

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON UNITED STATES
CENTRAL COMMAND, UNITED STATES AFRICA
COMMAND AND UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
COMMAND

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Senate

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Committee on Armed Services

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11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:3 a.m., in
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John
13 McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

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Committee Members Present: Senators McCain

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[presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer,

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Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed,

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Nelson, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly,

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Hirono, Kaine, and King.

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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 receive testimony
5 on the posture of U.S. Central Command, Africa Command, and
6 Special Operations Command in the context of our review and
7 oversight of the fiscal year 2017 defense budget.

8 We are pleased to welcome our witnesses, General
9 Austin, General Rodriguez, and General Votel. We thank each
10 of you for decades of distinguished service and for your
11 leadership of our men and women in uniform. I would like to
12 extend special thanks to General Austin and General
13 Rodriguez, as this may be their last appearance before this
14 committee.

15 Our Nation's most distinguished national security
16 leaders have testified before this committee repeatedly that
17 we are witnessing the unraveling of the rules-based
18 international order. Nowhere is this unraveling more
19 visible or more dangerous than the Middle East. From North
20 Africa to South Asia, state authority and the balance of
21 power are breaking down.

22 This emerging vacuum has been filled by the most
23 extreme and anti-American of forces: Sunni terrorist groups,
24 such as ISIL and Al Qaeda; Shiite extremists, such as the
25 Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies; and the imperial

1 ambitions of Putin. As a result, almost every Middle
2 Eastern country is now a battleground or combatant in one or
3 more wars, to wit, this morning's New York Times entitled,
4 "Pentagon plan to fight ISIS in Libya includes barrage of
5 airstrikes."

6 These are diverse, complex, and transregional threats
7 that our military confronts every day across CENTCOM,
8 AFRICOM, and SOCOM lines of responsibilities.

9 As this committee continues its review of the
10 Goldwater-Nichols Act, we are interested to hear our
11 witnesses' views as to whether the current structure best
12 enables us to succeed in the strategic environment of global
13 and transregional threats in the 21st century and what
14 reforms we might consider. This is critical because there
15 are already too many obstacles to success as it is.

16 Time and again, politically driven strategy,
17 micromanagement, and misguided reductions in defense
18 spending have made our military's job more difficult. This
19 has been especially true for our Special Operations Forces.
20 More than 15 years of continuous deployments, due in part to
21 an overreliance on their unique capabilities, has led to
22 unprecedented stress on the force.

23 As the threats we face impose greater demands on our
24 special operators and their families, we must be vigilant
25 and provide the necessary support to maintain their vital

1 capabilities, not just in direct action, but in building
2 partnership capacity across CENTCOM and AFRICOM.

3 While we marvel at our Special Operations Forces, we
4 must remember they are just one part of our force and our
5 strategy. They are not a magic solution to every problem or
6 a substitute for a coherent strategy, as the
7 administration's "light footprint" approach in the Middle
8 East has demonstrated repeatedly.

9 Despite temporary relief from the arbitrary spending
10 caps imposed by the Budget Control Act, we are still facing
11 an unnecessary and dangerous burden on the backs of our
12 servicemembers in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM theaters.
13 President Obama's fiscal year 2017 defense budget request
14 does little to relieve that burden.

15 Secretary Carter has said the military is at a major
16 inflection point, requiring urgent and simultaneous
17 investments in next-generation technologies and in current
18 operations, such as a 50 percent increase in funding for the
19 fight against ISIL. In view of these needs, President Obama
20 should have requested a defense budget that reflects the
21 scale and scope of the national security threats we face.

22 Instead, he chose to request lowest level of defense
23 spending authorized by last year's budget agreement and
24 submitted a defense budget that is actually less in real
25 dollars than last year, despite the fact that operational

1 requirements have grown.

2 This comes as little surprise from an administration
3 that for the past 7 years has sought to scale back America's
4 involvement in and commitment to the Middle East. In
5 moments of consequence -- Iran's Green Revolution, Libya
6 after the fall of Qadhafi, the withdrawal from Iraq, and the
7 crossing of the chemical redline in Syria -- this President
8 walked away and ignored the lessons of history that power
9 abhors a vacuum, that wars do not end because politicians
10 say so, that the perils of indecision and inaction often
11 outweigh the risks of action, and that while America cannot
12 solve the problems of the Middle East, American leadership
13 is indispensable to managing them.

14 With major policy decisions hanging in the balance
15 right now, our Nation cannot afford to ignore these lessons
16 again. In Afghanistan, the President has told our enemies
17 that we will proceed with a calendar-based decision to cut
18 U.S. troop presence in half by the end of this year, and he
19 has yet to explain the consequences of reducing U.S. troop
20 levels from 9,800 to 5,500; significant reductions to ISR
21 and close-air support capacity; diminished operational
22 flexibility of U.S. counterterrorism forces; and perhaps
23 most damaging of all, the end of the U.S. train, advise, and
24 assist mission at all but the highest level of the Afghan
25 military precisely when their support is needed most.

1 What all this translates to is risk, risk that problems
2 and contingencies once addressed in days will be addressed
3 in months, that is if they are addressed at all; risk that
4 sudden tactical or operational setbacks that would have been
5 in our power to reverse will put Afghanistan on a path to
6 strategic failure we will be powerless to stop; and risk
7 that the gains won by the sacrifices of American and Afghan
8 troops will be squandered.

9 In Iraq and Syria, the artificial limitation on troop
10 levels ties the hands of our military commanders and makes
11 our troops more vulnerable to attack and much less likely to
12 succeed. The President has inched forward with incremental
13 increases in needed capabilities, but this misguided
14 gradualism serves only to allow the enemy to adjust before
15 these capabilities ever make a difference.

16 It is clear to me from my conversations with our
17 military commanders both on the ground and in the Pentagon
18 that they have been reduced from considering what it will
19 take to win to, "What will I be allowed to do?" And it is
20 our troops and our national security that are paying the
21 price.

22 Africa has emerged as the next front of the global war
23 on terror with ISIL, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab
24 commanding territory and launching successful attacks
25 throughout the continent.

1 Most alarming, ISIL now commands an army of 5,000
2 fighters in Libya. While the threat in Africa continues to
3 metastasize, our military commanders are being forced to do
4 more with less, starved for resources and denied timely and
5 flexible authorities to take advantage of battlefield
6 opportunities and halt the advance of extremism.

7 In the gulf, the President is failing to live up to the
8 promises made at the Camp David summit in May 2015. For
9 example, the President committed to fast-tracking arms
10 transfers to our gulf partners with fighter aircraft sales
11 for Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain that could help thwart
12 Iranian hegemonic ambitions. They are languishing on the
13 shelf gathering dust. Once again, American credibility is
14 disintegrating as the malign influence of Iran and Russia
15 continues to grow.

16 This administration's great failure to date has not
17 been that it makes mistakes. It is rather that it has
18 failed or perhaps refused to learn from them. Unless we
19 chart a new course, it may well be this administration's
20 lasting legacy.

21 Senator Reed?

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

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

4 I too want to join you in commending and thanking
5 General Austin and General Rodriguez for their extraordinary
6 service, since this is likely to be their last appearance
7 before the committee.

8 It has been a privilege to work with you for many
9 years. Your professionalism, skill, and commitment to the
10 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that you lead is
11 without parallel. So thank you, gentlemen, both.

12 And, General Votel, we appreciate your appearance here
13 today as a Special Operations Commander, and we will see you
14 again tomorrow, I suspect, as you have been nominated to be
15 the successor to General Austin in Central Command. Again,
16 your service is also deeply appreciated.

17 Earlier this year, I traveled to Iraq, Afghanistan, and
18 Djibouti to see firsthand some of the pressing challenges
19 that we have been talking about.

20 In Iraq, the diplomatic and military officials I met
21 universally agreed that the Iraqi security forces'
22 successful retaking of Ramadi in June was critical for
23 providing momentum for upcoming operations. While ISIL has
24 now lost considerable territory that it once held in Iraq,
25 the more difficult military task is still ahead.

1 In the coming months, the combination of a newly
2 trained Iraqi security force, enabled by coalition
3 intelligence and airstrikes, should be able to continue to
4 make progress in evicting ISIL from population centers. We
5 look forward to our witnesses' assessment of what we can
6 expect realistically in the coming months as Iraqi special
7 forces and security forces turn their attention particularly
8 to Mosul.

9 In addition, Iraq's political leadership must confront
10 the longstanding questions related to political
11 reconciliation in Iraq.

12 General Austin, I look forward to your assessment of
13 the political atmosphere in Baghdad and whether you believe
14 the conditions are set for a political dialogue, which will
15 stabilize the political situation to complement military
16 actions taking place.

17 In Syria, the secession of hostilities agreement
18 appears to be tenuously holding, and tenuously at best. It
19 remains unclear, however, this incremental step will be
20 sufficient to set the stage for meaningful political
21 negotiations, which every side said is the ultimate solution
22 to their issue.

23 ISIL remains in control of much of eastern Syria.
24 Syrian Kurdish armed fighters with the assistance of
25 coalition airstrikes and Special Operations Forces have made

1 gains in northern Syria, but the battlefield dynamic
2 continues to present many challenges.

3 As General Breedlove discussed last week, the
4 weaponization of refugees by Russian and regime activity in
5 Syria presents military, political, and humanitarian issues
6 that we have not seen in the modern era. I hope our
7 witnesses will provide their assessment of the situation in
8 this respect.

9 Iran continues to be a cause of significant concern to
10 the committee, particularly its recent missile test and
11 ongoing support to nonstate actors across the Middle East.

12 General Austin, I hope you will provide your updated
13 assessment of Iran's activities in the wake of the Joint
14 Comprehensive Plan of Action's implementation day.

15 In Afghanistan, the past year has been one of
16 significant security and political transition. We must
17 continue to evaluate how we can best enable efforts by the
18 Government of Afghanistan to protect and govern its
19 population.

20 I know that General Nichols, the new commander of
21 Resolute Support, is now conducting an assessment of what
22 capabilities and associated troop levels he believes will be
23 required to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan throughout
24 the rest of 2016 and into 2017. As I said before, his
25 recommendations must be given most serious consideration,

1 since he is on the battlefield and the closest to the issue.

2 General Austin, General Votel, your thoughts, again, on
3 this issue would be deeply appreciated.

4 General Rodriguez, one of the results of CENTCOM's
5 operations against ISIL in Iraq and Syria has been ISIL
6 metastasizing into Libya and other places, as we have talked
7 about. Your command has undertaken a number of operations
8 against ISIL in Libya. But the lack of a functioning
9 government in Tripoli or a unified Libyan military makes it
10 difficult to sustain progress. I hope, again, you will give
11 us your insights on this issue.

12 While in Djibouti, I was made more familiar with the
13 operations in Somalia. As you know, General Rodriguez, the
14 AMISOM, African Union Mission in Somalia, has been
15 functioning, but it is coming under increasing pressure.
16 We, in turn, have been helping them. Just recently, there
17 was a significant airstrike by U.S. forces to help support
18 their efforts. So I would like your assessment of the
19 situation there, and, as we go forward, what we can do.

20 There is one issue that cut across all the areas I
21 visited, and that was that we seem to be losing the
22 information war of messaging, of getting our message to the
23 people of all these countries about our support for the
24 legitimate government, for reasonable, decent government.
25 That is ironic, to say the least. So your comments about

1 how we can reverse this tide and, in fact, win the
2 information war and win the population to our side would be
3 appreciated.

4 Again, General Votel, finally, as the chairman has
5 noted, your Special Operations Forces have sustained
6 extraordinary operational tempo over the last years. We
7 know what they have done. They have done extraordinary
8 work, and we appreciate your leadership. But we all would
9 like you to commend them personally, and their families, for
10 what they have done.

11 I would be remiss if I did not recognize the senior
12 enlisted personnel that are here. Thank you, gentlemen, for
13 your leadership.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman McCain: Welcome, General Austin.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA,
2 COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

3 General Austin: Good morning, Chairman McCain, Ranking
4 Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee, I want
5 to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to
6 discuss the current posture of your United States Central
7 Command.

8 I am pleased to appear here this morning alongside
9 General David Rodriguez and General Joe Votel.

10 Today's global security environment is incredibly
11 complex. Most of the challenges that we face transcend
12 borders. I cannot ask for two better teammates than the
13 gentleman beside me to work through these challenges on a
14 daily basis.

15 Ladies and gentlemen, this past year has been an
16 especially challenging one for the governments and for the
17 people of the central region. We have seen an almost
18 unprecedented level of turmoil and conflict among regional,
19 state, and nonstate actors, along with increasing
20 involvement by external state actors such as Russia and
21 China.

22 At the same time, many of the countries that make up
23 the central region are under growing economic pressure. Of
24 course, the combination of these and other factors makes
25 this strategically important region vulnerable to conflict

1 and to increased instability.

2 Presently, the United States Central Command is
3 involved in or supporting multiple military operations, and
4 they include the campaign to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria,
5 and our Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. We are
6 providing limited support for the Saudi-led coalition in
7 Yemen. And we continue to prosecute the fight against
8 terrorism and extremism throughout our area of
9 responsibility. We are also dealing with the mischief that
10 we see throughout the region that is caused by Iran.

11 I will talk briefly about a few the situations, in
12 particular as they continue to demand a large portion of our
13 attention and our resources. I will start with the fight
14 against ISIL.

15 Ladies and gentlemen, we are defeating this enemy in
16 Iraq and Syria, and we are pressuring ISIL on more fronts
17 than at any other point in time since they marched into
18 Mosul some 18 months ago. We are doing so by degrading the
19 enemy's military capability, by taking back territory, by
20 diminishing his economic resources, and by removing his
21 senior leadership from the battlefield. We are also slowing
22 the flow of foreign fighters joining his ranks.

23 All of these actions in combination are contributing to
24 a force that is less capable and increasingly demoralized
25 and paranoid and prone to defections.

1 While we are defeating ISIL in Iraq and Syria, we see
2 increased efforts by this enemy to expand into other areas
3 of the globe, mainly North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula,
4 and South Asia. And he is expanding into these and other
5 areas in part because he knows that he is losing in Iraq and
6 Syria, and he needs to find other ways to maintain his
7 legitimacy.

8 Halting this expansion will require a concerted effort
9 by the international community going forward.

10 In the meantime, Iraq's security forces are performing
11 better with time through our capacity-building efforts. Of
12 note, the Kurdish Peshmerga remain critical to our efforts
13 on the ground in the northern part of the country. They are
14 irreplaceable, and we must do all that we can to support
15 them.

16 In Syria, we continue to work with indigenous forces,
17 including Syrian Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and others as they
18 take the fight to the enemy. Together, they are achieving
19 tremendous results, including securing more than 18,000
20 square kilometers of territory previously held by the enemy.

21 Ladies and gentlemen, the fight against ISIL in Iraq
22 and Syria remains incredibly complex. While the defeat of
23 ISIL will take time and it will not be easy, you can rest
24 assured that we will get it done.

25 Meanwhile in Afghanistan, the security forces continue

1 to hold their own. They have come a long way over the past
2 14-plus years, and we want to ensure that they maintain
3 momentum going forward. This past year, the Afghans
4 underwent multiple transitions that together have shifted
5 the operational environment. I still assess that the Afghan
6 security forces are capable of holding their gains against
7 the Taliban, however, like with any plan, changing
8 conditions on the ground may require a reevaluation of our
9 planning assumptions.

10 We have invested a great deal in that country. It is
11 an important country for a number of reasons, and we want to
12 do what is necessary to help the Afghans be successful in
13 the long term.

14 Finally, with respect to Iran, while we are hopeful
15 that the implementation of the JPOA agreement and the
16 results of the recent elections will lead to more
17 responsible behavior by the Iranians, we have not yet seen
18 any indication that they intend to pursue a different path.
19 The fact remains that Iran today is a significant
20 destabilizing force in the region.

21 Ladies and gentlemen, some of the behavior that we have
22 seen from Iran of late is certainly not the behavior that
23 you would expect to see from a nation that wants to be taken
24 seriously as a respected member of the international
25 community. So we will continue to keep a close eye on Iran

1 going forward.

2 Today, despite the many challenges that exist in
3 CENTCOM, we do see progress being made in a number of areas.
4 Of note, our decades of investment are paying off, and we
5 are seeing our regional partners assume a greater share of
6 security responsibilities in the region. They are
7 effectively dealing with extremist threats in their own
8 countries while conducting military operations as a part of
9 a counter-ISIL coalition in Iraq and Syria.

10 So we are encouraged by what we are seeing, and we
11 remain committed to working with our partners in support of
12 our shared goals and objectives.

13 Ultimately, we want to see a strategically important
14 central region move in the direction of increased stability
15 and security. We must be properly resourced to do what is
16 required to effectively protect and promote our interests.

17 We do appreciate this committee's strong, continued
18 support. In closing, Chairman McCain and Ranking Member
19 Reed, members of the committee, I want to thank you most
20 importantly for the strong support that you continue to show
21 to our servicemembers, our civilians, and their families. I
22 am incredibly proud of them, and I know that you are as
23 well. Thank you again for the opportunity. I look forward
24 to answering your questions.

25 [The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 General Rodriguez?

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ, USA,
2 COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Rodriguez: Chairman, Ranking Member,
4 distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the
5 opportunity to update you on the efforts of the United
6 States Africa Command. For the past 3 years, I have been
7 honored to command the men and women of Africa Command.

8 Africa is an enduring interest for the United States,
9 and its importance continues to grow as African economies,
10 population, and influence grow.

11 Small but wise investments in African security
12 institutions today offer disproportionate benefits to
13 Africa, Europe, and the United States. African solutions to
14 African problems are, in the long run, in the best interest
15 of Africans, Americans, and, indeed, the world.

16 Now, in the most troubled spots on the continent,
17 Africans have an understandable fear and distrust of the
18 governments and security forces, which are charged with
19 promoting and guarding the welfare of the people. Predatory
20 practices, patronage networks, corruption, and political and
21 economic exclusion of portions of the population, as well as
22 inconsistent adherence to the rule of law, combine to crush
23 the hope of a better future.

24 These conditions create an environment ripe for the
25 expansion of violent extremism and represent a threat not

1 only to Africa but to our European allies and the United
2 States. Effectively addressing the threat before, during,
3 or after a military crisis requires a comprehensive approach
4 employing diplomacy, development, and defense to address the
5 root causes of extremism and replace fear and uncertainty
6 with trust and confidence in African institutions.

7 This approach must seek improvements in governance
8 consistent with adherence to the rule in a society that
9 offers equal political and economic opportunity for all.

10 Africa Command's contributions to this broad solution
11 lie primarily in encouraging and enabling the
12 professionalism of the African security institutions, which
13 will secure national populations, cooperate in addressing
14 regional security concerns, and increasingly play a role in
15 sustaining global security.

16 Our military strategy articulates a long-term,
17 regionally focused approach to enabling our African
18 partners. Our operational approach seeks to disrupt and
19 neutralize transnational threats by building African partner
20 defense capability and capacity.

21 While we have achieved progress in several areas
22 through close cooperation and coordination with our
23 partners, allies, and interagency partners, threats and
24 challenges remain.

25 In East Africa, we are helping to set the conditions

1 for the eventual transfer from the African Union Mission in
2 Somalia, or AMISOM, to use the Somalia National Army and
3 federal Government of Somalia.

4 However, al-Shabaab remains a continuing threat and is
5 conducting almost daily lethal asymmetric attacks in Somalia
6 against AMISOM troops.

7 In North Africa, Libya's insecurity has negative
8 consequences for its people, its neighbors, Europe's
9 southern flank, and our peace and security objectives in
10 Africa and the Middle East. An international coalition to
11 support the Libyans to counter the Islamic State of Libya
12 would support a functional Government of National Accord and
13 reduce the risks of the expansion of ISIS, further
14 instability in North Africa, and the emergence of a direct
15 threat to U.S. interests.

16 Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition that will
17 require an appropriate long-term strategy. Across West
18 Africa, our partners and allies are countering terrorist
19 organizations like Boko Haram through the Multinational
20 Joint Task Force. With troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad,
21 Niger, and Nigeria, the Multinational Joint Task Force is a
22 collaborative regional effort to address Boko Haram's
23 conflicts and lethal attacks aimed at destabilizing
24 governments and terrorizing civilians.

25 In Central Africa, through the combined efforts of

1 civilian agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and
2 military forces, the Lord's Resistance Army no longer
3 threatens regional stability, and its capacity to harm
4 civilian populations has diminished greatly. Today, we
5 estimate less than 200 LRA fighters remain, and local
6 communities are better prepared to protect themselves.

7 Now, elections and transition of power remain a source
8 for political instability in many African nations. Despite
9 a decline in violent coup terms, challenges to the electoral
10 process and the peaceful democratic transfer of power
11 threaten both new and established governments.

12 Currently, our requirements are increasing faster than
13 our resources. But within the command, we seek innovative
14 ways to mitigate capability gaps by refining our priorities
15 and deliberately improving the alignment of our resources to
16 our strategy. Success, however, requires teamwork extended
17 well beyond the command itself. Close cooperation with our
18 African partners, allies, the interagency, nongovernmental
19 organizations, international organizations will, over time,
20 strengthen democratic institutions, spur economic growth,
21 and advance African peace and security to a degree that U.S.
22 military efforts alone cannot achieve.

23 Together, we can help the people of Africa achieve
24 their potential on the global stage.

25 I want to thank you all for your continued support of

1 our mission and to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines,
2 Coast Guard, civilians, contractors, and their families, as
3 we continue to advance our Nation's defense interest in
4 Africa. Thank you very much.

5 [The prepared statement of General Rodriguez follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 General Votel?

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER,
2 U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

3 General Votel: Good morning, Chairman McCain, Ranking
4 Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee.
5 Thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning
6 alongside my teammates, General Lloyd Austin and General
7 Dave Rodriguez, to discuss the current posture of the United
8 States Special Operations Command.

9 On any given day, nearly 10,000 SOF men and women are
10 deployed or forward-stationed to over 80 countries around
11 the globe. They fill combatant command requirements that
12 span the range of our congressionally delineated core
13 activities, from behind-the-scenes information-gathering and
14 partner-building to high-end dynamic strike operations.
15 Every success they achieve reinforces what we already know:
16 Our people are our greatest asset. They are adaptive, bold,
17 and innovative. Through persistent presence in harm's way,
18 they allow us to see opportunities early, and they routinely
19 deliver strategic impacts with the smallest of footprints.

20 Perhaps nothing makes this point more clearly than the
21 stories of two operators you have likely heard about in the
22 past days and weeks.

23 Navy Seal Senior Chief Petty Officer Ed Byers was
24 awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor last week for his
25 courage and heroism above and beyond the call of duty in

1 rescuing an American citizen held hostage in Afghanistan in
2 2012.

3 More recently, Army Green Beret Sergeant First Class
4 Matthew McClintock provided immediate medical care to a
5 wounded American teammate before leaving an Afghan element
6 under intense fire to secure a landing zone for medevac
7 aircraft. His courageous actions cost him his life but
8 saved the lives of his teammates and ultimately turned the
9 tide of the engagement.

10 While the stories of these two American heroes are
11 publicly known, it is the stories of thousands of SOF
12 operators from all of our services, aircrews, acquisition
13 specialists, intelligence analysts, communicators,
14 logisticians, and many others that underwrite our enduring
15 SOF value to the Nation -- quiet professionalism and
16 absolute excellence in accomplishing our most challenging
17 military missions.

18 So allow me to emphasize my strongest point this
19 morning: Thank you for your devotion to the well-being and
20 resilience for the men and women of SOCOM and their
21 families. Their emotional, social, psychological, and
22 physical health is in good hands thanks to you, and we are
23 very grateful for your enthusiastic support.

24 While the command priorities remain unchanged from my
25 testimony last year, USSOCOM continues to learn, evolve, and

1 adapt to meet the current operational environment, an
2 environment characterized by rapidly shifting power with
3 competition and conflict between both state and nonstate
4 actors, actors who are increasingly ambiguous,
5 transregional, and multidimensional.

6 As a result, this past year, we focused on gaining a
7 deeper understanding of today's gray zone challenges, and we
8 have restructured our operational rhythm to focus on the
9 transregional nature of violent extremist organizations.

10 Given this complex security environment, the demand for
11 SOF skill sets remains understandably high. Therefore, your
12 support for SOCOM is more important than ever.

13 It is a truth that SOF cannot be mass-produced in times
14 of need. So consistent investment in our people and
15 capabilities is very important.

16 And as good as our men and women in SOCOM are, we
17 remain extraordinarily dependent on service-provided
18 capabilities and capacity to perform our mission. I ask for
19 your strong support for them as well. We simply could not
20 perform our mission without service-provided capabilities,
21 infrastructure, and institutional programs.

22 Alongside our colleagues in the services, we are
23 grateful for the budget stability forged out of last year's
24 agreement and remain hopeful for similar stability beyond
25 2017.

1 In closing, I would like to once again thank the
2 committee and Congress as a whole for your outstanding
3 support in funding, authorities, and encouragement. Your
4 oversight of our efforts to man, train, equip, and employ
5 SOF remains critical as we confront an increasingly complex
6 security environment.

7 We look forward to continuing this great relationship,
8 and I pledge to you that we will remain transparent,
9 engaged, and responsive. I remain honored and humbled to
10 command the best special operations force in the world. I
11 am extremely proud of each and every one of our team members
12 and their families as they continue to serve our great
13 Nation. I look forward to your questions today.

14 [The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you, General.

2 General Austin, General Nicholson, the new commander in
3 Afghanistan, testified before this committee in no uncertain
4 terms that the security situation in Afghanistan is
5 deteriorating. Do you agree with that?

6 General Austin: Sir, as you heard me say in my opening
7 statement, I do think the environment in the country has
8 changed because of a number of --

9 Chairman McCain: Actually, he said the situation was
10 deteriorating, General. We really would like just
11 straightforward answers. I only have a few minutes here.

12 He said that the situation is deteriorating. Do you
13 agree with that assessment?

14 General Austin: In part, I agree. I think the Taliban
15 has become more active and the ANSF have been challenged
16 over the last year.

17 Chairman McCain: Thank you. Would that argue for not
18 having further reductions in troop strength there in
19 Afghanistan, would you think?

20 General Austin: Sir, as I mentioned earlier, you start
21 with a plan. The plan is based on facts that you know at
22 that time and assumptions that you make in order to continue
23 planning. When the situation changes so that those facts
24 are no longer valid, or the assumptions that you made are no
25 longer appropriate, then I think you have to go back and

1 revisit your plan. So I would agree that a review of the
2 plan is in order.

3 Chairman McCain: Do you agree with General Breedlove
4 that Putin is "deliberately weaponizing migration in an
5 attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European
6 resolve"?

7 General Austin: I think what we have seen with the use
8 of barrel bombs and the massive number of refugees and
9 displaced personnel I think is absolutely awful. And,
10 again, there is no logical reason that he would choose to
11 employ this kind of weapon over and over again.

12 Again, I think the fact that we have a cessation of
13 hostilities on the ground right now has enabled us to get
14 some humanitarian assistance to some of the disadvantaged
15 people. That is a good thing. But what he has done with
16 this barrel-bombing is awful.

17 Chairman McCain: Well, actually, he is not barrel-
18 bombing. Bashar Assad is. But he is indiscriminately
19 bombing targets without regard to precision weapons or
20 precision targets. Is that true?

21 General Austin: I misunderstood you. I thought you
22 said Assad.

23 Chairman McCain: I said General Breedlove said that
24 Putin is deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to
25 overwhelm European structures and break European resolve. I

1 am sorry if I did make that clear.

2 General Austin: I misunderstood you, Chairman.

3 Clearly, the approach that the Russians have taken is
4 irresponsible. They are using dumb bombs. They have
5 inflicted extraordinary numbers of civilian casualties, and,
6 again, it is indiscriminate. So a really poor approach to
7 warfighting.

8 Chairman McCain: Well, again, General Breedlove said
9 it is an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break
10 European resolve, including breaking up the EU. Do you
11 support the sale of fighter aircraft to Qatar, Kuwait, and
12 Bahrain?

13 General Austin: I do, Chairman.

14 Chairman McCain: Do you think Putin's \$8 billion in
15 advanced arms sales to Iran increased risk to U.S. forces
16 and operations in the region?

17 General Austin: Certainly, that will enable our
18 adversaries to have greater capabilities. But I will say at
19 the same time that GCC countries have spent some \$10 billion
20 on military hardware during the same time period.

21 Chairman McCain: General Rodriguez, there is a New
22 York Times story that says the Pentagon plan to fight ISIS
23 in Libya includes a barrage of airstrikes. "Thirty to 40
24 targets in four areas of the country would aim to deal a
25 crippling blow to the Islamic State's most dangerous

1 affiliate outside of Iraq and Syria." That is a quote from
2 story.

3 Would you recommend a barrage of airstrikes, such as
4 described in the New York Times?

5 General Rodriguez: Sir, that answer would be better
6 given in a classified setting. I will get that to you and
7 your leadership, sir.

8 Chairman McCain: Do you believe vigorous action should
9 be taken in response to the metastasizing of ISIS?

10 General Rodriguez: I think the international community
11 has to take action to halt the expansion, degrade it, and
12 eventually defeat it. Yes, sir.

13 Chairman McCain: Do you think we are doing enough now
14 to stop this spread, particularly expansion in Libya?

15 General Rodriguez: The spread in Libya continues to be
16 a challenge because of the lack of governance as well as the
17 breakup of the military and the multiple militias on the
18 ground. We continue to develop our situational
19 understanding --

20 Chairman McCain: My question was, do you think we need
21 to do more?

22 General Rodriguez: I think the international community
23 and Libyans all --

24 Chairman McCain: I am not asking about the
25 international community. I am asking about the United

1 States of America.

2 General Rodriguez: Yes, I think we as part of that
3 international community have to do more. Yes, sir.

4 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed?

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

6 General Austin, one of the issues in Iraq is the
7 potential consequences of failure of the Mosul dam. It is
8 not often in headlines, but it has potentially serious
9 consequences. Can you give us a status of the situation,
10 and also the planning that has gone into the consequences of
11 the failure of the dam?

12 General Austin: Yes, sir. We have remained concerned
13 about the status of the dam since the conflict started here.
14 As you know, when Daesh captured the dam, the employees
15 initially left and the grouting ceased. We have encouraged
16 the Iraqi Government, since the dam has been back in the
17 hands of the Iraqis, to make sure that they are doing the
18 right things to go about repairing the dam to ensure that it
19 does not fail.

20 They have most recently hired an Italian company to
21 perform maintenance on the dam. It may be several weeks or
22 months before that company is up and running, so there is a
23 time period that we are concerned about that there will be
24 limited to no maintenance being pulled on the dam.

25 If the dam fails, it will be catastrophic. There will

1 be thousands of people downstream that will either be
2 injured or killed, certainly displaced. The damage could
3 extend all the way down to close to Baghdad or into Baghdad.

4 We have worked with Iraqis to ensure that they are
5 doing the right things to warn people about this, and, in
6 the event that it does fail, what actions they should take
7 to get to safety.

8 We certainly have placed measures in place to ensure
9 that U.S. personnel are accounted for and able to be
10 evacuated in case of the dam failure.

11 Senator Reed: Thank you, General.

12 General Rodriguez, when I was in Djibouti, we focused a
13 great deal of the resurgence of al-Shabaab, the ability to
14 concentrate forces, and to pick off some of the African
15 allies we have in place. I presume you are taking this very
16 seriously and you are beginning to try to disrupt their
17 ability to attack, and also to support the Ugandan, Kenyans,
18 Djibouti, and Ethiopian forces, and I think the Burundi
19 forces are on the ground. Is that fair?

20 General Rodriguez: Yes, it is, Senator.

21 Senator Reed: Is there any indication that our African
22 colleagues, the Ugandans, Kenyans, Djiboutis, Ethiopians,
23 and Burundis, are wavering, or are they committed to the
24 mission?

25 General Rodriguez: They are committed to the mission.

1 They continue their activities that they have been doing for
2 the last several years.

3 Right now, because of the adjusting tactics that al-
4 Shabaab have taken, they need to start making adjustments,
5 too, and that is what we are working with them on.

6 Senator Reed: Very good.

7 I had a question for both the General Votel and General
8 Austin. Given the years we have been suggesting,
9 encouraging, the Pakistani military forces to take action in
10 the FATA along the border, they recently have. But one of
11 the consequences is they have driven a significant number of
12 terrorist elements into Afghanistan, which actually seems to
13 have increased the counterterrorism demands on forces there.

14 Is that a fair assumption, in terms of on the ground?

15 I will start with General Votel, and then General
16 Austin.

17 General Votel: Senator, I think it is. Certainly,
18 their pushing into Afghanistan has not been without some
19 level of coordination with our forces. So while it has
20 increased the turbulence, it has also provided us an
21 opportunity to address that threat as well.

22 Senator Reed: General Austin, your comments?

23 General Austin: It has increased opportunities and
24 demands on the Special Operations Force, Senator.

25 Senator Reed: A final question, General Austin. This

1 is flipping back to Syria. There was, indeed, a train and
2 equip program, and it was terminated because it was deemed
3 not to be accomplishing objectives. The reality though, and
4 you may dispute this, is that in order to hold ground there
5 once we capture it, we need indigenous forces, not just
6 Kurds but Syrians.

7 Are we revising in some way train and equip on a
8 smaller scale and prepared to provide that kind of support?

9 General Austin: We are, Senator. I have asked for
10 permission to restart the effort using a different approach.
11 As you mentioned, we were being effective, but we were slow
12 in getting started and generating the numbers that we needed
13 to generate.

14 Part of that was because we were trying to take large
15 numbers of people out of the fight and keep them out for
16 training for long periods of time. We have adjusted our
17 approach.

18 As we look to restart our efforts and really focus on
19 smaller numbers of people we can train on specific skills,
20 and as we reintroduce those people back into the fight, they
21 will be able to enable the larger groups that they are a
22 part of. The training would be shorter, but again, I think
23 they would be able to greatly enable the forces once they
24 are reintroduced.

25 Senator Reed: Thank you very much.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte?

3 Senator Ayotte: I want to thank all of you for your
4 distinguished service and leadership to our country.

5 General Austin, in your opening testimony, you talked
6 about Iran and you said they are having a destabilizing
7 effect on the region. In fact, there is no indication that
8 they are following a different path than they have
9 previously.

10 We know in press reports just this week, in fact,
11 Tuesday, that Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps test-fired
12 several ballistic missiles from silos across the country,
13 defying both recent U.S. sanctions, and, of course, this
14 follows on after the JCPOA was signed, the ballistic missile
15 test that they did in October and November of this year.

16 DNI Clapper has testified before this committee that
17 that would be their preferred method for delivering a
18 nuclear weapon.

19 Are you concerned about their continuing pursuit of
20 testing ballistic missiles?

21 General Austin: I am, Senator.

22 Senator Ayotte: What are the implications of that?

23 General Austin: Well, certainly, we hope that the
24 JCPOA will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in
25 near- to mid-term, and forever, hopefully. But this is

1 something we will continue to watch.

2 Senator Ayotte: But clearly, the JCPOA is not
3 continuing deterring them on the ballistic missile program.
4 Would you agree with me on that?

5 General Austin: I would agree with that, Senator.
6 What I would say is that what we and the people in the
7 region are concerned about is that they already have
8 overmatch with numbers of ballistic missiles. The people in
9 the region remain concerned about their cyber capability,
10 their ability to mine the straits, and certainly the
11 activity of their Quds Force, which we see malign activity
12 not only throughout the region but around the globe as well.

13 So there are a number of things that lead me to
14 personally believe that their behavior, that they have not
15 changed any course yet. This is something we will continue
16 to watch.

17 Senator Ayotte: Well, I would argue that, clearly, the
18 sanctions the administration did put in place, which I have
19 said from the beginning are pathetic and weak, are having
20 absolutely no impact, given that they are now continuing to
21 test ballistic missiles. I would hope that we would up our
22 game and impose real, tough sanctions on Iran, on their
23 ballistic missile program.

24 I wanted to follow up on an important question, both
25 General Rodriguez and General Votel. This is something I

1 have actually asked both of your predecessors about.

2 My concern is if we capture Ayman al Zawahiri or al-
3 Baghdadi tomorrow, where will we detain these individuals
4 under long-term law of war detention, most importantly to
5 interrogate them, so we can find out all that we need to
6 know about Al Qaeda and ISIS?

7 And I asked your predecessor, going back to 2011, I
8 asked General Ham, your predecessor in AFRICOM, what would
9 happen if we tomorrow captured a member of Al Qaeda in
10 Africa? You know what he told me? He said, I am going to
11 need some lawyerly help on answering that one.

12 I also asked the same of Admiral McRaven, your
13 predecessor, General Votel. He said to me that it would be
14 very helpful if there was actually a facility that was
15 designated for long-term law of war detention and
16 interrogation.

17 So I guess my question to both of you is, tomorrow, if
18 we capture these individuals, given the phenomenal work that
19 the men and women who serve underneath you do every day,
20 where are we going to interrogate them? Do you know that?
21 Do you know what you would do with them, especially if we
22 want to have a long-term interrogation of them?

23 General Vote: Senator, in my experience, as we look at
24 operations where we are actually going to change someone
25 somebody, we have had a plan in place before we actually

1 conducted the operation for how we were going to potentially
2 detain them and what their legal disposition would be,
3 whether that was back --

4 Senator Ayotte: General, we just recently captured
5 someone in ISIS. As I understand it, they are being held
6 short term and then they are going to be turned back to the
7 Kurds.

8 So what about long-term detention? You would agree
9 that long-term interrogation was quite helpful, for example,
10 in gathering the information we needed to get bin Laden.
11 That is what worries me. What do we do in a long-term
12 setting? Do we know?

13 General Votel: I would agree that there is a
14 requirement for long-term detention, Senator.

15 Senator Ayotte: Do we know where that would be now?

16 General Votel: I do not know. That is a policy
17 decision that I think is being debated.

18 Senator Ayotte: I think it is a policy decision that
19 has basically never been made under this administration. It
20 is one that has been left up in the air, which means it is
21 left up in the air in a way that I think undermines our
22 national security interests.

23 I think that you all need to know what would happen
24 tomorrow, given the great work of the men and women who
25 serve underneath you. We hope they capture these

1 individuals, we interrogate them, and we find out what they
2 know, so that we can prevent attacks on this country and
3 obviously continue to dismantle these terrorism networks.

4 Thank you all.

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen?

6 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

7 Thank you all for being here this morning and for your
8 service to the country.

9 General Austin, I want to follow up on some of the
10 questions about Afghanistan because I saw reports over the
11 weekend that President Ghani claimed that ISIS had been
12 defeated in the eastern part of the country following a 21-
13 day operation by Afghan forces. Do we agree with President
14 Ghani's analysis of what has happened there?

15 General Austin: I think we have had some good initial
16 effects, Senator, but I think there is more work to be done
17 in that area.

18 Senator Shaheen: So do we expect the Afghan national
19 forces to follow up with ISIS in that area? Are we working
20 with them directly on what is happening there? Can you
21 elaborate a little bit on what is going on?

22 General Austin: As you know, Senator, we are advising
23 and assisting the Afghan special operation forces on a daily
24 basis. Yes, we are helping them to identify these threats
25 and also advising them on the best means to go after these

1 threats.

2 Senator Shaheen: If, in fact, they are performing well
3 with respect to ISIS, what does that mean for the continued
4 fighting against the Taliban? I saw recently reports about
5 Helmand Province and what is happening there.

6 Having had the opportunity to visit there back in 2010,
7 2011, we visited Lashkar Gah, which is the provincial
8 capital, and saw some really amazing work that had been done
9 by ISAF forces to engage the local population to get kids in
10 school, to do very positive things. So it is very
11 distressing to see what is happening now in Helmand and the
12 fact that provincial capital may fall to the Taliban. It is
13 under threat from that.

14 So can you talk about whether there are benefits from
15 the effort against ISIS that carry over to the fight against
16 the Taliban? I do not want to use the word "propaganda,"
17 but is there messaging there that is helpful in terms of the
18 Taliban's recurring activity in Afghanistan?

19 General Austin: As was mentioned, earlier, Senator,
20 the environment in Afghanistan this last year has been a
21 very challenging environment to work in because of a number
22 of transitions -- transition of power for the first time in
23 that young government's history. You had a new government
24 standing up. We reduced our footprint. The death of Mullah
25 Omar was announced. And that caused the Taliban to begin to

1 fracture a bit, but also gave rise to a new leader who set
2 out to prove himself with increased activity.

3 So all of this worked together to prove to be very
4 challenging for the Afghan security forces, and there were
5 some setbacks. Those setbacks were due to a number of
6 things -- leadership, inappropriate techniques.

7 General Campbell and now General Nicholson are working
8 with the Afghan security forces to address those setbacks.
9 They put measures in place that should improve the
10 performance there.

11 The President, Mr. Ghani, has embraced these
12 suggestions, and they are making corrections. So we expect
13 to see some improved performance. There is more advising
14 and assisting that needs to be done going forward.

15 One of the key things that has transpired here recently
16 is that, because the Afghans in some cases were
17 overextended, they have adjusted their footprint to give
18 more flexibility. The smaller footprint allows them to
19 project combat power at will in places that they need to
20 project combat power to.

21 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

22 General Votel, Senator Reed raised the issue of
23 countermessaging in his opening statement. I know that in
24 2016, the NDAA provided resources for technologies to
25 support our information operations and communication

1 activities. So can you elaborate on what you are doing in
2 this area to improve our countermeasuring efforts, which I
3 think are really critical, both to what is going on with
4 ISIS, but also to Putin in Russia?

5 General Votel: Thank you, Senator. I agree with your
6 assessment. I think it is absolutely critical, and it must
7 be an integrated aspect of all of our operations, from start
8 to finish. It cannot be something we think about
9 afterwards.

10 I am very grateful for the support we have gotten in
11 the NDAA. Specifically, what we have done at USSOCOM is we
12 have looked at publicly available information and how we
13 develop the tools and the techniques and the procedures to
14 use that information to help us understand the threats that
15 we are dealing with. So we are looking at how we can
16 experiment in the area, the different things that we can do
17 and bring to bear for our forces.

18 So publicly available information and being able to
19 work in that environment is an area in which we hope to
20 improve our capabilities in the future.

21 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. My time is up, but I
22 would be interested in hearing what we are doing to work
23 with other agencies within the Federal Government, so that
24 we are coordinating our messages across all of our
25 activities. Thank you.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Rounds?

3 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Gentlemen, thank you for your service.

5 General Austin, with regard to the challenges
6 surrounding the retaking of Mosul and Raqqa by December of
7 this year coming up, you currently have I think about 4,000
8 ground forces available, if I am correct.

9 Is that enough? Do you have enough right now to assist
10 in your plans to be able to retake Mosul and Raqqa?

11 General Austin: The approach that we have used and
12 will continue to use, Senator, as you know, is to use the
13 indigenous forces to conduct the operations on the ground
14 and enable those forces with our aerial fire and other
15 enablers.

16 As we look toward Raqqa and Mosul, clearly, there will
17 be things that we will want to do to increase the capability
18 of it, to be able to increase the pace of operations. That
19 will require some additional capability. We have gone
20 through and done some analysis to see what types of things
21 we need to provide, and we have made those recommendations.

22 Senator Rounds: Could you share those recommendations
23 with this committee?

24 General Austin: No, sir. I would not care to do so
25 because I have just provided those to my leadership.

1 Senator Rounds: But you have made the recommendations
2 and you are awaiting a response to your recommendations at
3 this time?

4 General Austin: Yes, sir. It will work its way up the
5 chain.

6 Senator Rounds: If you were allowed to have more
7 ground troops, what would be the capabilities that you could
8 accomplish, or what could you accomplish if you had more
9 individuals on the ground there at this time?

10 General Austin: We could develop better human
11 intelligence. We could perhaps provide more advise and
12 assist teams at various levels. We could increase our
13 assistance in terms of providing help with some logistical
14 issues. And we could increase some elements of the special
15 operations footprint.

16 Senator Rounds: Assuming we would be successful in
17 retaking both of those two towns, what then? It is broken.
18 Clearly, you come back in, you need to reestablish civil
19 order and so forth. When we take them back, do we have a
20 plan in place? Do we have a plan that we want to execute to
21 bring back in a sense of order to those communities? What
22 does it look like right now? What part would we play?

23 General Austin: The short answer is, yes, Senator,
24 first of all, the Iraqis will take back Mosul, and we will
25 work with the Syrian indigenous forces to take back Raqqa as

1 well.

2 As you have seen us do, as they have taken back towns
3 in Iraq that include Ramadi, Baiji, Tikrit, Sinjar, and
4 other places, that effort has been to reestablish security
5 in those places and then immediately try to do what is
6 necessary to repair damage and make sure that we are taking
7 care of the people, the people are able to move back in and
8 resume their lives.

9 So we built incrementally as we kind of move forward.
10 There is a lot of work to be done, Senator. You know from
11 just looking at Ramadi, there is a mountain of work to be
12 accomplished to get that back to some reasonable state.

13 But in Mosul, then looking forward to Raqqa, the same
14 types of things apply. Establish the security and when that
15 is done, bring in the humanitarian assistance, do the
16 reconstruction activities to get things back to normal.

17 Senator Rounds: Do you believe that the current
18 structure in Iraq with the government that is there now, do
19 they have the capabilities and competencies to provide that
20 to those communities in Iraq?

21 General Austin: I think they do, sir. I think that it
22 will require a lot of work, and it will require the
23 government to work together much more and much better than
24 what we have seen them do up to this point.

25 Senator Rounds: Thank you.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Senator Reed: [Presiding.] Senator Manchin, on behalf
3 of the chairman.

4 Senator Manchin: Thank you all for being here, and
5 thank you for your service.

6 I would ask the first question I think to General
7 Votel. Given that we will be considering your nomination to
8 succeed General Austin as CENTCOM commander, it would be
9 insightful to get your opinion on the current situation in
10 Iraq and Syria. I guess the question would simply be, who
11 poses the greater threat to the region and to the United
12 States, ISIS or Iran?

13 General Votel: Well, I think right now, Senator, my
14 answer would be ISIS does because they are inspiring and
15 they are orchestrating external attacks that could impact
16 our people. So I think we have to take that extraordinarily
17 seriously.

18 That said, as we have kind of discussed here already,
19 despite the JPOA and the agreement has been made, we should
20 understand that Iran is not ambiguous in their activities
21 and their focus on the United States, and certainly on our
22 allies in the region. So I think they do pose a long-term
23 threat as well.

24 Senator Manchin: General Austin, do you agree?

25 General Austin: Sir, I would say, clearly, the most

1 dangerous near-term threat is ISIL or Daesh. We will deal
2 with that threat as a part of an international coalition. I
3 would say the greatest mid- to long-term threat to stability
4 in the region is clearly Iran. We will need to work with
5 our partners in the region to really counter the malign
6 activity that we have seen Iran conduct over time.

7 Senator Manchin: The additional revenue that Iran has
8 coming now, because their oil is starting to flow and the
9 revenue from that, do you see that exacerbating the problem?

10 General Austin: It certainly adds a little fuel to the
11 problem, sir. They were going to spend money on their
12 military and buy weapons anyway. This gives them some
13 capability to do more.

14 Having said that, the GCC is working together, probably
15 in ways that they have not done in the past, and they
16 continue to buy a healthy dose of our equipment and our
17 weapons as well. So they are increasing their capability as
18 well.

19 Senator Manchin: Also, with the change of regime
20 there, I guess the last election they just had showed an
21 awful lot of the moderates got elected and some of the
22 extremes got pushed out of office. It is too soon to tell,
23 but do you see that as a promising factor?

24 General Austin: I think it is too soon to tell, sir.
25 I think what we saw leading up to the elections, we saw a

1 lot of moderates get disqualified from the elections. So
2 the folks who are now classifying themselves as moderates,
3 are they really moderates or just another flavor of
4 hardliners? We will see as time passes here.

5 Senator Manchin: General Rodriguez, regarding the U.S.
6 strike in Somalia that occurred Saturday, I read that the
7 fighters that were targeted had just completed training for
8 a large-scale attack against American forces. So the
9 question would be, could you give me a sense of the number
10 of camps like that that are still in Somalia that you have
11 identified? And how big a concern is it that there are
12 other camps in this region that we do not even know about?

13 General Rodriguez: Sir, the camps are transitory, so
14 they pop up and move, and they are at different places
15 throughout Somalia at different times. It is a concern
16 because the last three times they did something similar to
17 this, they had the ability to conduct a devastating attack
18 on the AMISOM forces.

19 Senator Manchin: General Votel, I would follow up with
20 you. The National Guard State Partnership Program has been
21 successful in building extremely strong relationships
22 between the Guard and 70 other countries for over 20 years.
23 In some cases, it has been going on longer.

24 In your testimony, you indicate one of your major
25 priorities is to continue to build relationships with

1 international and domestic partners through sustained
2 security cooperation, expand the communication architects,
3 and liaison activities.

4 It seems to be something National Guard has been
5 successful with in the State Partnership Program. So do you
6 see a role for the State Partnership Program in helping
7 advance this priority?

8 General Votel: Senator, I absolutely do. Of course,
9 as you may be aware, West Virginia has played a very key
10 role in sponsoring exercises for our Polish SOF partners
11 that was very successful. We have already engaged on doing
12 the next version of that.

13 So I think the State Partnership Program is absolutely
14 essential to us. Of course, a number of embassies we have
15 National Guard bilateral officers at the same place where we
16 have some of our special operation liaison officers. I
17 think that provides a great opportunity to increase our
18 interaction and integration on activities.

19 I think it is a wonderful program, and we are going to
20 try to leverage it in every way we can.

21 Senator Manchin: General, I appreciate that, because
22 we think it has been very successful, also, and very cost-
23 effective for us, too. So thank you for that.

24 My time is up.

25 Senator Reed: On behalf of the chairman, Senator

1 Ernst, please.

2 Senator Ernst: Thank you very much.

3 Gentlemen, thank you for being here today. I certainly
4 appreciate your many, many years of service.

5 I would like to start, General Austin and General
6 Votel, just in your professional military opinion, you have
7 served a while in our armed services. I was going to say
8 over 40 years of service, but we will just say many, many
9 years. Again, thank you for that. What are the
10 implications of Russia's actions in Syria and the world's
11 response or lack of response with Russia in Syria and their
12 international behavior?

13 I guess what I am trying to get at is, what lessons do
14 you think Putin is taking out of Syria? And what concerns
15 should we have about what Putin is doing in Syria? We have
16 heard discussion about weaponization of migrants. Can you
17 give me a little input on that, please?

18 General Austin: Thank you, Senator.

19 Russia's entry into this problem set has made a very
20 complicated problem even more complicated. You know, when
21 you consider the actors that are part of this, the regime,
22 the Russians, the Turks, the YPG, the Iranians, Lebanese
23 Hezbollah, Daesh, all of these elements interacting with
24 each other in a fairly confined battle space, the
25 introduction of Russia has made this more complicated,

1 especially because of the fact that, although they said they
2 came to counter terrorism, to counter Daesh, what we have
3 seen them do principally is bolster the Assad regime. That
4 potentially extends the conflict.

5 So my personal opinion is that, as Russia entered this,
6 they had no designs on being there for a long time. I do
7 not think they can be there for a long time, because of the
8 impact that it will have on their economy. But clearly,
9 they tried to use this to demonstrate muscle and impress the
10 region. I think they will have an opposite effect. When
11 they came in and aligned themselves with the Syrian regime,
12 they also aligned themselves with the Iranians and with
13 Lebanese Hezbollah. That will eventually begin to alienate
14 them from many of the Sunni Arab states in the region.

15 Senator Ernst: Do you think that is his overall goal,
16 the alienation of those groups, and alignment with himself?

17 Has he achieved that?

18 General Austin: I think what they wanted to do was
19 gain greater -- certainly, they wanted access to a port in
20 the Mediterranean. They want influence in the region. And
21 they want to increase their influence in the region by doing
22 some of the things that they have done. But I think at the
23 end of the day, it will probably have the opposite effect of
24 what they wanted to do.

25 Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you, sir.

1 General Votel?

2 General Votel: Senator, I agree with everything that
3 General Austin just said. I would add one additional point.

4 I think the big lesson that we are learning out of this
5 is this ability to operate in the gray area, this area
6 between normal state competition that we normally expect and
7 open warfare. I think, in my view, this is an area in which
8 Russia is engaging. Syria is another example. Certainly,
9 Eastern Europe is another example. The Ukraine is another
10 example.

11 Short of open warfare, but they are certainly
12 challenging our interests, challenging our influence, and
13 challenging the interests of many of our allies. So for
14 those of us in SOCOM, we are paying very close attention to
15 this and trying to understand the gray zone and how that is
16 going to impact our future operations, and how we contribute
17 in a particular area.

18 Senator Ernst: Okay, I appreciate that.

19 My time is short, but very quickly, if you could,
20 General Austin, talk about the Sunni fighting force in Iraq.
21 Why is it taking so long to develop a force, which would
22 keep the region stable?

23 General Austin: One of the things I think that must be
24 done, Senator, and I think you probably feel the same way,
25 is that the Sunnis have to be a part of the solution going

1 forward. We have worked with the leadership, with the Prime
2 Minister, to enlist and hire and train and pay Sunni tribal
3 elements that can help us.

4 They have across-the-board enlisted about 15,000 or so
5 of Sunni tribal elements. They have proven that they are
6 very reliable troops.

7 The reason it has taken a long time is because there
8 are hardliners in the environment that do not want to see a
9 large Sunni force armed and equipped because of the bad
10 experience with Daesh.

11 But nonetheless, the Sunnis have to be a part of the
12 solution going forward. We see the Prime Minister doing
13 some things to enlist their help. We just need some more
14 activity here.

15 Senator Ernst: Gentlemen, again, I appreciate it very
16 much. Thank you for your service.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 Chairman McCain: [Presiding.] Senator Hirono?

19 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 General Rodriguez, regarding Libya, you mentioned in
21 your written testimony that the lack of stability and
22 security in Libya threatens our peace and security
23 objectives in the Middle East. Of course, whatever we do in
24 the Middle East is fraught with all kinds of peril and
25 unintended consequences.

1 So while the Libyan Government of National Accord
2 established by agreement in December 2015, as you noted in
3 your testimony, is an important step, it will take time to
4 establish its authority.

5 So can you talk more about what is supposed to happen
6 under this agreement, and what is to be expected to happen
7 in Libya? And what kind of time frame are we talking about,
8 to establish civility and security in Libya?

9 General Rodriguez: Thank you, Senator.

10 The agreement that the U.N. brokered to build of the
11 Government of National Accord was supposed to bring together
12 both the House of Representatives in the east and the
13 General National Congress in the west, and build a central
14 government that could then begin to govern Libya.

15 This will be a long time coming as they work through
16 this. We will continue to press on all the diplomatic
17 fronts that the U.S. and international community can to get
18 this thing moving. It has continued to move along slowly.

19 As far as the second part of your question, to build
20 stability in Libya is going to take a long time because of
21 the lack of institutions that are there, the fractured
22 society, and the multiple competing militias and spoilers
23 from all sides of Libyan society.

24 Senator Hirono: What would you say are maybe the one
25 or two most important steps or conditions that must occur

1 for this process to proceed in a way that will result in
2 civility in Libya?

3 General Rodriguez: I think the Government of National
4 Accord has to come together and have enough legitimacy in
5 the eyes of the Libyan people that it can function well
6 enough to move forward and help to begin building stability.

7 Senator Hirono: And is that happening?

8 General Rodriguez: It has not happened yet.

9 Senator Hirono: Beginning to happen?

10 General Rodriguez: Yes.

11 Senator Hirono: So when you say it is going to be a
12 long time, do you have any kind of a sense? Are we talking
13 about 10 years, 15 years?

14 General Rodriguez: For long-term stability, yes, it is
15 going to take 10 years or so to build that society up. Yes,
16 ma'am.

17 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

18 General Votel, North Korea's nuclear threats are
19 increasing and becoming more of a concern by the day. What
20 efforts are SOCOM engaging in that we hope will dispel or
21 lower this imminent threat? And do you think that a
22 peaceful solution is possible at this point?

23 General Votel: Thank you, Senator. I do not know if a
24 peaceful solution is possible at this particular point.

25 What we are doing, of course, is we are retaining our

1 capability to deal with those types of weapons in the venues
2 in which we are asked to deal with them, which are fairly
3 peculiar. So we do maintain that capability as one of our
4 kind of no-fail missions.

5 That said, the other thing that we have done over the
6 last 18 months is increase our presence and partnership with
7 our South Korean partners. I am pretty proud to say right
8 now, today, there are more SOF men and women on the
9 peninsula than we have had any time in the past. We are
10 continuing to maintain a robust presence there with all of
11 our capability -- air, maritime, and ground SOF forces.

12 Senator Hirono: Even as we speak, are we engaging in
13 some exercises with South Korea and our Marines?

14 General Votel: We are. There are major exercises that
15 occur at various times of the year. There is one going on
16 right now. We are extraordinarily well-integrated into
17 that, and through our Special Operations Command Korea, we
18 are supporting General Scaparrotti in his objectives.

19 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

20 Again, to you, General Votel, regarding our rebalance
21 to the Asia-Pacific, which is a key strategic goal,
22 particularly as we see what is going on with North Korea and
23 China, with what you can say in this unclassified setting,
24 can you comment on the capabilities of SOCOM in the Asia-
25 Pacific region? Do you have a Special Operations Forces

1 structure to meet the growing demands of this region? Does
2 this year's budget request provide the resources necessary
3 to meet the demand?

4 General Votel: Senator, to the last part of your
5 question, we absolutely do have a structure. It is formed
6 around Special Operations Command Pacific that is under the
7 operational control of Admiral Harris under my combatant
8 command. We are sourcing them. They are a fairly robust
9 headquarters. So they have the ability to exercise command
10 and control and coordination, integration with Admiral
11 Harris' staff.

12 With regards to the other things that we are doing, I
13 guess I would like to say that SOCOM never left the Pacific.
14 We have always been engaged out there. Most of our
15 activities are bilateral. We certainly had some success in
16 the Philippines in the past and in support of many of
17 Admiral Harris' objectives out there.

18 We are working very closely with a large variety of
19 partners to reassure them, to develop their capabilities,
20 and to show that we remain very committed to the area.

21 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much. I thank all of
22 our testifiers today. Mahalo.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham?

25 Senator Graham: Thank you all for many years of great

1 service.

2 Syria, General Votel, are you responsible for training
3 the Syrian Democratic Forces?

4 General Votel: We are providing forces to General
5 Austin who has that mission.

6 Senator Graham: What percentage of the Syrian
7 Democratic Forces are Kurds?

8 General Votel: Probably about 80 percent.

9 Senator Graham: Is it possible for the current
10 construct for these forces to take Raqqa away from ISIL?

11 General Votel: I do not know. I think that they are
12 capable. As we have seen in some of the things that they
13 have done, without --

14 Senator Graham: Is there a plan to take Raqqa back
15 from ISIL using these forces?

16 General Votel: We have a strategy to get to Raqqa --

17 Senator Graham: No. I said, is there a plan?

18 General Votel: There is currently not a plan.

19 Senator Graham: Okay. Is there a plan to hold Raqqa
20 once we take it?

21 General Votel: I would say, no. There is not a plan
22 to hold Raqqa.

23 Senator Graham: Okay.

24 General Austin, is it fair to say that when Russia and
25 Iran came in to assist Assad, that changed the balance of

1 power on the ground militarily in his favor?

2 General Austin: It is, Senator.

3 If I could make a comment on the question that General
4 Votel just answered?

5 Senator Graham: Sure.

6 General Austin: As you know, Senator, as we continue
7 to work with the forces in theater, the indigenous forces.
8 Our goal is to recruit more Arabs and Turkmen and others to
9 --

10 Senator Graham: Will the recruitment require them to
11 fight ISIL alone and not go after Assad?

12 General Austin: We will recruit, train, and equip
13 forces to focus on Daesh, on ISIL.

14 Senator Graham: And part of the conditions will be we
15 are not going to support you when it comes to Assad.

16 General Austin: That is correct, sir. We will only
17 support those elements that are --

18 Senator Graham: So what happens when Assad bombs the
19 people we train? What do we do?

20 General Austin: We will defend the folks that we are
21 supporting.

22 Senator Graham: Have we defended them against the
23 Russians and Assad, the people we have previously trained?

24 General Austin: In terms of forces that I have
25 trained, we have not had that issue.

1 Senator Graham: Well, the forces that the agency has
2 trained have been bombed by the Russians and Assad. Is that
3 correct?

4 General Austin: Sir, I would not want to address that
5 in this forum.

6 Senator Graham: I think it is pretty common knowledge
7 that the people we trained have been hit by the Russians and
8 Assad.

9 Is it fair to say that, going into any negotiations,
10 Assad is in pretty good shape because Russia and Iran are
11 behind him militarily and we are not behind the opposition
12 militarily?

13 General Austin: I certainly would say, Senator, that
14 Russia's support and Iran's support of Assad has really
15 emboldened him and empowered him to a degree.

16 Senator Graham: You have been in Iraq a long time.

17 Thank you for your years of service, to all of you. I
18 certainly mean that.

19 On June 24, 2010, I had an exchange with General
20 Odierno. You were there, too. We were changing over from
21 General Petraeus.

22 Here is what I said: I think you indicated we are
23 probably on the 10-yard line when it comes to Iraq.

24 This is General Odierno: I did, sir. And I think we
25 are on the 10-yard line. I think that the next 18 months

1 will determine whether we get to the goal line or really
2 give the Iraqis an opportunity to get to the goal line by
3 2011.

4 Did you recommend a residual force?

5 General Austin: I did, sir.

6 Senator Graham: Okay. If we were on the 10-yard line
7 in June 24, 2010, using football analogies, where are we at
8 today in Iraq?

9 General Austin: Clearly, we are in a completely
10 different game with respect to where we were then, sir.
11 Nobody knows this better than you because you have spent so
12 much time over there.

13 Senator Graham: It is a different game. I think that
14 is a good way to say it.

15 General Austin: Absolutely, sir.

16 Senator Graham: What is the strongest ground component
17 in Iraq? Is it the Iraqi security forces or the Shia
18 militia? Who has the most capability right now?

19 General Austin: The Shia militia have a lot of
20 numbers, but in my opinion, they are not really good
21 fighters. They do not have good tradecraft. They do not --

22 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say they cannot be used
23 to liberate Mosul?

24 General Austin: I would say, if we go down that path,
25 Senator Graham, we will make a significant mistake.

1 Senator Graham: I could not agree with you more. I am
2 glad you said that. So we are really relying on the Iraqi
3 security forces and Peshmerga. I think that is a long way
4 away.

5 Libya, General Rodriguez, thank you for your service.

6 What percentage of Libya would you say is under the
7 control, actual or de facto control, of extremist groups
8 like ISIL?

9 General Rodriguez: ISIL and Daesh control the area in
10 and around Sirte. I could not give you the exact
11 percentage. The other places are either contested or have
12 transitory factors.

13 Senator Graham: Would you consider Libya at this point
14 a failed state?

15 General Rodriguez: Yes, sir.

16 Senator Graham: Thank you all very much for your
17 service.

18 Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine?

19 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Thanks to the witnesses. Also, I echo all the comments
21 about the appreciation for your service and the many times
22 you have been before this committee.

23 General Rodriguez, I want to ask a couple questions,
24 touching on each of your expertise about the training we do
25 with foreign militaries.

1 In Africa, I know the U.S. military is a preferred
2 training partner, and many African nations seek our
3 assistance. I kind of would like to have you talk about the
4 success of those training efforts over the course of your 3
5 years in the position and what other nations do significant
6 -- not African nations -- do significant training of African
7 militaries?

8 I think this is one of the most cost-effective
9 investments that we make, and I would like to hear your
10 thoughts on it.

11 General Rodriguez: Yes, Senator. Thank you.

12 We are by far the largest contributor to training
13 African peacekeepers in Africa. We have a tremendous amount
14 of successes.

15 Just to give you one benchmark now, the U.N. missions
16 in Africa are 47 percent provided by African soldiers. So
17 that is a significant increase over the last several years
18 and almost a 180 degree-turn from a decade ago.

19 Then we have a great program that is really led by the
20 State Department for training soldiers. And all the
21 soldiers that are trained to go to Somalia, as an example,
22 all five nations have been trained by the State Department,
23 supported by AFRICOM, as well as 11 nations in Mali.

24 So we do a tremendous job of training all the U.N.
25 missions who are heading out there. They have done

1 extremely well overall.

2 There continue to be challenges in certain areas. They
3 have had some problems with discipline in some of those
4 units. But overall, it has been a huge success story.

5 As an example, in Burundi, almost every one of their
6 units has been trained and headed to AMISOM and then come
7 back. It has increased the professionalism of the forces.

8 The U.N. also does some training, as do the United
9 Kingdom and the French. They are the biggest contributors.

10 Senator Kaine: The training that we do is not only
11 training around dealing with security challenges, but in
12 some of these nations the military has sometimes been the
13 force for civilian repression. There are rule of law and
14 human rights issues.

15 So I assume that one of the sets of expertise we
16 provide is how to do the security job, and at the same time
17 do it in a way that respects rule of law and human rights?

18 General Rodriguez: It is, sir. It is all about
19 professionalizing the forces in every aspect, not just the
20 tactical operations but also the rule of law, the law of
21 armed conflict, and how to support the government in a
22 democratic nation.

23 Senator Kaine: General Votel, would you talk about the
24 same thing with respect to special operations and special
25 forces, the training work we do with other nations?

1 Senator King and I traveled to the region, actually to
2 Lebanon a few years ago, and we witnessed some training that
3 LAF was incredibly thankful for.

4 But just talk a little about the training component of
5 what you do.

6 General Votel: Thank you, Senator. The example you
7 cited in Lebanon is a good example of many of the ways in
8 which we are working with some of our international
9 partners, particularly through their SOF elements.

10 I think one of the very best authorities that Congress
11 has provided to us is the authority that allows us to work
12 very closely with some of our partners here to develop
13 capabilities, to assist in our counterterrorism efforts. I
14 think that has been a very, very successful program.

15 So what we try to do is we try to leverage the long-
16 term relationships, the long historical relationships that
17 many of our countries and particularly their SOF forces have
18 in the region.

19 So, for example, the French SOF, of course, are great
20 partners in North Africa. The British, of course, have
21 inroads in a lot of different places. We try to leverage
22 that as well.

23 But we are also looking to work with partners to
24 develop capacity to export their skills. So we look at a
25 country like Poland, for example. That is a good example.

1 We worked long term with that country, and they have
2 actually been somebody who can deploy, support our
3 activities, and, in fact, bring others with them.

4 So I think the investment that not only we are making
5 in SOF but a lot of our partner nations that are making in
6 SOF, I think we are leveraging them very well through our
7 relationships and partnerships.

8 Senator Kaine: This is budgets, appropriations, and
9 NDAA season, so we are looking at line items, and we are
10 looking at expenditures. My opinion is that one of the best
11 things we do, if you look at the Pentagon budget, the amount
12 we spend to train foreign militaries, either in their real
13 estate or bringing leaders over here for programs at the
14 National Defense University. It is just a fraction of a
15 fraction of a DOD budget, but it might be one of the best
16 investments we make in terms of both building capacity, but
17 also building relationships that can be important. So I
18 just encourage you each in that.

19 Again, thank you for your service.

20 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

21 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer?

22 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 And thank you, gentlemen, for your service, your many
24 years of service to this country and our people.

25 General Rodriguez, last year, you testified that Libya-

1 based threats to U.S. interests are growing and if left
2 unchecked, I believe they have the highest potential among
3 security challenges on the continent to increase risk to
4 U.S. and European strategic interests in the next 2 years
5 and beyond.

6 What is your assessment of the current situation? Do
7 you see these threats continuing to impact not just the
8 United States but our allies?

9 General Rodriguez: Yes, Senator. It has continued to
10 grow in the last year, as I mentioned. Because of the
11 ungoverned space in Libya, that is also what contributes to
12 the migration challenges that our European partners are
13 facing. I think I agree with all those statements I made
14 last year.

15 Senator Fischer: As we look at Libya and really how
16 unstable this area of the world has become, and the impact,
17 the negative impact, it is having not just on that area but,
18 as you said, with migration in Europe as well, are we going
19 to see a unity government form? Is there any hope that that
20 is going to happen? Or are we going to continue to see the
21 threats grow faster than the possibility of the formation of
22 a unity government?

23 General Rodriguez: I think unity government, as
24 encouraged by everybody, has a chance of moving forward. It
25 will be dependent upon how they handle the spoilers who are

1 really not in it for the future of Libya. So that will be
2 the real determining factor.

3 The concern right now for the building of the
4 government and the ability for Libyans to contribute towards
5 stabilization are the resources that have continued to go,
6 their ability to generate the resources that continue to
7 dwindle over time, so the instability has increased. That
8 is the real risk, ma'am.

9 Senator Fischer: In your best military advice, what
10 are the additional steps that could possibly be taken in
11 order to combat that threat that is in Libya against the
12 formation of the unity government? What are the steps that
13 you see that we could take?

14 General Rodriguez: The first, of course, is to
15 continue to press on all the diplomatic fronts to get some
16 kind of government that can function enough, that is
17 legitimate enough in the eyes of the people that it can
18 function properly.

19 And then on the military side, it is all about working
20 with our partners, first of all, all around Libya, whether
21 it is the European Union in the north that has a mission
22 going on to help with the migrant situation, or NATO, both
23 have missions in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as shoring
24 up all the partners around us. An example is Tunisia, which
25 we have done a good job at helping build their capacity to

1 withstand the challenges there.

2 Then somehow at some point in time the international
3 community is going to have to figure out how to halt the
4 expansion of Daesh and then degrade it so that this
5 government has a chance to move forward.

6 Senator Fischer: So you do believe that the formation
7 of this government, it is going to take outside help in
8 order to stabilize this area?

9 General Rodriguez: Yes, I do.

10 Senator Fischer: Do you have any idea on who our
11 partners would be in that? Besides the European Union, do
12 we have partners outside of them?

13 General Rodriguez: NATO, as I mentioned, also has a
14 mission in the Mediterranean Sea, and the European Union, as
15 you mentioned. But the real critical partners who have
16 continued to work in this effort are the U.K., France,
17 Italy, as well as Spain and Germany.

18 Senator Fischer: Do we have a plan moving forward on
19 that?

20 General Rodriguez: Yes, we do, ma'am.

21 Senator Fischer: General Votel, are you concerned that
22 the threat may outpace that political reconciliation in
23 Libya?

24 General Votel: I am. I think as General Rodriguez
25 pointed out, that is a long-term proposition, so I do think

1 we have to be concerned about that.

2 Senator Fischer: General Austin, have you seen
3 cooperation between Syrian Kurdish groups and Russia?

4 General Austin: We have seen some cooperation between
5 the YPG element that is in the northwestern part of the
6 country with the Russians.

7 Senator Fischer: Is it frequent cooperation?

8 General Austin: I would characterize it as infrequent.
9 But again, they are going to turn to the folks that they
10 think can provide them capability when they need it most.

11 Senator Fischer: Have the Kurdish groups attacked
12 Syrian rebels that are supported by us?

13 General Austin: There is evidence of that.

14 Senator Fischer: Do you see that growing?

15 General Austin: I do not see it growing. I think
16 right now, during the cessation of hostilities, we do not
17 see much activity at all.

18 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Blumenthal?

21 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 Thank you all for your distinguished service to our
23 Nation.

24 General Votel, I noticed in your testimony reference to
25 enhancing our relationships with special operators from

1 other countries, the interoperability of our activities with
2 theirs. Is that an area that you see as a priority? And if
3 so, what can we do to support it?

4 General Votel: Thank you, Senator. It is an area that
5 I see as a priority.

6 In fact, over the last several years, we have
7 incorporated into our headquarters liaison officers from
8 about 17 or 18 different foreign SOF forces, who are
9 integrated with us right in our headquarters as kind of a
10 demonstration of how important we think that it is.

11 I think what you can do is continue to support our
12 efforts in that regard. Frankly, I think the biggest
13 challenges that we have working with our international
14 partners really fall into information-sharing arrangements
15 we have with them. I find that that is kind of a friction
16 point that we continue to work through. So I think anything
17 we can do in those regards would be very, very positive.

18 Senator Blumenthal: Is information-sharing also an
19 issue when it comes to other United States agencies, such as
20 the DEA, the FBI? I noticed the reference in your testimony
21 to those agencies as well.

22 General Votel: In general, Senator, I think that has
23 improved a lot. So I do not see those as significant
24 obstacles. Most of those agencies you mentioned have
25 representatives in my headquarters, and they help smooth any

1 potential conflicts we have. So I think our interchange of
2 information-sharing with them is quite good.

3 Senator Blumenthal: Over the years, we have heard
4 testimony, both in secure settings and in public settings
5 such as this one, about the opportunities and the failings
6 to interdict illicit substances, heroin, opium, which not
7 only undermines our activities in some countries abroad --
8 Afghanistan being an example -- but also threatens our
9 national security at home.

10 In fact, we are debating now on the floor of the Senate
11 a measure called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery
12 Act, which aims to prevent as well as treat addiction to
13 illicit substances in our country.

14 I wonder if you could comment on both the opportunities
15 and the potential failings of our Nation in addressing those
16 problems of interdicting and stopping the flow of heroin and
17 other substances to this country, and the growing of it in
18 other countries.

19 General Votel: I think, as you know, we have had a
20 long-term plan in countries like Colombia that the U.S.
21 Special Operations Force and others have supported for a
22 while that has had some success to it. We do conduct a
23 number of activities in our southern regions here to support
24 some of our partners in those particular efforts. And in
25 most cases, we have begun to see some success when we do

1 that.

2 I think they look for our leadership. They look for
3 our partnership. They look for our expertise in helping
4 them with that. I think what we generally see with those
5 countries that we partner with, we do see some success. We
6 see better efforts.

7 Certainly, the problem is extensive. So I think our
8 focus on interdiction routes is extraordinarily important.

9 In my view, in my experience, the same routes over
10 which drugs travel, humans travel, foreign terrorist
11 fighters could travel. So I think these are multipurpose
12 threats to us that have to be addressed very, very
13 seriously.

14 Senator Blumenthal: In some sense, the flow of heroin
15 is along the same routes terrorists travel, as other kinds
16 of threats to our Nation may come to this country.

17 General Votel: In my experience, Senator, I think that
18 is true.

19 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you very much. Thank you
20 for your excellent testimony today.

21 Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Lee?

23 Senator Lee: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

24 Thanks to all of you for being here and for all you do
25 for the security of our country.

1 General Rodriguez, a New York Times report from
2 February 27 recounted that at the time when intervention in
3 Libya was being discussed, then-Secretary Bob Gates stated
4 that Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi "was not a threat to us
5 anywhere." Then-director of the Defense Intelligence Agency
6 General Michael Flynn commented that Qaddafi was "a thug in
7 a dangerous neighborhood, but he was keeping order."

8 So, General Rodriguez, how has the chaos in Libya,
9 specifically the proliferation of weapons from Qaddafi's
10 stockpile and the infiltration of ISIS and Al Qaeda
11 affiliates, led to the further destabilization of North
12 Africa and the Middle East, and threatened our security
13 interests?

14 General Rodriguez: Thank you, Senator.

15 The first effect of that destabilization was probably
16 in Mali when many of the fighters as well as arms,
17 ammunition, explosives, headed that way, which created some
18 of the challenges down there. So it has destabilized North
19 Africa all the way across to Mali.

20 The other challenge are the militias who have grown up
21 in and around there, and used many of the ammunition stocks
22 for their power and influence not only internal to Libya,
23 but external to its neighbors.

24 Then the challenges have continued to grow, because of
25 ISIS and its brand of terrorism, to threaten places like

1 Tunisia. Then, of course, the destabilized and total chaos
2 in the area there has contributed to the migrant problem.

3 Senator Lee: Thank you.

4 In a long report last week from the New York Times, it
5 was made clear that then-Secretary of State Clinton and the
6 White House were persuaded to support Western intervention
7 in Libya in 2011 largely due to pressure from European and
8 Arab allies, who seemed to indicate that they would lead the
9 operations, allowing the United States to lead from behind,
10 as it was put at the time.

11 What is your assessment of the involvement of European
12 and Arab nations in Libya now, after that intervention has
13 now led to chaos and sort of Islamist insurrection?

14 General Rodriguez: I think, as the Secretary said many
15 times, I think we would all hope that many of the European
16 nations would do more in this arena.

17 Senator Lee: The United States has been supporting
18 Saudi Arabia's military initiative in Yemen now for over a
19 year -- this one is for General Austin -- sharing
20 intelligence in providing logistical support. In this time,
21 the Houthis have not been driven out and the humanitarian
22 crisis that is there seems to have been exacerbated. It
23 certainly has not been alleviated.

24 Further, terrorist groups like AQAP and ISIS affiliates
25 are able to have safe haven and gain strength, finances, and

1 weaponry in the conflict.

2 General Austin, what is your overall goal in supporting
3 the Saudis in Yemen? And would you assess the Saudis'
4 intervention in Yemen thus far as being successful?

5 General Austin: First of all, I assess that the
6 current state of play in Yemen is that they are at an
7 operational stalemate, Senator. I think both sides have
8 pushed hard against each other. Because neither one has an
9 overwhelming advantage, neither one feels the need to come
10 to the table to negotiate in earnest.

11 Having said that, I think even though I would
12 characterize it as an operational stalemate right now, I
13 think it is trending toward a coalition, a Saudi-led
14 coalition, because of some incremental gains that have been
15 made here recently.

16 Our goal is to support the coalition in their efforts
17 to reestablish the legitimate government in Yemen, and we
18 are hopeful that the coalition will be able to bring the
19 Houthis to the table and negotiate a settlement that allows
20 for this government to come back in and reestablish itself.
21 If it does that, that will enable us to work with that
22 government to do more to counter terrorist networks like
23 AQAP.

24 We will be able to do more, but that does not mean that
25 we are doing nothing right now, Senator. As you know, with

1 all the means that we have available, we are pressurizing
2 AQAP on a daily basis.

3 Senator Lee: Thank you, General.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Senator Reed: [Presiding.] On behalf of the chairman,
6 Senator King.

7 Senator King: Thank you.

8 General Austin, could you give us a quick update on the
9 status of the investigation into the allegations of
10 corruption of the intelligence analysis function in CENTCOM?

11 General Austin: Yes, sir. The investigation is
12 ongoing. The DOD IG continues his work. As I said from the
13 very beginning, the leadership at CENTCOM will do everything
14 within its power to support the efforts of the DOD IG.

15 Senator King: Do we have a date? Do we have a
16 projected date? It has been sometime since that
17 investigation.

18 General Austin: It has been, sir. I would defer to
19 the IG to provide that date.

20 Senator King: Did you stand up any kind of
21 investigation of your own of these allegations, being the
22 principal victim of them?

23 General Austin: Sir, as you know, it would be
24 inappropriate for me to do that while the DOD IG
25 investigation is ongoing.

1 Senator King: And you do not have any idea when the IG
2 will be completing their work?

3 General Austin: I do not, sir. I hope it is soon. I
4 would also tell you, as I said before, if the IG or the
5 investigation finds out or determines that there have been
6 inappropriate actions, I will take the appropriate measures
7 to address whatever the infractions were.

8 It is important to me that my intelligence analysts and
9 all of my subordinates provide me unvarnished input on a
10 routine basis.

11 Senator King: I understand that. That is why I
12 characterized you as the principal victim. If you are not
13 getting good intelligence, it compromises your ability to
14 perform your function.

15 Let me change the subject for a moment. Afghanistan,
16 the current schedule is 9,800 to 5,500 on January 1, 2017.
17 The problem as I see is to get to 5,500, you cannot just
18 turn a switch on December 31. There is going to be a
19 drawdown of some kind starting probably in late summer.

20 Are you concerned, given the heightened level of
21 Taliban activity, that we would be making a mistake by
22 embarking upon a drawdown of that nature, to get back to the
23 football analogy, if we are on the 10-yard line or the 5-
24 yard line? It concerns me that we, again, are backed into
25 being calendar-driven rather than conditions-driven.

1 General Austin: Yes, sir. The way I view this is, you
2 have to have a plan. You build that plan on the facts, and
3 you make assumptions at the time that you build that plan.

4 Senator King: You have testified to a heightened level
5 of Taliban activity and greater stress on the Afghan forces.
6 Is it not time to reassess that plan now? If we wait until
7 August or September, we are already in the midst of a
8 drawdown.

9 General Austin: Sir, that is exactly where I was
10 going. As the facts change, and as the assumptions are no
11 longer valid, then it is appropriate to go back and review
12 that plan and make adjustments, as required.

13 Senator King: Is that happening right now? Is there a
14 reassessment underway?

15 General Austin: The new commander is on the ground and
16 he is assessing things now, at all levels. We will take a
17 look at this and make the appropriate recommendations to the
18 leadership.

19 Senator King: I certainly hope that we do not find
20 ourselves in a situation where we are drawing down at a time
21 when, both in terms of personnel and authorities, we need
22 more authority to maintain the really significant gains that
23 have been achieved.

24 General Rodriguez, are al-Shabaab and Boko Haram
25 growing? Are they adding members? I know they do not hold

1 territory, but are they adding areas of influence?

2 General Rodriguez: Boko Haram does own some
3 significant territory in northern Nigeria, as does al-
4 Shabaab in limited areas of Somalia, Senator.

5 Right now, in Somalia, there has been a tactical
6 upswing in al-Shabaab activities. I think that is a
7 tactical change right now. We are doing everything we can
8 to support the troop-contributing countries, to ensure that
9 that is just a temporary change.

10 Senator King: Final question. General Austin, the
11 cessation of hostilities, would you characterize that as a
12 predecessor to peace talks or a locking in of the regime's
13 position? A cessation of hostilities in an insurgency, it
14 seems to me, always favor the regime.

15 How would you characterize where we are now? Is this
16 simply a pause? Or is this a predecessor to peace talks?
17 Or is this, as I say, locking in the regime?

18 General Austin: It is left to be seen what the outcome
19 is going to be, Senator. Clearly, the goals of the
20 cessation of hostilities would be to allow humanitarian
21 assistance to get to the disadvantaged people. That is
22 happening. That is a really good thing.

23 The other thing that we want to happen is for this to
24 lead to talks and, eventually, a better outcome. We are
25 hopeful that will happen, but that is left to be seen.

1 We can expect that there could be some incremental
2 tactical gains made by the regime and supported by the
3 Russians. But I think, long term, the Russians do not own
4 the clock. So if we reach a point where this drags out for
5 an extremely long period of time, then I think it is going
6 to play to their disadvantage.

7 Senator King: And the cessation of hostilities are
8 certainly better than the all-out war we were seeing before.

9 General Austin: Absolutely, sir.

10 Senator King: Thank you.

11 Thank you, General.

12 Senator Reed: On behalf of the chairman, Senator
13 Cotton?

14 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen, for your
15 testimony here today, and also for your long service to our
16 country, particularly to the two who may no longer have the
17 pleasure of appearing before our committee anymore.

18 General Austin, I want to take stock of Russia's
19 intervention in Syria. Last fall when Russia first
20 intervened, President Obama and several senior
21 administration officials used words like quagmire or
22 strategic blunder.

23 How would you take stock of Russia's intervention to
24 this point, given their stated objectives? Are they
25 achieving their objectives at an acceptable cost to the

1 Putin regime?

2 General Austin: Again, I cannot speak exactly to what
3 their specific objectives were, but I would tell you,
4 Senator, that my assumption would be that they wanted to
5 make a substantial difference as fast as they could and
6 transition to something else very, very quickly. They have
7 not been able to do that.

8 I think what they are finding out is that this could go
9 on for some time.

10 Senator Cotton: You say, on page 12 of your testimony,
11 "It is apparent through Russia's actions that their primary
12 objective in Syria is to bolster the Assad regime."
13 Skipping down a few lines, you say, "Assad would almost
14 certainly not be in power today were it not for the robust
15 support provided to the regime by Iran and Russia."

16 If that is one of their key objectives, is it fair to
17 say that they are meeting that objective of stabilizing the
18 Assad regime?

19 General Austin: They have certainly bolstered and
20 empowered the Assad regime, yes, sir.

21 Senator Cotton: You say further on page 13, "None of
22 Russia's military actions have helped stabilize Syria or end
23 the suffering of the Syrian people." Could you elaborate on
24 that statement?

25 General Austin: We still see thousands and thousands

1 of civilians being disadvantaged. Barrel bombs continue.
2 So their intervention has not made things better for the
3 people of Syria.

4 Senator Cotton: Can you give a rough estimate, I know
5 it will not be exact, but a rough estimate of how much of
6 Russia's airstrikes are targeting Islamic State positions
7 and personnel versus non-Islamic State positions?

8 General Austin: I would say a small percentage, sir.
9 I think, as you know, what they have said is that they
10 wanted to come in and counter terrorism or counter Daesh.
11 What we have witnessed is, in almost all cases, they have
12 gone after counter-regime forces.

13 Senator Cotton: You further note on page 13 that
14 Russia's cooperation with Iran appears to be expanding
15 beyond near-term coordination or operations in Syria and is
16 moving toward an emerging strategic partnership. Could you
17 say more about that emerging strategic partnership?

18 General Austin: It is left to be seen where this will
19 wind up, but we have seen a sort of strengthening of that
20 relationship as time has passed.

21 Russia came in, aligned itself with the regime,
22 obviously, and also Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah. What I
23 worry about is if that relationship between Syria, Russia,
24 and Iran develops further, then it will present a problem
25 for the region.

1 Senator Cotton: On page 21, you state something
2 similar there. They, Iran, "also continue to support some
3 Shia surrogate groups in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Houthis
4 in Yemen, and Lebanese Hezbollah, with a combination of
5 money, arms, and training. Iran's emerging relationship
6 with Russia further complicates the security environment as
7 they look to expand their cooperation in areas that include
8 the sale of high-end weapons." Can you say a little bit
9 more about those high-end weapons that worry you?

10 General Austin: We have seen recently the sale of
11 high-end air defense capability from Russia to Iran, and
12 that is a problem for everyone in the region. Also, coastal
13 defense cruise missiles, as that type of technology migrates
14 from Russia to Iran, it will eventually wind up in the hands
15 of Lebanese Hezbollah.

16 Senator Cotton: I am glad you raised coastal defense
17 cruise missiles, because I would like to ask both you and
18 General Rodriguez a question. The Levant in the eastern
19 Mediterranean, North Africa, all kind of sits at the seam of
20 your AOs as well as European Command.

21 But what are the implications for a long-term,
22 permanent presence with the kind of robust modernized
23 weapons that Russia has in Syria? What are the implications
24 for our sea control of the Mediterranean, for access to the
25 Suez Canal, for some of our allies in the region?

1 General Austin: There are potential threats there,
2 Senator. I think Russia has had a presence in this region,
3 as you know, for some time. I think we would have to do
4 everything we can as part of an international community to
5 put pressure on Russia to make sure that these weapons, that
6 they do not move around the region freely.

7 Senator Cotton: General Rodriguez?

8 General Rodriguez: I agree, sir. I know General
9 Breedlove does, too. We talk about this and it is important
10 for it not to get anywhere. Thank you.

11 Senator Cotton: And, General Rodriguez, if I could
12 shift topics very briefly, my final question.

13 What can you tell us about the ongoing violence in
14 Burundi, specifically the extent to which old, ethnic
15 rivalries between the Hutu and the Tutsi people are driving
16 that conflict, and the impact it could have on the Great
17 Lakes region more broadly?

18 General Rodriguez: Yes, Senator. Thank you.

19 The violence thus far is mainly political violence and
20 has not degenerated to the direct ethnic issues that you
21 talk about that have occurred, as you know, in the past. So
22 we are watching that every single day to make sure that that
23 does not grow. But most of it has been politically
24 motivated, ethnically motivated.

25 Senator Cotton: Thank you very much.

1 Senator Reed: On behalf of the chairman, Senator
2 Nelson.

3 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Gentlemen, thank you for your public service. Thank
5 you, General Austin, for your long, enduring public service.

6 We have been proud to have you as a citizen of Tampa,
7 and as with General Votel. He will continue to be a citizen
8 of Tampa for a while.

9 Let me ask you about Libya. Do we have the capability,
10 General Rodriguez, to prosecute a war in Libya against ISIS
11 while at the same time going after them in other parts of
12 the world, including Iraq and Syria?

13 General Rodriguez: Senator, I think the answer to that
14 is yes. It is a question of how much risk the Nation has to
15 take with the readiness of the forces and how much you are
16 going to commit versus how much you are going to maintain
17 the readiness, sir.

18 Senator Nelson: And, as I understand it, you all have
19 a recommendation to the White House. Obviously, you cannot
20 share that. That is internal conversation. But in your
21 status of forces, you feel that you have the capability that
22 if the President's decision is to go after ISIS and other
23 extremist elements in Libya, that we have the ability to
24 thwart those elements?

25 General Rodriguez: Yes, sir. I do, Senator.

1 Senator Nelson: Thank you.

2 Would any of you want to comment on the efforts around
3 here to cut back on your headquarters staff?

4 General Rodriguez: We have worked that hard throughout
5 the headquarters to figure out the best place to cut back.
6 That continues to move forward. We will support the efforts
7 we are required to take.

8 General Austin: We clearly want to leverage all of the
9 capabilities that exist in the entire system, Senator. We
10 want to avoid duplication of effort, wherever possible. But
11 as you look at U.S. Central Command, as you know, sir, as I
12 mentioned earlier, we are involved in four major military
13 operations simultaneously, if you include Afghanistan, Iraq,
14 Syria, Yemen, and then this current, ongoing battle against
15 terrorists in the region.

16 So it takes a fair amount of effort to maintain all of
17 that and also do things to promote stability and security
18 throughout the region as well.

19 But the effort to cut back on staff applies to
20 everyone. I fully appreciate I have to do my part. But
21 again, we also need the capability to maintain the efforts
22 that we are involved in.

23 General Austin: Senator Nelson, I would agree with the
24 comments that have already been made on that. Certainly,
25 there are opportunities here for us to simplify and

1 streamline and reduce duplication. We should always be
2 looking at that.

3 The concern that I would have at SOCOM is we did make
4 some decisions in the past year to move people from our
5 headquarters out to our theater Special Operations Command,
6 so we have recognized this in the past. We certainly should
7 continue to look at how we create more efficiencies and
8 certainly more effectiveness in how we are doing our
9 headquarters responsibilities.

10 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman McCain: [Presiding.] Senator Sullivan?

12 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 I thank the three of you for your outstanding service
14 to our country.

15 General Austin, in particular I want to thank you for
16 all you have done for the Army and America. I had the
17 opportunity to serve with you a decade ago. It was one of
18 the highlights of my military career, although I must say I
19 am a little concerned about the lack of marines sitting
20 behind you. That was a joke.

21 In all seriousness, to the staff, too, I know how much
22 they put into these kinds of testimonies. So I want to
23 thank all of you men and women sitting behind you.

24 I wanted to follow up on Senator McCain's and Senator
25 Cotton's comments on the Iranian weapon sales from Russia to

1 Iran, particularly the S-300 missile defense system. There
2 was a recent article that talked about that system, which
3 would be capable of rendering the Iranian skies inaccessible
4 for most U.S. and Israeli jets.

5 One thing that has not come up in the testimony: Is
6 that not just a blatant violation of the U.N. Security
7 Council conventional weapons ban against sales to the
8 Iranians that is still in existence, and a violation of the
9 current Iranian nuclear deal that the United States and
10 other countries signed?

11 General Austin: Senator, I do not know if it is a
12 violation of the nuclear deal. I will have to research that
13 a bit. But clearly, it is concerning to everyone. These
14 are things that will increase the amount of effort required
15 to do whatever work we need to do. We will certainly find
16 the ways and means to get the job done if required to do
17 that. But this makes it a little bit more difficult, but
18 not impossible, Senator.

19 Senator Sullivan: The three of you have decades --
20 decades -- of experience with regard to service in the U.S.
21 Army. Earlier, we were talking about a lot of focus on our
22 special operations troops. There seems to be less focus in
23 my view on our conventional Army.

24 As you know, the QDR in 2014 required the Army to get
25 down to a number of 450,000 Active Duty soldiers. I think

1 General Milley and others in the Army are looking at that as
2 bringing very high levels of risk, given the new security
3 challenges that our Nation faces, not only in CENTCOM and
4 AFRICOM AORs but really all over the world.

5 I would like your professional military opinion on that
6 number, given the increased threats that you personally see
7 in your different AORs, the transnational terrorists that
8 you are focused on.

9 General Votel, do you agree with the statements by
10 General Milley and Mr. Fanning that our Army is getting
11 dangerously small, given the current threat environment and
12 that the number of 450,000 troops in terms of Active Duty
13 Army is too high a risk, given our current threats, in your
14 professional military judgment?

15 General Votel: In my judgment, I do agree with General
16 Milley in the comments that he has made in regards to that.

17 I would just add, as I mentioned in my comments here,
18 that as the Special Operations Commander, we are
19 extraordinarily dependent on the services and the Army, in
20 particular, because of what they bring in institutional and
21 infrastructure capability that we are absolutely and 100
22 percent dependent on.

23 So I am concerned, as these reductions take place, the
24 impact that it has on us directly and indirectly.

25 Senator Sullivan: So, General, that is a great point.

1 I think there is a lot of focus in this committee that,
2 well, we do not need a big conventional force, we do not
3 need airborne troops anymore, because we have these great
4 special operators. And they are great special operators,
5 but they certainly cannot do it all in today's threat
6 environment. Is that not correct?

7 General Votel: Senator, I could not agree with you
8 more. I would not want to give anyone the impression that
9 Special Operations Command had all the capabilities it
10 needed to do the operations that we do. Literally,
11 everything we do is supported by some conventional force,
12 whether it is ISR from the Air Force, close-air support from
13 them, basing from the Army, logistics support, at-sea
14 capabilities by the Navy. So we are extraordinarily
15 dependent on all of the services to support our activities.

16 Senator Sullivan: General Rodriguez, General Austin,
17 can you comment, in your professional military judgment, on
18 what you think of the number right now, in terms of what a
19 450,000 Active Duty Army does to our Nation's security?

20 General Rodriguez: I absolutely agree with the Chief
21 of Staff of the Army that that is high-risk. That is how he
22 characterized that because of both the current operations
23 that are going on with counterterrorism, as well as the
24 threats from the four major challenges out there between
25 Korea, Iran, China, and Russia. Thank you.

1 General Austin: As you know, Senator, in a former
2 life, I was Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. I was
3 concerned about the direction that we were headed then and
4 certainly even more concerned now. I do agree with General
5 Milley's comments.

6 Senator Sullivan: That 450,000 is too small?

7 General Austin: Yes, sir. We are getting dangerously
8 small here.

9 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe?

12 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 It is hard for me to believe, General Rodriguez, that
14 it has been 9 years since AFRICOM. Before that time, of
15 course we all remember, it was part of three different coms,
16 including PACOM.

17 I also remember back during the Clinton administration,
18 I was opposed to sending troops into Bosnia. The excuse
19 that was being used at that time was because of ethnic
20 cleansing, and I recall saying on the Senate floor that for
21 every person who has been ethnically cleansed in Bosnia,
22 there have been 100 in any of the West African countries.
23 So it was something that was needed.

24 It was brought out by Senator -- I cannot remember
25 which one it was; Senator Cotton, I think it was -- about

1 Burundi, that there is a problem over there. There are a
2 lot of problems in Africa. They do not rise to the top
3 where they can see it, but the President there, in
4 Nkurunziza, is one that our State Department opposed.

5 It is my understanding, because I know him personally,
6 and I have been with him several times -- I have been to
7 Burundi. He was legitimately put into office, but it was
8 not an election. The reason that our State Department was
9 opposed to him running again was because the term limits
10 would have set in if that first term had been considered a
11 whole term. You follow me there so far.

12 Then when the courts came along, the Supreme Court in
13 Burundi, and agreed that he was entitled to run again, then
14 I think I will always believe that one of the big political
15 problems that you pointed to in answering Senator Cotton's
16 question was the fact that our State Department was very
17 active in that race. Our State Department objected to the
18 fact that he was running again, in spite of the fact that
19 their Supreme Court had made that decision.

20 Did you have any thoughts on that at the time? Were
21 you involved in that discussion?

22 General Rodriguez: I was not involved in that
23 discussion, Senator. My thoughts continue to be focused on
24 the military.

25 Senator Inhofe: I appreciate that. I wish the State

1 Department sometimes would follow that advice, too.

2 There are other problems that have been brought out
3 here. We have been talking about Libya, about Boko Haram in
4 northern Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia. Other than those,
5 and the discussion on Libya, what other areas do you see
6 taking place, really hot issues right now, in Africa, other
7 than the three I just mentioned?

8 General Rodriguez: Sir, obviously, Al Qaeda and what
9 is happening across northern Mali, and then you already
10 mentioned Burundi, but we have challenges like that in both
11 South Sudan and the Central African Republic, sir.

12 Senator Inhofe: Maybe in Zimbabwe, too, with some of
13 the problems we have down there.

14 South Sudan, that is an interesting situation there,
15 because I remember for years, South Sudan was wanting to get
16 independence from Sudan and they finally did it, and then
17 they end up in a civil war. What is the status of that
18 civil war right now?

19 General Rodriguez: Sir, that civil war continues. And
20 both the leaders are being obstructionist people to limit
21 the ability of that government to get back together again.

22 Senator Inhofe: They are supposedly right now in
23 Ethiopia, I think it is, trying to have peace talks. Do you
24 see anything really productive going on there?

25 General Rodriguez: The fact that the regional partners

1 are pressing them diplomatically to come to a solution is a
2 very, very good sign. I think that, unfortunately, that has
3 happened before and we have not seen any progress. But we
4 are hoping there will be a breakthrough this time.

5 Senator Inhofe: One last area that I have been
6 interested in for a long time. In 2005, I went up to Gulu,
7 and I had two Senators with me, Senator Boozman and Mike
8 Enzi.

9 That was the first time that the LRA had really
10 surfaced in the minds of people as to how serious that thing
11 was. Joseph Kony, while he started there, he ended up going
12 as far south as Congo and maybe even western Rwanda and then
13 up to the Central African Republic.

14 Just last week, one of his top people -- you can
15 probably pronounce it better than I can -- was done away
16 with. Over the years, we have found others of his top
17 people, Joseph Kony's, but it seems like he continues to go
18 on, even though the level of abduction and tragedies has
19 subsided quite a bit. Do you agree with that?

20 General Rodriguez: General, we continue to pursue him
21 with all means possible with our African Union Regional Task
22 Force, sir.

23 Senator Inhofe: Okay. That is all I care about.

24 General Rodriguez: Thanks.

25 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan had a couple more.

2 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 I just wanted to follow up on the chairman's opening
4 statement when he talked about the micromanagement of
5 operations.

6 As you gentlemen are more than well-aware, looking at
7 the levels of warfare -- strategic, operational, tactical --
8 and how when you go down that level, there is obviously some
9 civilian involvement, but the further down, the conventional
10 wisdom is, the less there should be civilian involvement.

11 In fact, one of the classic criticisms of the Vietnam
12 War and the conduct of that war was how it was micromanaged.
13 Pictures of President Johnson at the White House, in the
14 Oval Office, picking targets in Vietnam is often seen as a
15 symbol of the mismanagement of that war.

16 Yet let me just give you a couple quotes from some
17 articles in the paper that talk about what seems to be
18 extreme levels of micromanagement. I know the these are not
19 easy questions, but I would like to get your view on it.

20 There was a Wall Street Journal headline article last
21 year where it said the U.S. military campaign against
22 Islamist militants in Syria is being designed to allow
23 President Barack Obama to exert a high degree of personal
24 control going so far as to require that the military obtain
25 presidential sign-offs for strikes in Syrian territory.

1 Similarly, former Secretary Gates recently said, when
2 he was talking about the operational micromanagement, he
3 said it drove me nuts to have NSC staffers calling senior
4 commanders out in the field, second-guessing these
5 commanders. When I was a deputy national security adviser,
6 if I would have tried to call a field commander going around
7 the Secretary of Defense or the chairman of the Joint
8 Chiefs, I would have had my head handed to me, probably
9 personally by the President.

10 Does the White House approve targets in terms of our
11 operations in Syria? If so, is it helpful to have 20-
12 somethings with no military experience on the NSC staff
13 guessing what our commanders or second-guessing what our
14 commanders are doing in the field?

15 Does that happen? In the Wall Street Journal, it says
16 the President was going to approve military targets in
17 Syria.

18 Does that help our operational tempo? It seems like it
19 is micromanaging not even in the operational level of
20 warfare but down to the tactical, which I think most of us
21 think is a huge mistake.

22 Do you care to comment on that? I know it is not an
23 easy question, but to the extent you can be frank about that
24 and how you can see the micromanagement, it would be helpful
25 for us, in terms of our oversight capabilities.

1 General Austin: Actually, Senator, the question as to
2 whether or not the White House approves our strikes, picks
3 our targets in Syria, that is an easy answer. The answer is
4 no, that does not happen.

5 Senator Sullivan: They do not approve of strike
6 packages or targets that were focused on in Syria, in terms
7 of what we are bombing or anything like that?

8 General Austin: No, Senator. That does not happen.
9 We have a process where we generate the intelligence. It
10 goes into our target analysis, our target-generation
11 process. Then it is approved by military commanders.

12 Senator Sullivan: Related to that, when the Iranians
13 took our sailors prisoner for that time, was there any
14 involvement?

15 How did that happen, General Austin, in terms of our
16 ROEs? We had our sailors out there with 50 caliber machine
17 guns that are pretty forceful weapons. Was there any
18 involvement out there from higher political forces that
19 talked about ROEs, that, hey, we cannot return fire? How
20 did our sailors get captured by Iranian forces? Why did
21 they not return fire when they had the Iranians come upon
22 them?

23 General Austin: To answer your question as to whether
24 or not there was intervention from a higher level of the
25 White House in this particular incident, the answer is

1 absolutely not. Things unfolded fairly rapidly with these
2 young sailors. The investigation on that has just been
3 completed. It has been forwarded up through channels to be
4 reviewed by the CNO. It will take a bit more time for it to
5 be finalized.

6 But what you know has been reported, in that the
7 sailors veered off course, had a mechanical issue that they
8 stopped to address, and when they did it, they were detained
9 by Iranians.

10 In terms of specifics on what happened between the
11 Iranians and sailors, that will come out as a result of the
12 investigation.

13 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman McCain: It is interesting in these hearings,
16 General, how it matters how the question is asked. I think
17 facts are stubborn things.

18 For example, for 16 months, we did not bomb the fuel
19 trucks that ISIS was using, generating millions and millions
20 of dollars in oil revenues. Now it is a fact that it was a
21 recommendation that we hit those oil trucks. It was not
22 turned down; it was never approved. This is what is so
23 infuriating to so many of us. So for 16 months, these fuel
24 trucks went unmolested. And God knows how many millions of
25 dollars of fuel revenue was generated.

1 So 16 months later, we finally drop some leaflets and
2 told the drivers to get out of the trucks.

3 This hearing is adjourned.

4 [Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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