HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE

U.S. STRATEGY TO COUNTER THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND

THE LEVANT AND U.S. POLICY TOWARD IRAQ AND SYRIA

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:34 a.m. in
Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John
McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.
Committee Members Present: Senators McCain
[presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer,
Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed,
Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal,
Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN MCCAIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA

Chairman McCain: Well, good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony on the ongoing efforts of the United States to combat ISIL as well as U.S. policy toward Iraq, Syria, and the broader Middle East.

We welcome our distinguished witnesses and thank them for their appearance today as well as for their continued service to our Nation.

This morning, our hearts are with the loved ones of the 224 people killed aboard a Russian airliner over Egypt, of the 43 people killed in bombings in Beirut, of the 130 people killed in Paris, and of the 14 people killed in San Bernardino. Each one of these atrocities committed or inspired by ISIL has occurred in just the month and a half since the Secretary last appeared before this committee. A year and a half since he appeared, and all of these things have happened. Whatever illusions anyone may have had that our national security was not at stake in the conflict in Iraq and Syria or that ISIL was somehow contained, these attacks make it clear that ISIL's threat against our homeland is real, direct, and growing, that we are not winning this war, and that time is not on our side.

Americans have never been more worried about being attacked than at any time since the months that followed
September 11th, 2001. Today's hearing is essential to help the American people and their elected representatives understand what the Department of Defense is doing to protect our Nation from this new terrorist threat.

The administration says it has a strategy to destroy ISIL which it has called, quote, "an indirect approach," unquote. This means that, instead of taking the fight to ISIL more directly, the administration seeks to build up local ground forces in Iraq and Syria, to support them with U.S. and coalition airpower, to enable our local partners to liberate their own lands, and to create conditions for lasting political settlements. Much of this is what many of us have been advocating for years. And, to be sure, we are making some progress. As I recently saw on a visit to Iraq with Senator Graham, the recent operation to retake Sinjar was important. Iraqi forces are closing in on Ramadi, though they still have not finished the job. And our counterterrorism operations are taking a lot of ISIL fighters off the battlefield in Iraq and Syria.

All of this represents tactical progress, and it is a testament to our civilian and military leaders as well as thousands of U.S. troops hoping -- helping to take the fight to ISIL every day. However, significant challenges remain. The Iraqi government is weak and beholden to Iran. The training of Iraqi Security Forces has been slow. And the
building of support for the Sunni tribal forces, even slower. At the current pace, U.N. -- U.S. commanders estimate that ISIL will still control Mosul at the end of next year.

In Syria, what the administration calls its "strategy" looks more like a hope. We will not destroy ISIL until Raqqa, the capital of the caliphate, falls. But, there is still no ground force that is both willing and able to retake Raqqa, nor is there a realistic prospect of one emerging soon.

The Syrian Kurds could take Raqqa, but won't. And the Syrian Sunni Arabs want to, but can't, partly due to our failure to support them. What's worse, our military and diplomatic efforts are misaligned. Russia and Iraq are doubling down on Bashar Assad. Russia's airstrikes are still overwhelmingly directed at coalition-supported groups, and more talks in Vienna will not convince Vladimir Putin to abandon his idea of Russia's national interests in Syria. We need leverage to do that, but nothing we are doing, military or otherwise, is creating the necessary conditions, both in Putin's mind as well as on the ground in Syria, to achieve a favorable political settlement. As a result, the conflict will likely grind on, ISIL will grow stronger, and the refugees will keep coming.

Meanwhile, ISIS is metastasizing across the region --
in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and, perhaps most worryingly, in Libya. In short, the threat is growing and evolving faster than the administration's efforts to counter it.

The broader shortcomings of the administration's approach has to do with two assumptions it appears to be making. The first is that time is on our side, that we can afford to play out their indirect approach for years while ISIL continues to hold key terrain, such as Raqqa and Mosul. Time has never been on our side in this conflict, and it certainly is not now, after Sinai, Paris, and San Bernardino.

The second assumption is that we should not put U.S. forces on the ground, because that's what ISIL wants. It is true that ISIL seeks an apocalyptic conflict with the West, but another key pillar of ISIL's ideology is the creation of the caliphate. So, as long as ISIL can claim to possess its caliphate, it projects an aura of success that is its most powerful tool of radicalization and recruitment. There are no local forces that are able and willing to destroy ISIL's caliphate on the ground. And if we will not commit our own forces, then we are accepting the existence of the caliphate.

On Sunday, President Obama once again resorted to the strawman argument that his critics want to invade Iraq and
Syria with 100,000 U.S. troops. No one -- no one is calling for that. What we do need in Iraq is several thousand additional U.S. troops to improve and accelerate the training of Iraqi forces, especially Sunni tribal fighters, embed with and advise Iraqi units closer to the fight, call in airstrikes from forward positions, and conduct counterterrorism operations. Once ISIL is destroyed in Iraq, we must keep a residual force there, as we should have done before. If we leave again, the threat will return, and we will have to intervene again. Iraqis must win the peace, but America has a major stake in their success, and a unique role to play in helping them. To do so, we must be present.

In Syria, the U.S. needs a coherent strategy to destroy ISIL and end the civil war as soon as possible. Our military efforts must create the conditions for this outcome. America must work with its coalition partners to establish and protect zones inside Syria where refugees can be safe, to deny the Assad regime the use of airpower and barrel bombs, and to impose costs on Russia for targeting moderate opposition groups.

Ultimately, to destroy ISIL in Syria, we will need a multinational ground force primarily made up of Sunni, Arab, and European forces, but with a strong U.S. component, to do what no local force now can or will: retake Raqqa, destroy ISIL's caliphate in Syria, and prepare for a long-term
stabilization effort.

Beyond Iraq and Syria, we need to seize the initiative and roll back ISIS -- ISIL's regional expansion. This will require a greater forward presence of U.S. military and intelligence teams that can map its networks, destroy them as part of a broader strategy to support countries and building just and inclusive governments.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, we have known each other for many years. I know you to be a skilled and dedicated public servant. I think you are performing to the best of your abilities as Secretary of Defense, and I value our partnership on many issues. It is true that you have made four appearances before this committee as Secretary. But, when you were nominated for your position, you agreed to, quote, "appear and testify, upon request, before this committee." Since your last testimony, as I mentioned, we have seen ISIL launch or inspire attacks in the sky over Egypt, in Beirut, in Paris, and here at home, in San Bernardino. We have also heard the administration roll out additional actions that it claims are needed to address this threat. If we are truly at war against ISIL, as the President says, then we will continue to expect the Secretary of Defense to provide regular updates to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the progress of that war. This is your responsibility to us so we can perform our
responsibilities on behalf of those who elected us.

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

Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And let me welcome Secretary Carter and General Selva. This morning's hearing is extraordinarily timely, in light of several recent and very disturbing events, including ISIL claiming responsibility for the bombing of the Russian airliner, the attacks on innocent civilians in Beirut and Paris, and the deadly attack in San Bernardino by what appears to be self-radicalized individuals. And our hearts go out to the victims of these terrible and senseless tragedies.

As the President outlined in his speech to the Nation on Sunday, it is critical that the U.S.-led 60-plus-nation coalition for defeating ISIL pursue a multidimensional approach. The United States and its coalition partners are intensifying their efforts to degrade ISIL militarily and deny their leaders any safe havens, to cut off ISIL financing, to interdict the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL-controlled territories, and to counter the spread of ISIL's murderous ideology that the President accurately characterized as part of a cult of death. Such an approach will require the careful coordination of military, intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement efforts to combat ISIL across the departments of the U.S. Government
and within our coalition.

Recently, the administration announced a number of steps to intensify our military efforts in Iraq and Syria. These include the deployment of A-10s to Turkey, the addition of Special Operations Forces in northern Syria to assist local forces, and, most recently, an announcement by you, Secretary Carter, of the intent to deploy, in full coordination with the Government of Iraq, an expeditionary targeting force to assist the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces in removing ISIL leaders from the battlefield. In addition, coalition partners, including Britain, France, and Germany, have stepped up their contributions to the fight against ISIL since the Paris attacks. And I welcome -- and I think we all do -- these continuing efforts to reevaluate and enhance our military campaign, and would be interested in any further steps that may be under consideration to intensify the military pressure on ISIL in Iraq and Syria. And I think we all agree that that intensity has to be increased significantly and rapidly.

At the same time, a sustainable defeat of ISIL in the region requires that ground combat forces be primarily local forces, though U.S. forces can, and I think should, provide critical advice, assistance, and enablers to assist these forces and go where they must go to assist these local forces. Putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground,
as has been suggested, I think, by all my colleagues, in Iraq and Syria, could play, directly or indirectly, into ISIL's propaganda war.

It's also clear that a sustainable outcome will only be possible with more inclusive governance by the Abadi government in Baghdad and a political transition in Syria that puts an end to the brutality of the Assad regime. Russia's direct engagement in the Syrian conflict will continue to further reduce the chances of achieving an acceptable political solution, so long as the Russians remain focused on attacking the moderate Syrian opposition and claiming to be joining an anti-ISIL fight, where they are, in effect, trying to degrade the anti-ISIL -- Assad forces.

We will be interested in hearing from our witnesses regarding the progress of the campaign to defeat ISIL, the status of our efforts to train, equip, and assist local forces in Syria and Iraq, and then having -- training them to help them seize territory and hold territory taken from ISIL control.

And, General, I hope you can also address whether we now have the right command structure for Operation Inherent Resolve and whether our military commanders in theater have the flexibility they need to carry out the campaign plan.

Finally, the committee would be interested to get an
assessment from our witnesses of the factors contributing to the expansion of ISIL and associated groups beyond the Syria-Iraq region, as the Chairman has pointed out, and what the Department needs to counter this threat that is burgeoning throughout the region.

Again, thank you to the witnesses.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Welcome, Secretary Carter and General Selva.
STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE; ACCOMPANIED BY GENERAL PAUL J. SELVA, USAF, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Secretary Carter: Thank you. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the U.S. counter-ISIL military campaign with Vice Chairman Paul Selva, here. Chairman Dunford is, as you know, currently visiting our troops deployed around the world this holiday season, conveying to them the thanks of a grateful Nation for all they do in our defense. I will soon be doing the same.

And, Chairman, you're right, and Ranking Member Reed, we are intensifying the campaign, and have, in the 6 weeks since I appeared before you last time. And I'm happy to be here today to describe what we're doing. It's very much along the lines of what you just described. That is, forces to accompany, to call an airstrike, to conduct counterterrorism strikes, and train and equip. So, I'll describe those actions which we're taking.

Because the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino were an assault upon the civilization that we defend, ISIL requires, and it will receive, a lasting defeat. The President has directed us to intensify and adapt the military campaign --, or, I'm sorry, had directed us to intensify the military campaign before the Paris attacks. And the necessity of
accelerating our efforts, as we're doing, has only been made
clearer by the recent attacks.

We are urging others in the region and around the world
to do the same, because those attacks further highlighted
the stakes that not just the United States, but the world,
has in this fight. The defense of the homeland must be
strengthened, to be sure. But, it is absolutely necessary
to defeat ISIL in its parent tumor in Syria and Iraq, and
also to take necessary action wherever else in the world
this evil organization metastasizes. Achieving these
objectives means leveraging all the components of our
Nation's might, as the Chairman noted: diplomatic,
military, and law enforcement, homeland security,
intelligence, economic, informational. That's the right
overall approach, for three principal reasons:

First, the strategy takes the fight to the enemy where
they are, which we must do.

Second, it seeks to develop capable, motivated, local
ground forces as the only force that can assure a lasting
victory. U.S. and international coalition forces can and
will do more to enable them, but we cannot substitute for
them.

And third, it seeks to set the conditions for a
political solution to the civil war in Syria and for
inclusive governance in Iraq, both of which are essential,
because they're the only durable ways to prevent a future ISIL-like organization from re-emerging there. And that's why the diplomatic work led by Secretary Kerry is the first and absolutely critical line of effort.

The Defense Department, of course, is centrally responsible for the military campaign, which is the focus of my statement today. Through our and our coalition partners' actions, the military campaign must and will deny ISIL any safe territorial haven, kill or capture its leadership and forces, and destroy its organization, all while we seek to identify and then enable motivated local forces on the ground who can expel ISIL from the territory it now controls, hold it, and govern it, and ensure that victory sticks.

Militarily, we're taking new steps each week to gather momentum on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq. I'll take a few extra minutes this morning to give as much detail as possible about the new things we're doing, applying multiple pressures on multiple fronts simultaneously to accelerate ISIL's defeat.

The reality is, we're at war. That's how our troops feel about it, because they're taking the fight to ISIL every day, applying the might of the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

In northern Syria, local forces, with our support, are
fighting along the Ma'ra line, engaging ISIL in the last remaining pocket of access into Turkey. Meanwhile, a coalition of Syrian Arabs that we helped equip in northeastern Syria are fighting alongside Kurdish forces and have recaptured important terrain, most recently pushing ISIL out of the town of al-Hawl and at least 900 square kilometers of surrounding territory. They're now focused on moving south to isolate ISIL's so-called capital of Raqqa, with the ultimate objective of collapsing its control over the city.

To build on that, President Obama, on my and Chairman Dunford's advice, ordered U.S. Special Operations Forces to go into Syria to support the fight against ISIL. American special operators bring a unique set of capabilities that make them force multipliers, such as intelligence-gathering, targeting, and enabling local forces. Where we find further opportunity to leverage such capability, we will not hesitate to expand it.

Next, in the south of Syria, we're also taking advantage of opportunities to enable indigenous fighters trained and equipped by us and other coalition partners to conduct strikes inside Syria. We're also enhancing Jordan's border control and defenses with additional military assets and planning assistance.

Turning to northern Iraq, Peshmerga units, with the
help of U.S. power, airpower, and advisors, have retaken the
town of Sinjar, cutting the main line of communication
between Raqqa and Mosul, which are the two largest cities
under ISIL's control. To move people and supplies, ISIL
must now rely on backroads, where we will locate and destroy
them.

Elsewhere in Iraq, we have about 3,500 troops at six
locations in support of Iraqi Security Forces. There, we've
been providing increased lethal fire and augmenting the
existing training, advising, and assisting program. And
we're prepared to do more as Iraq shows capability and
motivation in the counter-ISIL fight and in resolving its
political divisions.

After a frustratingly long time, we are starting to see
some movement in the operation to recapture Ramadi. Over
the past several months, the coalition has provided
specialized training and equipment, including combat
engineering techniques, like in-stride breeching and
bulldozing, and munitions, like AT-4 shoulder-fired
missiles, to stop truck bombs, to the Iraqi Army and its
counterterrorism service units that are now beginning to
enter Ramadi neighborhoods from multiple directions. In
fact, in the last 24 hours, the ISF retook the Anbar
Operations Center on the northern bank of the Euphrates
River, across from Ramadi's city center. It is an important
step, but there's still tough fighting ahead. ISIL has
counterattacked several times, but, thus far, the ISF has
shown resilience.

The United States is prepared to assist the Iraqi Army
with additional unique capabilities to help them finish the
job, including attack helicopters and accompanying advisors,
if circumstances dictate and if requested by Prime Minister
Abadi.

I mention all this because it represents how we've
adapted in the way we support our Iraqi partners, and it
shows that training, advising, and assisting helps, and
works. We will do more of what works, going forward.

While we're focused on making additional tactical
gains, the overall progress in the Sunni-populated areas of
Iraq has been slow, much to Prime Minister Abadi's and our
frustration. Indeed, with respect to Sunni tribal forces,
we are urging the Iraqi government to do more to recruit,
train, arm, mobilize, and pay Sunni popular mobilization
fighters in their communities. We continue to engage the
Iraqi government at all levels to move forward on this
critically important aspect of the counter-ISIL campaign,
including working with Sunni local police to ensure that
there's an Iraqi hold force to sustain future gains.

Next, in full coordination, again, with the Government
of Iraq, we're deploying a specialized expeditionary
targeting force to assist the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga
forces and put even more pressure on ISIL through a variety
of raids and intelligence-gathering missions. This force
will also be in a position to conduct unilateral operations
in Syria.

In Iraq, the force will operate at the invitation of
the Iraqi government and focus on defending its borders and
building the ISF's ability to conduct similar operations.
We will not be discussing specifics of this expeditionary
targeting force, or its operations, in unclassified
settings, both to protect our forces and to preserve the
element of surprise. We want this expeditionary targeting
force to make ISIL and its leaders wonder, when they go to
bed at night, who's going to be coming in the window.

Chairman Dunford and I recognize that, in principle,
there are alternatives to the strategic approach we have
adopted to drive ISIL from Syrian and Iraqi territory,
including the introduction of a significant foreign ground
force, hypothetically international, but including U.S.
forces, even in the absence of capable, motivated, local
ground forces.

While we certainly have the capability to furnish a
U.S. component to such a ground force, we have not
recommended this course of action, for several reasons. In
the near term, it would be a significant undertaking that,
much as we may wish otherwise, realistically we would embark
upon largely by ourselves. And it would be ceding our
comparative advantage of Special Forces, mobility, and
firepower, instead fighting on the enemy's terms.

In the medium term, by seeming to Americanize the
conflicts in Iraq and Syria, we could well turn those
fighting ISIL, or inclined to resist their rule, into
fighting us instead. As Chairman Dunford testified last
week, quote, "ISIL would love nothing more than a large
presence of U.S. forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria so
that they could have a call to jihad."

And lastly, in the long term, there would still remain
the problem of securing and governing the territory. These
must be done by local forces. So, in the end, while we can
enable them, we cannot substitute for them.

Next, momentum on the ground, as I've described, in
both Syria and Iraq has been enabled by greatly increased
coalition airstrikes. Additional strike aircraft we've
deployed to Incirlik Airbase in Turkey, along with improved
intelligence, allowed us, in November, to significantly
increase our airstrikes against ISIL to the highest level
since the start of our operations in August 2014. Moreover,
because of improved intelligence and understanding of ISIL's
operations, we've intensified the air campaign against
ISIL's war-sustaining oil enterprise, a critical pillar of
ISIL's financial infrastructure. In addition to destroying fixed facilities, like wells and processing facilities, we've destroyed nearly 400 of ISIL's oil tanker trucks, reducing a major source of its daily revenues. There is more to come, too.

We're also improving our capability to eliminate ISIL's leadership. Since I last appeared before this committee, in late October, we have removed two more key ISIL figures from the battlefield; namely, "Jihadi John," an ISIL executioner, and Abu Nabil, ISIL's leader in Libya. Like previous actions, these strikes serve notice to ISIL that no target is beyond our reach.

And as our military campaign intensifies on the ground and in the air, the Defense Department is also developing more strategic options in the cyberdomain.

These, then, are just nine areas of the adaptations we've made over the past 6 weeks to accelerate this campaign and to see momentum build. President Obama is committed to doing what it takes as opportunities arise, as we see what works, and as the enemy adapts, until ISIL is defeated in a lasting way. The President has consistently supported the recommendations from me and General Dunford, and we know he is prepared for us to bring him more. And we will.

At the same time that we're constantly looking to do more in the fight -- in this fight, the world must do the
The international community, including our allies and partners, has to step up before another attack like Paris. France was galvanized by the attack on its capital, and intensified its role. Britain has now expanded its air campaign to strike ISIL in Syria. Italy has deployed its most elite police units, like the Carabinieri, to assist in Iraq. Germany is now making additional contributions. And the Netherlands is actively considering doing more, as well.

But, we all -- let me repeat that -- all must do more. Turkey must do more to control its often porous border. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states joined the air portion of the campaign in the early days -- only the air part -- but have since been preoccupied by the conflict in Yemen, both in the air and on the ground. And just this past week, I personally reached out to my counterparts in 40 countries around the world in the coalition and asked them to contribute more -- in many case, contribute much more -- to enhancing the fight against ISIL. The types of things I've requested from our partners include Special Operations Forces, strike and reconnaissance aircraft, weapons, and munitions, training assistance, and other items.

Meanwhile, as the Chairman noted, Russia, which is publicly committed to defeating ISIL, has instead largely attacked opposition forces. It's time for Russia to focus
on the right side of this fight.

Before I conclude, I'd like to respectfully request the committee's attention to matters that bear upon our security and its responsibilities:

First, over a month ago, I submitted a request to the four congressional defense committees, including this one, to release holds on the final tranche of funds in the Syria equipping program; that is, some $116 million. We need these funds to provide and transport ammunition, weapons, and other equipment to further enable the progress being made against ISIL in Syria by partners like the Syrian Arab Coalition. All four committees have failed to act on that request. And I ask you to release these holds, urgently. We should not be impeding the very momentum we are trying to build.

Next is the necessity to fill key vacancies in the Defense Department's critical leadership positions. I have appeared before this committee, as noted, six times over the last 10 months -- four times on the Middle East, and twice in just the last 6 weeks, on ISIL. While this committee has held 58 full hearings over the last year, only three have been confirmation hearings for DOD civilian leaders. DOD currently has 16 nominees awaiting the constitutional advice and consent of the Senate. Twelve of these 16 are still awaiting even a hearing, including our nominees to be
Secretary of the Army, the Under Secretaries of each of our three military departments -- Army, Navy, and Air Force -- and the Under Secretaries of both Intelligence and Personnel and Readiness. These positions should be filled by confirmed nominees, especially in a time of conflict. So, I welcome that the process is now moving, and I urge it to move quickly for all of our civilian nominees and also for our senior military nominations that will be made early next year.

Finally, as I conclude, I want to commend this committee on last month's budget deal, which is the kind of deal I called for back in March. It was a consequential agreement for the Nation's security. As current funding for the government is set to expire, it is vital that the two houses now conclude work on funding all of the government, consistent with the budget deal. Now is not the time for more gridlock.

I thank this committee in advance for your efforts, because funding this budget deal is what our national security demands, and it sends the right message to our troops, our allies, and our enemies in this time of broad global national security challenges, and especially in this war.

Thank you.
Chairman McCain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response -- Mr. Secretary -- in response to your last two points, one on the funding, we just received that request last week, but you know very well it's a result of the absolute failure of the expenditure of what was judged then to be $43 million and four or five people were trained. We don't want to approve of something like that again. We want to -- if you want that kind of funding to train and equip, we want to know what the plan is, and we don't want to see a repetition of the testimony by the head of Central Command who said, "Well, we have four or five less, and we've spent $43 million." We have an obligation to the taxpayers.

On the nominees, there is four pending before the United States Senate today, and there is four more who will be having hearings this afternoon, which takes care of half of yours.

And I'm not going to waste the time of the committee to go back and forth about threats of vetoes that, in the view of the majority of this committee, were totally unjustified on the part of the President, including the failure, still -- still, despite your appearance in my office with the President's counterterrorism person, that you were going to send me a plan, you were going to send this committee a plan on the closure of Guantanamo. We still haven't gotten that plan, Mr. Secretary.
So, if you're a little bit concerned about a lack of movement, I've been a little concerned about a lack of movement on Guantanamo for the last 7 years.

Secretary Carter: Right.

Chairman McCain: So, I will do what I can to get the four that are pending before the Senate today confirmed by the Senate, and I will -- we will be having a hearing this afternoon on the four additional ones.

So --

Secretary Carter: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate that.

Chairman McCain: Thank you.

Mr. Secretary, on the 1st of December, before the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Forbes asked General Dunford, quote, "Have we currently contained ISIL?" General Dunford, "We have not contained ISIL." Mr. Secretary, do you agree with General Dunford?

Secretary Carter: I agree with that General Dunford said, yes.

Chairman McCain: So, if we have not contained ISIL, how are we to know -- believe that we are succeeding against ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I think that we are building momentum against ISIL. I'm going to be very careful about describing the -- I have described the trajectory of that
success all around Iraq and Syria, some actions we're taking in Libya. It's not my principal responsibility, but I met, yesterday, with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the FBI, the Director of National Intelligence, and other officials, to talk about what we could do more to strengthen the defense of the homeland, as the Department of Defense. But, in our principal responsibility, which is to take the fight to Syria and Iraq, I've described the actions that we've taken just since --

Chairman McCain: And --

Secretary Carter: -- I appeared last time, and I think they are building momentum --

Chairman McCain: Thank you. How long do you think it'll be before we retake Mosul or Raqqa?

Secretary Carter: With respect to Mosul, Mr. Chairman, it is hard to say, because it -- that depends much on the progress of the Iraqi Security Forces, which I described, in building themselves into a more capable combat force.

With respect to Ramadi, as I described --


Secretary Carter: Oh, Raqqa. Well, Raqqa, there the -- and you noted this, yourself, Mr. Chairman -- the Syrian Kurds to the north have done an excellent job of clearing their territory. We're going to --

Chairman McCain: They're not going to --
Secretary Carter: -- work with the Syrian Arabs --
Chairman McCain: They're not going to go into Raqqa,
and you and I know that.
Secretary Carter: They're not going to go to Raqqa.
No, no, no. No. It's -- the Syrian Arab -- it would be the
Syrian Arabs.
Chairman McCain: I guess the point is, Mr. Secretary,
here we are with attacks on the homeland, the United States
of America. We have not contained ISIL. And we have no
timeline -- the timeline I was given when Senator Graham and
I went over there was at least the end of next year before
Mosul, and there is no plan, no strategy, to retake Raqqa.
And I think it's pretty obvious to all that, as long as they
have a caliphate base, then they are able to orchestrate
attacks such as they've successfully achieved in the last
several weeks, whether it be the -- Ankara, Russian
airliner, southern Beirut, Paris, or San Bernardino. So,
here we are with a -- and you described some measures that
are probably very helpful, but with no timeline of which to
take out the caliphate from which there are many things
happening, including, according to news reports, developing
chemical weapons. So -- and this is why I'm really puzzled.
This morning, by the way, on one of the news shows,
former head of the United States Army -- Chief of Staff of
the United States Army, General Odierno, said we ought to
have American contingent of troops on the ground. And I, frankly, do not understand the logic in your statement about -- said, while you certainly have the capability to furnish a U.S. component in such a ground force, "we've not recommended, because it would be a significant undertaking." I agree. "We would have to do it largely by ourselves." I do not agree. "It would be ceding our comparative advantage"? We'd be -- "And the meaning -- in the medium term, it would seem to Americanize the conflicts." Does somehow -- does anybody really believe that if the United States struck back against the people that just slaughtered some American in San Bernardino, that somehow that would encourage them? What encourages them, Mr. Secretary, is success. And they have a pretty serious record, here, of success, just in the last several -- couple of months since you were here.

So, I do not understand why in the world you wouldn't want, as General Keane, the architect of the surge, the successful surge, and others, military leaders, including, this morning, former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, a small component of American forces with an international force which could be -- if the United States had the credibility, could be gathered and then go in and take out this caliphate. As long as the caliphate -- I know of no expert who doesn't believe that, as long as this
caliphate exists in Raqqa, they're going to be able to
orchestrate attacks and metastasize, and maybe even move to
Libya.

So, maybe you can help the committee out again that
this would somehow cede a comparative advantage if we went
in with a large Arab force -- the Turks and Egyptians, even,
and other Sunni nations -- and go in there and take those
people out. There's 20- to 30,000 of them that -- it's --
they are not giants. So -- but, finally --

Secretary Carter: May I --

Chairman McCain: -- someone's going to have to
convince me that airpower alone, and Special Operations
Forces, are going to succeed in the short term in order to
prevent further things, such as San Bernardino. I'd love to
hear you response.

Secretary Carter: A couple of things, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, to your main point about more American
forces -- and I would say Special Forces, but others, as
well, that train, advise, assist, and accompany -- they're
not Special Forces -- we are doing --

Chairman McCain: I was talking about a multinational
force.

Secretary Carter: Well, there, Mr. Chairman, as I
indicated, I, too, wish that particularly the Sunni Arab
nations of the Gulf would do more. And going way back --
Chairman McCain: They are willing to do so.
Secretary Carter: -- to March --
Chairman McCain: -- if there's --
Secretary Carter: I've had lengthy conversations with

Chairman McCain: And so have I.

Secretary Carter: -- representatives there. Well, I have to say that I have consistently emphasized to them that they have a unique role, here, and also, insofar as they're concerned about Iran, which is another concern they have -- and, by the way, that we have, also -- totally different, but serious, subject also -- that what I've emphasized to them is that we don't like it, but the Iranians are in the game, on the ground. And I very much would like, and we would very much welcome -- and we've repeatedly said this -- working with those countries on the ground, because we believe, as you noted, that they have -- would have a distinctive advantage in a ground fight.

With respect to the Europeans, the Europeans have, generally speaking, offered to do more within their capabilities and capacities. I will note here -- and there -- this is uneven across Europe, but, in general, I am quite concerned with the level of investment that Europe is making in its militaries and its alliance and partnership therefore with the United States. There is much more that their
economies would enable them to do, and that their history, 
as standing up for the same kind of civilized values that we 
stand up with, really require of them. And so, while we're 
getting more from the Europeans -- and I indicated I've 
asked for more -- I'd like there to be still more. So, in 
that sense, I completely am with you.

I just -- I simply in -- on the basis of my urgent and 
persistent consultations with them, am less -- have less 
high hopes, perhaps, than you that they would assemble such 
a force. We would certainly welcome that.

With that, I also don't want to --

Chairman McCain: Could I just say that I urgently and 
fervently asked you for a strategy that you can tell us when 
we're going to take Mosul, when we're going to take Raqqa, 
and when we're going to wipe out this caliphate. And 
frankly, I have not seen that.

General, did you want to add anything?

General Selva: Sir, I would add three points.

First, I agree completely that defending the homeland 
is our top priority.

Second, taking the fight --

Chairman McCain: That's helpful.

General Selva: -- taking the fight to the caliphate is 
what is going on today in Iraq and Syria. The combination 
of increasing the momentum with the movements in Iraq in
Chairman McCain: And again, General, there is no timeline for Mosul and Raqqa, which is the basis of the caliphate.

General Selva: Sir, the fight on the ground defines the progress we will make against the caliphate. We have put significant pressure on northern Syria. We have taken -- with Syrian Arab coalition partners, have taken significant ground in the north and the east of Syria. They are using the equipment that we have provided to put pressure on ISIL's main lines of communication between Raqqa and Mosul. To provide a timeline would deny the fact that the enemy on the ground gets a vote, but they do not have freedom of maneuver. They do not have operational freedom of maneuver, they do not have tactical freedom of maneuver.

Chairman McCain: General, they were just able to orchestrate an attack in San Bernardino, California.

My time is long ago expired.

Senator Reed.

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

Mr. Secretary, we've all come to the conclusion we need American forces on the ground. The question, very generically, is how many, and what are they going to do? This is a unique situation, but we've got some analogies, or at least examples. One, in Enduring Freedom, we sent in
specialized teams of U.S. personnel and -- airpower -- and, together with local forces, were able to disrupt and then ultimately defeat the Taliban. In Iraqi Freedom, we sent in conventional forces, we won a very swift and brilliant conventional victory, and then were confronted with instability and counterinsurgency. It would seem to me that you're tending to favor the former model, which would be to have specialized troops in there with our airpower, et cetera, and that the constraining factor right now is the local indigenous forces on the ground, particularly Arab forces -- not Kurdish forces, but Arab forces. And I am told there's about 100, sort of, new Syrian fighters that have been trained, that are on the ground, that are the potential. Can you elaborate on those comments?

Secretary Carter: I can. First of all, with respect to the Afghan experience, I agree with your general analysis of the history of those two incidents. That was a circumstance, in 2001 and 2002, where we were able, very rapidly and extremely effectively, to leverage a preexisting indigenous force -- namely, largely the Northern Alliance -- which we had, over the previous, geez, decade or so, built up in order to fight the Soviets. And they actually succeeding at expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan. That force, that organization, and other organizations of the so-called Mujahideen in those days, we could quickly link up
with again. And, by providing them -- enabling, exactly in
this manner, they would advance. That would cause the
Taliban to expose their positions, and we could cream them
from the air. And so, that was a perfect example -- ideal.
We'd like to replicate that. Of course, in this current
circumstance in Syria and Iraq, we're having to build those
forces, and they don't exist in the same way that they did
in the Northern Alliance.

With respect to the new Syrian forces -- and it gets
back to the funding issue -- we did change our approach to
training and equipping Syrian forces. Our early experience
there was disappointing. I've said that. I always told you
I'm going to be very honest about things. That didn't work
out very well, because we were trying to build units from
scratch. And what our -- the new approach -- and by -- the
one we're asking you to fund, and we are providing -- I'm
willing to send up a team today to brief you further on what
we're looking for. But, we really need this agility if
we're going to fight a war, so I'd plead with you to take
the briefings or whatever. We have a reason for requesting
this money. It's different from the old program. We
learned our lesson. We're doing something different, which
is this. We're taking units that have already formed and
have undertaken to combat ISIL. The Syrian Arab coalition
is an example of that. And instead of making -- trying to
create a brand new force or recruit a brand new force -- and
then put them, including by being on the ground with them,
but especially equipping them and providing them with
airpower, amplifying their power. And we hope -- and this
gets to the Chairman's question about a timeline for Raqqa
-- the -- that if we make them successful as they move
further south -- remember, now these are Syrian Arabs, not
Kurds -- the Chairman rightly noted wouldn't be appropriate
for us --

Senator Reed: Right.

Secretary Carter: -- to attack largely Arab Raqqa --
that they and their success will build, so to speak, a
snowball that accumulates more fighters as they go. As that
accumulates and there are more of them, we'll do more in --
to fall in behind them, with the objective, then, of them
taking Raqqa, which would be a very important victory in the
heart of ISIL territory.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

General, quickly, the command arrangements. General
MacFarland is now the joint commander with operational
control both in Iraq and Syria, I understand. Are you
satisfied, and General Dunford satisfied, that you have the
best framework for command now to integrate all of the DOD
elements and ancillary elements you need?

General Selva: Yes, sir. The Joint Task Force command
structure in Baghdad that covers both Iraq and Syria is more than adequate to cover the military maneuver that's required and to orchestrate the forces that are required, and has the support of Central Command's headquarters as a oversight and supporting headquarters.

Senator Reed: And they have the flexibility to make critical decisions in a timely way without sort of second-guessing up and down the line?

General Selva: Yes, sir.

Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Sessions.

Senator Sessions: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I appreciate your remarks. There's a great deal of frustration, Secretary Carter, and concern that we're drifting and reacting and not in -- don't have the kind of plan that will lead to success, number one.

Number two, I understand now the President says he wants an authorization of force. But, because of the difficulties and bungling I think that we've seen so far, we're going to have to know what you're going to do, how you're going to do it, how it's going to be successful. That is not clear. It's not clear to the American people. It's not clear to Congress, not clear to our European allies, our allies in the Middle East, or our enemies. And that's a problem we've got. It's just very real.
Secondly, I think that Secretary Gates was correct to say we need an overarching strategy for this whole deal with Islamic extremism in maybe 20, 30, 50 years. And we've used the word "containment" to deal with that. However, that does not mean that, in a long-term strategy of containment of extremism, that we don't have to act decisively and militarily now.

And I just think, and I shared with you, that we're -- I believe the Defense Department is underestimating the significance of the refugee crisis, the impact it's having in Europe, the impact it's having in the United States, what's happening from all this disorder and the flee of human beings and the deaths that's being caused and the humanitarian disaster that's out there.

So, it seems to me, does it not to you, that a prompt, decisive action to create safe zones in Syria, where people don't have to flee their home country, can be kept safe there, would be positive as a matter of humanity and as a military possibility?

Secretary Carter: Thank you, Senator. I'll begin, including on the safe zones, and then perhaps ask the Vice Chairman to add in. He's done a lot of work on that, as well.

I'll just note, with respect to the AUMF, that we have the -- I'm not a lawyer, but I'm told, and I'm glad,
otherwise it would be a problem -- we have the authority, legal authority, to do what we want to do. And the AUMF, as I've testified, that the President submitted would also allow us to do everything we need to do in this campaign.

Senator Sessions: Well, just don't blame the Congress --

Secretary Carter: And --

Senator Sessions: -- for not rubberstamping it immediately --

Secretary Carter: Yeah. No, I understand --

Senator Sessions: -- if we don't understand what the --

Secretary Carter: I think it's okay. In fact, I didn't even mention it, for just that -- for just that reason.

You're right. And I -- I associate myself with you about acting decisively. I do recognize that there may be decades of combating radicalism, in general. But, we need to go after ISIL in its parent tumor, in Iraq and Syria, now, and urgently. And so, I associate myself with that point of view.

Refugees is a tragic matter. And, by the way, I -- just a reminder that only about half of other refugees are actually from Syria. And they are also, importantly, from Libya, from Afghanistan, from throughout Africa. And while
there are women and children and -- caught up in this
circumstance, the great bulk of them are young people,
mostly male, and professionally oriented, who are looking
for work. That's why German companies are at the train
station, recruiting them off the trains for their companies.
That's the reality. But, what does that mean for the
countries from which they come? It's a tremendous talent
drain, as well as a humanitarian issue. So, all the more
reason why in Syria, to the extent that's part of -- a major
part of the refugee crisis, we have to get an end to the
civil war there and get a government that can govern
decently. And Assad's government is not that.

With respect to safe zones, we have thought about that.
I've certainly thought about that a great deal. I'll begin
and describe -- the concept of a safe zone would be to
create a patch of Syria that -- wherein people who are
inclined to go there could go there and be protected. They
would need to be protected, because you can foresee that at
least ISIL and other radical groups, and quite possibly
elements of the Assad regime, would undertake to prove that
it wasn't safe. And so, it would have to be made safe, and
that takes us back to the question of who -- what's the --
an appropriate force of that size to protect a zone of that
size? It's -- in our estimates, it's substantial. And
again, I don't see, much as I wish otherwise, anybody
offering to furnish that force.

I also think we have thought about who might want to reside in such a zone. I think it would undesirable if it became a place into which people were pushed, say, from Turkey or Europe, expelled, so to speak, into this zone. I don't know what the people who now live in the zone would think about other people coming into the zone. That would have to be taken into account -- and whether other people want to live there.

So, it's -- so, we have thought about it. It's complicated. We have not recommended that, because it's an undertaking of substantial scale, wherein I -- my judgment, the costs outweigh the benefits.

Let me ask General Selva --

Senator Sessions: Just -- before you answer, on -- a major European Ambassador told me that the Europeans have recommended that, and the United States has said no. Is that correct?

Secretary Carter: No European defense leader has indicated a willingness to do that and contribute to a force to do that.

Senator Sessions: Well, I asked him twice. I said, "So, you've recommended that, and the United States is the one saying no?" And that's what he said, "Yes."

Secretary Carter: I haven't observed that, no.
Chairman McCain: Senator McCaskill.

Senator McCaskill: Thank you.

If you would disagree with any of these statements, I'm going to summarize a letter that General Austin sent to Senator King about what is the situation in the fight against ISIL.

Number one, ISIL is losing territory. Correct? I won't go into all the details that delineate the territory they've lost, but -- because I don't want to take the time, but certainly it's factually available to any member of the committee or any American.

Secondly, ISIL is losing leadership. Correct?

Secretary Carter: Yes.

Senator McCaskill: We've -- we have, in fact, taken out more than 100 of ISIL's leadership, including the Special Ops taking out their chief financial officer, where we gained a great deal of intelligence about what was funding ISIL. And secondly, air strikes taking out their online recruiting campaign, the cyber caliphate, and also the top commander in Libya. Correct?

Secretary Carter: That -- that's -- and "Jihadi John," the executioner, another one of note. But, there are many, yes.

Senator McCaskill: And we have taken -- and they are losing funding, correct?
Secretary Carter: That is correct.

Senator McCaskill: We have -- the coalition airstrikes have destroyed hundreds of oil transport trucks just in the last 30 days --

Secretary Carter: That's --

Senator McCaskill: -- correct?

Secretary Carter: -- true.

Senator McCaskill: In addition to oil operations infrastructure that we have taken out with our airstrikes.

Secretary Carter: True also.

Senator McCaskill: Okay. So, one of our colleagues, who is not here today, which is interesting, considering this would be a pretty important hearing if you're running for President, he has said, quote -- this is Senator Cruz -- has said, "We will utterly destroy ISIS. We will carpet-bomb them into oblivion. I don't know if sand can glow in the dark, but we're going to find out."

How many women and children would be involved if we carpet-bombed the areas where ISIS is currently a stronghold? What are we talking about, in terms of lives lost of women and children in those areas? Does anybody have an estimate?

Secretary Carter: I -- Senator, I'll let General Selva speak that. That is, of course, not our approach. And we are very effective from the air, but we take some --
Senator McCaskill: We're surgical.
Secretary Carter: -- which is able to be effective.
We're able to be effective, while minimizing collateral damage.

Senator McCaskill: And one of the reasons the locations we took out was so important is, now we've forced their transport trucks out into the open, where we can find them and take them out; whereas, when they're in the city center, we'd kill thousands of innocent people, correct?
General Selva: Senator, our process is to be as deliberate as possible, as careful as we can, with the intelligence that we have, and to discriminately strike targets and avoid civilian collateral damage. That has been our process since day one. It has proven very effective. And I -- that's where I would end the comment.
Senator McCaskill: And isn't the biggest danger to the homeland the ability of this extreme jihad viewpoint being transferred to Americans and them become radicalized and do what these people did in San Bernardino? Isn't that the biggest threat to our homeland?
General Selva: Senator, it's clear from ISIL's strategy that their objective is to cause us to engage in what they believe is an apocalyptic war with the West. And anything that we do to feed that particular frame of thinking counters our national security. We have to be very
careful about how we prosecute a campaign that appears to be
an indiscriminate attempt to attack ISIL and the population
that surrounds it.

Senator McCaskill: If we did an indiscriminate carpet-
bombing of a major area, and killed thousands of women and
children, would you assume that would have some impact on
their ability to recruit misguided barbarians, like this
couple that took out more than a dozen innocent people last
week? I would have to assume it would put their recruiting
on steroids.

General Selva: Senator, I'm going to avoid anything
hypothetical. What I would say categorically is, the
process you described as your hypothetical question is not
the way that we apply force in combat. It isn't now, nor
will it ever be.

Senator McCaskill: Ever.

General Selva: No, ma'am.

Senator McCaskill: If we cleared out Raqqa, which I
have no doubt that our military could do, if we could --
cleared our Raqqa or Ramadi, do we have any local force
capable of providing security on the ground in those
locations ongoing?

General Selva: Senator, I can't talk about
specifically about Raqqa, because we don't have that kind of
intelligence on Raqqa. In the case of Ramadi, there is a
Sunni -- predominantly Sunni police force that is ready to follow in behind the force that is attempting to take Ramadi back, and it is the intention of the Iraqi government to put that police force in place. I don't, at this instant, have the numbers. I can provide them for you if you'd like them. Senator McCaskill: But, in Raqqa, are we aware of any force that is available to secure and hold Raqqa if we were able to take it out, or would we have to stay as long as it took?

General Selva: The forces that we are aware of at this point are the Syrian democratic forces that are working with Kurdish partners that are willing to put pressure on Raqqa. It's not clear that that force is large enough to be the hold force and the security force that would follow. That is one of the reasons that we have advocated and gotten authorities to put Special Ops Forces into Syria to build that depth of intelligence to understand which forces are available to put increasing pressure and a hold force into Raqqa.

Senator McCaskill: Thank you very much.

Chairman McCain: You don't want to neglect World War II, General Selva, as far as carpet-bombing is concerned. Senator Sullivan has asked for -- to take precedence over his colleagues.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Fix this mic, here. Thanks. Having a mic issue.

Mr. Secretary, General, good to see you.

You know, I think one of the things that's -- you're hearing here is a common theme, really from all our colleagues, is a sense of urgency. So, you're laying out the strategy. And I think some of the elements that you've highlighted in your testimony look like they're useful elements of strategy, but they're -- there's a strong belief that there's a lack of sense of urgency, here. And I think one only had to watch the press conference between President -- with President Obama and President Hollande, and you saw one leader who was very urgent, he was going around the world trying to get our allies motivated on this, and you saw another leader -- unfortunately, it was our President -- was very passive. And I think, no matter what the strategy is, if there's not engaged American leadership, serious leadership, that people believe that we're in there and committed to the strategy, we're not going to be able to do any of these things. We've talked about an Arab army force. They're not going to follow unless they believe we're fully committed. So, I think that's one of the elements of the frustration that you see among the members on the committee today.

Let me ask you, in terms of strategy. Now, this is a bit of a difficult question, but let's say that there's
another, kind of, San Bernardino event, but maybe much
bigger, in our country, maybe 200 Americans killed, an ISIS-
directed attack on Americans. Would we keep the same
strategy right now, or would we keep the same strategic
patience, as the White House calls it? Assume you had a
crystal ball and you saw that coming 2 weeks from now or 3
weeks from now, where 200 Americans are killed by -- would
you be satisfied that this should be the strategy?

Secretary Carter: As far as the military campaign is
concerned, Senator, I just want to say, I share your sense
of urgency. And as far as --

Senator Sullivan: But, it doesn't seem like the
President does. And I think that's a real common -- even
members of his own party have indicated that.

Secretary Carter: He has encouraged General Dunford
and me, and we have encouraged all of our subordinate
commanders, as was asked -- said before, to propose ways to
accelerate the campaign. And the -- he has approved all the
ones we've proposed so far. We expect to propose more, as I
indicated, and to gather momentum in this campaign.

With respect to others following --

Senator Sullivan: So, let me ask just the question I
-- if you can address the question I asked. Assume there's
a Paris-like attack, 200 Americans killed. God forbid it
happens, right? None of us want that to happen. But, let's
say that happens and it's directed by ISIS. Would you go back to the President, saying, "Keep the same strategy"?

Secretary Carter: Well, look, Senator, if I had more to recommend to him to accelerate the defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, I'd be doing it now.

Senator Sullivan: But, isn't that the key question? That we want to make sure we don't have 200 Americans killed in an ISIS-like attack, so we should be doing everything now so we don't have to be motivated to do it once it happens?

Secretary Carter: I think -- again, on the military campaign, it is as I said. With respect to homeland security -- and here, I'd have to refer you to Secretary --

Senator Sullivan: But, they're all related --

Secretary Carter: -- Johnson -- of course -- and so forth. I know that you all are considering various provisions in the law that affect visa waivers and so forth. I think there are probably some improvements and steps that can be taken in that direction. And if there are, again, I would refer you to Secretary Johnson and Director Comey and Attorney General Lynch and others on that. I --

Senator Sullivan: Well, Mr. Secretary, I just -- I think it's important. We can't wait for an attack -- a big attack -- we've already just had one -- on our country to get the President engaged and more urgent. I think that's the frustration that you're seeing.
Let me ask a related question on urgency. Do you believe that the longer ISIS holds territory, that that increases risk to the homeland? Do you think that's a -- so, if they hold more territory, and they continue to do so, does that increase risk to our citizens here at home?

Secretary Carter: Whenever a terrorist group finds safe haven somewhere from which to plot against the United States, that's a danger to the United States. We've been pursuing such groups for -- since 9/11, and actually before, and we have to do that with respect to ISIL today. So, yes, that's absolutely right.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for being here. I appreciate very much your service, too.

Secretary Carter, I think that, you know, all -- you can -- the frustration -- I can just speak for the constituents in West Virginia, all the good people and all the military that we have from West Virginia. We're just -- they ask me the question, "What's the end game this time? Is it going to repeat what we've done before? Are we going to get bogged down for 10 years or more again? And American men and women in our National Guard people put on the front
line, in jeopardy?" So, if ISIS and/or Assad would fall, if we're able to make that transition, how do we prevent that being filled by another terrorist group? Because, you know, we started out with the Taliban we heard about first, then al-Qaeda, then all the spinoffs of al-Qaeda, and then ISIS came about. So, they believe that, basically, when you cut the head off, you can't kill the snake. And that's what they're concerned about. How do you ever have an end game that has any type of normalty -- or normalty from that area, if it's even possible?

Secretary Carter: Well, I've been speaking, obviously, mostly of the military campaign and the urgent need --

Senator Manchin: Yeah.

Secretary Carter: -- to crush ISIL. You're asking a -- the -- a very good question. And I said the political line of effort is fundamental here, because, in order to have what you're correctly identifying as the end state that will keep the peace in the long run, there has to be, first of all, in Syria, a political transition from Assad to a government that includes some of the opposition -- the moderate opposition that's been countering him, and preserves some of the structure of the Government of Syria so people can have a government there that functions and is decent.

And in Iraq, a government along the lines that Prime
Minister Abadi says -- and I believe he's genuine, he's trying to create there, which is one he -- he calls it, I think, a decentralized Iraq, namely one in which the different sectarian elements of Iraqi territory, mainly Sunnis and Shi'a and Kurds, can remain one state, but have enough autonomy within their different areas that they're not going at each other. That's absolutely fundamental in both --

Senator Manchin: Mr. Secretary --

Secretary Carter: -- of those places.

Senator Manchin: Mr. Secretary, if I could ask this question. I think the perfect -- have we identified anybody -- any group that we think's -- can take over if Assad's put aside to where the -- I mean, are we able to come to an agreement -- and we have to come to agreement, I would assume -- with Russia? Because they're much involved in that. Iran seems to be having an awful lot of input in that. And are we three going to be able to come to agreement of a new leadership in that -- that's going to bring the rebel -- so-called friendly rebels in and everyone turns their efforts towards ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I'd have to refer you to Secretary Kerry on that matter. And -- but, it -- I think that's exactly what he's trying to do. And in addition to the three parties you mentioned -- namely, us and the Russians
and the Iranians -- and, of course, the Russians and the
Iranians are on the -- working in the wrong direction at the
moment, so it means getting them turned around. But, also I
might note, all the Gulf -- Sunni Gulf states that we've
talked about, otherwise, would need to be involved, as well.
And that's the end state that will keep the peace in Syria.

Senator Manchin: And can you give me -- I understand
that they're currently meeting in Saudi Arabia now, talking
about all of these things that we're talking about right
now. Why hasn't the YPG or the Syrian Kurds been involved
in these talks? Why do you think they haven't -- which has
seemed to be the most effective ground troops we have in
Syria right now -- of them leading the charges, and they're
not even asked to be at the table. Would that be because
we're trying to please the Saudis and not upset the Turks?

Or --

Secretary Carter: Can I get back to you on that
question? I don't know where, diplomatically -- I mean, we
are obviously in touch with them. We are -- and Secretary
Kerry knows that and is --

Senator Manchin: Sure.

Secretary Carter: -- involved with them. I simply --

Senator Manchin: Sure.

Secretary Carter: -- would have to give you --

Senator Manchin: And the other thing I'd --
Secretary Carter: -- a considered answer.

[The information referred to follows:]
Senator Manchin: -- like to get your opinion on is
that -- you know, we've been talking about, "What do we do
for the visas -- visa waivers?" And I've had a lot of
conversation with different people from that part of the
world that basically have located in West Virginia. And
they understand that we have to have a much tougher, much
stronger vetting process, or -- they don't want to relax
that at all.

The other thing they would be acceptable to is
biometric scanning. And I'm thinking biometric scanning --
people can change their name, they can change their
appearance, they can't change who they are. And to me, I
think the American people would be a lot more comfortable if
we go down that path and says, "There will be no more visas
coming to this country unless you've had biometric scanning
and we know who you are." And that's something that's
accepted, I think, in -- is it -- is that something that you
think, in your thought process, would be feasible, we could
do?

Secretary Carter: I really would need to defer you to
the Department of Homeland Security and so forth on that,
Senator. Very good question. I just simply don't know a
good answer.

Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte.

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Senator Ayotte: I want to thank you both for being here.

General Selva, could you tell us what percentage of U.S. sorties are returning in the fight right now against ISIS without dropping munitions?

General Selva: Madam Senator, it depends on which day and which target set we're talking about, but roughly 40 percent come back every day not having struck dynamic targets, with weapons still aboard.

Senator Ayotte: So, let me ask you this. We asked Central Command recently whether or not the Department of Defense JTACs are operating outside of operations centers. And, basically, what we heard back is that they weren't. And so, I would like to hear from you, Secretary Carter, and you, General Selva -- I mean, we know that the -- one of the things that makes our airstrikes even more effective are the forward air controllers on the ground calling them in. And what is our position, in fact, on embedding JTACs, whether it's with the Kurds or Iraqi forces, so that we can more effectively bomb ISIS and take out the most productive targets to defeat them?

Secretary Carter: First, I'll note a very good memory I have of your coming to the Pentagon with a number of JTACs --

Senator Ayotte: I did.
Secretary Carter: -- a couple of months ago.

Senator Ayotte: And I appreciate -- we met with the JTAC Associations. And thank you for doing that.

Secretary Carter: Oh, thank you. It was very grateful, and they're great people, because they represent veterans of a great capability. And a -- that's -- we talk about American comparative advantage, this is one of the things we are incomparably good at and that is very effective when we do it.

And the answer to your question is yes, we are -- I want to be careful about what we're doing actually today, as I speak, but we are doing that, accompanying. And people who have those -- and, by the way, other skills -- intelligence skills and other skills that allow us to leverage a local force and make it much more powerful by bringing in the full weight of America -- America's might behind it. And it's the JTACs and those kind of skills that create that connection between a motivated local force and the might of American power.

General Selva, do you want to say anything about JTACs?

General Selva: Senator, in areas where we're not able to accompany to the nearest point of contact, we have actually trained Syrian Arabs, members of the New Syrian Forces, as well as our Iraqi partners, to provide the kind of precision target identification that's necessary. And
then we're passing that pack through JTACs to be vetted in Ops Centers.

Senator Ayotte: Well, I'm glad to hear this, because what we were hearing before is that they were only in the Ops Centers. And obviously, when possible, getting them at the battalion level is going to make the difference. So, we can train all the other people we want, but we know our guys are the best, and women who do this. And that they're going to be able to call in these airstrikes. And we've got 40 percent returning. We can increase that percentage dramatically by having the right information on the ground.

One question I've gotten a lot of is -- you know, I saw, in your testimony, Secretary Carter, that we've taken out 400 ISIS fuel trucks at this point. And I appreciated the report that there were 116 of those taken out with the help of A-10s. But, why did it take so long for us to go after assets like the fuel trucks, knowing where they were? And I think there's a lot of people that have asked that. And are we going to be more aggressive in really going after these assets, going forward?

Secretary Carter: Yes, we're going to be more aggressive, but -- and what made it possible was intelligence that we didn't have before. And that is what allowed us to identify those parts of the oil infrastructure that are being used to fund ISIL. And we greatly increased
our insight into that infrastructure in recent months. And this is one of the ways that, as our intelligence, which I have to say, when I started out, had a lot of improvement to be done in -- there, in terms of collection and graininess of data and so forth -- is getting a lot better. And that is also a huge enabler. Because when those JTACs call in airstrikes, it's based upon an intelligence foundation. That's getting -- that is what made the critical difference in our ability to go after the energy infrastructure --

Senator Ayotte: So, I don't want to -- I don't want to interrupt, but I need to, since my time is almost up, and a really important topic before we leave, and that's Iran. We've now been informed that Iran has made another missile test, on November 21st. We know that previously they made a missile test on October 10th, in violation of existing U.N. resolutions. And, as far as I can tell, in raising this with the administration, nothing has been happening. No response. And these are certainly -- our own Ambassador to the U.N. has said the October 10th, clear violation of the U.N. resolution. You and I have talked, Secretary Carter, about the importance of stopping them from having ICBM capability. Yet, they continue to test, in violation of U.N. resolutions. What's our response?

Secretary Carter: Well, what we're doing, in the Defense Department -- and you may remember, we discussed
this shortly after the nuclear deal was made with Iran --
is, basically, we continue to deter Iran to counter its
malign influence, to have a military presence in the region,
which is oriented not only toward the urgent need to defeat
ISIL in its homeland, but we also have to remember we need
to deter and counter Iran, as well.

    And, as far as its ballistic missile program is
concerned, as you know, we're making some improvements in
our -- both qualitative and quantitative -- in our missile
defense system. That's principally oriented towards North
Korea at the moment, but it's also a capability that will be
relevant against Iran, in the unfortunate event which --
sometime in the future they were able, as we discussed
earlier, to field an ICBM.

    On the specific matter of this missile test, I'd refer
you to the U.S./U.N. or our -- or the State Department on
that. But, on the military side, we are continuing
unchanged in our need to deter and counter Iranian malign
influence in the region.

    Senator Ayotte: Let me just say this. I'm all for --
I've been long supporting enhancing our missile defense
system in this country, but there already are existing U.N.
resolutions that they're in violation of, that -- in testing
these missiles. And if we don't respond to their violations
in a very forceful way, then this agreement -- we might as
1. well -- you know, this -- tear this JCPOA up, because it doesn't matter, because this issue is already a demonstration of them really backing off on international commitments with this agreement pending.

Chairman McCain: Before I recognize Senator Donnelly, Mr. Secretary, you may want to correct the record. We all knew those fuel trucks were moving back and forth. We've seen them. We knew it. A decision was not made by the White House to attack them. I think you may want to correct the record, because I certainly knew --

Secretary Carter: Well, I can --

Chairman McCain: -- that the fuel trucks were --

Secretary Carter: Not a matter of correction at all. I can clarify, if you -- if that would help.

The -- that is the case. And the -- what the air commanders were able to do is identify those trucks -- and in a classified setting, I can describe exactly how that information was obtained -- which were directly supporting ISIL. We have and continue to try to withhold attacks upon that part of the general infrastructure -- energy, electricity, water, et cetera -- that is also necessary for the people of Syria. And we're trying to peel off that which is -- which ISIL uses in command and controls for its own revenue source. We are now able to make that distinction, which is what enabled the airstrikes, Chairman.
And with regard to where that intelligence came from and so forth, I'd be happy to have somebody come up and tell you in a classified manner.

Chairman McCain: I'll be glad to. But, I repeat, we knew those fuel trucks were moving back and forth. We saw them. And -- through ISR -- and the decision was not made in the White House to attack them or not. You can't tell me they were moving all that stuff back and forth for over a year and we didn't know about it. I mean, it's just not possible, given our technologically -- capabilities. But, I'll be glad to hear additional information. But, I was told directly, in Iraq, that we didn't attack them because the decision had not been made to attack them, and they didn't want to harm anybody. So, I'll be glad to call those people a liar that briefed me that were doing those attacks.

Senator Donnelly.

Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you said before that none of the European defense ministers has offered to provide troops to creating a safe zone. Have you asked any of them to provide troops for creating a safe zone and to provide an area for Syrian refugees?

Secretary Carter: We've talked to them about all kinds of capabilities. And as I indicated --

Senator Donnelly: Did you ask any of them to provide
troops to help create a safe zone?

Secretary Carter: Well, we believe that the costs outweigh the benefits --

Senator Donnelly: So, you --

Secretary Carter: -- of a safe zone. So, that is --

Senator Donnelly: So, it's safe to say --

Secretary Carter: -- not something --

Senator Donnelly: -- we did not ask them.

Secretary Carter: We -- I have not asked them for forces for that undertaking. I have asked them persistently for forces of all kinds for undertakings where we think the benefits outweigh the costs. And there are many of those.

Senator Donnelly: And what are the answers that you're getting from the French, from the English, from the Saudis, from the Jordanians?

Secretary Carter: It varies. But, just to -- the French, as I mentioned, were truly galvanized. And I spoke several times to the French Defense Minister. He came here to the United States. We've talked. And they're doing a great deal more. And I'm sorry about the circumstances that galvanized them --

Senator Donnelly: My expectation --

Secretary Carter: -- but I appreciate the help.

Senator Donnelly: -- is that if you asked the French Defense Minister for troops for a safe zone, he would
probably offer them.

Additionally, what I'm trying to find out is -- I believe also, like you and like others, when ISIS holds ground, it makes it more dangerous for our own country, because they have a safe haven to work out of. And so, I have confidence that we're working in Iraq to move them out of Iraq. And then we look at Syria. And so, we talk about 100 people in training. They have 20,000 on the ISIS side. How do we get to Raqqa, and when do we get to Raqqa, when we are training 100 people? Where do the other people come from?

Secretary Carter: The people that we are now not only training -- in fact, not even principally training, but equipping and enabling, are Syrian Arab forces that are working with the Kurdish YPG in the northern part of Syria. They are prepared to advance. They already have, as I indicated, advanced south. And we are enabling them. We're doing more to enable them. And as they do more, we will do yet more to enable them.

Senator Donnelly: Do we have any timeline --

Secretary Carter: And they're the right force to do it, if I may say, because they're Syrian Arabs.

Senator Donnelly: Well, you know, I was in Saudi Arabia, and they said, "We want to put in troops to help." Maybe they told you different. Maybe they wouldn't actually
do it. But, they said they want to put in troops to help. King Abdullah, in Jordan, said, "We want to put in troops to help." So, you have Sunnis in Jordan, you have Sunnis in Saudi Arabia who want to put in troops to move the ball to head toward Raqqa. So, you have other groups that want to help, as well. Do you not want their help, or do you not think that they --

Secretary Carter: We welcome everything King Abdullah is doing, and are very grateful to it. And, as I said, I've spoken to the Saudis, and I remind you that the -- that we had a -- the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders to Camp David, back in -- geez, that was -- I think it was April or so -- and specifically talked to them about the creation of a Sunni-Arab combined force. And so -- and that has not --

Senator Donnelly: So, why can't we --

Secretary Carter: -- materialized among them.

Senator Donnelly: -- get that off the ground? And isn't that the force that gets to Raqqa?

Secretary Carter: Well, it depends on -- from one to another. And I would prefer to speak about part of this -- these things privately.

Senator Donnelly: That's fine.

Secretary Carter: But, one thing that's very clear, in the case of the Saudis, just to -- since you mentioned them, has been the Yemen situation, which has preoccupied a lot of
the time and energy of their forces, as well as their leadership.

Senator Donnelly: I also spoke with some of the Sunni tribal leaders today. They still have extraordinary humanitarian needs. Do we have a plan to work to meet those? Because they still have people who are starving.

Secretary Carter: Yeah, there is. It's a -- State Department, AID, and various international donors are part of that. I can't speak to that authoritatively. Secretary Kerry could. But, it's important to note, from the military point of view, from our point of view, because it's an important part of holding territory once it's taken. To give you an example, when Tikrit was retaken, it was important that order be kept, that services be restored, and that humanitarian assistance be rendered. And that's why people are moving back into Tikrit --

Senator Donnelly: I apologize, Mr. Secretary. I have a vote I have to get to. I just want to finish up by saying this. It is strongly believed, by me and many others, that, as long as Raqqa is held and other areas are held, that dramatically increases the chance of another attack in our country. When we ask, "When are we going to get to Raqqa and move them out?" -- it's not because we're trying to find a date, it's because it's extraordinarily dangerous to the citizens of this country that they're there. So, the sooner
the better that we clear up the clutter with the Saudis, the Jordanians, and move on that city.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carter: Amen.

Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you mentioned the targeting force. What impact do you expect that force to have on the battlefield?

Secretary Carter: I'm sorry. Well, I'm hoping it has a very great effect. That's what it's designed to do. I believe it will. The -- it -- the -- we envision a variety of missions for -- I want to be careful what I say here -- that range from interdicting individuals on the move, leaders on the move, to the kind of -- well, let me give you two examples where we've already employed this technique, because, again, I want to be very careful about operational security here. This is a no-kidding, you know, force that'll be doing important things. But, to -- I think it would help everyone to understand. If you remember the raid that killed Abu Sayyaf, that's an example of the kind of thing that this force could do. Another one was the freeing of 70 prisoners -- ISIL prisoners in which a very heroic action was taken by a soldier, Joshua --

Senator Fischer: Correct.

Secretary Carter: -- Wheeler --
Senator Fischer: We've seen --

Secretary Carter: So, there's an example of the kinds of things that can be done. And it puts the leadership on notice. It'll get valuable intelligence. It'll free people, in the case of that kind of mission. So, there's a variety of missions, and I --

Senator Fischer: Correct. I -- if I can, we've seen those two raids in the last year and a half. Would you anticipate that we're going to see a greater frequency with this force in the days and weeks and months ahead?

Secretary Carter: That's absolutely the intent, Senator.

Senator Fischer: And I would hope we could have general conversations -- I realize the sensitivity of this force, but I would hope we could have general conversations about them so we could lay out truly what the goals are when we're talking about the force. Do you have any immediate goals in mind for this targeting force that you can speak about in a -- general terms at this point?

Secretary Carter: In general terms, they fall in the categories I described: intelligence-gathering, interdiction of leadership, key nodes, facilitation -- and certainly, for you, we can discuss more in a classified setting also. But, that's the kind of thing that -- it's actually a really -- to me, to all of us, a very flexible
and potent tool. And so, it would learn from experience.

By using it, one raid builds on another. You know, the Abu Sayyaf raid built on things, because we gained understanding, as has been reported.

Senator Fischer: And you said that we will do more of what works, going forward. So, I hope, in a more classified setting, you can lay out those goals so that we can have something to measure the success or failure of these raids by them in the future.

I was also interested in knowing, as the number of raids are increasing, will General MacFarland receive any authority to help to plan and order the -- that these raids be carried out, then?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, General MacFarland is in overall charge of the campaign there. I've made that very clear. And I have great confidence in him, and it's why I created that role, so that we would have one senior leader in charge of the entire campaign, covering both Syria and Iraq. And that is General MacFarland, who has -- who is extremely experienced.

Senator Fischer: Will he be able to approve those raids by himself, or will he need to come to you or the President?

Secretary Carter: In many cases, this would be something that he and General -- I think General Austin,
remember, also in the chain of command -- otherwise, when -- if they come to me for approval of things that they think require my approval, that's fine, too. But, there will, and there has to be, a certain amount of delegation of authority, here, so that the -- because, for one thing, one expects that raids build upon themselves, and so you can't -- you're going to want to strike again after you're struck once, on the basis of what you've learned from the first strike. So, we need to have some significant authority in there.

Senator Fischer: When you said it -- it's "fine, too" if they come to you, do you -- don't you have that laid out what a --

Secretary Carter: We do.

Senator Fischer: -- certain plan would be that would require --

Secretary Carter: Yes, we --

Senator Fischer: -- the General, then, to come to you?

Secretary Carter: Yes, we do. It's based on their judgment about whether approval at my level is required. And that's as -- I mean, that's generally true. It's perfectly appropriate in this case.

Senator Fischer: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed [presiding]: On behalf of Chairman

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Senator King: Thank you.

Before beginning my questions, several references have been made to a letter, which I received in early November from General Austin, which laid out a series of steps that had been taken. I'd like to submit that letter for the record, please.

Senator Reed: Without objection.

Senator King: Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]

Senator King: Mr. Secretary, it strikes me that this
is an exceedingly complex challenge. I guess that's pretty obvious. But, part of the problem is, we want to defeat ISIS, but we want to do it in such a way that doesn't propagate their ideology around the Muslim world. And that really makes it very difficult. I think the San Bernardino attack is a good example. There's no evidence that I've heard that that attack was directed by ISIS. Instead, these people were self-radicalized and took it upon themselves to perform these heinous acts.

The question is, How do we keep moderate Muslims, the vast majority of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, from falling into the ISIS trap? And ISIS has made it clear that part of their strategy is to provoke us to Westernizing this conflict and making it a war of America and the West against Islam, and thereby pushing heretofore moderate Muslims in their direction. So, this gets to the question of, How do we take Raqqa, for example? And my understanding is that there's no inclination to use a large contingent of U.S. troops, but there is a recognition, as the President has already acknowledged, that there are places for U.S. troops in a Special Forces kind of setting. Is this the kind of calculation that you're making?

Secretary Carter: That's exactly correct, yes.

Senator King: How do we -- the gap in the strategy, it seems to me, from the beginning -- and I say "gap," that's
not a criticism, that's just the fact -- is, Where do we get ground troops in Syria? Ground troops are available in -- Arab ground troops, Muslim ground troops, are available in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces and the Peshmerga. In Syria, there's not an available force. And that's why, it seems to me, the whole issue of getting rid of Assad is a key part of this calculation, that Assad is the lightning rod that, in effect, created ISIS, in part. And if we can work with other parties, particularly Russia, to move Assad off the stage, then you've got an Arab army, a Muslim army, in Syria. It's the -- all of the opposition, except perhaps al-Nusra, and the Syrian army. That's why, it seems to me, that's a key part of it. But, the question that our colleagues are asking is: time. We -- somehow we've got to accelerate the timetable. We can't wait years for Assad to leave and we turn the guns of the opposition and the Syrian army on ISIL. Would you -- do you share that -- Secretary Carter: I do. I mean, I -- as you can hear, I'm all for urgency and acceleration of the military campaign. And I'd like to see that, too, on the political side. It's trickier. Secretary Kerry's trying to work toward that end. But, it is exactly as you say. If we could get a political transition that brought the Syrian armed forces, that part of which it would be appropriate to carry forward into a new Syria, plus the moderate
opposition, you'd have a force that could both clear Syrian
territory of radicals and eliminate the civil war, which is
what fuels the violent -- this extremism, in the first place

Senator King: Do --
Secretary Carter: -- and have a governance of Syria
that the Syrian people deserve.

Senator King: But, there's one piece of this -- and
you've mentioned it -- you listed a long series of things
that we needed to do, and, at the very end, you said,"information." And that's where we're losing right now. I
heard a figure recently that ISIS posts something like
90,000 posts a day in social media. And just reading a
piece about a young man in the U.S., 17 years old, who found
this ISIS community online, and he's being encouraged to
move forward. And I know it's not in the Department of
Defense, but we -- this country has to do a much better job,
it seems to me, of countering the story that ISIS is telling
to attract young people across the world. We're not only
engaged in a military war, here, we're engaged in a war of
ideas. And right now, I think we're -- it's somewhere close
to a stalemate on the military side, but we're losing the
war of ideas.

Secretary Carter: May I just note, Senator, that it is
for that very reason that yesterday I got together with the
Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the FBI, the Director of National Intelligence, and we were talking exactly about that, how -- what -- the information war. Now, you're right, it's not principally a defense thing. We don't operate here at home. We do operate in the cyberdomain. I alluded to that. And, you know, we're at war, and we have authorities to use our Cyber Command in this case, and are identifying opportunities to do that. At the same time, I just -- I have to say, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence are working intensely -- they were before San Bernardino, they're working now -- and hence the -- on exactly this question of these people who are --

Senator King: If we --

Secretary Carter: -- sitting with a keyboard somewhere in the United States.

Senator King: If we win a town in Syria and lose 10,000 kids in France or Belgium or Florida or Ohio, that's not victory. I'd hope, in the councils of war, you will continue to press that point of view.

Secretary Carter: Will do.

Senator King: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Wicker, please.
Senator Wicker: Thank you very much.

Mr. Secretary, always good to have you back. And I do echo what Senator McCain said, and I hope you'll come back more often and share with us your thoughts.

Let me let you be explicit on the issue of Bashar Assad, because I hear and I read in the paper -- for example, December 7, Bloomberg said, "Obama no longer seems sure Assad should go." Is that true? Do you believe that Mr. Assad should explicitly be removed from power? Or is there a growing feeling that perhaps we ought to team up with Assad?

Secretary Carter: I think -- and I don't want to speak for him, but I think what Secretary Kerry is trying to engineer is the departure of Assad in a way that everyone can support, which, by the way, includes the Russians, who have a lot of influence with Assad, so there -- it's important to see if you can get them on the right side of history, here -- and that accomplishes that -- and this is important, quite apart from the atrocities that Assad has committed -- in a way that removes him while the structures of the Syrian state are still relatively intact, because, to get back to what Senator King was saying a moment ago, we do want -- we do need there to be, after Assad, an -- a Government of Syria that is inclusive, that involves the forces that have been fighting each other, fighting ISIL and
governing the territory decently. That is exactly the
transition that Secretary Kerry is working --

Senator Wicker: Much like we needed in Iraq after the
successful invasion. I think I understand what you're
saying. But, let's get your testimony on this. To your
knowledge, is the President still resolute in saying that
Assad should go and that a solution is not that we should
begin to work with him?

Secretary Carter: No, I -- a political transition in
which Assad leaves power and is replaced by a more inclusive
form of government is the outcome that we're trying to --

Senator Wicker: And a political solution in which
Assad stays in power, is that acceptable to you?

Secretary Carter: I think what -- no, Secretary --
what Secretary --

Senator Wicker: Is it acceptable to the President?

Secretary Carter: Well, what Secretary Kerry is trying
to arrange is --

Senator Wicker: I understand what your testimony just
was. I'm -- but, I'm wondering -- we need to get this on
the record, and Americans need an answer to this. Is the
President steadfast in having a goal that includes Mr. Assad
being removed from power?

Secretary Carter: Well, that's the path that he has --
that's the kind of political transition that he has
Senator Wicker: Would you agree that it would be very difficult to convince Syrian rebels to fight only ISIS if -- and not Assad -- if that were a direction in which the administration should --

Secretary Carter: We actually have experience in exactly that matter, and --

Senator Wicker: And what is your experience?

Secretary Carter: The experience is that they're -- that it's easier to find fighters who are intent upon fighting Assad than to find ones that are intent upon fighting ISIL.

Senator Wicker: Do you believe Mr. Assad should be removed from power?

Secretary Carter: Yeah. I think that to have a decent government there that is in -- that brings the moderate opposition into governance there is going to require the departure of Assad. The how, the when, the where, and so forth, is something that Secretary Kerry is negotiating.

Senator Wicker: Yeah, I --

Secretary Carter: You know, the --

Senator Wicker: -- I understand.

Secretary Carter: -- civil war has gone on a long time, and he's been a lightning rod in that civil war. And if we want to get it behind us and defeat ISIL and get peace
in Syria, I think that's going to be necessary, yeah.

Senator Wicker: Well -- very good. I may try to follow up with some questions on the record there.

Let me ask you about no-fly zones. I understand we've had some testimony today about safe zones. And I'll ask you first, Mr. Secretary, and then if you want to ask the General to add his thoughts, that would be good.

Safe zone -- I mean, no-fly zones would allow Syrians to stay in their own country instead of seeking to become refugees anywhere. They would allow Syrian opposition leaders to exercise sovereignty over Syrian territory. Do you and our coalition partners have the pilots, personnel, and equipment required to establish no-fly zones? And, in particular -- I think maybe earlier, while I was out of the room, there was an attempt to get you to discuss the coalition partners that might be able to enforce this. And do you believe President Putin would challenge our air dominance there and the clearly defined no-fly zones that we would be seeking to enforce?

First you, Secretary Carter.

Secretary Carter: Sure. On no-fly zones, that's something that I've discussed for the committee before. That's not a step we have recommended -- again, because the benefits don't warrant it, in light of the costs. I can explain more, but I'm going to ask General Selva, who's done
a lot of work on that kind of thing, to comment further.

And with respect to the Russians, also, he can comment on the Memorandum of Understanding there, and it -- and the working relationship we have with the Russian military in the air in -- over Syria right now.

Senator Wicker: Fair enough.

General?

General Selva: Senator, we have the military capacity to impose a no-fly zone. The question that we need to ask is, Do we have the political and policy backdrop with which to do so? And I don't mean that in the case of our government, but in the case of the governments who would challenge the no-fly zone. And so, if we're asking the question, Could we do it? -- the answer is yes. Are we willing to engage the potential of a conflict -- a direct conflict with the Syrian Integrated Air Defense System or Syrian forces, or, by corollary, a miscalculation with the Russians, should they choose to contest the no-fly zone? And those are the questions that have been posed, asked, and answered.

And so, military capacity, we have the capacity to do this. We have not recommended it, because the political situation on the ground, and the potential for miscalculation and loss of American life in the air in an attempt to defend the no-fly zone, don't warrant the no-fly
zone, given the fact that, on the ground, the forces would still contest the safe zone on the ground.

Senator Wicker: Well, I'm way over my time, but let me just say that the Secretary mentioned the cost and benefit. And when I think of the benefit that we could have had in the United States not to be faced with this refugee crisis, the benefit to Europe if we had given Syrians a place where they could live in their own country safely, away from these barrel bombs and the -- and these attacks on civilians, it just seems to me that the benefit of doing so, even now, but certainly having done so over time, would have been so enormous that it would have justified whatever cost we might have had to risk.

So, thank you very much for your answers.

And I appreciate the Chair indulging me.

Chairman McCain [presiding]: General, I must say, it's one of the more embarrassing statements I've ever heard from a uniformed military officer, that we are worried about Syria and Russia's reaction to saving the lives of thousands and thousands of Syrians who are being barrel-bombed and massacred. So far, 240,000 of them. Remarkable performance.

Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary and General Selva, for being
Mr. Secretary, you noted in your testimony that Russia, which has publicly committed to defeating ISIL, has instead largely attacked opposition forces. And you said, "It's time for Russia to focus on the right side of this fight." What's it going to take to have Russia turn its attention to fighting ISIL rather than propping up Assad?

Secretary Carter: Well, I can't speak for the Russians, but I have spoken to the Russians, and I have explained to them why their actions are wrongheaded and counterproductive even from the point of view of their own security, because it fuels the civil war in Syria, which we've discussed, which is the underlying cause of the radicalization that gave rise to ISIL, which is the very thing they fear. So, their actions are -- as I -- the phrase I've used is "pouring gasoline on the civil war in Syria."

Senator Hirono: So -- I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary -- so, is Russia fully engaged in the discussions to end the -- with us, with Secretary Kerry and the -- some of the other parties that are -- that need to be at the table, in ending the civil war in Syria? Are they fully engaged in that?

Secretary Carter: I don't want to speak for Secretary Kerry in that regard -- fully engaged. They are certainly engaged. He's talking to them along the lines that we
discussed, along with a range of other parties that will be necessary to a final political transition, here.

Senator Hirono: I think there are a lot of people who agree with the assessment that ending the civil war in Syria is one of the keys in enabling the United States, as well as Russia and our other partners, some 60-plus, to focus on defeating ISIL. I think that that is generally acknowledged, and I certainly agree with that.

One of the advantages that ISIL has its ability to recruit young men and women and influence actors around the world through its online media campaign. And San Bernardino is just the most recent example. In your opinion, how can we counter this or overcome the effectiveness of ISIL's online presence? And I realize that this is an issue that should be addressed, not just by -- perhaps not even mainly by you, but FBI and the Director of National Intelligence, Homeland Security, with whom you met. So, what do we have to do to debase ISIL's ability and its success in motivating lone wolves in our country and all across the world in committing terrorist acts?

Secretary Carter: Well, you're right. Here at home, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security and Director of National Intelligence are working along those lines at -- to identify those who are self-radicalizing or plotting using the Internet. And I wouldn't want to speak for them.
They're -- I can only tell you that they're intent upon solving that problem.

There is a role, I would say, not in that fight, but it is related to the fight we are waging, because it's why I think it's important to strike at and eliminate the parent tumor in Syria and Iraq, because that's part of the creation of the narrative that fuels the Internet, which fuels even lone wolves, and also, where we are able to, to eliminate people who are trying to recruit our people.

I think the Chairman referred, earlier, to the elimination of Junaid Hussain, which I reported to you when I was last up here. He was somebody who was trying to recruit Americans to attack Americans. No doubt about it.

So, there are some things even we can do -- well, not only "even we" -- we can do as the Department of Defense to assist in this. But, this -- a big effort by Director Comey and Secretary Johnson and the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of Central Intelligence, on this effort. Now, it began well before San Bernardino, but San Bernardino illustrates why this is no-kidding important thing to do.

Senator Hirono: Would you say that debasing the ability of ISIL to motivate lone wolves -- what -- people who don't even have any direct contact with ISIL, but who have access to their ideology and through the Internet --
that this is more of a whole-of-government approach that we need to take that includes law enforcement and -- local law enforcement as well as people in the community?

Secretary Carter: Yes. This whole campaign really is a whole-of-government campaign. Has to be. In today's world, all these pieces need to be connected.

Senator Hirono: Mr. Chairman, my timing -- the timer is not working, so I have absolutely no idea how much time I have left. Well, in that case, I will stop here.

[Laughter.]

Chairman McCain: -- I'd say to the Senator.

Senator Hirono: I just have one last question, that -- we talk about defeating ISIL. And, really, what does that look like? I mean, what does defeating ISIL look like?

Secretary Carter: In --

Senator Hirono: Including the -- preventing the ability of them to encourage the lone-wolf actors all across the world.

Secretary Carter: In Iraq and Syria, which, as I said, is necessary -- not sufficient, but necessary -- it means destroying their organization, their leadership, their ability to control territory, their ability to have a source of revenue, and their ability to claim that they're anything but a bunch of barbarians, their state. That's what eliminating them -- and that's the end state that we're
seeking in Iraq and Syria. And, of course, to make that stick gets us back to what others have been talking about, the political dimension of it. But, from the military point of view, that's the objective.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Rounds.

Senator Rounds: I'd like to return to this question of no-fly zones. General Selva, your testimony is that United States has the military capability to impose a no-fly zone over Syria.

General Selva: Yes, sir.

Senator Rounds: A little over 2 weeks ago, Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft for violating Turkish airspace. How many Russian aircrafts have violated Turkish airspace since that incident?

General Selva: None that I know of.

Senator Rounds: Do you think we can infer a lesson from Vladimir Putin's conduct in the aftermath of that shootdown, since he had repeatedly violated Turkish airspace beforehand?

General Selva: I think I'd be very careful in inferring his decision process to that particular set of circumstances, because what the Russians have done, as a consequence of that shootdown, is to beef up their integrated air defense. They've brought surface-to-air
missiles into their base in Latakia, they've installed surface-to-air missiles around Aleppo. They have worked with Syrian partners, and the Syrian partners now have their radars active, which they didn't have just a few weeks ago.

So, I think it's -- it is that set of consequences, when we think about no-fly zones, that we have to factor into our calculus. If a no-fly zone is to be defended, and it is to have effect on the ground, the consequences of activity by surface-to-air missile systems and air-defense aircraft have to be factored into the equation. We have the capability to deal with those. The consequence is a direct confrontation with Russia or Syria.

Senator Rounds: Thank you.

Secretary Carter, I noticed that you were smirking at my question. Could I get your take on that?

Secretary Carter: No, I was -- I'm sorry, I was smiling at the General's --

Senator Rounds: I think it might deserve a smirk. I'm not --

Secretary Carter: -- directly, but it's hard to --

Senator Rounds: -- rebuking you.

Secretary Carter: No, no, no. I was smiling about inferring Vladimir Putin's intentions. I -- and I -- he rightly said, it's a little hard to know. That's all. I was just --
Senator Rounds: Well, I would submit that he repeatedly violated Turkish airspace until Turkey defended its airspace, and he has not done that -- done so since then, and that maybe we can learn a lesson from that.

I also want to return to the point that Senator Ayotte was discussing about the oil trucks that we struck shortly after the Paris attacks. I believe it was a little over 100. Can you explain why that didn't happen earlier? I mean, why that didn't happen 6 months ago, a year ago?

General Selva: There are two principal reasons. First is the development of the actual intelligence as to the contribution of those particular routes to the finances of ISIL. With respect to the Chairman, those are -- that black-and-gray economy in oil across the region --

Senator Rounds: And I -- so, I understand that, and I understand that intelligence can often be hard to develop, especially when you don't have a presence on the ground. But, I don't understand what's hard to develop intelligence about tanker trucks leaving refineries in ISIS-controlled space.

General Selva: The second point, Senator, is that, in an effort to minimize the civilian casualties, the drivers of those trucks are not necessarily adherents to ISIL's ideology, but are Syrians trying to make --

Senator Rounds: I have no doubt about that.
General Selva: So --

Senator Rounds: They're probably Syrians who are driving trucks, and Islamic State said, "Drive this truck or we're going to kill you and cut the heads off your kids."

General Selva: So, I actually visited with the unit that prosecuted the attacks on the bulk of those vehicles. And they used a set of tactics, techniques, and procedures that warned the drivers in advance so they could flee their trucks, and then destroyed the trucks in situ. We are looking for more opportunities to do exactly the same thing so that we don't alienate the civilian population, those that are not ISIL adherents.

Senator Rounds: I --

General Selva: We'll continue to degrade the infrastructure for production --

Senator Rounds: And I strongly support that. And I'm aware of the TTPs you're discussing, but those are things that our Air Force have done for a long time to minimize civilian casualties. We didn't just develop these TTPs in the last month, did we? I mean, we could leaflet civilians 6 months ago or 12 months ago, right?

General Selva: They are not new TTPs, but the opportunities and the places with which to use them are a product of the intelligence that we developed from our understanding of the oil infrastructure and distribution.
network that supports it.

Senator Rounds: I'd like to talk about, now, the rules-of-engagement decision-making authority. One constant thing I've heard from senior commanders down to low-level troops in my travels in the region and here in the United States is that decisions that were being made in the middle part of the last decade by O-5s are now being made by three- and four-star generals, or even civilians, in Washington, and that the rules of engagement have been incredibly restrictive -- as the example, this oil tanker truck example. Secretary Carter, do you care to comment on what I've been hearing from troops directly on my trips --

Secretary Carter: I'll start, and then I do want General Selva to represent professional military judgment in this matter, so I'd like him -- to give him the opportunity to speak, as well.

The commanders there, the air commanders, have told me -- and I'll let -- and General Selva and General Dunford have reported to me about limitations on the effectiveness of the air campaign. And I have asked about whether our rules of engagement are a limiting factor that is stopping them from being more effective. And just two things I'd say about that, and then I'll let General Selva go into it ion more detail.

They have not changed over time. And, by the way, they
are not -- these are not things that are approved in
Washington or anything, they're -- these are things that are
done by the air operators in theater, which is appropriate.
The -- in -- the things that have really enabled our air --
well, let me put -- turn it around and say, the things that
have limited it from time to time, our air campaign, have
been, first of all, annoyingly, weather. And that was true
a month and a half ago, for a couple of weeks. But, then
more -- and that's important -- more fundamentally has been
intelligence. And we've gotten a lot better intelligence
picture now, and therefore are able to conduct more
effective strikes, which is one reason why we're able to be
-- to conduct more strikes, absorb more air capability,
because we can get into Incirlik, from which the sorties
were shorter, absorb more capability from the French and
others, and put it to good use, because we could develop the
targets. And I always say it's better to have more
airplanes than targets, than targets than airplanes. And
so, on some days, a sortie goes out for dynamic targeting,
as opposed to deliberate targeting. Deliberate targeting,
the bombs are almost always dropped. More than 90 percent.
Dynamic targeting is where you go out there and hope that a
target that you're thinking might develop actually does
develop. That's an important thing to do, because it's what
stops ISIL from being able to use the roads safely, having
to drive at night with their lights off, all that kind of stuff. And you don't always find those targets. And so, sometimes the airplanes come back with their bombs on them. It's intelligence that makes all the difference.

General, please.

General Selva: Senator, I haven't met a soldier, sailor, airman, or marine who wouldn't ask for looser ROE in any active fight. But, having consulted with the commanders, from the JTF all the way up to Central Command, I know of no rules-of-engagement restrictions that have prevented us from striking targets and that prevented our forces from being as effective as they can be on the ground. I've consulted with all of them.

Senator Rounds: Thank you.

I'm over time. But, Senator Reed, if I can have one moment to ask a more lighthearted question of General Selva. For 60 years, NORAD and the Air Force has been tracking Santa over the skies of North America. Can you assure the boys and girls of this country that NORAD and the Air Force are fully prepared to track Santa once again?

General Selva: I don't have a complete intelligence report, Senator, but I understand that the reindeer have been, in fact, fed their quantity of oats and are prepared for the delivery of all of those gifts to those who have been nice and not naughty.
Senator Rounds: Well, I think it's a welcome reminder that, while most Americans are at home enjoying Christmas with their families, that our airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines, whether they're in NORAD or around the world, are out there keeping us safe and defending our values and what makes this country great.

General Selva: Sir, not to extend the questioning and the answering, but I did spend my Thanksgiving with our troops in Iraq, in Baghdad, Taji, and Arrow, and I can report to you that their moral is high, and they did phone home and talk to the people who love them.

Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you very much for reminding us of the service and sacrifice of so many, Senator.

And, on behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Nelson, please.

Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carter, I gave a speech recently and showed the map of Syria and Iraq and the area that ISIS used to occupy that it no longer occupies and the area that it occupies now that it did not occupy. And the difference is dramatic, that you all have shrunk the territorial occupation of ISIS. And you are to be congratulated on that.

But, at the end of the day, as you all have already
testified, Syria is not going to be able to contain ISIS until at least there is a plan for the exit of President Assad. Now, when that occurs, what is the Arab force that is going to be on the ground, with the guidance of our Special Operations Forces -- what is -- give me a concept of what that makeup is of that Arab force.

Secretary Carter: Well, it's a very good question, and it gets to the issue of the end state of the campaign, here, and the critical political ingredient, because a political transition in Syria is essential to a durable end state to this. Because it's the civil war in Syria that started this whole business in Syria. And that would mean -- and, at that time, the force that is now not available because they're fighting each other, but that could fight ISIL, is the combination of Syrian forces and the moderate opposition that is now fighting in Syria. If there's a political settlement, that -- in the meantime, we're using forces -- some Kurds up north, the YBG, and we're trying to accumulate additional Syrian Arabs who want to take their homes back from ISIL. But, the civil war is, meanwhile, using up a lot of combat power that could potentially be used against ISIL.

Senator Nelson: So, you really believe that, once there's a path for Assad to leave, that Syrian government forces, which include Alawites, which are Shi'a, are going to join up with the opposition Sunni forces to go after
Secretary Carter: The political transition is exactly to have a Syria that is once again whole, multisectarian for sure, like all those states over there, with all the complications that go with that, and that we see in Iraq. But, that, as an alternative to sectarianism and the continuation of sectarian civil --

Senator Nelson: Right.

Secretary Carter: -- war, yes.

Senator Nelson: So, go over to Iraq. Is that anti-sectarian? Is it working, with the forces on the ground that we're supporting from the air?

Secretary Carter: Well, first of all, Prime Minister Abadi -- I've spoken to him frequently; I'll have an opportunity to speak to him in coming days when I, too, will be visiting our troops in theater -- is committed precisely to that kind of vision for Iraq. I believe him. I've talked to him --

Senator Nelson: Do you think he --

Secretary Carter: Well, that's the -- whether he can pull it off in Baghdad is obviously a difficult matter for him. We are supporting him in that regard, because we believe that the alternative, which is further sectarian division, civil war, cleansing, and so forth -- we've seen that before. And if he can keep his vision of an Iraq,
which, as he called it, is decentralized, so it's not
everybody under the thumb of Baghdad, because he knows the
Kurds and the Sunnis won't go for that -- but, still, the
ability to retain an integral state that keeps peace within
its borders -- that's what he's --
Senator Nelson: Right.
Secretary Carter: -- committed to. That's the end
state we also want in Iraq.
Senator Nelson: Right. So, it's possible that, with
Assad leaving Syria, you could get Syria under control, but
everything could go haywire in Iraq.
Secretary Carter: They are two separate dynamics.
There's one thing I'll mention that I mentioned when I was
with you 6 weeks ago, and we have -- and has subsequently
come to pass. I was talking about the importance of getting
the town of Sinjar -- you're talking about territory, but
the -- but, you know, a lot of that territory is empty, and
it's the towns that matter. The critical crossing of Sinjar
-- now, what is Sinjar? Sinjar is a place in between Mosul
and Raqqa. And the -- to cut ISIL into its Syrian branch
and stop them from cross-feeding is a -- the objective of
taking Sinjar. And so, in the end, the political end states
are different for Syria and Iraq, absolutely.
Senator Nelson: Understand.
Mr. Chairman, if I may, just one quick question,
because the Department of Defense has asked for $116 million reprogramming to keep the effort of General Nagata's training program. Do you support the restarting of that program?

Secretary Carter: I urgently support that funding. I -- but, I don't describe it, and the documents we sent you don't describe it, as a restarting of the old program. As I described earlier, we learned from the old program. It had some success, but not nearly what we had hoped for. And I've told you that that -- for me, that was a disappointment. And -- so, I'm very up front about that. But, what we're asking for is that -- is funds that were previously earmarked for that to an approach that we think is more effective, which is precisely one of the ones I've been describing today. That's why we would urgently like that fund.

And I just -- you know, I mean, people decry micromanagement, but micromanagement also comes from -- can come from many sources. And I would urge you, please, to avoid that, give us that funding that we've requested. We submitted the paperwork -- I know the Chairman said, a week ago, and I -- I apologize if it was that recently. My understanding was, it was more than that. But, this is a war, and I'd simply urge you -- I know you're very busy people who have lots of things to do, but if you can please
Chairman McCain [presiding]: We will, Mr. Secretary.
We also, obviously, as I mentioned before, would like to
know the details of how it's used. And I think that's
appropriate. I thank you.
Secretary Carter: Fair enough.
Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis.
Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Gentlemen, thank you both for being here today.

On November the 12th, the President answered the
question, "Is ISIS gaining strength?" by saying, "I don't
think they're gaining strength, and I believe we've
contained them." Now, 2 weeks before that interview, in
Ankara we saw two bombs kill 102 people, in the Sinai we saw
224 people lose their lives when the Russian jetliner was
downed. On the day of his interview, in Beirut, two suicide
bombers killed 43. And then the day after his interview, a
wave of six terrorist attacks killed 130 in Paris. And then
on December 2, 14 Americans were killed.
Right now, in another committee hearing down at
Judiciary Committee -- I stepped in for a minute before I
came back here -- Director Comey said that America is at its
highest threat level since 9/11.
So, I'm trying to square the statement made by our
President on November 12th, that they're not gaining
strength and that we have contained them, with a comment
that you made in the opening, I think, in response to
Chairman -- the Chairman's question about how we contain
them. What am I missing, in terms of you saying that we
haven't contained them, the President says that we have and
that they're not gaining strength, with the events that
we've -- I've just summarized there? Secretary Carter, I'll
start with you, and then General Selva.

Secretary Carter: Well, we have to defeat ISIL. And

Senator Tillis: I agree with that, but --

Secretary Carter: -- and that --

Senator Tillis: -- a part of it is -- excuse me,
because I want to try to stick to the time -- a part of it
has to do with the President acknowledging the current
situation. Do you agree with his characterization that
they're not gaining strengthen --

Secretary Carter: The --

Senator Tillis: -- and we've contained them?

Secretary Carter: The President has asked me, and
asked our military leaders, to give him recommendations, and
to keep giving him recommendations, to defeat ISIL. That --
and he has approved all the ones that we've taken to him.
We expect to take more. And I think that's --

Senator Tillis: Secretary Carter --
Secretary Carter: -- that's the --

Senator Tillis: -- have you told the President that they're not gaining strength and that we've contained them?

Secretary Carter: I have not used -- General Dunford said, last -- talked about tactical containment versus strategic containment, if we're going to use that word. I kind of like the word "defeat," myself, Senator.

Senator Tillis: General Selva, I want to ask you a question about some of the airstrikes. I know that you were talking about the rules of engagement. And it seems to make sense to try and protect the civilian drivers in the tankers, et cetera.

Back in June, the military officials acknowledged that 75 percent of the planes flying combat missions returned without dropping their weapons. You, in response to Senator Ayotte's questions, said that that's now about 40 percent. What's changed?

General Selva: Senator, we've increased the number of deliberate strikes, preplanned designated targets, as opposed to having airplanes looking for dynamic targets in the environment. We have sufficient airpower in the region to accomplish both. But, in any case of dynamic targeting, some of those airplanes are always going to come back with their ordnance because targets don't present themselves.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.
And former Deputy Director Mike Morell, of the CIA, made, in a comment on November the 25th, that we didn't go after oil wells, actually hitting oil wells that ISIS controls, because we didn't want to do environmental damage and we didn't want to destroy infrastructure. Are those still key factors in whether or not you go after ISIS targets?

General Selva: I don't know of the rules of engagement that he's talking about, but, as we develop deliberate targets, we do bring environmental considerations into the factors that we consider, but they do not limit us from striking the infrastructure. They just change the way we strike it. So, we try to do as little environmental damage as possible, but still limit the capacity of the well to produce.

Senator Tillis: And, Secretary Carter, maybe just to close out with this, just to go back to defining the problem. If we shift -- and you made the distinction between tactical and strategic containment -- but, if we shift to a global perspective, away from the narrow focus of, maybe, tactically, what we're doing in Iraq and Syria, is there any grounds for describing ISIS as "contained"?

Secretary Carter: I'll let General Dunford, who's not here, speak for himself. I described, and I think we need to be concerned about -- we've talked about metastasis to
the homeland, and we've talked about the necessity of
getting the parent tumor. We have not discussed as much the
necessity of going after ISIL elsewhere. I mentioned Libya.
We took out its leader in Libya. We're going to have to do
more in Libya. ISIL is becoming a magnet for groups that
previously existed, in some cases, that are now rebranding
themselves as ISIL. But, it's worse than that, because in
-- they're also gaining energy from the movement in Iraq and
Syria, which is why we need to destroy it in Iraq and Syria.

But, this is a worldwide phenomenon. And I've talked to
leaders -- I was recently talking to some leaders in
southeast Asia, actually, about many things, but one of the
things they raised is concern about little patches of ISIL
and self-radicalization of the kind that we find.

So, in the Internet Age and the Social Media Age,
terrorism doesn't have any geographic bounds. So, I think
we have to recognize it while we need to attack it
geographically on the ground in Syria and Iraq. That is
necessary, it's not sufficient.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Secretary Carter, do you agree with a recent study done
by the RAND Corporation suggesting that it would be wise for Congress to pass a new Authorization for Use of Military Force against ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I haven't seen that study, Senator. I have testified in favor of the AUMF that the President submitted, and I welcome that. It's not necessary, literally, in the sense that we're able to conduct our campaign.

Senator Kaine: The RAND -- the study -- I would just encourage you to take a look, because I think it backs up --

Secretary Carter: Will do.

Senator Kaine: -- backs up your position; it was reported 2 days ago -- says that an authorization by Congress would send a message of resolve to our allies --

Secretary Carter: Would do.

Senator Kaine: -- send a message of resolve to ISIL, it would send a message of resolve to the troops.

Secretary Carter: Troops.

Senator Kaine: And RAND, which is, you know, not biased on the legal analysis, said that, at a minimum, the connection of the battle against ISIL to the 2001 and 2002 authorizations requires, quote, "legal gymnastics" that it would be wise to clear up.

Secretary Carter, what message does it send to the 3600 troops that are deployed overseas in this fight at the
holidays, and to the families of the 11 servicemembers who have lost their lives in Operation Inherent Resolve, and five others who have been wounded, that Congress has been unwilling to debate and vote upon this war in the 16 months since it started?

Secretary Carter: I think that the passage of an AUMF, as you indicate -- and this is one of the reasons why I testified in favor of it, would be a signal of resolve and support to our troops. Therefore, I think it's -- it is desirable. By the way, a signal of resolve to our enemies. I should say, that's not the only thing. I think when you visit them, as some of you have done in the last week, when you hold a hearing like this and show that you care what they're doing, when you go back to your bases and -- at home and tell them how proud you are of them, the family members that are back here -- all that stuff's incredibly important. They need to know we're behind them. And, you know, I always tell our people, "I'm 1,000 percent behind you." And --

Senator Kaine: Let me --

Secretary Carter: -- if this would add to it --

Senator Kaine: Let me ask you this.

Secretary Carter: -- that's good.

Senator Kaine: It -- our Chairman, Senator McCain, was quoted last week -- now, this was not an approving quote,
this was a critical quote, in the same way that I am
critical of the current status of affairs where Congress has
been silent for 16 months -- the quote was that a
congressional vote to authorize war against ISIL doesn't
seem forthcoming now, because of politics here, and that it,
quote, "may require an attack on the United States of
America to force such a vote." Would it wise for Congress
to wait that long?

Secretary Carter: Again, I -- I'm -- I am in favor of
the one that the President submitted. I think, on balance,
it would be a positive thing and a sign that the country's
behind the troops. And, provided it allowed me and General
Selva and our military leaders to do what we think is needed
to defeat ISIL -- provided it does that, it -- I think the
signal it sends of resolve by this country is a good thing.

Senator Kaine: At least three nations on the U.N.
Security Council -- England, France, and, I'm very sorry to
say, Russia -- have submitted to their legislative bodies
the -- a -- for a debate and vote, their engagement in
military action in Syria and Iraq. And other nations, such
as Germany, have done the same. The President started the
war against ISIL 16 months ago yesterday. There's only been
one vote in the Senate -- it was a Senate Foreign Relations
Committee vote, a year ago Friday. There hasn't really been
action in the House.
I just hope that we would follow -- I hate to say this -- I hope we would follow the lead of other nations whose legislative bodies have decided it was important enough to have a debate and vote on this before the public.

Second issue I want to just bring up. And this is more just kind of an observation for you. Senator McCain was the first to call for the no-fly zones. And, at the time that he started that, I didn't agree with him. And the reason I didn't is that there were testimony from General Dempsey and others here that to do a no-fly zone would run the risk of running across the Syrian air defenses. To many of us on the committee, that argument fell away when the administration came and proposed an aerial attack on Syria after the use of chemical weapons against Bashar al-Assad. And when we reminded them, "Hey, wait a minute. You said Syria has really tough air defenses," the administration testimony at that point was, "Yeah, well, we're not that worried about them."

Let me tell you why I think the absence of the humanitarian zone is going to go down as one of the big mistakes that we've made, equivalent to the decision not to engage in humanitarian activity in Rwanda in the 1990s. With respect to Syria, there's been testimony from the military to us that the Syrian Air Defense System is really not all that great, and that we could take care of it. And
with respect to Russia, Russia voted for Security Council Resolution 2139 in February of 2014 calling for cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria without the permission of Bashar al-Assad.

There are few guarantees in life, but I can pretty much give you this one. Russia would not intervene and try to mess around with us if we were engaged in a humanitarian effort that was premised upon a U.N. Security Council Resolution that they actually voted for. And since February of 2014, we've had the ability and the legal rationale to enforce that resolution. And we haven't. And millions of refugees have left the country. If we had done that then, I think we'd be in much better place now. And I think we can still do it, and we'd be in much better place.

So, just in terms of the argument about, "Here's why we don't think it's a good idea," previous testimony to the committee by folks from the Pentagon have undercut your argument with respect to Syria and Russia.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any other questions.

Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

Senator Graham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary and General, thank you for your service.

The President addressed the Nation Sunday night. Did you hear his address, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary Carter: I did not. I read it.
Senator Graham: Okay. Do you believe that we're at war with ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I do.

Senator Graham: Do you believe they're at war with us?

The answer is --

Secretary Carter: Yeah.

Senator Graham: -- yes, yeah. They would hit our homeland if they could.

Secretary Carter: For sure. They say that --

Senator Graham: Okay.

Secretary Carter: They say that they -- and they indicate that --

Senator Graham: Is there any place on the planet that you would take off limits when it comes to fighting ISIL?

Secretary Carter: No, I don't think we can do that, for the reasons I just -- I said earlier. They are metastasizing everywhere, and everywhere there is -- there are information media, there are going to be people who go online who, maybe, have never been to Syria or Iraq, or even know where they are --

Senator Graham: The answer is --

Secretary Carter: -- they only know --

Senator Graham: -- no.

Secretary Carter: -- where their screen is.

Senator Graham: Right, I agree with you. I think
that's a very good answer. There is no place on the planet we should give them safe haven.

Number two, when it comes to time, in terms of this war, when will it end?

Secretary Carter: As soon as we can possibly bring it to --

Senator Graham: Five years? Ten years? Does anybody know?

Secretary Carter: Well, I think that --

Senator Graham: Do you want to put a time limit on how long we should fight it?

Secretary Carter: I think, in war, it's good to have plans. I think it was Eisenhower, who --

Senator Graham: Here's my question. Are you willing to put a time limit on how long we can fight ISIL?

Secretary Carter: I think we have to fight ISIL until ISIL is defeated everywhere.

Senator Graham: I couldn't agree with you more.

When it comes to means, do you believe this country should use all lawful means when it comes to fighting ISIL, depending on what the circumstances dictate?

Secretary Carter: Sure.

Senator Graham: Do you think Raqqa, Syria, will be -- still will be in the hands of ISIL by January 2017, more or less likely?
Secretary Carter: I'm sorry, you said -- which ones?
Senator Graham: Do you think Raqqa, Syria, will be in
the hands of ISIL --
Secretary Carter: Oh, I very much hope that it won't
-- that it would be -- that --
Senator Graham: Do you think it's more likely --
Secretary Carter: -- it will either be -- it not be in
the hands of ISIL or that there -- control will be
substantially eroded --
Senator Graham: Okay. So --
Secretary Carter: I hope that. I can't guarantee --
Senator Graham: Right.
Secretary Carter: -- that. You can't guarantee
anything --
Senator Graham: Right. But --
Secretary Carter: -- in war, but it's --
Senator Graham: -- we hope --
Secretary Carter: -- certainly an objective.
Senator Graham: We all --
Secretary Carter: As soon as possible.
Senator Graham: We all hope, but we're not going to
get there on hope. So, you're a good man. I'm not trying
to fight you, here.
Here's what I've done. I'm making an offer to our
President that I believe this war is going to go on for a
long time, after his presidency. I believe that they're going to go wherever they can on the planet, and that we should stop them wherever necessary. And when it comes to means, we should not limit this Commander in Chief or any other Commander in Chief when it comes to means. Do you agree with that?

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I do.

Senator Graham: So, I have an Authorization to Use Military Force, Senator Kaine. It's not limited by geography. It's not -- could you put it up, please -- it's not limited by geography, time, or location. It represents a theory that this President and future Presidents need to have the same capabilities against ISIL as we gave -- that existed after 9/11 regarding al-Qaeda.

So, I agree with Senator Kaine that the Congress should be involved. I am answering the request of the President to get involved. And here is the question. As Secretary of Defense, could you support an authorization using military force that has no limit on geography, time, or lawful means when it comes to destroying ISIL?

Secretary Carter: Well, I'm not going to invent a new AUMF here. This is the first time I've studied yours. I'm sorry to --

Senator Graham: Okay.

Secretary Carter: -- to say. I did support the
President's AUMF, for two principal reasons. The first --

Senator Graham: Do you --

Secretary Carter: -- first --

Senator Graham: Do you --

Secretary Carter: -- the first was because I thought

it could, exactly as you say, permit us to conduct the

campaign that we need to do to defeat ISIL. That's

critical. It did have a time dimension in it, which I --

Senator Graham: From a military point of view,

General, do you think saying you're going to have a time

dimension is probably a wrong signal to send to the enemy?

General Selva: The context of the time signal makes a
difference. I would prefer not to have one.

Senator Graham: Okay.

General Selva: So I could say to them, "I'm going to

prosecute you anywhere I find you."

Senator Graham: That's what I want to say.

General Selva: As long as I --

Senator Graham: I want to say to this President that,

"I want to give you the tools, that time is no factor when

it comes to destroying ISIL, and location doesn't mean a
damn thing, where, after you -- wherever you go, as long as

it takes, whatever is required to defeat you." That's the

statement I think America needs to make. Is that a fair

statement?
Mr. Secretary? "Whatever it takes, as long as it takes, wherever we need to go to destroy you," when it comes to ISIL.

Secretary Carter: Well, I mean, that's okay, from the point of view of conducting the military campaign, but you have to --

Senator Graham: That's --

Secretary Carter: -- but you have to get the votes.

Senator Graham: That's -- no, I know.

Secretary Carter: And I -- that, I can't --

Senator Graham: Yeah, but, you know --

Secretary Carter: -- predict. So --

Senator Graham: -- I'm not asking you to vote.

Secretary Carter: -- I'm not going to try to craft what it -- what can be passed here, Senator. I've testified in favor of the AUMF the President --

Senator Graham: Would you vote for this?

Secretary Carter: -- submitted.

Senator Graham: Would you vote for this?

Secretary Carter: I don't know. I'm seeing it for the first time. I'm --

Senator Graham: Well, as Secretary --

Secretary Carter: -- not a --

Senator Graham: -- Secretary of Defense, do you support the concept that the President --
Secretary Carter: I support an AUMF that the President submitted --

Senator Graham: Do you support --

Secretary Carter: -- that gives us the authority --

Senator Graham: With --

Secretary Carter: -- to wage the war that --

Senator Graham: Just --

Secretary Carter: -- we need to wage. That's --

Senator Graham: Mr. Secretary --

Secretary Carter: -- the important thing.

Senator Graham: -- do you support the concept, the authority that this President should have no time limits placed on his ability to fight the war? Do you support that concept?

Secretary Carter: I think the AUMF, as submitted, only recognizes that his term of office --

Senator Graham: I'm not asking you --

Secretary Carter: -- comes to an end --

Senator Graham: -- about his AUMF.

Secretary Carter: -- in a year.

Senator Graham: Right. I agree with that. Do you agree the next President, whoever he or she may be, should have a AUMF not limited by time? That's just a smart decision, from the military point of view. Do you agree with that?
Secretary Carter: Well, it's not --

Senator Graham: When you -- are you going to -- are you, as Secretary of Defense, telling me that you want to put limits, in terms of time, regarding --

Secretary Carter: No, I'm trying to explain to you why -- as I explained to this committee before, why I understood that there was the 3-year time thing --

Senator Graham: I'm not asking you about --

Secretary Carter: -- provision. And it was not --

Senator Graham: Listen.

Secretary Carter: -- for a military reason.

Senator Graham: Okay, right. But --

Secretary Carter: It was in deference to a future President.

Senator Graham: Yeah. Okay.

Secretary Carter: And you can agree or disagree --

Senator Graham: Right.

Secretary Carter: -- with that, but that was the reason why it was included --

Senator Graham: Okay.

Secretary Carter: -- in there. And I -- that was a political reason --

Senator Graham: Right.

Secretary Carter: -- having to do with --

Senator Graham: From a military point of view --
Secretary Carter: -- the constitutional system, not a military --

Senator Graham: From a military -- listen to me, please. From a military point of view, you don't want time limits.

Secretary Carter: I don't think we can -- I don't think --

Senator Graham: From a military point of view, you don't want geographical limits.

Secretary Carter: Yeah, I don't -- we don't -- we can't have geographic --

Senator Graham: And from a military point of view, you don't want to take means off the table that are lawful, when it comes to --

Secretary Carter: And that we --

Senator Graham: -- destroying ISIL.

Secretary Carter: -- that are useful to this --

Senator Graham: Yeah.

Secretary Carter: -- campaign.

Senator Graham: So, to the Congress, if you don't like what this President or future President does, in terms of fighting ISIL, defund it. That's your job. I am making a simple proposition to this President that, "I will give you whatever you need, in terms of my authorization to go wherever you need to go, as long as it takes, to use
whatever available tools you have, within legal limits, to
destroy this threat. Mr. President, are you all in, or
not?" The Secretary of Defense seems to be indicating this
is good military policy.

To my colleagues on the other side, if we produce an
Authorization to Use Military Force restricted by time,
means, or geography, you're sending a message to the enemy I
will not send, you're restricting our ability to defend this
homeland, which is a -- an imminent attack is coming. So, I
want to have this debate, like Senator Kaine has suggested.
And it is imperative that the Congress get off the
sidelines.

Tim Kaine and I may have a different outcome, but
you're absolutely right, let's have a discussion, let the
enemy know, without hesitation, there is no limitations on
time, means, or location when it comes to destroying ISIL.
"Mr. President, embrace this authorization for you and
future Presidents, because the country needs it."
Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary and General, for
your fine service.

Chairman McCain: Senator Blumenthal.
Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Thank you for your service, Mr. Secretary, General.
And thank you for being here.
I've just come from a vote on the floor, but, before
that, a hearing of the Judiciary Committee, where FBI
Director Comey was testifying about many subjects related
closely to the subject matter of your testimony. Even
though the geography may be different, the threat is the
same. And clearly, the strategy for confronting that threat
of terror has to be coordinated and targeted to what poses
the danger to our Nation. And my feeling is -- I agree with
you -- the reality is, we are at war. That's the stark,
irrefutable reality. And more needs to be done, more
aggressively, more intensely, and more effectively, in using
our Special Operators, advising local forces, supplying and
equipping them, providing them with intelligence,
intercepting communications of our adversaries, and cutting
off the flow of money, which is their lifeblood. And the
pace of our present activities seems inadequate.

Now, we may differ on that point. And you have more
on-the-ground knowledge than I do. But, the American people
are growing impatient and apprehensive. I think that
statement, in fact, is an understatement.

So, I would like to see our strategy become more
aggressive and intensified in combating this threat abroad,
in the theater, where we confront ISIL, and at home, where
we confront terror in our neighborhoods and streets, and
where the adversary is just as real and potentially growing
just as alarmingly.
Are you satisfied that the intersection and coordination between those two efforts, in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world and internally at home, is sufficiently aligned and coordinated that we have the most effective strategic approach?

Secretary Carter: I met, just yesterday, with Director Comey, also along with the Director of Homeland Security, Jay Johnson, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper -- John Brennan's out of the country, but his -- somebody from CIA was there, and other agencies, working to do exactly what you rightly know is necessary -- say is necessary, namely to align our efforts overseas, which involve exactly the ingredients that you name, and you're right, we are looking for opportunities to do more by using precisely the tools you describe. We're finding them, and we're strengthening and gaining momentum in the military, which we need to do, because we need to defeat ISIL over there as soon as possible. Back here, we haven't -- it's a different kind of challenge, but it's related. Director Comey's working extremely hard and skillfully on that. And the purpose of my calling this meeting yesterday was precisely to make sure that we're all aligned. And we'll continue to do that periodically. And there are things, by the way, that we can do, as DOD, even though we obviously don't operate here in the United States the way the FBI
does, in terms of striking their information infrastructure
the same way we strike their energy infrastructure, their
command and control, and so forth, in Iraq and Syria.

Senator Blumenthal: I thank you for that answer. I
agree totally that the efforts need to be aligned. And, in
fact, better aligned, more seamless than they are now, in
terms of intelligence-sharing and intelligence-gathering,
but also working with our partners in the region, because
the troops on the ground need to be local. We cannot send
American troops back to that part of the world in massive
numbers with a combat mission. There's always the danger of
mission creep, even in a small number. But, I remain
dissatisfied that the number of Special Operators on the
ground may be insufficient, and the pace of sending them
there may be too lengthy, and that local forces, like the
Peshmerga, have shown that a robust effort involving all of
those ingredients that are planned to be sent can make a
difference if they're timely and sufficient.

And I agree, finally, that an Authorization for the Use
of Military Force is absolutely essential. The reality is,
we are at war. And the President deserves a declaration of
war. And that declaration may define the kind of conflict
that we see, and provide a forum for debate about the limits
we may want to put on them. But, at least it will provide a
framework for public support that the President needs for
this continuing war.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Lee.

Senator Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks, to both of you, for all you do for us to keep us safe.

I want to start by echoing some of the concerns that have been stated by my colleagues, Senator Kaine and Senator Blumenthal. Like them, I feel like, for constitutional reasons, we ought to be following the process in the Constitution. For some of the reasons mentioned by Senator Graham, I think it's important to have the debate and the discussion about the extent of our involvement there. And that's another nice process associated with following the constitutional structure.

After the failure of the initial train-and-equip program in Syria, the Department of Defense seems to have shifted its focus to equipping forces that are already on the ground in Syria, such as the Syrian Kurds and Arab groups that we have somehow, in one way or another, using methods that I'm not familiar with, deemed to be moderate, or deemed to somehow have interests that overlap with ours.

Mr. Secretary, can you explain to us how, specifically, we're vetting this -- these groups, how we decide who ought to be the beneficiary of this program?
Secretary Carter: Well, you're basically right. We --
that is the shift we made, although, you know, we're still
willing to do -- we're open to lots of different
possibilities with our train-and-equip program, but the --
it is essentially --

Senator Lee: It's not, basically, an equip program
rather than a train-and-equip program, right?

Secretary Carter: No. We take some of the people out
for training. We're willing to do that. And we have those
training sites, so we'll take selected individuals -- not
the whole unit -- out and give them specialized training in
how to connect with us and how to connect with our enablers.
So, there is a training aspect to it. But, you're right,
fundamentally, it's enabling groups that exist rather than
trying to create brand-new groups. That's the essential
correction, I'd say -- course correction that we made.

And you asked how they're vetted. They are -- they're
-- it is their leaders that are vetted, rather than down to
the individual level. And I can get you a description of
that.

[The information referred to follows:]
Secretary Carter: And, General Selva, maybe you'd like to say something about the vetting process in general.

General Selva: We have, in the case of the Syrian Arab coalition, convinced leaders to come to the Iraqi side of the border. We have vetted them through public and classified databases for their relationships and prior conduct, and we have spent time with them on the items that the Secretary talked about, how they link to our forces, how they communicate back their progress. And our relationship with them is relatively transactional, where we supply them with ammunition and the advice required to hit strike-specific targets, and then we watch that progress.

Senator Lee: Once we decide to equip a particular group -- I mean, it sounds like it is -- it's made on a group basis, based, in part, on our assessment of their leaders -- what degree of command and control do we retain over the group in question, over its leaders, and specifically, perhaps most importantly, over the supplies that we give them?

General Selva: I could go into much more detail in a classified environment, but, at the surface level, we don't exercise command and control. We exercise influence. And the influence we have is their connection to the enablers, that we provide fire support through airpower, advice, and training.
Senator Lee: Do the groups that we're supporting in this capacity, specifically the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian Arabs -- do they -- or to what extent do they share the same political goals and the same vision for Syria in the future?

General Selva: Today, they share the goal of wanting to take their homes back and defeat ISIL in doing so. And that is necessary and sufficient to get at the fight in eastern Syria and working our way back towards Raqqa.

Senator Lee: Are you concerned about the possibility of their goals shifting? I mean, is it common in the region for some groups to have one focus one day and then have a priority shift, perhaps one day having interests that align roughly with our own goals and with preserving interests that are important to American national security that might change later?

General Selva: If you'd allow me to discuss that one in a classified setting on the how we measure and manage that relationship, it will be much more useful than doing it in open session.

Senator Lee: Okay.

Can you tell me roughly how many people are involved in this right now, how many units or how many members they have? Is that something we can discuss in a nonclassified environment?

General Selva: Yes, sir. The Syrian Arab coalition,
we brought out roughly 40 of their leaders -- I'm sorry --
20 of their leaders, did a full vetting of their allegiances
and their prior conduct. They brought to the battlefield
roughly 1600. The number varies up and down slightly from
that number, based on who's engaged in the fight. But,
roughly 1600 fighters that have worked their way through
roughly three villages or three towns right now in eastern
Syria. They started in a place called al-Hasakah. They
have taken al-Hawl, and they are beginning the preparatory
actions to prosecute a third target that I'd like to keep
private at this point.

Senator Lee: Okay.
I see my time is expired. Thank you very much.
Chairman McCain: Senator Gillibrand.
Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Thank you so much for your testimony today. This has
been extremely helpful to our committee. And thank you,
obviously, for your extraordinary service.
In yesterday's hearing, Commander Jeffrey Eggers said
that, while our military victories against ISIL will affect
their ability to recruit new fighters, how we conduct the
war will also affect that ability. Specifically, he said
that having ground troops go into Syria is what ISIL wants.
On Monday, a New York Times article pointed out that in
2003, al-Zarqawi had called the Iraq war, quote, "the
blessed invasion," because his and ISIL's apocalyptic vision
is that non-Muslims will come to Syria to fight Muslims and
bring about the end of the world.

So, do you believe that a ground war with Western
troops would help or hurt ISIL's recruiting? And which
countries are best positioned to fight ISIL on the ground,
in your opinion?

Secretary Carter: The forces that are best positioned
to fight ISIL on the ground in both Iraq and Syria would be
local indigenous forces, particularly Sunni forces, because
the ISIL representation and the territory they occupy is
mostly Sunni territory. Therefore, outside of -- well, so
in both Iraq and Syria, Iraqis and Syrian local forces --
that's why we're trying to work with them, that's why we're
trying to put a political end to the civil war in Syria, so
that the Syrians stop -- Syrians who are not ISIL -- are not
ISIL sympathizers, not under the thumb of ISIL right now,
can unite to defeat ISIL.

Next in line -- and this is something that I have
urged, and the U.S. has urged now for some months, would be
for more of Sunni Arabs from the Gulf states to become
involved, not necessarily occupying territory, but
participating in enabling local forces there and --

Senator Gillibrand: Have you had any luck there? I
mean, any?
Secretary Carter: Well, they have participated, in the early days, in the air war. Now, I'm generalizing a little bit --

Senator Gillibrand: Yeah.

Secretary Carter: -- here -- and not -- generally disinclined to participate on the ground and, of course, now with the Yemen conflict, got preoccupied with that. But --

Senator Gillibrand: General?

General Selva: Ma'am, I think your quote of Mr. Zawahiri -- or Zarqawi, I'm sorry -- that said, "Bringing Americans to this fight is a blessing to the radical Islamic view that ISIL portrays" is exactly right. What we don't do enough of is talking about who ISIL is and what they do. They're barbaric, they are -- they subjugate women, they subjugate children, they engage in extortion. They are not creating a caliphate that's consistent with Islamic teaching; they're creating caliphate that's consistent with their narrative of Western subjugation and extremist Islam. And it's about their power and enriching themselves. And so, we need to tell that truth. If we fall into the trap of radical Islamic violent extremists baiting us into a ground fight, we're actually doing exactly what they want us to do.

Senator Gillibrand: Yeah.

General Selva: So, as we work through and with partners that we can find that are willing to fight, they'll
have the effect we need them to have.

Senator Gillibrand: And can't we be more aggressive with our allies in the region, particularly Sunni Arab allies, to do more? I mean, I don't -- I haven't seen our success there yet. So, I'm wondering if you feel there's leverage there to get that result.

General Selva: We have had support from Turks, from the Jordanians, as well as from a small number of our Sunni partners. That is a place where we might be able to exert some additional effort.

Senator Gillibrand: Just quickly on Turkey, since you raise it. Obviously, Turkey is critical to the fight against ISIL. What do you think were Turkish calculations in shooting down the Russian plane? And has it affected our ability to work with Russia and Turkey?

General Selva: I can only tell you what I learned from consultation with my Turkish counterpart the day of the shootdown. I actually was in Turkey that afternoon after the shootdown. They believe, and executed against, a incursion into their airspace. What I pressed him on, though, was securing their -- the Turkish border from end to end. And there is a roughly 90-kilometer span of the Turkish border through which ISIL still has a fair number of smuggling lanes that are relatively open because ISIL controls the Syrian side of that border. The Turkish have
redoubled their efforts. They have opened up their Terrorist No-Fly List, their Terrorist Identification Database, and a variety of other techniques to help seal that border. Much beyond that, if we could do that in a closed session or a private conversation, that would be --

Senator Gillibrand: That would be fine.

Secretary Carter, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Secretary Carter: No, I think General Selva said it very well. We -- the -- Turkey is -- shares a border with both Syria and Iraq. That border has been used as the principal border through which fighters flowed in both directions. And we've asked the Turks to do more. They have done some more. We're helping them do yet more. But, it's critical that they control their border.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Well, of course, ISIS wants, more than anything else, to preserve their caliphate. No one is arguing to -- that there should be 100,000 troops, although the President, and obviously you, like to set up the strawmen. It is clear that, without American participation and leadership, there is no strategy to take Raqqa, which is their base of operations where they are planning and orchestrating attacks. We just saw the manifestation of it,
including working on chemical weapons.

Mr. Secretary, I would beg you to call up General Keane, General Petraeus, Secretary Gates, Secretary Panetta, even former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Ask all of them, and they will tell you that a safe zone could have prevented the millions of refugees and the horrible consequences of at least a quarter of a million people barrel-bombed.

And for you to sit there, General, and say that we'd have to take out Syrian air defenses is either a stunning display of ignorance or, again, this whole aspect of avoiding -- or making the problem seem so huge that we can't handle it. All we have to do is protect a no-fly zone. We don't have to take out a single airplane -- air defense capability of theirs. All we have to do is tell them, "If you fly into this area, you're going to get shot down," which we can do with Patriot batteries. And everybody knows that. And that's why General Keane and General Petraeus and Secretary Gates, Secretary Panetta, and even Secretary Clinton have said that these things are doable. It's really saddening to see that, basically, business as usual while thousands and thousands of Syrians are slaughtered by this horrible barrel-bombing, which also was accompanied by acts of chemical weapons.

So, I leave this hearing somewhat depressed, because
clearly there is no strategy to take Raqqa, there is no
motivation to set up a no-fly zone, which, even as I say
Hillary Clinton has supported and every military leader that
I know that was architect of the surge, says you can do it
without much difficulty. But, we are seeing again what we
have seen from this administration for the last 4 years,
since some of us advocated it, saying that it would be too
hard to do, ignoring the fact that, as long as Bashar Assad
continues to do this horrible barrel-bombing, they're
slaughtering thousands of innocent civilians -- men, women,
and children. Where is our moral -- where is our -- the
tradition of the United States of America? We went to
Bosnia after the -- after they ethnically cleansed 8,000
people. This guy has killed 240,000. And yet, it's too
hard for the most powerful nation on Earth to set up a no-
fly zone.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:26 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]