

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON U.S.  
STRATEGY AND POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING  
1155 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N.W.  
SUITE 200  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036  
(202) 289-2260  
[www.aldersonreporting.com](http://www.aldersonreporting.com)

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
U.S. STRATEGY AND POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

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

3           Chairman McCain: Good morning. The Senate Armed  
4 Services Committee meets this morning to continue our focus  
5 on U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East.

6           I want to begin by saying that we all welcome the news  
7 this weekend that four Americans who had been unjustly held  
8 captive in Iran were finally released. There will be plenty  
9 of time to examine the circumstances of their original  
10 detention and ultimate release, but four Americans being  
11 united with their families is good news. Now the United  
12 States must continue to press for the release of those  
13 Americans still missing or imprisoned in Iran, including  
14 Robert Levinson; and we must push for the release of  
15 thousands of Iranian political prisoners jailed by the  
16 Iranian regime, which continues to suppress dissent and  
17 undermine human rights.

18           A previous generation of American leaders once  
19 remembered that they were, quote, "present at the creation"  
20 of the rules-based international order that has been the  
21 source of unprecedented security and prosperity for the  
22 United States and the world. If present trends continue, we  
23 may well remember that we were present at the unraveling of  
24 this international order. And, while signs of this  
25 unraveling can be seen in Europe and Asia, it is most

1 visible and most dangerous in the Middle East.

2 All across the region, we see a dangerous breakdown of  
3 state authority and the balance of power. As Henry  
4 Kissinger testified before this committee, there is a  
5 struggle for power within states, a conflict between states,  
6 a conflict between ethnic and religious groups, and an  
7 assault on the international system. And, as General  
8 Petraeus also told us last year, almost every Middle Eastern  
9 country is now a battleground or a combatant in one or more  
10 wars.

11 For the past 7 years, the Obama administration has  
12 sought to scale back America's involvement and commitment to  
13 the region, assuming that a post-American Middle East would  
14 be good for the region and for us, and that regional powers  
15 would step up to police the region themselves. The results  
16 of this massive gamble should now be clear to us all. No  
17 new order has emerged in the Middle East. Only chaos. A  
18 power vacuum has opened up in the absence of America and has  
19 been filled by the most extreme and anti-American of forces,  
20 Sunni terrorist groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda, or Shi'ite  
21 extremists such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and its  
22 proxies, and the imperial ambitions of Vladimir Putin.  
23 These challenges were always going to be present and  
24 difficult, but it did not have to be this way, this  
25 dangerous. Instead of acknowledging its failures and

1 changing course, as previous administrations of both parties  
2 have done, the administration has all too often doubled down  
3 on its reactive, incremental, and inadequate policies. Now  
4 more than a year into the campaign to roll back and destroy  
5 ISIL, it is impossible to assert that ISIL is losing or that  
6 we are winning. To be sure, there has been some tactical  
7 progress, including the recent recapture of Ramadi. This is  
8 a testament to our civilian and military leaders, but  
9 serious challenges remain.

10         ISIL has lost some territory on the margin, but has  
11 consolidated power in its core territories in both Iraq and  
12 Syria. It maintains control of key Iraq cities, like Mosul  
13 and Fallujah. And our military commanders estimate that  
14 this key terrain will not be retaken this year.

15         The U.N. reports that, since ISIL's invasion of Iraq in  
16 2014, nearly 20,000 Iraq civilians have been killed, nearly  
17 3,500 people, predominantly women and children, are  
18 estimated to be ISIL's slaves in Iraq. As sectarian  
19 divisions worsen in Iraq, it is no surprise that the  
20 training of Iraq security forces has been slow and the  
21 building of support for Sunni tribal forces even slower.

22         In Syria, there is no plausible strategy to achieve  
23 ISIL's defeat on a timeline that won't result in the tragic  
24 deaths of tens of thousands of Syrians. There is still no  
25 ground force that is both willing and able to retake Raqqa,

1 nor is there a realistic prospect of one emerging soon.

2 In the absence of a realistic strategy to create the  
3 conditions for the achievement of U.S. goals, the  
4 administration has instead fallen back on hope, the hope  
5 that diplomacy, without sufficient leverage, can convince  
6 Russia and Iran to abandon Bashar Assad and join the fight  
7 against ISIL. And yet, we read, just this morning, that  
8 Russia's air campaign continues to target moderate  
9 opposition groups and may be gaining traction in stabilizing  
10 the Assad regime. Meanwhile, ISIL continues to metastasize  
11 across the region in places like Afghanistan, Libya,  
12 Lebanon, Yemen, and Egypt. Its attacks are now global, as  
13 we saw in Paris, San Bernardino, and most recently in  
14 Istanbul. These attacks should be a wake-up call that  
15 ISIL's threat to our homeland is real, direct, and growing,  
16 and that we need a strategy to destroy ISIL, not ultimately,  
17 but as quickly as possible. The administration cannot  
18 continue to assume that time is on our side.

19 One element of the administration's Middle East policy  
20 that has been clear from the beginning is its policy toward  
21 Iran. But, instead of negotiating a deal to force Iran to  
22 give up its nuclear program, the administration signed a  
23 deal that would, as Dr. Kissinger said, merely move from  
24 preventing proliferation to managing it. Despite all the  
25 talk of how this nuclear deal has opened a window for a new

1 relationship with Iran, the Islamic Republic's behavior has  
2 not changed. Indeed, rather than empowering Iranian  
3 moderates, as the administration claimed, the nuclear deal  
4 appears to be doing the opposite: emboldening hardliners.  
5 Iran has now conducted two advanced missile tests since  
6 October, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.  
7 It fired rockets within 1,500 yards of a U.S. aircraft  
8 carrier. Iran seized two U.S. Navy vessels transiting the  
9 Persian Gulf, illegally detained 10 American soldier --  
10 sailors, and propagandized the entire incident, in total  
11 violation of international law and centuries of maritime  
12 tradition. And I must add, as a former Navy person and from  
13 a Navy family of generations, that's the most humiliating  
14 thing that I have seen that American sailors, members of the  
15 United States Navy, has been subjected to in my or their  
16 lifetime. I am sure that the Iranians used those pictures  
17 of American servicemen and a -woman on their knees much to  
18 their great success throughout the world as well as the  
19 region.

20       Shortly after the result -- release of four American  
21 hostages in Iran, we learned that three Americans were  
22 kidnapped in Baghdad, apparently by an Iranian-backed  
23 Shi'ite militia. I have no doubt that the Obama  
24 administration has pursued a new relationship with Iran  
25 because it believed doing so would diminish sectarian

1 tensions in the region, but the reality is that the  
2 administration's overtures to Iran have only exacerbated  
3 these tensions and deepened feelings of suspicion and  
4 alienation among our traditional Sunni partners and our  
5 allies such as Israel and Turkey. This dynamic has only  
6 grown worse because the administration has been so slow to  
7 offer support to those allies and partners, as we have  
8 recently seen with delayed fighter aircraft sales to Qatar  
9 and Kuwait. For decades, America's role in the Middle East  
10 has been to suppress security competition between states  
11 with long histories of mistrust and to prevent that  
12 competition from breaking down into open war. This is the  
13 responsibility that we are now advocating, and we're paying  
14 a very heavy price for doing so that is only growing.

15 I hope that our witnesses today can help us better  
16 understand the costs of our current course and contemplate a  
17 better alternative.

18 Senator Reed.

19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

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

3           Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.  
4 Let me join you in welcoming our witnesses. They have an  
5 extraordinary wealth of experience and distinguished service  
6 to the Nation in different capacities.

7           Gentlemen, thank you for your service, and we look  
8 forward to your testimony.

9           This past weekend, we saw a number of significant  
10 developments in the Middle East, most notably implementation  
11 day of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the JCPOA,  
12 an exchange of prisoners between the United States and Iran,  
13 and the settlement of a 35-year-old legal dispute between  
14 the United States and Iran. Individually, these are notable  
15 developments, but, combined, they have the potential -- and  
16 let me emphasize "potential" -- to represent an inflection  
17 point and an opportunity to shift the course of United  
18 States and Iranian relations. And, as the President stated  
19 this weekend, the opportunity for these kind of changes are  
20 rare, indeed.

21           While I share the President's hope for new  
22 opportunities, I also share concerns about Iran's  
23 destabilizing actions in the Middle East. In order for  
24 improved relations to materialize, Iran will need to  
25 faithfully implement the terms of the JCPOA, change its

1 course in its destabilizing actions in Syria, Lebanon, and  
2 Iraq, and its provocative actions with respect to its  
3 missile program. I hope the witnesses will provide their  
4 assessment of these events and what opportunities and  
5 cautionary notes they would present for consideration to the  
6 committee.

7 I recently returned from a visit to Iraq, where I had  
8 the opportunity to meet with some of the country's political  
9 leadership, our Nation's diplomatic representatives, and our  
10 military commanders on the ground. My visit came on the  
11 heels of the successful operation by Iraq's security forces  
12 to take and retake Ramadi. This success, which was enabled  
13 by coalition airpower, gave a significant confidence boost  
14 to the Iraqi Security Forces, and I hope this momentum will  
15 continue.

16 In Syria, as a result of the violent agendas of both  
17 the Assad regime and ISIL, the humanitarian situation is  
18 increasingly dire, and the human cost of this conflict is  
19 staggering. With regard to ISIL, our military has embarked  
20 on a campaign to ensure that ISIL is under increasing  
21 pressure. The deployment of additional Special Operations  
22 Forces and other critical enabling capabilities are  
23 important developments. With respect to the overall  
24 conflict in Syria, Secretary Kerry is pursuing an ambitious  
25 agenda to facilitate a diplomatic pathway to end the

1 conflict, and should be recognized for his persistence. I  
2 look forward to hearing the views of our witnesses on their  
3 assessment of whether the current peace talks might bear  
4 fruit.

5 One other issue that struck me during my visit to the  
6 region was our government's efforts to counter ISIL in the  
7 information environment. And this is an area where the  
8 administration is appropriately and necessarily trying to  
9 breathe new life into interagency efforts on this front  
10 through the creation of the Global Engagement Center. This  
11 is a well-intended effort, but we must ensure that it is  
12 adequately resourced and empower it with necessary  
13 authorities if it is to be successful. And I look forward  
14 to hearing from our witnesses on what they hope to see from  
15 this Center; more importantly, how we can effectively begin,  
16 I think, to win the information war which ISIL has been so  
17 effective at.

18 And then, given that Ambassador Crocker is here, I'm  
19 going to also take the opportunity to briefly mention  
20 Afghanistan, which I also had the opportunity to visit. The  
21 security situation is challenging, but Afghan National  
22 Security Forces remain coherent and responsive through the  
23 first year in which they had sole responsibility for  
24 conventional ground combat operations. Further complicating  
25 the security situation has been the emergence of the so-

1 called Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, or ISKP. The  
2 chairman referred to that. Given the increasing threat  
3 posed by ISKP to the United States and regional security, I  
4 support the reported recent approval by the White House of  
5 targeted strikes against the group. Ensuring our commanders  
6 on the ground have the proper authorities will be critical  
7 to the future success of our broader efforts to support the  
8 Afghan National Security Forces.

9 From the political standpoint, the National Unity  
10 Government, led by President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, has  
11 held together through a difficult year, providing an  
12 opportunity for progress on key reform issues, including  
13 governance and corruption. An evaluation of lessons learned  
14 for the past year may yield new ways in which the U.S. and  
15 our coalition partners can improve our support to security  
16 operations and political progress by the Afghans, going  
17 forward. And again, I'd be interested, particularly from  
18 Ambassador Crocker, on what we should do and must do in this  
19 area.

20 Thank you, gentlemen, and I look forward to your  
21 testimony.

22 Chairman McCain: Welcome, General Keane, Chairman of  
23 the Institute for the Study of War, and former Vice Chief of  
24 Staff for the Army; and The Honorable Ryan C. Crocker, Dean  
25 and Executive Professor of the George Bush School of

1 Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, former  
2 United States Ambassador to too many countries to name; and  
3 The Honorable Philip H. Gordon, Senior Fellow of the Council  
4 on Foreign Relations, and former Special Assistant to the  
5 President, and White House Middle East Coordinator.

6 General Keane, due to your advanced age, we will begin  
7 with you.

8 [Laughter.]

9 General Keane: Okay.

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOHN M. KEANE, USA (RET.),  
2 CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, AND FORMER VICE  
3 CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY

4           General Keane: Thank you, Chairman McCain, Ranking  
5 Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee. I'm  
6 honored to be back to provide testimony again on the  
7 challenges of the Middle East.

8           This committee's persistence in keeping us focused on  
9 the unparalleled upheaval in the Middle East is commendable.  
10 And thank you for your hard work and much welcome reforms  
11 that are included in the National Defense Authorization Act.

12           I am honored to be a part of this distinguished panel  
13 with The Honorable Phil Gordon, and particularly to be  
14 reunited with Ambassador Crocker, who remains today  
15 America's most successful and preeminent diplomat, whose  
16 extensive service throughout the Middle East is legendary.  
17 I was privileged to work with Ambassador Crocker during the  
18 Iraq and Afghanistan surges while I was assisting General  
19 Petraeus.

20           In previous testimonies before this committee, I  
21 provided details on how to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria,  
22 and also on Russia's involvement in Syria. Today, my focus  
23 is yours and what you've asked us to do, and that is to deal  
24 with overall U.S. policy and strategy in the region. I've  
25 brought along a couple of maps for you to look at. I think

1 they'll put them up on boards when we reference them, and  
2 they -- you should have them at your seat, as well.

3       The Middle East has experienced one of the most  
4 tumultuous periods in its history, with the old order  
5 challenged by the aspirational goals of the Arab Spring,  
6 radicalized Islamists taking advantage of the political and  
7 social upheaval, and the Islamic State of Iran using proxies  
8 to achieve regional influence and control. Some issues in  
9 the Middle East have been simmering for some time and  
10 certainly are underlying factors, such as historical  
11 sectarianism, repressive regimes, political and social  
12 injustice, and the lack of economic opportunity, exacerbated  
13 now by the price of oil. One cannot simply blame these  
14 larger forces operating in the region and absolve the United  
15 States of specific policy decisions that has had unintended  
16 adverse consequences. Let's just go name a few:

17       Egypt. In 2010, the Arab Spring begins, and, in  
18 looking back, while most Arab countries were in some form of  
19 pre-revolutionary phase, it was a strategic surprise. The  
20 United States, in the face of major civil unrest in Cairo,  
21 abandons Mubarak, a multi-decade ally of the United States  
22 and an ally of the Arab states in the region. The result  
23 is, the Muslim Brotherhood, who are elected, moved quickly  
24 without any U.S. opposition, to transition Egypt, a secularist  
25 state, to an Islamic state. Iran supports the Muslim

1 Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood, as we know, quickly  
2 lose support of the people and are deposed in a military  
3 coup.

4 Libya. In 2011, after Qadhafi is deposed and killed, a  
5 newly elected moderate Islamic regime requests support to  
6 train a national security force to repress the radical  
7 militants. The United States refuses. Some of the same  
8 militants, Ansar al-Sharia, burn down the U.S. Consulate,  
9 kill the Ambassador and three others, force the evacuation  
10 of a covert CIA base, and, the following year, force a U.S.  
11 retreat from Libya, with the closing of the U.S. Embassy.  
12 Libya is now a failed state, a breeding ground for radical  
13 Islamists, and the largest ISIS presence outside of Syria  
14 and Iraq.

15 Iraq. Whether the 2003 invasion was misguided or  
16 righteous, it ushered in the first Arab democracy in the  
17 Middle East while also giving rise to al-Qaeda in Iraq, who  
18 was defeated in 2008. In 2009, the new U.S. administration  
19 began to distance itself politically from Iraq, providing  
20 the entree for greater Iranian influence and culminating in  
21 a total military pullout from Iraq in 2010. Prime Minister  
22 Maliki immediately begins a purge of political opponents and  
23 military leaders, and al-Qaeda reemerges that same year.

24 Syria. Syria's civil war, growing out of the Arab  
25 Spring in 2011, is stalemated because the rebels' initial

1 gains are thwarted by Iranian proxies, the Hezbollah, and  
2 Iraqi Shi'a militias, plus the Quds Force, and much needed  
3 supplies and equipment from Russia and Iran. The rebels, in  
4 2011 and 2012, seek assistance from the United States, which  
5 is recommended by Secretaries Clinton and Panetta, General  
6 Dempsey, and Director Petraeus. The United States refuses.  
7 Al-Qaeda in Iraq is incentivized by the protracted civil war  
8 in Syria, moves out of Iraq with several hundred Iraqi  
9 fighters, establishing a sanctuary in the northeastern  
10 Syria, and grows a terrorist army of some 30- to 40,000.  
11 This strategic decision that Baghdadi made is  
12 transformational for him, and was the most critical decision  
13 he has made since he's been the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq  
14 and now ISIS and the Islamic State. Two years later, ISIS  
15 invades Iraq and expands its territory in Syria. ISIS, as  
16 we know it today, would not exist without the opportunity  
17 that Syria provided. In 2013, the chemical weapons redline  
18 is crossed. The United States does not respond as promised.  
19 Arab allies are dismayed and disillusioned. Assad continues  
20 to conduct, as we all are painfully aware, a comprehensive  
21 depopulation campaign killing 250,000 civilians, displacing  
22 11 million people, forming them outside the region,  
23 resulting in thousands of Syrians joining tidal waves of  
24 others in the region to migrate to Europe.

25 In Yemen, Iranian-backed Houthis, in 2014, force the

1 U.S.-backed Yemen Government to topple, and the much-touted  
2 U.S. counterterrorism operation is in full retreat, with the  
3 closing of U.S. military operations and the United States  
4 Embassy in Yemen.

5 This is an extraordinary chronology of events, where  
6 U.S. policy, while not necessarily the primary cause of  
7 these disturbing events, was at least a factor in further  
8 destabilizing the Middle East and losing the confidence and  
9 trust of our allies in the region, so much so that Russia is  
10 seeking to replace the United States as the most influential  
11 out-of-region nation. And many of our allies are listening.

12 However, the most critical policy failures are  
13 essentially strategic, and therefore have the most profound  
14 impact. Simply stated, they are the United States and  
15 allies' strategic failure to organize, plan, and defeat  
16 radical Islam and to successfully counter Iranian regional  
17 hegemony.

18 As to radical Islam, 23 years after the first World  
19 Trade Center bombing, and 14-plus years after 9/11, we still  
20 have no comprehensive strategy to defeat radical Islam.  
21 Radical Islam is morphing into a global jihad with the  
22 expansion of al-Qaeda and the extraordinary success of ISIS,  
23 which has rapidly become the most successful terrorist  
24 organization in history, still growing at one and a half to  
25 2,000 per month and expanding into affiliate organizations

1 throughout the Middle East, Africa, South and Southeast  
2 Asia, and developing a worldwide following, where believers  
3 are willing to kill their fellow citizens, foment terror and  
4 unrest, and mobilize -- excuse me -- and polarize the  
5 population between Muslim and non-Muslims. See the map,  
6 provided by the Institute for the Study of War, which  
7 depicts ISIS's desire to expand into affiliates in the near  
8 abroad, in orange; and the far abroad, in yellow; with the  
9 number of current affiliates, as represented by the black  
10 stars; and affiliates that are in process of approval, in  
11 blue stars. Most of the far abroad will not have  
12 affiliates, but, rather, radicalized followers who are  
13 inspired by ISIS to act, either as individuals or small  
14 cells.

15         The United States strategic failure derives not from --  
16 derives from not understanding the nature of the conflict.  
17 The Bush war on terror and the Obama counterterrorism war  
18 are simply tactics. The battle is within Islam itself,  
19 where, in the Arab world, this battle is intersecting with  
20 authoritarian regimes' and family monarchies' failure to  
21 politically reform and to adjust to the needs of their  
22 societies. Therefore, we are fighting a political and  
23 religious ideology which draws its origin from the very  
24 strict interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith as well as  
25 the intolerance of Wahhabism and Salafism. Political

1 leaders such as al-Sisi and King Abdullah have referred to  
2 it as a religious revolution. Yet, the current U.S.  
3 administration fails to define radical Islam, or explain it,  
4 nor understand it. How can we possibly defeat radical Islam  
5 if we don't understand it? Knowing the kind of war you are  
6 fighting is the first priority of a national or military  
7 leader. Given this purposeful misunderstanding, or self-  
8 deception at best, by not acknowledging this narrowly  
9 focused Islamic ideology, it creates an unnecessary  
10 condition where all Muslims are brought under suspicion.  
11 Law-abiding, faith-based, traditional or modern Muslims, who  
12 would do no harm to their fellow man and resent any  
13 association with radical Islam, deserve better treatment  
14 than that.

15 This is a 21st-century generational ideological  
16 struggle similar to the 20th-century multigenerational  
17 struggle with communist ideology. The 9/11 Commission  
18 recommended a global alliance to design a strategy and to  
19 work together to defeat radical Islam. King Salman of Saudi  
20 Arabia is organizing a 34-member alliance to combat radical  
21 Islam, and it remains to be seen if it amounts to anything  
22 substantive. I do know it begs for the United States to  
23 play a leadership role. The next President of the United  
24 States will likely defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria, having  
25 provided the required resources and leadership necessary to

1 do the job. But, ISIS and radical Islam is a global  
2 movement. It is not a question of whether we want to combat  
3 radical Islam; it's unavoidable. The only question is how.

4 While I believe global alliance members should design a  
5 strategy, and not the United States, there are some elements  
6 that are obvious and critical. National leaders and Muslim  
7 clerics must undermine the political and religious ideology  
8 with not just what is wrong, but what is the right thinking  
9 and ideology. Arab Muslim countries must change the levels  
10 of intolerance and the influence of Wahhabism. Political  
11 reform and social justice are essential. Financial and  
12 economic support must be countered. And countries  
13 permitting such behavior by their citizens should be held  
14 accountable. Intelligence, technology, and selected  
15 equipment should be shared. Partnering for training and  
16 military education is essential to raise the level of  
17 operational competence. There is no substitute for an  
18 effective ground force supported by airpower. Airpower is  
19 an enabler, it is not a defeat mechanism.

20 This is about alliance members providing the  
21 predominant military response. It's not the United States  
22 military. The United States military would provide a  
23 certain level of support.

24 Enemy combatants should be pursued aggressively and  
25 ruthlessly. Destroy and defeat radical Islamic sanctuaries.

1 Sanctuaries or safe havens, by themselves, protract the  
2 conflict and drive up the casualties. Syria is a sanctuary.  
3 Libya is rapidly becoming one. And Pakistan, for 14 years,  
4 has provided two sanctuaries for the Taliban and has  
5 unnecessarily protracted that war.

6 As to Iran, in 1980 Iran declared the United States as  
7 a strategic enemy, with its stated goal to drive the United  
8 States out of the region, achieve regional hegemony, and  
9 destroy the state of Israel. It uses proxies primarily as  
10 the world's number-one state sponsoring of terrorism and to  
11 fight proxy wars. Beginning in the early 1980s, it began  
12 jihad against the United States by bombing the marine  
13 barracks, the United States Embassy, and the annex in  
14 Lebanon, something our Ambassador is intimately familiar  
15 with, the United States Embassy in Kuwait, the Air Force  
16 barracks, Khobar Towers, in Saudi Arabia, and attacking the  
17 United States military in Iraq using Shi'a militias trained  
18 in Iran with advanced IEDs developed by Iranian Quds Force  
19 engineers.

20 During the '80s, Iran began an aggressive kidnapping  
21 and assassination campaign, which resulted in numerous  
22 American hostages and the death of CIA Station Chief  
23 Buckley. A policy of hostage-taking for political gain  
24 continues to this day, as we are very much aware of.

25 To date, the result is, U.S. troops left Lebanon, Saudi

1 Arabia, and initially Iraq, while Iran, as you can see on  
2 the next map, The Changing Middle East map, in red, has  
3 direct influence and some control over Lebanon, Gaza, Syria,  
4 Arak, and Yemen, while strategically desiring to influence  
5 not only the major shipping in the Gulf, but the shipping  
6 entering and departing the Suez Canal.

7       Let me just add, editorially. When you talk to a  
8 leader in the Middle East, an Arab Sunni leader, this is  
9 what they think of when they think of Iran, this is how they  
10 see Iran and what it's doing, in terms of their future  
11 security and stability.

12       Is there any doubt that Iran is on the march and is  
13 systemically moving toward their regional hegemonic  
14 objectives? Some suggest that Iran is agreeing to a delay  
15 in acquiring a threshold capability toward a nuclear weapon  
16 is a transforming event that may lead to Iran joining the  
17 community of nations seeking stability and security. Given  
18 a return of \$100 billion in sanction relief funds and a  
19 proven track record of belligerence and armed violence to  
20 pursue its goal, a tough-minded skepticism is in order to  
21 force compliance on the nuclear deal, as Senator Reed  
22 mentioned, and finally, once and for all, the first  
23 development of a regional strategy to counter Iran. A  
24 remarkable fact is that, since the killing of Americans and  
25 hostages taken by Iran and its proxy wars began in the

1 1980s, no American President, Democrat or Republican, has  
2 ever countered Iran's regional strategy. No more than ever  
3 with Iran developing -- excuse me -- now more than ever,  
4 with Iran developing a ballistic missile capability and  
5 likely to cheat on the conditions of the nuclear deal,  
6 because it can, it is an imperative to join with Israel, our  
7 Arab and European allies, to counter Iran's strategy of  
8 regional hegemony. A part of that strategy's concrete steps  
9 should be taken:

10 In Syria, to reverse the decision that Assad can stay,  
11 which guarantees there will never be a negotiated peace, a  
12 concession Secretary Kerry made, I believe, to the Russians  
13 just to get them to participate; establish safe zones and  
14 no-fly zones in Syria to change the momentum against the  
15 Assad regime and protect the Syrian people; move eventually  
16 to a transition government; and, eventually, independently  
17 observe national elections.

18 In Iraq, establish a key political objective to reduce  
19 Iranian influence and to gain Prime Minister Abadi's strong  
20 political, military, and economic support for the Sunni  
21 tribes and the Kurds; dispatch Ambassador Crocker to Iraq to  
22 once again assist an Iraq government -- sorry, Ambassador --  
23 in achieving political unity, something I've been saying  
24 publicly since the 2014 invasion.

25 In Yemen, assist the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the

1 Gulf states in pushing back against the Houthis with  
2 intelligence, targeting and striking targets if necessary.  
3 Ballistic missile testing, malign proxy regional behavior,  
4 hostage-taking, and, of course, any nuclear-deal violation  
5 should all be met with tough, unrelenting economic  
6 sanctions. Failure to counter Iran's malign influence has  
7 encouraged their aggressive and destructive behavior for 36  
8 years.

9 In conclusion, first and foremost, the United States  
10 should return to its historic role of the major out-of-  
11 region power helping our allies to secure a stable and  
12 prosperous Middle East. The United States major policy  
13 challenges in the Middle East surround the development of  
14 comprehensive strategies to defeat radical Islam and to  
15 counter Iranian aggression and malign behavior. If these  
16 competencies are not addressed, the Middle East will  
17 continue to be in freefall as the Middle East problems  
18 becomes the world's problems in confronting global jihad.

19 The potential of Middle East war between the Kingdom of  
20 Saudi Arabia and Iran, and supported by their allies, is  
21 real, and a nuclear Middle East proliferation leading to the  
22 horror of the world's first nuclear exchange is real, which  
23 is Secretary Kissinger's major concern as a result of the  
24 nuclear deal. The risk has always been high in the Middle  
25 East, and the challenge is certainly complex, but now

1 inadequate strategies and misguided policies are driving up  
2 that risk exponentially.

3 Thank you, and I appreciate you giving me an extra few  
4 minutes to explain that. And I look forward to your  
5 questions.

6 [The prepared statement of General Keane follows:]

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 Ambassador Crocker.

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1           STATEMENT OF HON. RYAN C. CROCKER, DEAN AND EXECUTIVE  
2 PROFESSOR, THE GEORGE BUSH SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC  
3 SERVICE, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, AND FORMER UNITED STATES  
4 AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

5           Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator  
6 Reed, members of the committee. It's an honor to be with  
7 you this morning.

8           You have my written testimony, I believe, Mr. Chairman.  
9 I will just make a few brief remarks now so we can get on  
10 with the questions.

11           I would start where General Keane left off. In a  
12 region experiencing unprecedented tumult in its 100-year  
13 modern history, there is an urgent need for a reassertion of  
14 U.S. engagement and leadership. I'll have some specifics.

15           I was just in the Middle East last month, and talking  
16 to some long-time friends in Lebanon, with Saudis, with some  
17 Syrians. There is a perception that the United States is  
18 not engaged, is absent, and that malign forces are,  
19 therefore, having a field day out there. Our friends are  
20 uncertain and scared. Our adversaries are gaining ground.  
21 We need to make this clear, that what happens in the Middle  
22 East is of vital national importance to us. And it is, sir.  
23 At a time when states are failing and nonstate actors are  
24 rising, it's become all too clear that, as my good friend  
25 and former wingman Dave Petraeus has said, "What happens in

1 the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East." That was  
2 the lesson of Paris. So, we have an urgent national  
3 security imperative, here.

4 Let me just say, briefly, on Iran, since that obviously  
5 is the issue of the hour around town, there are some pretty  
6 momentous developments. And they're important. I think the  
7 implementation of the JCPOA is important for regional  
8 security and global security. We are going to have to be  
9 very vigilant to see that Iran follows through. We're  
10 delighted, as you said, Mr. Chairman, that our hostages have  
11 come home. But, as I look at this over the sweep of recent  
12 history, these are transactions, they're not  
13 transformations. I'm reminded of our arms control  
14 agreements with the Soviets in the '80s. They made the  
15 world a safer place, with a nuclear power, not just an  
16 aspirant nuclear power, but they didn't transform anything.  
17 The Cold War continued. We continued to stand against the  
18 evil empire, in spite of some important arms control  
19 transactions.

20 I was in Lebanon when some of our hostages were taken,  
21 and I was in Lebanon when they came home. I loaded the  
22 remains of my former colleague, Bill Buckley, on a  
23 helicopter in Beirut on Christmas Eve. The Syrians were  
24 instrumental in that. But, the Syrians were also  
25 instrumental in holding those hostages, as was Iran and

1 Hezbollah. So, their release didn't transform anything,  
2 didn't transform our relationship with Syria. Syria  
3 remained on our list of state sponsors of terrorism, as it  
4 should have.

5 So, while what has happened in this past week, I think,  
6 is important, it is transactional.

7 A broader point is that we are witnessing, in the midst  
8 of these hot conflicts, a Middle Eastern Cold War. The  
9 primary protagonists are Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran is on  
10 the move, the radical Shi'a militias it sponsors in Iraq,  
11 Hezbollah, working with the Revolutionary Guard, to support  
12 Assad in Syria. We need to stand clearly, not in the middle  
13 of this Cold War, we need to stand on one side of it. And  
14 that, in my view, is with our traditional allies, Saudi  
15 Arabia and the other Gulf states, with Turkey, with Israel,  
16 with Egypt. We have differences with some of them,  
17 particularly with Saudi Arabia over Yemen, I think, but we  
18 have to take a stand here, Mr. Chairman. The Russians have  
19 taken a stand. They're all-in with Iran and with Bashar  
20 Assad. I think we all know they're not there to fight  
21 Islamic State. They don't care about Islamic State, nor  
22 does Iran. They care about shoring up Assad. So, that axis  
23 -- Damascus, Tehran, Moscow -- is perceived in the region as  
24 an anti-Sunni Arab axis. And the more we don't take sides,  
25 the more we try to work with the Russians or the Iranians,

1 the more that perception takes hold among the Sunni Arabs,  
2 the considerable majority of the population of that volatile  
3 region, and the more Islamic State can make hay out of it.

4 So, I could go on at great lengths, but I won't. I  
5 would mention several specific steps I think we need to  
6 take:

7 I would agree completely with General Keane on the  
8 importance of establishing a no-fly zone and safe zones.  
9 That's gotten infinitely harder now that the Russians are  
10 there. I still would like to see us pursue it. And I would  
11 imagine this committee is heavily engaged with the  
12 administration on looking at its feasibility. It's  
13 important -- like many military actions, it's important  
14 politically. It would signal to Sunni Arabs in Syria and  
15 beyond that we stand with them against the butchery of  
16 Bashar al-Assad. He's killing far more of his own citizens,  
17 far more, than Islamic State is, and it's no surprise that  
18 moderate Sunni resistance groups in Syria are far more  
19 focused on Assad than they are on Islamic State. So, taking  
20 a stand against Assad, not to drive him from power --  
21 General Keane and I may differ slightly on this -- but, to  
22 weaken him and to change the calculations in Damascus, in  
23 Tehran, and in Moscow as to what prolonging this conflict  
24 will achieve. Then, but only then, might we get to the  
25 table. We are not going to get to the table under these

1 current conditions. I've talked to Iranians, I've talked to  
2 Russians in the Middle East. They're on a roll. They're  
3 not interested in trying to negotiate a transitional regime.  
4 So, we've got to change the facts on the ground. This would  
5 be one way to do it.

6       There are several other things we could do to indicate  
7 we're serious. We have an anti-ISIS envoy, with whom I  
8 worked in Iraq. He should be a presidential envoy, he  
9 should speak for this administration, not for the Department  
10 of State. We should reinstitute the Deputy National  
11 Security Advisor, that General Doug Lute so ably filled  
12 during my time in Iraq, to coordinate an interagency effort  
13 against Islamic State. And, from a political perspective, I  
14 would argue we should -- I know General Petraeus has made  
15 this point -- we should move our headquarters from Kuwait to  
16 Baghdad. It made a heck of a lot of difference to me to  
17 have my military counterpart in the next room and not in the  
18 next country. These are small steps, some of them, but  
19 symbolically important, showing that we are in this fight,  
20 we are serious about it, we are going to work with our  
21 allies to develop the kind of comprehensive strategy that  
22 General Keane indicates is so important.

23       So, I hope very much that, in the wake of the events of  
24 the last week, we will take a deep breath, understand where  
25 our long-term strategic interests are in the region, realize

1 that the relationship with Iran is transactional. They are  
2 pursuing their agenda with full force. We need to define  
3 and pursue ours with equal force with our allies.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Crocker follows:]

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 Mr. Gordon, welcome.

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1           STATEMENT OF HON. PHILIP H. GORDON, SENIOR FELLOW, THE  
2 COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, AND FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
3 OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

4           Mr. Gordon: Thanks very much, Senator, Ranking Member  
5 Reed, and all of you, for having me back before the  
6 committee. I'm honored to be here, and honored to testify  
7 along with my two distinguished colleagues.

8           Senator, given the vastness of the topic, I submitted a  
9 few articles in more detail. I'd like to ask that they be  
10 put in the record --

11          Chairman McCain: Without objection.

12          Mr. Gordon: -- thank you very much -- so I can just  
13 use my time here to make three broad points about the  
14 region.

15          And the first is that the Middle East today -- maybe it  
16 goes without saying -- is going through a period of powerful  
17 tectonic change that the United States did not create and  
18 cannot fully control. In the wake of the Arab Spring in  
19 2011, the state institutions have crumbled in Syria, Libya,  
20 Yemen, and elsewhere. And I think if we're honest, we have  
21 to acknowledge that those institutions are unlikely to put  
22 -- be put back together anytime soon. On top of that, you  
23 have sectarian tensions that are rising across the region.  
24 Obviously, this issue has persisted for decades or  
25 centuries. It got a boost by the Iranian Revolution in

1 1979. It got a further boost by the 2003 Iraq War, which  
2 gave Iran much more say in Iraq, and has prompted a Sunni  
3 response. But, even in the past years, I think, even more  
4 than those two developments, the result of the Arab Spring,  
5 where the question of state institutions and control is up  
6 in the air, has created space for even more sectarian  
7 tensions. And just last week, obviously, we saw those  
8 tensions inflamed further with the Saudi execution of a  
9 prominent Shi'a cleric, and Iran's violent response.

10 So, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is a geopolitical  
11 conflict that is on top of a sectarian conflict. And, as  
12 long as it persists, the biggest conflicts in the region --  
13 in Iraq, in Syria, and Yemen -- that have a sectarian  
14 content will be enormously difficult to resolve.

15 We should also remember, on top of that, that the Sunni  
16 population across the Middle East is, itself, deeply  
17 divided. Sunni terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS,  
18 of course, are Sunnis aligned against Sunni regimes; and the  
19 Sunni regimes, themselves, are deeply divided between those  
20 who embrace political Islam, such as Turkey and Qatar, and  
21 those that are threatened by it, including Saudi Arabia,  
22 Jordan, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt under President al-  
23 Sisi, as Egypt is -- itself, is divided down the middle on  
24 this topic.

25 So, even though most Sunni majority states stand

1 together when it comes to sectarian conflicts, like Iraq and  
2 Syria and Yemen, where the Sunni states are all aligned  
3 together, when you face conflicts in places without a  
4 sectarian dimension, like in Libya or Egypt, the Sunni  
5 states divide among themselves, and you get Turkey and Qatar  
6 on one side, and the others on the other.

7 Now, I mention all of these points and complexities at  
8 the beginning, not to suggest that the region is so complex  
9 and unstable that there is nothing we can do, but to  
10 underscore the enormity of the challenge we face and,  
11 frankly, the need for humility as we consider our policy  
12 options. We should be extraordinarily careful about  
13 assuming there are quick fixes to any of these regions'  
14 problems and very cognizant of the potential for unintended  
15 consequences of the actions that we take. And I hope -- and  
16 I expect we'll talk more fully about that during the  
17 hearing.

18 My second main point is that, in the context of this  
19 immense regional turmoil, the implementation of the Iran  
20 nuclear agreement last week buys valuable time and presents  
21 a real opportunity if we use that time wisely. As everybody  
22 here knows, when the United States initiated the talks with  
23 Iran in early 2013, Iran was essentially on the threshold of  
24 a nuclear weapons capability. And now, with the mothballing  
25 of two-thirds of its centrifuges, the shipping out of 97

1 percent of its low-enriched uranium stockpile, the ending of  
2 its production of 20-percent uranium, the wholesale redesign  
3 of the heavy water reactor at Arak, which would have, by  
4 now, been capable of producing enough weapons-grade  
5 plutonium for one or two bombs per year, and the setting of  
6 an intrusive inspections regime, we are no longer faced with  
7 the terrible choice between using military force to set back  
8 the program for a couple of years, less time than it has now  
9 been set back by the agreement, or effectively acquiescing  
10 to its further development.

11 None of this is to say, let me be clear, that the  
12 nuclear deal somehow solves the Iran problem. And even  
13 proponents of the JCPOA, of which I am one, should admit  
14 that, in some ways, it makes the problem worse. And we've  
15 heard some of the consequences referred to here, including  
16 the concerns about the long term and the concerns of some of  
17 the key players in our friends in the region. And those are  
18 real, and I think we should acknowledge them. An Iran that  
19 gains access to more than \$50 billion of its frozen assets  
20 abroad and starts to increase oil sales will be an Iran that  
21 can devote more resources to nefarious activities in the  
22 region. But, I think the right response to these realities  
23 is not to deny them, and it's not to scrap the nuclear deal,  
24 because doing so would isolate the United States, impede our  
25 ability to impose effective sanctions, and, frankly, leave

1 us with no good options for stopping the Iranian nuclear  
2 program. Think about North Korea, which was in the news  
3 just the other day, the other week, for its testing of a  
4 nuclear weapon. Think about that situation, where we,  
5 indeed, isolated, sanctioned, contained, but the result is  
6 not a non-nuclear North Korea; it's a crazy dictatorship  
7 with its hands on numerous nuclear weapons and a real  
8 paucity of potential U.S. responses. And that's why I think  
9 we're in a better position with the JCOP -- JCPOA in Iran.

10 The alternative, again, is not to deny these problems,  
11 but instead to rigorously enforce the deal, to use all of  
12 the tools at our disposal to confront and contain Iran in  
13 the region, and to use the valuable time that it buys us to  
14 cautiously explore whether a better relationship with Iran  
15 is possible in the long term. And again, I hope that's  
16 something we can discuss during this hearing.

17 My third and final point concerns the war in Syria.  
18 And my bottom line is that we have an enormous national  
19 interest in prioritizing the de-escalation of this conflict,  
20 even over other important objectives. You really need to  
21 think through the strategic consequences of the status quo.  
22 The conflict in Syria is killing or maiming hundreds of  
23 thousands of people, innocents, forcing millions of Syrians  
24 to flee their homes, destabilizing neighboring states --  
25 Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey -- radicalizing an entire

1 generation of young Muslims, provoking a far-right backlash  
2 in Europe and problems within the European Union, fostering  
3 religious intolerance in the United States and beyond.  
4 Given these enormous strategic costs, I think you could say  
5 that almost any peace in Syria at present would be better  
6 than the current war.

7       To reach this objective, I believe it is necessary to  
8 decouple our attempts to reach a comprehensive political  
9 settlement in Syria, one that includes Assad's immediate  
10 departure, from our objective of negotiating a nationwide  
11 cease-fire. While we all like to see the immediate  
12 departure of Assad and his cronies, who should face justice  
13 for their atrocities, and we'd like to see the installation  
14 of an inclusive moderate regime, there is almost no prospect  
15 for near-term agreement on a -- new detailed institutional  
16 arrangements in Syria, let alone on new leadership. And I  
17 think we have to be honest about that. The delay just -- or  
18 the probable delay this week in the Syrian talks that were  
19 scheduled for the 25th of this month is, thus,  
20 disappointing, but, I think, not surprising.

21       Now, I know some argue -- and we've heard previews of  
22 that today, and I suspect we'll discuss it -- that we can  
23 produce the political transition in Syria that we seek by  
24 providing more military support to the opposition, or even  
25 by intervening military, ourselves. However, given the

1 strong commitments by Russia and Iran to support the regime,  
2 which also maintains significant support among Syria's  
3 minorities and even in the majority Sunnis, I think that  
4 such an escalation would lead not to the regime's  
5 capitulation that we want to see, but rather to a new  
6 counter-escalation, which, after all, has been the pattern  
7 for nearly 5 years. We shouldn't underestimate the degree  
8 of force it would take to displace the regime. And again,  
9 that's what we're talking about. We're not talking about  
10 modest concessions by the regime; we're talking about it  
11 agreeing to disappear. I don't think we should  
12 underestimate what it would take to do so or the unintended  
13 -- potential unintended consequences of doing so.

14 As an alternative, I've put forward a plan, along with  
15 two colleagues in the RAND Corporation -- Jim Dobbins and  
16 Jeff Martini -- it's one of the publications I submitted for  
17 the record -- to seek a nationwide cease-fire in place that  
18 would defer the ultimate disposition of political power in  
19 Syria, including the question of Assad's fate, and include  
20 the creation of regional safe zones, based roughly on  
21 current areas of control within the country, the resumption  
22 of humanitarian deliveries, prisoner releases, and the  
23 collective focus on destroying ISIS.

24 I will be the first to admit that even this outcome  
25 would be enormously difficult to achieve and would not be

1 without downsides and risks. I think that applies to any  
2 proposal for the Syrian conflict. But, I do believe it is a  
3 more realistic goal than the current one of a comprehensive  
4 political agreement. I think it's far better than the  
5 status quo. And I think it's more practical than any of the  
6 available alternatives. And I fear that if we just persist  
7 with the status quo, we could have -- be having a hearing in  
8 1 year, 2 years, or 4 years, and be talking about even  
9 greater strategic consequences of this conflict.

10 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I look forward  
11 to discussing these questions.

12 [The prepared statement of Mr. Gordon follows:]

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Chairman McCain: Well, thank you very much.

2 And I want to thank the witnesses, all the witnesses,  
3 because -- and I wish that -- I wish the American people and  
4 all Members of Congress could have heard that testimony and  
5 the discussion that we're about to have. Obviously, it is a  
6 transcendent and now direct threat to the United States of  
7 America, as evidenced in San Bernardino and other places.  
8 And I think there's -- it's a very complex situation and one  
9 that requires a lot of understanding. And I respect the  
10 views of all the witnesses.

11 And, Ambassador Crocker, I especially am grateful for  
12 your incredible service, as well as other witnesses, but I  
13 will never forget your testimony before this committee, with  
14 General Petraeus, at a very crucial time in American  
15 history.

16 On the issue of how we take care of ISIS, before I get  
17 into Syria, there are many of us that have been advocating  
18 for a long time an additional several thousand in Syria --  
19 in Iraq to retake Mosul, beat back ISIS, and -- including  
20 elements of airpower. In addition to that, the force of --  
21 mainly composed of Sunni Arab countries, including Turkey  
22 and Saudi Arabia and others, with the avowed intention not  
23 just of defeating ISIS, but also replacing Bashar Assad, we  
24 have proven to anyone's satisfaction that if the object is  
25 only ISIS, you're not going to find more than 4 or 5 young

1 men who are willing to fight. That was the testimony before  
2 this committee. And yet, there is question -- I think it  
3 was all members -- what's our priority, and should we try to  
4 assemble that force to go to Raqqa and take it out? I think  
5 it's pretty obvious that, in Raqqa today, they are  
6 developing chemical weapons, that we've seen films that  
7 they've published of bomb factories. They are directing  
8 acts of terror throughout the world using the Internet.  
9 And, as long as Raqqa remains in ISIS hands, then we -- they  
10 are going to be able to foster terrorism throughout the  
11 entire world. At the same time, we're seeing a situation  
12 evolved -- and I mentioned in my opening statement this  
13 morning -- that Russian airpower is having an effect of  
14 reducing any capability we might have to prevail on the  
15 battlefield, thereby hardening the position of Bashar Assad  
16 in power, who is the godfather of ISIS. The -- it's a very  
17 complex situation that's evolved over the years. And maybe  
18 the witnesses can help us out -- sort out this Gordian --  
19 cut this Gordian Knot that seems to plague our decision  
20 makers. Maybe beginning with you, Ambassador Crocker.

21 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have  
22 outlined, indeed, the complexity of what is truly a problem  
23 from hell.

24 We have never really seen the formation of a collective  
25 Arab combat force. Arab armies have fought against Israel

1 -- 1948, 1967. Didn't go well. There was an effort to  
2 create an Arab deterrent force in Lebanon in the 1970s,  
3 during that civil war, that quickly became a purely Syrian  
4 force; the other states withdrew their contingents. So, I  
5 am -- my expectations are under control, let me put it that  
6 way, that it would be possible to build and field such a  
7 force, certainly not without very substantial U.S.  
8 engagement. I think that that would be key. And then we'd  
9 have to ask ourselves, since Islamic State has said  
10 repeatedly in its propaganda, "The Crusaders will come, and  
11 we will destroy them," whether that would be a further  
12 rallying cry for them and their recruiting. We would have  
13 to think that through, which is why I started with something  
14 incredibly difficult, but maybe a bit easier: the notion of  
15 a no-fly zone. General Keane may want to speak to the  
16 feasibility of that. I mean, I'm just a civilian; I don't  
17 know.

18 But, in terms of shifting the dynamic, not eliminating  
19 the regime, but weakening it, stopping a humanitarian  
20 slaughter, and signaling to Sunnis in Syria, as well as  
21 outside, that we stand with them -- because right now I  
22 don't think they're persuaded. To get support, in Syria or  
23 in the region, for an effort against ISIS, we're going to  
24 have to deal with what is the number-one threat, which, in  
25 Syria for the Sunnis, is Assad, and, in the region, it's

1 Iran, backed by Russia. So, we're going to have to stand up  
2 to those forces, and show we mean it, before I think we're  
3 going to get any serious traction for a serious Sunni effort  
4 in Sunni or, for that matter, in Iraq.

5 I see my time is up.

6 Chairman McCain: And the Russians?

7 Ambassador Crocker: Yes, sir. The Russians are in  
8 Syria for one reason only; that is to support Bashar al-  
9 Assad. They talk the talk about confronting Islamic State.  
10 We all see the reports of who they're actually hitting.  
11 Islamic State doesn't really threaten Assad. I think they  
12 have almost a tacit understanding to pretty much leave each  
13 other alone. It's the groups that we would like to support,  
14 should support, that are really locked in with Assad, who  
15 are bearing the brunt of Russian airpower. So, they're all-  
16 in on this, they're all-in against us. But, we're not doing  
17 anything to demonstrate to anyone that we're pushing back.

18 General Keane: Yes. Well, those are great questions,  
19 Senator, and I agree with much of what the Ambassador said.

20 Let's start with Syria and then come -- go to Iraq,  
21 because Syria is ISIS center of gravity. What they're doing  
22 in Iraq is occupying Sunni lands. But, in Syria, is -- it's  
23 from Syria that they've expanded into those affiliates I've  
24 described on those maps, and it's from Syria that they're  
25 creating a worldwide following to kill their fellow citizens

1 to foment disagreement between Muslim and non-Muslim  
2 populations.

3 So, Syria truly matters and, in military terms, they're  
4 the center of gravity, but it's also a much more complex  
5 problem. When you talk to leaders, Sunni leaders,  
6 unequivocally they will tell you that Iran is their number-  
7 one problem. That is their issue. And that's why that -- I  
8 put that map up there, because sometimes a visual picture  
9 tells an incredible story of what's -- their concern is.  
10 That is their number-one existential threat to the stability  
11 and security of their nation. ISIS is a threat, make no  
12 mistake about it; but, it is second.

13 So, when you enter into a discussion with them about,  
14 "We want to do something about ISIS in Syria, and we're  
15 going to need your forces to do it," they said what they  
16 will do is defer that and come back with, "We have to do  
17 something about Assad first. We have to get -- do something  
18 about Assad." And Assad is being propped up by the  
19 Iranians, and it's a client state of Iran, which ties to  
20 their overall stability and security concern.

21 And that is why the Ambassador and I both agree that,  
22 while there are no per se military solutions to Syria,  
23 military solutions do -- military action does play a role in  
24 getting political solutions. It always has, since the  
25 beginning of time. And our thought is that it's reasonable

1 to establish safe zones and no-fly zones to turn the  
2 momentum against the regime.

3 Now, listen. The regime is, by no means, 10 foot tall.  
4 This is an organization that used to be 220,000. It's about  
5 100,000, with a high desertion rate, low morale. The  
6 equipment isn't working very well. And they've had --  
7 they've been narrowed down to -- 21 percent of Syria is what  
8 they control. And after a 4-year civil war -- the initial  
9 year, they nearly lost the war to the rebels. If you  
10 remember that. So, that's what brought all the Iranians in,  
11 and the 5,000 Hezbollah, over 8,000 Iraq Shi'a militia, the  
12 Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani on the ground, because they were  
13 about to lose the state. That was 4 years ago. Turn back  
14 to last year. Unbeknownst to many -- we were tracking this  
15 daily at ISW -- the rebel forces -- and, admittedly, Jabhat  
16 al-Nusra is powerful in this -- but, so is the CIA-trained  
17 rebel force that we can't talk about, in terms of numbers  
18 and all the equipment that they have, but that also was a  
19 powerful player on the battlefield. And they put this  
20 regime in a precarious situation, so much so that the  
21 Iranians made multiple visits to the Russians to convince  
22 them, while a nuclear deal is ongoing, that, "We have got to  
23 take some action." I think they waited until that nuclear  
24 deal was almost finalized, and the Russians put their base  
25 into Syria this summer, for one reason only, because even

1 the Alawite enclave at Latakia provinces was being  
2 threatened, and that would force the collapse of the regime.

3 So, here's the rebel forces, 4 years later, actually  
4 putting that kind of pressure on the regime. The Russians  
5 thought this was going to be easy. And it hasn't been.  
6 They began striking, September 30th. Months later, they've  
7 been making some progress. They will eventually wear down  
8 these rebels, and they will be an enclave established and a  
9 security buffer for the regime. There is no intention, and  
10 not possible, for the Syrian military, assisted by Russians  
11 and the Iranians, to reclaim Syria. That is not happening.  
12 All they can get is a security buffer for themselves. And  
13 that is it. They may go to Palmyra, which will take  
14 considerable force generation to do that, to open up the  
15 lines of communication there, and also because of the  
16 significance that Palmyra has in world opinion, but that's  
17 it.

18 So, military action in turning momentum against this  
19 regime still -- fortunately, still has a practicality of its  
20 own if you shut down airpower and establish no-fly zones.  
21 That then can move to some kind of transition of power. And  
22 I'm not saying Assad's got to go tomorrow. But we have to  
23 not give up on the plan that Assad must go, because there's  
24 no way that the rebels are going to stop fighting until you  
25 get some promise that this regime is going to go, after

1 250,000 dead and many of their families displaced. These  
2 are pretty tough fighters, and they're not giving up on what  
3 they've been trying to achieve for 4 years.

4 In Iraq -- Iraq, a different situation, but the  
5 political component in Iraq is paramount importance. We  
6 need to have -- we need to deter the influence that the  
7 Iranians have with this -- with Prime Minister Abadi. And I  
8 say Ambassador Crocker is the answer. He says other people  
9 are the answer, but -- we're after the same goal. The goal  
10 is political unity.

11 And I'm frustrated, here, because we spent so much time  
12 on this nuclear deal, we should have been in and out of  
13 Baghdad with high government officials, Secretary of State  
14 on the ground routinely working with this new administration  
15 to achieve the political unity that the United States said  
16 was their political objective. But, we're not even close to  
17 achieving it. The Kurds are still looking for money, and  
18 they're still looking for the weapons that they need. And  
19 we're not even close on the tribal force that we need from  
20 the Sunnis. ISIS is occupying Sunni lands exclusively. The  
21 Kurds have been able to retake their territory back.  
22 Therefore, you need, common sense tells you, Sunni tribal  
23 force to be able to hold the territory even if the Iraqi  
24 army was able to reclaim it. And without that, it's not  
25 going to happen.

1           So, that -- and that's why I've said you've got to put  
2 more advisors, more trainers in there; you have to have air  
3 controllers on the ground; you've got to up our ante  
4 considerably to convince the Sunnis that we're serious about  
5 this and move the political situation in that direction, as  
6 well. And then you start to get some answers, in terms of  
7 how you're really going to take Mosul.

8           Chairman McCain: Mr. Gordon.

9           Mr. Gordon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I agree with the  
10 others, that you summarized the challenges and complexities  
11 very well. A lot has been said, but maybe I'll just pick up  
12 on two or three of the points.

13           Your first point, Mr. Chairman, about 1,000 more troops  
14 for Iraq or what else we could do, I think there are serious  
15 legitimate military things that we can and should be looking  
16 at to strengthen our ability to deal with ISIS in Iraq. And  
17 there are -- they usually come in the categories of more  
18 joint tactical air controllers, spotters, more accompany  
19 missions with the Iraqis, more Special Operations Forces.  
20 And I --

21           Chairman McCain: Even Apache.

22           Ambassador Crocker: And Apaches, absolutely. The  
23 question in each of those is just the balance of benefit  
24 versus risk. There are risks, and there are risks of  
25 Americans dying on the battlefield or being captured. But,

1 I think if the military advisors on the ground think that  
2 there would be a significant benefit from those additions,  
3 they should absolutely be made, because, as you, I think,  
4 suggested, retaking Mosul, or some big accomplishment like  
5 that, would do a lot. Someone asked earlier about the  
6 propaganda campaign and the messaging -- a visible defeat  
7 for ISIS on the ground, like in Ramadi but followed by  
8 Mosul, would be important. And so, I think that cost-  
9 benefit should absolutely be assessed, and potentially  
10 revised.

11 On the question of Raqqa, and taking Raqqa and taking  
12 territory directly by the United States, there -- again, I  
13 think it goes without saying that we have the military power  
14 to do that alone, if necessary. The question there is,  
15 Would the benefit of doing so outweigh the costs and  
16 consequences? And here's one of the sort of unintended-  
17 consequences areas that I was referring to. You know, one  
18 is, of course, the whack-a-mole problem, where you could  
19 take ISIS control of Raqqa, but if the same fighters and  
20 commanders and terrorists move to Deir al-Zor or Mosul or  
21 Aleppo, then you've sort of displaced the problem and you've  
22 got 10-, 20-, 30,000 American troops on the ground as a  
23 recruiting poster for ISIS without really having dealt with  
24 the problem. I am at least as skeptical as Ambassador  
25 Crocker about the prospects of an Arab force doing this for

1 us. It has been on the table for some time, and we actually  
2 tried to work with the Saudis and others to create it. But,  
3 let's just say they're a long way from being able to  
4 deliver. I mean, look at the situation in Yemen, where you  
5 actually do have a coalition of more than 10 Muslim  
6 countries, Arab countries led by the Saudis, willing to  
7 support and fight with the Saudis, but no ground force, no  
8 ability or political willingness to deploy that ground force  
9 in Yemen -- and that is, you know, just Yemen -- let alone  
10 an ability of these forces to go into Syria or Iraq. So, I  
11 think we should be really cautious in assuming that we don't  
12 have to do it, we'll get some Arab force to do it for us.

13 And then, finally, but maybe most centrally, because I  
14 think most of us agree that Syria is at the heart of all of  
15 these questions, I am more skeptical than others that modest  
16 military steps will lead to the political settlement that we  
17 would all like to see. Whether it's more Special Forces or  
18 a no-fly zone, again, politically, I think we have to  
19 recall, we are not talking about a compromise from the  
20 regime, we're not talking about a goal of getting it,  
21 quote/unquote, "to the table." We're talking about getting  
22 rid of it and raising all sorts of questions, among those  
23 who support it, about their future livelihood. So, I think  
24 we should not underestimate what it would take, or assume  
25 that a modest amount of greater support to the opposition --

1 again, the reason I think we know that is, it's what we've  
2 been doing for almost 5 years. And there have been  
3 significant amounts of arms and support that have gone to  
4 the opposition, and the result has been a doubling down by  
5 Iran and Russia. And we should acknowledge that to deal  
6 with it, we would have to directly confront them and apply,  
7 I think, a lot more military force than has really been  
8 considered.

9 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

10 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.  
11 Thank you, gentlemen.

12 And let me, first, start with Ambassador Crocker and  
13 thank you again for your extraordinary service in so many  
14 different ways. But, the issue of a no-fly zone implies, at  
15 least to me, the cooperation of an adjacent country. And  
16 there are only really two: Jordan and Turkey. The  
17 impression I have -- and it's just an impression -- is that  
18 the Jordanians feel they have a sort of de facto no-fly zone  
19 because they've worked out an arrangement in the south that  
20 their border is not subject to aerial attack, more or less.  
21 And the Turks, though, are the most problematic. In fact,  
22 their behavior sometime is totally unpredictable in what  
23 they've done in Iraq with sending troops there, and what  
24 they've done in terms of helping or not helping us to close  
25 the last 50 or 60 kilometers on their border. So, can you

1 -- what is the feasibility of a no-fly zone if you get  
2 limited or unenthusiastic buy-in by the Turks, as it seems  
3 to be the case right now?

4       Ambassador Crocker: It's a great point, Senator. No-  
5 fly zones north or south, or both, would have to have the  
6 full support of Jordan in the south, Turkey in the north.  
7 Not going to work, otherwise. Again, General Keane is far  
8 more competent than I to speak of it. We would -- we'd have  
9 to enforce a no-fly zone in the air from Turkish airspace,  
10 and probably from Patriot missile batteries in Turkey. So,  
11 they'd have to do it.

12       Now, the Turks have said, and have -- they've been  
13 saying, for some time now, that they favor a no-fly zone and  
14 a safe zone. I certainly would like to call that bluff, if  
15 indeed it's a bluff. They have said publicly, recently,  
16 that they would like to work with us on support for non-ISIS  
17 Arab fighters to take care of that gap. I'd like to explore  
18 with them putting the two together, doing both.

19       Again, do I think this is easy? Obviously not. I'm  
20 not even sure it's possible. But, as we look at a horrific  
21 landscape out there and the politics inside Syria and in the  
22 region that make it highly unlikely there is going to be any  
23 sustained effort by anyone against Islamic State under the  
24 current dynamics, I think we have to seriously look at it.

25       Senator Reed: Mr. Gordon, your comments before I call

1 on General Keane.

2 Mr. Gordon: Yeah. I think -- I mean, first of all,  
3 the humanitarian situation is such that we should constantly  
4 review whether there's anything we can do to stop the  
5 airpower being used. So, it should absolutely be on the  
6 table, and has been on the table, and we've looked at it,  
7 when I was still in the administration, constantly. But,  
8 beyond that, I would say three things:

9 First, you would have to think about where you're doing  
10 the no-fly zone. Often, people who support it limit it to  
11 just the sort of northeast of the country or maybe a sliver  
12 on the north, a sliver in the south, to avoid coming into  
13 direct conflict with the regime and the Russians and the air  
14 defenses. But, if you only put it in areas where the regime  
15 is not really flying anyway, it would obviously have limited  
16 effect. Obviously, it doesn't work against ISIS, because  
17 ISIS doesn't have airpower, and the regime is not  
18 significantly flying in those parts of the countries. To  
19 really have a significant effect on refugees and  
20 humanitarian, you'd have to put it much further west,  
21 including over places like Aleppo, and then you get into --  
22 if you're going to do that, then you have to possibly take  
23 out air defenses. You have what is now really a huge  
24 problem with the Russians. And that, in turn, has -- to get  
25 to your specific question about Turkey -- been the problem

1 with the Turks. Because, again, when I was still in the  
2 administration, we spoke extensively with Turkey and tried  
3 to figure out a way to do it together. Their insistence was  
4 that it cover Aleppo and beyond, which -- and, not  
5 surprisingly, because they actually had an interest in us  
6 getting into a direct military conflict with the regime.  
7 The slippery slope that many here were concerned about was  
8 their objective, in some ways, that we would have to take  
9 out air defenses, they might challenge it, that would make  
10 the regime weaker, and then we would be in conflict with the  
11 regime.

12 Last point, because I think it's essential, is, What  
13 are we trying to accomplish with it? I am skeptical --  
14 again, I -- if there's a way to do it that protects people  
15 and helps the humanitarian situation, great -- I am  
16 skeptical that it really gives us leverage that leads to  
17 Assad's departure. If that's the goal, it seems to me  
18 unlikely that, even if we did it, the Russians and the  
19 Iranians would somehow come around to the view that maybe  
20 they should get rid of Assad after all.

21 Senator Reed: Amen.

22 Chairman McCain: You'd think that after 250,000  
23 killed, Mr. Gordon, that you would -- might consider it  
24 seriously.

25 Senator Sessions.

1           Senator Sessions: Well, on the no-fly zone, Ambassador  
2 Crocker, you indicated that we don't focus -- I mean, we  
3 need to consider the political ramifications. What's  
4 happening to Europe as a result of refugee flows is just  
5 incredible. Three senior European officials told me the  
6 European Union is threatened by this, the very existence of  
7 it. Would you agree that it has the -- I think perhaps the  
8 military is a little less focused because they're not  
9 recognizing the enormity of the political danger.

10           Ambassador Crocker: It's a great point, Senator. The  
11 -- what we're watching with the refugee flows is worse than  
12 at any time since World War II. Far worse. It isn't a  
13 regional problem, it isn't a European problem; it's a global  
14 problem. But, it's falling on the region -- obviously, the  
15 Syrians, themselves, but Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan with  
16 enormous refugee populations, and, as you say, in Europe,  
17 where the European Union, as a political construct -- not an  
18 economic, but a political construct -- is threatened. We  
19 have seen, in Germany, which I consider one of our strongest  
20 NATO allies under Angela Merkel, she is now -- she has now  
21 been weakened by this, by trying to do the right thing. So,  
22 taking steps in Syria that can save lives and reduce the  
23 flows of people out of Syria, I think, is -- it's an  
24 imperative. It's a humanitarian issue, but it's also a  
25 political issue. So, it's using military assets for

1 political and humanitarian purposes.

2 I just -- I wish we could get on with it. There are  
3 obviously very complex questions as to how far you have to  
4 go to make a difference. I'm all for taking out his air  
5 defenses. You know, this is not going to take us to total  
6 war. If that's what is required, you know, we should look  
7 at it. And again, I'm in that delightful position of total  
8 irresponsibility, since I represent nothing but myself, but  
9 I think these are questions for the administration, for  
10 Congress, and particularly for this committee to look very,  
11 very seriously at.

12 Senator Sessions: General Keane, I have felt the  
13 difference in North Korea after they got a nuclear weapon  
14 than before. I mean, they were in a position where they  
15 could be defeated. Now they're in a position to lob bombs  
16 into Seoul, at least, if not the United States. So, isn't  
17 it difficult to under- -- to over-estimate the danger to the  
18 region of a nuclear-armed Iran? Isn't that an enormous  
19 event, if Iran gets nuclear weapons?

20 General Keane: Yeah. Absolutely, because -- listen,  
21 it'll lead to the nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.  
22 I mean, the Middle East will just go nuclear. And I'd take  
23 heed of Secretary Kissinger's warning that he believes Iran  
24 with a nuclear weapon is the most calamitous event in his  
25 lifetime, in terms of its threat to global security, because

1 it would likely lead to the first nuclear exchange ever.

2 Senator Sessions: I think it's just -- it's enormous.

3 General Keane: And so -- certainly. And that's -- and  
4 I think there's common ground on that. I mean, nobody wants  
5 to have Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, with the issues we've  
6 all been arguing over. What's the best method to stop that  
7 from happening?

8 Senator Sessions: Secretary Kissinger indicated that  
9 if they're within months of it, that that creates  
10 instability in its own --

11 Ambassador Crocker, let me just ask you something that  
12 you raised that's hugely important. And maybe I'll just ask  
13 you to explain a little more about it. You say we need to  
14 take sides, and -- we need to take sides with our  
15 traditional allies; basically, the Sunni states. And there  
16 are those who believe Iran can somehow be brought in from  
17 the cold. It's a revolutionary regime. If we could just  
18 get the Shi'a Persians to moderate, the world would be  
19 better and we could transform the Middle East. How do you  
20 evaluate that situation, please?

21 Ambassador Crocker: Senator, it is both a series of  
22 hot wars and a cold war. The Iranians have taken sides with  
23 the Russians and with Assad in Syria. That is not the side  
24 we want to be on. They've taken sides in Iraq, with the  
25 Shi'a militias, who, as we sadly remember, just like ISIS,

1 kidnapped and executed Americans, 2007. These are the guys  
2 the Iranians are supporting. So, they've taken a side. The  
3 Russians in Syria have taken a side. We need to be clear  
4 that we stand against this and that we stand with our  
5 allies.

6       You know, Saudi Arabia, yes, we have differences.  
7 There's no doubt. But, Saudi Arabia has been kind of the  
8 bedrock of our regional security policy since FDR met Ibn  
9 Saud on the deck of the Quincy in 1945. This is unraveling.  
10 This -- the Saudis went into Yemen without consulting with  
11 us. They us a little bit in advance, but they didn't  
12 consult on it. From my generation of Near East hands,  
13 that's unthinkable. So, we have got to shore up those  
14 relationships. You start with your traditional friends,  
15 then you move to your adversaries, not the other way around.

16       I hope that gets at your --

17       Senator Sessions: Thank you. It's an important  
18 question.

19       Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

20       Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21       And thank all of you. You bring a tremendous amount of  
22 experience and wisdom to the table, and we really appreciate  
23 that. And I think it seems like the more we hear, the more  
24 confused it becomes in how we -- of how we approach this.

25       I'm concern about, basically, since 9/11, you know, and

1 that's basically the start of what most people think, in  
2 America, started our engagement over in that area. Now, I'm  
3 sure it started many, many, many, many years before that,  
4 and this thing has been brewing for quite some time. But,  
5 with that being said, 9/11 seems to be the start of it.

6 So, all three of you being afforded the hindsight and  
7 being 20/20, what the greatest mistake that we have made, as  
8 a country, since 9/11? Just as quickly as you can. Because  
9 my concern that we have now is that -- is -- Mr. Gordon, you  
10 had said that, you know, with even our allies -- and I think  
11 as Ambassador Crocker had said, that they're not willing to  
12 fight on the ground, they're not willing to take the fight  
13 on the ground, so if we don't do it, doesn't look like it's  
14 going to be done. And we've proven it. We've been there,  
15 and it didn't seem to stabilize that area, because, as soon  
16 as we pulled out, it was falling apart. So, if you could  
17 just give me an oversight, very quickly, on the greatest  
18 mistake and the simplest direction forward that we could not  
19 repeat that mistake again.

20 General Keane: Well, I had it in my testimony -- I  
21 mean, I fundamentally believe that the singular strategic  
22 mistake that we've made is not to develop a strategy dealing  
23 with radical Islam, and not just focus on one particular  
24 group, and embrace the intellectual challenge that this  
25 ideology presents to us, embrace it politically, but brace

1 it in terms of what we need to do financially and  
2 economically, and what we must do militarily, and bring  
3 people together, nations together, to have a common invested  
4 interest in this, and deal with it.

5       There's going to be something after ISIS. We will  
6 defeat ISIS. There is going to be something after ISIS that  
7 will threaten our national interests in the Middle East or  
8 someplace else that's going to get us involved and  
9 concerned, and we're going to have meetings about it, and  
10 people will follow me in here in telling you how to deal  
11 with that problem. But -- and that is the singular problem  
12 I see, that we have not faced up to the -- this issue,  
13 strategically, to deal with radical Islam, itself, and stop  
14 -- while we have to stop and defeat ISIS, as we had to stop  
15 and defeat the al-Qaeda senior leadership in Pakistan, until  
16 we deal with a comprehensive strategy, we're going to find  
17 ourselves in the same situation we are now with ISIS. This  
18 is a generational problem. We have to understand it for  
19 that and take a page out of the 20th century in how we dealt  
20 with communist ideology, form a NATO and SEATO common  
21 political and military alliances to come together to deal  
22 with a common problem.

23       Senator Manchin: Ambassador Crocker.

24       Ambassador Crocker: Senator, that is a profound  
25 question. I've thought a lot about it. I opened our

1 Embassy in Afghanistan shortly after the fall of the  
2 Taliban. The force on the ground then was 5th Special  
3 Forces Group, the CIA, and one Marine Expeditionary Unit.  
4 That was it.

5 Senator Manchin: That was after 9- -- that was --

6 Ambassador Crocker: After 9/11.

7 Senator Manchin: Yeah.

8 Ambassador Crocker: The Pentagon at that time was  
9 absolutely opposed to introducing any more forces to help  
10 Karzai secure cities outside of Kabul. I think the biggest  
11 mistake we made is not understanding the reach of time and  
12 the resilience of those who are our adversaries. I had my  
13 first --

14 Senator Manchin: But, you would think, by just  
15 watching happened with Russia being there for 10 years, we  
16 would have had some insight of the resilience these people  
17 have.

18 Ambassador Crocker: Which may have been behind the  
19 thinking of the Pentagon at the time --

20 Senator Manchin: Gotcha.

21 Ambassador Crocker: -- for not wanting --

22 Senator Manchin: Gotcha.

23 Ambassador Crocker: -- additional forces.

24 So, we kept our force footprint down. And, of course,  
25 our resilient enemy came at us, as it subsequently did in

1 Iraq -- different enemy, but same league. So, it's a way  
2 the same. There aren't any easy answers. It's hard to say  
3 -- I mean, I will not go to the extreme position of saying  
4 that the overthrow of the Taliban and the expulsion of al-  
5 Qaeda was a mistake. I -- as an American, I cannot bring  
6 myself to say that.

7 Senator Manchin: Declaring war in Iraq?

8 Ambassador Crocker: I'm coming to the mistakes.

9 But, the -- Afghanistan is worth spending some time on,  
10 because -- hard to argue that we shouldn't have taken  
11 military action after what came to us out of Afghanistan.  
12 But, the mistake, if there was one, was not understanding  
13 that you can't kill them all and that the effort to create a  
14 strong, stable state in Afghanistan probably wasn't going to  
15 happen. So, then what? In Iraq, it was --

16 Listen, Senator, I learned maybe two things during  
17 almost 4 years in the Middle East. I thought one lesson  
18 every couple of decades was a pace I could sustain. It's --  
19 so, the first lesson is: Be careful what you get into in  
20 the Middle East. And the first time I learned that lesson  
21 was in Lebanon, 1982, Israeli invasion. We all thought it  
22 was a good idea, get rid of the PLO. Well, we got rid of  
23 the PLO, and we got Hezbollah. And we got a chain of events  
24 that led to the bombing of my Embassy, with me in it, and  
25 the bombing of the Marine barracks. Be careful what you get

1 into.

2 But, the second thing I learned is: Be just as careful  
3 what you propose to get out of, that disengagement can have  
4 consequences as great or greater as engagement. And I would  
5 suggest to you, we didn't follow those lessons at all well,  
6 either of them, in Iraq.

7 Senator Manchin: Mr. Chairman, can Mr. Gordon just  
8 give us his -- what he thinks the greatest mistake --

9 Mr. Gordon.

10 Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador.

11 Mr. Gordon: Yeah, I agree, it's a profound question, a  
12 hard question. And I'd say, with the greatest respect, it  
13 may not even be a helpful question, because we should be  
14 reluctant, because of these complexities, to identify single  
15 things. I think many would argue, if you had to identify a  
16 single thing, that it would be the Iraq War, not just  
17 because of the financial and human costs, but because it  
18 tipped the strategic balance in the region and put Iran in  
19 charge in Iraq. It led to Sunni disempowerment, which is  
20 partly fueling the Al-Qaeda in Iraq and then ISIS. It made  
21 the U.S. public wary of our engagement in the Middle East,  
22 and arguably even over-wary, so we're not willing to do  
23 things that, arguably, we should. But, I don't -- I think  
24 we have to acknowledge that for every, you know, mistake of  
25 action, there would have costs of inaction, too. So, even

1 I'm not willing to say that that's the greatest single  
2 mistake, because, had we not done it, we might be sitting  
3 here talking about the mistake of leading -- leaving Saddam  
4 Hussein in power. So, that's why I'm reluctant to --

5 Senator Manchin: Sure.

6 Mr. Gordon: -- identify single things.

7 I've pointed out elsewhere that, you know, when you  
8 think back about the region, in Iraq, we intervened and  
9 occupied, and it turned out very badly. In Libya, we  
10 intervened, but didn't occupy, and it has turned out very  
11 badly. And in Syria, we neither intervened nor occupied,  
12 and it has turned out very badly. I think the lesson of  
13 that is just overall caution that there is some single  
14 answer or model for how we should deal with these problems,  
15 again, has been said, so I would -- I would say there's not  
16 a single mistake, just as there's not a single answer for  
17 what we should do, going forward.

18 Senator Manchin: Thank you.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte.

21 Senator Ayotte: Thank you, Chairman.

22 I want to thank all of you for being here.

23 General Keane, I wanted to ask you -- and certainly  
24 we've seen Iran twice test ballistic missiles this fall, and  
25 we know that, recently, the administration has issued some

1 minimal sanctions, frankly, recently, after the hostage  
2 release, to address those ballistic missile tests. Do you  
3 think that their response to these testing of the ballistic  
4 missiles, post the inking of this agreement, obviously in  
5 clear violation of existing U.N. resolutions, is sufficient?  
6 And what does this -- as I hear all of you say, that, no  
7 matter where you stand on the Iran agreement, we've got to  
8 be quite vigilant, going forward -- and what do you make of  
9 this?

10 General Keane: Well, to directly answer your question,  
11 I think that's a totally inadequate response. These are  
12 essentially U.S. unilateral sanctions that we're imposing.  
13 This is a violation of U.N. resolution. The United States  
14 should lead an effort in the Security Council to impose  
15 tough economic sanctions on that and set that as a bar,  
16 certainly, because the Iranians have already told us that  
17 they're going to continue to test ballistic missiles. Now,  
18 these are medium-range ballistic missiles. They're  
19 eventually going to be testing long-range ballistic missiles  
20 that'll reach all of Europe. And then the Iranians are  
21 totally capable of moving to intercontinental ballistic  
22 missiles. So, if -- here's the 36-year pattern of not doing  
23 anything, and look where we are with the Iranians.

24 So, I'm -- I am of a mind that we have to have tough-  
25 minded economic sanctions. They have worked. It is what

1 brought the Iranians to the negotiating table over the  
2 nuclear deal, primarily, in my judgment. And so, yes. I  
3 think every time they take a hostage, there should be some  
4 kind of a sanction. And we have refused to do that. The --  
5 we are incentivizing hostage-taking. As the Ambassador  
6 painfully is aware of, they have been taking hostages since  
7 the 1980s. This is a cottage industry for them. They take  
8 hostages, we scream and holler about it. We eventually get  
9 our hostages back. Tragically, they killed CIA Station  
10 Chief Buckley. But, the reality is, we've not stood up to  
11 it. And that gets their attention.

12 So, I think, yes, we have to take a stand by this and  
13 demonstrate to the Iranians and to our allies in the region  
14 that, despite the nuclear deal we've made with the Iranians,  
15 we are not giving up on standing up against their malign  
16 behavior in the region and as it impacts our interests and  
17 the stability and security of the region. Now, we're going  
18 to be there. And when we don't do that, and we just do what  
19 we did, these unilateral in -- sanctions for missile  
20 testing, that is inviting more missile testing.

21 Senator Ayotte: Can I also ask -- Ambassador Crocker,  
22 I was very curious about your statement, which I thought was  
23 very direct, in answer to Senator Sessions, about, Where  
24 does the United States stand? And, as we look at allies  
25 like Saudi Arabia, that right now we are giving them the

1 impression that we aren't standing with them. And, in fact,  
2 we've seen, obviously, that Iran and Russia, you very  
3 clearly laid out, have taken a side, here, and it's a side  
4 against our interests, ultimately, and against peace and  
5 stability in the region, which is in, of course, all of our  
6 interests. And so, I wanted to ask you. in terms of what we  
7 should be doing, I see this as connected. So, when the  
8 Iranians act badly and we don't respond, I think this also  
9 gives a message to some of our allies that are concerned  
10 about Iran's hegemonic behavior in the region. And so, what  
11 would you like to see us do with regard to our allies? And  
12 how do we turn this around right now to make sure that our  
13 allies, who we need at this moment to address the ISIS  
14 threat and also threats that can flow from Iran from their  
15 malign behavior, going forward?

16 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator.

17 First, make it clear that we are going to stand against  
18 malign Iranian activity. I gave a suggestion on what we  
19 might look at doing in Syria. In Iraq, I would like to see  
20 -- not Ryan Crocker, but John Kerry go out and -- anybody  
21 but me -- go out and spend a prolonged period of time out  
22 there.

23 Senator Ayotte: Don't ask us, because we're going to  
24 want to send you.

25 [Laughter.]

1           Ambassador Crocker: You know, Condi Rice did this when  
2 I was out there. In this administration, I think there have  
3 been two Secretary of State visits in 7 years to Iraq, one  
4 by Secretary Clinton and one by Secretary Kerry. I think  
5 that's right. I'm not sure.

6           Senator Ayotte: Well, that's telling. That's telling.

7           Ambassador Crocker: And in -- and so, the space we  
8 vacated, the Iranians filled. And they're -- they are not  
9 seeking a unified Iraqi state that is friendly with Iran.  
10 They are seeking, basically, the destruction of an Iraqi  
11 state, its division into a Kurdistan, where they would have  
12 heavy influence, a Shi'astan, with most of the oil that they  
13 would effectively control, and a Jihadistan that the Islamic  
14 State can have, and who cares?

15           So, I would start making a major diplomatic push.  
16 There is a Prime Minister we can work with. He hasn't had  
17 many options, beyond Tehran. I'd like to see us give him  
18 one. Those would be a couple of things.

19           And when the Secretary needed a break from Baghdad, he  
20 could move around to Oman, to Tel Aviv, to Ankara, to Cairo,  
21 to Riyadh, repeat as necessary. And it will be necessary.

22           Your business on this Hill, and the business I left,  
23 has one thing at the center of both: It's about  
24 relationships. I am concerned that we have let our  
25 relationships atrophy with our friends in the region. We

1 need to take some specific actions to show our resolve. We  
2 also need to just take them seriously and engage with them.

3 And finally, I would say, with respect to the ballistic  
4 missile tests, I would agree with General Keane. I -- and  
5 maybe we're doing this -- that we are active in the United  
6 Nations with the Security Council. Probably a good time to  
7 be a little bit quiet on it until we can do the prep work,  
8 but I think we should make the same effort there that we did  
9 on the nuclear issue.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator King.

11 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 First, General Keane, I agree with you completely that  
13 a comprehensive strategy that involves everything from  
14 military force to information to ideology to ideas is needed  
15 to deal with the threat of ISIS, which is the longrun  
16 threat. So, I appreciate your testimony on that. I think  
17 that's exactly right.

18 Just a small question. Ambassador Crocker, you noted  
19 you thought Prime Minister Merkel was suffering politically  
20 for, quote, "doing the right thing" about taking in Syrian  
21 refugees. I presume you think that this country has some  
22 responsibility to take in Syrian refugees?

23 Ambassador Crocker: Yes, sir, I do. More profoundly,  
24 I believe this country has an obligation to lead on a global  
25 crisis, not to let the European -- or, leave it to the

1 Europeans, who --

2 Senator King: You're talking now about the refugee  
3 crisis.

4 Ambassador Crocker: The refugee crisis. The -- we  
5 have a broad responsibility, I believe, as America, as a  
6 global leader, to lead on a global crisis, to help the  
7 Europeans sort out what they're doing with these people, to  
8 support, as fully and actively as we can, the Turks, the  
9 Lebanese, and the Jordanians.

10 Senator King: But, it would be very difficult for us  
11 --

12 Ambassador Crocker: And part of that -- oh, sorry,  
13 Senator.

14 Senator King: No, you go ahead.

15 Ambassador Crocker: And part of that -- you know,  
16 we're not going to be able to lead effectively if we don't  
17 walk the walk.

18 Senator King: That was going to be my question.

19 Ambassador Crocker: And that -- and in my view, that  
20 means taking in a significant number of refugees. They're  
21 not going to take us very seriously in Europe. Angela  
22 Merkel's got a million, and we've got 2100. That doesn't  
23 mean we've got to -- I mean, I'm all for the vetting  
24 process. It's essential. I'd just like to see it made more  
25 of a priority to be able to move refugees faster. But,

1 again, this crisis isn't going to get any better. And with  
2 the kind of fractionated approach of dealing with it that  
3 has emerged without a single State stepping forward and  
4 saying, "Let's everybody get together and figure out how  
5 we're going to deal with it," I'm just afraid we're going to  
6 see more and more of this.

7 Senator King: I thank you for your testimony. I'm  
8 sitting in a Senate seat that was occupied by Edmund Muskie,  
9 whose father was an immigrant from Poland, and George  
10 Mitchell, whose mother was an immigrant from Lebanon.

11 General Keane, the central question about Syria, you  
12 touched upon, and we've sort of talked around it. Where  
13 does the ground force come from? I think I heard agreement  
14 that it shouldn't be us, because that's a recruiting poster,  
15 that's what ISIS wants, that would be a gift. But, then  
16 we're hearing that the Muslim countries don't seem to want  
17 to step forward with ground troops. Where do we -- that's  
18 -- this has been the problem with the strategy for 3 years  
19 -- where do the ground troops come from in Syria to confront  
20 ISIS?

21 General Keane: You know, ISIS in Syria, much as ISIS  
22 in Iraq, is occupying Sunni land. The bit of land that they  
23 were dealing with the Kurds on, the Kurds have effectively  
24 reclaimed in Syria, as well as in Iraq. And, by the way, we  
25 should use that as evidence that ISIS certainly isn't 10

1 foot tall.

2 Senator King: Right.

3 General Keane: We put together a fairly decent  
4 representative ground force, supported by some effective  
5 airpower, we can defeat ISIS. So --

6 Senator King: And the same thing happened in Ramadi.

7 General Keane: Yeah. And the problem we have is that  
8 the ground force is fighting Assad. And that is essentially  
9 -- the largest force that's fighting Assad are Sunni Syrian  
10 Arabs.

11 Senator King: And therefore, getting rid of Assad  
12 should be a priority --

13 General Keane: That --

14 Senator King: -- in order to turn that force --

15 General Keane: That is what we are --

16 Senator King: -- on ISIS.

17 General Keane: That is what the Ambassador and I have  
18 been saying, that Assad remains a priority for -- certainly  
19 to get off the status quo and this humanitarian catastrophe  
20 that we're facing, which is contributing to migration  
21 challenges, but it also enables ISIS to thrive, because the  
22 Sunni Arabs are not going to cross that border while -- and  
23 fight ISIS while the Iranians are propping up the Assad  
24 regime. It is --

25 Senator King: If Assad --

1           General Keane:  -- just not going to happen,

2           Senator King:  If Assad went, you'd have -- the Syrian  
3    army plus the moderate opposition would then be able to  
4    focus on ISIS.  The -- but, the -- now -- and I'm not being  
5    argumentative here, that you all have -- or at least you two  
6    have endorsed a no-fly zone.  That was a lot easier when it  
7    was just the Syrian air force.  And we're -- the testimony  
8    is, How do we -- we talk about a no-fly zone.  You're  
9    talking about shooting down Russian airplanes.

10          General Keane:  Well, you know, this is a problem we've  
11    always had, from the Cold War to the present.  And because  
12    the Russians have a capability and we have a capability, and  
13    if we fear their use if that capability and paralyzes us  
14    from taking action, then we're taking a knee.  And I don't  
15    think we need to do it.  I'll be quite frank about it.  I  
16    would have demonstrated America's resolve right from the  
17    beginning.  When they first bombed Syrian moderates that we  
18    trained, we should have cratered that runway and send a  
19    strong signal -- not kill a single Russian, but cratered  
20    that runway and say, "You do that again, then more than that  
21    runway is going to go away."

22          And these -- this is something we learned in the Cold  
23    War.  The Russians have stepped up.  They have brought to  
24    the table a very limited Russian capability.  They haven't  
25    been out of the region in 35 years, since they went to

1 Afghanistan. And that was a failed military operation, as  
2 we're all aware of. They are an inferior military, by  
3 comparison to the United States. They know that. They know  
4 it. They have selected capability that is very good. And I  
5 think if we establish a no-fly zone, I don't -- and we're  
6 going to put people in there to protect them -- I don't  
7 really see the Russians coming in to bomb it. They would be  
8 a pariah on the world stage for doing something like that.  
9 The more likely attempt at protecting a safe zone would be  
10 from infiltration, suicide bombers or something like that,  
11 where you would need some kind of ground force to protect  
12 it, or firing a missile or a rocket at it, which means  
13 you'll -- you have to bring up from Jordan and Turkey  
14 missile defense systems that could help protect the no-fly  
15 zone. So, I don't think the --

16 Senator King: We wouldn't necessarily --

17 General Keane: -- the fear of Russian intervention in  
18 a no-fly zone should paralyze us from establishing that very  
19 thing.

20 Senator King: Well, I share your analysis. So, going  
21 back to the Soviet Union, the best analogy I ever heard was  
22 that they're like a hotel thief; they try all the doors  
23 until they find one that's open.

24 [Laughter.]

25 General Keane: I haven't heard that one.

1           Senator King: That's essentially what you're  
2 suggesting here. And by not showing any level of  
3 resistance, then they're going to maintain their presence.  
4 Of course, the danger is some kind of counter-escalation.  
5 And I think, Mr. Crocker, something I wrote down, "Be  
6 careful what you get into." That's always a good piece of  
7 advice.

8           Thank you, gentlemen. Very important testimony.

9           Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

10          Senator Cotton: General Keane, if I could continue on  
11 this point. Russia began significant operations in Syria in  
12 late September. They had multiple incursions into Turkish  
13 airspace September, October, and early November. And then,  
14 in late November, Turkey shot down one of their -- one of  
15 Russia's aircraft. Do you know how many times Russia has  
16 invaded Turkish airspace since that shootdown?

17          General Keane: I have no idea. I suspect they have  
18 not.

19          Senator Cotton: What do you think that says about the  
20 connection between those two events and their willingness to  
21 respect a demonstration of force in enforcing airspace  
22 rights?

23          General Keane: Yes. I mean, the pattern of the  
24 Russians is exactly what we see in that situation. Turkey  
25 was protecting their sovereign airspace. They took what

1 they thought was reasonable action to do that. And the  
2 Russians have stayed away from it. And I think that would  
3 be the same situation dealing with a no-fly zone.

4 Listen, they -- the Russians, at the end of the day,  
5 are not fools. They're practical. They're in Syria for one  
6 reason only, to prop up the Assad regime. They have a very  
7 limited military objective. That is their goal. They -- I  
8 cannot see them extending that to bomb a place where we're  
9 trying to protect innocent people.

10 Senator Cotton: Ambassador Crocker, would you agree  
11 with that assessment?

12 Ambassador Crocker: I would, sir, and I'd extend it,  
13 of course, to Iran, that they, Russia and Iran, in alliance,  
14 are going to push, in Syria and elsewhere, at least in the  
15 case of Iran, until somebody, like us, pushes back.

16 Senator Cotton: And if we could stick with Turkey for  
17 a moment, since they are, in many ways, the lynchpin of both  
18 the -- what's happening in Syria and our efforts there, as  
19 well as the refugee flows. At this moment, based on their  
20 past conduct, how would you assess that the Turkish  
21 government prioritizes the various fights they are engaged  
22 in -- the Kurds, the Assad regime, and the Islamic State?

23 Ambassador Crocker: That's a great question, Senator,  
24 because it highlights something that we've been talking  
25 about this morning. We want the non-jihadi Syrian groups to

1 fight Islamic State. Their archenemy isn't the Islamic  
2 State, it's Assad. We want the Arab states to come in to  
3 fight Islamic State. That's not their biggest issue. It's  
4 Iran. And the same thing applies with Turkey. Islamic  
5 State is clearly a threat to them, and they know it. We've  
6 seen the attacks into Syria. But, the -- in the -- in  
7 Ankara's calculus, the Kurds are a much greater threat. So,  
8 we've got the dilemma that the most effective on-the-ground  
9 force we have found in Syria is the one that the Turks fear  
10 the most, particularly since the Syrian Kurdish groups, the  
11 YPG, are affiliated with the PKK. And, you know, thousands  
12 have died in that conflict inside of Turkey, both Kurds and  
13 Turks. So, this is the problem from hell at every  
14 dimension. It isn't going to get better on its own. A  
15 startling revelation, I know. It's going to take that kind  
16 of sustained dialogue and engagement with all of our  
17 traditional allies in that area. We just need to be having  
18 that conversation.

19 Senator Cotton: Continuing on priorities, which Sunni  
20 Arab state views the Islamic State as a graver threat than  
21 it views Iran and Shi'ite aggression in the region?

22 Ambassador Crocker: I am not totally current on this.  
23 I would say, based on my last interactions -- and, of  
24 course, King Abdullah was just here; some of you may have  
25 had that conversation with him -- I think King Abdullah

1 would put Islamic State up there ahead of Iran. The Arabian  
2 Peninsula states -- no, it would be Iran. We've -- didn't  
3 get much notice, but the Kuwaitis made some arrests, in the  
4 last week or so, of individuals accused in a massive terror  
5 plot involving literally tons of explosives that they traced  
6 to Iran. So, for them, it's an existential threat.

7 And in Iraq, he is in no position to say so, but I  
8 would bet that, sandwiched between ISIS and Iran, the Iraqi  
9 leadership would probably put them on pretty much a par.

10 Senator Cotton: Well, my time is expired, but, Mr.  
11 Gordon, I infer from your head-nodding that you largely  
12 agree with Ambassador Crocker's assessment? Do you care to  
13 add any perspective?

14 Mr. Gordon: I agree with his assessment. I think the  
15 United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq would all say  
16 ISIS is a greater threat. Saudi Arabia would be focused on  
17 Iran.

18 Senator Cotton: Okay.

19 Thank you all, gentlemen.

20 Chairman McCain: The dilemma is to reconcile those  
21 priorities.

22 Senator Heinrich.

23 Senator Heinrich: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

24 And I want to continue on this issue of, sort of,  
25 priority and scale, because we've heard a lot today about

1 the threat of Iran and its influence in the region, the  
2 threat of Assad in Syria. On a scale, we've heard a lot  
3 less about ISIS.

4 And, Secretary Gordon, I wanted to ask you, How would  
5 you prioritize or rank and scale those three threats in the  
6 region, in terms of our greatest -- the greatest threats to  
7 our current interests and security?

8 Mr. Gordon: To the three, Iran, ISIS, and -- what was  
9 the third?

10 Senator Heinrich: And just Assad in Syria.

11 Mr. Gordon: Yeah, which you could couple with Iran, in  
12 many ways. You know, I don't like the choice, because we  
13 should acknowledge that we have major problems with Iran,  
14 which --

15 Senator Heinrich: Right.

16 Mr. Gordon: -- threatens our interests, and we have an  
17 interest in containing Iran. And we also have a strategic  
18 interest in defeating and destroying ISIS. So, I don't like  
19 the choice, which somehow implies --

20 Senator Heinrich: And, obviously, they're all related.  
21 So, I'm not asking for, necessarily, a one-two-three, but a  
22 -- How do we prioritize our resources to address these three  
23 threats?

24 Mr. Gordon: I think we have to do them all at the same  
25 time. And the question of Syria, I already made clear that

1 I think our prioritization needs to be de-escalating the  
2 conflict more than displacing Assad. Would I like to get  
3 rid of Assad tomorrow? Absolutely. I wouldn't like to, if  
4 the cost of that was an even greater all-out war among all  
5 of the different groups in Syria. I fear that the most  
6 likely result of immediate steps to get rid of Assad now  
7 would not result in moderates ruling Syria in an inclusive  
8 way and turning on ISIS, which we'd love to see, but,  
9 rather, an all-out battle for Damascus, hundreds of  
10 thousands, or possibly millions, more refugees of all those  
11 who are afraid of living in that battle between ISIS, Nusra,  
12 and dozens of other groups. So, for that reason, my  
13 priority on that issue would be de-escalating the war rather  
14 than getting rid of Assad.

15 Another important priorities question is undermining  
16 Russia in Iran, vis-a-vis stopping the war. Is it in our  
17 interests to contain and undermine Russia in Iran?  
18 Absolutely. We could put that on the top of our list and do  
19 whatever it takes to do that. But, I think the costs and  
20 consequences of that -- the ongoing Syrian civil war, the  
21 lack of a nuclear agreement with Iran -- would outweigh  
22 those. So, that's the -- I mean, that is a nice summary for  
23 this --

24 Senator Heinrich: Well, that's --

25 Mr. Gordon: -- entire hearing --

1 Senator Heinrich: That's actually helpful.

2 Mr. Gordon: -- the need for discipline in  
3 prioritizing, because we have a lot of goals.

4 Senator Heinrich: And in relations to that, one of the  
5 challenges we have, especially with regard to the ISIS piece  
6 of this, is that, while we all recognize that Turkey can  
7 play a very strong and sort of geostrategic role in all of  
8 this, their approach has been oftentimes ambiguous. How do  
9 we leverage greater focus on ISIS from Turkey, given their  
10 concerns about the Kurds and other priorities? And what do  
11 you think, Secretary Gordon, Prime Minister Erdogan's  
12 strategic goals and objectives are, truly, in this current  
13 engagement?

14 Mr. Gordon: That's another great question. And  
15 Ambassador Crocker alluded to this. The problem -- you  
16 know, we all have lots of different adversaries in the  
17 region, and we prioritize them differently. Turkey's and  
18 ours, on the questions we've been discussing -- Turkey, I  
19 would say, prioritizes the war with the Kurds, because they  
20 are internally threatened and, as was said, have lost 30,000  
21 people in a conflict over three decades. Next is Assad.  
22 And then after that is ISIS, which they don't like, but they  
23 have a strategic interest in avoiding a conflict with, so  
24 they've been reluctant to really poke too much. I would say  
25 ours are the opposite. We would put ISIS on the top of

1 those three --

2 Senator Heinrich: Right.

3 Mr. Gordon: -- Assad next, and the Kurds are not only  
4 lower down, they're actually a partner.

5 Senator Heinrich: Yeah.

6 Mr. Gordon: And I would note that, in the past week  
7 alone, we have seen Turkey oppose Kurdish representation in  
8 the opposition group that is meant to meet to try to de-  
9 escalate these talks, which is hard to -- you know, it's  
10 hard to imagine excluding the Kurds from the opposition, and  
11 Turkey taking military action against the PYG, which is one  
12 of our strongest forces in fighting ISIS. So, that really  
13 underscores the difference that we have with Turkey on some  
14 of these. And you asked --

15 Senator Heinrich: That's --

16 Mr. Gordon: -- you know, how to deal with it. And I  
17 think you used the word "leverage." Look, Turkey is still  
18 an ally and a partner, and we need to have an absolutely  
19 frank conversation. Because we have different priorities,  
20 only a sort of tradeoff on these issues can get us on the  
21 same page.

22 Senator Heinrich: Ambassador Crocker, while I have a  
23 couple of seconds left, you pointed out that in -- Germany  
24 has a million-plus refugees. I think Jordan has a million-  
25 two, something like that. The U.S. is willing to take 2100.

1 Do you have an opinion on the House-passed bill, the  
2 American Security Against Foreign Enemies, or SAFE, Act and  
3 its potential impact on being able to deal with refugees  
4 from Iraq and Syria?

5 Ambassador Crocker: I appreciate the fears in this  
6 country in the wake of Paris, and particularly San  
7 Bernardino. These are real fears. I just think the  
8 legislation is aiming in the wrong direction.

9 You know, the refugees are not the source of the  
10 problem or of terror. They're the victims of it. It's also  
11 very important, again, to keep a regional perspective. I  
12 follow Islamic State media as closely as I can, and it was  
13 very interesting. Back in September, when Chancellor Merkel  
14 made the statement that refugees were welcome in Germany,  
15 the Islamic State social media went nuts, "Don't believe it.  
16 It's a trap. They're trying to lure you in so they can  
17 imprison you, or worse." On it went. It defeats a key part  
18 of the Islamic State narrative if the West, including the  
19 U.S., is seen as welcoming of the refugees that they are  
20 helping to create, that we are the protectors of Muslims,  
21 not them, that they are the tormenter, we are the protector.  
22 That's the narrative we want to get out there. And I just  
23 hope we do it. Again, I understand what the legislation is  
24 intending to do. I think it's -- it's actually  
25 counterproductive.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Hirono.

2 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Ambassador Crocker, you noted that we need to stand  
4 with the Sunnis, because of, you know, others -- Iran has  
5 taken a position. So, what does this mean? What concrete  
6 steps do we take to reaffirm our relationship, for example,  
7 with Saudi Arabia and with Turkey? Because there are  
8 internal issues going on within both of these countries that  
9 make it difficult, not to mention, for example, in Turkey,  
10 that they are very concerned that we are depending on Kurds  
11 to fight in Syria, and that is the biggest concern that  
12 President Erdogan has, apparently, in Turkey. And then, in  
13 Saudi Arabia, there are succession issues and some internal  
14 posturing that's going on there. So, how do we, with these  
15 two very important allies -- how do we shore up our  
16 relationships with them and let them know that we stand with  
17 them? What concrete steps would you suggest?

18 Ambassador Crocker: Well, two sets of issues, Senator.  
19 First, taking actions that demonstrate that we are on the  
20 same side of issues critical to them, as well as us. That  
21 is why I have been saying it's important to take a stand  
22 against what Iraq -- Iran is doing in the region, both in  
23 Syria and Iraq, in particular. They're slightly different  
24 cases. But, to show the Saudis and others that, yeah, we're  
25 serious about the same things they're serious about.

1           With Erdogan in -- Turkey is a -- you know, a NATO  
2 ally. It's in a special category. They stood with us in  
3 Korea. We should be having the kind of high-level sustained  
4 dialogue that befits a critical treaty alliance, to listen  
5 to them, to understand their concerns, to see how the region  
6 looks to Erdogan in some detail and depth. It starts with  
7 that kind of engagement.

8           We also need to be careful, I think, in understanding  
9 the very real limits on how helpful the Kurds can be. When  
10 you get outside of areas of their traditional influence --  
11 and we saw this when they led the effort to retake the  
12 Sinjar region in northern Iraq from Islamic State -- some  
13 real frictions developed, because that is not a  
14 traditionally Kurdish area. So, in addition to Turkish  
15 fears, trying to push the Kurds into, say, Arab areas -- not  
16 a good idea. So, just kind of understanding the dynamics,  
17 and then having that strategic dialogue.

18           I'd just say one final point on Saudi Arabia, Senator.  
19 I've followed Saudi affairs for a long time. I'm never  
20 going to figure out how their internal political dynamics  
21 work. What I do know is, you know, for most of the last  
22 four decades, the West -- elements in the West have been  
23 predicting the collapse of the House of Saud. It's still  
24 there. I think it's going to be there for a good, long  
25 time. Let them worry about how their internal politics are

1 organized, and let's just deal with them as a government.

2 Senator Hirono: Well, with the Saudis, there's a  
3 potential for a young 30-year-old to take over the  
4 leadership there. So, the Middle East is fraught with  
5 peril.

6 Mr. Gordon, you said that de-escalating the conflict in  
7 Syria is the more immediate concern than getting rid of  
8 Assad. Isn't that the path that the U.S. is taking right  
9 now? De-escalating the conflict there?

10 Mr. Gordon: I think the U.S. is interested in de-  
11 escalating the conflict and is trying to find some middle  
12 ground between what might have been an ideal objective or an  
13 initial objective of complete regime change in Syria and  
14 living with Assad. And so, looking for --

15 Senator Hirono: For the moment. I mean, it's not a  
16 long-term desirable --

17 Mr. Gordon: That's right. And that's why they're  
18 looking at: Could you have a certain amount of time that he  
19 can stay? Or, could you reduce his powers in the meantime?  
20 And I think all of these things are important to explore  
21 diplomatically. I just fear that the insistence on  
22 immediate departure without a means to bring it about just  
23 perpetuates the war.

24 Senator Hirono: Well, I --

25 Mr. Gordon: And while it wouldn't be ideal to have a

1    cease-fire in place, and many have questioned whether the  
2    opposition would ever accept it, all of which are  
3    legitimate, if you could offer them what has never really  
4    been offered at all in the -- in 5 years, which is control  
5    over the areas that they control, an end of the offensive  
6    operation and barrel bombs, humanitarian assistance,  
7    prisoner releases, and a path and process to deal with Syria  
8    more generally, I think it would be an awful lot better than  
9    where we are right now.

10           Senator Hirono: My understanding of our posture in  
11    Syria is that, in fact, we are not insisting that Assad go  
12    right away, because we recognize, as Ambassador Crocker has  
13    said, "Be careful what," you know, "you get into and what  
14    you get out of." So, I do not think that that is, in fact,  
15    what we're doing. I think what we're doing is to try to  
16    figure out a way to achieve a cease-fire there. And that  
17    would have -- go a long way to addressing the humanitarian  
18    crisis that is happening in Syria.

19           Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

20           Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine is sitting down.

21           You know, where is our moral compass? Where are we  
22    satisfied to leave someone in power that has killed 250,000  
23    men, women, and children, and sent millions into refugee  
24    status? Ambassador Crocker addressed the result of this  
25    failure, "So, let's leave him in power for a while and let's

1 live with Bashar Assad for" -- so, what? So, he can kill  
2 more people? So he can starve them, so he can slaughter  
3 them with poison gas? Is that the moral compass that the  
4 United States has followed? I don't think so. I think the  
5 greatest example of sticking to your moral compass is the  
6 Reagan administration. And for us to sit by and say, "Well,  
7 maybe Bashar Assad can stay for a while. Maybe we can" --  
8 we're -- the -- it's immoral. And if we lose our moral  
9 compass, then we're just like every other nation in history.

10 Senator Kaine.

11 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And you know I  
12 strongly support your -- have long supported your proposals  
13 with respect to the humanitarian or no-fly zone in northern  
14 Syria. And you were prescient in calling for that.

15 A couple of questions for the witnesses. And I  
16 apologize for stepping out. We're having a Foreign  
17 Relations Committee hearing on exactly the same topic, and  
18 we've been going back and forth.

19 Who's a bigger enemy to the United States, ISIL or  
20 Syrian refugees?

21 General Keane: What was the second part of that?

22 Senator Kaine: Who is a bigger enemy to the United  
23 States, ISIL or Syrian refugees?

24 General Keane: Well, clearly ISIL is a bigger enemy.  
25 And I certainly don't think Syrian refugees are an enemy,

1 period.

2 Senator Kaine: Other witnesses?

3 Mr. Gordon: Agree.

4 Ambassador Crocker: Yes, sir. We had a -- something  
5 of a conversation on that before you came back in. I agree  
6 completely.

7 Senator Kaine: The reason I ask is, we're debating a  
8 bill this afternoon, and the title of the bill is Securing  
9 America Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015. And the  
10 enemies referred to in the bill are refugees from Syria and  
11 Iraq. We haven't had a debate or a vote about ISIL.

12 The President sent a draft AUMF authorization to  
13 Congress in the Middle of February. Now, I've not been  
14 hesitant to be critical of the administration. I think they  
15 should have sent it earlier. I'm not that wild about the  
16 content of it. But, they asked Congress for an AUMF draft  
17 in February. Each of you has had long experience. Are you  
18 -- not only have we not voted on it, there has not been a  
19 debate or a vote in committee or on the floor in either  
20 house on the question of either the President's  
21 authorization or an alternate authorization in 11 months  
22 since the President sent it. Are you aware of any other  
23 time in our history where the President asked Congress for a  
24 war authorization, sent a proposed authorization to  
25 Congress, but that it was not even taken up for debate in

1 committee or on the floor of either house?

2 General Keane: I'm not aware of any that -- any  
3 precedent like that. I provided testimony on this very  
4 subject, AUMF, and I certainly -- I believe it should be  
5 taken and should be debated, and it should be voted on. And  
6 I think it was very appropriate for the President to send  
7 it.

8 Senator Kaine [presiding]: Other thoughts?

9 Ambassador Crocker: Yeah. It's an important question.  
10 I would -- you know, as a civilian, I would look at it in  
11 practical terms. Are there contingencies out there to which  
12 we could not respond militarily because the existing AUMF is  
13 not adequate? If the answer to that is yes, then I -- just  
14 speaking as a citizen, I would find it incredible that  
15 Congress has not acted on it in almost a year.

16 Mr. Gordon: I'm also not aware of any such precedents.  
17 But, I agree with you that it's a problem. I think we have  
18 a legal basis for what we are doing. I don't know of  
19 anything we'd immediately like to do that we can't do  
20 because we don't have it. But, I also think that the basis  
21 on which we are acting is mushy and far removed from what  
22 are trying to do. And, you know, we were talking here about  
23 slippery slopes or military slippery slopes. This is a sort  
24 of legal slippery slope, where you just get in the habit of  
25 not having a specific authorization, and then you're years

1 away from the specific authorization you have. And I don't  
2 think that's a habit the United States should want to  
3 develop.

4       Senator Kaine: Ambassador Crocker, I wanted to ask one  
5 last question about an item in your testimony. I'm really  
6 grappling with something. And so, I'm only trying to answer  
7 this for myself. You were real candid that in this Iran-  
8 Saudi Arabia tension which has now really accelerated --  
9 it's longstanding in origin, accelerated -- that we really  
10 need to pick a side. What I've been worried about is, Is  
11 there a -- are there unfortunate consequences of picking a  
12 side that we may not want? So, one analysis of this  
13 conflict is, it's a Sunni-Shi'a divide. And I think we  
14 would all agree, the U.S. doesn't have a side in a  
15 theological debate about which strand of Islam we prefer.  
16 But, that's not something we would pick a side in. It's a  
17 nation-state battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There  
18 may be a cultural Arab-Persian component to it. There's  
19 certainly a worry about Iran's economic competitiveness and  
20 their military activity. There may be a little  
21 Revolutionary Guard against monarchy component. So, there's  
22 a lot of layers to this.

23       How do we pick a side without just kind of making it  
24 look, to the -- to that region of the world, that we're just  
25 sort of planting our feet on the Sunni side of a Sunni-Shi'a

1 sectarian fight?

2           Ambassador Crocker: Yeah, it's a great question. We  
3 should not be in the position of having to pick a side, in  
4 my view, Senator, in that area. We should be leading. We  
5 should be deciding what the strategic agenda is, and then  
6 lining up support for it where it's most appropriate.  
7 Unfortunately, now we're playing catchup. The sides have  
8 been formed. We're very late to a very critical game, and  
9 are in that sad position of having, effectively, to choose a  
10 side. When we do -- and I hope we do -- then we need to  
11 work to start shaping that side, because there are some  
12 things going on there now that are not good for our allies  
13 or for the region as a whole or for our long-term interests.  
14 But, just sitting on the sidelines doesn't really let you  
15 affect how the team's going to play.

16           Senator Kaine: Dr. Gordon?

17           Mr. Gordon: Maybe just to referred on this. Let's be  
18 clear, I think. We do pick a side. I mean, nobody should  
19 misunderstand. We do have allies and partners. You know,  
20 with Iran, even after the nuclear deal, we will have  
21 unilateral U.S. sanctions on Iran, we'll confront Iran, in  
22 terms of terrorism, human rights, other issues. We won't  
23 have diplomatic relations with Iran. Whereas, with the  
24 other side, we have extensive relationships, bases, ships,  
25 missile defense cooperation, sell billions of dollars worth

1 of weapons, have strategic partnerships. So, I think, you  
2 know, the starting point should be to understand that we  
3 have partners and we have an adversary. So, that's clear.

4 The question is -- and I do agree with my colleagues  
5 that, notwithstanding everything I just said, we have a  
6 perception problem, and we have to deal with it. And we  
7 should. But, nobody should misunderstand that we're somehow  
8 right in the middle between Iran and our Gulf partners.

9 But, the question is, does picking a side take you all  
10 the way to doing things that might not be in your interest,  
11 like not having a nuclear deal with Iran or going directly  
12 to war in Syria? And I think there's limits to the degree  
13 that we take sides. And we have our own national interests,  
14 and that has to be a part of our frank dialogue with our  
15 friends and partners.

16 Senator Kaine: General Keane?

17 General Keane: Yeah. I think the model of the Soviet  
18 Union is a good one. We clearly took a side and -- because  
19 we felt it was an existential threat to the country. Here,  
20 we believe, I think, Iran's geopolitical strategy to  
21 dominate the region is not in the United States national  
22 interests, nor in our allies' interest. So, clearly we're  
23 lined up against that. I don't think we've done enough to  
24 counter this malign behavior. And, at the same time, in  
25 dealing with the Soviet Union, we obviously formed political

1 and military alliances against it, but it never stopped us  
2 from seeking opportunities to work with the Soviet Union for  
3 common purpose and common interest.

4 And I think when you do -- when you operate from a  
5 position of strength like that, it actually enables you to  
6 get more done with your adversary. And I think that's what  
7 Ambassador Crocker and I are arguing for, that this train  
8 has already left the station and we have disengaged from the  
9 region, and, without our involvement in it, this could get  
10 to be a very dangerous situation between Saudi Arabia and  
11 the Iranians and their supporters. We have to get back in  
12 it, and we have to rally our allies, and we have to have  
13 clear political and diplomatic objectives of what we're  
14 trying to achieve to counter the Iranian advance in the  
15 region.

16 Senator Kaine: Thank you for your service and  
17 testimony.

18 Senator Shaheen.

19 Senator Shaheen [presiding]: Thank you, Senator Kaine.

20 Senator Kaine and I were running back and forth between  
21 the Foreign Relations Committee upstairs, so thank you for  
22 holding on until I could get down here.

23 First of all, let me thank all three of you, both for  
24 being here this morning and for your service to the country.  
25 It truly is impressive. And your willingness to continue to

1 engage is also impressive.

2 I wanted to just follow up on some of the specifics  
3 that you raised in your testimony. Ambassador Crocker, one  
4 of the things you said -- and I may not be putting this  
5 exactly accurately, but I think what I understood you to say  
6 is that the more we appear to take sides with Russia and  
7 Iran, the more difficult it becomes to get a resolution with  
8 those people who have been our friends in the Middle East.  
9 Did I understand that correctly? And I ask you this because  
10 it seems to me, as I look at Syria, that if we're going to  
11 get any kind of a political solution, that Iran and Russia  
12 have got to be at the table. Do you disagree with that?

13 Ambassador Crocker: I think they do have to be at the  
14 table. My concern is that, with the current dynamic in  
15 Syria, where Russia and Iran both feel -- they're on a roll,  
16 here -- that their intervention is being quite successful in  
17 propping up Assad, that not only will we not have a  
18 successful negotiation, we're not even going to get to the  
19 table. And that's what I think we're seeing now with -- as  
20 these talks scheduled for next week sort of slip away from  
21 us. So, yeah, there has to be a negotiated end to this  
22 conflict. My belief is, for that negotiation to succeed or  
23 even take place, we've got to change some of the dynamics on  
24 the ground, both to back up Assad, Iran, and Russia, to  
25 reinforce our Sunni friends inside Syria, and to send a

1 signal to the larger region. So, absolutely there has to be  
2 a negotiation, but we just don't have the terms for it now.

3 Senator Shaheen: Well, I don't -- I agree, basically,  
4 with what all of you have said with respect to the need to  
5 intervene more to try and force the forces supporting Assad  
6 to the table to come up with some resolution. The question  
7 that I still have is based on what each of you had to say.  
8 It's still not clear to me how we do that, because the -- I  
9 like the idea of the no-fly zone. I think that sounds like  
10 one of the positive things that we could do. On the other  
11 hand, we've had testimony from members of our military, some  
12 of our military leaders, that that would require a  
13 significant military presence, we would take casualties, we  
14 would have a difficult time destroying Syria's air defense  
15 system. And I've also heard from representatives of the  
16 refugee community who say it would put a target on refugees,  
17 because it would be a place where they would be forced to go  
18 because they felt like they were safe, and then they would  
19 become targets of ISIS. So, I'm not quite sure how that  
20 works without a significant military presence. I do think,  
21 you know, the involvement of Special Operations Forces -- I  
22 mean, that seems to me one of the things that we're -- we've  
23 been trying to do more of. And I think there's -- I  
24 certainly believe that there's been some success with that  
25 and with air defenses.

1           But, again, it's just not clear to me how we accomplish  
2 the successes that each of you talk about, in reality,  
3 without putting back on the ground the kind of military  
4 force that we had in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are now  
5 seeing the impact of withdrawing those forces. So,  
6 enlighten me, if you would.

7           General Keane, I'll ask you to go first.

8           General Keane: Sure. Well, I think you're talking  
9 about two things, Assad and Syria, and the military and  
10 political dimension of that, and also ISIS. And I think, to  
11 a -- to some degree -- I mean, Syria gives you a headache  
12 just thinking through it. And reasonable people can  
13 disagree, certainly, on what to do about it. And they  
14 certainly do. But, in my judgment -- and we've been  
15 discussing this on and off most of the morning -- the  
16 political dimension in Syria is critical. And we have to  
17 change the momentum against the regime to be able to get a  
18 political solution. The Russians are there and the Iranians  
19 are there to prop up and preserve this regime and their own  
20 national interests.

21          Senator Shaheen: Right. I heard most of --

22          General Keane: So --

23          Senator Shaheen: -- the testimony --

24          General Keane: So, that --

25          Senator Shaheen: -- this morning.

1           General Keane:  -- that is critical.  And the no-fly  
2 zone, I disagree with my military colleagues, who may have  
3 made it appear too difficult to achieve.  I don't think, for  
4 a minute, that we're going to have an issue with Syrian air  
5 defense systems, which, if we did, we would destroy them  
6 all, quite frankly.  And they know that.  I also don't --

7           Senator Shaheen:  Well --

8           General Keane:  -- I don't believe --

9           Senator Shaheen:  -- let me just -- I don't want to be  
10 argumentative, but -- and I'm out of time, so I will just  
11 make a final point, because you raised that.  And maybe  
12 circumstances have changed.  But, we've had direct testimony  
13 from military leadership expressing concern about the losses  
14 that would be incurred if we had to go in, from the Syrian's  
15 air defenses.  So, maybe the situation has changed.  Can you  
16 speak to that?

17           General Keane:  No.  I mean, that's their job, to lay  
18 out the level of risk that's associated with any option that  
19 takes place.  And there is a level of risk.  That doesn't  
20 mean we don't do it.  There's always potential for  
21 casualties.  That's the reality of it.  But, I've also spent  
22 a lot of time on this issue.  And I'm very convinced that we  
23 can establish a no-fly zone with minimum interference from  
24 the Syrians, to be sure.  And, listen, it -- if we're going  
25 to put innocent people in there, I don't see the Russians or

1 the Syrians bombing that, frankly, and certainly not the  
2 Russians. The Syrians have bombed their own people in the  
3 past, but they would pay a price for it.

4 And, secondly, I think the threat would come largely  
5 from the ground. And that would be in the case of suicide  
6 bombers and others. So, you have to have some kind of  
7 international force on the ground to protect that site.

8 I think we've got a history with no-fly zones in the  
9 past. We've done them successfully. And I think we could  
10 do it here. It would have been better to do it a long time  
11 ago, certainly, as it would have been better to deal with  
12 the Syrian Arabs, in terms of helping them a long time ago.  
13 But, still, it is still a realistic option that should be on  
14 the table for implementation to help us move towards a  
15 political solution.

16 Mr. Gordon: Senator, could I add a word on this?

17 I just think it's important to remember that it's all  
18 about the political objective. And if the political  
19 objective remains that the regime is giving up power, I  
20 think changing the balance on the ground modestly, or even  
21 putting in a no-fly zone, is unlikely to bring about that  
22 objective. And if you think about precedents, there's not a  
23 lot of precedent for this type of operation, where you  
24 gradually increase support for some armed opposition, and  
25 then the regime decides to hand over power, certainly not

1 when it's backed by major powers like Iran and Russia.

2 Think about Libya, which had nowhere near the strength  
3 of Syria and wasn't backed by anyone. We started with a no-  
4 fly zone. A number of allies were providing arms to the  
5 opposition. It didn't end with a peaceful transition of  
6 power and the regime giving up its leader; it ended with the  
7 death of Qadhafi and everything we've seen since.

8 Other precedents, like Kosovo, we weren't even asking  
9 for the regime to give up power; we were just asking to get  
10 security forces out of part of the country. We had a 78-day  
11 NATO bombing campaign with tens of thousands of sorties and  
12 the threat of a ground invasion before they did that. Iraq,  
13 we had no-fly zones for years, and it didn't bring about the  
14 political settlement.

15 So, again, there may be other reasons to do these  
16 things, but I'd be awfully careful about thinking that those  
17 steps will lead to the political transition that we're  
18 trying to bring about.

19 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you all again.

20 And thank you very much, Ambassador Crocker, for your  
21 statements with respect to refugees. I think -- I  
22 appreciate your willingness to speak out on that.

23 Senator Gillibrand.

24 Senator Gillibrand [presiding]: Thank you, Senator  
25 Shaheen. I'm going to continue your line of questioning.

1           So, I hear, from at least the answers that you gave to  
2   Senator Shaheen about some of the difficulties of a  
3   response, but, given that Turkey has the second-largest  
4   standing military in NATO, with almost 700,000 Active  
5   personnel and 400,000 Reserves, Saudi Arabia is the most  
6   powerful army of the -- of any Arab nation, with only --  
7   with over 200,000 Active troops, 1200 tanks, 700 aircraft.  
8   Jordan has 90,000 Active troops, 60,000 Reserves. However,  
9   up until this point, Iran has been the most active regional  
10   power in supporting ground troops fighting ISIL. So, what  
11   can we do, and what should we do, to engage our allies to  
12   bear a larger burden in the fight against ISIL? And what  
13   can we do to encourage them to actually participate on the  
14   ground?

15           Ambassador Crocker: Senator, the first thing we need  
16   to do is indicate that we are allies, and, as such, take  
17   their strategic and security concerns seriously. For Saudi  
18   Arabia, ISIL isn't the primary threat. It's Iran. For  
19   Turkey, ISIL isn't the primary threat. It's the Kurds, our  
20   allies.

21           Senator Shaheen: But, not -- they'll say, "not all the  
22   Kurds." We just met with Erdogan, and he said, "We have  
23   lots of Kurds that are our friends. And, in fact, the Kurds  
24   voted for me." So, he will take the Kurds as not a monolith  
25   and say, "We get along with these Kurds. We just don't get

1 along with the PKK." And he'll be very assertive about  
2 that.

3 Ambassador Crocker: Right. But, the Kurds in  
4 question, Senator, are the YPG in Rojava, in northern Syria,  
5 and they are affiliated with the PKK. So, it is a problem.  
6 And that's why I have advocated a reinvigorated U.S.  
7 engagement with traditional allies and partners. We have  
8 differences, clearly, with Ankara. We have differences with  
9 Riyadh. What I'm concerned about is that we're not talking  
10 about the differences as friends and allies with the view to  
11 developing common ground, common understandings, and a  
12 common strategy. Because, without that, any notion of  
13 regional forces intervening in Syria against Islamic State  
14 is just fanciful. They are not going to do it.

15 So, you're recommending more engagement. And, frankly,  
16 when we took a CODEL of eight Senators, and that's what we  
17 heard, meeting with the Saudi defense forces who do  
18 antiterrorism. They were grateful for all of our  
19 intelligence efforts. They wanted to amplify everything  
20 we're doing together. From some of the more anecdotal  
21 conversations, they're looking for more engagement, not  
22 less. The same thing true with Turkey. Erdogan wants to  
23 increase trade. He's taken 2 million refugees. He wants  
24 the United States to engage on a far more aggressive level.  
25 So, they seem to be asking, at least of eight Senators that

1 come to visit them, "What's happening with regard to U.S.  
2 policy? And what are we not doing that we should be doing?"

3 Ambassador Crocker: I understand all too well the  
4 pressures on any administration, and particularly its senior  
5 members -- the President, the Secretary of State, and so  
6 forth. But, I think, at that level, we've just got to be  
7 more involved in the region. A lot of this can be done by  
8 telephone calls. But, there's nothing like a Secretary of  
9 State visit. Earlier in the hearing, I --

10 Chairman McCain [presiding]: As opposed to a  
11 congressional visit.

12 Senator Shaheen: Yeah. We're just eight Senators --

13 Ambassador Crocker: I was --

14 Senator Shaheen: -- from all over the country.

15 [Laughter.]

16 Ambassador Crocker: I was going to say, Mr. Chairman  
17 --

18 Senator Shaheen: Chickenfeed.

19 [Laughter.]

20 Ambassador Crocker: -- particularly -- CODELs are  
21 really important. And, you know, I know they're -- it's as  
22 -- it's probably as hard for you, as members of the  
23 administration, to get away. But, having hosted many of  
24 them over the years, particularly in Iraq, where I saw a  
25 whole lot of the Chairman, that's just crucial.

1           Senator Shaheen: So, you recommend the Secretary of  
2 State go to the region and engage more aggressively.

3           Ambassador Crocker: Yes, ma'am, I do. I had said  
4 earlier that -- you know, the Iranians have kind of filled  
5 the vacuum in Iraq, and it is a very, very bad situation. I  
6 would like to see the Secretary go camp out there. And when  
7 he needed a break, he could go to Riyadh and Tel Aviv and  
8 Cairo and Ankara. We just -- we've got to ramp this up,  
9 because this is -- as bad as this situation is now -- I'll  
10 try to say something uplifting -- we're going to look back  
11 on this day with fondness and nostalgia, because, the way  
12 things are tracking, it's going to be a whole lot worse in a  
13 couple of months.

14           Senator Shaheen: Well, Mr. Gordon, you said, in fact,  
15 that we should be not dealing with the symptoms of ISIL, but  
16 be going straight to the cause of ISIL. And I'd be  
17 interested -- I'm past my time, so maybe you could submit it  
18 to the record -- but, how can the United States have an  
19 impact on the causes? And obviously, it's not just a  
20 military effort, it's diplomatic, as well. But, what is the  
21 message or the approach you think that actually could  
22 resonate?

23           Mr. Gordon: Senator, that would, indeed, be a longer  
24 answer than we have time for, so I'll just give a brief one.  
25 But, by "focus on the causes more than the symptoms," what I

1 meant was that we can and should and need to do all of the  
2 things people normally talk about in a comprehensive ISIS  
3 strategy on foreign fighters and finances and the borders  
4 and the opposition and direct U.S. action. All of those  
5 things can and need to be done. But, to really zero in on  
6 it, so long as the 20 million Sunnis who live between  
7 Damascus and Baghdad are feeling disadvantaged, repressed,  
8 and killed by Iranian-backed Shi'a dictators, we're going to  
9 be facing this problem, and they're going to be radicalized,  
10 both in the region and beyond.

11 So, again, it's a longer conversation of how we do that  
12 in Iraq. And I think, among us, we have a consensus that  
13 there needs to be more done politically for the Sunnis of  
14 Iraq to empower them and make them feel they're actually  
15 part of the country.

16 And in Syria, the ideas I've presented de-escalating  
17 the war, it is true that Assad is a magnet in the cause of  
18 ISIS. It's even more true that the war, and the daily  
19 bombing and killing of Sunnis in Syria, is a cause of ISIS.

20 And so, if we could empower the Sunnis in Iraq and de-  
21 escalate the war in Syria, I think we'd make more of a  
22 contribution to this conflict than any incremental number of  
23 forward air controllers or Special Forces.

24 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Blumenthal.

2 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. And thank  
3 you for continuing this series of very significant and  
4 illuminating hearings.

5 And I want to thank all three of our witnesses.

6 Particularly, Ambassador Crocker, thank you for hosting  
7 us when you have in Afghanistan, and for your insights and  
8 advice to this committee and to me afterward.

9 And I know a lot of ground has been covered. I've been  
10 in and out of the hearing, and had an opportunity to follow  
11 it, as well, remotely.

12 I want to focus, for the moment, on the refugee issue,  
13 and most particularly on trafficking of survivors, refugees,  
14 particularly women and children. I met recently with a  
15 young Yazidi trafficking survivor who told me about her  
16 escape, very courageous escape from systematic rape and  
17 brutality that Yazidi women and children have endured at the  
18 hands of ISIL. And it has been -- the situation has been  
19 detailed by a number of the media, as well. Rape has been  
20 increasingly used as a tool of terrorism to destabilize  
21 communities and exert control over women and girls and  
22 communities there, and, in the case of ISIL, purposely to  
23 hold thousands of Yazidi's men, women, children in  
24 captivity. So, I think we should try to find a way to  
25 expand and intensify our efforts to assist these victims.

1           Let me begin, Mr. Gordon, by asking you what role the  
2 United States and its coalition partners should have in  
3 securing the safe release of these women and children still  
4 held by ISIL, and how -- maybe open it to the other  
5 witnesses, as well -- how CENTCOM can ensure that the  
6 partner training exercises being conducted in Iraq are  
7 taking an interagency approach to this issue.

8           Mr. Gordon: Senator, thank you. I couldn't -- it is  
9 impossible to overstate the humanitarian and strategic  
10 consequences of the refugee crisis. You mentioned it in a  
11 humanitarian standpoint. There are more than 10 million  
12 displaced. Strategically, it really does threaten the  
13 neighbors. And I think some of us may be surprised that a  
14 country like Lebanon is still functioning, notwithstanding  
15 the fact that I think a quarter of its population are now  
16 Syrian refugees -- Syria, Jordan. We've talked about how it  
17 spills over to the U.S. and the European Union, as well.

18           We are already doing a lot. I think the United States  
19 has been a leader. I think we've provided more than \$4  
20 billion. But, as you know, and, I think, are implying,  
21 that's not even close to what is necessary. So, we need to  
22 do even more. We need to lead.

23           I think one of the arguments for America's embrace and  
24 willingness to take refugees is not just the humanitarian  
25 one, which is enormous; otherwise, leaving them to their

1 fates in the region or to a squalid refugee camp. But,  
2 showing as -- America as a welcoming country and not anti-  
3 Muslim, I think, is a -- is the big tool in this overall  
4 struggle, beyond what we can do to the individuals.

5 And then, finally, comes back to the political points  
6 that we're all talking about. Whatever we can do for  
7 individual refugees is obviously hugely important, but we  
8 need to stop the flow, the sources of this problem that we  
9 just discussed, response to Senator Gillibrand's question.  
10 I fear, too, that if we don't deal with those causes, we're  
11 going to have a hearing 2 or 3 years from now on this same  
12 problem, and it's going to be many times bigger than it is  
13 now.

14 Senator Blumenthal: Ambassador Crocker?

15 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator.

16 Of course, the community you're talking about are  
17 neither Muslim nor refugees. They would love to be  
18 refugees, because, however bad that was, at least they'd be  
19 out of the hands of Islamic State.

20 Senator Blumenthal: They're, right now, captives.

21 Ambassador Crocker: They are captives. They are  
22 slaves. They are sex slaves.

23 It is a reminder that Islamic State is evil. And, as  
24 long as it exists, as long as it holds ground, it will use  
25 it for evil purposes. Whether that is attacks into Paris,

1 planning attacks into the United States, enslavement of  
2 innocents, executions of others, they will do it. And I'm  
3 grateful to you for recalling that there is a -- there is  
4 such a thing in this world as evil. Assad is evil. ISIS is  
5 evil. And, as the Chairman has said in a different context  
6 earlier, we need to keep a moral compass on these things.  
7 We're America.

8 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

9 Chairman McCain: I thank the witnesses. And this has  
10 been extremely helpful, I am sure, to all of us and those  
11 who are observing on C-SPAN. And I don't think we could  
12 have had three finer members of the -- of a group of people  
13 who have served their country with honor and distinction.  
14 And we were proud to have all three of you before the  
15 committee today.

16 Jack, do you want to --

17 Senator Reed: Just to comment you, Mr. Chairman, for  
18 holding a very timely and very important hearing, and to  
19 thank the witnesses again for their service and for their  
20 thoughtful, thoughtful comments. Thank you.

21 Chairman McCain: Adjourned.

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

23

24

25