HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF: LTG KENNETH F.
MCKENZIE, JR., TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL
COMMAND; AND LTG RICHARD D. CLARKE TO BE GENERAL AND
COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31 a.m. in
Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James M.
Inhofe, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Members Present: Senators Inhofe [presiding], Wicker,
Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Cruz, Kyl, Reed, Nelson,
Shaheen, Gillibrand, Hirono, Kaine, Heinrich, Warren, and
Peters.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Chairman Inhofe: Our meeting will come to order. The committee meets today to consider the nominations of the -- General Frank McKenzie to be Commander of the Central Command, and Lieutenant General Richard Clarke to be the Commander of the Special Operations Command.

Of course, we appreciate very much the -- your many years of service, and we'll expect that, when you are recognized for your opening statements, that you recognize your family that is a very important part of where you -- of your being here today.

We do have some required questions. And I'd ask you to answer these questions so that -- audibly, so we'd be able to hear your response.

First one: Have you adhered to the applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: All right. Do you agree, when asked, to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the administration in power?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: Have you assumed any duties or undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the outcome of the confirmation process?
[Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you. Prompting does help.

[Laughter.]

Chairman Inhofe: Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established for requested communications, including questions for the record in hearings?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: Be witness to -- will those witnesses be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: And do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify, upon request, before this committee?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

Chairman Inhofe: And, lastly, do you agree to provide documents, including copies of electronic forms of communications, in a timely manner, when requested by a duly constituted committee, or to consult with the committee regarding the basis of any good-faith delay or denial in providing such documents?

[Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]
Chairman Inhofe: Okay. Well, thank you both for your decades of service to our country. We appreciate the great work that you have done.

The committee recently held a hearing to discuss the findings of the National Defense Strategy Commission. Their report says, "The Commission assesses, unequivocally, that the NDS is not adequately resourced." It's clear we must provide sufficient, sustainable, and predictable funding to make the NDS a reality. During the hearing, Ambassador Edelman highlighted the bipartisan conclusions reached by this Commission.

By the way, this Commission report -- have both of you read this Commission report?

General McKenzie: Yes, sir.

General Clarke: I have.

Chairman Inhofe: It's one of the best reports I've -- in my years of experience, I've heard, and put together in a -- it tells a lot of the hard truths you don't like to talk about, what our condition is today, what we need to -- how we need to improve it.

General McKenzie, the NDS Commission reported -- report noted that the National Defense Strategy talks are about accepting more risk in the Middle East, but was vague on where that risk might be taken; for example, in the fight against ISIS, or containing Iran, or in Afghanistan. Look
forward to your views on what accepting more risk in the Middle East might look like.

General Clarke, if confirmed, you will be responsible for ensuring our Special Operations Forces are trained, equipped, and ready to implement the NDS and confront threats across the spectrum.

So, appreciate your being here today. We are going to be interested, particularly, in your comments on our peer competition in both -- in and the threats that we are -- face today.

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

Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
And I'd like to join you in welcoming the nominees.

Thank you both for your willingness to serve in positions of great responsibility in the Department of Defense, and would also like to thank your family members, who, like all military families, sacrifice so much for the security of our Nation. So, thank you all.

And I would also note, with a heavy heart, the loss of the U.S. Fifth Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Scott Stearney over the weekend, on -- I think I share the feelings of all of our colleagues as I extend our condolences to his family, friends, and all who knew him.

General McKenzie and General Clarke, if confirmed, you will lead combatant commands at the forefront of protecting our national security. As noted by the National Defense Strategy, or the NDS, as the Chairman has indicated, the long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department and require both increased and sustained investment. The NDS goes on to say, "The Department will sustain its efforts to deter and counter rogue regimes such as North Korea and Iran, defeat terrorist threats to the United States, and consolidate our gains in Iraq and Afghanistan while moving to a more
resource-sustainable approach."

The guidance contained in the NDS is likely to result in significant changes to the commands you have been asked to lead. With respect to U.S. Central Command, CENTCOM, the NDS forecasts reduced force structure and more efficient utilization of what remains. Managing the implementation of those changes and any impact they may have on our ability to carry out counterterrorism operations, deter Iran, and reassure our allies and partners will be significant considerations for CENTCOM in the coming years.

With respect to U.S. Special Operations Command, SOCOM, the focus of the NDS raises questions about the role of Special Operations Forces in the competition with potential near-peer adversaries. Given that Special Operations Forces have been heavily committed to the fight against violent extremist groups since 9/11, SOCOM will necessarily have to evaluate whether its current capabilities are appropriately match the operations its forces will be asked to conduct in the future. Additionally, given the already high operational tempo on Special Operations Forces, SOCOM will need to be careful that any additional responsibilities do not overstress the force.

I hope both of our nominees will discuss the expected impact of the NDS on the commands they have been nominated to lead, and how any challenges can be mitigated in
Last week, as the Chairman noted, we held a hearing with the National Defense Strategy Commission to discuss their views of the NDS. The Commission's report states that there is a, quote, "relative imbalance in civilian and military voices on critical issues of strategy development and implementation." It goes on to state that civilian voices were relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy, undermining the concept of civilian control. When I read the Commission's report, I was struck by these observations and the consequences that such an imbalance could have on the development of defense policy, the impact it could have on the civilian and military personnel serving in the Department, and how it may shape the advice provided to the President. As senior members of the Joint Staff, I hope both of our nominees would share their thoughts on the Commission's findings and how their experience with civilian policymakers would shape their leadership of CENTCOM and SOCOM, respectively.

On this point, the committee focused attention in recent years on strengthening the partnership between the SOCOM Commander and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, or the ASD-SOLIC. In particular, Section 922 of the National Defense
Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 enhanced the role of ASD-SOLIC to serve as a Service Secretary-like official responsible for oversight of, and advocacy for, Special Operations Forces. General Clarke, I look forward to hearing your views on the implementation of these reforms and how the ASD-SOLIC/SOCOM partnership can be further strengthened.

Again, thank you very much for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

We'll now hear from our witnesses. And we'll start with you, General McKenzie. And your entire statement will be made a part of the record, so you can abbreviate where you so desire.

Senator -- or, General McKenzie.
STATEMENT OF LTG KENNETH F. McKENZIE, JR., NOMINEE TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

General McKenzie: Good morning, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee. It's an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Commander of United States Central Command. I am humbled by President Trump, Secretary Mattis, and Chairman Dunford's faith in me, and grateful for that trust. If confirmed, I look forward to continue serving our Nation alongside the dedicated, disciplined, and honorable men and women of the United States Central Command.

I'd like to introduce the committee to my wife, Marilyn, who has been my best friend and partner in all our years of service. While I've received much of the credit and attention, Marilyn has quietly, but resolutely, supported not only me, but the men and women of the joint force in all our varied assignments. I'm very proud of her, and thankful for her service and steady presence in my life.

I'd also like to introduce my son, Kenneth Ray McKenzie, who graduated from the Naval Academy with the Class of 2007 and has served two tours of duty in Afghanistan as a Marine infantry officer. He's now employed in the railroad business in Alabama. Also here is his wife, Kristin, and my sister, Andrea. Safely tucked away with a friend are our two grandsons, ages 3 and 5, whom I have, I
1 think wisely, chosen not to inflict on the committee today.
2
3 I'd like to talk just a moment about the officer seated
4 next to me. In my opinion, the President could not have
5 nominated anyone better to be the next SOCOM Commander than
6 Lieutenant General Rich Clarke. He is an exceptionally
7 talented, morally grounded, and strategically-minded
8 officer. And if we're confirmed, I look forward to the
9 opportunity to continue to march alongside him in Tampa and
10 across the theater.
11
12 I would also like to pay a brief tribute to General Joe
13 Votel, the current Central Command Commander. I believe he
14 is one of the finest generals the U.S. Army has ever
15 produced. Our Nation is safer and stronger because of his
16 selfless service.
17
18 As this committee is aware, the 20 countries that make
19 up the U.S. CENTCOM area of responsibility are as richly
20 diverse and unique as any in the world. They also present a
21 set of vexing challenges. We have vital strategic interests
22 in the Central Command area of responsibility, and we're
23 going to need to stay engaged to address these issues.
24
25 Under General Votel, Central Command has fostered
26 outstanding relationships across its area of responsibility,
27 with myriad senior civilian and military leaders, including
28 those from Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, and across
29 Central Asia. He has also worked tirelessly with our
Department of State, the Agency for International Development, and a host of other government and nongovernment organizations. I pledge to continue that interaction. The work of our colleagues in the Department of State is critical, and, if confirmed, supporting them will be a very high priority for me, personally. And interaction with allies and partners across the region will also be a matter of great importance. I hope to lead a new generation of CENTCOM professionals to carry on the work of General Votel and those leaders who came before him in meeting these challenges.

CENTCOM remains a dangerous theater of war, and we have seen the costs as recently as last week. I am certainly mindful of the burden we have borne in the past and that, unfortunately, we will continue to bear.

I would also like to mention the death of my friend, Vice Admiral Scott Stearney, the Fifth Fleet Commander, over the weekend in Bahrain. He will be missed.

I vow to this committee that I will faithfully pursue the policies and orders of the President and the Secretary of Defense within the authorities you have provided combatant commanders, and, moreover, that I will be open and transparent with you and the rest of Congress.

Thank you for considering me, and I look forward to answering your questions.
[The advance questions from General McKenzie follow:]
Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, General McKenzie.

General Clarke.
STATEMENT OF LTG RICHARD D. CLARKE, NOMINEE TO BE
GENERAL AND COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

General Clarke: Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today regarding my nomination to be the next Commander of the United States Special Operations Command. I am grateful to the President, Secretary Mattis, and Chairman Dunford for the trust and confidence in this nomination.

Serving our Nation has been the greatest privilege of my life, and I come before you, grateful and humble, to be considered for the opportunity to continue to serve with the thousands of dedicated soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians in the Special Operations Command that have been, and remain, on the front lines around the world to keep our Nation safe.

I'm honored to share this table with my friend and fellow Joint Staff member, a marine for whom I have the greatest respect due to his intellect, his knowledge of the region, and as a leader to applies commonsense touch to every problem. There is none better than Frank McKenzie to assume the U.S. CENTCOM mantle. And, if confirmed, our preexisting relationship and shared mutual respect will benefit the fight we have against terrorism specifically in the CENTCOM AOR.
In the audience is my wife and soulmate of almost 30 years, Suzanne, my bedrock and my best friend since we first met in Berlin American High School, and who has been tremendously supportive of countless Army families during numerous deployments. She is accompanied by our son, Will, a senior in high school. Our daughter, Madeleine, is a college junior in Boston and is unable to join us as she gets ready to close out this semester at Tufts University.

Suzanne and I are fortunate products of proud Army families that instilled the values of duty, honor, country upon us from the earliest age. While Suzanne's mom and dad could not be here today, we are grateful for the attendance of my parents, Dick and Gail Clarke, and thankful for both of our fathers' service as career Army officers, to include combat in Vietnam and in the Korean conflict.

I would like to thank General Tony Thomas for his leadership and example, not only as Commander of SOCOM for 3 years, but throughout his storied career. It is an honor to be considered by this committee to follow in his footsteps.

Most importantly, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the fallen and their families who have made the ultimate sacrifice for this Nation. The human toll hits close to home and serves as a close reminder of the considered responsibility of this position, as four of our recent fallen were all SOCOM warriors.
For the past 31 years, your Special Operations Forces provided critical capabilities and options for challenging problems to the Department and our Nation as a result, in large measure, to the prescient leadership of this Congress with the enactment of the Nunn-Cohen Amendment.

Our world continues to evolve and increase in complexity. While violent extremism persists, challenging regional stability and threatening our interests, near-peer competitors grow in both capability and intent to contest our vital national interests. The United States requires capabilities across all elements of national power, and Special Operations remains a critical part of our defense.

If confirmed by this committee, I pledge to work tirelessly, with your support, to continue to provide our Nation with the world's most capable, agile, and lethal Special Operations Forces the world has known.

Thank you again, Chairman, Ranking Member, and those on the committee, for your consideration.

[The advance questions from General Clarke follow:]
Chairman Inhofe: Well, thank both of you.

Let's -- we're going to be confronted with some difficult decisions. I'd -- to kind of set the stage for it, in 2010, the budget was 700-and -- if we use constant dollars, let's say 2018 dollars -- 2010, the budget was at $794 billion. In 2015, using the same constant dollars, it was down to 586. Now, that's a drop of 200-and- -- well, actually, 24 percent's the best way to look at that. So, that's where we found ourselves. And so, consequently, we made a decision, for fiscal years '18, to go up to 700 billion; fiscal year '19, up to 716 billion. And the strategy -- or the agreement, I should say -- both of you have read that Commission report, and you remember, in that report, they talked about the necessity of increasing the -- a minimum increase of 3 to 5 percent over inflation. Now, that's what everyone agreed on, that's what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed on, that's what the Secretary agreed on.

Now, when the President came out with the original budget, it was $733 billion for the fiscal year '20. Well, if you do the math on this thing, and you go from 716 to 733, the increase is 2.1 percent, which is actually below the amount that they are -- that everyone has been prescribing and saying it's going to be necessary to meet the competition. It's a different competition than we've
ever had before, at least in my opinion. I would like to
ask both of you to comment on that, and if you consider the
-- in light of that, the 733 to be a floor, as opposed to a
ceiling. What do you think, General?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for the question.
The 733 figure was arrived at by the Department
carefully looking at the requirements of the National
Defense Strategy. It reflects our best projection of a
strategy-informed budget. We recognize that there could
have been a higher number. As you said, the 3 to 5 percent.
But, we also recognize that the Department exists within a
larger government, and puts and trades there are just a
natural part of the process. Anything below 733 would
increase risk, and that risk would be manifested across the
force. We are in the process now of very carefully across
the Department examining the details of what the nature of
that risk would be, who would it be imposed upon, and the
nature of it.

Chairman Inhofe: Good. Good.

General Clarke?

General Clarke: Senator, I associate myself with
General McKenzie's remarks and would state that the
"sustained and predictable," but then the key is the
"adequate" funding that is required by the Department. And
once looked upon, and if confirmed for SOCOM, I'd have to
look at specifically what that means to SOCOM's budget and
where that risk would be assumed, whether it's in readiness,
whether or not it is in technologies required, or whether it
is in what we're doing forward.

Chairman Inhofe: Good. And I appreciate that.

In my opening statement, we talked about our peer
competitors, Russia and China. And it's difficult, for
those of us on this side of the table, when we're talking to
groups outside of government, to explain to them that, in
some cases, both China and Russia have things that we don't
have. I have a long list of things, including statements on
our artillery. We are outgunned, outranged. And so, we
have problems now that we -- I don't think we had before.
And now, from SOCOM's perspective, what's the best way, you
think, to confront these problems that we have not
experienced before?

General Clarke: Senator, you talked about the things
we don't have --

Chairman Inhofe: Yeah.

General Clarke: -- what I would qualify is the things
that we do have that Russia and China don't have. We do
have some asymmetric advantages that we have, you know,
looked at. And you've -- you're familiar with our Joint
Military Net Assessment. The other thing that we have,
Senator, that those two countries don't have is allies and
partners. And our position around the world, specifically with SOCOM with our Special Operations that are forward, do provide us that advantage.

Chairman Inhofe: Yeah. That's good.

And, General McKenzie, there's been a lot of talk about the S-400 and the threat to the United States and the coalition force in Syria. What's your thought about that, evaluating that and how much of a threat that does pose?

General McKenzie: Senator, the S-400, if -- once activated, will increase the threat to our forces and those of our coalition partners flying over Syria. There will be a manifest difference in the capabilities of the system, though, depending on whether it's manned by the Syrians or the Russians. And we're still working to figure out how that's actually going to be executed.

Chairman Inhofe: Yeah, thank you.

Senator Reed.

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

As I mentioned in my opening statement, the National Defense Commission talked about the private civilian leadership in terms of the interaction with the military. And we talked about this before, previously. But, for the record, just your reaction to those comments. There are several possibilities. One, they could be noting the
absence of civilian leadership -- i.e., not enough people
have really been confirmed yet, or nominated -- or they're
not involved in some way, shape, or form, or there is a gap,
a cultural gap, between civilians and the military that's
growing. So, I -- General McKenzie, if you start, then
General Clarke.

General McKenzie: Senator, I believe that, in the
Department of Defense, final decisions are made by
civilians, final policy recommendations are made by
civilians. It's informed by a robust dialogue between the
military and the civilians, but -- and, when it's all said
and done, the Secretary makes the final decision. And
probably the last person in the room is going to be his
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, The Honorable John
Rood. I would argue, just from my observation, that much of
this may stem from a -- the slowness of filling appointed
positions within the Department early on. I do not believe
this reflects a structural or a cultural problem, but,
rather, a temporary problem that, I believe, if it existed,
it has largely been corrected.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

General Clarke, please.

General Clarke: Senator, I concur with General
McKenzie's comments.

The thing that I would add on top is -- I work closely
with Secretary Rood on a daily basis, and I don't believe this exists, but you stated, in your opening, about SOCOM -- in specific, the SOLIC -- aspect of the -- ASD-SOLIC be given control, direction, and authority over SOCOM. I welcome that. I think the advocacy for SOCOM and having that civilian leadership -- I clearly understand the military/civilian bounds, and will work closely and directly with ASD West, if confirmed.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

And again, let me address this question to both of you, because it involves both your commands, and that's the situation in Afghanistan, which is becoming more complicated, and it was -- always was complicated, but, again, we've lost several servicemembers this week. General Dunford said, up in the Halifax Conference, that we were in a stalemate. How is that stalemate going to affect our operations? I'll start with General McKenzie and then ask General Clarke. And, in addition, with Ambassador Khalilzad on the ground, what role will he play? That will be one your principal missions, General McKenzie.

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. I believe that the operational military situation is largely stalemated, so I agree with the Chairman in his assessment of what's happening on the ground. I believe, however, that what is changed and what is new are the efforts of Ambassador
Khalilzad. That is a new element in the equation that we have not had before, working to actually try to form -- to come to some form of reconciliation and a political end state to the conflict that we've been unable to approach before. There are multiple lines of effort that are working. The military effort, which is stalemated, is one of them. The diplomatic line of effort is alive and being vigorously pursued now by he and other actors in the region.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

And, General Clarke, in particular, since most outcomes still remaining on the battleground field are terrorist elements -- in fact, there is a number of them; I think, a long, long list -- so that Special Operations would be concerned, going forward, with these threats even if there was some political settlement in another dimension. So, could you comment?

General Clarke: Senator, you hit the nail on the head. The al Qaeda presence that remains in the AFPAK region, and the ISIS presence that is there currently, pose direct threats to the homeland. That's -- and that's where the SOCOM and the task force that is in Afghanistan continues to support General Miller's efforts.

The other piece in the Afghan strategy that I would highlight is the effort to realign our forces with doubled the amount of Afghan commandos to be able to help with the
strategy to put the pressure on the Taliban. And I think that effort is bearing fruit, and SOCOM will remain in direct support of General Miller and General McKenzie, you know, throughout this effort.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Mr. Chairman, I must recognize General Clarke's father, because, without his tutelage, I would never have survived plebe swimming at West Point. And so, I owe you a lot.

Thank you, sir.

Thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Duly noted. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Wicker.

Senator Wicker: General McKenzie, let me just follow up with Senator Reed's questions. How significant is it that the Afghan government formerly controlled 72 percent of the geographic area of Afghanistan, and now controls only 56 percent of the country?

General McKenzie: Senator, it's concerning, but it's not a critical factor. They have chosen to defend areas where the population exists, which has been a tradeoff in giving up more sparsely populated areas. You'd always prefer to control more, but, in a practical military sense, it does reflect most of the country is under their control.

Senator Wicker: So, a lot of these new areas are sparsely populated.
General McKenzie: Many of them are, sir. It -- again, I would note that you'd prefer to eventually control more than what we have now, but that's a -- I would agree with that.

Senator Wicker: Okay. And you mentioned Ambassador Khalilzad's efforts. We're certainly optimistic about that, and we think he -- at least from my standpoint, I think he knows the issues, he knows the people, and I think we'll be well-served there.

What would letting up on military pressure do to his diplomatic efforts, at this point?

General McKenzie: Sir, we believe that it is important to convince the Taliban, even as we are in a stalemate, so they are in a stalemate, and they will be unable to find a path to victory on the battlefield by the actions of the forces on the ground. So, therefore, it is critical to maintain unrelenting pressure on the Taliban so that they see the virtue of actually choosing to deal with the diplomatic approach, which Ambassador Khalilzad embodies.

Senator Wicker: Now, let's differentiate the parties there. How large would you say the Taliban is, in terms of manpower, in Afghanistan?

General McKenzie: Sir, I would say it -- 20,000 or more. It depends on who you choose to do the counting. A substantial group of people on the ground.
Senator Wicker: And --

General McKenzie: They're not a monolithic mass, and it's important to understand that, also.

Senator Wicker: So, they're different -- there are different opinions and different loyalties within the Taliban.

General McKenzie: Sir, there are.

Senator Wicker: And then, in terms of counterterrorism, we are fighting ISIS, al Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. Tell us about them, the size and strength of those organizations.

General McKenzie: Sir, ISIS is a fairly small organization, hundreds to thousands, probably low thousands, in eastern Afghanistan. They pose a direct threat to the United States by aspiration. However, right now, they're severely constricted, both by our operations, and the Taliban has put pressure on ISIS-K, as well. Al Qaeda, much smaller, but with good global interconnections. They also maintain a long-term aspirational goal to attack the West; and the United States, in particular. What keeps them from being able to do that is the direct pressure that's maintained on them every day by the CT forces in the region, assisted by the ecosystem that is part of the Afghan army and the Afghan government. So, that's an important part of the pressure that we place on them, as well.
Senator Wicker: Now, to what extent do our military and diplomatic leaders -- are they able to assess public opinion in Afghanistan about our involvement?

General McKenzie: Sir, I believe the Department of State monitors that through a variety of polling mechanisms. They look at it pretty hard. They have the lead for that element of the campaign.

Senator Wicker: Okay. They have the lead for it, but what is your impression? Are the -- do the Afghan people wish we would leave, or they -- are they happy that we're there? And do they support our effort to fight these terrorist organizations and bring the Taliban to the table?

General McKenzie: Senator, I believe the Afghan people are weary of war. I think they're a proud people, and, in general, they prefer to not have occupation forces, as some of them would view it, in their country. But, they also recognize the brutality of the Taliban regime. The Taliban enjoys fairly -- very low, actually, polling numbers with the Afghan public. People remember what it was like, back in 2000 and 2001, and Afghanistan was not a good place for women, for -- and for a variety of other elements of the Afghan population. People clearly remember that. As with any kind of nation, they're -- the data is complex, but there's no agreed -- for example, Afghans don't all want us to leave. Elements of the population do, but a lot of
Afghans don't want the Taliban to remain -- to come back and reassert themselves, either.

Senator Wicker: They remember those days prior to 9/11, do not want them to return.

General McKenzie: Sir, that is very clear in the data.

Senator Wicker: Now -- so, what do we say to the families of the 13 American servicemen who have been killed in Afghanistan this year, or the 1,000 Afghan forces that have been killed in Afghanistan this year?

General McKenzie: Sir, what we are doing is, we are protecting the homeland of the United States from being attacked. That's what you say to the Americans, and that's a clear, visible, tangible effort that we can honor them for. For the Afghans who have died, it's an attempt to come to a long, peaceful political settlement in their country, and I think that, too, is an honorable goal. I think Afghans and Americans who have died in action in Afghanistan have all been pursuing an honorable and reasonable objective.

Senator Wicker: Is the Afghan military in better shape from top to bottom than it's been in recent years?

General McKenzie: I think it's in better shape. It has a long way to go. I believe it is in better shape.

Senator Wicker: Thank you.

Well, good wishes to you. Thank you for your service.
Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for your willingness to consider taking on these assignments at this critical time in our country.

I want to go, General McKenzie, to another hotspot in the Middle East: Syria. I appreciated your meeting with me last week, and I think, at that time, I raised the concerns that I had, based on my visit there this summer, that we have made significant gains in the northeast section of Syria, and have beaten back ISIS, and life is returning to normal for the people who live there; and am concerned about the fact that, right now, there is a hold on the stabilization funds for that part of Syria. So, can you talk about how we can continue to maintain the gains that we have there without the stabilization money?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. Eventually, to maintain our gains, we're going to have to adequately resource what follows, which is local security under civilian control, generally speaking, east of the Euphrates River. That's going to require monetary assistance. If it comes from this country -- it can come from this country, it could also come, I think, from partners in the region who need to step up to the plate, because the problems in Syria
are all actually closer to them than they are to us. So, I think the -- but, your point is exactly right, the long-term solution has to be a stability solution, it has to be local, and it has to be appropriately resourced. And that remains a challenge.

Senator Shaheen: I agree with you wholeheartedly. One of the things that we have heard from the administration is that they support "the enduring defeat of ISIS." What does that look like to you in the Middle East? What does that mean, "the enduring defeat of ISIS"?

General McKenzie: Sir, the -- Senator, the enduring defeat of ISIS is not going to be the absence of ISIS. ISIS, if defeated in the lower Euphrates River Valley, is going to transition to an insurgency, and there are going to be continued attacks from ISIS and derivatives of ISIS, both in the region and, really, globally. But, our goal would be that those attacks typically would be of an intensity and a scope where they've be able to be contained by local forces that would not necessarily require our assistance. It's getting to that point. But, I want to emphasize that it won't be -- for a while, it won't be pretty, it won't be silent, there will be pockets that are going to continue to crop up.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

General Clarke, one of the things that we heard from
the Commission report on the NDS from Ambassador Edelman was
that he question the NDS's suggestion that we can -- we are
at a point where we can take risk, in the Middle East, of
terrorist attacks in order to address the major-power
conflict that we're facing again. Can you talk about how
SOCOM should balance those two challenges?

General Clarke: Yes, Senator. The first thing that
the NDS allows us to do -- and I think it's important -- is
relook our strategies, and look -- relook what we're doing,
and prioritize. So, we still have to maintain the
counterterrorism pressure on those that are most likely and
-- and are inspired and want to attack in our homeland. So,
we have to keep that pressure up. But, at the same time,
Special Operations Command is uniquely qualified, with its
experienced operators, which -- with the maturity of the
force, and with the relationships that we have established
around the globe with many of our partners through our
theater Special Operations Commands that exist inside each
combatant commander to be able to give a global look, and to
look at allies and partners who -- those great powers,
specifically Russia and China, that, through our actions, we
can counter some of their malign activities.

Senator Shaheen: And would you agree with the
conclusion that the Commission drew that right now we've got
to do more if we're going to be proactive about addressing
the gray-zone issues with Russia and China, and also some of
the cyber threats?

General Clarke: Senator, I do. And one of the key
aspects of the National Defense Strategy is expanding the
competitive space. Secretary Mattis is clear on that. And
I do believe that SOCOM, as I stated earlier, about the
capabilities that exist within the Command, allow us to
expand that competitive space, going forward. And, if
confirmed, I assure the committee that I will, you know,
personally look into this. And there is a committee report
from SOCOM, through ASD-SOLIC, that is due to this committee
in the springtime, and I will make sure I --

Senator Shaheen: Ah. Good.

General Clarke: -- pay attention to that report.

Senator Shaheen: Good. Thank you.

Also, I'm out of time, but can you just briefly address
the additional challenges that you see SOCOM facing with the
-- taking on the responsibility for WMD?

General Clarke: Senator, the weapons-of-mass-
destruction mission that was given to SOCOM 2 years ago
didn't come with no resources. It came with almost 100
personnel positions from STRATCOM. But, the same approach
that SOCOM takes to countering the violent extremist
organization, which has -- it has a global responsibility --
can still be applied to the weapons-of-mass-destruction
mission. It's the appropriate mission for SOCOM. I know
General Thomas has taken it on wholeheartedly, and, if
confirmed, I will do the same.

Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you, again.

Thank you both. And thank you for taking time to meet
with me.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

General Clarke, in your answers to Senator Shaheen --
you and I had discussed the same issue -- when we see a
focus now on great-power competition with Russia and with
China, what does that do for your forces? You know, I've
been told, for many years, that there are heavy demands on
SOCOM, and the demand far exceeds the supply that we have.
You seem to be saying that working with partners and allies
is going to pick up even more of that extra demand that
we're going to be facing. Did I understand you correctly?

General Clarke: Senator, I think working with allies
and partners is a critical component to this. I would also
state that we're already working with allies and partners in
most places through our theater Special Operations Command.

Senator Fischer: Where do you think the focus needs to
be for the resources that you would have, then? And, in
many cases, they may be limited resources that you're going to have. Where is it -- where is the investment going to be? Where do -- what are you going to prioritize with the revenues that you receive?

General Clarke: Senator, the -- I believe the most important aspect of SOCOM are the people, and the people that are performing the mission, wherever it is, whether it's counterterrorism, countering terrorism in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or whether they are inside the theater Special Operations Commands; for example, inside the European Command, where they are working with our allies and partners. They're conducting training with Special Operations Forces from nations that are all -- within NATO and within Russia's near abroad.

Senator Fischer: Would you be asking for increased numbers of personnel?

General Clarke: Senator, right now, I believe that the personnel within SOCOM are adequate. I think -- if confirmed by this committee, I will take a -- I will take a very hard look, myself, at how this applies to great-power competition. But, one thing that I would highlight is that we should look at all missions across the globe, as the Secretary has reprioritized with the NDS, and that Special Operations Command should only do those missions that are suited for Special Operations Command. And those missions
that can be adjusted to conventional forces should also go
to -- should go to those conventional forces. And so, we
have to look at a prioritization of requirements.

Senator Fischer: The missions that would be more
suited to your command, would those be counterterrorism
rather than great-power?

General Clarke: Senator, I do believe there are some
unique capabilities within the Special Operations Command.
I didn't talk about the specifics, but things like the
Military Information Support Operations is one aspect, civil
affairs, that -- and our military information support
professionals that exist within the theater Special
Operations Commands, some are actually stationed in
embassies around the world in support of the Chief of
Mission at those embassies. Those help build a network.
So, no, I'm not advocating for additional resources at this
time, but I am looking for -- make sure that this -- that
the people are prioritized in the right places.

Senator Fischer: And I would say I would certainly
support any resources that you would need to complete the
missions you are given, sir.

General Clarke: Thank you.

Senator Fischer: General McKenzie, according to the
GAO's October report on Afghanistan security, the Afghan
National Defense and Security Forces have improved some
fundamental capabilities, such as high-level operational
planning, but they continue to rely on the United States and
coalition support to fill several key capability gaps.
Where do you believe the biggest shortfalls remain, in terms
of the security forces' ability to conduct its missions?
And how do you believe the United States should work to make
the Afghan forces more sufficient -- self-sufficient? I
know we -- in your followup, here, to Senator Wicker, when
we were talking about the losses that we suffer as a country
when we lose brave military men and women, the Afghan
soldiers and police, just last year alone, lost more than
the total that we've seen in the American death toll in 17
years. How can we more effectively support them?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. I think one of
the most important things that we can help the Afghans with
is continuing to refine their force-generation process --
how they recruit, how they train, and how they present
forces for actual execution. As you noted, their losses
have been very high. They're fighting hard, but their
losses are not going to be sustainable unless we correct
this problem. And I know that it has General Miller's
direct attention. And, if confirmed, it would be something
that I would like to work with him on as a matter of great
importance.

The other part of your question talks about the
capabilities that we provide them actually in the field, and they range from close air support, which they are now beginning to generate, themselves, but we still assist them with, with intelligence, with CASEVAC, when -- under certain situations, and all the maintenance activities that go into putting a large, complex army in the field. These are all areas where additional work needs to be done. These are areas that are being addressed by General Miller today in the theater.

Senator Fischer: Thank you both. And thank you both for visiting with me prior to this hearing. I look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Senator Peters.

Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, gentlemen, thank you for your testimony today, and also for your willingness to take on some very difficult jobs. So, we all appreciate that.

General McKenzie, I want to follow up on some of my colleagues' questions related to the National Defense Strategy that we had presented to us last week. And I want to read a portion of that report that I think is particularly significant, and I quote, "While the United States was focused on counterterrorism and defeating
insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and China were focused on acquiring capabilities to overcome America's technological edge and operational reach. As a result, America has been losing its military advantage in a number of key warfighting areas," is the quote, which I think is significant, and one that -- certainty one that is very significant to the work that this committee does and the work that you do each and every day.

The report goes on to suggest that Congress needs to invest in new capabilities and operational concepts. And that leads to my concern about Afghanistan, where we are still spending $45 billion a year in Afghanistan. And, given the focus of the new National Defense Strategy, my question to you, sir, is, If confirmed, how will you adjust the requested requirements for Afghanistan, given the strategy's focus on great-power competition?

General McKenzie: Sir, I'd like to begin by completely agreeing with the NDS Commission's assessment. In fact, over the last decade and a half, and even longer, our two principal competitors, Russia and China, have carefully studied us while we've been engaged in the -- principally, in the CENTCOM theater. They have used that opportunity to steal a march, and they have made those investments based on a very careful study of our potential weaknesses. So, I think it's a very good analysis.
Senator, I think the way forward in Afghanistan is to try to reach a political settlement that is going to allow us to remove elements of our presence that are there now. The key thing, though, that we need to bear in mind as we look at a future in Afghanistan is, our long-term interest is preventing attacks being generated against the homeland, so we have to provide for that in any potential future political settlement. And that is what we're looking to Ambassador Khalilzad to work on right now. I believe that does present a long-term way forward, and I think we're going to know more about it, here, in the near future.

Senator Peters: Now, we've been hearing about this as -- well, as long as I've in Congress, I've been hearing about the need for the political settlement and having Department of State involved. So, this isn't a new strategy, at least in terms of what I've been hearing over many years. And the other thing that I've heard, and I think I heard it again here today from you as well, is the necessary capability requirements for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Ultimately, they have to be able to stand up and defend their country. That's going to be also critical to get a political settlement, is to have security forces in Afghanistan, with Afghan people defending themselves.

So, my question to you directly is, How far are the
Afghan Security Forces from having the capability to secure
their country without the presence of 15,000 United States
soldiers and marines and airmen?

General McKenzie: Senator, I'll reply equally
directly. They're not there yet. And if we left
precipitously right now, I do not believe they would be able
to successfully defend their country. I think it's a
conditions-based approach. We're going to go through this
winter. We'll see how they do in the force-generation phase
of this winter. But, I don't know how long it's going to
take. I think that one of the things that would actually
provide the most damaging to them would be if we put a
timeline on it and we said we're going out at a certain
point in time. As we've seen when we precipitously withdrew
from Iraq earlier, certain effects probably follow from
that.

Senator, I don't know how long it will take. I do know
that we're working it very hard. I do know they are making
improvements. I do know that, today, it would be very
difficult for them to survive without our and our coalition
partners' assistance. And we should remember that NATO and
a number of other nations are with us on the ground in
Afghanistan.

Senator Peters: Yeah. And I'm not asking you to put a
number on when we would withdraw. And I agree, you cannot
put just a time out there to say that we're going to be pulling out. You want to make sure that the Afghan forces have the capability to stand up and do the work on their own. But, we've been at it for 17 years. Seventeen years is a long time. What are we doing differently when it comes to the Afghan Security Forces that we haven't done for 17 years while being focused on this?

General McKenzie: Senator, I understand your frustration. I've been there twice. My son's been there twice. I would say two things. First, we are doing things significantly different with the Afghan Security Forces. They are doing the fighting. Americans are still at risk. And, as we saw, tragically, last week, Americans are still going to go in harm's way, and some of them may die. But, we are no longer doing the fighting. They are doing the fighting. They're doing it imperfectly, but they are doing it, with our assistance in those niche capabilities that we talked about a little before. So, that is actually a new thing.

The other thing, Senator, that is new -- and I completely understand your reference that we've been pursuing a diplomatic solution for 17 years, not in the manner in which we are now, not with an empowered envoy that is actually talking directly to the Taliban, where we have the opportunity to bring them together. Senator, I believe
this is a new thing. And I may be wrong, but I believe this
is a new opportunity for us, and the military campaign is in
direct support of that.

Senator Peters: Thank you.
Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Peters.
Senator Cotton.

Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen, for your
appearance today and for your willingness to continue to
serve our country in new positions. Thanks, to your
families, for loaning you to our country for so long.

General Clarke, let's speak about SOCOM's budget. In a
time of tight budgets, when some in the administration are
already talking about cutting 5 percent from the Department
of Defense budget, many people say, "But, that's okay,
because the Special Operations Command, which is bearing so
much of the fight, will be fully funded." Can you talk
about your dependence on the rest of the conventional
military and how our Special Operations Forces fight with
them, and why stable, predictable, and increasing funding
for those conventional forces is so important for the
Special Operations Command?

General Clarke: Senator, thanks. There are five
Special Operations truths. The fifth truth of that is, most
Special Operations require non-Special Operations Force
assistance. I believe in that, that truth. And we see it
apparent every day in the operations in which Special
Operations conduct, especially for longer-term, enduring
missions, where Special Operations -- we need the support of
the services in all of those, and the conventional force.

The other aspect I think I'd be remiss if I didn't
highlight is that Special Operations Command is made up of
the services. Much of the recruitment, much of the force is
actually started in conventional force and actually came up
through the ranks, and they were identified as some of the
best of breed in that particular service in which they
served, and then they rose -- they raised their hand and
volunteered for the Special Operations. So, the services
are inherently important to SOCOM.

Senator Cotton: Thank you.

General McKenzie, there's already been a lot of talk
this morning about the implications of the National Defense
Strategy, both for Central Command and for Special
Operations Command and its focus on near-peer or peer
competition, what it means for the Middle East, which --
where we've primarily fought counterinsurgency wars over the
last 15 years. But, obviously, there is one power in the
Middle East that has the resources and the power of a
nation-state: Iran. It's not a peer competitor, or even a
near-peer competitor, but it does have the abilities that
only a nation-state can marshal to threaten U.S. interests.
Can you talk about what the National Defense Strategy means for you in Central Command relative to the threat of Iran?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. The long-term, enduring, most significant threat in the U.S. CENTCOM AOR is Iran and Iran's malign, hegemonistic ambitions across the theater and, indeed, globally. I mean, that's clearly recognized in the NDS. It's -- where there are five principal threats to the Nation that are identified in the National Defense Strategy, Iran is one of those. It is below the threats of Russia, which can destroy us, and China, which can seriously injure us, but Iran also has that capability, and they're exploiting their malign views every day in the theater. So, how the Central Command AOR, or the Central Command, will be forced to deal with those is, first of all, recognize that there is going to be a force repurpose, to some degree, in Central Command. We've already begun to see elements of that as we talk about how often carriers come into the Central Command AOR. It's going to require the Command to adopt innovative new techniques to maintain deterrence against Iran, because that is sort of the underpinning of everything else that will go on in the theater, is the ability to deter Iran and respond, if required to.

Senator Cotton: If Iran's leadership were to
miscalculate and to challenge a U.S. Navy vessel in the
Persian Gulf or, say, close the Strait of Hormuz, do you
have any doubt that the United States military is postured
in the Central Command area of responsibility to meet that
challenge?

General McKenzie: Senator, I'm confident we can
respond. And what -- I would also caveat it a little bit.
The element of risk would be the time it would take us to
reassert ourselves. And we can do it very quickly, or it
might be a little bit later. But, when it's all said and
done, we're going to -- we will reassert the status quo ante
bellum.

Senator Cotton: While we're talking about Iran, can we
talk about what's happening in Yemen, and the extent to
which Iran is supporting the Houthi forces in Yemen, and the
implications for U.S. security and our partner security
there?

General McKenzie: Sir, when we talk about Yemen, I
think it's important to remember that Iran is behind the
irresponsible behavior that actually led to the overthrow of
the Government of Yemen, and actually created the situation
that we now have in Yemen, itself. So, Iran has been
extraordinarily irresponsible as a nation in what they've
done in Yemen, and that has had a large factor in driving
the conflict forward.
Senator Cotton: Ballistic missiles are being launched from Houthi-controlled territory into Saudi Arabia, to include in the vicinity of Saudi Arabia's International Airport in Riyadh, where Americans fly in and out of every day. I'm not aware of ballistic missile manufacturing companies in Yemen. Are you?

General McKenzie: Sir, I'm not. We are confident that those missiles come from another place. They're smuggled in. They're typically assembled there, with Iranian assistance, and then they're employed by the Houthis, both against the Kingdom as well as against UAE and, as you know, also, irresponsibly, into the Babel Mander area and into the Red Sea, where vital oil transport occurs.

Senator Cotton: My time is expired. Thank you again, gentlemen.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks, to the witnesses. Congratulation on the nominations. Look forward to working together with you, should you be confirmed.

General McKenzie, I want to start off talking about Afghanistan, as many have. One of the recent deaths in Afghanistan was a Virginian Army captain, Andrew Ross, who has family in both Lexington and Richmond, very beloved
individual, and we feel that very deeply, his death.

You've been asked a number of questions. I just want
to ask this. The stalemate's disappointing. And I was in
Halifax, as well, when General Dunford talked about the
stalemate. But, it's one thing to have a stalemate with
14,000 American troops there, it's another thing to have a
stalemate with 100,000. We're down, from a peak of 100,000,
to 14,000, and it seems to be that that's about the number
that's required right now to provide the ancillary support
to enable the Afghans to have this fight. Are you aware of
any plans by this administration to significantly, in the
near or medium term, change that number of U.S. troops in
Afghanistan?

General McKenzie: Senator, I'm not aware of any plans.

Senator Kaine: Okay. Thank you for that.

Let me ask you about Syria, General McKenzie. How do
you -- how do you define -- how do you understand the U.S.
military mission in Syria?

General McKenzie: Senator, the U.S. military mission
in Syria is designed to finish ISIS -- the physical
caliphate of ISIS off in the lower Euphrates River Valley.
That is the principal objective of our operations in Syria.

Senator Kaine: Principal objective. One of the things
that I've been confused on the committee is that that is
always stated as either the objective or the principal
objective. There is a sort of a good-faith debate in this committee and elsewhere about whether the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force covers that objective, but many scholars believe that it does. But, we also occasionally read or hear, at committee meetings like this, figures from the administration articulate additional objectives, where the legal rationale is not, frankly, even covered by the 2001 authorization. So, for example, the United States has taken action against the Syrian government, twice launching missile strikes against the Syrian government in response to use of chemical weapons, but it's also undertaken military action against the Syrian government when the Syrian government has made gains against the Free Syrian Army in space where ISIS is not that much of a factor. Do you understand the mission in Syria, the American mission in Syria, to include pushing back or attempting to topple the Syrian government?

General McKenzie: Sir, I do not believe the mission in Syria includes that objective.

Senator Kaine: It has often been stated, both by Cabinet Secretaries, especially Secretary of State, that part of the mission in Syria is to provide a check against Iran. Do you understand that as a reason for American military presence in Syria?

General McKenzie: Senator, that may possibly be a
derived effect of our presence on the ground. That is not a mission that the -- that we are undertaking.

Senator Kaine: Is Iran in -- working in tandem with ISIS, as far as you know?

General McKenzie: Iran is certainly not doing a lot against ISIS. They're pursuing other objectives there. They are intermittently working against ISIS, but not as consistently as, for example, we are.

Senator Kaine: Iran is backing up the Syrian government. Is the Syrian government working against ISIS, or indifferent to ISIS?

General McKenzie: I think they're work -- I think they have -- pretty much consider the ISIS threat over. They're turning to crush the last remnants of opposition against the Assad government now, Senator.

Senator Kaine: We often hear it stated, in press and even in this hearing, that part of the U.S. military presence in Syria is to provide a check against Russian influence. Is that your understanding as an objective of U.S. military presence in Syria?

General McKenzie: It is not. Again, it may be a derived observed effect. It is clearly not an objective of our presence in Syria.

Senator Kaine: The last thing I want to do is just say a word about the debate we're currently having about Yemen,
to follow up a little bit on Senator Cotton's questions.

And this is just sort of a statement to share with you. I think one of the reasons that this body is considering, on the floor, a declaration that we are not involved in -- that we are not to be considered or take military actions for the Saudis in the Yemeni civil war -- one of the reasons we're having a debate is sort of a credibility issue, including credibility of what we've been told by the military. We have had military leaders look at the Senate and say that we are not involved in hostilities to support either side in the Yemeni civil war. And when we've pointed out that the U.S. is refueling Saudi jets on the way to bombing runs in Yemen, we're told that that's not assisting in the hostilities. The War Powers Resolution in 1973 defines "hostilities" to include aiding allies in moving troops into hostilities. But, we've had military leadership look us in the face and tell us that refueling Saudi jets on the way to bombing runs is not hostilities. Many of the bombs that have killed civilians in Yemen are made in the United States and either provided to Saudi Arabia via military sales or from U.S. companies. But, again, we're told the U.S. is not involved in hostilities.

I think one of the reasons that we're having this debate on the matter that's pending before the Senate right now is, we don't like being told -- and we're proxies for
the American public -- we don't like being told we're not involved in hostilities, when bombs are falling that are made in the United States and when U.S. jets are involved in refueling Saudi bombing runs into Yemen. We -- we're insulted by that. I think we just need to be candid about what we're doing and not doing.

And I'm not asking for a response for either of you from this, but I'm just saying one of the reasons we're having this debate, I'm convinced right now, is because we've been told some things from the administration and from military leadership in the last months that we find, frankly, incredible, and we don't find that to be believable.

And so, the debate will clarify, as a matter of policy from the Article 1 branch that's supposed to the declarer of war, military action, especially against a nation -- this will be a clarifying debate, and I think it's one that we need to have.

And, with that, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Inhofe: Oh. Thank you -- let's see -- thank you, Senator Kaine.

Senator Rounds.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Generals Clarke and General McKenzie, I want to thank you both, and your families, for your decades of service to
our Nation.

General Clarke, there's been considerable discussion on
the stress of the Special Operations Force after 17 years of
continuous operations, and the doubling of the force during
that same timeframe. Can you discuss, from your
perspective, the difference in the quality of individual
special operators in 2001 and now, and the challenges the
Command faces in maintaining that quality? And what do you
need from Congress, proactively, to make certain that
special operator quality remains unmatched in the face of
operational requirements, which we all know will not be
reduced?

General Clarke: Senator, thanks for that question, and
thanks for your support.

The quality of Special Operations since 2001, I think,
has actually increased. The experience that our Special
Operations operators have gained throughout the world in the
activities in which they have participated have made them
better and have made them stronger. And I still stick with
that the quality is more important than the quantity, one of
the SOF truths. And so, as we look at that quality, the
standards have not changed. We have not, you know, lowered
standards within SOCOM in any of the specialties that
support, and they all have their own individual standards
which they have to meet.
I was -- and the other piece I would highlight for the committee is, as we -- as you -- you specifically mentioned stress on the force. And, as the Secretary has stated, first line of effort is, build a more lethal and agile force -- adaptive force. And that -- a lot of that goes to readiness and the readiness of the force that we have. The Secretary has given guidance to the Department, in terms of having a 2-to-1 dwell ratio. So, for every month deployed, a Special Operations, you know, warrior has to be back home for 2 months to reset. So, that 3 months would be -- equate to 9. I think those things, as we look at our force, are crucial.

And, as far as what Congress can do and what this committee can do, I think it's the sustainable, predictable funding for SOCOM that allow it to have the special programs that it does have and the SOF-unique equipment that has been recognized by this committee as crucial to our mission.

Senator Rounds: Thank you.

General Clarke -- or, I'm sorry, General McKenzie, you come into CENTCOM during a time in which there is clearly a discussion here within the Senate with regards to the role that we would play in Yemen. Most recently, and I think the discussion was here in which you didn't get an opportunity to respond with your thoughts concerning the role that this country plays in the activity in Yemen today. I'd like,
from your perspective, based upon what's going on there
today, your thoughts about the need to either support the
efforts there to come to a peaceful resolution and what the
role of our Nation should be in trying to bring all of the
different sides to the negotiating tables, and the critical
need, at this juncture, to maintain a steady course. Could
you talk a little bit about the role that you see right now,
from a policy perspective, with regard to the activities in
Yemen?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for the question.

When I -- when we look at Yemen, there are really two
things we look at. And the most thing remains the ability
to apply direct CT pressure to al Qaeda on the Arabian
Peninsula and to ISIS on the Arabian Peninsula. We should
all remember that, before 2001, an attack against a U.S.
warship initiated by AQAP down in Aden was actually one of
the early attacks of this long war that we're in now. So,
they have an aspiration to attack the United States. They
are prevented from generating that only because of the
direct pressure that remains on them. So, that is a clear,
unequivocal national interest of the United States.

Senator, I believe that the best solution in Yemen
would be a negotiated solution that we're, hopefully,
beginning to, maybe, see the leading edge of now with Martin
Griffin and other members of the United Nations that are
attempting to bring parties to a cease-fire that will allow
for the distribution of food, and which -- and the Houthis
bear a large measure of that blame for not distributing that
food -- but an attempt to get to a situation where the large
fraction, almost two-thirds, of the population of Yemen that
is at food risk now can be appropriately addressed. I think
that is an important thing. I believe our ability to
participate and drive those discussions require that we
remain in contact with both UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi
Arabia.

Senator Rounds: Thank you.

My time is expired. Thank you both for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

Senator Warren.

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, General McKenzie and General Clarke, for
being here today.

So, I want to go back to Yemen. It -- for over 3
years, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition warplanes, refueled
and armed with missiles by the United States, have been
bombing Yemeni territory to counter Iranian-backed militias
as part of a dangerous proxy war between Saudi Arabia and
Iran. And this week, the Senate advanced a resolution that
would, if it became law, cut off all U.S. support for Saudi-
led coalition's bombing campaign in Yemen. So, I just want
to make sure that we're all clear about what's going on. I
think it would be helpful for the American people to
understand how we have directly contributed to the situation
in Yemen since March of 2015. And we seem to have had some
challenges in getting this on the record.

So, let me start here. General McKenzie, we provide
both intelligence support and military advice to the Saudis
for targeting Houthi and Saleh-aligned forces in Yemen. Is
that correct?

General McKenzie: Senator, it is, with the important
exception that the intelligence we're providing them is not
target-level intelligence --

Senator Warren: Well, it is intelligence. So, I just
want to make sure I've got this. Are you saying that we
provide intelligence support and military advice? Is that
right?

General McKenzie: That is correct.

Senator Warren: Okay. And, until November 11th of
this year, we've refueled Saudi-led coalition strike air
force that bombed these targets in Yemen. Is that right?

General McKenzie: Senator, that is correct.

Senator Warren: And Saudi aircraft routinely drop both
guided and unguided bombs, some of which are sold by U.S.
defense contractors, drop them on these targets in Yemen.
Is that correct?

General McKenzie: Senator, that's correct.

Senator Warren: So, we've got intelligence, we've got refueling, we've got bombs, we've got military advice. You know, you and I talked yesterday about our military relationship with Saudi Arabia, and I know that you think that continuing the campaign in Yemen is in our interest, but I respectfully disagree on this. Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Millions of people are on the brink of starvation. It is the worst cholera outbreak in modern history. Thousands of civilians have been killed, thousands more wounded. Children have starved to death. Neither side is winning this proxy war. And the Yemeni people are suffering. I think it is time to reevaluate our relationship with Saudi Arabia, in light of its actions not only in Yemen, but with the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. And we need to ask ourselves if the benefits of this relationship with Saudi Arabia is worth the costs if this kind of behavior continues. And that's why I cosponsored this bipartisan resolution that would stop our involvement in Saudi military operations in Yemen unless Congress provides specific authorization for it.

So, I want to ask about one other area while I have time, and that is the nuclear deal between the United States and five partner nations and Iran that placed Iran's nuclear
program under limits and inspections that -- so that it
could not develop a nuclear weapon. So far, this deal has
worked, and Iran's compliance has been verified repeatedly
by international inspectors, but President Trump has put
this deal at risk when he unilaterally withdrew the United
States and imposed all sanctions on Iran that were meant to
be suspended as a condition of Iran's compliance with the
agreement.

Now, the Director of National Intelligence Worldwide
Threat Assessment from this year said, in part, that the
Iran deal has, quote, "extended the amount of time Iran
would need to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon
from a few months to about one year, and," quote, "has
enhanced the transparency of Iran's nuclear activities."

General McKenzie, do you agree with the intelligence
community's assessment?

General McKenzie: Senator, I do agree with the
assessment.

Senator Warren: And, aside from the current nuclear
agreement, at this time are you aware of any alternative
binding diplomatic agreement that would prevent Iran from
developing a nuclear weapon?

General McKenzie: Senator, I'm not.

Senator Warren: And, since the Trump administration
violated the nuclear deal by unilaterally withdrawing from
it and reimposing sanctions, has the Iranian government significantly reduced its destabilizing activities?

General McKenzie: Iranian destabilizing activities across the region were active before, during, and after the JCPOA.

Senator Warren: Okay. So, on effect. You know, there's no other binding diplomatic agreement to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, and we know that Iran's government is a bad actor, but I think it's easier to counter Iran's destabilizing behavior if it has no nuclear weapon than it would be if it did have nuclear weapons. If Iran maintains itself in compliance, then I believe the President should reverse his reckless decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions, because the deal makes America safer and makes the world safer.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Warner.

Senator Ernst.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And, gentlemen, thank you very much for your years of service to our wonderful, great United States of America. I want to thank your families, as well, for being here today. We understand how important they are to your success, as well. So, thank you very much.

We understand that SOCOM and CENTCOM have been really
centrist in our fight against terrorism in the last 17 years. And now that we see the National Defense Strategy rightly prioritizing the great-power competition with adversaries like China and Russia, we still have to understand that there continues the fight -- the counterterrorism fight and the fight against VEOs in the CENTCOM region. So, as my position as the Subcommittee Chair on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, I do look forward to continuing to work with you in focusing on the Middle East so that we can put as much pressure on those organizations as possible. So, thank you for the great work in that area.

Senator Reed, I know that, earlier, you said, as we focus on families, that Mr. Clarke had been very helpful to you. I want to acknowledge. Were you in ROC swimming?

Senator Reed: I -- yes, I was in ROC swimming, and barely graduated because of that, but --

[Laughter.]

Senator Reed: -- I know your daughter is probably the best swimmer in her class.

Senator Ernst: Well, she is a swimmer. I won't say the best swimmer. But, because we do focus very heavily on our families, and especially with SOF, it is very important that we focus on all aspects of our special operators, whether it is their training and qualifications, the family
support. It is very important.

And, General Clarke, you brought up the SOF truths that exist out there. There are five of them. One of them is that Special Operations cannot be mass produced, either. And on Friday, I had the honor of attending Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado, where I had the great honor of securing the latest Hell Week Class with the newest buds there, as well as speaking to the SQT, the SEAL Qualification Training, course before they pinned on their tridents. These young men really have spent months and months, if not years, enduring some of the toughest physical and mental challenges known to our fighting men and women. And we want to do all that we can to support them.

This has been discussed earlier, but the pool of qualified folks that are able to go into Special Operations is very small. And you acknowledged that they come from all service branches. So, what can we do to further recruit and retain the best of the best, knowing that we do need these elite special fighters?

General Clarke: Senator, one of the most important things we do is work through the services for that. And it's critical that the services also have the tools and means. And a lot of that is funding. This is -- as the Secretary said last week, and this is not just an all-voluntary force, but this is also a recruited force for our
Nation, and we have to -- we have opened up, as you well
know, Special Operations Forces across all genders. We want
the best of the people who have the physical, the
intellectual, and the desire to serve in our Special
Operations community to be able to serve in our Special
Operations community.

And then, specifically, some of the things that this
committee has done is provide the tools and the resources
for SOF to be able to take care of its servicemembers and
families; specifically, the preservation of the Force and
Family --

Senator Ernst: Thank you. Thank you.

General Clarke: -- Program and the warrior care that
is given to our SOCOM operators as a SOF-specific piece,
because our operators have to work in the shadows, they have
to work in places that are sensitive, things that they can't
talk about. And to have a program that is specific to their
needs of them, that are on the front lines, but them as
their families who are waiting for them to come home, this
has been a critical part for our Special Operations Command.

And thank this committee for that.

Senator Ernst: Yes. And thank you. And thank you for
acknowledging POTFF. That's where I was going to drive
next, because POTFF is an incredible combination of support
for our warriors as well as for our families, which, again,
I want to acknowledge are so very important to the men that serve in your organization, as well as women. But, I was able to also, while I was at Coronado, spend some time with their POTFF team, and visiting with their psychologist. And I think it's incredible that we are actually able to embed our psychologists with our various teams of operators across the force, and understanding that we not only need to make sure that they are physically and spiritually ready, but also mentally capable to drive on to their next mission.

So, thank you so much.

Again, gentlemen, thank you for your years of service.

And, to your families, God bless you for the great support that you give.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both. It's good to see both of you again.

Aloha.

This is a -- these are two questions that I ask of every nominee who comes before any of the five committees on which I sit. It's part of my responsibility to ensure the fitness of nominees for appointments to senior positions, positions of power within the administration. So, I'd like to ask each of you the following two questions:
I’ll start with you, General McKenzie. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

General McKenzie: Never, Senator.

Senator Hirono: General Clarke?

General Clarke: Never, Senator.

Senator Hirono: Second question. Have you ever placed discipline or entered into a settlement relating to this kind of conduct?

General McKenzie: I have not, Senator.

General Clarke: No, I have not, Senator.

Senator Hirono: Thank you.

General McKenzie, I am concerned that there is not enough effort being put to our diplomatic regions in the CENTCOM region. And I brought this up in our discussion earlier, when we met. The fact that we do not have an Ambassador to Egypt or Pakistan, and just recently nominated an Ambassador, Saudi Arabia, suggests that the administration hasn't taken all of the steps it should to support diplomacy in the region. Will you support fully staffing the diplomatic missions in the region, and work with them to increase regional stability?

General McKenzie: Senator, I will.

Senator Hirono: That means lending your voice to the
fact that we need to fill these positions.

You mentioned in your testimony, General McKenzie, that we are in a military stalemate in Afghanistan. And, in fact, that’s also acknowledged by Chairman Dunford. And the only path to peace in Afghanistan is a diplomatic path. And, General McKenzie, in your response to questions from this committee, you said that there is a role for Pakistan in reaching this kind of settlement. So, why did you say that? Are there any indications that Pakistan wishes to play that kind of a role with regard to Afghanistan?

General McKenzie: Senator, I do believe that any solution in Afghanistan is going to require the assistance of Pakistan. It has to be a regional solution, not just a solution centered in Afghanistan. It is in Pakistan’s long-term interests to have a government in Afghanistan that is stable, that is going to -- that they can do business with. So, I think Pakistan has not shown indications, by and large over the last few years, of being a serious partner in this regard. Ambassador Khalilzad is meeting with the Pakistanis very soon to see if we can find some way forward. It will be hard to reach a settlement without some form of assistance from Pakistan.

Senator Hirono: And you say that Pakistan has still not acknowledged that it has a potential major role to play.

General McKenzie: Senator, I believe Pakistan knows
very clearly that their assistance will be required to reach an end state in Afghanistan. I think the task that we have is to make it attractive to them so that they see that it is in their best interest to do that.

Senator Hirono: And I think when you use the words like "attractive to them," that means that they will want something from us in return for playing any kind of a positive role in bringing about a reconciliation, which, by the way, reconciliation in Afghanistan means that the Taliban will have a role to play -- a major role to play in the further governance of Afghanistan. Is that correct?

General McKenzie: Senator, I believe that it does. And, if I could, just very briefly, I'd like to correct an earlier remark. I noted the size of the Taliban in Afghanistan at being 20,000. I believe -- would actually say it's around 60,000, vice that earlier number.

Senator Hirono: General McKenzie, you were asked some questions about the nuclear deal that the United States entered into with other nations. And you said, today, that Iran has not ceased or cut back on its malign activities in the Middle East before, during, or after the nuclear deal. The nuclear deal did not have anything to do with stopping Iran from these kinds of activities in the Middle East, correct?

General McKenzie: Sir, that -- Senator, that is
correct.

Senator Hirono: So, why do you think the President used Iran's malign activities in the Middle East as a reason for unilaterally pulling out of the nuclear deal?

General McKenzie: Senator, I can't speculate --

Senator Hirono: I think that's called --

General McKenzie: -- on that.

Senator Hirono: -- a rhetorical question.

Let me get to you, Lieutenant -- General Clarke -- excuse me. How many personnel are there in SOCOM?

General Clarke: Senator, there's 70,000 --

Senator Hirono: 70,000.

General Clarke: -- personnel.

Senator Hirono: And you testified today that SOCOM should only be involved in those missions suited for SOCOM, and that missions suited for conventional forces should remain or go to the conventional forces. Is this kind of delineation clear within the Department of Defense? And is that reflected in what SOCOM does?

General Clarke: Senator, I -- the Secretary has been very clear in those lines, that SOCOM should be specific to SOCOM missions. So, I don't think there's any issue of delineation within the Department of Defense for that.

Senator Hirono: Well, this is because we -- of our understanding that SOCOM has been deployed often, to the
point where there is major stress on SOCOM. And I think you
mentioned that there are attempts underfoot to -- ongoing, I
should say, to relieve the stress on the deployments of
SOCOM. So, is that because of the understanding that the
delineation for what SOCOM should be doing and what our
conventional forces should be doing really needs to be
adhered to?

General Clarke: Senator, with the publishing of the
National Defense Strategy and relooking the prioritization
of the force, it's given us a very good opportunity to
relook all of our deployments, look where the forces are, to
make sure that SOCOM forces are, in fact, dedicated to the
missions that are most important and are specific to Special
Operations Forces.

Senator Hirono: Thank you.

Thank you both for you your responses to our questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Senator Kyl.

Senator Kyl: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I join my colleagues in thanking both of you,
gentlemen, for your willingness to continue to serve our
country, and also join those who have noted the families and
the sacrifices that they make. I join in that thanks, as
well.
There's been a great deal of discussion here today about the new National Defense Strategy and the Commission report on that strategy. I had the good fortune of both serving as a member of that Commission to the time that we finished our deliberations and then, having gotten appointed to the Senate, now am in a position to try to do something about it. One of things is to help bring attention to what the strategy and the Commission's report about that strategy really require. I'd like to just make a comment and then get your reaction.

Everybody has noted the fact that the new Defense Strategy, the Secretary is -- has dramatically reprioritized U.S. interest, putting the potential threat from China and Russia at the top of the list, and then relegating the threats from countries like Iran and North Korea and the terrorist threats to a subsidiary level. And that's in contrast to what we have been doing over the last 8 to 10 years.

What the Commission has noted is that that reprioritization has certain consequences. And one of the consequences is what we spend our money on. The money will need to be spent on being able to defeat, and therefore -- and this is, of course, the key -- deterring Russia and China from ever seeking to have conflict with us. That
means that we're going to have to -- instead of putting our first available dollars into readiness to support wornout troops and equipment that's been used in the Middle East, for example, we're going to have to put the first dollars into long-term, expensive research and development and acquisition projects to take advantage of a lot of new technology, and to try to blunt some of the new technology that these peer adversaries have been developing against us. This has to do with hypersonics, directed energy, and space, and all of those things that require some new ways of conducting war. It requires some continuing work and greater dedication to the modernization of our nuclear deterrent. Unfortunately, some bills are coming due all at the same time, not only the life extension of the nuclear weapons and the rebuilding of the laboratory complexes, but also three -- all three parts of our triad wearing out and, therefore, having to be redeveloped and deployed at the same time -- the air leg, the missile leg, and the submarine leg. And it has been noted as costing upwards of a trillion dollars over 30 years, but that still represents, at its peak, maybe six-point-two or -three percent of the defense budget. We're going to have to position -- take advantage of allies, and assist them, position ourselves as close as we can get to potential areas of conflict. We're going to have to have more sea and air transport, because the new
strategy calls for having to move things around in the event of a conflict. We don't have enough now to be able to have everything we need, in every theater, against every potential enemy. So, we'd have to reposition forces from Europe to Southeast Asia, for example. Now, we also noted -- the Commission noted that the forces in Southeast Asia are not necessarily the ones you would want to fight a land war in Europe; likewise, the land-war-in-Europe forces are not necessarily the ones that would be best to be sending to a potential area of conflict with the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, though we'll do our best to do all of that with the capability we have, we understand that there will be risks that will have to be taken, where those risks will, unfortunately, fall right into your lap, because they deal with the threats you have to deal with all of time.

And I just wanted to ask you if you understand that that is the strategy that is being suggested, here, and do you understand the risks to that strategy that the Commission has notified -- has reported on, and to tell us just a little bit about your thoughts on it. I know, General Clarke, for example, you said, "Well, we need sustainable and predictable funding," and that's exactly what the Commission said we needed, in addition to more of the top line above 3 to 5 percent above inflation. So, your thoughts on all of that.
General McKenzie: Senator, I'll begin, then turn it over to Rich, here.

I was the J-5 in a prior life. Rich relieved me in that job. So, I was present at the creation. I'm intimately familiar with the NDS, and I am -- in fact, fully embrace the principles that it has. I recognize that, in my AOR, in particular, if confirmed, that there would be increased risk. We're going to have to be prepared to shift forces. But, I think the answer to that, Senator, just to just select one thing to briefly talk about, would be that we have to examine all problems globally. And we have a thought process in mind that would allow us to rapidly shift forces across the globe to respond. And that dynamic force employment is what we know that term -- the term of art we use inside the Joint Staff. But, because those margins that you've described have grown so narrow, there are no longer purely regional solutions to anything. Every solution, even a regional one, has to have a global component.

And I'll pause there.

General Clarke: Senator, the -- as the current J-5, having relieved the gentleman sitting next to me, also am familiar with the National Defense Strategy. The central idea, also, of the National Defense Strategy is to compete, deter, and win. And I think that competition aspect, so that we compete and we're able to deter so we don't have to
fight that fight, it does go to the readiness of the force. And I'd -- and it does go to the technologies that are required to be able to deter our enemies. And I think that is a balance that we have to look at. It's going to be up to the Secretary to determine where those risks and puts or takes are, going forward, but it's something we are very familiar with, and support the National Defense Strategy.

Senator Kyl: General, I would just conclude, the Commission concluded that the strategy could be a very effective strategy if adequately resourced. And that's the caveat that we attached to it.

I thank you, again, very much for your testimony.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Kyl.

Senator Cruz.

Senator Cruz: Gentlemen, welcome. Thank you for your service.

Let's start by talking about Iran. General McKenzie, could you give your thoughts as to the short-term and long-term threat posed by Iran?

General McKenzie: Senator, the most significant long- and short-term threat in the Central Command theater is Iran and Iran's ambitions, both in the theater and also, to a degree, globally.

Senator Cruz: How do you assess the impact of the President's decision pulling out of the Iranian nuclear
deal?

General McKenzie: Sir, as we spoke just a few moments ago, I would say that Iran's malign behavior in the theater hasn't abated from before, during, or after the nuclear deal, in the other domains that -- which I see, which is their development of ballistic missiles, their activities both in Syria and in Yemen and in other nations across the AOR.

Senator Cruz: So, let's take those once piece at a time. In terms of ballistic missiles, what are we seeing? What's their capability? And what is the threat of those ballistic missiles?

General McKenzie: They -- you know, Iran has chosen to substitute ballistic missiles, both short- and medium- and long-range, for their paucity of aviation assets. So, they have an aggressive developmental program going forward that would include an aspiration to develop an ICBM.

Senator Cruz: And how close do you assess they are to having an ICBM that could hit the continental United States?

General McKenzie: Well, they're testing, and we watch their space launch vehicle with great interest, because, as we've seen in other places around the world, that is technology that is easily transferred from a space-launch vehicle to an ICBM of significant range.

Senator Cruz: And what would be the national security
threat posed to the United States if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons?

General McKenzie: Should Iran acquire nuclear weapons, I think that there -- they're been inimically opposed to us for years. You would always -- and so, you can only speculate what they might do with those weapons. But, I can't imagine that anything good would proceed from Iran possessing a weapon of great striking power and ability to destroy.

Senator Cruz: How would it impact the region if Iran were to become a nuclear power?

General McKenzie: Senator, I believe it would be destabilizing in the region if Iran procured nuclear weapons. It would possibly lead to other nations pursuing nuclear weapons. It would lead to the worst of all outcomes for us, which would be widespread proliferation of those weapons across the theater.

Senator Cruz: And describe for this committee Iran's conduct in terms of spreading and fomenting and funding terror.

General McKenzie: Senator, we see it active in Yemen. Actually, the humanitarian tragedy that we confront in Yemen is the child of Iranian ambitions in Yemen and their support for the Houthis in trying to create a Hezbollah-like state there. So, that proceeds directly from them. We see
the same activities in Syria, as well, where they are
actively supported in -- actively participating and
supporting the government of Bashar al Assad and all that
proceeds from that and the terror that he has inflicted on
his own people. Just to cite two examples, Senator.

Senator Cruz: And what's been the state of the Iranian
economy following our withdrawal from the nuclear deal?

General McKenzie: Pressure remains on the Iranian
economy. As you know, Senator, it's hard to see there. And
we look, but it's hard to know. But, I believe there is
pressure on the Iranian economy. It remains to be seen if
they're going to be able to work with other countries that
will seek to circumvent some of the sanctions that are on
them. Don't know the answer to that. And I'm probably not
the best person to describe that. But, I believe there is
pressure on the Iranian economy.

Senator Cruz: But, even with that pressure on the
economy, have you seen any indications of their scaling back
their terror activity, funding of Hezbollah, and other --
and Houthis and other terrorists?

General McKenzie: I've seen nothing appreciable
change, Senator.

Senator Cruz: What's your assessment -- we saw,
earlier this year, significant protests against the
Ayatollah and the mullahs. What's your assessment of the
degree of unrest and dissatisfaction among the Iranian
people with the regime?

General McKenzie: Senator, it's an authoritarian
regime that responds very harshly. And so, I haven't seen
anything. And I'd defer to the intelligence community for a
better look at that, but I haven't seen anything that I
would characterize as spreading or, essentially, threatening
the fundamental nature of the Iranian regime.

Senator Cruz: Now, we've certainly seen, in the past,
that Iran has a long history of making promises and then
breaking those promises. What do you see as the likelihood
that they either have initiated or will initiate again a
nuclear program, working to develop nuclear weapons?

General McKenzie: Senator, I think we should watch
very closely -- we should watch very closely -- that
possibility.

Senator Cruz: Gentlemen, thank you both for your
service.

General McKenzie: Sure.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Cruz.

Senator Nelson.

Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, that was a very good dialogue with
Senator Cruz. I commend you for your quick and sharp
responses.
Given the fact that the U.S.-supported coalition has really routed ISIS in Syria, in Iraq, what's next? And weave your answer in with, not necessarily just ISIS, but al Qaeda and other groups in the areas, such as Yemen, anyplace that there is chaos, some of the regions of North Africa, the Horn of Africa, et cetera.

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for that question.

I would say this. We are seeing the fruits of the military campaign in Iraq, where a government is in the process of seating itself, where we're now prepared to move forward to true building-partner-capacity activities with the Government of Iraq, going forward. So, we're seeing the fruits of some success there. I don't want to oversell it, because ISIS is still active in pockets in Iraq, but Iraq security -- Iraqi security forces are generally proving effective at squashing them when they appear. And, as I've noted earlier, I believe that the long-term success for ISIS is not going to be the complete disappearance of the entity, but, rather, the ability of local security forces to be able to deal with a problem when it does arise. So, that's in Iraq.

Senator, in Syria, I think that we are very close to finishing the physical destruction of the caliphate. The same thing will obtain. They will transition to a
counterinsurgency, more activity will be needed. I think the solution in Syria that we would like to see would be a politically-informed solution, where all parties have a seat at the table. And we'll see how that goes forward. But, the military component of that is coming to a -- very near to an end. I wouldn't want to put a timeline on it, but it's coming close.

Senator, very briefly, the last thing I'll just talk about is Yemen, where we maintain unrelenting pressure on both ISIS in the Arabian Peninsula as well as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, because al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is actually the last entity to successfully generate an attack against the United States, back in 2009, the Christmas Day bomber. So, we need to keep unrelenting pressure on them. In that area, Iran is not helpful at all. They fomented and began the war that now exists -- the civil war that now exists in Yemen that adds immense suffering to that part of the world and is -- it is a definite factor as we pursue operations against ISIS. So, if I were to pull back and finish by just saying the -- that the largest strategic view is, we are close to finishing the heart -- the physical heart of ISIS. AQ is similarly suppressed. It will require continual pressure to prevent them from resurging. They also have tentacles, though, that reach out into sub-Saharan Africa, as you
noted, and in other parts of the world. And that's where
the larger coalition of nations that have the same interests
that we have in preventing the return of ISIS are going to
be a critical factor as we go forward.

Senator Nelson: What's the latest on al Baghdadi?

General McKenzie: Sir, I think he's a very scared man,
running for his life somewhere in the desert, near the
Euphrates River.

Senator Nelson: And as -- obviously, that's a major
goal, to get him, as we try to continue to mop up the
caliphate.

General McKenzie: Senator, I would just note, as long
as you're concerned about whether you're going to die in the
next hour or so, it's hard to plot attacks against Detroit.

Senator Nelson: There you go.

General Clarke, tell me, since SOCOM is involved in all
of these areas -- sometimes you might have, even though
you've gotten a lot of resources -- you, SOCOM -- over the
years, you have to worry about getting stretched too thin.
What can the Congress do to help you so that you're not
getting too thin?

General Clarke: Senator, thanks for that question.

I think critical for SOCOM -- in a little bit to follow
on with what General McKenzie just stated -- SOCOM has to
have the global view of the threat, in that role, looking at
the flow of fighters, looking at the resources, and looking
at the messaging they go -- that is going across COCOM
boundaries. In order to have that and to ensure that SOCOM
is not stretched too thin, we've got to continue to get the
sustained and predictable and adequate funding for the force
and for our budget, going forward.

Senator Nelson: And, General McKenzie, do you see U.S.
troops continuing to help you mop up ISIS and al Qaeda even
in these areas that are contested, like Yemen?

General McKenzie: Senator, right now, and in Yemen in
particular, we provide unique capabilities that get after al
Qaeda and AQ. In the long-term, our view would be, you want
to create conditions where local security forces are going
to be able to contain those threats. We are not that -- we
are not at that level yet, but that remains our clear goal.

Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Nelson.

And we thank both of our witnesses for your patience,
and also thank your families for being here to support you.

And we're adjourned.

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