

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

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

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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S.  
2 SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

3           Chairman Inhofe: Our meeting will come to order.

4           The committee meets today to consider the nominations  
5 of the -- General Frank McKenzie to be Commander of the  
6 Central Command, and Lieutenant General Richard Clarke to be  
7 the Commander of the Special Operations Command.

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

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

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

18          [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

22          [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

23          Chairman Inhofe: Have you assumed any duties or  
24 undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the  
25 outcome of the confirmation process?

1 [Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

2 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you. Prompting does help.

3 [Laughter.]

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

8 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

12 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

15 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

18 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

25 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

1 Chairman Inhofe: Okay. Well, thank you both for your  
2 decades of service to our country. We appreciate the great  
3 work that you have done.

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

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

14 General McKenzie: Yes, sir.

15 General Clarke: I have.

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

21 General McKenzie, the NDS Commission reported -- report  
22 noted that the National Defense Strategy talks are about  
23 accepting more risk in the Middle East, but was vague on  
24 where that risk might be taken; for example, in the fight  
25 against ISIS, or containing Iran, or in Afghanistan. Look

1 forward to your views on what accepting more risk in the  
2 Middle East might look -- East -- might look like.

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

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

11 Senator Reed.

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

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

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

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

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

1 resource-sustainable approach."

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

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

23           I hope both of our nominees will discuss the expected  
24 impact of the NDS on the commands they have been nominated  
25 to lead, and how any challenges can be mitigated in

1 implementation.

2           Last week, as the Chairman noted, we held a hearing  
3 with the National Defense Strategy Commission to discuss  
4 their views of the NDS. The Commission's report states that  
5 there is a, quote, "relative imbalance in civilian and  
6 military voices on critical issues of strategy development  
7 and implementation." It goes on to state that civilian  
8 voices were relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S.  
9 defense and national security policy, undermining the  
10 concept of civilian control. When I read the Commission's  
11 report, I was struck by these observations and the  
12 consequences that such an imbalance could have on the  
13 development of defense policy, the impact it could have on  
14 the civilian and military personnel serving in the  
15 Department, and how it may shape the advice provided to the  
16 President. As senior members of the Joint Staff, I hope  
17 both of our nominees would share their thoughts on the  
18 Commission's findings and how their experience with civilian  
19 policymakers would shape their leadership of CENTCOM and  
20 SOCOM, respectively.

21           On this point, the committee focused attention in  
22 recent years on strengthening the partnership between the  
23 SOCOM Commander and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for  
24 Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, or the ASD-  
25 SOLIC. In particular, Section 922 of the National Defense

1 Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 enhanced the role of  
2 ASD-SOLIC to serve as a Service Secretary-like official  
3 responsible for oversight of, and advocacy for, Special  
4 Operations Forces. General Clarke, I look forward to  
5 hearing your views on the implementation of these reforms  
6 and how the ASD-SOLIC/SOCOM partnership can be further  
7 strengthened.

8 Again, thank you very much for your service.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

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

15 Senator -- or, General McKenzie.

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1           STATEMENT OF LTG KENNETH F. MCKENZIE, JR., NOMINEE TO  
2 BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

3           General McKenzie: Good morning, Chairman Inhofe,  
4 Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee. It's an  
5 honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee  
6 to be the next Commander of United States Central Command.  
7 I am humbled by President Trump, Secretary Mattis, and  
8 Chairman Dunford's faith in me, and grateful for that trust.

9           If confirmed, I look forward to continue serving our Nation  
10 alongside the dedicated, disciplined, and honorable men and  
11 women of the United States Central Command.

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

19           I'd also like to introduce my son, Kenneth Ray  
20 McKenzie, who graduated from the Naval Academy with the  
21 Class of 2007 and has served two tours of duty in  
22 Afghanistan as a Marine infantry officer. He's now employed  
23 in the railroad business in Alabama. Also here is his wife,  
24 Kristin, and my sister, Andrea. Safely tucked away with a  
25 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 I'd like to talk just a moment about the officer seated  
3 next to me. In my opinion, the President could not have  
4 nominated anyone better to be the next SOCOM Commander than  
5 Lieutenant General Rich Clarke. He is an exceptionally  
6 talented, morally grounded, and strategically-minded  
7 officer. And if we're confirmed, I look forward to the  
8 opportunity to continue to march alongside him in Tampa and  
9 across the theater.

10 I would also like to pay a brief tribute to General Joe  
11 Votel, the current Central Command Commander. I believe he  
12 is one of the finest generals the U.S. Army has ever  
13 produced. Our Nation is safer and stronger because of his  
14 selfless service.

15 As this committee is aware, the 20 countries that make  
16 up the U.S. CENTCOM area of responsibility are as richly  
17 diverse and unique as any in the world. They also present a  
18 set of vexing challenges. We have vital strategic interests  
19 in the Central Command area of responsibility, and we're  
20 going to need to stay engaged to address these issues.

21 Under General Votel, Central Command has fostered  
22 outstanding relationships across its area of responsibility,  
23 with myriad senior civilian and military leaders, including  
24 those from Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, and across  
25 Central Asia. He has also worked tirelessly with our

1 Department of State, the Agency for International  
2 Development, and a host of other government and  
3 nongovernment organizations. I pledge to continue that  
4 interaction. The work of our colleagues in the Department  
5 of State is critical, and, if confirmed, supporting them  
6 will be a very high priority for me, personally. And  
7 interaction with allies and partners across the region will  
8 also be a matter of great importance. I hope to lead a new  
9 generation of CENTCOM professionals to carry on the work of  
10 General Votel and those leaders who came before him in  
11 meeting these challenges.

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

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

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

24 Thank you for considering me, and I look forward to  
25 answering your questions.

1 [The advance questions from General McKenzie follow:]

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1 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, General McKenzie.

2 General Clarke.

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

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

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

17           I'm honored to share this table with my friend and  
18 fellow Joint Staff member, a marine for whom I have the  
19 greatest respect due to his intellect, his knowledge of the  
20 region, and as a leader to applies commonsense touch to  
21 every problem. There is none better than Frank McKenzie to  
22 assume the U.S. CENTCOM mantle. And, if confirmed, our  
23 preexisting relationship and shared mutual respect will  
24 benefit the fight we have against terrorism specifically in  
25 the CENTCOM AOR.

1           In the audience is my wife and soulmate of almost 30  
2 years, Suzanne, my bedrock and my best friend since we first  
3 met in Berlin American High School, and who has been  
4 tremendously supportive of countless Army families during  
5 numerous deployments. She is accompanied by our son, Will,  
6 a senior in high school. Our daughter, Madeleine, is a  
7 college junior in Boston and is unable to join us as she  
8 gets ready to close out this semester at Tufts University.

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

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

20           Most importantly, I would be remiss if I failed to  
21 acknowledge the fallen and their families who have made the  
22 ultimate sacrifice for this Nation. The human toll hits  
23 close to home and serves as a close reminder of the  
24 considered responsibility of this position, as four of our  
25 recent fallen were all SOCOM warriors.

1           For the past 31 years, your Special Operations Forces  
2 provided critical capabilities and options for challenging  
3 problems to the Department and our Nation as a result, in  
4 large measure, to the prescient leadership of this Congress  
5 with the enactment of the Nunn-Cohen Amendment.

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

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

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

19           [The advance questions from General Clarke follow:]

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1 Chairman Inhofe: Well, thank both of you.

2 Let's -- we're going to be confronted with some  
3 difficult decisions. I'd -- to kind of set the stage for  
4 it, in 2010, the budget was 700-and -- if we use constant  
5 dollars, let's say 2018 dollars -- 2010, the budget was at  
6 \$794 billion. In 2015, using the same constant dollars, it  
7 was down to 586. Now, that's a drop of 200-and- -- well,  
8 actually, 24 percent's the best way to look at that. So,  
9 that's where we found ourselves. And so, consequently, we  
10 made a decision, for fiscal years '18, to go up to 700  
11 billion; fiscal year '19, up to 716 billion. And the  
12 strategy -- or the agreement, I should say -- both of you  
13 have read that Commission report, and you remember, in that  
14 report, they talked about the necessity of increasing the --  
15 a minimum increase of 3 to 5 percent over inflation. Now,  
16 that's what everyone agreed on, that's what the Chairman of  
17 the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed on, that's what the  
18 Secretary agreed on.

19 Now, when the President came out with the original  
20 budget, it was \$733 billion for the fiscal year '20. Well,  
21 if you do the math on this thing, and you go from 716 to  
22 733, the increase is 2.1 percent, which is actually below  
23 the amount that they are -- that everyone has been  
24 prescribing and saying it's going to be necessary to meet  
25 the competition. It's a different competition than we've

1 ever had before, at least in my opinion. I would like to  
2 ask both of you to comment on that, and if you consider the  
3 -- in light of that, the 733 to be a floor, as opposed to a  
4 ceiling. What do you think, General?

5 General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for the question.

6 The 733 figure was arrived at by the Department  
7 carefully looking at the requirements of the National  
8 Defense Strategy. It reflects our best projection of a  
9 strategy-informed budget. We recognize that there could  
10 have been a higher number. As you said, the 3 to 5 percent.

11 But, we also recognize that the Department exists within a  
12 larger government, and puts and trades there are just a  
13 natural part of the process. Anything below 733 would  
14 increase risk, and that risk would be manifested across the  
15 force. We are in the process now of very carefully across  
16 the Department examining the details of what the nature of  
17 that risk would be, who would it be imposed upon, and the  
18 nature of it.

19 Chairman Inhofe: Good. Good.

20 General Clarke?

21 General Clarke: Senator, I associate myself with  
22 General McKenzie's remarks and would state that the  
23 "sustained and predictable," but then the key is the  
24 "adequate" funding that is required by the Department. And  
25 once looked upon, and if confirmed for SOCOM, I'd have to

1 look at specifically what that means to SOCOM's budget and  
2 where that risk would be assumed, whether it's in readiness,  
3 whether or not it is in technologies required, or whether it  
4 is in what we're doing forward.

5 Chairman Inhofe: Good. And I appreciate that.

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

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

19 Chairman Inhofe: Yeah.

20 General Clarke: -- what I would qualify is the things  
21 that we do have that Russia and China don't have. We do  
22 have some asymmetric advantages that we have, you know,  
23 looked at. And you've -- you're familiar with our Joint  
24 Military Net Assessment. The other thing that we have,  
25 Senator, that those two countries don't have is allies and

1 partners. And our position around the world, specifically  
2 with SOCOM with our Special Operations that are forward, do  
3 provide us that advantage.

4 Chairman Inhofe: Yeah. That's good.

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

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

16 Chairman Inhofe: Yeah, thank you.

17 Senator Reed.

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

19 And thank you, gentlemen.

20 As I mentioned in my opening statement, the National  
21 Defense Commission talked about the private civilian  
22 leadership in terms of the interaction with the military.  
23 And we talked about this before, previously. But, for the  
24 record, just your reaction to those comments. There are  
25 several possibilities. One, they could be noting the

1 absence of civilian leadership -- i.e., not enough people  
2 have really been confirmed yet, or nominated -- or they're  
3 not involved in some way, shape, or form, or there is a gap,  
4 a cultural gap, between civilians and the military that's  
5 growing. So, I -- General McKenzie, if you start, then  
6 General Clarke.

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

21       Senator Reed: Thank you.

22       General Clarke, please.

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

25       The thing that I would add on top is -- I work closely

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

9 Senator Reed: Thank you.

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

21 General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. I believe that  
22 the operational military situation is largely stalemated, so  
23 I agree with the Chairman in his assessment of what's  
24 happening on the ground. I believe, however, that what is  
25 changed and what is new are the efforts of Ambassador

1 Khalilzad. That is a new element in the equation that we  
2 have not had before, working to actually try to form -- to  
3 come to some form of reconciliation and a political end  
4 state to the conflict that we've been unable to approach  
5 before. There are multiple lines of effort that are  
6 working. The military effort, which is stalemated, is one  
7 of them. The diplomatic line of effort is alive and being  
8 vigorously pursued now by he and other actors in the region.

9 Senator Reed: Thank you.

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

17 General Clarke: Senator, you hit the nail on the head.

18 The al Qaeda presence that remains in the AFPAK region, and  
19 the ISIS presence that is there currently, pose direct  
20 threats to the homeland. That's -- and that's where the  
21 SOCOM and the task force that is in Afghanistan continues to  
22 support General Miller's efforts.

23 The other piece in the Afghan strategy that I would  
24 highlight is the effort to realign our forces with doubled  
25 the amount of Afghan commandos to be able to help with the

1 strategy to put the pressure on the Taliban. And I think  
2 that effort is bearing fruit, and SOCOM will remain in  
3 direct support of General Miller and General McKenzie, you  
4 know, throughout this effort.

5 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

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

10 Thank you.

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

12 Senator Wicker.

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

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

24 Senator Wicker: So, a lot of these new areas are  
25 sparsely populated.

1           General McKenzie: Many of them are, sir. It -- again,  
2 I would note that you'd prefer to eventually control more  
3 than what we have now, but that's a -- I would agree with  
4 that.

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

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

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

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

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

1 Senator Wicker: And --

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

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

7 General McKenzie: Sir, there are.

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

12 General McKenzie: Sir, ISIS is a fairly small  
13 organization, hundreds to thousands, probably low thousands,  
14 in eastern Afghanistan. They pose a direct threat to the  
15 United States by aspiration. However, right now, they're  
16 severely constricted, both by our operations, and the  
17 Taliban has put pressure on ISIS-K, as well. Al Qaeda, much  
18 smaller, but with good global interconnections. They also  
19 maintain a long-term aspirational goal to attack the West;  
20 and the United States, in particular. What keeps them from  
21 being able to do that is the direct pressure that's  
22 maintained on them every day by the CT forces in the region,  
23 assisted by the ecosystem that is part of the Afghan army  
24 and the Afghan government. So, that's an important part of  
25 the pressure that we place on them, as well.

1           Senator Wicker: Now, to what extent do our military  
2 and diplomatic leaders -- are they able to assess public  
3 opinion in Afghanistan about our involvement?

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

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

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

1 Afghans don't want the Taliban to remain -- to come back and  
2 reassert themselves, either.

3 Senator Wicker: They remember those days prior to  
4 9/11, do not want them to return.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Senator Wicker: Thank you.

25 Well, good wishes to you. Thank you for your service.

1 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

2 Senator Shaheen.

3 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

18 General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. Eventually, to  
19 maintain our gains, we're going to have to adequately  
20 resource what follows, which is local security under  
21 civilian control, generally speaking, east of the Euphrates  
22 River. That's going to require monetary assistance. If it  
23 comes from this country -- it can come from this country, it  
24 could also come, I think, from partners in the region who  
25 need to step up to the plate, because the problems in Syria

1 are all actually closer to them than they are to us. So, I  
2 think the -- but, your point is exactly right, the long-term  
3 solution has to be a stability solution, it has to be local,  
4 and it has to be appropriately resourced. And that remains  
5 a challenge.

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

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

24 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

25 General Clarke, one of the things that we heard from

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

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

23 Senator Shaheen: And would you agree with the  
24 conclusion that the Commission drew that right now we've got  
25 to do more if we're going to be proactive about addressing

1 the gray-zone issues with Russia and China, and also some of  
2 the cyber threats?

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

13 Senator Shaheen: Ah. Good.

14 General Clarke: -- pay attention to that report.

15 Senator Shaheen: Good. Thank you.

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

19 General Clarke: Senator, the weapons-of-mass-  
20 destruction mission that was given to SOCOM 2 years ago  
21 didn't come with no resources. It came with almost 100  
22 personnel positions from STRATCOM. But, the same approach  
23 that SOCOM takes to countering the violent extremist  
24 organization, which has -- it has a global responsibility --  
25 can still be applied to the weapons-of-mass-destruction

1 mission. It's the appropriate mission for SOCOM. I know  
2 General Thomas has taken it on wholeheartedly, and, if  
3 confirmed, I will do the same.

4 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you, again.

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

7 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

8 Senator Fischer.

9 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

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

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

24 Senator Fischer: Where do you think the focus needs to  
25 be for the resources that you would have, then? And, in

1 many cases, they may be limited resources that you're going  
2 to have. Where is it -- where is the investment going to  
3 be? Where do -- what are you going to prioritize with the  
4 revenues that you receive?

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

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

17 General Clarke: Senator, right now, I believe that the  
18 personnel within SOCOM are adequate. I think -- if  
19 confirmed by this committee, I will take a -- I will take a  
20 very hard look, myself, at how this applies to great-power  
21 competition. But, one thing that I would highlight is that  
22 we should look at all missions across the globe, as the  
23 Secretary has reprioritized with the NDS, and that Special  
24 Operations Command should only do those missions that are  
25 suited for Special Operations Command. And those missions

1 that can be adjusted to conventional forces should also go  
2 to -- should go to those conventional forces. And so, we  
3 have to look at a prioritization of requirements.

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

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

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

22 General Clarke: Thank you.

23 Senator Fischer: General McKenzie, according to the  
24 GAO's October report on Afghanistan security, the Afghan  
25 National Defense and Security Forces have improved some

1 fundamental capabilities, such as high-level operational  
2 planning, but they continue to rely on the United States and  
3 coalition support to fill several key capability gaps.

4 Where do you believe the biggest shortfalls remain, in terms  
5 of the security forces' ability to conduct its missions?

6 And how do you believe the United States should work to make  
7 the Afghan forces more sufficient -- self-sufficient? I  
8 know we -- in your followup, here, to Senator Wicker, when  
9 we were talking about the losses that we suffer as a country  
10 when we lose brave military men and women, the Afghan  
11 soldiers and police, just last year alone, lost more than  
12 the total that we've seen in the American death toll in 17  
13 years. How can we more effectively support them?

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

25 The other part of your question talks about the

1 capabilities that we provide them actually in the field, and  
2 they range from close air support, which they are now  
3 beginning to generate, themselves, but we still assist them  
4 with, with intelligence, with CASEVAC, when -- under certain  
5 situations, and all the maintenance activities that go into  
6 putting a large, complex army in the field. These are all  
7 areas where additional work needs to be done. These are  
8 areas that are being addressed by General Miller today in  
9 the theater.

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

13 Thank you.

14 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

15 Senator Peters.

16 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

20 General McKenzie, I want to follow up on some of my  
21 colleagues' questions related to the National Defense  
22 Strategy that we had presented to us last week. And I want  
23 to read a portion of that report that I think is  
24 particularly significant, and I quote, "While the United  
25 States was focused on counterterrorism and defeating

1 insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and China were  
2 focused on acquiring capabilities to overcome America's  
3 technological edge and operational reach. As a result,  
4 America has been losing its military advantage in a number  
5 of key warfighting areas," is the quote, which I think is  
6 significant, and one that -- certainty one that is very  
7 significant to the work that this committee does and the  
8 work that you do each and every day.

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

17 General McKenzie: Sir, I'd like to begin by completely  
18 agreeing with the NDS Commission's assessment. In fact,  
19 over the last decade and a half, and even longer, our two  
20 principal competitors, Russia and China, have carefully  
21 studied us while we've been engaged in the -- principally,  
22 in the CENTCOM theater. They have used that opportunity to  
23 steal a march, and they have made those investments based on  
24 a very careful study of our potential weaknesses. So, I  
25 think it's a very good analysis.

1           Senator, I think the way forward in Afghanistan is to  
2    try to reach a political settlement that is going to allow  
3    us to remove elements of our presence that are there now.  
4    The key thing, though, that we need to bear in mind as we  
5    look at a future in Afghanistan is, our long-term interest  
6    is preventing attacks being generated against the homeland,  
7    so we have to provide for that in any potential future  
8    political settlement. And that is what we're looking to  
9    Ambassador Khalilzad to work on right now. I believe that  
10   does present a long-term way forward, and I think we're  
11   going to know more about it, here, in the near future.

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

25           So, my question to you directly is, How far are the

1 Afghan Security Forces from having the capability to secure  
2 their country without the presence of 15,000 United States  
3 soldiers and marines and airmen?

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

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

24 Senator Peters: Yeah. And I'm not asking you to put a  
25 number on when we would withdraw. And I agree, you cannot

1 put just a time out there to say that we're going to be  
2 pulling out. You want to make sure that the Afghan forces  
3 have the capability to stand up and do the work on their  
4 own. But, we've been at it for 17 years. Seventeen years  
5 is a long time. What are we doing differently when it comes  
6 to the Afghan Security Forces that we haven't done for 17  
7 years while being focused on this?

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

20 The other thing, Senator, that is new -- and I  
21 completely understand your reference that we've been  
22 pursuing a diplomatic solution for 17 years, not in the  
23 manner in which we are now, not with an empowered envoy that  
24 is actually talking directly to the Taliban, where we have  
25 the opportunity to bring them together. Senator, I believe

1 this is a new thing. And I may be wrong, but I believe this  
2 is a new opportunity for us, and the military campaign is in  
3 direct support of that.

4 Senator Peters: Thank you.

5 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Peters.

6 Senator Cotton.

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

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

22 General Clarke: Senator, thanks. There are five  
23 Special Operations truths. The fifth truth of that is, most  
24 Special Operations require non-Special Operations Force  
25 assistance. I believe in that, that truth. And we see it

1   apparent every day in the operations in which Special  
2   Operations conduct, especially for longer-term, enduring  
3   missions, where Special Operations -- we need the support of  
4   the services in all of those, and the conventional force.

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

14           Senator Cotton:  Thank you.

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

1           Can you talk about what the National Defense Strategy  
2 means for you in Central Command relative to the threat of  
3 Iran?

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

25           Senator Cotton: If Iran's leadership were to

1 miscalculate and to challenge a U.S. Navy vessel in the  
2 Persian Gulf or, say, close the Strait of Hormuz, do you  
3 have any doubt that the United States military is postured  
4 in the Central Command area of responsibility to meet that  
5 challenge?

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

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

18           General McKenzie: Sir, when we talk about Yemen, I  
19 think it's important to remember that Iran is behind the  
20 irresponsible behavior that actually led to the overthrow of  
21 the Government of Yemen, and actually created the situation  
22 that we now have in Yemen, itself. So, Iran has been  
23 extraordinarily irresponsible as a nation in what they've  
24 done in Yemen, and that has had a large factor in driving  
25 the conflict forward.

1           Senator Cotton: Ballistic missiles are being launched  
2 from Houthi-controlled territory into Saudi Arabia, to  
3 include in the vicinity of Saudi Arabia's International  
4 Airport in Riyadh, where Americans fly in and out of every  
5 day. I'm not aware of ballistic missile manufacturing  
6 companies in Yemen. Are you?

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

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

16          Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

17          Senator Kaine.

18          Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

22          General McKenzie, I want to start off talking about  
23 Afghanistan, as many have. One of the recent deaths in  
24 Afghanistan was a Virginian Army captain, Andrew Ross, who  
25 has family in both Lexington and Richmond, very beloved

1 individual, and we feel that very deeply, his death.

2           You've been asked a number of questions. I just want  
3 to ask this. The stalemate's disappointing. And I was in  
4 Halifax, as well, when General Dunford talked about the  
5 stalemate. But, it's one thing to have a stalemate with  
6 14,000 American troops there, it's another thing to have a  
7 stalemate with 100,000. We're down, from a peak of 100,000,  
8 to 14,000, and it seems to be that that's about the number  
9 that's required right now to provide the ancillary support  
10 to enable the Afghans to have this fight. Are you aware of  
11 any plans by this administration to significantly, in the  
12 near or medium term, change that number of U.S. troops in  
13 Afghanistan?

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

15           Senator Kaine: Okay. Thank you for that.

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

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

23           Senator Kaine: Principal objective. One of the things  
24 that I've been confused on the committee is that that is  
25 always stated as either the objective or the principal

1 objective. There is a sort of a good-faith debate in this  
2 committee and elsewhere about whether the 2001 Authorization  
3 for Use of Military Force covers that objective, but many  
4 scholars believe that it does. But, we also occasionally  
5 read or hear, at committee meetings like this, figures from  
6 the administration articulate additional objectives, where  
7 the legal rationale is not, frankly, even covered by the  
8 2001 authorization. So, for example, the United States has  
9 taken action against the Syrian government, twice launching  
10 missile strikes against the Syrian government in response to  
11 use of chemical weapons, but it's also undertaken military  
12 action against the Syrian government when the Syrian  
13 government has made gains against the Free Syrian Army in  
14 space where ISIS is not that much of a factor. Do you  
15 understand the mission in Syria, the American mission in  
16 Syria, to include pushing back or attempting to topple the  
17 Syrian government?

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

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

25 General McKenzie: Senator, that may possibly be a

1 derived effect of our presence on the ground. That is not a  
2 mission that the -- that we are undertaking.

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 Senator Kaine: The last thing I want to do is just say  
25 a word about the debate we're currently having about Yemen,

1 to follow up a little bit on Senator Cotton's questions.  
2 And this is just sort of a statement to share with you. I  
3 think one of the reasons that this body is considering, on  
4 the floor, a declaration that we are not involved in -- that  
5 we are not to be considered or take military actions for the  
6 Saudis in the Yemeni civil war -- one of the reasons we're  
7 having a debate is sort of a credibility issue, including  
8 credibility of what we've been told by the military. We  
9 have had military leaders look at the Senate and say that we  
10 are not involved in hostilities to support either side in  
11 the Yemeni civil war. And when we've pointed out that the  
12 U.S. is refueling Saudi jets on the way to bombing runs in  
13 Yemen, we're told that that's not assisting in the  
14 hostilities. The War Powers Resolution in 1973 defines  
15 "hostilities" to include aiding allies in moving troops into  
16 hostilities. But, we've had military leadership look us in  
17 the face and tell us that refueling Saudi jets on the way to  
18 bombing runs is not hostilities. Many of the bombs that  
19 have killed civilians in Yemen are made in the United States  
20 and either provided to Saudi Arabia via military sales or  
21 from U.S. companies. But, again, we're told the U.S. is not  
22 involved in hostilities.

23 I think one of the reasons that we're having this  
24 debate on the matter that's pending before the Senate right  
25 now is, we don't like being told -- and we're proxies for

1 the American public -- we don't like being told we're not  
2 involved in hostilities, when bombs are falling that are  
3 made in the United States and when U.S. jets are involved in  
4 refueling Saudi bombing runs into Yemen. We -- we're  
5 insulted by that. I think we just need to be candid about  
6 what we're doing and not doing.

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

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

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

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

22 Senator Rounds.

23 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Generals Clarke and General McKenzie, I want to thank  
25 you both, and your families, for your decades of service to

1 our Nation.

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

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

15           The quality of Special Operations since 2001, I think,  
16 has actually increased. The experience that our Special  
17 Operations operators have gained throughout the world in the  
18 activities in which they have participated have made them  
19 better and have made them stronger. And I still stick with  
20 that the quality is more important than the quantity, one of  
21 the SOF truths. And so, as we look at that quality, the  
22 standards have not changed. We have not, you know, lowered  
23 standards within SOCOM in any of the specialties that  
24 support, and they all have their own individual standards  
25 which they have to meet.

1           I was -- and the other piece I would highlight for the  
2 committee is, as we -- as you -- you specifically mentioned  
3 stress on the force. And, as the Secretary has stated,  
4 first line of effort is, build a more lethal and agile force  
5 -- adaptive force. And that -- a lot of that goes to  
6 readiness and the readiness of the force that we have. The  
7 Secretary has given guidance to the Department, in terms of  
8 having a 2-to-1 dwell ratio. So, for every month deployed,  
9 a Special Operations, you know, warrior has to be back home  
10 for 2 months to reset. So, that 3 months would be -- equate  
11 to 9. I think those things, as we look at our force, are  
12 crucial.

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

18           Senator Rounds: Thank you.

19           General Clarke -- or, I'm sorry, General McKenzie, you  
20 come into CENTCOM during a time in which there is clearly a  
21 discussion here within the Senate with regards to the role  
22 that we would play in Yemen. Most recently, and I think the  
23 discussion was here in which you didn't get an opportunity  
24 to respond with your thoughts concerning the role that this  
25 country plays in the activity in Yemen today. I'd like,

1 from your perspective, based upon what's going on there  
2 today, your thoughts about the need to either support the  
3 efforts there to come to a peaceful resolution and what the  
4 role of our Nation should be in trying to bring all of the  
5 different sides to the negotiating tables, and the critical  
6 need, at this juncture, to maintain a steady course. Could  
7 you talk a little bit about the role that you see right now,  
8 from a policy perspective, with regard to the activities in  
9 Yemen?

10 General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for the question.

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

22 Senator, I believe that the best solution in Yemen  
23 would be a negotiated solution that we're, hopefully,  
24 beginning to, maybe, see the leading edge of now with Martin  
25 Griffin and other members of the United Nations that are

1 attempting to bring parties to a cease-fire that will allow  
2 for the distribution of food, and which -- and the Houthis  
3 bear a large measure of that blame for not distributing that  
4 food -- but an attempt to get to a situation where the large  
5 fraction, almost two-thirds, of the population of Yemen that  
6 is at food risk now can be appropriately addressed. I think  
7 that is an important thing. I believe our ability to  
8 participate and drive those discussions require that we  
9 remain in contact with both UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi  
10 Arabia.

11 Senator Rounds: Thank you.

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

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

15 Senator Warren.

16 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

19 So, I want to go back to Yemen. It -- for over 3  
20 years, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition warplanes, refueled  
21 and armed with missiles by the United States, have been  
22 bombing Yemeni territory to counter Iranian-backed militias  
23 as part of a dangerous proxy war between Saudi Arabia and  
24 Iran. And this week, the Senate advanced a resolution that  
25 would, if it became law, cut off all U.S. support for Saudi-

1 led coalition's bombing campaign in Yemen. So, I just want  
2 to make sure that we're all clear about what's going on. I  
3 think it would be helpful for the American people to  
4 understand how we have directly contributed to the situation  
5 in Yemen since March of 2015. And we seem to have had some  
6 challenges in getting this on the record.

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

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

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

18 General McKenzie: That is correct.

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

22 General McKenzie: Senator, that is correct.

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

1 Is that correct?

2 General McKenzie: Senator, that's correct.

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

23 So, I want to ask about one other area while I have  
24 time, and that is the nuclear deal between the United States  
25 and five partner nations and Iran that placed Iran's nuclear

1 program under limits and inspections that -- so that it  
2 could not develop a nuclear weapon. So far, this deal has  
3 worked, and Iran's compliance has been verified repeatedly  
4 by international inspectors, but President Trump has put  
5 this deal at risk when he unilaterally withdrew the United  
6 States and imposed all sanctions on Iran that were meant to  
7 be suspended as a condition of Iran's compliance with the  
8 agreement.

9 Now, the Director of National Intelligence Worldwide  
10 Threat Assessment from this year said, in part, that the  
11 Iran deal has, quote, "extended the amount of time Iran  
12 would need to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon  
13 from a few months to about one year, and," quote, "has  
14 enhanced the transparency of Iran's nuclear activities."  
15 General McKenzie, do you agree with the intelligence  
16 community's assessment?

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

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

23 General McKenzie: Senator, I'm not.

24 Senator Warren: And, since the Trump administration  
25 violated the nuclear deal by unilaterally withdrawing from

1 it and reimposing sanctions, has the Iranian government  
2 significantly reduced its destabilizing activities?

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

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

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Warner.

18 Senator Ernst.

19 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20 And, gentlemen, thank you very much for your years of  
21 service to our wonderful, great United States of America. I  
22 want to thank your families, as well, for being here today.

23 We understand how important they are to your success, as  
24 well. So, thank you very much.

25 We understand that SOCOM and CENTCOM have been really

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

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

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

18 [Laughter.]

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

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

1 support. It is very important.

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

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

20 General Clarke: Senator, one of the most important  
21 things we do is work through the services for that. And  
22 it's critical that the services also have the tools and  
23 means. And a lot of that is funding. This is -- as the  
24 Secretary said last week, and this is not just an all-  
25 voluntary force, but this is also a recruited force for our

1 Nation, and we have to -- we have opened up, as you well  
2 know, Special Operations Forces across all genders. We want  
3 the best of the people who have the physical, the  
4 intellectual, and the desire to serve in our Special  
5 Operations community to be able to serve in our Special  
6 Operations community.

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

12 Senator Ernst: Thank you. Thank you.

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

21 And thank this committee for that.

22 Senator Ernst: Yes. And thank you. And thank you for  
23 acknowledging POTFF. That's where I was going to drive  
24 next, because POTFF is an incredible combination of support  
25 for our warriors as well as for our families, which, again,

1 I want to acknowledge are so very important to the men that  
2 serve in your organization, as well as women. But, I was  
3 able to also, while I was at Coronado, spend some time with  
4 their POTFF team, and visiting with their psychologist. And  
5 I think it's incredible that we are actually able to embed  
6 our psychologists with our various teams of operators across  
7 the force, and understanding that we not only need to make  
8 sure that they are physically and spiritually ready, but  
9 also mentally capable to drive on to their next mission.  
10 So, thank you so much.

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

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

14 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

16 Senator Hirono.

17 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

19 Aloha.

20 This is a -- these are two questions that I ask of  
21 every nominee who comes before any of the five committees on  
22 which I sit. It's part of my responsibility to ensure the  
23 fitness of nominees for appointments to senior positions,  
24 positions of power within the administration. So, I'd like  
25 to ask each of you the following two questions:

1           I'll start with you, General McKenzie. Since you  
2 became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests  
3 for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical  
4 harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

5           General McKenzie: Never, Senator.

6           Senator Hirono: General Clarke?

7           General Clarke: Never, Senator.

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

11          General McKenzie: I have not, Senator.

12          General Clarke: No, I have not, Senator.

13          Senator Hirono: Thank you.

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

24          General McKenzie: Senator, I will.

25          Senator Hirono: That means lending your voice to the

1 fact that we need to fill these positions.

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

11           General McKenzie: Senator, I do believe that any  
12 solution in Afghanistan is going to require the assistance  
13 of Pakistan. It has to be a regional solution, not just a  
14 solution centered in Afghanistan. It is in Pakistan's long-  
15 term interests to have a government in Afghanistan that is  
16 stable, that is going to -- that they can do business with.

17           So, I think Pakistan has not shown indications, by and  
18 large over the last few years, of being a serious partner in  
19 this regard. Ambassador Khalilzad is meeting with the  
20 Pakistanis very soon to see if we can find some way forward.

21           It will be hard to reach a settlement without some form of  
22 assistance from Pakistan.

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

25           General McKenzie: Senator, I believe Pakistan knows

1 very clearly that their assistance will be required to reach  
2 an end state in Afghanistan. I think the task that we have  
3 is to make it attractive to them so that they see that it is  
4 in their best interest to do that.

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

12 General McKenzie: Senator, I believe that it does.

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

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

25 General McKenzie: Sir, that -- Senator, that is

1 correct.

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

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

6 Senator Hirono: I think that's called --

7 General McKenzie: -- on that.

8 Senator Hirono: -- a rhetorical question.

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

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

12 Senator Hirono: 70,000.

13 General Clarke: -- personnel.

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

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

24 Senator Hirono: Well, this is because we -- of our  
25 understanding that SOCOM has been deployed often, to the

1 point where there is major stress on SOCOM. And I think you  
2 mentioned that there are attempts underfoot to -- ongoing, I  
3 should say, to relieve the stress on the deployments of  
4 SOCOM. So, is that because of the understanding that the  
5 delineation for what SOCOM should be doing and what our  
6 conventional forces should be doing really needs to be  
7 adhered to?

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

15 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

16 Thank you both for you your responses to our questions.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

19 Senator Kyl.

20 Senator Kyl: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 And I join my colleagues in thanking both of you,  
22 gentlemen, for your willingness to continue to serve our  
23 country, and also join those who have noted the families and  
24 the sacrifices that they make. I join in that thanks, as  
25 well.

1           There's been a great deal of discussion here today  
2 about the new National Defense Strategy and the Commission  
3 report on that strategy. I had the good fortune of both  
4 serving as a member of that Commission to the time that we  
5 finished our deliberations and then, having gotten appointed  
6 to the Senate, now am in a position to try to do something  
7 about it. One of things is to help bring attention to what  
8 the strategy and the Commission's report about that strategy  
9 really require. I'd like to just make a comment and then  
10 get your reaction.

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

19

20           What the Commission has noted is that that  
21 reprioritization has certain consequences. And one of the  
22 consequences is what we spend our money on. The money will  
23 need to be spent on being able to defeat, and therefore --  
24 and this is, of course, the key -- deterring Russia and  
25 China from ever seeking to have conflict with us. That

1 means that we're going to have to -- instead of putting our  
2 first available dollars into readiness to support wornout  
3 troops and equipment that's been used in the Middle East,  
4 for example, we're going to have to put the first dollars  
5 into long-term, expensive research and development and  
6 acquisition projects to take advantage of a lot of new  
7 technology, and to try to blunt some of the new technology  
8 that these peer adversaries have been developing against us.

9 This has to do with hypersonics, directed energy, and  
10 space, and all of those things that require some new ways of  
11 conducting war. It requires some continuing work and  
12 greater dedication to the modernization of our nuclear  
13 deterrent. Unfortunately, some bills are coming due all at  
14 the same time, not only the life extension of the nuclear  
15 weapons and the rebuilding of the laboratory complexes, but  
16 also three -- all three parts of our triad wearing out and,  
17 therefore, having to be redeveloped and deployed at the same  
18 time -- the air leg, the missile leg, and the submarine leg.

19 And it has been noted as costing upwards of a trillion  
20 dollars over 30 years, but that still represents, at its  
21 peak, maybe six-point-two or -three percent of the defense  
22 budget. We're going to have to position -- take advantage  
23 of allies, and assist them, position ourselves as close as  
24 we can get to potential areas of conflict. We're going to  
25 have to have more sea and air transport, because the new

1 strategy calls for having to move things around in the event  
2 of a conflict. We don't have enough now to be able to have  
3 everything we need, in every theater, against every  
4 potential enemy. So, we'd have to reposition forces from  
5 Europe to Southeast Asia, for example. Now, we also noted -  
6 - the Commission noted that the forces in Southeast Asia are  
7 not necessarily the ones you would want to fight a land war  
8 in Europe; likewise, the land-war-in-Europe forces are not  
9 necessarily the ones that would be best to be sending to a  
10 potential area of conflict with the Chinese in Southeast  
11 Asia. Meanwhile, though we'll do our best to do all of that  
12 with the capability we have, we understand that there will  
13 be risks that will have to be taken, where those risks will,  
14 unfortunately, fall right into your lap, because they deal  
15 with the threats you have to deal with all of time.

16 And I just wanted to ask you if you understand that  
17 that is the strategy that is being suggested, here, and do  
18 you understand the risks to that strategy that the  
19 Commission has notified -- has reported on, and to tell us  
20 just a little bit about your thoughts on it. I know,  
21 General Clarke, for example, you said, "Well, we need  
22 sustainable and predictable funding," and that's exactly  
23 what the Commission said we needed, in addition to more of  
24 the top line above 3 to 5 percent above inflation. So, your  
25 thoughts on all of that.

1           General McKenzie:  Senator, I'll begin, then turn it  
2 over to Rich, here.

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

19           And I'll pause there.

20           General Clarke:  Senator, the -- as the current J-5,  
21 having relieved the gentleman sitting next to me, also am  
22 familiar with the National Defense Strategy.  The central  
23 idea, also, of the National Defense Strategy is to compete,  
24 deter, and win.  And I think that competition aspect, so  
25 that we compete and we're able to deter so we don't have to

1 fight that fight, it does go to the readiness of the force.

2 And I'd -- and it does go to the technologies that are  
3 required to be able to deter our enemies. And I think that  
4 is a balance that we have to look at. It's going to be up  
5 to the Secretary to determine where those risks and puts or  
6 takes are, going forward, but it's something we are very  
7 familiar with, and support the National Defense Strategy.

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

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

13 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Kyl.

14 Senator Cruz.

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

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

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

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

1 deal?

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

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

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

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

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

25 Senator Cruz: And what would be the national security

1 threat posed to the United States if Iran were to acquire  
2 nuclear weapons?

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

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

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

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

21 General McKenzie: Senator, we see it active in Yemen.

22 Actually, the humanitarian tragedy that we confront in  
23 Yemen is the child of Iranian ambitions in Yemen and their  
24 support for the Houthis in trying to create a Hezbollah-like  
25 state there. So, that proceeds directly from them. We see

1 the same activities in Syria, as well, where they are  
2 actively supported in -- actively participating and  
3 supporting the government of Bashar al Assad and all that  
4 proceeds from that and the terror that he has inflicted on  
5 his own people. Just to cite two examples, Senator.

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

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

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

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

23 Senator Cruz: What's your assessment -- we saw,  
24 earlier this year, significant protests against the  
25 Ayatollah and the mullahs. What's your assessment of the

1 degree of unrest and dissatisfaction among the Iranian  
2 people with the regime?

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

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

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

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

19 General McKenzie: Sure.

20 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Cruz.

21 Senator Nelson.

22 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 General McKenzie, that was a very good dialogue with  
24 Senator Cruz. I commend you for your quick and sharp  
25 responses.

1           Given the fact that the U.S.-supported coalition has  
2 really routed ISIS in Syria, in Iraq, what's next? And  
3 weave your answer in with, not necessarily just ISIS, but al  
4 Qaeda and other groups in the areas, such as Yemen, anyplace  
5 that there is chaos, some of the regions of North Africa,  
6 the Horn of Africa, et cetera.

7           General McKenzie: Senator, thank you for that  
8 question.

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

23           Senator, in Syria, I think that we are very close to  
24 finishing the physical destruction of the caliphate. The  
25 same thing will obtain. They will transition to a

1 counterinsurgency, more activity will be needed. I think  
2 the solution in Syria that we would like to see would be a  
3 politically-informed solution, where all parties have a seat  
4 at the table. And we'll see how that goes forward. But,  
5 the military component of that is coming to a -- very near  
6 to an end. I wouldn't want to put a timeline on it, but  
7 it's coming close.

8       Senator, very briefly, the last thing I'll just talk  
9 about is Yemen, where we maintain unrelenting pressure on  
10 both ISIS in the Arabian Peninsula as well as al Qaeda in  
11 the Arabian Peninsula, because al Qaeda in the Arabian  
12 Peninsula is actually the last entity to successfully  
13 generate an attack against the United States, back in 2009,  
14 the Christmas Day bomber. So, we need to keep unrelenting  
15 pressure on them. In that area, Iran is not helpful at all.

16 They fomented and began the war that now exists -- the  
17 civil war that now exists in Yemen that adds immense  
18 suffering to that part of the world and is -- it is a  
19 definite factor as we pursue operations against ISIS.

20       So, if I were to pull back and finish by just saying  
21 the -- that the largest strategic view is, we are close to  
22 finishing the heart -- the physical heart of ISIS. AQ is  
23 similarly suppressed. It will require continual pressure to  
24 prevent them from resurging. They also have tentacles,  
25 though, that reach out into sub-Saharan Africa, as you

1 noted, and in other parts of the world. And that's where  
2 the larger coalition of nations that have the same interests  
3 that we have in preventing the return of ISIS are going to  
4 be a critical factor as we go forward.

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

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

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

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

15 Senator Nelson: There you go.

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

22 General Clarke: Senator, thanks for that question.

23 I think critical for SOCOM -- in a little bit to follow  
24 on with what General McKenzie just stated -- SOCOM has to  
25 have the global view of the threat, in that role, looking at

1 the flow of fighters, looking at the resources, and looking  
2 at the messaging they go -- that is going across COCOM  
3 boundaries. In order to have that and to ensure that SOCOM  
4 is not stretched too thin, we've got to continue to get the  
5 sustained and predictable and adequate funding for the force  
6 and for our budget, going forward.

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

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

16 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Nelson.

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

20 And we're adjourned.

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

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