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COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO CONDUCT A CONFIRMATION HEARING ON THE
EXPECTED NOMINATION OF: LLOYD J. AUSTIN III TO BE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
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The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:01 p.m., in Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James M. Inhofe, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Inhofe [presiding], Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Warren, Peters, Manchin, and Duckworth.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Chairman Inhofe: Since this is my last committee meeting to be important, we will start right on time. Got that, Jack? All right.

The committee meets today to consider expected nomination of Mr. Lloyd J. Austin III to be Secretary of Defense of the United States of America.

And thank all of you guys for being here. It has been a hardship on many of you, and it was on me, too, and we are able to get this done.

So, Mr. Austin, we welcome you, and a warm welcome to Charlene, your wife of more than 41 years. My wife and I were 61 years. Think you will make it?

[Laughter.]

Chairman Inhofe: All right. We are very happy -- Mr. Austin, you will be introduced now by Senator Sullivan, a member of our committee.

Senator Sullivan?

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The last time we were together as Senators our Capitol was under siege. America's authoritarian rivals abroad have been gloating about our disunity. Democracy brings chaos, they tell their people. Better to have a strong hand that keeps order.
We live in an imperfect democracy, no doubt, and the American I am proud and honored to introduce, Mr. Lloyd Austin, understands our imperfections more than many. But on closer inspection, the world's dictators have little to celebrate. Congress went back to work on January 6th to count Electoral College votes. Tomorrow, there will be a transfer of power at the top of our Government, as there has been since the founding of our republic.

At some point, Chinese and Russian citizens will ask, "Why can we not do that? Why do we not have strong, resilient institutions that ensure the regular election of new leaders and, thus, self-government in the people?"

When these questions are asked, authoritarians like Xi Jinping and Putin will not be gloating anymore because they do not have answers.

What does this all have to do with Lloyd Austin? A lot. Mr. Austin has been nominated to lead one of America's most trusted institutions, the Department of Defense. Many of us have worked hard to rebuild our military, and we can all agree that there has been too much turmoil at the top. As its civilian leader, I am confident that Mr. Austin will bring steadiness, leadership, and respect to this indispensable institution.

I got to know Mr. Austin in 2005 and 2006. Serving together in an Army heavy combatant command, conducting
combat operations throughout the Middle East, we had what might be described today as an uneven power relationship. He was a two-star general. I was a major. He had spent decades on active duty. I was a Reservist. He was a soldier. I was a Marine.

I was just one of hundreds of field-grade infantry officers recalled to active duty deployed in the region during a challenging time for our Nation. But when I asked for his help, Mr. Austin gave it. When I had a problem, he listened. And when I asked for guidance on an important mission, he provided it.

A critical hallmark of exceptional leadership, especially for organizations like the Pentagon, is not just how one treats superiors, but how one treats subordinates. What I saw was respect, integrity, and someone who gets things done in a difficult environment. It is clear to me that the core principles of Mr. Austin's life has been duty, honor, and country.

That may sound quaint to some, but I think having individuals of impeccable character at the top of our Government is more important than ever. Other than integrity, there is no singular requirement for the difficult job of Secretary of Defense. But as the former director of the Joint Staff and CENTCOM commander, Mr. Austin certainly has insights on critical issues, such as
interagency budget battles, working with our allies, and congressional oversight.

Mr. Austin is fully committed to the constitutional principle of civilian control of our military, something that those who serve in uniform typically understand and revere more than those who do not. In that regard, I thought some of the testimony from our recent hearing on this important topic was a bit simplistic, with discussions about so-called military logic versus political logic. So let me play devil's advocate.

The very nature of this confirmation hearing is evidence that civilian control of the military is not at risk in America. I believe the related, but opposite problem should be of more concern today -- no military experience in the top ranks of our Government.

With the exception of Mr. Austin, no nominee on the incoming Biden national security team has ever served in uniform. With regard to the entire Biden Cabinet, only one other nominee has any military experience at all. This is not wise.

If confirmed, I am sure I will not agree with all of Mr. Austin's decisions. But when the inevitable budget battles occur, it will be critical for our Nation's security and military members to have a Secretary of Defense who understands firsthand the very real morale and
readiness problems that result from drastic cuts to our military.

Let me conclude with this. We are living through difficult times -- a pandemic, racial tensions, riots, turmoil at the top of the Pentagon, and rising dangers from China, Russia, and Iran. Mr. Austin's confirmation will not solve all these problems, but it will help. He represents the best of America, a man of integrity, humility, and character, with a wealth of relevant experience.

Our allies will take comfort in his confirmation, and our adversaries will take pause. And as America's first black Secretary of Defense, he will be an inspiration to millions both in and out of uniform.

I urge my colleagues to support his confirmation and the waiver it requires.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. And I do agree with your comments wholeheartedly, and I believe that we are going to be doing the right thing here.

Now we have another introduction by Secretary Panetta, a former Secretary of Defense and former -- very close friend of mine, served together in the House together, and it has been too long, Secretary Panetta. And you are recognized for your part of this introduction.
Mr. Panetta: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Inhofe, I always enjoyed our friendship, going back to the House of Representatives.

Ranking Member Reed and distinguished members of this committee, it is an honor for me to again have the opportunity to appear before this distinguished committee, this time alongside Senator Dan Sullivan, to introduce President-Elect Biden's nominee to be the 28th Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin.

We do meet at a time of great peril for our Nation, but it is also a time of great promise. We have endured a harrowing year, dealing with a deadly pandemic and, most recently, the violent attack on our Capitol, this Congress, and our democracy itself. Our adversaries are watching very closely. They are trying to determine whether America will remain the strongest and most resilient democracy the world has ever known.

It is also a time of great promise. Tomorrow at this time, our country will have a new President, a man who many of you know personally from his decades of service as a United States Senator. A man who I have known for over 40 years and had the privilege to work with during my years in the Congress, in the White House, and I was honored to serve him when he was Vice President as CIA Director and Secretary of Defense.
Joe Biden is absolutely committed to ensuring that we remain the strongest military power on the face of the Earth. He believes that we must have the best-trained, best-equipped, and most capable fighting force in the world, and he believes that the Department of Defense must be led by someone who not only knows the issues of war and peace, but also knows the heart and soul of the women and men who bravely wear the uniform, put their lives on the line, and fight for our freedom. That is why he selected Lloyd Austin to serve as Secretary of Defense.

Lloyd's accomplishments at the Department of Defense are without peer. He graduated from West Point. He led troops at almost every level, commanded in combat, served as America's military commander during the drawdown in Iraq. He served as Vice Chief of Staff of the Army and as commanding general of the U.S. Central Command. And all of you know that that is one of the key combat commands at the Department of Defense.

I met Lloyd when I came to DOD as Secretary in July of 2011. We had just 6 months to implement the drawdown in Iraq, and Lloyd was the man on the ground charged with getting it done. It was a huge logistical task.

He consulted carefully with the President, with the Vice President, the National Security Adviser, his colleagues at the State Department, and those in the
intelligence community. And he carried out with diligence and professionalism the plan that was set forth by me and other civilian leaders at the Pentagon. He had to negotiate with the Iraqis, who were not easy to negotiate with at that time, and ensured that our troops and all of their equipment could redeploy safely while protecting America's core national security interests.

I mention this episode because I know that many of you are wondering whether a former general officer can uphold the principle of civilian control of the military. I have spoken to Lloyd, and there is no doubt in my mind that he will uphold the principle of civilian control. And frankly, the best military officers that I had the honor to serve with are those who understand the importance of civilian control, and Lloyd was one of those.

He will respect the civilian chain of command, enshrined not only in tradition, but in law. He will ensure there is transparency and accountability at the Pentagon. He will make himself and Department leaders available to this committee and to the Congress for oversight. And he will provide regular briefings to the American people.

He will support the appointment of civilian leaders across the Office of the Secretary and the Department. He knows that while we cannot defend our Nation without our
Armed Forces, we cannot defend our democratic form of government without strong civilian stewardship of our national security.

Lloyd Austin is a man of uncommon character and decency and courage. He is a trailblazer, feared by our enemies and admired by those that he led. He was the first African-American general officer to lead the Army Corps in combat. He was the first African American to command an entire theater of war. And if confirmed, he will be the first African American to lead the Department of Defense.

In sum, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I believe that Lloyd Austin is the right person at the right time, a man that we need at this moment to lead the Department of Defense. He is clear-eyed about the threats, and we know there are a number of threats we are dealing with abroad -- China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, cyber attackers, and terrorists.

He understands the value of alliances and keeping them strong and supporting them, and he is prepared to shoulder the awesome burden of sending our best men and women in uniform, if necessary, into harm's way, the most difficult task we, who have been Secretary of Defense, had to assume.

As Americans watched the tragic images from the Capitol Rotunda on January 6th, I was reminded of one painting in that space that has always represented for me
the ideal of service to country. That is the oil painting of George Washington resigning his commission as general in the Army so that he could assume the duties of being the Nation's first President.

It is a statement about our democratic form of government that has stood the test of time in that hallowed citadel of liberty. The tradition of military leaders from Washington, Eisenhower, Marshall, to the large number of veterans who are serving in Congress today, including my own son, of taking off our uniforms, returning to civilian life to lead and to serve again. That tradition is as old as our republic itself and essential for the quality of leadership we need in order to protect our Constitution and our national security.

I am absolutely confident that Lloyd Austin will follow in that tradition. I am honored to introduce him to the committee and urge his swift confirmation.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Secretary Panetta. It is great to be with you again after all these years, and you have not lost a thing.

Okay. Mr. Austin, we have our first seven questions, and you know what they are. So you are ready to answer them, but answer them audibly, if you would?

Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?
Mr. Austin: I have.

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

Mr. Austin: I will.

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

Mr. Austin: I will.

Chairman Inhofe: Will those witnesses be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

Mr. Austin: They will.

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

Mr. Austin: I do.

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

Mr. Austin: I do.

Chairman Inhofe: And have you assumed any duties or undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the
outcome of the confirmation process?

Mr. Austin: I have not.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you very much.

As Secretary Panetta clearly stated, there is not a time in the past that we have had more threats than we are facing today. And throughout my tenure as chairman, this committee has focused on the ensuring that the DOD has authorities and resources it needs to implement this, the National Defense Strategy.

This document is a document that means a lot to all of us here. It has been our blueprint that we have used since 2018. It was put together by six knowledgeable Democrats, six knowledgeable Republicans, and it has served as our blueprint. And I would assume that you would consider and continue to do that. As the Secretary of Defense, second in the chain of command, you would be responsible and accountable to the President of the United States and to the American people for implementing this strategy.

I look forward to learning how you will drive military readiness for the strategic competition with China and Russia, which we have talked about at length here; how you will also handle some of the provocations from rogue nations like Iran and North Korea. Even worse is that our military's technology advantage has eroded. We were used to the old days when we had the best of everything. That
that is not true anymore. We fell down a little bit.

I know that between the years of 2010 and 2015, we were dropping our defense in terms of dollars down by about 25 percent, while China was increasing theirs, Mr. Austin, by 83 percent. And that is not acceptable. The Nation and the Department of Defense is going to tackle this problem head on if we hope to preserve and defend our way of life from those who would do harm to us.

If confirmed, you would have the honor of leading a team of Americans who represent everything that is noble and best for our Nation -- our soldiers, our sailors, our airmen, the Marines, and space guardians, our military families.

By the way, on the military families, we always hear from those who are a little less enthusiastic about a strong national defense that we spend more than Russia and China put together, and there is a reason for that. The reason for that is we care about the families. We care about housing. We care about -- the largest single expense that we have in the military is for our families, our military families.

Now, in a Communist country, you do not have that. They just give you a gun and said, "Go out and shoot people." So that is what we are concerned about, and we will continue to do that.
Our many defense civil servants also sacrifice day in and day out for our national security and rarely get the credit that they deserve. The Department will require strong civilian leadership. For you to serve as the Secretary of Defense, Congress must provide an exception to the law that prohibits individuals from being appointed if they are within 7 years of their military service.

Last week, this committee held a hearing on civilian control of the armed services, which I think it was instructive. I have never been all that concerned about the 7 years, but others have. I hope that you will share with the committee what actions you will take to ensure your tenure reflects and protects the principle of civilian control of the military if you are confirmed.

We look forward to hearing your views on these and other important issues.

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

Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I join you in welcoming Lloyd Austin to today's hearing.

General, I want to thank you for your four decades of military service to our country, and I appreciate your willingness to return to public service, this time in a civilian capacity.

In addition, I want to welcome your wife, Charlene. I also want to recognize and thank former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, who spoke on your behalf, in addition to Senator Sullivan, for their introductions.

Today's hearing is also very different from previous Secretary of Defense nomination hearings. Due to recent security threats, the Acting Secretary of Defense has authorized the deployment of 25,000 National Guard troops to Washington, D.C. I never thought I would see such a large display of U.S. military force in the streets of our country.

I thank the service members and the other Federal agencies for ensuring that the U.S. Capitol and the inauguration is safe and secure. In addition, the world continues to be engulfed in a global pandemic that has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States
and sickened millions more. This has not only affected the way we conduct our hearings, but it has become the paramount issue facing the new administration, including the Department of Defense.

General Austin, you have a long and distinguished career. You have served at the highest echelons of the Army and capped your service as the commander of U.S. Central Command.

If confirmed as the next Secretary of Defense, you will face a daunting array of current and emerging security threats. U.S. strategic priorities have shifted in recent years, as reflected in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, to focus increasingly on the near-peer competition with China and Russia. At the same time, the Trump administration, through its disruptive behavior, has eroded faith in U.S. global leadership with adverse strategic consequences.

Indeed, our National Defense Strategy must be a component of an overall national security strategy that embraces all aspects of soft power as well as military power. As a former commander of U.S. Central Command, you have valuable experience to addressing security threats in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere in the CENTCOM area of operations. The incoming Biden administration faces an immediate challenge with respect to
Iran's growing nuclear, ballistic missile, and proxy capabilities. The Department of Defense will play a key role in deterring these threats while supporting diplomatic efforts.

In Iraq and Syria, while the physical ISIS caliphate has been defeated, the underlying factors that gave rise to ISIS and al-Qaeda remain largely unaddressed. Defending against transnational violent extremist groups will require continued vigilance.

In Afghanistan, our allies and partners need to be reassured that going forward, they will be consulted up front on any changes in U.S. force posture. The incoming administration will need to assess the conditions on the ground, including whether the Taliban is, in fact, living up to their commitments and what level of support are required to protect U.S. national security interests and invigorate a diplomatic solution.

In addition to these broad strategic challenges, as Secretary of Defense, you must also grapple with issues specific to the management of the Department. The Fiscal Year 2022 budget will be the first that is unconstrained by the Budget Control Act, and some view this as an opportunity to redirect the overall defense budget.

This year will mark an inflection point in how the Department prioritizes resources it needs to accomplish its
missions. The Department must focus its efforts on critical technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and cybersecurity while also emphasizing rapid delivery of advanced new weapon systems on timelines that keep pace with technological change.

The Department of Defense must partner with Congress to find ways to retire legacy systems without incurring too much risk operationally or economically. The Department also has management challenges that require investment in great people to manage the complexities of the Pentagon and its processes rather than an endless search for budget cuts and workforce reductions.

Ensuring robust funding for full-spectrum readiness, including additional home station training, flying hours, steaming days, depot maintenance, and installation sustainment, has been a high priority for this committee, and I expect it will be yours, too. The Department must also hold private housing companies and their defense chain of command accountable to ensure families live in the homes they deserve. Our men and women in uniform and the civilian workforce that supports them remain this committee's top concern, and they must be yours as well.

Recruiting and retaining a sufficiently sized, trained, and equipped military of the necessary quality of character and talent to meet national defense requirements
is always a paramount goal of the Secretary of Defense and this committee. Successful recruiting ensuring the health of the force has been and will continue to be a challenge while we finish the national fight against COVID.

General Austin, as I have recounted in great detail, if confirmed, you will manage a Department coping with many extraordinarily difficult issues that will require strong civilian leadership to address these challenges and to reverse the erosion of civil-military relations over the past several years. However, in order to serve as the Secretary of Defense, Congress must provide an exception to the statutory requirement that prohibits individuals from being appointed if they are within 7 years of their military service.

Last week, this committee heard from expert witnesses on the state of civilian control in the Armed Forces. Some members expressed concern that providing an exception for you to serve as the Secretary of Defense, particularly so soon after Secretary Mattis, could harm civil-military relations. It is a valid concern.

But as our witnesses testified, it is possible to mitigate the effects if you demonstrate your commitment to empowering civilians in the Department. Further, we must also hear how you view the role of Secretary of Defense and how that position is different from your days of honorable
service as a military officer.

This distinction is critical, as the Secretary of Defense is an inherently political position requiring a skill set for managing a vast bureaucracy while balancing personalities within the Department and across our Federal agencies. Relatedly, an effective Secretary must be transparent with Congress. Tensions often exist between the executive and legislative branches, regardless of political party. However, the Department must keep Congress fully informed on critical national security developments so that we can conduct congressional oversight.

General Austin, with these broad categories in mind, I hope you will candidly share what actions you will take to ensure your tenure reflects and protects the principle of civilian control of the military.

Finally, strengthening civil-military relations is not the sole responsibility of the Secretary of Defense. Congress has a role, too. This includes expeditiously confirming qualified civilian nominees to serve in the Pentagon. Furthermore, I believe Congress should revisit the headquarters reductions implemented over the past several years. While well intentioned, these budget cuts have sapped the Department of experience, expertise, and institutional knowledge, all of which degrades the
Department's ability to oversee the critical policy issues that are integral for robust civilian oversight.

Again, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to hearing from our nominee.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed. Excellent, excellent statement.

With some Senators attending remotely, I want to let everyone know how we are going to run this thing. Since it is impossible to know exactly when our colleagues who will be joining via computer, we will not follow our standard early bird timing rule. Instead, we will handle the order of questions by seniority, alternating to each side, Democrat and Republican, until we have gone through everyone. Then we will see how much time we have left and what the wish is.

We will do the standard -- instead of doing the standard 5 minutes, Senator Reed and I have agreed that 7-minute rounds might be more appropriate. And I ask my colleagues on the computers to please keep an eye on the clock, which you should see on your screens, and we will try to adhere to those 7-minute rounds.

Finally, to allow for everyone to be heard, whether in the room or on a computer, I ask all colleagues to please mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

Mr. Austin, we will begin with your opening statement
and be assured that the entirety of your written statement
will be made a part of the record.

General Austin?
STATEMENT OF LLOYD J. AUSTIN III TO BE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, members of this committee.

I am grateful for your time this afternoon, especially during these momentous days. It was apparent to me and to all Americans 2 weeks ago how seriously you take your duties to the Constitution, and I thank you for that commitment.

I know that you share my gratitude for the commitment of the men and women of the Department of Defense as well, who share your devotion to that founding document, our Constitution. Many of them are serving overseas. Some of them are serving just outside this room. And all of them are keeping us safe. We owe much to their selflessness and to that of their families.

I want to thank Senator Sullivan and Secretary Panetta for their kind words of introduction. I am truly grateful.

And of course, I want to thank my wonderful wife, Charlene, who, like today, has stood by my side for more than 40 years, guiding me, supporting me, and making me a better man.

I am also very grateful to President-Elect Biden for asking me to serve my country again. I value the strength of my relationship with him, and I am humbled by the trust...
and confidence that he has placed in me. I hope this hearing will earn me your trust.

Let me say at the outset that I understand and respect the reservations that some of you have expressed about having another recently retired general at the head of the Department of Defense. The safety and security of our democracy demands competent civilian control of our Armed Forces, the subordination of military power to the civil.

I spent my entire life committed to that principle. In war and in peace, I implemented the policies of civilians elected and appointed over me, leaders like Secretary Panetta. And I know that being a member of the President's Cabinet, a political appointee, requires a different perspective and unique duties from a career in uniform.

I intend to surround myself with and empower experienced, capable civilian leaders who will enable healthy civil-military relations grounded in meaningful oversight. Indeed, I plan to include the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in top decision-making meetings, ensuring strategic and operational decisions are informed by policy.

I will rebalance collaboration and coordination between the Joint Staff and the OSD staff to ensure civilian input is integrated at every level of the process,
and I will make clear my expectation that the Pentagon work hand-in-glove with the State Department supporting the work of our diplomats.

Now I know that a large measure of civilian control of our military lies right here with this body. And if you confirm me, I assure you that the Pentagon under my leadership will respect your oversight responsibilities, and we will be transparent with you. And I will provide you my best counsel, and I will seek yours.

And just like you, I will take seriously the many challenges facing our country, the most immediate of which, in my view, is the pandemic. And if confirmed, I will quickly review the Department's contributions to coronavirus relief efforts, ensuring that we are doing everything that we can to help distribute vaccines across the country and to vaccinate our troops and preserve readiness.

We will also do everything we can for our military families. They, too, are educating kids at home and losing their jobs and trying to stock the pantry. I know this committee shares my view that we owe them our best efforts to lighten that load.

We also owe our people a working environment free of discrimination, hate, and harassment. And if confirmed, I will fight hard to stamp out sexual assault and to rid our
ranks of racists and extremists and to create a climate
where everyone fit and willing has the opportunity to serve
this country with dignity. The job of the Department of
Defense is to keep America safe from our enemies, but we
cannot do that if some of those enemies lie within our own
ranks.

For those enemies and adversaries outside the ranks
and around the world, we need resources to match strategy,
and strategy matched to policy, and policy matched to the
will of the American people. Globally, I understand that
Asia must be the focus of our effort, and I see China in
particular as a pacing challenge for the Department. I
know I will need your help in tackling these problems and
to give our men and women in uniform the tools that they
need to fight and win.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, while I did
not seek this job, I consider it an honor. And if
confirmed, I will carry out the mission of the Department
of Defense always with the goal to deter war and ensure our
Nation's security, and I will uphold the principle of
civilian control of the military as intended. And I would
not be here asking for your support if I felt that I was
unable or unwilling to question people with whom I once
served in operations that I once led or too afraid to speak
my mind to you or to the President.
I was a general and a soldier, and I am proud of that. But today, I appear before you as a citizen. The son of a postal worker and a homemaker from Thomasville, Georgia, and I am proud of that, too. And if you confirm me, I am prepared to serve now as a civilian, fully acknowledging the importance of this distinction.

And I thank you again for consideration of my nomination and for your steadfast support of our men and women in uniform, our civilians, and their families, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Austin follows:]
Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, General Austin. Great statement.

You heard my comments, General Austin, about the document, the National Defense Strategy. You are familiar with this. I am sure you have read it many times.

What do you think about its relevance today? Do you see changes that should be made in this, or what is your feeling today contemporarily about this statement?

Mr. Austin: I think much of the document is absolutely on track for today's challenges, Mr. Chairman. As is the case with all strategies, if confirmed, one of the things that I would look to do is to work to update the strategy and work within the confines of the guidance and the policy issued by the current -- the next administration.

Chairman Inhofe: Yes, well, that is right. And the guidance also from this document I think is still relevant to date.

In this document, the previous two Secretaries of the Defense -- Secretary Mattis, Secretary Esper -- both agreed that that document, it prescribed that we probably need a 3 to 5 percent real growth in defense budget effectively in the coming years. Do you agree generally with that statement?

Mr. Austin: Well, Mr. Chairman, as I said in the
opening statement, I believe that our resources need to
match our strategy, and our strategy needs to match our
policy.

Chairman Inhofe: Yes, I would assume that would be
yes. And others are going to be asking about the civilian
and military relations, I know that, but let me cover a
couple of things that I think are important.

On the nuclear triad, a lot of people who are at
different ideas on what we should do and the priorities we
have in our defense system, that they try to whittle away
at the nuclear triad. And we have always felt, and the
Secretaries of Defense, that nuclear deterrence, do you
agree with them that nuclear -- their assessment that
nuclear deterrence is the DOD’s highest-priority mission?

Mr. Austin: I do, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: And do you agree that the triad --
the land, air, and sea-based nuclear delivery platforms are
still necessary, even though we do hear a lot of arguments
that two of the three would be adequate? What do you
think?

Mr. Austin: Mr. Chairman, I believe that the triad
has served us well in the past, and I certainly believe
that it will continue to do so going forward. And I
personally support the triad.

Chairman Inhofe: Good. We have kind of a forgotten
continent for a long period of time in Africa. I can
remember when Africa was in three different commands. It
was in the PACOM, the Central Command, and the EUCOM. And
we came along with AFRICOM, and I think things have really
improved since that time. And I think it is a critical
theater for implementing this National Defense Strategy
that we have.

We see China, all of our people talk about the South
China Sea, about their building of the islands and all
these things that are going on, but they forget that China
has, for the first time, left their city limits to support
a major objective on their behalf, and that is in Djibouti.
And they go not just in Djibouti, but all throughout China
as far south as the southern part of Tanzania, and so it is
very active in that area.

I would ask you, right now, we have some 6,000 DOD
personnel on the continent. I know there has been an
effort, there was an effort in this last administration to
be reducing in some areas what our presence, what our
resources, how they should be put out. My feeling was that
we had inadequate resources to start with only 6,000 in the
entire continent.

Do you have any thoughts that you have given to that
in terms of the resources that we need to use in that part
of the world?
Mr. Austin: Mr. Chairman, Africa, like some other places in the world, has been one of those places where we have been able to gain good effect by -- with a small amount of investment by helping to -- helping our partners to increase their ability to defend their sovereign territory and to protect themselves.

Chairman Inhofe: That is excellent. We have to keep in mind that many of our closest allies are there right now, and if we should deteriorate our presence in any way, we would -- I have a feeling they would do the same thing. So I appreciate that very much.

One last thing I want to touch on because it is a current issue. Ever since the International Court of Justice ruled way back in 1975, I believe it was, that we have -- in Western Sahara, we have supported a referendum for self-determination.

Now the United States has done that ever since the 1970s. The U.N. has done that since the 1970s. The African Union has done that, and most all of the 52 nations of Africa have all stated that the Western Sahara should have a referendum for self-determination. What do you think?

Mr. Austin: Well, that is an issue that I certainly would want to take a closer look at, Mr. Chairman, before I gave you a detailed answer. But that is one of the things
that I will look at, if confirmed, right away going into the position.

Chairman Inhofe: Yes, and I would like to have you keep in mind that they have been consistent for so many years. And so I would anticipate that your feelings would be the same.

Senator Reed?

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, General Austin.

One issue that is obvious is the discussion of the erosion of civilian control, participation, influence on the Department of Defense. That was highlighted by the National Defense Security document, which the chairman has displayed. But the suggestion there was it was not something that was happening in an instant, that it was taking place over years. And part of that, I believe, is the lack of competent civilian authorities in place.

There are many individuals, as I suggest in my statement that are acting. There are others who are civil servants who have been pushed up into jobs that normally require confirmation, and there has been a lack of sometimes candidates for confirmation.

So I would ask you, if you are confirmed, will you do your utmost to ensure that every position, civilian position in the Department is filled, that we get nominees
promptly? I know you have to work through the White House. And that other individuals will be put in positions where they are both skilled and qualified?

Mr. Austin: Absolutely, Senator Reed. I will do everything I can to move as quickly as I can to move to fill those positions with experienced and competent, qualified civilians. And I will need the help of this body to make sure that we are moving quickly.

Senator Reed: Yes, I concur. This has to be a collaborative effort. I think in addition, too, with the civilian members, and as you suggest in your remarks, you have to ensure that there is a very appropriate working relationship with uniformed personnel, particularly on the Joint Staff. And from your comments, I assume that will be one of your priorities, to make sure that and, indeed, that the civilians have a critical role in that process. Is that correct?

Mr. Austin: It is absolutely correct, Senator Reed. I think it is imperative that the OSD staff maintain primacy in terms of crafting strategy and policy, and I think, you know, we will need the right civilians in key positions to help us do that.

And we have already begun to move down that road. You have seen Colin Kahl nominated to be the Under Secretary for Policy, a very talented young man that will do well.
You have seen Kath Hicks nominated to be the Deputy Secretary of Defense. So we are off to a good start, and we will continue to maintain momentum in filling those positions and making sure that we rebalance the workload between the Joint Staff and the Secretariat.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

On another subject, the need for strength in alliances seems to be obvious, but something that you are going to have to take on immediately. I am thinking of the Pacific Defense Initiative, which the chairman was the principal author, and it is based on solidifying our relationships, both diplomatic and operationally, with our near partners in the Pacific -- the Australians, the Japanese, and the South Koreans -- and then building further with other Pacific nations.

And I would presume and hope that you would see that as an important task also, building up our relationships and alliances, which, in many respects, has been neglected. Is that something that you see as important?

Mr. Austin: I think it is critical, Senator Reed, and I also very much look forward to going out and refurbishing those alliances and making sure that we build additional capacity where possible. And you can look when we are -- when we do begin to travel again that that region will be one of my first stops.
Senator Reed: Right. And the old saying, there is strength in numbers, and I think there is some truth to that. So as we build up our not just in a superficial way, but training together, conducting exercises together, integrating our intelligence, integrating our operations at sea, on land, and in the air, that, I think, it could be the best deterrent we could think of with respect to the aspirations of China. And I think you might concur.

Mr. Austin: I agree.

Senator Reed: One of the tasks you are going to have is as you are trying to deal with all these places around the world, you also have to transform the Department of Defense. As the chairman indicated, our technological advantage, which was, we thought, uncontested in the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, et cetera, is contested. In fact, there are suggestions that we might not be ahead in many places.

And so you are going to have to think very seriously about how do we elevate science? How do we, more importantly, take our scientific developments, our prototypes, and get it to the field, to soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines in the field? And if you have any comments on that, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Austin: I certainly agree with you, Senator Reed that our acquisition system needs to be more agile and more responsive to the needs that you just mentioned. We need
to get the capability down to the people who need it, the people who are going to use it, as quickly as possible.

I would also say that we need to develop the operational concepts that support those new capabilities to make sure that we continue to present a credible deterrent. But I absolutely agree that there is much to be done in terms of working with the acquisition process to make sure that it becomes more agile.

Senator Reed: Well, thank you.

Now just as a final point, I think I have to respond to the challenge that the chairman gave you to reach your 61st wedding anniversary. Having been married for the first time at the age of 55, despite my best efforts, I can guarantee the chairman, I will not reach 61 years.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: I do not believe that.

Senator Wicker?

Senator Wicker: Senator Reed, you just do it one day at a time.

Senator Reed: Thank you. That is good advice,

Senator Wicker.

Senator Wicker: Mr. Austin, thank you for being with us today. Thank you for the conversation that we had several weeks ago over the phone, and thank you for your willingness to serve in the military and now to serve in a
civilian capacity.

You are a West Point graduate. I pointed out to Senator Reed that I am wearing an Army tie today in your honor, but I suppose also in honor of Senator Reed and all the distinguished Army folks. I am an Air Force veteran myself, but I am also a former chair of the Seapower Subcommittee, and so today, I want to talk to you at the beginning about seapower.

The 30-year ship building plan was finally released just last month by the leadership in the Navy, and it calls for 405 manned ships by the year 2051. That is compared to a 355 ship requirement that we previously had and that we actually placed into the statute.

Have you read the 30-year ship building plan, Mr. Austin?

Mr. Austin: I have not read the ship -- the 30-year plan yet, Senator Wicker.

Senator Wicker: Are you familiar with the fact that the 30-year ship building plan calls for increasing our requirement? Actually, it increases our requirement from 355 ships to 405 manned ships by the year 2051.

Mr. Austin: I am familiar with that -- with that fact.

Senator Wicker: Do you support that finding?

Mr. Austin: I certainly -- I would just say, Senator,
our Navy is the most capable naval force on the face of the planet. It will remain so if I am confirmed and become Secretary of Defense.

I think that it is important that we maintain the capabilities that we will need to be relevant not only today, but relevant tomorrow. So I look forward to getting on the ground, if confirmed, and working with the leadership of the Navy to better understand the requirements and how we are going to support those requirements.

And also I look forward to working with this body to make sure that we have the right resources to support that requirement.

Senator Wicker: Well, that does bring me to a point that I need to make, and that is that within the administration, it is not only the White House and it is not only DOD, but also OMB is a mighty big gorilla sitting in the room there, and they force a lot of constraints upon us.

Let me just say to you that I hope you will soon become familiar with the ship building plan and be able to give us a more definite answer about the need for an increased Navy to do the things that we have to do. It calls for adding 82 new ships between 2022 and 2026 at a cost of $147 billion.
Previously, that number was only 44 ships. So the new requirement, the new plan is 82 new ships in that short 4-year period, rather than 44 ships, and an extra $45 billion over that timeframe. So rest assured that we need to have more conversations there.

The distinguished chairman mentioned China, the fact that their ambitions not only are in the Pacific, but also extend to Africa, and he named a few locations there. The DOD report to Congress on China recently said it is likely China will aim to develop a military by mid century that is equal to or, in some cases, superior to the U.S. military.

Do you agree with that assessment, Mr. Austin?

Mr. Austin: I would agree. I would agree that that is their goal. My job, if confirmed as Secretary of Defense, is to make sure that we develop the capabilities, the plans, and the operational concepts to ensure that we maintain a competitive edge. And so, while that may be their goal, I would, again, if I am confirmed, would intend to make sure that that never happens.

Senator Wicker: Well, it is my contention that the new ship building plan calling for 405 manned ships by the year 2051 and additional 82 new ships in the next 5 years is part and parcel to answering that challenge. What do you say to that, Mr. Austin?

Mr. Austin: I would certainly say that we need to
have the right kinds of capability to be able to counter the emerging threat. And again, I look forward to having that conversation with the Department of the Navy.

If that is the analysis that has been provided by the Navy, I have every reason to believe that it is accurate. But I really would like to have that conversation in more depth.

Senator Wicker: Let me quote another Army man, the distinguished Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, who said just last month, "Look, I am an Army guy, and I love the Army, but the fundamental defense of the United States and the ability to project power forward will always be for America naval and airspace power."

I would just commend to you that statement and suggest that the additional seapower is going to be necessary. I would also want you to comment, and I will just ask you, because we are time constrained, to comment about the idea of basing two additional destroyers at Rota, Spain, to be there to combat Russian aggression. But, Mr. Chairman, because I only have 2 seconds, I will take that for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Austin.

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Wicker.
Senator Shaheen?

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, thank you for being willing to be considered for this important post at this critical time in our Nation's history.

As you are probably aware, last week this committee received testimony from outside experts on the issue of the waiver that will be required for you to serve and the whole issue of civil-military relations. And I know you addressed that briefly in your opening comments, and Senator Reed followed up with some specific questions. But one of the interesting things to me in that hearing last week was one of the people testifying talked about the concern that during Secretary Mattis' tenure that there was an over-deference to military views that were critical to shaping America's military policy or defense policy.

Can you talk about how you would respond to those concerns and what you think should be done to ensure that the balance continues, with the prominence being on civilian control of the military?

Mr. Austin: Yes, thank you, Senator.

I believe that you need to have the right people in the right positions that can be in -- that are in the decision-making process. And so I look to have a very experienced Under Secretary for Policy. I look to have a
very experienced Deputy Secretary of Defense. My Chief of Staff will not -- if I am confirmed will not be a military person, but yet a person that really understands strategy and policy and also has deep ties to the Hill, as well as to the White House.

And so I think the people in the room and contributing to the decision-making, it makes all the difference in the world. So to answer your question, I will make sure that we staff the positions with the right people who have the right experiences and who are not afraid to provide their input. And I will empower them to make sure that they have the flexibility to get the job done, to coordinate with the Joint Staff and coordinate with the other agencies to ensure that we have a policy -- have significant policy input on every decision.

Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that, especially the importance of the empowerment of those individuals.

When we talked shortly after your nomination was put forward, we talked about two of New Hampshire's military installations that we are very proud of, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which is shared between New Hampshire and Maine, and also our 157th Air Refueling Wing at Pease National Guard, which was the first Air National Guard base to receive the new KC-46 refueling tanker.
And there are two long-term concerns that I have about those installations. One is the shipyard optimization plan, as we look at the need to invest in our public shipyards in the future. That optimization plan is going to be critical to ensuring that the capacity is there not just at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, but our other public shipyards to support our naval fleet. And I hope that you will remain committed to that plan and to moving forward with that plan as we look at the upcoming years.

Mr. Austin: I will, Senator.

Senator Shaheen: And the other is the KC-46 and the continuing issues with getting that tanker online. As you know, the most recent one is the remote vision system, which still is not fixed in a way that allows those tankers to fly and do the refueling mission that is so critical.

Again, I would hope that you will stay on that issue with Boeing and make sure we get those planes right so that they can do the refueling that we are paying for them to do.

Mr. Austin: I will absolutely stay on this -- on this issue. I think it is critical. It is a critical component of our overall force, and so I think it is important that we continue to press and get this capability to where it needs to be.

Senator Shaheen: Great. And I hope you will come up
to New Hampshire and visit both of those installations at some point in your tenure, if confirmed.

I would like to ask you about Afghanistan next because as we look at where we are in Afghanistan, the treaty or the agreement -- I do not know what we want to call it because, clearly, the Taliban is not complying with what had been announced as concessions that were made as part of that agreement. Also, the failure of that agreement to take into consideration the role of women and minorities in Afghanistan that have been so important as they have written a new constitution.

And as we look at ending conflict there, one of the things we know from the data is that when women are at the table in negotiations, that there is a 35 percent better chance that those peace agreements will last 15 years or longer. So this is not just for the optics, it looks great to have women at the table. It is about how do we ensure that those negotiations are long lasting?

And I wonder if you can talk about what you would like to see at this point in Afghanistan as we think about how do we withdraw there in a way that leaves a country that enshrines some of the changes that have been made to support a new constitution and all of the effort that has been put in there by the United States and so many other countries in the world.
Mr. Austin: Well, Senator, I certainly would like to see this conflict end with a negotiated settlement, and I think we are going to make every effort that we can to ensure that that happens. I would also like to say upfront I am truly grateful for the sacrifices of the thousands of men and women that have gone through Afghanistan and given so much, sacrificed so much. To your point, their work has made a difference.

But I think this conflict needs to come to an end, and we need to see an agreement reached, and in accordance with what the President-Elect wants to see, I think we want to see an Afghanistan in the future that does not present a threat to America. So a focus on some kind of terrorism issues, I think, in the future I think would be helpful.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

And via Webex, Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, General Austin.

This committee has consistently heard testimony, including from every STRATCOM commander who has appeared before this committee since I have been a member, recommending against making unilateral reductions to our nuclear forces. Do you agree that making unilateral reductions is unwise?
Mr. Austin: Senator, I am having a tough time hearing you.

Chairman Inhofe: Yes, the volume seems not to be high enough. If anyone knows how to adjust that, this is a good time to do it.

Senator Fischer: Let me see if I do.

Chairman Inhofe: That sounds better.

Senator Fischer: Do you hear me okay?

Chairman Inhofe: Yes.

Senator Fischer: Okay. I was asking, sir, about making unilateral reductions to our nuclear forces. Do you agree that making these reductions unilaterally is unwise?

Mr. Austin: I think that we should -- I look forward to getting onboard, if confirmed, and having an ability to kind of look under the hood and see exactly what we are doing with our nuclear forces. So once I have had a chance to do that, Senator, I would love to come back and discuss it with you.

Senator Fischer: In your answer to some questions that were sent over to you, you said that -- you said, "I believe it is in the national security interests of the United States and its allies and partners to pursue formal, verifiable arms control agreements that reduce the nuclear threats from Russia and China." Is that correct?

Mr. Austin: That is correct, Senator.
Senator Fischer: So reductions should be made through negotiated, verifiable agreements, not unilaterally. Is that right?

Mr. Austin: That is correct.

Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Another fact that has been consistently emphasized by civilian officials and military leaders in both the Obama and Trump administrations is that nuclear modernization cannot be delayed any further. Speaking in 2016, President Obama's Secretary of Defense Ash Carter put it in the following way, "The fact is most of our nuclear weapon delivery systems have already been extended decades beyond their original expected service lives, so it is not a choice between replacing these platforms or keeping them. It is really a choice between replacing them or losing them. That would mean losing confidence in our ability to deter, which we cannot afford in today's volatile security environment."

More recently, Admiral Richard, the current STRATCOM commander, in his posture statement last year testified that, "Many of the modernization and sustainment efforts necessary to ensure the deterrent's viability have zero schedule margin and are late-to-need." He went on to state, "We cannot afford more delays and uncertainty in delivering capabilities and must maintain a focus on..."
revitalizing our nuclear forces and the associated infrastructure."

General, is this also your understanding of the modernization schedule?

Mr. Austin: Well, I again -- I misunderstood your first part, the first part of the question there, when you were -- when you started out. What I wanted to tell you was I really look forward to getting into the details of the nuclear modernization program, if confirmed. And you know, I really would like to be able to look at the details of exactly what we are choosing to invest in and the timelines associated with that, and I would love to come back to you and discuss that with you.

Senator Fischer: I would have your assurance, though, that you would, of course, be visiting with the current STRATCOM combatant commander, as well as previous ones, about the need to make sure that we have these platforms that we need and also --

Mr. Austin: That will be a --

Senator Fischer: Go ahead.

Mr. Austin: That will be a top priority, Senator.

Senator Fischer: I guess I am kind of surprised by your answer, General. When the chairman asked you about the triad, specifically about maintaining an effective nuclear triad of land, air, and sea-based platforms, I
thought your answer was, yes, we have to maintain that effective nuclear triad. Is that correct?

Mr. Austin: That is correct, Senator.

Senator Fischer: And I realize that you do have to review where we currently are in modernization, but I would think having an understanding that every administration and every STRATCOM commander and also our Secretaries of Defense have been adamant that we cannot fall behind on this, your answer that you would have to get back on me is somewhat surprising. I understand it is a complicated topic, but it is a 60-year-old foundational concept that we have here.

Mr. Austin: Yes, Senator. And I think -- I think that we are in agreement that this is a priority, this needs to remain a priority. What I was just conveying was the specific timelines of which pieces are being resourced at what rate, those things I would really like to get into details and have a further discussion with you on.

But there is no question that I consider this to be a priority, and it will remain a priority. And I look forward to getting with the STRATCOM commander and having that discussion in detail.

Senator Fischer: Well, thank you. I hope also, if you are confirmed, you will be a strong advocate for the National Nuclear Security Administration being able to
receive sufficient funding so that they can meet the Department of Defense's needs.

Mr. Austin: I will be.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Now via Webex, Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Austin, President-Elect Biden made overturning President Trump's ban on open transgender military service a day one priority. Can you confirm your commitment and tell the committee how you plan to reinstate open service?

Mr. Austin: I support the President's plan or plan to overturn the ban. I truly believe, Senator, that as I said in my opening statement, that if you are fit and you are qualified to serve and you can maintain the standards, you should be allowed to serve. And you can expect that I will support that throughout.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Austin.

When we met together, we talked at length about the scourge of military sexual assault in the military. We talked about how this has been an issue for decades, and in fact, we talked about all the efforts that the Department of Defense has made over at least the last decade that I have been on the Armed Services Committee to try to eradicate it.
Every Secretary of Defense from the last 25 years has said there is a zero tolerance for sexual assault in the military. But every time they say there is zero tolerance, we look at the facts, we look at the evidence, we look at how many sexual assaults are committed, how many go to trial, how many end in conviction, and we do not seem to improve at all. In fact, last year, the Department of Defense announced a record number of sexual assaults reported by or against service members and the lowest conviction rate for their assailants on record.

In your opinion, does this reflect good order and discipline within the military? Does this reflect enhanced military readiness?

Mr. Austin: Senator, I take the issue of sexual assault seriously and personally. And to your point, Senator, I think we have put a lot of effort into this, and I am grateful for all of the effort that you have personally put into this and this committee has put into this, but we have not gotten better. And we have to get better, and we will get better.

We have to go after the culture. We have to go after the climate. This is a leadership issue. It is a readiness issue. And it starts on the top, and we have got to work from the bottom as well, simultaneously.

Senator Gillibrand: So, therefore, is your answer,
yes, that it does not reflect good order and discipline and
does not reflect the readiness that you would like your
service to have?

Mr. Austin: That is correct, Senator.

Senator Gillibrand: Furthermore, the most recent
Pentagon survey on the topic found that 64 percent of
sexual assault survivors who reported their crime received
some form of retaliation for reporting that crime, often
from the exact chain of command that is supposed to protect
them. This number is statistically unchanged from 2016.

Does this suggest to you adequate progress on what the
top brass has promised to do year after year? Do you
believe that this is sufficient progress?

Mr. Austin: I absolutely do not believe that it is
progress, Senator.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, given the total lack of
progress or accountability within the military justice
system, do you believe that a new approach must be taken?
Because as we discussed the recent events at Fort Hood, a
new approach is clearly warranted. What is your view on
that?

Mr. Austin: I certainly believe that we need to do
better, a lot of things better in terms of investigation
and prosecutions, and I think we have to look at this
holistically. And I know that you know that the President—
Elect has committed to standing up a 90-day commission to really look at this soup to nuts. And I look forward to the read-out of that commission, but I will not wait for 90 days to get after this.

As I indicated, this starts with me, and you can count on me getting after this on day one.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, to be honest, President-Elect Biden said much more than that. He promised much more than a commission. He said, in fact, when asked directly by Protect Our Defenders' Nancy Parrish if he would support "moving the military justice system into the 21st century by allowing military prosecutors to make prosecution decisions for nonmilitary crimes -- serious felonies like rape, murder, and child abuse." And that President-Elect Biden in response said, "Yes, yes, yes."

So do you share President-Elect Biden's commitment to move prosecutorial decisions outside the chain of command and giving that decision to trained military prosecutors?

Mr. Austin: I would like -- if confirmed, I would like to work with the chain of command and very rapidly assess what things that there are that need to be -- that need to be fixed or addressed. I would like to make those recommendations and provide those assessments to the President-Elect.

Senator Gillibrand: But you do agree that we cannot
keep doing the same thing that we have been doing for the past decade?

Mr. Austin: I absolutely agree with that, Senator. I absolutely agree with that.

Senator Gillibrand: Do I have your commitment to be relentless on this issue until we can end the scourge of sexual violence in the military?

Mr. Austin: You have my commitment.

Senator Gillibrand: Okay. I would now like to move to civil-military relations.

Mr. Austin, scholars rightly argue that the Secretary of Defense plays a critical role in maintaining balanced civilian-military relations by explaining the military's activities to the public. Secretary Mattis, another recently retired general who required a waiver to serve, did not embrace this role. According to Bob Woodward's book Fear, Mattis grew so tired of being asked to appear on Sunday shows that he threatened to send Sean Spicer to Afghanistan.

Mr. Austin, can you commit to following in the footsteps of your predecessors and regularly appearing on TV to explain to Americans where the administration has asked service members to risk their lives and why?

Mr. Austin: I fully understand and appreciate the role that the Secretary of Defense has in communicating
with the American public, Senator. And you have my commitment that I will establish a good relationship with the media and provide them the access and the information required to do their job of reporting out to the American people.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Austin.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Cotton?

Senator Cotton: Congratulations, General Austin, on your nomination, and thank you for your appearance today, especially for your four decades of military service.

Unfortunately, I must announce that I oppose the waiver of the 7-year cooling-off period. My decision reflects not at all on you personally or your record, which I respect. Rather, I believe Congress should no longer grant such waivers at all.

I supported the waiver for General Mattis with reservations 4 years ago, which I quickly came to view as a mistake and I have since regretted. For that matter, upon further reading of the historical record, I now believe the waiver for General Marshall in 1950 was also a mistake. Under no foreseeable circumstances can I imagine supporting such a waiver again.

Again, General Austin, my reasons for this decision
are distinct and separate from your nomination. And put simply, my reasons are the same reasons we have a cooling-off period for recently retired generals in the first place. Some of those reasons are simply effect, not something that you can address or about which you can reassure. Others, you can give reassurance, and I will give you that opportunity in a moment.

Among those concerns I have that I do not think can be addressed are the following. First, the perception that these waivers are now routine, not extraordinary. Senator Reed said in 2017 that he would not support another waiver, and they should happen "once in a generation." No matter what we say, though, if we approve two waivers in just 4 years, our actions will speak louder than our words.

Second, the perception among flag officers that a four-star billet is not a career capstone. Some generals and admirals may begin to think if they play their cards right, they, too, can become a Secretary in just a few years. I do not think that is good for the force or for the country.

Three, the perception among the American people that the military expertise of our general officers is the same as national security expertise more broadly and that the latter resides chiefly in the military, which I also believe is unhealthy for our democracy.
And four, the perception of potential Army favoritism. As a 41-year officer in the Army, many observers may disbelieve that you can hang up the Army green, rightly or wrongly. If you make the right decision for the Army over the other services, then those services' advocates may say it is because of favoritism. Make the correct decision for another service against the Army, and the Army's advocates will say you are protecting your flank against such charges of favoritism. Neither one of those may be true in the case, but I believe it is unavoidable.

Those concerns alone are weighty and enough for me to oppose this waiver, as I should have done 4 years ago. But there are still more reasons behind the cooling-off period. As I said, though, you can give reassurances about some of these concerns, and I want to give you the opportunity to do that.

First, Secretary of Defense is not a partisan job, but it is very much a political job. Bob Gates is a good example. He served in a Republican and Democratic administration with great political skill. We, of course, expect our generals, like you and General Mattis, to be apolitical, but our troops deserve a Secretary with the political skills and willingness to fight for them, whether within the Pentagon against its bureaucracy, within the Cabinet in fights over policy and budgetary resources, or
against parochial Members of Congress.

So, General Austin, what can you say to address this concern? If, for instance, John Kerry wants to sacrifice our force posture on China's periphery in return for ephemeral promises from China to reduce emissions in 2070? Or Jennifer Granholm wants to rob the nuclear security budget to fund pie-in-the-sky green energy programs? Or simply if the Office of Management and Budget wants to cut the military's budget, how would you manage such inherently political disputes?

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly in terms of providing resources for the military, my goal is to -- my job is to defend this country, if I am confirmed as the Secretary of Defense. And so I believe that we need to have the adequate resources to be able to do that.

In order to help me work the issues and make my points throughout the interagency, number one, I will develop great relationships with my partners in State and OMB and other places. Number two, I will hire the right people to be on my staff to make sure that they are working with me and crafting the right language to be able to be successful in this dialogue.

Senator Cotton: Thank you, General. If confirmed, I do urge you to be a forceful political advocate for the Department and its interests, both inside the Cabinet and
with the Congress as well.

A second concern I would like you to address is that the Secretary also holds a public office. Bob Gates routinely held on-camera press briefings about major decisions, new policies, public controversies, and so forth. Those have been almost nonexistent for the last 4 years.

General Austin, if confirmed, will you commit to hold regular, on-camera press briefings?

Mr. Austin: Yes.

Senator Cotton: Will you also commit to appear on television programs to explain the key issues of the day, as Senator Gillibrand raised?

Mr. Austin: Yes.

Senator Cotton: Thank you.

A third and final concern I want you to address is that a recently retired general is apt to bring with him much of his former military staff, perhaps re-creating his last command as a kind of supreme combatant command, also likely to rely too much on the Joint Staff.

General Austin, could you please discuss, if confirmed, how many of your former military staff from your various senior commands you plan to hire and how you will balance the Joint Staff with civilian appointees, the services, and the combatant commands?
Mr. Austin: The key billets for my staff, all of those positions are being -- we are looking at filling all those positions, if I am confirmed, with experienced senior civilians that, again, I will empower to be able to get their job done.

Senator Cotton: Thank you.

Again, General Austin, my concerns about these waivers do not bear at all on your nomination or your record of service to our Nation, for which I have the highest regard. I thank you again for answering the call of duty to your country.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

Senator Blumenthal?

Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, Mr. Austin, thank you for being here today. Thank you for your extraordinary career of service, which I deeply respect and admire.

My opposition to the waiver is not personal. It is a matter of principle, and I want to move on to the merits of the policy issues that will confront you, if confirmed. In my view, you have expressed clearly and cogently your commitment to strengthening civilian control over the military, which you would implement if confirmed.

First, I have been deeply alarmed, as have been many of my colleagues, by the rise of white supremacists and
extremist ideology in the military. You and I have discussed it. The latest signs are, in fact, that two National Guard members have been removed from their duties regarding the inaugural because of their potential links to extremist sentiments or organizations.

Last week, I led 13 of my colleagues in a letter to the Department of Defense Inspector General asking for an immediate and intensive investigation of the prevalence of white supremacy and extremist ideology. I am asking for your commitment that you will cooperate with and support that investigation. Shortly after our letter, the Department of Defense indicated it was going to do an evaluation of this issue, but I want an intensive investigation and action to counter it. And I look forward, hopefully, to working with you in countering and combating this very important threat.

Mr. Austin: I certainly look forward to working with you on this, Senator. I think this is critical. I would share a story with you from my past where when I was a lieutenant colonel working in probably the finest, one of the finest organizations in the Army -- the 82nd Airborne Division -- we woke up one day and discovered that we had extremist elements in our ranks, and they did bad things that we certainly held them accountable for.

But we discovered that the signs for that activity
were there all along. We just did not know what to look for or what to pay attention to, but we learned from that. And I think this is one of those things that is important to our military to make sure that we keep a handle on, to make sure our leaders are doing the right things. They are taking care of their troops. They understand, they know their troops.

And we can never take our hands off the wheel on this. This has no place in the military of the United States of America.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that answer.

You mentioned in your testimony the importance of the Chinese threat, the need to focus on it. But the most recent attack on our country was by Russia, which, for months, literally intruded, interfered, and attacked our Nation in cyberspace. In part because, as General Nakasone testified to us, our adversaries do not fear us -- that is exactly what he said -- in the cyber domain.

I would like to ask you to commit to conducting a top-down review of our cyber operations, including DOD’s posture and structure, and to making our adversaries pay a price when they attack us, as the Russians did, through SolarWinds.

Mr. Austin: You have my commitment that I will
conductor that review. I think that there is a review
ongoing now to really ascertain what transpired. I will
join that, if confirmed, in stride. And I really look
forward to understanding with clarity what really happened.

And I truly believe that, well, the FBI and the NSA
have given Russia credit for this. They have attributed
this activity to Russia. And if that is the case, I think
Russia should be held accountable. That is my personal
belief.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

Environmental action and climate change are more
important than ever. I know the President-Elect is going
to focus on it. As you and I have discussed in our
meeting, the Department of Defense has an immense role to
play. I welcome your comments on PFAS and the increasing
resilience of our military installations.

I would like to work with you on a total program or
plan for the Department of Defense beyond the magnitude of
what is done now, and I know you have indicated your
interest in it. So I am not going to ask questions about
it, but I do think that the use and procurement of clean
energy, the energy efficiency steps that DOD can take will
not only save dollars, it will save energy and
environmental values and provide leadership for the whole
world.
I want to focus on military sexual assault, which my colleague Senator Gillibrand did so well before, and say that I am working on legislation that would create liability for perpetrators and for the Department of Defense for sexual misconduct in among service members so that the survivors would have a right of action. They would be empowered to take action.

Will you support that kind of legislation, sir?

Mr. Austin: Well, I certainly look forward to reviewing what is in the legislation, Senator, and would love to have that discussion with you once I have had the ability to do that. And I just want to take a moment to thank both you and Senator Gillibrand for the tremendous work, especially Senator Gillibrand, for the work that you have both done to counter sexual assault in our ranks. And if confirmed, I look forward to working with both of you on this issue.

Senator Blumenthal: I appreciate that point. Let me just say I welcome and appreciate your focus in your written remarks in answers to specific questions on the need to focus on our suppliers, our supply chain, our workforce, our defense industrial base, which are very important to Connecticut, where we are the submarine capital of the world at Electric Boat and where a trained workforce is especially important, but the supply chain
equally so.

And I would like you to review, because I am out of time, legislation that I proposed that would give the Mayor of the District of Columbia the same powers that Governors have over the National Guard. Because a lot of the very unfortunate lack of planning and coordination between Federal and local agencies that has been on display over recent months, in my view, is attributable to the lack of that power on the part of, in effect, locally empowered officials here.

Thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Ernst?

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you so much, General, for being here today. We certainly appreciate your commitment and your service to our great nation, and thank you for stepping forward with this nomination.

I just want to briefly touch upon the issue of sexual harassment, sexual assault, as Senator Gillibrand and Senator Blumenthal just did. We had a conversation about this last week. Thank you very much for that. But part of that Fort Hood report that came forward stated that the military readiness requirement superseded the need to protect our service members.
What are your feelings as to that statement, and then how do we move forward and correct that?

Mr. Austin: Senator, I earnestly -- I honestly do not believe that these two issues are mutually exclusive. We absolutely have to take care of the men and women that are in our ranks. A failure to do so -- I mean, we are about people in the military. We have the greatest, the best equipment in the world, and I get that. But this is about people.

If we do not take care of our people, it is really, really tough to do the job at hand, and that is to defend this country. And so I do not see these two issues as being at odds with each other. I think we have to do both, and we have to do them both well.

Senator Ernst: I truly appreciate that. I fully agree. Our military readiness does not have to suffer because of sexual harassment. We can take care of that issue and also still be the best fighting force in the world. So I appreciate your stance there.

I today had such a great honor. I retired from the Iowa Army National Guard in 2015, and we have a number of those tremendous men and women serving right outside our doors today. And it was my honor to go out in front of the Capitol and re-enlist about 15 of our Iowa Army National Guardsmen, a great honor for me.
But the importance of our National Guard has really been on display the last year or so, as we have seen numerous trips deployed in support of fighting forest fires in California, or deployments and mobilizations supporting COVID-19 activities, whether it is food distribution to food banks, making sure that vaccines were distributed to our communities. We have seen tens of thousands of our soldiers and airmen mobilized. They were there. They responded. And they did it quite quickly.

And I will emphasize that point again, that the National Guard, they mobilized, and they were there quickly, even beyond the capacity of their active counterparts. So whether it was working for FEMA, helping those local health clinics, you know, distributing food, as I said, our National Guard members stepped up. And again, today we witness them out on our Capitol Mall keeping our Nation safe so that we here in Congress can do our duties.

So no matter what happens, whether it is response to riots or violence or other types of activities, they are mobilizing for us. And so what we have learned over the last year is that they do come to us quickly in response to these domestic missions.

Now what further changes or reforms could be made to make sure that our National Guard are treated equally because of their important role for our United States, but
treated equally with their active duty counterparts when it comes to training, when it comes to equipment, when it comes to readiness? What can we do to make sure that they are on par with their active duty counterparts?

Mr. Austin: Well, there are, as you know, being a -- having been a Guard member for quite some time, there are some challenges in terms of the amount of days that you have to actually conduct that training. But quite frankly, over the last two decades, we have seen our great Guard members work shoulder to shoulder in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, and we have seen a difference in the quality of equipment early on. I think we have closed that gap now.

I think we are doing better. There is more that we can do. But we are going to have to continue to work through these challenges. There are no easy fixes, but this is one thing that I will work with the services on to make sure that we are giving our Guard the very best, finest of equipment. We are giving them good-quality training opportunities, and we are recognizing them for the great work that they are doing.

Senator Ernst: No, I thank you for that answer. They mean a lot to us in defense of our country and certainly short-notice mobilizations, especially as we see right here in Washington, D.C., today.
So last issue because I know that we are running short on time, you and I did speak briefly about defense spending and the audit of our Pentagon and DOD. So we know that our defense budget has grown significantly to address many threats -- Russia and China, as well as persistent threat coming from Iran, as well as a number of much smaller terrorist groups around the world. So the potential for defense spending that is wasteful has also grown and expanded, and it is used on lower-priority or even obsolete programs.

So, if confirmed, how will you lead the budget reviews to reform the Pentagon, and do you see it as a possibility to make sure that the Department of Defense does obtain a clean audit?

Mr. Austin: That will continue to be our goal. As you and I talked, we have made some progress, as I understand it. I have been away from the process for a while, but there is more to be done. And you have my commitment that we will lean into this and continue to push to make sure that we can get that clean audit in the not-too-distant future.

Senator Ernst: Thank you very much, General. My time has expired. Again, thank you for stepping forward and looking to serve our Nation again in this capacity.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.
Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

Now via Webex, Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, it was good to have the chance to talk with you a little while ago. I ask all nominees before any of the committees that I sit on the following two questions as part of my responsibility to make sure that nominees are fit for the appointment to which they are nominated. So I will ask you the following questions.

Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

Mr. Austin: No.

Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement relating to this kind of conduct?

Mr. Austin: No.

Senator Hirono: I want to acknowledge my agreement with the questions asked -- some of the questions asked by my colleague Senator Blumenthal and your commitment that you will be -- you will counter any white supremacists or extremists within the ranks of the military. I think that is really important. Also the questions he asked relating to how important it is to make sure that we are safe from cyber attacks because these cyber systems are what the military communications very much depend on.
By the questions that were asked by several of my colleagues, including Senators Blumenthal and Gillibrand, a number of us are very concerned about the continuing scourge of sexual assault and harassment and retaliation in our military. And it is very clear that the reforms that the Department of Defense has instituted are not nearly good enough, and much more action is needed.

And I want to express to you last week a very tragic thing happened. Selena Roth, a 25-year-old Army veteran and military wife, was found dead in military housing at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. A soldier is in custody, and a homicide investigation is ongoing. And my heart goes out to Selena's family. Violent acts against women within our military community continue to occur at an alarming rate, and I am committed to ensuring -- to making sure that these perpetrators are held accountable.

And you noted in your statement that you will fight sexual assault and harassment in the military, including, I hope, that you will look at the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which I support, which Senator Gillibrand has been a leader on, and changing the UCMJ to remove the decision relating to prosecution of these kind of attacks outside of the chain of command. I hope you will review that very carefully because all of your predecessors have not supported that kind of a change.
I also want to mention that I have introduced the I am Vanessa Guillen Act. This act provides for the creation of a standalone punitive article for sexual harassment. If confirmed, would you support the creation of a standalone punitive article of sexual harassment to be included in the Uniform Code of Military Justice?

Mr. Austin: Senator, any time we change the Uniform Code of Military Justice, I would want to approach that with great deliberation. But I would commit to you that I would certainly want to take this on and look at it with the right experts to make sure that we achieve the right effects with doing something like that.

But I would certainly want to make sure I get the right experts on hand to really drill into this.

Senator Hirono: Well, sexual harassment can be subsumed under other charges, but it is not a standalone charge. I think it is very important, considering that sexual harassment occurs at an alarming rate in the military. So this is not -- and I would hope that this is not something that requires a great deal of thinking because, as I said, we can already charge someone under other articles for sexual harassment.

So when a service member is sexually assaulted, they are given the option of either making a restricted or unrestricted report, and the I am Vanessa Guillen Act would
allow victims of sexual harassment to also make restricted reports, allowing them to remain anonymous within their chain of command while still receiving the support services that they should have.

Would you support the creation of making that so, for victims of sexual harassment to be able to make a restricted report?

Mr. Austin: I do not think I heard the end of the question there, Senator. Would you remind repeating the last piece of that?

Senator Hirono: Yes. Would you allow victims of sexual harassment to have the same options that victims of sexual assault have in making a restricted report?

Mr. Austin: Yes.

Senator Hirono: Thank you.

I want to turn to the importance of training areas for the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility. Admiral Davidson, who is the commander of INDOPACOM, talked recently about the importance of joint, integrated training in this AOR. Admiral Davidson specifically mentioned the vital importance of both the Pacific Military Range Facility, or PMRF, on Kauai and the Army training areas, including Pohakuloa Training Range on the Big Island.

With Navy, Air Force, and Army leases all up for renewal in 2029, which is really right around the corner,
it is incumbent on DOD to engage with State authorities and the local stakeholders like the Native Hawaii community early, often, and openly. Having a clear and transparent process is very critical to the renewal of these leases, which, needless to say, is critical for the military's presence in Hawaii.

What are your thoughts on the value of realistic joint training with our coalition partners in the region and elsewhere?

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly the value of conducting joint training with our coalition partners, I mean, it is invaluable. It is we always work better as a team. I think it ought to be effective as a team. You have to train to do that day in and day out. And so --

Senator Hirono: So training is -- I am sorry. I am running out of time. I just want to make sure that I have your commitment that you will have an open dialogue with the community with regard to these really important training facilities in the State of Hawaii?

Mr. Austin: Yes.

Senator Hirono: Thank you.

I do have some other questions --

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: -- but I believe I am out of time. I will submit them for the record.
Thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Senator Rounds?

Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, first of all, I just want to thank you and your wife and your family for serving our Nation in uniform because you did it with honor, and you did it for 41 years. And I just want to say thank you for that, sir.

General, you and I have had the opportunity to speak now on several different occasions, and I have appreciated your answers to my questions with regard to the waiver. I truly do believe that the waiver was there for a reason, but I also think that the President-Elect does have -- I think the tie goes to the President. And in this particular case, I believe that he has nominated you because he believes that you are the right person at the right time.

I have no misgivings whatsoever about your capabilities and your competencies. And I think in this particular case, it is my intent to support the waiver so that you can have your -- the presentation of you before the Senate for confirmation.

I think part of the reason that I feel this way is because of the conversations that you and I had, and I want to go through them a little bit because, first of all, with
regard to the difference between being the Secretary of Defense and being a member of the Joint Chiefs, there is a true difference between the two, the role of the two. Can you share a little bit your understanding of the differences in the role and yet, at the same time, the real need for both to be expressed and your plans with regard to bringing in, as you indicated in your opening remarks, additional qualified civilians into those top areas?

Mr. Austin: So I think the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is required to give his best military advice to the President and to the Secretary routinely, and it is military advice. The Secretary has a much broader scope. He has a lot more to take into consideration. He is focused on strategy and policy, and he understands he is working within the guidelines provided by his boss, the President of the United States.

So there is an enormous difference, and I think one of the key enablers here, as I have said before, is to make sure that we have the right experts, the right professionals onboard working with me day in and day out to craft that strategy and develop that policy. But the Secretary has a much broader scope, and he is not focused on giving the same type of advice that the Chairman would provide.

I have seen this done right a number of times. All
the Secretaries, of course, get it right. But the two that come to mind more than anyone else for me, when I was a three-star serving as the director of the Joint Staff, Secretary Bob Gates was the Secretary of Defense, an absolute master at making sure that he outlined roles and responsibilities and swim lanes, designated swim lanes for the Joint Staff and the OSD staff.

Later, you know, I served in the Pentagon as a four-staff as a Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, and I had a chance to work with Secretary Panetta, who, once again, was a master at making sure that those roles remained separate and that he provided the right kind of advice to the President of the United States. And while he worked arm-in-arm with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, they did not provide the same kind of perspective.

And so I fully believe that I understand the difference, and I look forward to working with the Chairman. But I have no desire to be the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and so, if confirmed, we will make sure that those roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined.

Senator Rounds: Thank you.

We also had a chance to talk a little bit about cyber and about the work that we have done in the last couple of years with regard to cyber and the defense of our cyber operations. It used to be you had air, land, and sea to
worry about. Now we clearly have space, and we have
cyberspace. A lot of our adversaries have decided to take
the shortcut, and they are trying to impact all of the
other domains using cyber.

In the last couple of years, particularly with regard
to the 2018 DOD Cyber Strategy, we have decided to move
forward, and we have a "defend forward" policy. You have
indicated your support, or at least you have seen it, you
have observed it, and so forth. Can you give me very
briefly your thoughts about our cyber and the need to
continue to make strides and to allow for offensive cyber
operations to continue?

Mr. Austin: I think that is important. I think
having an offensive capability that we are able to use I
think is really important, and so I applaud the efforts
that have been made in the past. And once again, I have
been away from it for a bit, but I really look forward to
kind of getting back, getting under the hood, understanding
how the -- how the -- how the processes work now to ensure
coordination across the board, across the agencies.

And in this endeavor, speed matters. And so anything
that we can do to facilitate the work of the operators I
think is goodness, but we have got to make sure we are
doing it in the right way.

Senator Rounds: We will continue to remind you about
the need for speed on that, if at all necessary, and I do not think it will be.

Finally, General, Secretary Mattis implemented a Close Combat Lethality Task Force in 2018. This is an organization dedicated to providing resources to the forces who have accounted historically for nearly 90 percent of the casualties, yet constitute only 4 percent of the force and receive only 1 percent of the institutional investments.

I am concerned with how this task force has appeared to have lost its direct report, this relationship with the Secretary. It appears to have gotten caught in the bureaucracy over the last year, and I would like to see it back on track. I have worked on language to strengthen the task force with Senator Duckworth and other members, and this is more than a bipartisan effort. This is a nonpartisan issue.

Can you discuss the importance very briefly of a task force that represents our infantry, Marines, special operators, and other specialties who closely and directly impact the enemy and enemy operations, and how that would be channeled through your office?

Mr. Austin: Yes. I fully understand and appreciate the importance of making sure that we resource and support our men and women that are at the tip of the spear. You
know, the squads and platoons are out there actually fighting the enemy. Everybody else is supporting the fight.

And we have to make sure that they have what they need in order to be successful. This is an evolving effort. It will never remain static. And so while I do not know the reasons for things having -- why they have been repositioned and reporting chains have been redesigned, I would certainly take a look at that as I go in, if I am confirmed.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

Senator Heinrich?

Senator Heinrich: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Austin, first off, just congratulations on your nomination, and thank you so much for your willingness to continue to serve this great country.

One of the things I want to ask you about is, if confirmed as Secretary, you are going to play a really critical role in directing defense modernization priorities that have an impact on our forces for many, many years to come. That modernization, with critical investments in technologies like directed energy or hypersonics or artificial intelligence, is what will ensure that our men
and women in uniform will, hopefully, never experience a fair fight.

But modernization requires really difficult choices with regard to competing priorities. So I wanted to ask you, how will you balance investments in personnel and legacy systems with the critical need to develop capabilities that are going to give us a qualitative edge over near-peer adversaries like Russia and China?

Mr. Austin: Well, as you know, personnel costs are -- I mean, they are expensive, and we have to be mindful about that as we go forward. And we have to be willing to make sure that we are making the right calls, although they may be tough calls from time to time.

And in terms of legacy systems, I think I will have to get in and work with the services to ascertain what they believe is relevant and really have a tough discussion with them on whether or not it makes sense to continue to invest in certain types of things. But I agree with you. I think we absolutely have to invest in the capabilities that will make us relevant not in the last fight, but in the future fight.

We have to be able to understand. We have to be better faster, we have to be able to decide faster, and we have to be able to act faster. And that -- I mean, we will have to employ the use of space-based platforms, all the
things that you talked about, the use of AI, and the
development of those kinds of capabilities will not come
cheap. But this is not a choice, in my view. These are
things that we must invest in going forward if we are going
to maintain a competitive edge.

Senator Heinrich: Thank you for your thoughts on
that.

Mr. Austin, last week in the final days of the current
administration, the Air Force announced that it had
selected Huntsville, Alabama, to host the new Space Command
headquarters. And I believe this process, frankly, was
severely flawed, and it was not in line with what I have
seen historically with regard to a more deliberative
approach that the Air Force has typically taken with regard
to basing decisions of this magnitude.

I know you are not familiar with this decision and its
details, but I would simply ask that, if confirmed, that
you would take a close look at that process to make sure
that it met the historical standards for decisions of that
type.

Mr. Austin: I will do that, and I will make sure that
we look at all of our processes going forward so that
future decisions are made within the confines of the
policies that have been laid out.

Senator Heinrich: Thank you. I appreciate that very
much.

As you know, DOD has set an initial requirement to produce 30 plutonium pits per year at Los Alamos Labs by 2026. I would love your views on how important that milestone is to maintaining our nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Austin: Could you repeat your question, Senator?

Senator Heinrich: The Department of Defense has set an initial requirement to produce 30 plutonium pits per year at Los Alamos National Labs by 2026, and I would love your thoughts on the importance of achieving that milestone on that timeline.

Mr. Austin: Yes. As we have said earlier in our discussions here this afternoon, Senator, maintaining a credible, a reliable, safe, and sustainable nuclear capability is of utmost importance, of the highest importance. And so this is a component of that, and certainly, if we have laid out those goals and objectives for ourselves, I am very much interesting in making sure that they are the appropriate goals, but -- and I have no reason to doubt that they are, but making sure that we remain on time and on target with achieving those goals.

Senator Heinrich: I look forward to working with you on that front.

One of the last things I want to get to here in my final couple minutes is PFAS clean-up and remediation.
Many communities across the country continue to suffer from enormous impacts on their water supplies from PFAS chemicals, in particular in drinking water, in ground water that is used for both drinking and, in some cases, agricultural use. One of the most hard hit of these communities is around Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico, a community that has been incredibly supportive of that facility for decades.

The Air Force and the Department of Defense more broadly have, frankly, slow-walked the clean-up and the remediation efforts for a number of years now, despite really clear evidence that defense activities are the source of that contamination. And if confirmed, I would ask that you make full PFAS remediation a priority within the Department and ensure that the Department of Defense takes concrete steps to finally do right by these communities that have done right by the Department for literally decades.

Mr. Austin: The safety and the health of our military members, our family members, our DOD civilians, and our communities is very, very important to us in DOD. I think you know that Secretary Esper stood up a PFAS task force a while back and that their work is ongoing. And if I am confirmed, I will go in and ask that they pick up the pace on the work, and we will want to push to make sure that we
have good solutions for mitigation of our contribution to this contamination.

PFAS has been used throughout the economy, so I think we are going to have to work across -- you know, across the board with our partners to ensure that we are working together, we are doing the right things to mitigate the effects here. So I look forward to working with my colleague there in the EPA to make sure that the military is doing its part, and we stay focused on the right things here.

Senator Heinrich: Thank you, sir.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Heinrich.

Senator Tillis? And Senator Rounds presiding.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, can you hear me okay?

Mr. Austin: I can.

Senator Tillis: Congratulations to you and to your wife and your family, and thank you for your decades of service.

I would like to start by -- well, also I want to thank you for spending some quality time down at Fort Bragg at the tip of the spear with the 82nd Airborne.

I want to associate myself with comments made by Senators Gillibrand, Ernst, and Blumenthal on military sexual assault. I do not expect you to respond to it. I
heard your responses earlier. But to me, we will never
know what great leaders chose never to go into the military
if we continue to have a reputation for a culture that is
not making progress on military sexual assault.

I have heard you make commitments to my colleagues,
and I look forward to exploring this issue as a ranking
member on the Personnel Subcommittee. But we have got a
lot of work to do. I have been here for 6 years, and we
are not making near enough progress.

I would like to start, though, by asking you to give
me an idea of the general, a general overview of the threat
that you believe that Iran represents to national security
and security in the Middle East. I would also be curious
in your answer what you think about the recent agreements
with Middle East countries and Israel, whether or not that
is a positive step in the right direction?

Mr. Austin: Iran continues to be a destabilizing
element in the region. You look at its behavior, it
clearly -- a lot of activity that is destabilizing. It
does not work well with its neighbors. It, again, does
present a threat to our partners in the region and those
forces that we have stationed in the region.

If Iran were ever to get a nuclear capability, most
every problem that we deal with in the region would be
tougher to deal with because of that. So, to answer your
question, I think Iran's activity continues to be or its behavior is -- continues to be destabilizing.

Senator Tillis: And on the recent agreements, do you have any opinion as to whether or not they are a positive step to try and check Iran's ambitions in the Middle East?

Mr. Austin: I do. I think that any time that we -- you know, that countries agree to normalize relations, I think that is a good thing. And I think certainly this has put a bit more pressure on Iran, and I hope it will have good effects.

Senator Tillis: Thanks, General Austin.

General Austin, you wrote in your advance policy responses, this is a quote from them, "The continued erosion of U.S. military advantage vis-a-vis China and Russia in key strategic areas remains the most significant risk the Department must address. If left unchecked, this continued erosion could fundamentally change our ability to achieve U.S. national security objectives and limit the DOD’s ability to underpin other U.S. instruments of power."

Can you talk a little bit about the key strategic areas? We have long since thought that they had a quantitative advantage, but that we maintained a qualitative advantage. It seems like the margins are shrinking. So can you give me a brief expansion on the responses to the advance policy questions?
Mr. Austin: Thanks, Senator.

They continue to invest in modernization. They have gone to school on us in terms of how we deploy and how we employ our forces. And so if we would choose to do the same types of things that we have done in the past, I think that we will clearly be challenged. So we will have to have capabilities that allow us to hold -- to present a credible threat -- credible deterrent, excuse me, to China in the future.

We will have to make some strides in the use of quantum computing, the use of AI, the use of -- the advent of connected battlefields, space-based platforms. Those kinds of things I think can give us the types of capabilities that we will need to be able to hold a large element, large pieces of Chinese inventory, military inventory at risk.

And so I believe that we still have the qualitative edge, have a competitive edge over China. I think that gap has closed significantly, and our goal will be to ensure that we expand that gap going forward.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

Because I have limited time, I am going to submit a question to the record on I think the economic warfare that we are dealing with on China, the race to 5G and some of the interagency activities that I do not think the DOD is
prominently up there. We have got the USTR, Commerce Department, but I feel like that we are losing some ground. I have a unique perspective on that, looking at all the intellectual property theft, as the chair of the Intellectual Property Subcommittee on Judiciary. But I have got a lot of context I want to add to that. So I want to ask a question there.

So in my remaining time, if I were in person, I would have my 600-page request for proposal for the next-generation handgun with me. It is my favorite prop when we have a confirmation like this. And it just confounds me to think it took 10 years to procure the next-generation handgun, and it is going to take 10 years to deploy it. To me, it suggests a fundamental problem with the way we go about acquisitions and procurements in the Department of Defense.

So I would just seek your commitment, if confirmed, if you are going to have the kind of resources around you that are going to drill down across the business of the DOD and figure out if we are now at a point to where we can go from an investigational new drug to an approved vaccine in 11 months, it would seem to me that we could get to a point where we can specify certain procurements in the DOD in terms of months or years, not decades.

Do I have your commitment to make sure that you make
this a priority that you have someone there that has the
experience and insight to figure out how we get more
productivity and I think more sanity in our procurement
processes?

Mr. Austin: You have my commitment, Senator.

Senator Tillis: Well, thank you, General Austin.

And thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator Rounds [Presiding]: On behalf of the
chairman, Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And General Austin, congratulations on the nomination.

Ten years after the Civil War finished, at the end of
his second term as President, U.S. Grant gave a speech in
Des Moines, Iowa, September 1875. Here is what he said.

He was talking about the prospect of ever having another
civil war.

"If we are to have another contest in the near future
of our national existence, I predict that the dividing line
will not be Masons and Dixons, but between patriotism and
intelligence on the one side and superstition, ambition,
and ignorance on the other."

Those words are very chilling words as we contemplate
what we saw in this Capitol on the 6th of January. We saw
ambition. We saw superstition, if you could say
superstition might be QAnon fantasy or election was stolen
or widespread voter fraud. Ignorance. I do not know that
I would use that word. The speech that U.S. Grant gave was
to a group of Civil War veterans, and it was to promote the
idea of more broad public education, the idea that
education would drive out susceptibility to superstition.

It might be comforting for us to think that what we
saw on January 6th or generally was ignorance, but if you
look at the spectrum of people who were involved, you find
a number of very highly educated people. Sadly, and I know
this has been raised already, you find a lot of people who
have connection to our military, who should be -- as part
of the enormous training investment we make in them, be
able to spot the difference between truth and fantasy,
between reality and conspiracy theory.

Military Times did an analysis in 2019, a survey of
active duty military, and they found that 36 percent of
active duty service members have seen evidence of white
supremacist and racist ideologies in the military. That
does not mean 36 percent of military share those, but more
than one-third of our military have seen their colleagues
exhibiting either white supremacist or racist ideologies.

General Austin, if you are confirmed, you will make
history as the first African-American Secretary of Defense,
but you have also lived a life in this country and seen
these challenges. I know some colleagues have asked you
about investigations, but what I would like to ask you about is training. We invest so much to train a member of our military -- officer, enlisted -- what might you suggest to us, as we think about the training going forward, that would lead us to have a military that was immune from superstition and not so gullible as to fall for these false ideologies?

Mr. Austin: Thanks, Senator.

I think that we have to train our leaders to make sure that they are in touch with the people that they are leading, that they understand who they are, what they are doing, what they are reading, that they are looking at their environment that they are living in and looking for signs of things that could indicate that something is going in the wrong direction. I think leadership needs -- if leadership is not in touch with the people they are leading, these kinds of things can happen.

And I do not think that this is a thing that you can put a band-aid on and fix and leave alone. I think that training needs to go on routinely because things change. The types of things that you are looking for change.

I think our leaders need to be able to talk to their subordinates and instill in them the right types of values, the values that our military embraces, the values that our country embraces. And you know, failure to be able to
adhere to those values means that you should not be a part of our formation, and our leaders need to be able to sort those things out.

But having had personal experience with this, being in a unit that had a problem with this long ago when I was a lieutenant colonel, I can tell you that most of us were embarrassed that we did not know what to look for, and we did not really understand that by being engaged more with your people on these types of issues can pay big dividends. I know that that unit has probably learned that forever, but I do not think that you can ever take your hand off the steering wheel here.

Senator Kaine: Well, because in a way, the enemy within -- disunity -- is probably the most destructive force in terms of our ability to defend ourselves. So if we are divided against one another, how can we defend the Nation? I view this as an enormously important task that you will carry, should you be confirmed.

I want to echo what comments that have been made by colleagues about military sexual assault. Again, a divider within the body that makes us less able to externally face and defeat the threats we face.

I have read much of the Citizen Review Panel that was put together to look at the tragic murder of Vanessa Guillen at Fort Hood, and that is a very, very powerful
document. And I would encourage all members of the committee to do it.

I spoke to one of the members of that panel, and he relayed that he was doing one of the interviews -- and they did dozens and dozens of interviews -- and was talking to a mid-level officer on the base who was trying to say that they felt like they were doing all they could to deal with military sexual assault. And the interviewer said, "Would you let your daughter serve in the military?" He said, "No way." He just Rorschach answered the question and said, "No way."

And whatever the attempt to put a good spin on how we are doing, if you would worry about your own daughter serving in the military, we got a long ways to go.

Quality of life issues are enormously important. You have been asked about a lot of the strategic challenges. We face this tough one on military housing. And I just want to remind my colleagues, we started -- we faced that military housing issue about 2 years after we did significant reforms to reduce the size of headquarters staff. And what we found is we were kind of asleep at the switch in monitoring military housing.

An awful lot of the staffs that oversaw military housing had been dramatically shrunk because of what we did on the headquarters staff thing. That does not mean that
there is not fat that could be squeezed out of any organization. It just means that we have to really be careful, thinking if we shrink the civilian side or the headquarters side, we are going to be saving some money, which we did. But we ended up compounding a problem.

And I hope you will be attuned to the need to balance challenges like that so that we can provide the quality of life that our men and women and their families deserve and that will keep them re-enlisting if we want them to. If you could just say a word about that, and I am done.

Mr. Austin: Yes, I will. I will be certainly very attuned to that, Senator.

I think, in some cases, we have broken trust with our family members because of the housing issue and other issues. I think this is critically important. I look forward to being able to work with the services to really not only get after this, the immediate problems, but put the fixes in our contracting efforts so that we are much better at this down the road.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator Rounds: On behalf of the chairman, Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, General Billy Mitchell, the father of the
U.S. Air Force, in a hearing like this in front of the Armed Services many years ago, in the, actually, I think it was the 1930s, called Alaska "the most strategic place in the world." I like to say Alaska constitutes three pillars of America's military might.

We are the cornerstone on missile defense. Almost all the missiles and radar systems protecting the entire country are in Alaska. We are the hub of air combat power for the Arctic and Asia-Pacific. We will have over 100 fifth-gen fighters there. We are building up our tanker capability, an issue that I think is going to be important. And we are a platform for expeditionary forces like the 4-25, the First Stryker Brigade.

If confirmed, can I get your commitment soon in your tenure to come to Alaska with me and see this critically important national defense State and troops for America in my State?

Mr. Austin: Senator, I absolutely agree with you that Alaska is a national treasure, and it has -- it holds some of our most important military assets and resources. As you know, we are challenged with travel now, and as the opportunities present themselves, post trips to the Indo-Pacific where I need to get to right away, if I am confirmed, I certainly would accept your invitation at some point in the future.
Senator Sullivan: Well, General, a lot of us think that Alaska is kind of in the Indo-Pacific. So on your way out, we can get there early. So I look forward to doing that.

Related to that is the issue of national security in the Arctic, and that is certainly a new theater of great power competition. Russia, China being very aggressive in the Arctic with massive buildups of military forces, infrastructure. To be honest, for the last several years, I think the Pentagon was asleep at the switch with regard to our national security challenges in the Arctic.

This committee, in a bipartisan way, has been very focused on ensuring that the Pentagon recognizes these challenges with infrastructure, icebreakers that we need, capabilities. The Department of Defense released its Arctic Strategy in June 2019, required by this committee. The Air Force followed suit with its own strategy in July of 2020. The Department of the Navy just this week published its Arctic Strategic Blueprint, and the Army will soon be doing this as well.

Can I get your commitment to work with this committee, where this has been a high priority, to ensure that these service Arctic strategies are appropriately resourced and that we can protect our strategic interests in the Arctic?

Mr. Austin: You have my commitment, Senator.
Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

General, the other issue I just wanted to touch on here, in this hearing that we had last week on civilian control of the military, in op-eds, you have seen it with some of my colleagues, there has been this growing conventional wisdom that somehow because Secretary Mattis had been a previous CENTCOM commander, that his tenure is a warning really for what some are considering a failed tenure as Secretary of Defense.

I actually disagree with this quite vehemently. Secretary Mattis replaced a Secretary of Defense, Secretary Carter, with no military experience. Matter of fact, he was what many people are calling for, a political Secretary. I supported both, but let me just give you a little juxtaposition.

Secretary Carter oversaw a 25 percent cut in military funding. Readiness plummeted. Secretary Mattis rebuilt this up and rebuilt readiness with this Congress.

Secretary Carter would not support arming the Ukrainians with Javelin missile systems, despite the entire committee here pressing him to do so. Secretary Mattis did that almost immediately in his tenure.

Secretary Carter watched ISIS grow to be a very lethal threat. Secretary Mattis brought DOD strategy to crush ISIS.
Secretary Carter, for a whole host of reasons, was very reluctant to press for any freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. Secretary Mattis made those regular elements of our strategy in the Asia-Pacific.

And finally, Secretary Mattis put together the National Defense Strategy, one of the most important and bipartisan documents that many have seen on national security in a generation. He often got back to Senators quickly. In terms of oversight, with all due respect to Secretary Carter, sometime it took weeks just to schedule a phone call or a meeting.

So, General Austin, do you think Secretary Mattis had a failed tenure as Secretary of Defense because he had previously served as CENTCOM commander? I would like your assessment of that. It is being used right now as somehow a warning for your confirmation, and I think it is a conventional wisdom that I personally reject.

Mr. Austin: I do not think he should be considered as a failed Secretary of Defense because of his work in CENTCOM earlier. I think Secretary Mattis was a very thoughtful Secretary, and he did a lot of goodness for the Department. And certainly I would not want to evaluate his tenure as Secretary. I have great respect for him.

As you know, I served alongside him. I have worked with him on a number of tough issues, and I watched from
afar as he was Secretary. So I have no reason to believe that his role or his tenure at CENTCOM made his tenure at -- or diminished his role as the Secretary of Defense.

Senator Sullivan: And that would not be less a reflection on what you will be able to accomplish in the Department as well? People are using that as a warning, so to speak.

Mr. Austin: And I think it is -- I do not think that that is a fair assessment, and I would say also, Senator, that we are completely different people --

Senator Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Austin: -- as you know. You know us both. And again, I will absolutely do the things that we have talked about in this hearing, get the right civilians in the right positions to help me exercise civilian control of the military. And I will make sure that we have the very best experts focused on our toughest issues, like the China issue, the issue of our acquisition reform, and those kinds of things.

Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, if I may, just one final question. General, I just want you to have the opportunity to answer two other criticisms. One, that you have not had experience in the Asia-Pacific and, two, that with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs being an Army general, that somehow your tenure, with General Milley,
would be favoring the Army. Can you quickly address those two criticisms that have come about your nomination?

Mr. Austin: Well, I will take the last one first, Senator. If you look at my history, I spent a lot of time in joint assignments, both in Iraq and Afghanistan as the director of the Joint Staff, as commander of Central Command. You know, I have -- I know as many sailors and airmen as I do soldiers, I mean if you look at the folks that I have worked with over the past.

So in terms of being able to focus adequately on the issue of China, the reason that I was focused on the Middle East for quite some time was because that was the most important thing for our country. And so we put our best equipment towards that effort, our best people, and it was absolutely necessary at the time.

But if confirmed, you can expect that I will put a laser-like focus on developing the right capabilities, plans, operational concepts that will ensure that we maintain a competitive edge as we look at ourselves with respect to China. I think we will present a credible deterrent to China and any other adversary that looks to take us on.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Your time has expired.

Via Webex, Senator King is recognized.
Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. Austin, thank you very much for your testimony. As you can see perhaps, I am on the road. You have taken me today from just south of the George Washington Bridge to the George Washington Parkway. So I am almost there.

[Laughter.]

Senator King: First, I want to associate myself with two particular comments by my colleagues, one on the issue of the Arctic raised by Senator Sullivan. Incredibly strategic area, an area of enormous importance and developing importance.

And one of the things about the Arctic is we have been able to work cooperatively with Russia on most Arctic matters, and yet they are moving very rapidly toward militarization. So I commend that area to you for attention. The Navy just released a new Arctic strategy. So a very important issue.

The other issue is procurement that Senator Tillis mentioned. The whole idea of 10 years for a handgun and a 600-page spec, we just cannot do that. We need to be more agile, particularly in this day and age where technology is so important in terms of our ability to defend the country.

So those two things I do commend to your attention, when and if you are confirmed.
Now at the beginning of the hearing, there was a lot of talk about civilian control of the military. One of the problems is, Mr. Austin, that tomorrow, when David Norquist assumes the title of Acting Secretary, he will be the 10th Secretary or Acting Secretary in 10 years. And the last Secretary to serve more than 2 years was Bob Gates, and he left in 2011.

So when you have a Joint Staff that has continuity and a civilian side that manifestly lacks continuity, I think that is one of the areas where we can try to move to shore up civilian control of the military. So I guess my question is, are your bags unpacked, and are you prepared to move your loyalties from the Falcons and the Braves to the Nationals and the Washington Football Team? We want you to stay a while, Mr. Austin, if you are confirmed.

Mr. Austin: You can absolutely count on me staying a while if I am confirmed, Senator. And by the way, my wife is a native of this area, of D.C. So it did not -- I mean, my bags are already unpacked. But to the point that you are making, I am absolutely committed to making sure that we are doing the right things for the long haul.

Senator King: I appreciate that. To change the subject somewhat, in 2018 you gave an interview where you discussed the importance of coalitions as being one of the key elements of modern conflict. And Churchill once said
the only thing worse than fighting with allies is fighting without allies. Can you expand a bit on your views about coalitions and how and what we need to do to shore up our relationships with our allies?

Mr. Austin: I truly believe, and I believe this in my heart, that we perform better when we are operating as a part of a team. And throughout in all of the operations that I participated in that are major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the counter-ISIS campaign and so many other things, our allies brought valuable capability and capacity to the fight.

And I truly believe that you cannot just show up and fight and be effective. I think that these relationships have to be developed. You have to train, work, and live together in a lot of cases in order to have an effective and credible fighting force.

So I think that fighting as a part of a team, as part of a coalition is absolutely a part of who we are, something that we treasure. And if confirmed, I will look forward to re-establishing some of the critical partnerships and alliances that we have had and working with our allies to make sure that we keep them onboard as we move forward fast.

Senator King: Well, I think that is absolutely right. The way I like to put it briefly is that you have to have
the relationship before the ask.

Mr. Austin: I absolutely agree with that, Senator.

Senator King: Now we are turning our attention, and have been for the last several years, to the Asia-Pacific and particularly to China. And I have asked a question of a number of people that have appeared before this committee. I would like your thoughts on what does China want? What do you believe China's strategic goals are?

Are they looking to be the dominant world power or regional hegemon, an economic power? What is their -- what are their goals? Because it seems to me in order to determine how we best counter or cooperate, we need to understand where they are headed.

Mr. Austin: Yes, I think it is all of that. They are already a regional hegemon, and I think their goal is to be a dominant world power. And they are working across the spectrum to compete with us in a number of areas, and it will take a whole of government approach to push back on our efforts in a credible way.

Not to say that we will not see things down the road that are in our best interest that we can cooperate with China on, but we do things that are in our best interest. But certainly, some of the things that we have seen from them in recent past in terms of coercive behavior in the region and around the globe tend to make us believe that
they really want to be a dominant world power.

Senator King: Finally, I do not really have time for a long answer, but I just want to commend to you with the issue of cyber, 2 years ago this committee led the creation in the National Defense Act of something called the Cyber Solarium Commission, which I was honored to serve upon, along with a bipartisan group from the Congress and the private sector and the executive. I would commend to you our report, which was released last March, talks a lot about the issues we have talked about today.

As you know and as Senator Rounds mentioned, the area of cyber is not a potential area of conflict, it is a current area of conflict. And I will be sure that we get a copy of the report to you, and you can take a look at it. Because part of it is structure, but also part of it is policy, deterrence, resilience, and I think that this is something that obviously we need to attend to.

You have General Nakasone, who is crucial in this effort, and I look forward to working with you on those issues as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Austin, and congratulations on your testimony today.

Mr. Austin: Thank you, sir.

Senator Sullivan [Presiding]: On behalf of the chairman, Senator Cramer.
Senator Cramer: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

Thank you, General, for your decades of service and your willingness to continue in this new way. And congratulations to both you and your wife and your entire family.

First of all, I want to tell you how pleased I was with the very specific answer of affirming the chairman's question related to your support for a nuclear triad that includes the platforms of land, air, and sea as specified in the chairman's favorite book, the National Defense Strategy. That was very helpful to me, and I appreciate that. I appreciated the conversation we had about it and several other things last week as well.

With that specific answer to that specific question in mind, I want to drill down a little bit on just one of those three legs. As you know, as we talked about, Minot has two of the two three legs. It is the only place in the country that has two of the three legs of the triad.

You were asked -- of course, you did in the qualified questions, the previous questions, you were asked about the assessment of past Secretaries of Defense, and you said this. You said, "I agree that nuclear deterrence is the Department's highest-priority mission and that updating and overhauling our Nation's nuclear forces is a critical national security priority." Today, you specified the
words "triad."

In your advance policy question response, though, you did in referencing the aging nuclear deterrent, you chose the words "overhaul" and "updating," but you never used the word "replace." And I do not know if that was simply an error or omission or if it was strategic. But you did say, "U.S. nuclear weapons have been extended far beyond their original service lives."

And as Senator Fischer -- earlier, she quoted Admiral Richard of STRATCOM, and I am going to quote him now in a different quote where he said, "You cannot life extend Minuteman III. It is getting past the point where it is not cost effective to life extend the Minuteman III."

But you are going to get a lot of pressure from organizations, good folks, some Members of Congress, maybe some on an Armed Services Committee either here or on the other side of the Capitol, to delay the ground-based strategic deterrent, the replacement of Minuteman III, and maybe even shrink it. Do you think that we can extend the life of Minuteman III, even that means unilaterally decreasing our nuclear deterrent?

Mr. Austin: I think I may have indicated to you before that in order to really answer this question, I really need to sit down with not only the STRATCOM commander, but also sit down and take a look at where we
are in that modernization effort and what choices are being proposed and the rationale for that. And I have not had the ability to do that to this point, Senator Cramer. But when I do, I would love to have that discussion with you.

    Senator Cramer: Well, and I would look forward to that. And on your way to INDOPACOM before you get to Alaska, you could just stop in Minot. We will have a talk right there if it works. But anyway -- Senator Sullivan thinks the Arctic starts and ends in Alaska, and I just like to remind him every now and then there is other lands between here and there.

    Anyway, I wanted to ask you about the joint comprehensive plan of action that the Iran nuclear deal, and there have been some questions about Iran. But under the 2015 agreement, the restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment sunset are beginning in 2025, and that is obviously only 4 years from now. And so I want to know, in your view, are the risks of entering an agreement under the same conditions that would allow Iran to significantly increase its uranium enrichment only 4 years from now -- I mean, what would some of the risks of that be, do you think?

    Mr. Austin: I would hope, and I think the President-Elect has been clear, that the preconditions for us considering to re-enter into that agreement would be that
Iran meet the conditions outlined in the agreement. So back to -- back to where they should have been.

I would hope that as we enter into that agreement, we could have this discussion about when things sunset and also take a look at some broader things that may or may not be a part of this treaty, but certainly things that I think need to be addressed. And one of those things is ballistic missiles.

Senator Cramer: Very good. Thank you. You anticipated or at least you answered my next question. I appreciate that.

Another area that you and I discussed quite a bit was ISR. And of course, you would know more than a little bit about that, given your background particularly at CENTCOM, of course. There has been a lot of cutting of legacy programs recently to help pay for more advanced programs and technology in the future, and a lot of times we are confronted with either/or challenges. But sometimes, we have to do "all of the above" as well.

A lot of these cuts have been, of course, to ISR programs like the RQ-4 Global Hawk and the MQ-9 Reaper that, again, you depended on a lot at CENTCOM. Do you think we can strategically afford to cut back ISR to places like the Middle East, Africa, South America even, and to some degree, even the Pacific while we save up money for
future missions?

Mr. Austin: Well, I think our -- to look at our
global force posture is one of the things I really want to
have the opportunity to do and look at our requirements
versus where our forces are postured. Our focus is going
to be, as we talked earlier, in making sure that we have
what we need in the Indo-Pacific.

But in terms of the sentinel forces that are required
by the CENTCOM commander, I really would like to see what
he thinks his requirements are, what the threats are that
he needs to stay abreast of, and that sort of business.
But most likely, there will be some requirements for those
types of capabilities going forward. The Air Force
certainly has a strong voice in this in terms of what they
can afford to keep on in light of the investments that they
are making in modernization.

So, again, pretty complex equation that we will have
to tackle, but certainly, I look forward to taking it on.

Senator Cramer: Thank you, General.

Thank you, Chairman. I am out of time, or I would
have asked you about the $40 billion passthrough budget at
the Air Force, but we can talk about that another time.

Thank you.

Senator Sullivan: On behalf of the chairman, Senator
Warren.
Senator Warren: Thank you very much. Thank you.

General Austin, I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you a few weeks ago. And as I told you when we talked then, I believe we have to do a lot more to end the cozy relationship between the Pentagon and the defense industry, and over the years, I proposed number of legal changes in this area.

Now since 2016, you have served on the board of Raytheon Technologies and its predecessor, United Technologies, which is one of the largest defense contractors in the Nation. I am very pleased to hear that you have pledged that you will extend your recusal from matters involving Raytheon for 4 years and that you are not going to seek a waiver from those recusals. Do I have that right?

Mr. Austin: Senator, I can make the commitment to you that I will extend my recusal for Raytheon. And I certainly appreciated the opportunity to discuss these issues with you.

As you are aware, what you have asked goes beyond what is required by law, and I am making --

Senator Warren: Absolutely.

Mr. Austin: I am making this commitment because I recognize the unique circumstances here that you have highlighted. And Raytheon is one of the --

Mr. Austin: Raytheon is one of the world's largest defense contractors, and I am sensitive to the appearance concerns that you raise in this particular situation. And with respect to the issue of seeking a waiver, I do not expect to do that or to need one. But if such an unanticipated circumstance were to arise, I would consider available alternatives to a waiver before seeking one and would consult very carefully with agency ethics officials.

Senator Warren: Okay.

Mr. Austin: And if I am privileged enough to be confirmed, I can pledge to you that I will be mindful not only of the legal requirements that govern my conduct, but also of the appearances to ensure that the public has no reason to question my impartiality. And I will consult with the DOD career ethics officials on these issues and will require everyone that serves with me to ensure that public service is and will remain a public trust.

Senator Warren: Well, I very much appreciate that. And if I can, let me just ask one more aspect of this. You know, I have also called for new laws to prevent contractors from hiring senior Government officials who leave Federal service for a period of years. Again, to help eliminate the appearance of trading on Government service to help improve -- the idea is to try to help
improve public trust in our leaders.

So let me ask you about that. After you leave, are you willing to make any commitments on that?

Mr. Austin: Well, I have -- I do not intend to seek employment as a lobbyist or sit on the board of a defense contractor like Raytheon after my service. Quite frankly, I will be too old to sit on a board of a defense contractor after my service. I have -- I have no intent to be a lobbyist as well.

Senator Warren: All right. Well, I just want you to know I really do appreciate that, General. Going above and beyond what Federal law requires, as you are doing here, sends a powerful message that you are working on behalf of the American people and no one else.

Now I want to try to focus, if I can, on defense spending. But before I do, I just want to say a very quick word about military housing.

Two years ago, this committee heard horror stories from military families about mold, termites, lead paint, other terrible conditions at military houses managed by private, for-profit companies. The military has a responsibility to oversee these contracts, and this committee has some sweeping reforms increasing oversight powers, but I am still hearing from families who say that their situation is not substantially improving.
So, General Austin, can I ask for your public commitment on two things? First, to respond to my request for information about what is going on and, second, to pledge that you are going to make fixing this problem a priority.

Mr. Austin: I absolutely will respond to your request for information, if confirmed. And this has been a priority of mine and will always be a priority of mine. So I look forward to working with the services on this issue. I think, as I said earlier, in some cases, we have broken trust with some of our family members.

Senator Warren: Yes. So thank you very much. I am going to hold you to that commitment. I really appreciate it, General.

A few weeks ago, Congress passed the annual defense authorization appropriations bill that allocated over $740 billion to the Department of Defense. Now that is more than President Reagan spent during the height of the Cold War. It is more than the Federal Government spends on the rest of the discretionary budget combined.

In fact, it is more than the next 10 nations combined spend on defense, and most of those countries are our allies. The money that Congress appropriated a few weeks ago also comes on top of what we spent on two decades of endless wars in the Middle East that cost roughly $6.4
trillion and killed more than 7,000 American service
members and did very little to make America safer.

Now, General Austin, you have been nominated to lead
the Defense Department. So I am not expecting you to start
out your job by turning down the money that Congress just
gave you, but I want to ask you a different question. Do
you agree that protecting our Nation is not just about how
much money our Nation spends on defense, but also about how
we spend it and what specific challenges we focus on?

Mr. Austin: I do. My view, as the Secretary of
Defense, job one for me is the defense of this country, and
we are going to do what it takes to make sure that we are
successful at that. As we talked earlier, our strategy --
our resources ought to match our strategy, and our strategy
ought to match our policy. And so, again, I think I have a
requirement to be a good steward of our resources, but you
can count on me always asking for what we need to
accomplish the strategy that has been laid out for us.

Senator Warren: Well, I appreciate the approach that
looks at how we are spending that money and exactly what
challenges we are focusing our money on.

I see that I am out of time. So I am not going to get
to ask you about the importance of investing in our
diplomatic corps and making sure that we have adequate
funding for the State Department in order to help you in
the defense of our Nation. I promise, though, I will send
you some questions for the record about that.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Austin: That is an easy answer for me, Senator.
I think it is absolutely important that the State
Department be resourced adequately.

Senator Warren: Good. That is what I like to hear.
Thank you, General.

Chairman Inhofe [Presiding]: Thank you, Senator
Warren.

And now via Webex, Senator Scott.

Senator Scott: Hi, thanks. Chairman, can you hear me
all right?

Chairman Inhofe: Loud and clear.

Senator Scott: Okay. And thank you, Chairman, for
holding this meeting.

First off, I want to thank General Austin for all of
his hard work. We had the opportunity to work together
when he was at CENTCOM, and I just want to thank the
general for his distinguished service as a soldier and
commander and just what a great job he did in the military.
So I am very appreciative.

We had the opportunity to talk the other day, and so
if you could talk a little bit about how if you look at the
people in the military just have not spent a whole bunch of
time dealing with the risk of Communist China and how you
will get up to speed. Because we actually do not have the
same experience in dealing with Communist China as we do
with people in the -- dealing with the Middle East.

So, General Austin, can you talk a little bit about
how you will get up to speed and how important you think it
is to get up to speed on the risk of Communist China?

Mr. Austin: Well, I think it is absolutely important.
As I outlined in my opening statement, Senator Scott, I
think China is our most challenging -- our most significant
challenge going forward. So you can expect that I will
continue to focus the resources of the Department on this
issue to make sure that we are prepared to meet any
challenge and that we continue to present a credible
deterrent to China or any other aggressor who would want to
take us on and convince them that that would be a really
bad idea.

The issue of China, though, is very complex, and I
fully recognize that while I have the military component of
this problem set, it is a whole of government approach
because China looks to compete with us along a spectrum of
activities, you know, economic and IT and cyber and space
and other domains. So we will have the right experts. We
will have the right capabilities and plans and operational
concepts that are required to make sure that we are
effective in our efforts to deter China and any other aggressor.

Senator Scott: Thank you, General Austin.

So you, in your military career, you did a great job of building teams. From the people I have heard, including Senator Sullivan, you built a great team to get the results you wanted. And in this job, in this role, you have to do the exact same thing. So how are you going to be able to vet the people that will be working with you to make sure that they share your view on the importance of holding Communist China accountable and actually make sure we are a great deterrent to their ambition to dominate at a minimum the Indo-Pacific region?

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly, I will issue the -- I will make sure that I issue the appropriate guidance to focus the Department's efforts on this issue. We will make sure that the right processes and procedures are in place to review our efforts and to coordinate our efforts to make sure that we are operating as a joint force.

And you mentioned teams. And part of the team effort here is obviously and certainly with our allies. I think it is really important to make sure that we continue to reach out to our allies, we build the capacity necessary to be effective against China. And those allies include -- certainly include the people in the region, but they also
include allies around the rest of the globe.

So I will issue the right guidance. We will have the right policies in place and the right mechanisms to make sure that we are operating as a joint force and that we are focused appropriately and acquiring the right technologies to make sure that we are relevant going forward.

Senator Scott: Do you believe that with the Biden administration, you will have the opportunity to have influence on the people that will be part of your team internally to make sure that they share your view on the importance of holding Communist China accountable?

Mr. Austin: I absolutely believe that, Senator Scott.

Senator Scott: Okay. And one thing that Senator Sullivan brought up to me when I spoke to him yesterday about you was the fact that with your military background, you will be one of the few individuals in the Biden administration that will have the military background. Do you believe you will have the ability to influence their -- influence and convince them of the importance of having a strong military to be able to be a great deterrent and a great promoter of world peace?

Mr. Austin: I do, Senator Scott. I also believe that I have a great relationship with the President-Elect, and I certainly would like to be able to express my views to him as frequently as necessary.
Senator Scott: One of the issues we are dealing with is ambiguity with regard to Taiwan. I think a lot of us believe that Taiwan is worth making sure that we can continue -- help them continue as a democracy and as an entity independent of Communist China. Well, how -- I personally believe we have got to quit being ambiguous, and we have got let Communist China know the importance of Taiwan to us, and how would you do that to make sure that we are not sitting here down the road having to make a decision that Communist China has decided to invade Taiwan?

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly, our efforts will be to ensure that we do everything to make sure that China does not take that decision. But our support to Taiwan has been rock solid over the years, and it has been bipartisan support, and I would certainly want to thank this committee for their support and their willingness to work together on this issue.

We have been strong in our commitments, and certainly, if I am confirmed as Secretary of Defense, I will make sure that we are living up to our commitments to support Taiwan's ability to defend itself.

Senator Scott: Thank you, General Austin.

Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Scott.

Senator Manchin?
Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, General. Appreciate very much your service and your family's dedication and commitment to our country.

Sir, the 7-year cooling-off period, you have 5 years you have been in the private sector. What do you think could be accomplished in 2 more years? What are we missing there? I mean, I think that you segued pretty well into the private sector and understand the balance there.

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly, I will be 2 years older, but certainly, I do not think I will be -- I will have any more commitment --

Senator Manchin: And change.

Mr. Austin: -- to serving as a civilian than I have now.

Senator Manchin: Just from history, people know that it used to be 10 years. Then we changed it to 7 years. We should be looking at the quality of the person at the time we need them.

Mr. Austin: Senator Manchin, I absolutely agree. It is about what is in the mind and the heart of the person that is being asked to serve, and I certainly agree with you on that.

Senator Manchin: The strength of our military and the admiration the whole world has for it is because of the
separation and led by the private sector, and have the
knowledge you have and being able to come from the private
sector now, I think it is going to be a great asset.

There are other people in that cooling-off period down
the chain. Do you see any need to have any waivers for
those? Because I think it is a much smaller waiver. Most
of it is 180 days. People do not understand that either.
It is a very short period of time, but yet the person that
we need to lead it.

Mr. Austin: We have not yet completely fleshed out
who would be serving in key positions. But if there is
talent there that is a China expert or something else that
we really need, I think it is important to -- to kind of
weigh that out --

Senator Manchin: To have the flexibility.

Mr. Austin: -- and make sure that we are focused on
the right thing.

Senator Manchin: Well, I know you will get the right
people. A couple things. The people have been asking me
ever since I just came in today about tomorrow's security.
Right now, there has been 12 Guardsmen that have been
relieved from the detail, and you talked about an
experience you had in your earlier life in the military.

What do you see? I mean, it is a concern that I have
now more so than ever before, and more people, we never
realized it. But now we are seeing that all the conspiracy theories and all the different people are on the dark web, or wherever they are, are being recruited that have military experience. What can we do, and how should we approach this?

Mr. Austin: Well, I think we can do a better job of screening our -- you know, the folks that we bring in, the people that we bring in. I also think we need to do a better job of once we have people onboard, that we are paying attention to them, that we are creating the right kind of environment for them to live in, and that they are embracing the values that we think are important in the military and the values that are important for this country.

And I think this is a thing that we have to work at day in and day out. And so --

Senator Manchin: Knowing the presence of what we have and what we are dealing with and what happened last week, how do you feel about the security we have for tomorrow?

Mr. Austin: I do not know the specifics or the moving parts. The Secret Service is, I think, in charge of the overall effort. I think I have every reason to believe that they will do a very credible job and provide for our security.

I have confidence in our Guard. Again, the fact that
we are screening people and making sure that we do not have the wrong kinds of people in the formation I think is a credit to their efforts.

Senator Manchin: Well, you know that all the reports, and we do not have all the evidence yet and all of the -- but we will have that probably during this new trial we have coming up that the ball was dropped at the Department of Defense, that we did not get the support we needed or the help we needed or the protection we needed quick enough.

Mr. Austin: I think that is still under review, Senator.

Senator Manchin: Yes, yes.

Mr. Austin: And you know --

Senator Manchin: I am not accusing until we see the facts --

Mr. Austin: Yes.

Senator Manchin: -- but that has been the reports coming out. So I know that you have a lot of work ahead of you trying to build up that confidence level and the morale.

Mr. Austin: Right.

Senator Manchin: If I can ask you the greatest threat that we face as a country, if you were going to name one of the greatest threats or the greatest challenge you think
you are going to have coming into this position, what would it be?

Mr. Austin: I think there are a number of challenges --

Senator Manchin: I know.

Mr. Austin: -- as we discussed before. And quite frankly, the greatest challenge to our country right now, Senator Manchin, is the pandemic. It has killed over 400,000 of our America citizens, and that is just an incredible, incredible loss of life. I think we have to do everything that we can to break the cycle of transmission and to begin to turn this thing around. I know that the President-Elect is very, very much focused on this.

I think DOD can add value to this effort and speed and scale, and I would certainly hope -- again, if I am confirmed, one of the first things I will do is take a look at how we are contributing, and if there is more that we can do -- and I believe that there probably will be -- that we will lean into this and help this effort along.

You know, in terms of other challenges, we have talked about China, we have talked about Russia, we have talked about --

Senator Manchin: The pandemic is number one, though, you think from your standpoint?

Mr. Austin: China is the most concerning competitor
that we are facing.

Senator Manchin: Let me ask you this about finances. John McCain, the late John McCain, my dear friend, and we all knew John pretty well. If you worked with John, you knew John pretty well. He made sure of that.

But John and I had a bill that we always worked on, auditing the Pentagon, auditing the Department of Defense. It was the only agency in all of Government that was never audited. But they have been doing a good job, but they are still a little bit relaxed there. I just would like for your commitment on that to do everything you can to make sure that the finances that people know how we are investing their money and what type of return we are getting on that.

Mr. Austin: You have my commitment, Senator.

Senator Manchin: And let me just say this, sir. I truly believe with all my heart you are the right person at the right time to do this job because it is a tremendous undertaking. And I think to restore the confidence back to the American people that our Defense Department basically is there to defend us and it is basically run by the civilians, who basically who are not going to let military be used against us at any time. And what we saw last Wednesday was an anomaly that will never happen again.

Thank you, sir. I look forward to voting for you.
Mr. Austin: I look forward to working with you, Senator, if I am confirmed. Thank you.

Senator Manchin: Thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Manchin.

Now via Webex, Senator Blackburn.

Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this and the opportunity to talk with General Austin.

And I will say, General, I enjoyed our conversation yesterday so much. Thank you very much for your time, and thank you to your family for sticking with you as you go through this process.

I will say, and we discussed this, I am one of those who is not in favor of waivers. I believe that rules are -- and processes are put in place over time because of specific reasons. With that said, however, you and I do have mutual friends, and they have all spoken to your strength of character, the way that you fulfill your role, the work that you did with the military, and the leadership that you bring to different situations. And I thank you for that.

I do want to go back to the topic we discussed, the issue of China. And we talked about a quote that is attributed to you about strategic patience, and you had applied that to China. And you thought it was an
attribute or mentioned it was an attribution in the article, but I went back and looked at this, and it was a quote from an interview and, thus, later picked up by Asia Today or Asia Times and other foreign policy articles and, as you have heard from other members on the committee, China.

And I think you also believe China and great power competition is our greatest threat. Whether we are looking at what is happening on the economic side, and I appreciate you mentioned that earlier, because we discussed we do not know exactly where MOFCOM ends or where their economic sector ends and their military sector begins.

So what I would like for you to do is spend a minute and talk about why you cannot use strategic patience with China and why it is an imperative that we address the economic and the military side of that China problem coin, if you will, and how your budget priorities are going to reflect the desire to deal with China, to work with Taiwan, to work with Hong Kong? So if you would take a minute and just address that for us.

Mr. Austin: I think over the last two decades, Senator, as we have been focused on -- necessarily focused on issues in the Middle East, we have seen China modernize its military. We have seen its -- we have seen it employ aggressive, in some cases coercive behavior against our
allies in the region. We have seen it do a number of things that tend to make us believe that China really wants to be the preeminent power in the world in the not-too-distant future.

I think, again, China looks to compete with us against -- looks to compete with us in a number of areas across a spectrum that includes, as you pointed out, economics, cyber, competition in the domain of space. So China, because of its desires, because of its worldview, is clearly a competitor that we have to make sure that we begin to check their aggression.

It will require a whole of government effort to do that. The Department of Defense's piece in this is to make sure that we are presenting a credible deterrent to China so that it will think twice before it decides to take on the United States of America, China or any other aggressor.

And that requires investment in a number of areas. We have talked about this a bit before.

Senator Blackburn: Yes.

Mr. Austin: In modernization, things like AI and space-based platforms and directed energy and just a number of things. If we are called upon to conduct operations against a near peer such as China or Russia, it is a different type of engagement, and we need different capabilities. We need the operational concepts that can
employ those capabilities. And again, as I said earlier, we will be required to understand what is going on on the battlefield much better, much faster, be able to decide very -- a lot quicker, and then be able to act a lot quicker.

Senator Blackburn: Well, I appreciate that, and I think it is important for the record to reflect that you do not view dealing with China as a strategic patience. It is a different approach than we have had with ISIS.

Let me move on. We also talked a little bit about workforce and utilization of the Guard. As we look at some of the skill sets that are necessary moving into 5G deployment, a utilization of artificial intelligence, building out ISR, and some of those areas. So for the record, make a comment about Guard recruitment, retention, and how you would interface the Guard with the active duty men and women.

Mr. Austin: Well, we certainly have great talent in our Guardsmen and that we have seen that on display throughout these years of conflict that we have been in. Our Guard has performed very, very well.

Many of our Guardsmen have skills that you do not typically find in a normal unit or a normal organization, and so I think in a lot of cases, we can do a better job of leveraging those skills, those unique skill sets to help
our efforts in things like IT and other things.

Senator Blackburn: Well, thank you for that. We appreciate your service. We appreciate your time today. And Mr. Chairman, thank you for the hearing. I yield back.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

Now via Webex, Senator Peters.

Senator Peters: Well, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And General Austin, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your service over many, many years to this country, and thank you for your willingness to take on this job. Clearly, we are in an incredibly difficult time in our history, and we are facing significant challenges, and your willingness to serve your country once again is commendable. So, thank you.

I want to pick up briefly on some comments made by my colleague Senator Heinrich, and I think although you answered his question, I think it is important for you to know that there are many of us on this committee that are very concerned about PFAS contamination in military sites across the country. Clearly, this is a bigger problem than just military sites. We have got PFAS sites throughout the country.

Michigan has been particularly hard hit with sites
containing this very toxic chemical. In fact, I think of
the 700 sites identified around the country, roughly 200 of
them are in Michigan, although we think the reason that
number is so high is just because we have been looking for
it more than other States. It is likely to continue.

But we do have military sites that have been impacted,
and one in particular in Michigan, which is the former
Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda. The folks in Oscoda
and that area have been dealing with this contamination for
many years. They are, and rightly so, incredibly
frustrated by the slowness from the Air Force and others to
deal with it.

We have started to see some pick-up in activity in
clean-up, but they have waited too long. And I know you
made a commitment to Senator Heinrich to expedite this, but
I want you to know that this is a major issue for me, for
folks in Michigan, folks around Wurtsmith Air Force Base,
as well as other military sites across the country. I am
sure many of my other colleagues would join in.

And so I hope that you are, indeed, committed to
making sure we do right by these communities that have
hosted these bases for years and are now suffering the
consequences. So I do not know if you want to add anything
to what your response was to Senator Heinrich, but please
know this is a serious issue for us across the country.
Mr. Austin: No, I am committed, Senator. I think, as I said earlier, that the health and welfare of our military members, our families, our DOD civilians, and our communities is very, very important. And again, Secretary Esper stood up a PFAS task force. I will check in with them and make sure that I expedite their work if at all possible.

And certainly, I look forward to working with my EPA counterpart on this issue. I think it is very, very important to mitigate the effects of these contaminates as soon as we can. You can look for us to stay committed to that.

Senator Peters: I appreciate that, General. Thank you so much.

You mentioned it in a number of questions about the changing nature of warfare, and we are on the cusp of major changes as a result of technology. You alluded to some in the last answer, whether it is AI, automation, directed weapons. We just know that we are in a technological revolution that will change the way we live dramatically. And when that happens, that also changes the face of warfare in dramatic ways.

And it is not just the complexity of our tools, but as you mentioned, it is the strategic and operational environment as well. And so it is going to require some
really -- some creative thinking outside of normal policies in how we prepare for this change. And I think a lot of that requires changing some of the culture, particularly when you have a large bureaucratic organization like the Department of Defense. That is no different than any other large bureaucratic organization. It is sometimes difficult to get out of the established mindsets and understand that things are changing rapidly.

And so guidance from the top is incredibly important. That means in my mind -- and love to have your thoughts. That means placing a premium on digital skills by expanding eligibility for billets in the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, for example, Defense Innovation Unit and their service-level equivalents both inside as well as outside the Department.

So, General, if you can give me a sense of how do you assess the ability, for example, of defense innovation offices to develop systems that are going to be able to enhance both our performance and our effectiveness. And as you are thinking of this and answering this question, try to mention in particular how this will be helpful as we start operating perhaps more below the threshold of armed conflict, which may likely be an emerging pattern that we have to deal with more often than we would like.

Mr. Austin: Yes. So I think it is really important
that we have the ability to develop the kinds of
capabilities that you just described, Senator. You asked
specifically about the people that we have that are
dedicated to and working on these issues and whether or not
it is we are managing them the right way. Something that I
will have to look at.

I will have to go in and talk to the leadership about
what their needs are and how we can improve our efforts
right now. And I look forward to that conversation, but I
would not want to speculate on that issue right now.

But I really believe that what you just said is
absolutely important. We have got to be able to develop
the ability to move things with the appropriate speed and
focus that will enable us to be relevant going forward.

Senator Peters: And I think part of that speed -- and
there have been several questions related to the
procurement process -- is a lot of this innovation in the
past would take place within the Department of Defense.
Now we are seeing a lot of this innovation in commercial
markets, in the commercial sector. But as you integrate
that and having an era of centers or innovation centers
that work with those commercial centers, I think they are
incredibly important.

And I am happy to say in Michigan, we have our Ground
Vehicle Systems Center that takes advantage of the auto
industry and some of the developments we are seeing in automation. Would you commit to continuing to invest in those kinds of programs that work in partnership with advanced innovation in the commercial sector?

Mr. Austin: I think automation is really important to us. You have heard a number of leaders talk about that, and I think we are going to -- that will be an area of focus for us going forward.

Senator Peters: Well, I appreciate it, General.

Thank you.

I yield back.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Peters.

Via Webex, Senator Hawley.

Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General, for being here, and congratulations on your nomination. It is always nice to see a graduate of Webster University in St. Louis before the committee. So congratulations on that as well.

Let me come back to something you said at the very beginning of your testimony, during your statement at the beginning. You said that China is a pacing threat, "a pacing threat." I just want to be clear. Are there other pacing threats, and what would they be?

Mr. Austin: China is the most significant competitor that we are focused on. It is the pacing threat.
Senator Hawley: Thank you for that. That is a helpful clarification.

On that same point, you are going to have the opportunity here to oversee the next National Defense Strategy. You have said, and other committee members have quoted this today, you have talked about the competition, strategic competition with China and Russia. You have also said today, though, several times, including to me just now that you think that China is "the pacing threat" or China is the top priority. So can you commit to us that as you oversee the next NDS that China will be unequivocally identified as the top challenge, threat, competitor of the United States?

Mr. Austin: Yes. Clearly, the strategy will be arrayed against the threat, and China is -- presents the most significant threat going forward because China is ascending. Russia is also a threat, but it is in decline. It can still do a great deal of damage, as we have seen here in recent days, in an area -- and it is a country that we have to remain -- maintain some degree of focus on. But China is the pacing threat.

Senator Hawley: Very good. And you would expect -- just to press my point here, but you would expect to see that identified -- China, that is, identified as the pacing threat in the next National Defense Strategy? In other
words, you do not see any reason why that would not be the case? Is that correct?

Mr. Austin: That follows. That makes sense, Senator Hawley, I think. But again, I certainly do not want to try to write the strategy here. We want to make sure we go through the process of arraying the threats and identifying what capabilities we are going to place against them. But it certainly follows it is the pacing issue, the pacing threat currently, and I fully expect that it will remain so going forward.

Senator Hawley: Good. Well, I am pressing you on it only because I think there has been some confusion with the last National Defense Strategy, the way it has been interpreted in some quarters to put China and Russia on a plane. And what you just said just a second ago I think is very encouraging, that China is the pacing threat.

Russia, of course, is a threat. There is no doubt about that. But to your words, it is in decline. And of course, we have limited resources and capacities, and we are going to have to make sure that those limited resources and capacities are deployed corresponding to the relevant threat. So I am encouraged by what you said. I am going to hold you to that.

Let me shift to Taiwan, which is obviously closely related. I would like to follow up on something Senator
Scott asked you about.

Under the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States has committed to maintaining the capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security of the people of Taiwan. Given our obligations under that statute, General, do you agree that DOD should maintain the ability to deter a Chinese fait accompli when it comes to Taiwan?

Mr. Austin: Senator, you came in broken on that last piece there. If I could ask you to repeat the end of that, please?

Senator Hawley: Yes. When it comes to Taiwan, General, do you agree that the Department of Defense should clearly prioritize defeating a fait accompli scenario in Taiwan on the part of China, the attempt to invade, their pressure that would put us in a fait accompli scenario. Should that be our top priority?

Mr. Austin: Well, certainly, I do not want to go down the road of getting into hypotheticals about what we would do if certain things happened. I would just say that my job as the Secretary of Defense, if confirmed, is to present credible options to the President to ensure that we can protect our interests and defend ourselves.

And you know, one of our interests is to make sure that Taiwan -- and a commitment is to make sure that Taiwan
has the ability to defend itself. And so we will stay committed to that going forward.

Senator Hawley: Yes, and I certainly appreciate the fact that you cannot anticipate all threats going forward. However, we do have to plan. And to go back to points you have made about husbanding our scarce resources, making sure that we are using them well, we have got to identify the scenarios that we are prioritizing to plan for.

And so I just want to say, ask you one more time, with regard to the fait accompli scenario in Taiwan, which is identified, of course, in the current -- the 2018 National Defense Strategy, is that a scenario you think we ought to prioritize in our planning purposes in order to deter China?

Mr. Austin: Again, we are committed, we have been committed to the support of Taiwan throughout. And again, it has been bipartisan support. We will remain committed to supporting Taiwan, and so we will have the right options available to protect our interest and to defend ourselves.

Senator Hawley: Let me shift to Afghanistan here briefly, General, in the time I have got remaining. If the Taliban violates its part of the peace agreement, there is going to be significant pressure on the President-Elect to send thousands of troops back into Afghanistan and perpetuate the cycle that we have seen there.
How do you think we should respond if the Taliban violates our peace agreement so that we can achieve our counterterrorism objectives without increasing the number of troops that we have there in the region?

Mr. Austin: Senator, you know that we are currently operating as a part of a coalition effort there in Afghanistan. And what I have heard General Milley and General Miller say publicly is that they believe they have adequate resources to accomplish the objectives that they are assigned currently.

And so, if I am confirmed, as I go in, I would like to be able to assess the situation myself and then make my recommendations to the President in terms of what is required and what is not required.

Senator Hawley: I see my time has expired. Thank you again, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Hawley.

And finally, we now have, via Webex, Senator Duckworth.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I spoke in this committee last week about my concerns with making exceptions to allow any person to serve as Secretary of Defense less than 7 years after leaving regular military service. Mr. Austin, you and I spoke
about this issue on our recent call as well. I want to reiterate that my concerns are the same now as they were when we considered Secretary Mattis' nomination 4 years ago.

My vote against a waiver that would allow you to serve as Secretary of Defense has everything to do with restoring the bedrock principle of civilian control of the military and nothing to do with you, your qualifications, or your character. Last week, I pledged to my colleagues that if they choose to pass an exception to the statute, I will consider your nomination fairly and on its merits. Mr. Austin, I make that same promise to you today.

Based on our call last week, in fact, I feel we are aligned in our thoughts on a number of the most urgent national security issues facing our country. I am pleased to get the chance now to follow up on a few of those challenges that I believe the DOD is facing that concerns me the most.

First, I have raised alarms before about President Trump's total disregard for good order and discipline. Over the last 4 years, he has valorized ruthless killing and pardoned war criminals like convicted former SEAL Eddie Gallagher. He directly undermined leaders like former Naval Special Warfare Commander Admiral Green, who attempted to hold service members accountable when they
violated their oaths and failed to uphold good order and discipline.

And then some communities, like the SEAL community, were already struggling with service members drifting from their core values likely due to the stress of 19 years of war and deployments. President Trump's rhetoric has damaged attempts to restore discipline in our Department of Defense. Now in the fallout of violent insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th, we are starting to learn the depth of the problem in our military services.

Veterans, active duty troops, members of the National Guard have already been found to have participated in an actual attack on elected leaders and our constitutional process in direct violation of their oaths of office. We have seen significant reporting on the ways that extremist groups specifically target military members and veterans, and it is likely that we will discover more in the coming weeks.

Mr. Austin, it is clear that we are at a crisis point. We need strong leadership to root out extremists in the military and reaffirm the core values that have defined military service. If confirmed, what steps would you take to assert your leadership, set the example for the service chiefs, and reinstate good order and discipline?

Mr. Austin: Well, the activity that we have seen
recently in terms of potential racist or extremist behavior within our ranks is, in my view, absolutely unacceptable. And I think you have heard the chiefs, service chiefs and the Chairman recently speak to that as well.

I will work with the leaders of the various departments to make sure that it is absolutely clear to everyone in the Department, military or civilian, that this is behavior that does not -- does not fit our values, does not comport with our values. And so I will want the leaders of all of the services and all the departments to make sure that they are doing the right things to set the right example and to create the right climate that discourages and eliminates that type of behavior.

And this is not something that we can be passive on. This is something I think we have to be active on, and we have to lean into it and make sure that we are doing the right things to create the right climates.

Senator Duckworth: And there needs to be consequences for bad actors as well?

Mr. Austin: Certainly, if someone is accused and an investigation determines that that person is guilty of that type of behavior, then we will take the appropriate actions.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

Mr. Austin, you oversaw one of our military's largest
and most complex logistics operations in Iraq. So you understand better than most, almost anyone else going forward we cannot rely on the same logistics system and practices that we used in Iraq and Afghanistan as we look to future potential areas of conflict.

Great power competition demands that we innovate our approach to logistics, and so it is critical that we invest in TRANSCOM and ensure that logistics-related planning factors are central to our op plans and our major exercises. If confirmed, what initiatives will you prioritize to ensure that confrontation command and the rest of the DOD’s logistics enterprise is modernized and resourced to support global operations and to withstand threats from peer competitors, especially when we are talking about in contested environments?

Mr. Austin: I think, Senator, you are absolutely correct. Our logistics capabilities really enable us to do the great work that we have done around the globe. I think we have to continue to invest in the right things. I look forward to having a conversation with our senior logistics leaders in all of the branches and also in the Department as well.

And I want to invest in those types of things that can provide us innovative approaches to delivering the types of logistics that we will need to sustain ourselves. I agree
with you that we will not be able to do business as we have always done it going forward, as we are looking to compete with a near-peer competitor.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

The DOD is also well positioned to lead the way on developing the kind of clean energy technology that can accelerate our fight against climate change, one of the biggest national security threats of our time, and reduce the military's reliance on fossil fuel, which would shorten that logistics tail. If confirmed, how would you lead DOD to reduce its emissions and develop the sort of breakthrough energy technology that can make forward-deployed troops less reliant on fuel delivery and other energy-related sustainment?

Mr. Austin: Well, I think while we are no doubt doing some things on all of our installations now to reduce our energy consumption and reduce our carbon footprint, I think there is more that we can do. You know, we consume a lot of energy, and so I think that we can have a substantial impact if we are focused on the right things.

You know, this affects us in a lot of ways. I think that if we look at utilization on installations in other capacity, utilization of electrical vehicles and reducing the amount of energy that we are consuming and just a number of other things, we can make a pretty substantial
impact on our overall effort here. And so I look forward
to working with the administration and my colleagues and
working with the Department to really improve our
performance thus far.

I will appoint a specific person on my staff to help
me focus on this issue and to coordinate issues within the
Department and within the services as well.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you very much. I am over
time, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Inhofe: All right. I have been told that
this completes our members that were wanting to
participate, and we want to thank you very much, General
Austin, for the time you have given us, and we look forward
to working with you.

Senator Reed, did you want to make any further
comments?

Senator Reed: Mr. Chairman, no. I just want to thank
you for conducting this hearing and thank General Austin
for participating. And good luck, sir.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

And when we meet again 2 days from now, I think you
will be the chairman, and I will be the ranking member.
That transition will take place very peaceably --

[Laughter.]

Chairman Inhofe: -- and I want to tell you how we
have enjoyed working together for a number of years, and we will continue to do that.

Senator Reed: Mr. Chairman, it has been an honor and a great pleasure working with you. And I think, with your leadership, we have accomplished a great deal, and I thank you.

Chairman Inhofe: Thank you very much.

General Austin, did you have any other -- any questions that were not asked that you would like to volunteer answers to now? I think the answer is no.

Mr. Austin: That is correct, Mr. Chairman. I just want to thank you and the committee members for allowing me the time this afternoon to engage with you, and I want to thank you all also for the tremendous support that you have given to our military over the years. And if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and doing the same kinds of things that you have done in the past.

Again, thanks.

Chairman Inhofe: That is good. Thank you very much.

And we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 6:37 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]
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