

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF
DR. COLIN H. KAHL
TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR POLICY

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING
1111 14TH STREET NW
SUITE 1050
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
www.aldersonreporting.com

1 HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF DR. COLIN H. KAHL
2 TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

3
4 Thursday, March 4, 2021

5
6 U.S. Senate

7 Committee on Armed Services

8 Washington, D.C.
9

10 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in
11 Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,
12 chairman of the committee, presiding.

13 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
14 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
15 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,
16 Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer,
17 Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

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

3 Chairman Reed: Good morning. The Committee meets this
4 morning to consider the nomination of Dr. Colin Kahl to be
5 Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Dr. Kahl has had a
6 long and distinguished career in public service, including
7 multiple positions at the Department of Defense. In
8 addition, he has a close relationship with the White House,
9 having served as Vice President Biden's National Security
10 Advisor.

11 Dr. Kahl, I want to thank you for your willingness to
12 once again serve your country and the Defense Department. I
13 also recognize and thank Michèle Flournoy, who previously
14 served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and who
15 will be introducing Dr. Kahl this morning.

16 During his nomination hearing before this committee,
17 Secretary Austin made clear that the next Under Secretary of
18 Defense for Policy will play a central role in the
19 Secretary's efforts to empower the Department's civilian
20 staff, and ensure that strategic and operational decisions
21 are informed by policy.

22 If confirmed, Dr. Kahl, you will face a wide range of
23 challenges to global security. Foremost among these is the
24 re-emergence of strategic competition with near-peer rivals,
25 China and Russia. We must adapt to a new security

1 environment in which our adversaries are rapidly modernizing
2 their military capabilities and are increasingly aggressive
3 in challenging U.S. and allied interests. Our Armed Forces
4 must be prepared to operate in contested environments if our
5 deterrent is to remain credible. This great power rivalry
6 will significantly impact our defense policies across the
7 board.

8 We must take a long-term approach to the strategic
9 competition with China, a challenge Secretary Austin has
10 appropriately described as the "pacing threat" for the
11 Department of Defense. Competing effectively with China
12 requires that we develop new technologies to rival China's
13 advancements and new operational concepts to ensure the
14 desired deterrent effect against Chinese aggression.

15 Russia continues to subvert the rules-based
16 international order, including using military force to
17 intimidate and coerce its neighbors and other countries.
18 Russia is also engaged in an ongoing hybrid warfare campaign
19 just below the threshold that would provoke a military
20 response, including disinformation campaigns targeting
21 democratic processes, human rights abuses, and assassination
22 attempts against Kremlin opponents.

23 In addition to these broad strategic challenges, the
24 new administration must contend with regional
25 destabilization in the Middle East and South Asia, areas in

1 which Dr. Kahl has extensive experience. These complex,
2 interlocking challenges include deterring threats from Iran,
3 and its proxies, while seeking to contain the Iranian
4 nuclear threat; recalibrating the relationship with Saudi
5 Arabia; and continuing to mature the security relationship
6 with Iraq while keeping pressure on ISIS. In Afghanistan,
7 the administration is reviewing adherence to the May 1st
8 troop withdrawal timeline in the midst of an uptick in
9 Taliban violence across the country.

10 The shift to great power competition has been
11 accompanied by a call for a more resource-sustained approach
12 to counterterrorism. The Biden administration has an
13 opportunity to develop a sustainable policy framework for
14 the conduct of counterterrorism operations that ensures
15 transparency, seeks to enable foreign partners, emphasizes
16 the avoidance of civilian harm, and reserves unilateral use
17 of lethal force for only those instances where it is
18 absolutely necessary.

19 The Department is also confronted with a number of non-
20 traditional threats, from disruptive technologies including
21 cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and
22 advanced digital communications, to the substantial threat
23 climate change poses to our force posture and military
24 operations. This may require new policies and
25 organizational structures within the Department to respond

1 to these emerging threats.

2 Addressing these problems will require a comprehensive
3 security strategy, one that brings together all national
4 elements of power in a whole-of-government approach. The
5 Policy Office will have the lead in working with the State
6 Department and other civilian agencies to ensure a unified
7 effort on these critical national security matters. Dr.
8 Kahl, I hope you will share your views on the role of the
9 Department of Defense in such a coordinated, interagency
10 approach.

11 Finally, another key component of our defense policy
12 going forward must be ensuring a unified approach with our
13 allies and building strong partnerships globally. Our
14 allies and partner nations are force multipliers, providing
15 us a significant advantage in the strategic competition.
16 The Biden administration has pledged to reinvigorate these
17 relationships, which have been badly shaken in recent years,
18 leaving our allies and partners wondering whether they can
19 rely on U.S. leadership of the international community. I
20 will be interested to hear how you see the role of allies
21 and partners in the U.S. security strategy, and how, if
22 confirmed, you would rebuild the bonds with our defense
23 partners.

24 I look forward to your testimony, and let me recognize
25 Senator Inhofe.

1 STATEMENT OF HON. JIM INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Dr. Kahl, I want to begin by thanking you for your
5 willingness to serve. You have been nominated for one of
6 the most senior positions at the Pentagon, and you
7 previously served in high positions in the Obama
8 administration. But to be clear up front, from a policy
9 perspective, I do not think there is much we are going to
10 agree on, as we discussed on the phone last week.

11 Now, in regards to our discussion last week, we had a
12 conversation. Apparently someone who was listening went to
13 the press and claimed that you and I, and we are quoting
14 you, "said all the right things" and "may have flipped
15 Inhofe and his concerns."

16 First, I think I was pretty clear that we had
17 significant disagreements, so I am not sure how you got that
18 impression, or he got that impression, or who it was. And
19 second and most importantly, I am disappointed that a
20 slanted view of our conversation was shared with the press.
21 There is no reason for that.

22 On our call, I told you that I would have a hard time
23 supporting your nomination because of your previous policy
24 positions, unless you have learned from some of the mistakes
25 that you have made, which I will point out. But I also told

1 you that I can work with people with whom I disagree, and
2 people are always talking about that with me and Barbara
3 Boxer. We got more stuff done than any other two people who
4 did not agree on anything except infrastructure, but it
5 worked.

6 I understand that my committee staff has gotten
7 assurances that this leak did not come from you, but it did
8 not come from me either, so who did it come from?

9 Hopefully you can touch on this issue at some point
10 during today's testimony. Even if we disagree on policy
11 issues, we have to have some trust that we can have frank
12 conversations, and that would be necessary.

13 So now I want to discuss some of those areas where you
14 and I have disagreed.

15 Specifically, you had previously been against moving
16 the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, yet my recent
17 amendment to the reconciliation bill, which ensures that the
18 Embassy will remain in Jerusalem, passed by a vote of 97-3
19 -- those are Democrats we are talking about, along with
20 Republicans -- and the Biden administration has already
21 confirmed it will remain there also.

22 You have also been a vocal supporter of the Obama
23 administration's Iran nuclear deal, which gave Iran over
24 \$100 billion in sanctions relief, part of which Iran used to
25 fund terrorist groups, the very groups that rocketed

1 American forces in Iraq just this week.

2 Now, as I have said, my colleagues and I are used to
3 disagreeing with senior officials over various policy
4 matters. That is not new.

5 We had a very good hearing on Tuesday about global
6 security challenges and strategy. At this hearing, H.R.
7 McMaster said something about our foreign policy that I
8 think is really important. He said, and this is a quote, he
9 said, "We need to adopt a nonpartisan, long-term approach to
10 foreign policy focused on competitions important to our
11 nation's security, prosperity, and influence in the world."
12 Great statement.

13 What concerns me here is that hyper-partisanship,
14 especially in regards to our national security, is
15 inappropriate for the position of Under Secretary of Defense
16 for Policy. We are talking about the number three position.

17 We have seen this before, even with the previous
18 administration, when this committee rejected a nominee, in
19 part, due to his prior statements and hyper-partisanship.

20 The position of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
21 requires a leader with judicious temperament and sound
22 judgment. National security is too important for partisan
23 politics.

24 Unfortunately, in the past, in many cases, your public
25 policy positions have been couched in partisan politics

1 rather than fact-based analysis. I will give you just a few
2 examples because I expect my colleagues will have other
3 examples. I will just give you two here.

4 You downplayed the threat of Russia when Mitt Romney
5 highlighted it during the 2012 election, and then alleged
6 numerous conspiracy theories regarding President Trump's
7 ties to Russia following the 2016 election. Next, you
8 appeared to promote the fabricated Steele dossier, which
9 contains ludicrous and unsubstantiated accusations against
10 President Trump.

11 I realize you were not in public service when you made
12 these comments, and maybe at the time you thought you would
13 never be sitting in front of us as you are today.

14 My point is this. We know that there is a new
15 administration -- we understand that. I did not want it but
16 it is here -- and that we will have policy disagreements
17 that we will all try to work through. But how will you
18 rectify the fact that many Americans, including those who
19 work at the Department of Defense, know you only through
20 your very partisan comments? How can we be confident that
21 you will be a model of nonpartisan policy analysis, which is
22 what the job requires, if you are confirmed?

23 Finally, just to hit on some of your previous policy
24 predictions that have proven untrue, you said that ending
25 the Iran deal might lead to war, and that did not happen.

1 You said the Soleimani strike would force the United States
2 out of Iraq. That did not happen. You wrote that it would
3 be "difficult" to prevent a "massive war" on the Korean
4 peninsula in 2018. That did not happen. You said that
5 moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem would harm relations
6 with Arab states, and, in fact, Arab-Israeli relations have
7 never been better.

8 So here is what I hope you will address during the
9 hearing. What prior assumptions have you reconsidered?
10 Where do you stand on these matters now, and how will you
11 comport yourself in the position of Under Secretary of
12 Defense for Policy if you are confirmed? Where do you stand
13 on these matters now, and how will you comport yourself on
14 these policies? And how can you reassure this committee
15 that your hyper-partisan advocacy will not drive Pentagon
16 decisions?

17 We have got a lot to discuss, and I thank you for being
18 here today and your willingness. I sounded a little bit
19 upset on this, and frankly, I am.

20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe,
22 now let me recognize former Secretary of Defense, Michèle
23 Flournoy, via WebEx, to introduce Dr. Kahl, and then after
24 that I will ask the required questions of Dr. Kahl before
25 his testimony.

1 Secretary Flournoy, are you ready?

2 Ms. Flournoy: Yes, I am.

3 Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished
4 members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, it is truly
5 an honor and a pleasure for me to introduce my dear friend
6 and former colleague, Dr. Colin Kahl as President Biden's
7 nominee to be the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.
8 The Under Secretary for Policy is a position I know well,
9 and it plays a critical role in the Department of Defense.
10 As you know, it is the principal advisor to the Secretary of
11 Defense in the formulation of national security and defense
12 policy and the oversight of military plans and operations
13 and the National Security Council deliberations. The Under
14 Secretary's Office oversees the drafting of National Defense
15 Strategy and other key guidance documents and often
16 represents the Department in engagement overseas, with
17 allies, and the media, and before Congress.

18 I have known Dr. Kahl for nearly 15 years, and I cannot
19 think of anyone who is more qualified and better suited for
20 this position, particularly at this consequential moment for
21 our country. Dr. Kahl is both a respect policy expert and
22 an extraordinary leader and practitioners. Since receiving
23 his BA in political science from the University of Michigan
24 and his PhD in political science from Columbia University,
25 his career has alternated between being a professor at the

1 University of Minnesota, Georgetown, and now Stanford, and
2 serving his country in the Department of Defense and in the
3 White House.

4 During the Obama administration, Dr. Kahl served as
5 Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security
6 Advisor to the Vice President. In that position, he advised
7 President Obama and Vice President Biden on all matters
8 related to U.S. foreign policy and national security, from
9 China and Russia, Ukraine, North Korea, Central America, to
10 cyber, climate, Ebola, and the counter-ISIS strategy. He
11 has an incredible breadth and depth of both policy and
12 interagency experience at the highest levels, all of which
13 will serve him very well in the Department.

14 Prior to that, Dr. Kahl worked with me as Deputy
15 Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East at the
16 Pentagon. In this capacity, he served as the Senior Policy
17 Advisor to the Secretary of Defense for all of the countries
18 in the Levant and Gulf region. In this role, he delivered
19 some incredibly important outcomes for Secretary of Defense
20 Gates, for President Obama, for the U.S., and our allies.

21 A few examples. In the summer of 2009, he wrote the
22 initial memo that advocated for U.S. support for Israel's
23 Iron Dome rocket defense system, which had been languishing
24 at the Pentagon for years. This got the ball rolling at the
25 NSC, culminating in hundreds of millions of dollars, thanks

1 to the Congress, in support of a system that helped cement
2 our defense relationship with Israel and, in fact, saved
3 countless Israeli lives since then.

4 Dr. Kahl also spearheaded DoD efforts to bolster the
5 [inaudible] to counterbalance Iran while, at the same time,
6 safeguarding Israel's qualitative military edge, a feat that
7 he was able to manage by building extraordinarily close
8 security ties with both our JCC partners and his
9 counterparts in Israel.

10 At the same time, he helped oversee the contingency
11 planning for Iran and worked alongside the interagency and
12 CENTCOM to enhance and adjust our military posture
13 throughout the region to deter Iranian aggression and
14 support diplomacy to constrain Iran's nuclear program.
15 Throughout, he worked in close partnership with CENTCOM and
16 the Joint Staff, modeling the kind of collaborative civil-
17 military relationship we need more of today.

18 For these and his other extraordinary contributions,
19 Dr. Kahl was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for
20 Outstanding Public Service by Secretary Robert Gates in June
21 of 2011.

22 Dr. Kahl understands that these positions require not
23 just drafting good policy but also actually ensuring that
24 these policies are implemented, to deliver real security
25 benefits for the nation. He was exceptional in his ability

1 to develop a vision and road map for his area of
2 responsibility, to work closely with key civilian, military,
3 interagency, international, and I would add, congressional
4 on both sides of the aisle, stakeholders, to get their buy-
5 in and support, and then drive the delivery of outcomes.
6 Dr. Kahl has a record of being a leader who gets results.

7 He is also a leader who wins the respect and admiration
8 of his peers and his subordinates. When I was Under
9 Secretary, we launched a human capital strategy and policy
10 to boost the morale and enhance the performance of the
11 workforce. I decided to pilot the program in the two
12 busiest offices, including Dr. Kahl's Middle East office, to
13 demonstrate that it is possible to take care of your people
14 even as you maintain high-tempo operations.

15 The pilot was a stellar success, thanks to Dr. Kahl's
16 gifts as a leader and a manager of people. At a time when
17 the policy organization needs to be rebuilt and
18 reinvigorated, these skills will be critical to the next
19 USDP's success.

20 Thanks to his time in academia, and think tanks like
21 the Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for New
22 American Security, Dr. Kahl will also bring a tremendous
23 reservoir of intellectual capital to the position. He has
24 published numerous articles on international security and
25 foreign and defense policy, and has spent the past few years

1 working on a number of projects, ranging from a book on the
2 geopolitical consequences of COVID-19, a project on the
3 implications of emerging technologies such as artificial
4 intelligence and machine learning on strategic stability and
5 the future of deterrence, and a project providing a
6 theoretical and historical analysis of American grand
7 strategy since 9/11.

8 I believe Dr. Kahl has the expertise, the experience,
9 the ability to work with all stakeholders, no matter whether
10 they agree or disagree with him -- the leadership qualities
11 to be an exceptional Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.
12 I would urge you confirm him as quickly as possible, because
13 the Pentagon needs his help. Thank you so much.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you so much, Madam Secretary, not
15 only for your statement but for your dedicated service to
16 the nation in so many different ways.

17 Dr. Kahl, I will ask you a series of questions before
18 we recognize you for your statement.

19 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations
20 governing conflicts of interest?

21 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

22 Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or taken
23 any actions that would appear to resume the outcome of the
24 confirmation process?

25 Mr. Kahl: No.

1 Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and
2 oversight responsibility makes it important that this
3 committee, its committees, and other appropriate committees
4 of Congress receive testimony, briefings, reports, records,
5 and other information from the Executive branch on a timely
6 basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify
7 before this committee when requested?

8 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

9 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,
10 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
11 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
12 other appropriate committees of Congress and to consult with
13 a request regarding the basis of any good-faith delay or
14 denial in providing such records?

15 Mr. Kahl: I do.

16 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff
17 complies with deadlines established by this committee for
18 the production of reports, records, and other information,
19 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
20 record?

21 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

22 Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate in providing
23 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional
24 requests?

25 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

1 Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be
2 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

3 Mr. Kahl: They will.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Dr. Kahl, and
5 please go ahead.

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF DR. COLIN H. KAHL, TO BE UNDER SECRETARY
2 OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

3 Mr. Kahl: Well, thank you and good morning, Chairman
4 Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the committee.
5 It is a true honor to appear before you today.

6 I would like to thank President Biden for my
7 nomination. I would also like to thank Secretary Austin and
8 Deputy Secretary Hicks for their confidence, and of course,
9 to my good friend Michèle Flournoy for her kind
10 introduction.

11 Michèle has been a mentor to me and so many others over
12 the course of her distinguished career, and I am grateful
13 for her years of support and friendship. As Under Secretary
14 of Defense for Policy, she set a high bar for policy acumen,
15 skillful management, unshakeable integrity, and principled,
16 nonpartisan leadership, and if confirmed, I aim to emulate
17 her example.

18 I would also like to thank my wife Rebecca and my two
19 amazing children, our nine-year-old daughter Nora and our
20 six-year-old Rylan, for all their love, their support, and
21 frankly, their patience through this process. I wish they
22 could be here sitting behind me today, but I know they
23 cheering me on back home in California, so if you are
24 watching on TV, Daddy says hello.

25 I was born and raised in OSD Policy, and I could not be

1 more humbled by the prospect of leading this great
2 organization. I began my government career as an action
3 officer in the Pentagon during the Bush administration. I
4 returned to serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of
5 Defense for the Middle East during the Obama administration,
6 working for both Secretary Gates and then Secretary Panetta.

7 While the challenges we face as a nation have changed,
8 the role of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
9 remains just as critical as ever.

10 Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks have
11 pledged to empower the Policy team. If confirmed, I commit
12 to be a strong, constructive civilian voice in the
13 Department. I have the utmost respect for our military
14 professionals at all levels, and I would look forward to
15 working closely with the Joint Staff, with the combatant
16 commands, and the military services.

17 We have a lot of work to do together. We recently
18 reached the devastating milestone of over half a million
19 lives lost to COVID-19. That is more Americans than were
20 lost during World War II and in all wars since 1945 that
21 America has been involved in, combined. I agree with
22 Secretary Austin that the pandemic is our most immediate
23 national security threat, and if confirmed, I stand ready to
24 support the Department's many efforts to beat back COVID-19.

25 Beyond the crisis of the moment, the 2018 National

1 Defense Strategy, for which this committee deserves a great
2 deal of credit, aptly recognized the reality of accelerating
3 great power competition, particularly with China.

4 Successfully competing with China will requires us to lean
5 into our inherent strengths. That means building back
6 better at home, spurring technological innovation, leading
7 with our values, and reinvigorating our unrivaled network of
8 alliances and partners.

9 If confirmed, I would work diligently to further the
10 Department's efforts to strengthen deterrents and develop a
11 joint force to effectively counter a more assertive China.
12 The nuclear triad has been the bedrock of our strategic
13 deterrent for decades. In the face of challenges from
14 China, Russia, North Korea, and other states, we must ensure
15 that our nuclear deterrent remains safe, reliable, and
16 effective, one that is credible, not only in the eyes of our
17 adversaries but in the eyes of our allies.

18 Climate change represents another existential danger,
19 and if confirmed, I will champion a comprehensive approach
20 to addressing the national security implications of the
21 climate crisis.

22 We must also tackle growing threats in the cyber realm.
23 The SolarWinds intrusion is just the latest example of
24 vulnerabilities that have become even more acute as the
25 pandemic has forced entire communities and institutions

1 online. The Department should adopt a layered approach to
2 respond to cyberattacks, defend our networks and improve
3 their resilience, and work alongside like-minded nations to
4 constrain malign behavior.

5 Finally, I recognize that our country and the
6 Department faces a moment of reckoning. If confirmed,
7 I would do all that I can to support efforts to address the
8 scourge of sexual assault and end racism and violent
9 extremism within the ranks. You have my commitment to help
10 break down systemic barriers and foster a diverse and
11 inclusive Department.

12 If confirmed, I would look forward to working with
13 members of this committee on all of these issues. I am
14 personally grateful for your long bipartisan commitment to
15 our national defense, thoughtful oversight of our military,
16 and your devotion to those who serve our country in uniform
17 and their families. If confirmed, I would seek to forge a
18 collaborative working relationship with Congress, and I
19 would look forward to engaging with this committee regularly
20 to advance our shared national security objectives.

21 Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to
22 your questions.

23 [The prepared statement of Mr. Kahl follows:]

24

25

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Dr. Kahl. With
2 some Senators attending remotely I want to remind everyone
3 of how things will run. Since it is impossible to know
4 exactly when our colleagues who will be joining via the
5 computer arrive, we will not be following our standard early
6 bird timing rule. Instead, we handle the order of questions
7 by seniority, alternating sides, until we have gone through
8 everyone. Once we reach the end, if there is anyone we
9 missed we will start back at the top of the list and
10 continue until everyone has had their turn.

11 We will do the standard five-minute rounds. I ask my
12 colleagues on the computers, and at their desk, to please
13 keep an eye on the clock, which you should see on your
14 screens if you on the computer and the lights before you. I
15 think I have complete concurrence by the ranking member with
16 this, so I will reiterate that please.

17 Finally, to allow for everyone to be heard, whether in
18 the room or on the computer, I ask all colleagues to please
19 mute your microphone when not speaking. Thank you very
20 much.

21 Dr. Kahl, all of us have recognized, and you
22 particularly in your pre-hearing policy questions, China is
23 the top priority and pacing threat, as you described it, and
24 indeed Secretary Austin also called it a pacing threat. In
25 that regard, what would be your assessment of our current

1 posture in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly the forces
2 and capabilities that are west of the International Date
3 Line, and how does it align with the emerging threat?

4 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Chairman. There is no question
5 that China is the pacing threat, in most areas for the
6 Department. The reason for that is clear. China is the
7 only country in the world that can challenge the United
8 States systematically, that is, in the economic domain, the
9 technological domain, the military domain, and frankly, in
10 shaping international order more broadly.

11 From the Department of Defense perspective, we have to
12 get our posture in the Indo-Pacific right. I know,
13 obviously, the administration is in the beginning days of a
14 global posture review, and if I am confirmed I look forward
15 to participating in that.

16 But my general sense, and I would commend the committee
17 on its support for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative in this
18 regard, I think our posture has to be distributed, it has to
19 be ready and lethal, and it has to be resilient so that we
20 can counter the most likely scenarios for potential
21 conflict with China, and make it clear to Beijing that they
22 cannot win a potential conflict with the United States or
23 our allies.

24 Chairman Reed: Since we are all committed, I believe,
25 to a whole-of-government approach to problems, what non-

1 military aspects of a strategy do you believe need
2 additional attention? That will be one of your
3 responsibilities in the Department, to coordinate with State
4 and other agencies, so do you have a sense of what other
5 factors that we can contribute to our approach?

6 Mr. Kahl: Yes. I mean, clearly the Department of
7 Defense will have the lead in areas of competition,
8 especially where deterrence and national defense are
9 essential. But really, the Department is a supporting actor
10 to kind of a symphony of activities that other agencies are
11 involved.

12 You know, China and Russia, a lot of their activities
13 fall below the threshold of traditional warfare. You
14 mentioned yourself, in your opening remarks, about Russia's
15 hybrid warfare. We also see gray zone activities the
16 Chinese have engaged in.

17 But, you know, across the board energy coercion,
18 weaponized corruption, disinformation, cyberattacks, many of
19 these will require acts of diplomacy by the State
20 Department, a reinvigorated development policy to check back
21 against China's influence in the Belt and Road Initiative,
22 for example, a global public health policy that really rolls
23 back the pandemic and demonstrates American leadership, and
24 a government-wide technological policy that keeps us on the
25 cutting edge and protects our cyber networks, et cetera.

1 So if I am confirmed, a big role of the Under Secretary
2 is to work alongside the interagency. I think I have good,
3 trusting relationships with Secretary Blinken, with Wendy
4 Sherman, if she is confirmed, with many at the White House
5 such as Jake Sullivan and obviously the President. So I
6 think I could work well with our interagency partners.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Turning now to Iran,
8 President Biden has made clear his position that Iran must
9 be prevented from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon. But he
10 has indicated if Iran returns to strict compliance of the
11 JCPOA, the United States will join the agreement and begin
12 to negotiate and extend the provisions, and strengthen the
13 provisions of the JCPOA, while also addressing other issues
14 of concern, which is malign activities in Iran, which have
15 been demonstrated frequently.

16 Indeed, just last week, President Biden ordered, as we
17 all know, a strike just within the border of Syria on
18 Iranian paramilitary groups in response to strikes against
19 the U.S. facilities.

20 Do you believe it is possible to conduct this
21 essentially two-track approach, getting back into the JCPOA
22 while constraining the malign activities of the Iranians?

23 Mr. Kahl: I think it is, but it will be difficult. I
24 think that it is absolutely essential that we prevent Iran
25 from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon. It is also absolutely

1 essential that we prioritize the protection of our forces in
2 the Middle East and elsewhere, that are threatened by Iran
3 and its proxies.

4 So even as we pursue diplomacy to put Iran's nuclear
5 program back in the box, we have to remain vigilant against
6 the other threats that Iran poses, and if diplomacy makes
7 any progress on the nuclear front I would hope that that
8 would be a platform for us to address the other issues along
9 the lines that you suggested.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Dr. Kahl. Let me now
11 recognize Senator Inhofe.

12 Senator Inhofe: Well, Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First,
13 I have three questions. Before I come forth with my
14 questions let me make a comment about my rather harsh
15 introductory remarks.

16 I had two problems. One was that when we had our
17 conversation I thought it was confidential. I did not know
18 there were other people on the line. And the second thing
19 is, the report -- a conversation like that should not go
20 directly to the media, and I do not know why it did, and you
21 do not need to respond to why it did.

22 But in spite of what you might have heard from me, I
23 have one frailty, which I have lived with for a long time,
24 and that is in spite of what you think, I love everybody.

25 Now here are my three questions, and I structured

1 these, Dr. Kahl, to be yes-or-no questions, so it should be
2 easy and I ought be able to get all of them in, so you can
3 start the clock here.

4 Dr. Kahl, you said that -- well, under Soleimani's
5 leadership the Quds Force was responsible for the murder of
6 hundreds of American men and women in uniform. Soleimani
7 also armed, trained, and directed funds to terrorist groups
8 across the region, which deliberately killed many thousands
9 of innocent people in addition to Americans.

10 Dr. Kahl, you said that Soleimani's killing in January
11 2020, would lead to war. This did not happen. How do you
12 see it now? Is the world a better place without Soleimani?
13 Yes or no.

14 Mr. Kahl: I did not shed a tear for the death of Qasem
15 Soleimani, for all the reasons that you mentioned. Senator
16 Inhofe, I was concerned about the escalatory dynamics --

17 Senator Inhofe: Is the world in a better position now
18 without him?

19 Mr. Kahl: I think it probably is a better place
20 without him.

21 Senator Inhofe: Thank you. You wrote that President
22 Trump's decision to move the Embassy to Jerusalem risked a
23 third Palestinian uprising, and that also, as I said in my
24 opening statement, did not happen. In fact, the Arab-
25 Israeli cooperation has never been better. Do you

1 acknowledge that your previous assumption that stronger
2 U.S.-Israeli relations would spark violence and harm
3 relations with Arab states, were those statements a mistake?
4 Do you agree with it now?

5 Mr. Kahl: I think dynamics in the Middle East have
6 changed. I support the Abraham Accords and I would not move
7 the Embassy back to Jerusalem, and that is the policy, move
8 it away from Jerusalem, and that is President Biden's
9 policy, which I support.

10 Senator Inhofe: Very good. Last Thursday, at
11 Secretary of Defense Austin's recommendation, President
12 Biden took lethal action against Iranian-backed groups that
13 continue to target Americans, and I agreed with that action.
14 Dr. Kahl, do you agree and support President Biden's actions
15 against the Iranian-backed militias, and do you believe
16 pressure must continue to be placed on groups who take their
17 orders from Iranian leadership?

18 Mr. Kahl: I do.

19 Senator Inhofe: Good. And do you agree that so long
20 as Iranian-backed groups continue to target Americans for
21 murder, any easing of sanctions against Iran should be off
22 the table?

23 Mr. Kahl: I believe that we need to get the nuclear
24 program in a box, because as troubling as Iran's behavior
25 is, and it is very troubling, it would be exponentially more

1 dangerous if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon. So there maybe
2 context in which nuclear-related sanctions are part of a
3 compliance-for-compliance framework, but we should not be
4 loosening sanctions on terrorism or human rights or anything
5 else that checks back Iran's destabilizing activities.

6 Senator Inhofe: If they continue to target Americans
7 for murder, would easing the sanctions against Iraq, do you
8 think they should be off the table?

9 Mr. Kahl: Iran was engaged in those activities before
10 the Iran deal, during the Iran deal, and since we have
11 reimpose sanctions after leaving the Iran deal. I think we
12 need to check back Iran through a whole host of steps, some
13 of which include sanctions, but there are many other things
14 we need to be doing alongside our allies in the region, to
15 counterbalance Iran.

16 Senator Inhofe: Okay. I am going to ask you one more
17 time, and we are talking about in the event that they
18 continue doing what they have been doing. Shouldn't easing
19 sanctions be off the table? Yes or no.

20 Mr. Kahl: We should not ease sanctions on terrorism or
21 their other activities, and we should not ease any sanctions
22 on the nuclear front until Iran is in complete compliance
23 with its obligations under the JCPOA.

24 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Let me

1 recognize Senator Shaheen, please.

2 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
3 you to Dr. Kahl for being here and for your willingness to
4 consider being nominated to this critical post at this time.

5 I appreciated the phone conversation we had yesterday,
6 and I just want to ask you to reiterate two of the issues
7 that we discussed and what I understood you to say to me. I
8 was very pleased to hear you say that on the Havana
9 Syndrome, which has affected so many of our public servants
10 who were affected in Cuba and China and other parts of the
11 world that you would do everything possible to ensure that
12 we get to the bottom of who is responsible for those attacks
13 and that we cooperate with other agencies to try and ensure
14 we have answers and that people who are affected are taken
15 care of.

16 Did I understand that correctly?

17 Mr. Kahl: You did, Senator. I think there is no
18 higher obligation than making sure we are protecting our
19 people who serve overseas. That means not just our men and
20 women in uniform but our diplomats and other civilians. I
21 know this is an issue that you have championed, and I would
22 be happy to work with you on this issue, if I am confirmed.

23 Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. The other issue
24 that we talked about, and you said you thought it was very
25 important, was the continued implementation of the Women,

1 Peace, and Security Act, to ensure that we are including
2 women in all of our actions through the Department of
3 Defense. Again, you committed that that is a very important
4 step and the Department should continue work in that area.
5 Did I understand that correctly?

6 Mr. Kahl: You did. The empirical evidence is clear
7 that the inclusion of women and girls in society and women
8 in negotiations contributes to peaceful outcomes. I
9 understand the Department has a Women, Peace, and Security
10 strategic framework and implementation plan, and if I was
11 confirmed I would look forwa4rd to pushing that forward and
12 working with you on it.

13 Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. One of the
14 things that you mentioned in your opening statement was the
15 effectiveness of Russia's hybrid warfare, and we are looking
16 at how we respond and hold Russia accountable for what they
17 have been doing, whether it is the SolarWinds hack or
18 efforts to harass our troops in parts of Europe, I certainly
19 support the sanctions that the administration announced last
20 week, but one of the best ways I think we could hold Russia
21 accountable is to stop the completion of Nord Stream 2, and
22 to take every action possible. And I realize that some of
23 those actions need to be taken with the Department of State,
24 but can you talk about why it would be important for us to
25 shut down Nord Stream 2 and what the impact on Russia would

1 be?

2 Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. I share your view that Nord
3 Stream 2 is extraordinarily troubling. I think it would
4 create a type of energy dependence on Russia that would give
5 Russia coercive influence over some of our closest allies.
6 When I was in the Obama administration, traveling around
7 Europe with then Vice President Biden, we repeatedly made
8 the case against Nord Stream 2. I am obviously not privy to
9 the ongoing deliberations in the administration on this
10 issue, but, if confirmed, this is an issue I would continue
11 to push on.

12 Senator Shaheen: Great. I hope you will do it with
13 some urgency, as we need to act quickly if we are going to
14 shut down the final leg of that pipeline.

15 Finally, on Syria, there have been calls -- well, the
16 previous administration withdrew our troops from Syria in a
17 way that I thought was particularly detrimental, not just to
18 what was happening in Syria but to the impact on our allies,
19 the Kurds in that battle, our allies around the world,
20 because of what it said about the ability to trust the
21 United States.

22 But right now I think one of the biggest challenges we
23 have in the world is in Syria. I have been disappointed
24 that we do not yet have an envoy to Syria appointed by the
25 administration. But can you talk about what you think our

1 strategy towards Syria should be and how we develop a
2 comprehensive approach to dealing with it? Because I would
3 argue that neither the Obama administration nor the Trump
4 administration had a real strategy on Syria.

5 Mr. Kahl: Yeah. Neither of the administrations
6 cracked the code on Syria. That is for sure. I think, you
7 know, our number one national security priority in Syria
8 remains the sustained defeat of ISIS. The caliphate is down
9 but ISIS is not completely out, and so we have to be laser-
10 focused on that.

11 But I do think we have some leverage, and if we
12 reengage in diplomacy, you know, we are working with
13 partners that control about a third of the country. That is
14 real leverage. We can work with the international community
15 to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, not
16 us directly, from the American taxpayer, but the globe.
17 That is real leverage. And simply being back at the
18 diplomatic table means that our voices, not just the voices
19 in Moscow and Tehran and Ankara, will also be heard.

20 So there is no easy answer here. If there was, this
21 problem would have been solved a long time ago. But we need
22 to keep after it.

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

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator
25 Cotton, please.

1 Senator Cotton: Dr. Kahl, let's review some of your
2 recent foreign policy judgments. In 2017, when the U.S.
3 recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, you wrote that the
4 decision helps Iran and further isolated the U.S. in the
5 Middle East. Since then, the U.S. has brokered landmark
6 Mideast peace deals.

7 In 2019, when the State Department issued new guidance
8 about Israeli settlements, you wrote that the move would be
9 dangerous and destabilizing to the Middle East. But no such
10 destabilization happened. Indeed, those peace deals
11 happened.

12 In 2018, when President Trump warned Iran against
13 restarting its nuclear program, you wrote that war drums are
14 already sounding, but no war happened.

15 Also in 2018, when the Trump administration left the
16 Iran nuclear deal, you said war will be all that is left,
17 but no war occurred.

18 In 2019, when the Lincoln Strike Group was deployed to
19 the Persian Gulf you wrote there is growing evidence we are
20 on the path toward war, whether Trump realizes it or not.
21 But again, no war came.

22 Last year, when the U.S. killed Iran's terrorist
23 mastermind, Qasem Soleimani, you claimed now Trump has
24 started a war with Iran and Iraq. But once again, no war
25 followed.

1 By contrast, in 2010, as coalition forces withdrew from
2 Iraq, you dismissed concerns about the security situation as
3 exaggerated, and said it was very unlikely to trigger a
4 dramatic uptick in violence.

5 So, Dr. Kahl, while you spent the last four years
6 warning about impending wars that never happened, when
7 Mideast policy was your job at the Pentagon, you failed to
8 perceive the rise of ISIS, which launched an actual war
9 involving 30,000 Islamic insurgents, conquering a quarter of
10 Iraq.

11 Dr. Kahl, it seems to me that your judgments about
12 matters of war and peace are almost always wrong.

13 Now let's turn to some of your other writings. Could I
14 have the first poster board, please?

15 In 2019, in response to a story about Syria, you wrote
16 that the Republican Party has debased itself at the altar of
17 Trump, and now it is the party of ethnic cleansing.

18 Next poster board, please.

19 You further accused all Republican Senators who
20 supported foreign military aid to our partners as owning the
21 world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen. That is 45
22 Senators, all somehow responsible for mass civilian
23 casualties, inflicted, in no small part, by Iran's proxies,
24 I would add.

25 And could I have the next board, please?

1 And just last summer, you approvingly quoted a wild-
2 eyed claim that the Republican Party has a death-cult fealty
3 to President Trump.

4 Dr. Kahl, this is not about mean tweets or insulting
5 Senators. We are all used to harsh criticism up here. But
6 this is just a small, a very small sample of the many
7 intemperate and unbalanced remarks that you have directed at
8 people who disagree with you about public policy. But the
9 job you seek demands a judicious, even-tempered demeanor.
10 You will face disagreements every day, in the Pentagon,
11 across the Executive branch, with Congress, but your long
12 record of volatile outbursts will have a toxic and
13 detrimental impact on your relationship with Congress.

14 What is worse, I fear your intemperate manner will
15 create an equally toxic environment inside the Pentagon,
16 stifling healthy, robust debate. And there is the fact that
17 your rants have slandered not just a few politicians up here
18 in Congress but the millions of troops and veterans who
19 consider themselves Republicans.

20 So, Dr. Kahl, how you can responsibly execute the
21 duties of this position having so deeply poisoned the well?

22 Mr. Kahl: I appreciate your candor, Senator. To state
23 the obvious, the last few years have been pretty polarizing
24 on social media. I am sure there are times that I got swept
25 up in that. There were a number of positions that President

1 Trump took that I strongly opposed. I think the language
2 that I used in opposing those was sometimes disrespectful,
3 and for that I apologize.

4 I understand that the position of the Under Secretary
5 of Defense for Policy, while it is a political appointment,
6 is not a political job. It is a policy job, one that
7 requires me to be nonpartisan in the halls of the Pentagon
8 and bipartisan working with this committee and others in
9 Congress, and I know that I can comport myself in that way,
10 because I did it the last time I was at the Pentagon,
11 working for Secretary Gates. I did it when I was at the
12 Pentagon the first time, in the Bush administration. I have
13 a long track record of being able to put politics aside in
14 public office and put the national interests first.

15 Senator Cotton: Thank you, Dr. Kahl. I am glad that
16 you recognized that you were swept away in the moment. I
17 would just say that some of these tweets happened in the
18 middle of the night, when presumably you were sitting at
19 home reading the news. The real tense moments are going to
20 happen when you are in the Pentagon and Iran hijacks another
21 American ship, or China shoots down an aircraft. And if
22 this is the way you respond to mere policy disagreements
23 when you are sitting at home reading the news, I do not
24 think that you are fit to sit in the Pentagon and make
25 decisions about life and death. That is one reason why I

1 will oppose your nomination.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Now let me
3 recognize Senator Gillibrand via WebEx.

4 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr.
5 Kahl, Israel remains one of closest allies in the Middle
6 East. What is your view on the importance of the U.S.-
7 Israel relationship, and if confirmed, what policies will
8 you develop to maintain the ties between the military and
9 civil societies with the U.S. and Israel?

10 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I think that the U.S.-
11 Israel security relationship must remain iron-clad, and it
12 serves the vital national interests of both countries. When
13 I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the
14 Middle East from 2009 to 2011, I traveled to Israel 13 times
15 in 3 years. I had more than 100 meetings with senior
16 Israeli Ministry of Defense and Israeli defense forces
17 officials. I think that my colleagues in Israel would speak
18 highly of those encounters.

19 As Michèle Flournoy noted, in the summer of 2009 I was
20 the Pentagon official that shook loose the Iron Dome
21 proposal, which had been languishing for years, and got the
22 ball rolling so that we, working with Congress, could get
23 that money to support that vital defense system.

24 When I was at the White House, I supported the 10-year,
25 \$38 billion memorandum of understanding with Israel so that

1 we could continue to enhance our security relationship.

2 If I am confirmed, Senator, I will do what I did
3 before, which is to make sure that we are working as closely
4 as possible with our Israeli allies, because we have so many
5 interests in common.

6 Senator Gillibrand: Recent and ongoing regional
7 aggression by Iran and the Middle East continue to keep
8 concerns raised regarding Israel. What are your thoughts on
9 supporting continued U.S. funding for those programs such as
10 our missile defense program, Iron Dome, David's Sling and
11 Arrow, and what steps should the Department be taking to
12 address Iran's regional aggression? And what policy
13 developments would you suggest in response to recent rocket
14 attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq?

15 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I am clear-eyed about
16 the threat that Iran poses, not just to our forces in the
17 region but to our allies and partners in the region, Israel
18 first and foremost. Israel obviously faces direct threats
19 to its territory from Iranian-backed groups like Hezbollah
20 in Lebanon, and from the infrastructure that Iran has been
21 building in Syria. I think both the United States and
22 Israel have the right to defend themselves. I am supportive
23 of the strikes that Israel has taken to defend itself in
24 places like Syria. I also support our efforts to defend our
25 forces when they are attacked or threatened by Iranian

1 proxies.

2 I also think that the U.S.-Israel defense relationship
3 has so many benefits because Israel remains at the cutting
4 edge in developing things like Iron Dome and David's Sling
5 and the arrow system in missile defense, and that there is a
6 two-way street that our defense and technological
7 cooperation with Israel not only benefits Israel's security
8 but benefits our security. So, if confirmed, I would look
9 forward to continue advancing that relationship.

10 Senator Gillibrand: With regard to cybersecurity
11 issue, I am sure you are aware of the SolarWinds intrusion,
12 and that infiltration affected many parts of the United
13 States Government, including the Pentagon, without anyone's
14 knowledge for months, putting the military, the government,
15 and private companies at incalculable risks.

16 What policy advice will you be putting forward within
17 the DoD to help stop future intrusions? What DoD cyber
18 policies towards Russia will you put forward? And it is our
19 understanding that China piggybacked on the SolarWinds
20 intrusion to infiltrate the same systems and steal
21 information. What DoD policies will you put forward
22 towards Russia and China, to prevent and avert such cyber
23 intrusions in the future?

24 Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. Of course, I am not privy to
25 the classified information on SolarWinds. I am aware of the

1 open source information on it. My understanding is that DoD
2 unclassified systems, some of them were exposed but none
3 were compromised. But obviously the extent of the
4 SolarWinds intrusion is deeply troubling, and I think it is
5 a reminder of just how large the attack surface for
6 cyberattacks is. I fear that that attack surface has grown
7 substantially over the last year, as so many of our
8 activities have moved online as a consequence of the
9 pandemic. So this is an issue of foremost importance, not
10 just for the Department but across the U.S. Government.

11 I tend to align myself with the views of the Cyber
12 Solarium Commission report, and I know a number of members
13 on this committee have been quite involved in that, in the
14 sense that there is no silver bullet on the cyber threat.
15 We need a mix of deterrents by punishment, that is, the
16 ability to retaliate in cyberspace and other domains against
17 those who attack us. We have to be able to defend our
18 networks.

19 Almost as important, we have to be able to quickly
20 rebuild our networks so that that resilience itself is a
21 deterrent against actors who think they gain by taking those
22 networks down. And we have to work with allies and like-
23 minded states on norms and rules of the road around
24 cyberspace so that malign actors pay real costs
25 internationally, multilaterally, when they engage in harmful

1 activities.

2 So, if confirmed, I would look forward to advancing DoD
3 efforts in all these areas and working with the interagency
4 on a whole-of-government approach.

5 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just
6 for the record I am going to submit a question, since my
7 time has expired, about the cyber workforce and what role
8 you can play to ensuring that we recruit the highest
9 standard of cyber personnel for DoD.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand. Let me
12 recognize Senator Fischer.

13 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome,
14 Dr. Kahl. Dr. Kahl, as you are well aware, the
15 administration is considering resuming negotiations with
16 Iran over its nuclear program, and while the Department of
17 State would lead those efforts the Department of Defense
18 must take into account the impact that these negotiations,
19 and any agreement, would have on the military balance in the
20 Middle East.

21 In your answer to the chairman on the discussion on the
22 Iran situation you said it is essential prevent Iran from
23 obtaining a nuclear weapon. If that is true, why, in 2015,
24 did the Iran deal repeal restrictions on Iran's ballistic
25 missile program in a series of ways? First, the U.N.

1 Security Council resolution endorsing the JCPOA repealed
2 previous U.N. Security Council resolutions prohibiting Iran
3 from ballistic missile testing. Then, within the JCPOA
4 itself, restrictions on selling Iran missile technology
5 disappeared after eight years.

6 Do you have a response to that?

7 Mr. Kahl: I do. Senator, I share your view. Iran
8 should never be allowed to get a nuclear weapon. When I
9 worked at the Pentagon as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of
10 Defense I spent countless hours overseeing our military
11 contingency planning to hold Iran's nuclear facilities at
12 risk in the event that they move towards a nuclear weapon.
13 I also was instrumental in helping move additional forces
14 into the theater so that when President Obama said all
15 options are on the table, the table was actually set. So I am
16 clear-eyed about this challenge.

17 I do believe, based on my experience, that the most
18 enduring solution is a diplomatic one, and I support the
19 Biden administration's compliance-for-compliance approach,
20 which is that if Iran moves in full compliance with its
21 obligations that the United States would reenter the
22 agreement, but as a first step towards a stronger and longer
23 agreement in addressing the ballistic missile issue and
24 other destabilizing activities that Iran is engaged in,
25 because it is very important.

1 Senator Fischer: We all know that ballistic missiles
2 deliver nuclear warheads. Earlier you said that the nuclear
3 program for Iran should be in a box. Are you going to push
4 and insist that ballistic missiles research and the ability
5 for Iran to obtain ballistic missiles, that is going to be
6 off the table in the future in any discussion with Iran?

7 Mr. Kahl: No, I do not think so, Senator. I think the
8 goal would be to, on a compliance --

9 Senator Fischer: Aren't you contradicting yourself
10 when you say a nuclear program should be in a box for Iran,
11 but yet you are going to allow them to obtain a delivery
12 system? A ballistic missile is a delivery system of a
13 nuclear warhead.

14 Mr. Kahl: Sorry, Senator. I think you were
15 misunderstanding me. I am not supporting Iran's ballistic
16 missile program. I am saying that putting Iran's program in
17 a box, in a compliance-for-compliance framework, is a
18 vehicle to address Iran's ballistic missile program, and I
19 think we should do that.

20 Senator Fischer: You know, many of us were surprised
21 when the sunsets for these restrictions were included in the
22 deal. A week before the deal was struck, then Chairman of
23 the Joint Chiefs of staff, General Dempsey, testified before
24 this committee that, quote, "Under no circumstances should
25 we relieve pressure on Iran relative to ballistic missile

1 capabilities and arms trafficking," end quote. So you agree
2 with General Dempsey's view?

3 Mr. Kahl: I do not believe we should lift sanctions on
4 Iran's ballistic missile program. I think we should try to
5 get their ballistic missile capabilities reduced through
6 diplomacy, and, if confirmed, I will work with the
7 interagency to make sure we have a clear-eyed approach which
8 addresses this issue.

9 Senator Fischer: In your answers to this committee's
10 advance policy questions regarding a no-first-use policy you
11 stated, "I believe the United States should periodically
12 examine its nuclear declaratory policy to ensure it is
13 suitable for the current and foreseeable security
14 environment and supports U.S. strategic objectives. Our
15 declaratory policy should support our strategic deterrents
16 and be credible in the eyes of both adversaries and allies.
17 As such, I would expect to consult closely with allies in
18 the course of reexamining our nuclear policy."

19 You know, I do not disagree with on any of that, but it
20 does not help us understand what your views are. At this
21 moment, is it your personal view that we should adopt a no-
22 first-use policy?

23 Mr. Kahl: It is not.

24 Senator Fischer: That surprises me, because it has
25 been the consistent advice that we have received as members

1 of this committee, from senior military leadership, that we
2 not adopt such a policy. Three members of President Obama's
3 Cabinet -- Secretary Carter, Secretary Kerry, and Secretary
4 Moniz, also reportedly opposed adopting a no-first-use
5 policy. That was in 2016. More recently, an independent
6 assessment performed by the Institute for Defense Analysis
7 concluded that, quote, "The U.S. adoption of a no-first-use
8 policy will not bring about a setting that is more conducive
9 to positive behavior by adversaries or to strengthen
10 relations with allies. In light of already constrained U.S.
11 policy and procedure governing nuclear use, the weight of
12 the evidence indicates significant potential for no-first-
13 use to impart more harm than good," end quote.

14 Mr. Kahl: Senator, just to clarify, we are in
15 agreement. I said I am not personally in support of a no-
16 first-use policy.

17 Senator Fischer: Oh. I am glad you clarified that,
18 sir. Thank you.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Let me
20 recognize Senator Blumenthal.

21 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you
22 for your public service, Dr. Kahl, and thanks for the
23 conversation we had yesterday. I would like to pursue a
24 couple of the topics that we covered.

25 Would you agree with me that climate change is a

1 national security threat?

2 Mr. Kahl: It is.

3 Senator Blumenthal: And would you also agree that we
4 need a new vision and new policies to address this threat,
5 around the world as well as within the Pentagon?

6 Mr. Kahl: We do, and if you will give me a moment to
7 expound on that as it relates to the Pentagon. Climate
8 change is going to change everything. It will change the
9 operational environment for the military in strategically
10 vital areas like the Arctic. It will create new
11 contingencies for humanitarian emergencies and violent
12 conflict that the Department may be called upon to respond
13 to. Extreme weather is already costing billions of dollars
14 here at home, to our DoD infrastructure, and that will
15 increase in the years ahead, at home and abroad. And, of
16 course, there are real questions about energy resilience,
17 especially in the context of great power competition.

18 So for all those reasons I think climate has to be
19 integrated into our defense strategy.

20 Senator Blumenthal: Better than it is now. And I look
21 forward to pursuing all of those areas with you in greater
22 detail, because I think it is so vitally important, never
23 has been more important, so thank you.

24 Would you agree with me that white supremacy and far
25 right extremism, lack of sufficient inclusiveness all our

1 continuing threats to our national security and readiness?

2 Mr. Kahl: Yes, I think the recent statements by the
3 FBI made clear that the various threads of domestic
4 terrorism, which are often aligned with those view, are a
5 growing threat to the country.

6 Senator Blumenthal: And would you also agree that
7 military sexual assault needs to be combatted more
8 vigorously and thoroughly within the military?

9 Mr. Kahl: There is no question. All the trend lines
10 on this issue are in the wrong direction. I know that the
11 Department has tried to address this issue in the past, but
12 whatever it has done clearly has not worked. And so I stand
13 firmly behind Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks.
14 I know they have a new commission looking at this. I know
15 this is an issue that the committee is passionate about, and
16 for good reason because it is a scourge. And so, if
17 confirmed, I would look forward to working with you and with
18 others on this committee as we try to get a good answer to
19 this terrible problem.

20 Senator Blumenthal: These two topics are very much of
21 concern to many of us on this committee, and I welcome your
22 willingness to work with us on it.

23 I would like to pursue some of our arms sales policies
24 and focus first on Saudi Arabia. You and I discussed this
25 issue yesterday. My own view is that we need to reset our

1 relationship with Saudi Arabia and recalibrate our sales, in
2 fact, cut significantly some of our arms sales to Saudi
3 Arabia. Can you suggest specifics in that regard, and maybe
4 the threshold question is, do you agree that we ought to
5 recalibrate and reset that relationship?

6 Mr. Kahl: Yes, very much. I support President Biden's
7 effort to recalibrate the relationship to make sure that it
8 is more fully aligned with our interests and with our
9 values. A dimension of that, of course, is our arms sales to
10 Saudi Arabia and other countries. My understanding is that
11 the administration is in the midst of a strategic review, of
12 which this is a component. And so if I was confirmed, I
13 would look forward to engaging in that review, and as I get
14 more deeply briefed on the matter I would gladly come back
15 and speak to you and others about it.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Do you think that we
17 ought to be similarly reviewing, with close scrutiny, our
18 arms sales to other countries, some of them having
19 autocratic regimes and some similarly anti-humanitarian
20 policies?

21 Mr. Kahl: I do. I think our arms sales need to be
22 aligned not just with our national interests but with our
23 values.

24 Senator Blumenthal: And do you think that there is an
25 urgency about this review?

1 Mr. Kahl: I hope there is. From everything I know
2 from the outside there is, and you have my personal
3 commitment that if I am confirmed I will treat the issue
4 urgently, because it is important to me.

5 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Thank you very much.
6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. Let me
8 recognize Senator Rounds via WebEx.

9 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Kahl,
10 thank you for our recent call and the chance to get some of
11 your views on defense policy and to discuss some of the
12 criticisms that you have already received here today. You
13 were very critical of a great number of the Trump
14 administration's policies. I want to let you know that
15 there is a lot of concern among the minority with some of
16 the statements that have been attributed to you. Your
17 tweets have been tough, and in many cases, incendiary,
18 something for which many members had issues with the
19 previous administration's nominee for this very same
20 position.

21 I would like to focus on some other issues specifically
22 with regard to policy, and I would like to begin -- look, I
23 believe that a credible, modernized nuclear triad is the
24 better outcome on which the nation's defense rests. I
25 believe that the ground-based strategic deterrent is

1 critical to maintaining the triad.

2 Could you please tell the committee where you stand on
3 the importance of maintaining the triad into the future, to
4 provide a credible nuclear deterrent both for our own
5 defense and for the defense of our allies? And also, if you
6 are confirmed, do we have your commitment that you would
7 support full funding for the GBSD? And I just add that it
8 is not real helpful for one to say that they will study the
9 issue, as we have heard from some others. This is one of
10 the main defense program issues that we face right now, and
11 it would seem reasonable that you would have a position on
12 it during a confirmation hearing.

13 Mr. Kahl: Well, thank you, Senator, and I too enjoyed
14 our conversation. Look, there is nothing more important to
15 our national survival than ensuring that we have a safe,
16 secure, and effective nuclear deterrent. I think our
17 modernization efforts are essential in that area, not only
18 as it relates to the three legs of the triad but to nuclear
19 command and control systems.

20 I agree with you that the triad has been a bedrock of
21 deterrence and stability for many decades, and I think that
22 the triad remains -- my personal position is that the triad
23 remains a critical hedge against the possibility of
24 technological modernization by our adversaries could call
25 into question the survivability of any one leg of the triad.

1 So undoubtedly there will be areas that I am not
2 currently privy to, because I do not have access to
3 classified information, so I look forward to being more
4 deeply briefed on those issues, but that is my position.

5 Senator Rounds: So I am just going to clarify this.
6 Today your position is you fully support the triad,
7 including the GBSB, and you would commit today that at this
8 time you are in support of fully funding its modernization.

9 Mr. Kahl: My position is that all three legs of the
10 triad need to remain viable. What that requires is
11 something that will require me to dig into the details of
12 the current modernization efforts. I have not been in the
13 government in four years. My information is four years out
14 of date. But I support modernization efforts to keep the
15 triad viable.

16 Senator Rounds: And you would see it as a triad and
17 not only two of the three but all three.

18 Mr. Kahl: Correct.

19 Senator Rounds: Thank you. As you know, the budget
20 topline for the Department of Defense is one of the major
21 issues facing our committee. What is your position on it,
22 and what do you base the position on?

23 Mr. Kahl: My personal position is that we should not
24 start with a budget number in mind and work backwards to
25 strategy. We should do it the other way around. And, if

1 confirmed, one of my principal jobs, as Under Secretary of
2 Defense for Policy, would be to get the strategy right so
3 that we can discern from that the policies and capabilities
4 and investments that are required, and then the budget flows
5 from that.

6 So you have my commitment that if I am confirmed that
7 the budget recommendations I make will be matched to the
8 strategy that we put forward.

9 Senator Rounds: The DoD cyber strategy, published in
10 December of 2018, charges the DoD to defend forward, shape
11 the day-to-day competition, and prepare for war. United
12 States Cyber Command has demonstrated successful instances
13 of defend forward, and doing it in securing the 2018 and the
14 2020 elections.

15 In your role as Under Secretary of Policy, if
16 confirmed, you would oversee the development of cyber
17 policy. What are your views on the defend forward, shape
18 the day-to-day competition, and prepare for war concepts to
19 deter and disrupt Russia and China in cyberspace?

20 Mr. Kahl: Senator, I support the defend-forward
21 position and I agree with you that it generated very
22 impressive results, at least as far as I can tell from open
23 source information, in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles. I
24 think it needs to be part of a layered approach, as I
25 mentioned earlier, that also includes better defense of our

1 networks, better resilience, and also more concerned
2 diplomacy alongside our allies and partners to shape the
3 rules of the road around cyber so that malign actors pay a
4 heavier price for their activities.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
6 My time has expired.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Let me
8 recognize Senator Hirono via WebEx.

9 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I note that
10 this nominee has been criticized regarding some tweets that
11 he put out on the Iran deal, which I consider to be one of
12 the most critical agreements that this country has entered
13 into. And that kind of criticism regarding tweets from
14 folks who did not say anything about the kind of lying,
15 racist tweets out of the former President I think is pretty
16 rich.

17 I would like to say, regarding the Iran deal, it placed
18 significant and verifiable constraints on Iran's ability to
19 build nuclear weapons. That was the intent of the Iran
20 deal, because Iran was maybe one or two months from having
21 developed a nuclear weapon. So that was a very critical
22 agreement that we got into, and former President Trump's
23 reckless decision to unilaterally -- unilaterally --
24 withdraw from the Iran deal has made the world less safe.
25 Instead of isolating Iran, the decision isolated the United

1 States, and now Iran has begun ramping up uranium enrichment
2 efforts, which is exactly what Dr. Kahl said would happen.

3 The criticism of Dr. Kahl's alleged tepid support of
4 Israel is unfounded. In 2009, he worked to approve U.S.
5 support for Israel's Iron Dome rocket defense system to
6 protect itself from incoming attacks. So with regard to the
7 Middle East, I think the criticisms of Dr. Kahl are very
8 much misplaced.

9 I want to ask you, Dr. Kahl, the following two
10 questions that I ask of every nominee who appears before any
11 of the committees on which I sit.

12 The first question is, since you became a legal adult,
13 have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or
14 committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a
15 sexual nature?

16 Mr. Kahl: No.

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

19 Mr. Kahl: No.

20 Senator Hirono: Dr. Kahl, I applaud Secretary Austin's
21 recent announcement that the Pentagon will prioritize
22 climate change considerations in its activities, risk
23 assessments, and the next National Defense Strategy, and
24 also the recognition in your opening statement that climate
25 change represents an existential challenge. I have to say

1 that the Department of Defense is one of the few departments
2 that has actually, through testimony of prior DoD
3 Secretaries and going forward, to acknowledge that climate
4 change poses a threat to the world, not just to our country.
5 So it is an existential challenge.

6 If confirmed, how do you intend to mitigate the risk of
7 climate change across the joint force?

8 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I think that climate
9 change is a top national security issue. You know, one of
10 the jobs that I would have in front of me if I am confirmed
11 is to revise the National Defense Strategy. I think as we
12 do so we need to build on the 2018 strategy, which I think
13 is an excellent document and I think especially we need to
14 get the China challenge right.

15 But there are some things that were not in the 2018
16 document that we need to include, and climate change is one
17 of them. And so I would see a principal role of mine is to
18 make sure that climate change is integrated into the
19 National Defense Strategy, and then there will be policies
20 and investments that flow from that. And as I said to
21 Senator Blumenthal, that means that the strategy has to
22 account for the effect that climate change will have on DoD
23 operations, on the contingencies the Department could be
24 called upon to respond to, on DoD infrastructure, and also
25 energy resilience. So I would make sure all those areas are

1 covered.

2 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much for that kind of
3 commitment. I want to turn briefly to the Indo-Pacific AOR.
4 In fiscal year 2021, NDAA included \$2.2 billion for the
5 Pacific Deterrence Initiative, PDI, to bolster our alliances
6 in the Indo-Pacific and counter increasingly malign Chinese
7 activities in the region. The INDOPACOM commander, Admiral
8 Davidson, just submitted a report asking for an additional
9 \$4.7 billion in fiscal year 2022 for the PDI to continue
10 momentum in this area.

11 I would ask that you continue to build on the PDI and
12 engage with our allies in the region, especially the freely
13 associated states, FAS, like Palau, Micronesia, and the
14 Marshall Islands. I hope you will continue that kind of
15 engagement and support.

16 Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. I strongly commit to you and
17 others on the committee for the Pacific Deterrence
18 Initiative. There is a lot of bipartisan support for
19 supporting our allies and partners in the region, and you
20 have my commitment to act in that regard, if I am confirmed.

21 Senator Hirono: Thank you. I look forward to working
22 with you, especially in those areas.

23 Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Let me
25 introduce and recognize Senator Ernst.

1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, very much.

2 Dr. Kahl, I have a few questions for you today
3 regarding some of your previous positions and statements
4 that have caught my attention leading up to today's
5 hearings, and you have heard from some of my colleagues that
6 had similar concerns.

7 Dr. Kahl, you are nominated to an important position,
8 and that position is Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.
9 And while everyone's world outlook and views on national
10 security matter when it comes to the Department of Defense,
11 your core beliefs and internal working philosophy are
12 central to the position that you are seeking, and to be
13 blunt, Dr. Kahl, your social media and other commentary over
14 recent years -- years, not just a handful of months but
15 years -- provides a concerning outlook to me. And this is
16 especially true when it comes to Iran.

17 In one tweet you pushed the idea that pushing for more
18 inspections of Iran's nuclear sites is just an effort to
19 destroy the Iran deal. You further pushed that the Trump
20 administration's Iran strategy as efforts to, quote,
21 "justify war," end quote, and to, quote, "bait Iran into
22 restarting its nuclear program."

23 So, Mr. Kahl, do you stand by your assessment that the
24 Trump administration was baiting Iran into restarting its
25 nuclear program?

1 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. My concern with the
2 maximum pressure campaign was largely that it would have two
3 consequences. One is that it would encourage Iran to re-
4 accelerate its nuclear program, and two, that it would
5 encourage Iran to try to generate counter-leverage by
6 increasing their provocations in the region. Both of those
7 things have happened in the last three years. Iran is a lot
8 closer to the fissile material required for a nuclear weapon
9 than they were at the end of the Obama administration, and
10 we see more attacks against our forces in Iraq. We have
11 seen attacks in the Strait of Hormuz. We have seen more
12 drone attacks and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia.

13 So I am clear-eyed about the threat that Iran poses,
14 but it was not clear to me that the Trump administration's
15 approach was having the effect that President Trump and
16 Secretary Pompeo and others were hoping for.

17 Senator Ernst: And I would counter, as well, that the
18 JCPOA, I do not believe, stopped any further development of
19 Iran as it made its way to nuclear capabilities.

20 Mr. Kahl, do you still stand by your assessment that
21 the \$100 billion released to Iran for the Iranian deal was
22 being used for domestic investment? I think at that time
23 you had said that, quote, "Most of it will go to butter,"
24 end quote.

25 Mr. Kahl: So I am not privy to the classified

1 assessments on this. All I know is that the DIA testified
2 in 2017 that the majority of the sanctions relief from the
3 JCPOA went to domestic purposes. You may be privy to
4 information that contradicts that. I am not. I do know
5 that unfortunately, as we have re-imposed sanctions as a
6 part of the maximum pressure campaign, it has not had the
7 effect of drying up Iranian resources for its support for
8 its missile program, its conventional weaponry, its support
9 for terrorism.

10 So I think we need to do both. I think we need to
11 address the nuclear program and address these other
12 destabilizing activities.

13 Senator Ernst: Well, \$100 billion is a lot for butter.
14 Do you believe it to be plausible that some of that \$100
15 billion could have gone to Iran's proxy terrorist forces
16 that perhaps targeted some of our allies as well as American
17 forces?

18 Mr. Kahl: It is completely conceivable. I will say
19 that, you know, the Trump administration, in 2018, I
20 believe, released an estimate that between 2012 and 2018,
21 Iran spent about \$2 to \$3 billion a year supporting its
22 proxies around the Middle East. The sad reality is it is
23 just not very expensive for them to do it.

24 And so it is a huge problem for us, but one that
25 unfortunately does not require a lot of resources for Iran

1 to carry out.

2 Senator Ernst: Mm-hmm, which is true. That is very
3 true that it is very unfortunate.

4 So, admittedly, you and I do come from starkly
5 different places on Iran. I think the Obama policy on Iran
6 was a naïve approach and the Iran deal was a failed policy
7 that made us more vulnerable, and in recent years I do think
8 those concerns have been proven to be legitimate. For more
9 than four decades, Iran and the terrorist organizations'
10 funds have targeted American civilians and military
11 personnel as well as our partners and allies, and we know
12 that they will continue to be a prominent state sponsor of
13 terrorism, not just across the Middle East but cultivating
14 different operating networks around our globe.

15 I know my time has expired. I will just make one final
16 comment. We have mentioned the tweets. A number of my
17 colleagues have. There is one that will demonstrate my
18 thoughts today, where you tweeted that if Bolton replaces
19 McMaster we are all going to die. And I think that this
20 demonstrates that these exaggerated views and incendiary
21 remarks are not what we are looking for in someone that will
22 serve advising policy within the Department of Defense.

23 I served in uniform in the Middle East. I have a
24 daughter that is on track to serve in our great Army in just
25 a little over a year. And I will not be supporting your

1 nomination because I believe that my daughter, her
2 colleagues, the other young men and women that are choosing
3 to serve in our armed forces deserve someone that will take
4 a serious outlook to policy and not put this kind of garbage
5 out in front of the American public.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator
8 Kaine, please.

9 Senator Kaine: Dr. Kahl, thank you for being here
10 today. I think your nomination is sort of a proxy for a
11 sharp difference of opinion in this committee and in
12 Congress about the wisdom of the JCPOA, and that is the core
13 of many of the questions today. I believe the JCPOA,
14 although not perfect, was dramatically better than the
15 status quo ante. Democrats supported it. Republicans did
16 not. But I believe it was dramatically better than the
17 status quo ante, and it is not just me.

18 President Trump's Secretary of Defense, James Mattis,
19 who clearly understood Republican legislative opposition to
20 the JCPOA, advised him to stay in the deal. President
21 Trump's Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, who clearly
22 understood Republican legislative opposition to the JCPOA,
23 advised him to stay in the deal. Head of the Joint Chiefs
24 of Staff, General Dunford, who clearly understood Republican
25 opposition to the deal, told President Trump to stay in the

1 deal. Instead, he backed out of the deal and he shifted the
2 world's attention from Iran's behavior to America's good
3 faith, would American good faith follow a diplomatic deal.
4 So just some basic facts about the deal.

5 Didn't the first sentence in the first paragraph of the
6 JCPOA say that Iran reaffirms that it will never purchase,
7 develop, or acquire nuclear weapons?

8 Mr. Kahl: Yes, it does.

9 Senator Kaine: Did that have a sunset provision to it?

10 Mr. Kahl: No.

11 Senator Kaine: If Iran had ever sought to purchase,
12 acquire, or develop a nuclear weapon that would have been a
13 violation of the JCPOA. Correct?

14 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

15 Senator Kaine: And that violation would have given the
16 United States a legal rationale, if the United States
17 decided it needed to take military action to stop Iran's
18 nuclear program.

19 Mr. Kahl: Yes, and as I said, I spent my time at the
20 Pentagon planning for exactly that contingency.

21 Senator Kaine: And so the U.S. decision to back out of
22 this deal actually takes that iron-clad commitment that the
23 U.S. could have used as a legal rationale, should it have
24 been necessary, and it now makes that commitment, that
25 provision of questionable enforceability, doesn't it?

1 Mr. Kahl: I worry that it does, yeah.

2 Senator Kaine: The JCPOA gave the United States the
3 complete agreement to impose any sanctions we deemed
4 appropriate against Iran for human rights violations,
5 bellicose activities in the region, ballistic missile
6 programs. We had the complete freedom to impose sanctions
7 on any non-nuclear activity under the deal, didn't we?

8 Mr. Kahl: We do.

9 Senator Kaine: The only sanctions relief in the JCPOA
10 was sanctions relief that was specifically about Iran's
11 nuclear program. Correct?

12 Mr. Kahl: Correct.

13 Senator Kaine: And that sanction relief would only go
14 to Iran if they followed the JCPOA. Correct?

15 Mr. Kahl: Correct.

16 Senator Kaine: And there was an additional element --
17 some of my colleagues have asked about sunsets -- there was
18 an additional element of the JCPOA that did not sunset, like
19 the open commitment to never purchase, acquire, or develop
20 nuclear weapons. The element that did not sunset was there
21 was about 30 years of enhance inspection and other
22 requirements that Iran had to follow, but at the end of year
23 30, those enhanced inspections, many of them, or
24 restrictions on centrifuges, progressively expired. By year
25 30, Iran had pledged, henceforth, it would always follow all

1 IAEA inspection protocols, including the additional protocol
2 that was developed after North Korea cheated on IAEA
3 inspections. And that was permanent and never sunset.
4 Correct?

5 Mr. Kahl: It was the most verifiable arms control or
6 nonproliferation agreement ever negotiated.

7 Senator Kaine: And those inspections, including the
8 additional protocol, gave the United States significant
9 additional insight into the Iranian program so that if we
10 ever believed they were violating the promise contained in
11 the first sentence, and that then justified military action,
12 we would have better intel to target the military action to
13 achieve our objective. Correct?

14 Mr. Kahl: Yes. Our intelligence and military
15 professionals consistently made that point.

16 Senator Kaine: We have had intel about Iran for a
17 while but it has been murky, but what the JCPOA gave us was
18 intel plus this enhanced inspection regime to determine
19 their compliance but also, if necessary, tragically, to
20 target military activity to make sure that they would never
21 purchase, acquire, or develop nuclear weapons. Correct?

22 Mr. Kahl: Yes. If you do not know where something is,
23 it is hard to target it.

24 Senator Kaine: I really believe that the controversy
25 over your nomination is essentially a proxy war.

1 Republicans did not like the Iran deal. They were really
2 happy that President Trump pulled out of it, over the
3 objections of Secretary Mattis, Secretary Tillerson, head of
4 the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dunford. I think the activities
5 in the region have demonstrated that the pulling out of that
6 deal has had very, very negative consequences, and we are
7 living them today. It is a very different reality than it
8 was in 2015.

9 But I would like to return to a position where we would
10 have a clearly enforceable international agreement that Iran
11 would never seek to purchase, acquire, or develop a nuclear
12 weapon, and I cannot understand why an American President
13 would have blown up such a deal.

14 Thank you, Dr. Kahl.

15 Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

17 Let me recognize Senator Tillis.

18 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Dr. Kahl,
19 congratulations on your nomination being put forward. I had
20 not thought about talking about the JCPOA, but I really do
21 not think the discussion we are having here today relates to
22 legitimate policy differences on JCPOA. I think it is a
23 series of fact patterns and your communications that are
24 reminiscent of a Trump nominee who ultimately withdrew
25 because of concerns expressed by some of my colleagues on

1 both sides of the aisle about temperament and positions that
2 that person took before they were set forth as a nomination.

3 So, Dr. Kahl, I have been on this committee going into
4 my seventh year. I have confirmed the vast majority of
5 nominations that have come through, first in the Obama
6 administration, Trump administration, and I hope we are
7 going to get to the same place there. But you are going to
8 be in a very important position, and I feel like that this
9 committee really has a history of working on a bipartisan
10 basis. That is why we are successful with an NDAA every
11 year that I have been here. And I have some concerns that
12 your nomination may not put us in that same posture of
13 working with you.

14 I have a couple of questions, and I hope you have time
15 to go a couple of policy questions. But you appear to have
16 a history of making what some believe are bad-faith
17 arguments against those with whom you disagree. Why should
18 we believe, if you are confirmed, that you are going to
19 listen to members with opposing viewpoints, including
20 members of this committee and Members of Congress? Why
21 should we believe that we can have that working relationship
22 and have an honest disagreement and a productive
23 relationship?

24 Mr. Kahl: So I appreciate that question. I think you
25 can have confidence because the last time I was a senior

1 defense official that is how I comported myself. Keep in
2 mind I worked for two Republican Secretaries of Defense. I
3 do not think you will find anybody I worked with, either in
4 the Bush administration or in the Obama administration, when
5 I worked for Secretary Gates, who would accuse me of being
6 partisan in the halls of the Pentagon. I think I had good
7 relationships with the House and Senate committees when I
8 was in office.

9 So I believe strongly in public service and I believe
10 that the job that I am being considered for is a non-
11 political job. It is a policy job, and I am committed to
12 moving forward on that basis.

13 Senator Tillis: In some of your tweets, I know that
14 Senator Cotton and others have covered the landscape, but
15 the one that caught my attention was some of the tweets
16 related to conspiracy theories involving President Trump and
17 Russia. I think in your words you communicated the "Kushner
18 Kremlin quid pro quo and collusion on the DNC hack." The
19 Mueller investigation did not find anything to substantiate
20 that.

21 So, in retrospect, do you feel like you may have misled
22 some of your followers in context to these uncorroborated
23 allegations?

24 Mr. Kahl: So I think the tweets that you reference
25 were in response to media reports at the time. I mean, as

1 you know, Senator, the overwhelming consensus of our
2 intelligence community was that Russia interfered in the
3 2016 election. The Mueller report, which you made reference
4 to, as well as the bipartisan Senate Intelligence report
5 found that members of the Trump campaign were aware of
6 Russian activities, encouraged them, and were eager to
7 benefit from them.

8 I think people of good faith can disagree as to whether
9 to describe that as collusion or not. That is fair. But I
10 hope we would all agree that it was not a right.

11 Senator Tillis: Let's talk about something else. At
12 the time that Soleimani was talking out I think you were
13 critical of that decision. Do you still stand by your
14 position that you think taking out one of the worst
15 terrorists and murderers of American soldiers in the Middle
16 East was a bad idea, and why?

17 Mr. Kahl: I have no moral qualms with the strike
18 against Qasem Soleimani. He had the blood of hundreds of
19 Americans on his hands, and thousands of people across the
20 region. You know, I traveled to Iraq 16 times during the
21 thick of the war. I have been on the other side of rocket
22 fire. Some of those were probably made in Iran. And so I
23 had no problem with that.

24 My chief concern at the time, as I am sure you are
25 aware, was with the escalatory dimensions, which is why, of

1 course, the Bush administration had also not taken a shot.
2 It was not just the Obama administration. And we came very
3 close. As you know, the Iranians retaliated for the strike
4 with a missile salvo against Al Asad Air Base in western
5 Iraq. Fortunately, no servicemembers were killed but dozens
6 suffered brain injuries. And so we came very close to a
7 major shooting war with Iran, and that was my concern.

8 Senator Tillis: I apologize that I did not get to some
9 policy questions. I will probably submit a couple for the
10 record. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis. Let me now
12 recognize Senator King.

13 Senator King: First, with regard to your tweets, my
14 mother, when I first started dating in high school, gave a
15 piece of advice that may have helped you. She said, "Never
16 put it in writing."

17 [Laughter.]

18 Mr. Kahl: It is a good point.

19 Senator King: I want to ask a question that we could
20 take an hour or two hours or several days discussing, and I
21 would like you to try to give me an answer in about a minute
22 and half. What does China want? As we try to develop
23 policy with regard to China, I think it is important to
24 understand and appreciate what it is they are seeking, what
25 are their goals. I asked Henry Kissinger that question and

1 he gave me a very thorough answer. Give me a minute of
2 thought of what you think the goals of China are which
3 should inform our foreign and military policy.

4 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I would think about it
5 in the following ways. I mean, obviously, China, under Xi
6 Jinping, first and foremost is trying to promote domestic
7 stability and regime survival at home. But I think as
8 China's interests around the world have become more
9 expansive they want to make the world safe for the CCP, and
10 that means shaping the international order in a way that is
11 not just compatible with China's interests but with the
12 values of the communist party. That makes China a much more
13 revisionist actor, and one, frankly, at odds with our value
14 system, and our interests, in many respects.

15 I also think the Xi Jinping envisions China becoming
16 the world's preeminent power. I know that the DoD China
17 Power Report notes China's ambition to be the world's
18 greatest military power by midcentury. And so I think for a
19 long time China was biding its time, but in the Xi Jinping
20 era has really tried to come out on its on in ways that are
21 much more assertive and threatening to our interests.

22 Senator King: Thank you. You mentioned earlier cyber
23 and you mentioned the Solarium Commission. I appreciate
24 that. Many of us did a lot of work in that area. One of
25 the points of emphasis in our report was the importance of

1 deterrence, the importance of imposing costs on our
2 adversaries, on those who would intrude in terms of cyber in
3 our country, and also the importance of allies.

4 Talk to me about deterrence and allies and how those
5 two interact.

6 Mr. Kahl: Yes, sir. Thank you for your work on the
7 Cyber Solarium Commission. I know a lot of its
8 recommendations have already been put forward in legislation
9 and I imagine more to follow.

10 I think we can think of deterrence in two ways. There
11 is deterrence by punishment, that is, if an adversary takes
12 an act against you, they will know that you will strike back
13 in a way that will hurt, so that they will think twice about
14 doing it to begin with. So we have to have the cyber
15 equivalent of that. That includes action in cyberspace but
16 also elsewhere, sanctions, diplomatic isolation, things like
17 that.

18 But deterrence can also be deterrence by denial, that
19 is, adjusting the cost benefit calculation of the adversary
20 so that they just do not think it is worth it. And that is
21 a mix, I think, of a combination of defense of our networks
22 and resilience of those networks, because, frankly, some
23 attacks are always going to get through and so you need to
24 be able to reconstitute your systems quickly, especially in
25 the military domain where seconds matter.

1 Senator King: Let me move to the allies piece. My
2 sense is that sanctions are much more effective if they are
3 multilateral rather than unilateral, number one, and number
4 two, there is some utility in trying to develop an
5 international set of norms and expectations and guardrails
6 around cyber in order to indicate what the rules of the road
7 are. And we want an adversary who uses cyber as a means of
8 national power to understand that they can become a pariah
9 nation.

10 Mr. Kahl: I 100 percent agree on both scores, that
11 multilateralism gives us more leverage, more power when it
12 comes to sanctions, but also in shaping the normative rules
13 of the road, that can signal to malign actors they will pay
14 an international price for their behavior.

15 Final question, in a few seconds left, climate change
16 is often discussed in terms of domestic politics and
17 environmentalism and protecting the planet. I view it as a
18 serious national security threat, in terms of effect on our
19 operations. But also, to me, the long-range challenge is
20 migration and the stimulation of mass migration because of
21 climate change, particularly in the equatorial band. Do you
22 agree that this is a serious national security threat as
23 well as an environmental threat?

24 Mr. Kahl: There is no question it is a national
25 security threat for all of the reasons you mentioned.

1 Changing weather patterns and rising seas are going to
2 displace hundreds of millions of people. You are also
3 likely to see other humanitarian and food crises that drive
4 displacement issues. We have already seen, just our
5 hemisphere, the displacement by recent hurricanes in places
6 like the Northern Triangle and Central America. So this
7 problem is not going to go away and it is going to continue
8 to get worse.

9 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you for your
10 thoughtful testimony this morning.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Let me
13 recognize Senator Cramer, please.

14 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you
15 for the hearing. Thank you, Dr. Kahl, and thank you for our
16 discussion a couple of weeks ago. I enjoyed it very much,
17 and I look forward to more of them.

18 I was not going to bring up any of the political issues
19 until you responded to Senator Tillis. I just have to
20 address the Russian collusion question. I think he asked a
21 pretty straightforward question, after Russian collusion has
22 been deemed to be basically a lie by the Mueller report and
23 the bipartisan Senate committee report. I think you started
24 out your response to his question about your tweets pretty
25 good, pretty well. You said that they were a reflection of

1 media reports at the time. I just wish you would have
2 continued to say now that the media have been proven to be
3 liars, I no longer believe that, rather than trying to
4 rationalize it by changing the definition of collusion.

5 But I want to get into some policy things so I am not
6 going to spend a lot of time there. You can respond later.
7 But I do want to piggyback a little bit on what Senator
8 Rounds was asking you, and you and I talked about this,
9 about the importance of the triad, not a dyad, but the
10 importance of the triad, and I appreciate your personal view
11 that the triad is important, both in the past and going
12 forward.

13 But I want to be real clear. Do you believe that the
14 Minuteman-III can continue to be serviced? As you know,
15 these are decades-old weapons systems, and can their life be
16 extended without some consequence?

17 Mr. Kahl: So my knowledge of the life extension
18 programs on the Minuteman-III is four years old, so I do not
19 have the classified analysis. I have, of course, seen the
20 public statements by the STRATCOM commander. I have no
21 reason to question those statements. So obviously this will
22 be an issue that I will dig into more if I am confirmed, but
23 I have no reason to disbelieve the STRATCOM commander.

24 Senator Cramer: Well, if you believe the STRATCOM
25 commander then that is pretty good advice, I would say, and

1 I will not get further into the funding ramp for GBSD,
2 because we really are, I think, at the end of the rope and
3 cannot change that trajectory much, so I look forward to you
4 digging into that more.

5 And part of it is because you said something, I think
6 it was in your opening statement or maybe in one of the
7 early questions, about deterring China means that China
8 cannot believe they can win, or something. That is a
9 paraphrase, a paraphrase of lots of statements that are
10 similar. And I just think that the deterrent that the triad
11 provides, and the modernization that includes the LRSOs, the
12 re-engineering of the bombers that we have at Minot, GBSD
13 that we have at Minot are all important parts of that.

14 You talked a little bit about the Abraham Accords, and
15 I would just ask you, in a more specific way, how have the
16 Abraham Accords changed the landscape, if you will? It is
17 interesting you said four years ago, like four years is a
18 long time, except it is a long time. It is amazing what has
19 happened in four years. So maybe you could just elaborate
20 on that a little bit.

21 Mr. Kahl: Yeah. I think the Abraham Accords, I give
22 the Trump administration credit for getting the Abraham
23 Accords across the goal line. I think it is the culmination
24 of set of trends, frankly, that have been in the region for
25 about a decade. One is a common assessment of the Iranian

1 threat, which has moved Israel closer to many of its Arab
2 neighbors. Two is a concern for various extreme forms of
3 Islamism -- al Qaeda, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood. And
4 another factor, I think, is a perception that the region
5 needs to rely more on itself, and so that has pushed Israel
6 and its neighbors together.

7 So I commend the Trump administration for leaning into
8 those strategic trends, and the Abraham Accords are
9 something I think we should continue to encourage.

10 Senator Cramer: Thank you. Now one more thing,
11 because I have really -- again, I have enjoyed this very
12 much, this discussion today, especially in the honestly
13 policy disagreements. I really appreciated your answers to
14 Senator Shaheen about Nord Stream 2. And we know this is a
15 continuation of policies by this government, and we have
16 great concern. But it had not occurred to me until just a
17 little bit ago how directly connected Nord Stream 2 is to
18 not only national security but to climate change. And I
19 would like you, if you could, to speak just a little bit on
20 a good alternative to Russian oil to our European allies,
21 and that might be American LNG, which is produced and
22 delivered with about a 46 percent lower emissions,
23 greenhouse gas emissions. So it both is, as I said, a
24 national security benefit as well as a greenhouse gas
25 emissions benefit.

1 Mr. Kahl: Well, Senator, obviously I am not an
2 environmental expert or an expert on LNG. I do think there
3 is a good argument that LNG is an important bridge fuel to a
4 more carbon-neutral fuel mix, our energy mix, but I would
5 have to look into the issue more to give you a better
6 answer.

7 Senator Cramer: I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank
8 you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.
10 And now via WebEx, Senator Rosen.

11 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to
12 thank Dr. Kahl for being here today and for his willingness
13 to serve. I appreciated our conversation the other day,
14 especially about University of Minnesota.

15 But today I want to focus on Iranian aggression a
16 little bit. Last year, Senator Toomey and I co-led a
17 bipartisan resolution, co-sponsored by 58 Senators, that
18 called on the U.N. to extend the arms embargo on Iran. That
19 embargo, which limited the flow of sophisticated weapons to
20 Iran and restricted Iran's ability to provide its terrorist
21 proxies with arms, it expired last October. The practical
22 effect of this is that Iran is now free, under international
23 law, to purchase and transfer a wide array of weapons.

24 So while the U.S. arms embargo on Iran remains in
25 place, we cannot succeed alone. Dr. Kahl, if you are

1 confirmed, how will you work to curb the flow of
2 conventional weapons to and from Iran?

3 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I think the U.N. vote
4 is an example of the challenges we face when we cannot bring
5 the rest of the world to our side, and so I think the Biden
6 administration's commitment, and my personal commitment, if
7 I am confirmed, to rebuild our alliances and partners will
8 go a long way in getting the world closer to our views on
9 Iran.

10 I do not think there is a silver bullet to address the
11 very real threat that Iran's destabilizing activities, to
12 include its conventional arms and its arms supply to its
13 proxies in the region, but I think there is a mix of
14 activities, consistent with international law. We should
15 support interdiction efforts, where those are possible. We
16 should be building up the capabilities of our regional
17 allies so that they can counterbalance and check Iran. We
18 should be helping vulnerable countries like Iraq and Lebanon
19 build institutions that are more resilient to Iranian
20 influence. Obviously, when Iran takes actions against our
21 own forces we should defend ourselves and punch back. So I
22 think there is a mix of policies. No one is likely to solve
23 this problem.

24 Senator Rosen: Building on that, we do need those
25 partners to deter Iranian aggression, and we want to stop

1 the transfers of conventional arms to terrorist groups like
2 Hamas and Hezbollah, and we want to ensure freedom of
3 navigation in that region's waterways. And so what can we
4 do in that regard?

5 Mr. Kahl: Well, in the first instance I think even as
6 we right-size our presence in the Middle East we need to
7 remain postured to deter Iranian aggression and to work
8 alongside our allies and partners on precisely the issues
9 that you mention. You know, the specific requirements for
10 that will probably require me to be in the Department and
11 get more deeply briefed on the issue.

12 But this is important to me. I am clear-eyed about the
13 threat that Iran poses, and so if I am confirmed I look
14 forward to digging into more specifics and working with you,
15 Senator, and others on this committee, on this issue,
16 because I think there should be bipartisan agreement on the
17 need to push back on Iran in this area.

18 Senator Rosen: And also considering all the issues in
19 this area, this region of the world, if confirmed, how will
20 the Department of Defense work to maintain and enhance
21 Israel's QME to ensure their security and safety in the
22 region as we talk about the many threats against them?

23 Mr. Kahl: Yes. Well, Senator, this is an issue that
24 is very personal to me. When I was the Deputy Assistant
25 Secretary of Defense for the Middle East I was heavily

1 focused on ensuring Israel's QME, even as we were building
2 up the capabilities of other actors in the region to
3 counterbalance Iran. As you know, there were large arms
4 sales to the UAE, to Saudi Arabia, and others, but as we did
5 that, at least when I was at the Pentagon, we were always
6 mindful that anything we did had to respect our commitment
7 to Israel, to ensure that they remained at the cutting edge
8 and achieved a qualitative military edge against any
9 combination of states in the region.

10 Senator Rosen: Quickly, I want to just address
11 cyberspace. DoD, the cyber strategy is outlined as a
12 defend-forward approach. So in the wake of SolarWinds, if
13 you are confirmed, how do you plan to alter DoD's cyber
14 strategy to reflect the current threats and challenges that
15 we see, particularly in cyberspace?

16 Mr. Kahl: Thank you for that. As I mentioned earlier,
17 I support the defend forward position. I am obviously not
18 privy to classified operations that have happened in the
19 context of that approach, but I support the general
20 approach. I think it is only part of the equation. We not
21 only have to be able to defend forward, we have to be able
22 to engage in offensive action in response to malign
23 activity. We have to be better at defending our networks.
24 The SolarWinds incident is a reminder of the vulnerability
25 across the U.S. Government in that regard. Our networks

1 have to be more resilient so they bounce back further, and
2 we have to work, as I discussed with Senator King, we have
3 to work alongside our allies on new norms and rules of the
4 road to really constrain our adversaries.

5 So if I am confirmed, I would look to make sure DoD
6 strategy in this area, both the National Defense Strategy
7 and the cyber strategy, reflects these different principles,
8 and I look forward to working closely with CYBERCOM and
9 others on that issue, as well as members of this committee,
10 who I know are deeply committed to cybersecurity.

11 Senator Rosen: Well, again, my time has expired.
12 Thank you for being here. I look forward to working with
13 you as well. Thank you.

14 Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Now let me
16 recognize Senator Blackburn via WebEx.

17 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Kahl,
18 thank you for joining us and thank you for your time this
19 past week to discuss some of these issues.

20 There has been discussion about your inflammatory
21 rhetoric and the claims that you have made on Twitter. And
22 I think you realize that this is of concern to many of us on
23 the committee because your language is really not
24 representative the way a top policy official at the Pentagon
25 should write about policy, and whether it is for a domestic

1 or an international audience.

2 So this is something that you have put out there,
3 regardless of tone. What is interesting to me, as I have
4 gone back and read some of your predictions, is how wrong
5 and off-base you were on these predictions. And you have
6 talked about being there in policy and the ability to
7 participate in the interagency discussion. So I want to
8 just ask you some yes-and-no questions, for the record.

9 Do you still believe that sanctions relief to Tehran
10 will go toward the domestic investment and not support
11 terrorism?

12 Mr. Kahl: I do not know what the current intelligence
13 assessments suggest. My previous statements were based on
14 --

15 Senator Blackburn: Yes or no?

16 Mr. Kahl: I do not know the answer to that, because I
17 do not know the current assessment.

18 Senator Blackburn: Okay. Do you still believe that al
19 Qaeda is a bigger threat to Washington than Moscow?

20 Mr. Kahl: That al Qaeda is a bigger threat to
21 Washington than Moscow?

22 Senator Blackburn: Yeah, which is something that you
23 had tweeted out on April 23, 2012.

24 Mr. Kahl: I think that al Qaeda remains a significant
25 threat to the United States.

1 Senator Blackburn: You claimed several times that
2 Trump administration responses to Iranian aggression would
3 lead directly to war. Did they?

4 Mr. Kahl: I think that they were part of a cycle of
5 provocation on both sides. They brought us really close to
6 war on at least two occasions.

7 Senator Blackburn: And you know they did not. You
8 made a similar prediction about the likeliness of a "massive
9 war," using your word, on the Korean peninsula. Did that
10 happen?

11 Mr. Kahl: It did not.

12 Senator Blackburn: You claimed that the U.S. strike on
13 Soleimani would get the U.S., your words, "kicked out of
14 Iraq." Did it?

15 Mr. Kahl: The Iraqi Parliament voted to get rid of
16 U.S. forces, but our forces are still there.

17 Senator Blackburn: Yes. You claimed that relocation
18 of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, which is a bill I had when
19 I was in the House for a few years, bipartisan, by the way,
20 would lead to our provocations there. Did that happen?

21 Mr. Kahl: I think it worsened relations with the
22 Palestinians but it did not worsen relationships with other
23 Arab states.

24 Senator Blackburn: Okay. Let me move on. Strategic
25 patience. We talked about this. What does that mean to

1 you?

2 Mr. Kahl: I think it probably means different things
3 to different people. I am not a subscriber of strategic
4 patience. I think that the issues that we have talked about
5 in the hearing today, and there are many others, are urgent
6 issues that need to be tackled immediately --

7 Senator Blackburn: Would you say that applies to North
8 Korea?

9 Mr. Kahl: I think that North Korea --

10 Senator Blackburn: To China?

11 Mr. Kahl: I am sorry, Senator. There is a little bit
12 of a lag in the technology. I believe that the North Korean
13 threat is increasing, both its nuclear and its long-range
14 intercontinental ballistic missile threat to the United
15 States. It is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.
16 It is also an issue that has built up over decades, so it is
17 not likely to be solved overnight. But that does not mean
18 that we should sit on our hands and not do anything about
19 it.

20 Senator Blackburn: Okay. Let's talk about Pacific
21 deterrence. Current top Pentagon leadership has identified
22 China as the "pacing challenge" for the Department. If
23 confirmed, how would you work with the combatant commands to
24 balance the long-term vision of policy against the resources
25 that the commanders need right now?

1 Mr. Kahl: I think China is an example of where we do
2 not have the luxury of choosing between doing things now and
3 also planning for the long term. We have to do both,
4 because China poses a clear and immediate challenge to U.S.
5 interests and allies in the Indo-Pacific, so we have to make
6 sure that right now our forces are ready and lethal, that
7 they are as distributed and resilient as possible, that we
8 are as integrated with our allies and partners as possible,
9 but we also need to be making the investments as a nation
10 and as a department in the types of capabilities down the
11 line that will determine who wins the competition for the
12 21st century. That means artificial intelligence, quantum
13 computing, and other cutting-edge technologies.

14 So this is an area where we have to do both.

15 Senator Blackburn: Okay. I have a couple of questions
16 that I will submit for QFRs. Thank you for your time.

17 Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blackburn. Let me
19 recognize Senator Warren via WebEx.

20 Senator Warren: All right. Thank you very much, Mr.
21 Chairman, and, Dr. Kahl, it is good to see you again.
22 Congratulations on your nomination. Thank you for your
23 willingness to take on this important and challenging
24 position.

25 So I really enjoyed our conversation last week. As you

1 know, I have long been concerned about civilians who are
2 harmed as a result of our overseas military operations. I
3 have introduced two separate comprehensive bills to improve
4 transparency and reporting of civilian casualties, as well
5 as strengthen how we investigate and address cases when
6 civilians are harmed by U.S. or U.S.-led military
7 operations.

8 Now you have written persuasively on the need for
9 stronger measures to track and learn from civilian
10 casualties in order to prevent unnecessary harm in the
11 future. If you are confirmed, will you commit to finding
12 ways to bolster DoD's response to civilian casualties, for
13 example, by dedicating resources to investigate, address,
14 and understand patterns of civilian harm?

15 Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator, I am strongly committed on
16 this issue. We need to be more transparent. The reporting
17 needs to be better. There have to be the right
18 investigations and steps in place to address civilian harm,
19 however inadvertent, when our military is engaged in
20 operations. So I know there is a DoD instruction that is
21 being written as we speak. If I am confirmed, I look
22 forward to digging into that and working with you and others
23 on this issue to minimize civilian harm, moving forward.

24 Senator Warren: Good. Well, I really appreciate that.
25 You know, over the last several fiscal years Congress has

1 provided the DoD with funding to make offers ex gratia of
2 payments to civilians harmed in the U.S. and U.S.-led
3 coalition operations, and these are cash payments. Yet as I
4 understand it, very few payments have been made, and no
5 claims process exists.

6 So can you commit to reviewing this issue expeditiously
7 and working to find ways to establish an effective claims
8 process for families and survivors of military operations?

9 Mr. Kahl: Yes, I commit to that.

10 Senator Warren: Dr. Kahl, some of my colleagues have
11 criticized the Iran nuclear deal because it did not address
12 Iran's ballistic missile program and because of the sunset
13 provisions. They believe that the deal did not put Iran's
14 nuclear program in a box. I think it is worth setting the
15 record straight on just a few things. So I just want to ask
16 you, the Iran nuclear deal placed strict limits on Iran's
17 ability to enrich uranium needed for a nuclear weapon.
18 During the deal, was Iran complying with those limits?

19 Mr. Kahl: According to about a dozen IAEA reports
20 prior to President Trump's withdrawal from the agreement,
21 Iran had been in compliance.

22 Senator Warren: Yes. And since the Trump
23 administration pulled out of the deal, has Iran exceeded the
24 limits imposed by the deal?

25 Mr. Kahl: Yes, in a number of areas.

1 Senator Warren: Yes. So today, is Iran's breakout
2 time to have a nuclear weapon shorter than it was when Trump
3 went against our allies and pulled out of the deal?

4 Mr. Kahl: According to open source analysis it is
5 currently down to three or four months. It was at at least
6 a year at the end of the Obama administration.

7 Senator Warren: Okay. So Iran's nuclear program was
8 actually in a box when the deal was in force, and they are
9 now closer to having enough material to make a nuclear
10 weapon today than they were under the deal. I guess we can
11 all thank President Trump for making Iran even more
12 dangerous today. Thank you.

13 Thank you, Dr. Kahl, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren.
15 Let me now recognize Senator Tuberville.

16 Senator Tuberville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
17 Dr. Kahl, thank you for your service. We had a good phone
18 call the other day. I love your statement about this is a
19 nonpolitical position. This is a policy position, trying to
20 help our military and things in front of us, because we have
21 got problems.

22 In 2016, three NATO countries, including the United
23 States, they met their defense spend. Only three. Now we
24 have got most of them involved in it. How do you stand on
25 that?

1 Mr. Kahl: I think it is important that all the NATO
2 countries live up to their commitments that were made at
3 Wales in 2014, the 2 percent threshold that you mentioned,
4 and I am glad that more of those countries are turning in
5 that direction, but we can do better.

6 Senator Tuberville: Will you stay on top of it?

7 Mr. Kahl: Yes, sir.

8 Senator Tuberville: Thanks for answering the nuclear
9 triad question earlier, but just a yes-or-no question. Do
10 you support the funding of GBSD and LRSO modernization?
11 Will you support that funding?

12 Mr. Kahl: So I support modernization efforts, as a
13 general matter. This is an area where I need to get briefed
14 on the details, but I have no reason to question the
15 STRATCOM commander's assessment on the needs of
16 modernization. So once I get more deeply briefed on this I
17 will come back and talk to you, but as I said, I support the
18 triad.

19 Senator Tuberville: Yeah, thank you. You know, the
20 Houthis in Yemen, they are coming after the Saudis pretty
21 good, and they are being backed by Iran, and Iran is playing
22 games. Houthis are pretty good fighters, and we are going
23 to have some problems. So what are your thoughts about
24 that?

25 Mr. Kahl: I think that Yemen is one of the more vexing

1 and tragic circumstances in the world. The Houthis are not
2 good actors, but the war itself has also brought about the
3 greatest humanitarian disaster in the world, at least pre-
4 COVID, and COVID has actually made it worse. I do not think
5 that our support for the Saudi coalition has been very
6 effective in pushing back Houthi influence. I think the
7 best strategy for reducing Houthi influence is moving
8 towards a peace agreement that changes the nature of that
9 government.

10 Senator Tuberville: Tell me what you think about
11 Russia's economy.

12 Mr. Kahl: You know, I am not an expert on Russia's
13 economy. I will say, in general, that Russia is very
14 reliant on its energy resources. There are a lot of
15 fundamentals of Russia's economy and demographics that are
16 not in Moscow's favor. Now some people take solace in that.
17 I actually think it makes Russia more dangerous in the near
18 term, because I think that Putin sees Russia as a country
19 that used to be great and that is now on the decline and is
20 trying to make the most of the power they have left before
21 they sunset.

22 Anyway, I hope that answers your question.

23 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
24 Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville. Senator

1 Peters, please.

2 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Kahl, it
3 is good to see you here and congratulations on your
4 nomination.

5 I want to pick up on the Yemen issue, if I may. In
6 advanced questions you expressed, if I am correct, and
7 correct me if I am wrong, you expressed an understanding
8 that the United States lacks sufficient insight into
9 civilian casualty rates in Yemen, and yet an analysis by
10 Rand reports that 110,000 Yemenis have been killed as a
11 direct result of fighting, including 12,000 civilians.
12 Indirectly, at least 150,000 children, age 5 and under, have
13 died from starvation, the result of Houthis diverting
14 humanitarian food shipments as well as Saudi-led coalition
15 air strikes on food storage and distribution infrastructure.

16 You responded to a previous question and acknowledged
17 the fact that this is a major humanitarian crisis. I could
18 argue this is perhaps the largest humanitarian crisis in the
19 world today.

20 Please explain why you do not have visibility of the
21 casualties when they seem to be fairly clear, and given the
22 casualties, and given the fact that this is a major
23 humanitarian crisis, how would you advise the President and
24 folks at the Department of Defense that we need a policy
25 that is dealing with this, and we need it now?

1 Mr. Kahl: So I agree with you completely, and I am
2 aware of the estimates that you mentioned. I think the APQ
3 answer was largely in terms of precision, that is, the
4 precise number of civilian casualties may not be known to
5 the Department, but I have no reason to question the outside
6 assessment. It is not just that tens of thousands have been
7 killed and wounded, but millions have been pushed to the
8 brink of starvation, or are starving as we speak. I agree
9 with your assessment, that it is the worst humanitarian
10 disaster on the planet.

11 I supported President Biden's decision, as I think
12 there was bipartisan support as well, to cut off assistance
13 to the Saudi-led campaign and to take other steps to make
14 sure humanitarian aid was actually getting into Yemen. But
15 this problem is not going to be resolved until there is a
16 peace settlement, so I support the Biden administration's
17 efforts to reinvigorate that process.

18 Senator Peters: As we look at the future of conflict,
19 or I should say the conflict we are in right now, it is
20 probably best described as a conflict between authoritarian
21 regimes and democracy, a classic battle between two
22 ideologies, one that has existed through history, but we can
23 see, at least in recent times, that conflict escalating,
24 with a number of our adversaries that are working to
25 undermine democracy and to further autocratic governments

1 across the planet.

2 So given that, to what extent should we be thinking
3 differently about some of our defense policy, understanding
4 that the conflict that we may have with our adversaries may
5 be less in the realm of direct combat, although that is
6 certainly possible, that we need to be adequately prepared
7 for that. But a lot of the conflict is going to be in the
8 realm of gray zones. It is going to be in the realm of
9 adversaries trying to undermine Western or democracies where
10 they may be, undermine democracies from within and also
11 using other activities that are less than outright combat.
12 Are we adequately prepared for this evolving, serious
13 threat, and if not, what do we need to do?

14 Mr. Kahl: So I think there is a dawning recognition
15 about the challenge that you face. I think the new Interim
16 National Security Strategic Guidance that the administration
17 released yesterday framed the issues very much along the
18 lines that you did, that authoritarianism is on the rise.
19 For more than a decade now, we have had a global democratic
20 recession, that is the number of democracies slipping, and
21 not just over there but among advanced industrial
22 democracies.

23 My own view is that we have to rally what used to be
24 called the free world, that is the other advanced
25 democracies and like-minded states, to address issues like

1 cyberattacks, disinformation, but also things like
2 weaponized corruption, energy coercion, supply chain
3 vulnerabilities. The dawning recognition among democracies
4 that they face common challenges from Russia, China, and
5 other authoritarian powers is an opportunity for us, as the
6 United States, to lead in all of those areas.

7 Senator Peters: Well, one thing that we must lead, in
8 my mind, is in moral leadership, in order to rally those
9 democracies as the United States has always been that
10 shining city on the hill, that has led in terms of moral
11 issues.

12 At what point does our support of Saudi Arabia make
13 moral leadership difficult in the world?

14 Mr. Kahl: Well, as President Biden often says, it is
15 important that we not only lead through the example of our
16 power but the power of our example, and I think in recent
17 years there has been a greater and greater disconnect
18 between American values and the values put forth by the
19 government in Saudi Arabia. And so I support the
20 administration's efforts to recalibrate that relationship
21 and to hold Saudi officials accountable, and to relook at
22 every aspect of that relationship to make sure it conforms,
23 not just with our interests but our values.

24 Senator Peters: Thank you.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters. Now let me

1 recognize Senator Sullivan for the traditional five-minute
2 round.

3 [Laughter.]

4 Senator Sullivan: I hope Senator Inhofe is not timing
5 me on this. Sorry about my reputation in that regard.

6 Dr. Kahl, thanks for our meeting. I appreciate our
7 discussion. If confirmed, can you commit again to come to
8 Alaska to see the Arctic and the great power competition
9 that the Pentagon often forgets about, up in that part of
10 the world, with me?

11 Mr. Kahl: Yes. There is no question that strategic
12 importance of the Arctic is going up.

13 Senator Sullivan: Thank you. So, Dr. Kahl, I think a
14 lot of us are trying to figure out a critical issue, that
15 are you a balanced, measured, national security professional
16 who can help lead the Pentagon, or, to be a little bit more
17 frank, are you a political hack who has a history of going
18 off on Twitter, attacking those who do not share your
19 politics? And this is a free country, and you are certainly
20 allowed to do that. But I do think it is a critical issue.
21 Senator Tillis stated less than a year ago several Senators,
22 Republicans and Democrats, had concerns about a nominee for
23 the exact position you are being nominated for, that the
24 White House ended up withdrawing the nomination.

25 Mr. Chairman, I have a letter from several Senate

1 Democrats, many of whom are on this committee, who raised
2 concerns about this nominee, General Tata, who said, quote,
3 "he was not qualified because of his record of inflammatory
4 comments, which disqualify him," and including comments
5 against Members of Congress.

6 I think your comments about all Republicans are now the
7 party of ethnic cleansing is pretty strong stuff. Again,
8 free country. You can say whatever the heck you want. I
9 believe in that, but sometimes these kind of statements have
10 consequences.

11 So this is actually more for my colleagues who wrote
12 this letter. I think you guys have some explaining to do.
13 It is very analogous what is going on here, very analogous.
14 So I will leave that to my Armed Services colleagues, many
15 of whom were on this letter.

16 Senator Kaine, I agree with him a lot. This is a very
17 bipartisan committee. He said your nomination is about the
18 JCPOA. I would say it is actually broader than that. And I
19 do want to correct my friend. The JCPOA was the first
20 agreement in U.S. history that passed with a partisan
21 minority in the House and Senate. So when Senator Kaine
22 says Republicans were against it, Democrats were for it, he
23 is incorrect. A partisan majority of Republicans and
24 Democrats were against it in both the House and the Senate.
25 But I agree with Senator Kaine that the concerns about your

1 record on Iran are a critical element of your confirmation.

2 So let me just ask a few questions. The JCPOA provided
3 over \$100 billion in sanctions relief, despite Iran's
4 continuing malign activities. Those malign activities
5 increased -- \$1.8 billion in cash on an airplane. Do you
6 agree that Iran now is, and has remained for the previous
7 two administrations, the foremost state sponsor of terrorism
8 in the world?

9 Mr. Kahl: Yes.

10 Senator Sullivan: What I worry about with your policy
11 positions is they do not seem to have redlines with Iran,
12 and as you know, it is important for the United States to
13 determine redlines, and which it is critical to not allow
14 countries to cross. When we have taken tough actions
15 against the terrorist regime in Iran, you, as my colleagues
16 have mentioned, have often cried out that it is going to
17 lead to war.

18 So let me ask this. Does the killing and wounding of
19 over 2,000 Americans constitute a redline that we should
20 take action against Iran on?

21 Mr. Kahl: I support taking action against Iran and its
22 proxies when they threaten our forces. When I was at the
23 Pentagon as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense I
24 supported our action by, with, and through the Iraqis, to go
25 after these proxy networks, to include, in 2011, when we saw

1 a very concerning increase in rocket attacks that were
2 causing American casualties. I was a strong proponent of
3 hitting back, not just with the Iraqis but unilaterally.

4 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, this is a serious
5 question, and my final one. It is a sensitive and it is
6 going to take a minute, so I do apologize but I want to get
7 it on the record. And it is sensitive. It is an important
8 issue. Some might criticize me for even asking it, but I am
9 going to ask it.

10 In your opening statement, you said you wanted to,
11 quote, "end systemic racism within the ranks of the
12 military." Now I care deeply about this issue. In fact, I
13 put forward legislation last year that passed in the NDAA,
14 that looks at elements of this issue. I know you have not
15 served in the ranks of the military yourself, but can you
16 break that statement down a bit? It is a serious statement
17 to say that there is systematic racism within the ranks of
18 the military. The FBI director, for example, two days ago,
19 in hearings, was asked this question, and he said there was
20 not systemic racism in the FBI.

21 I have served 26 years in the United States Marine
22 Corps, still serving. Very diverse units, racially
23 [inaudible] arms units. I have seen one serious incident,
24 just in my personal experience of racism, where, as a young
25 Marine, I took action to stamp that out.

1 What data or information are you basing that statement
2 on? It is a big statement, and I am curious about that.

3 Mr. Kahl: So I spent much of my government service
4 working alongside men and women in uniform. I have
5 extraordinary respect for all of them. My personal
6 experience is that the overwhelming majority of people in
7 the armed services conduct themselves with honor and dignity
8 and are tolerant. I think there is a small minority that
9 have violent extremist views. I think the events of January
10 6th --

11 Senator Sullivan: Do you have data on that, because
12 systemic racism --

13 Mr. Kahl: I do not think we have credible data on the
14 amount.

15 Senator Sullivan: It is really important to get data
16 on this before you paint with such a broad brush, is my
17 point.

18 Mr. Kahl: So I did not mean to imply that there is
19 systemic racism among the ranks. I think there is systemic

20 Senator Sullivan: So that is what your statement said.

21 Mr. Kahl: What I am saying, Senator, is that I think
22 that there is a minority, and I agree with you that we need
23 better data on this, that we should not tolerate people who
24 combine racist views with violent tendencies, in the
25 military or anywhere else.

1 Senator Sullivan: I could not agree more with you.

2 Mr. Kahl: And that there have been barriers to
3 advancement and the need for greater diversity, equity, and
4 inclusion in the armed services --

5 Senator Sullivan: That is what my legislation looks at
6 --

7 Mr. Kahl: -- looks at.

8 Senator Sullivan: But I agree we need more data. It
9 is important to get data on this really important issue. I
10 cannot agree with you more. It is important, but that data
11 on it, before we make those statements.

12 Mr. Kahl: So I support the need to get better data on
13 it, and, if confirmed, I also look forward to working with
14 you on this, because I know it is an issue that is important
15 to you.

16 Senator Sullivan: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

18 Senator Sullivan: -- Senator Inhofe.

19 Chairman Reed: No, Senator. You are getting better.

20 Senator Sullivan: That was an important issue.

21 Chairman Reed: Now I would like to recognize Senator
22 Duckworth via WebEx, please.

23 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you
24 for this very important hearing, and, Dr. Kahl, good to see
25 you again. We had a great conversation yesterday. Today,

1 though, I would like to focus on the current pacing threat
2 for the Department of Defense, competition with the PRC. I
3 know you have already had this discussion a little bit today
4 already, and I also thank my colleague from Hawaii, Senator
5 Hirono, for bringing this up also.

6 I have long been an advocate for increased military-to-
7 military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and I think you
8 will agree that we are stronger and more secure when we work
9 with our allies and partners to confront changes and
10 challenges. In particular, I believe we must move quickly
11 to strengthen existing relationships in Southeast Asia, in
12 particular, and form new ones. These partnership are vital
13 to building our presence in the region and providing a check
14 on the PRC government, which has shown that unless it is
15 challenged it will attempt to single-handedly dictate terms
16 for the entire region. Our cooperation cannot be limited to
17 DoD alone, and I believe that a whole-of-society approach,
18 that includes greater diplomatic and economic engagement, is
19 necessary for success.

20 Can you please outline some key policy opportunities
21 you see to improve our strategic partnerships in Southeast
22 Asia? In your answer, please make sure to address how DoD
23 can support agencies' efforts in this critical region.

24 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I think the biggest
25 opportunity is the growing concern and recognition that a

1 more assertive China has produced. That is, I think that a
2 lot of our allies and partners are nervous. Frankly, I
3 think that the pandemic and China's early coverup of the
4 pandemic and some of its heavy-handed, wolf warrior
5 diplomacy during the pandemic has also created opportunities
6 for us to lean in with countries who are increasingly worried
7 about Beijing.

8 I could not agree with you more about the importance of
9 emphasizing our alliances and our partnerships. It is one
10 of the biggest asymmetric advantages that the United States
11 has. No other global power has the network of allies and
12 partners that we have, and if I am confirmed, a huge part of
13 my job will be in nurturing those relationships. I think we
14 have enormous opportunities in the Indo-Pacific. I think
15 that the last administration made some important strides in
16 this area, as did the Obama administration. I think we have
17 opportunities to work not just with our treaty allies, like
18 Japan and South Korea and Australia and the Philippines, but
19 with countries like Singapore and Vietnam, and others in
20 Asia, and I think there are growing opportunities with
21 India.

22 So I actually think this is an area where we have
23 enormous possibility.

24 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. If you are confirmed,
25 would you commit to working with me to explore innovative

1 ideas to improve mil-to-mil partnerships in the region,
2 instead of just working with the Department of State to
3 expand the IMET program, or perhaps using the Army Corps of
4 Engineers to help flooding or other opportunities like that?

5 Mr. Kahl: Yes. I commit to working with you and to
6 everybody else on the committee on those issues, because I
7 do think, you know, there is no monopoly on good ideas on
8 either side of the aisle or among any of us. So, you know,
9 it needs to be one team, one fight.

10 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I want to return to
11 this issue of racism within the military. People of color,
12 and women, can face significant systemic barriers to
13 maintain successful careers in the Department of Defense. I
14 saw it -- it is why I had two children at the age of 46 and
15 50 -- because in order to pursue my career I had to postpone
16 pregnancy. So there are systemic barriers to women and to
17 people of color. This leads to a lack of diversity at the
18 top levels of DoD, military, and civilian leadership, and in
19 certain communities, like this is especially true like
20 Special Operations.

21 If confirmed, how would you personally work to increase
22 diversity in the DoD leadership, both civilian and uniform,
23 and include people of color and women so they can contribute
24 to the mission, and ensure that everyone in the Office of
25 the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy has the necessary

1 support to succeed professionally?

2 Mr. Kahl: I think everybody in the DoD leadership has
3 an obligation to break down barriers to the advancement of
4 women and people of color. I agree 100 percent that the top
5 ranks, both civilian and military, do not reflect the
6 diversity of the United States. I think we are stronger, as
7 a country, when our workforce, including our national
8 security workforce, reflects the full diversity that our
9 country brings to bear. I think that is another one of our
10 asymmetric advantages, one that we are not taking advantage
11 of enough, because there is not enough diversity, equity,
12 and inclusion.

13 So you have my commitment, if I am confirmed as the
14 Under Secretary, that in the organization that I would lead
15 that I would look for opportunities to retain and promote
16 the talent that we already have, and as we hire and bring on
17 new folks, to make sure that this is a major priority, that
18 we are expanding the diversity of our workforce, and then
19 more broadly in the Department, working with Secretary
20 Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks on this issue, because I
21 know it is a big priority for them as well.

22 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, and I yield back, Mr.
23 Chairman.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Duckworth.
25 Let me recognize Senator Hawley.

1 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Kahl,
2 let me start in the same place as Senator Duckworth did,
3 with our pacing theater. Deputy Secretary of Defense Hicks,
4 when she was here a few weeks ago, agreed that it is
5 essential to strengthen our deterrents against China, that
6 we maintain the ability to defeat a Chinese fait accompli
7 with regard to Taiwan. Do you agree with that.

8 Mr. Kahl: I do.

9 Senator Hawley: Do you agree with her also that a
10 strategy of denial is essential for deterring Chinese
11 aggression?

12 Mr. Kahl: Yes. Denial both in the sense of building
13 up Taiwan's capabilities and our capabilities to prevent the
14 exact scenario that you outlined.

15 Senator Hawley: Good. And would you also agree that
16 the threat from the PRC is an imminent threat, not just a
17 threat in 10 or 15 or 20 years, but an imminent threat to
18 our security now?

19 Mr. Kahl: I think it is a growing threat to our
20 security, and it is a challenge that is urgent now, and is
21 only going to get worse as the years go on.

22 Senator Hawley: So let me ask you this. Our pacing
23 theater is INDOPACOM. You spent your career focused on the
24 Middle East, however. So let me just ask you. I mean, why
25 would we confirm another Middle East hand to lead the

1 Department of Defense when we are trying to steer the
2 Department's focus towards PACOM?

3 Mr. Kahl: Well, as I suspect you know, Senator, I was
4 trained as a generalist. I am international security and
5 conflict specialist. Like a lot of people with my
6 background, our attention focused on the Middle East. I am
7 not a Middle East person by training. It was a byproduct of
8 9/11 and the wars that followed, that and the service that I
9 spent after that.

10 As the National Security Advisor to Vice President
11 Biden, I had responsibility for the world. I was a member
12 of the Deputies Committee, you know, leading discussions on
13 China, Russia, Ukraine, Central America, Ebola, cyber, North
14 Korea, and much of my academic work in recent years has been
15 on emerging technologies and the geopolitical consequences
16 of the pandemic.

17 So I think of myself as a generalist who knows a little
18 bit about the Middle East, as opposed to a Middle East
19 Expert who knows a little bit about the rest of the world.

20 Senator Hawley: I know that you previously worked on
21 the pivot to Asia during the Obama administration. That is
22 frankly part of what concerns me. It was not a successful
23 pivot. Let me ask you about some of the challenges we are
24 going to have in pivoting now.

25 You said that troops in Afghanistan, troop levels

1 should be tied to conditions on the ground, and that any
2 withdrawal should support diplomatic efforts and be executed
3 in close consultation with our NATO resolute support
4 partners. Does that mean that you do not support the peace
5 agreement reached by the previous administration?

6 Mr. Kahl: I think we need a negotiated solution. My
7 concern with the U.S.-Taliban agreement that the previous
8 administration negotiated -- and I should caveat this by
9 saying I am not privy to the intelligence assessments -- but
10 based on reporting and open source materials, the Taliban
11 does not appear to be living up to its commitments, either
12 in the letter or the spirit of that agreement. So I would
13 want to make sure that we are defending our interests. I do
14 not think that the forever war in Afghanistan should go on
15 forever, but I do believe that we have vital interests there
16 --

17 Senator Hawley: How are we going to end it?

18 Mr. Kahl: Well, I think we are going to end it through
19 peaceful negotiation. Part of that --

20 Senator Hawley: Will we keep thousands of troops
21 there, in theater.

22 Mr. Kahl: Well, first of all, I need to get briefed on
23 the current threat matrix. A lot of my information on ISIS,
24 Khorasan, or the Taliban or al Qaeda is four years out of
25 date in the classified domain. My belief is that we need to

1 remain postured in the region to deal with the residual
2 counterterrorism issues that arise from groups like al Qaeda
3 and ISIS.

4 The exact force mix that that may require in
5 Afghanistan versus elsewhere is something I will have to dig
6 into, and, if confirmed, I look forward to talking to you
7 about this.

8 Senator Hawley: Here is what I am trying to figure
9 out. Based on the comments that the President has made,
10 including at the Munich Security Conference, and others he
11 made on the campaign, and based on the initial steps taken
12 by the administration, it looks like this administration
13 foresees major engagement across at least three theaters,
14 while, at the same time, essentially relieving the pressure
15 on NATO burden-sharing. I am trying to figure out how the
16 accounts balance. I mean, you also envisioned flat defense
17 spending.

18 So how are we going to prioritize the Indo-Pacific, how
19 are we going to prioritize the growing and, indeed, imminent
20 security threat from China, while also engaging heavily in
21 Europe, engaging heavily in CENTCOM, without any rebalancing
22 in those places? Can you just give me your -- this is,
23 obviously, a huge problem. The last administration
24 encountered the same problem. What are your thoughts on
25 this?

1 Mr. Kahl: So the Interim National Security Strategic
2 Guidance that the administration released yesterday racked
3 and stacked the regions. You know, we have interests in all
4 the regions -- we are a global power. We have interests
5 everywhere. But there are certain regions where it will
6 need to be more of an economy of effort. And I think the
7 Indo-Pacific is number one with a bullet for security and
8 economic reasons; Europe is probably number two, because of
9 the challenge that Russia poses to us and the NATO alliance,
10 and because NATO is a force multiplier for us, globally. So
11 I would put Indo-Pacific and Europe one and two. The
12 Western Hemisphere is always an interest of ours, going back
13 to the founding of the republic, but more of an economy of
14 effort. And I think we need to right-size our presence in
15 the Middle East and Central Asia, along the lines that we
16 just discussed, precisely because of the accelerating pace
17 of great power competition, which I think the 2018 National
18 Defense Strategy correctly kind of re-centered our focus on
19 that. And, if confirmed, I would look to continue that
20 trend.

21 Senator Hawley: Could I ask one more question, Mr.
22 Chairman?

23 Chairman Reed: Quickly.

24 Senator Hawley: Quickly. All right. Not to imitate
25 Senator Sullivan, but I just want to ask you about Israel.

1 According to news reports, Dr. Kahl, you led the effort to
2 remove recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel
3 from the 2012 Democratic Party platform. You also
4 reportedly staffed the effort to condemn Israel at the U.N.
5 Security Council in late 2016, and, of course, you have
6 spoken about against moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Do
7 you see Israel as a valued partner? I mean, obviously,
8 those positions are in serious tension with the interests
9 and positions of our Israeli partners. Do you see them as a
10 valued partner, and how are you going to respond to their
11 concerns over these positions?

12 Mr. Kahl: So absolutely, and I had the opportunity
13 earlier to go through my record on supporting Israel, so I
14 will not recapitulate that here, but it is long.

15 I will just say, in 2012, the platform that I was
16 involved in writing simply represented the U.S. official
17 policy at the time, which was the same policy as in the Bush
18 administration, which was not to formally recognize
19 Jerusalem because it was a final status issue. The platform
20 was amended, and I had no problem with the amendment. The
21 embassy has been moved. I support President Biden's policy
22 on that, not to move it back.

23 So I do not imagine this will cause any concerns in
24 Israel or elsewhere if I were to be confirmed for this
25 position. And just for the record, I had zero involvement

1 in the U.N. Security Council resolution, in pushing for it
2 or otherwise, in 2016.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley. Senator
4 Kelly, please.

5 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you,
6 Dr. Kahl, for your testimony today.

7 So with the recent SolarWinds hack that is fresh in our
8 minds, what is your perspective on how we address the
9 vulnerability in our digital architecture, that the U.S.
10 Government relies on, including the Department of Defense?

11 Mr. Kahl: Yeah. First of all, I could not agree with
12 you more about -- look, I would not describe SolarWinds as a
13 wake-up call, and I know you are not doing that either. I
14 think it is just the latest reminder of how vulnerable our
15 networks are. And as I mentioned earlier, I think this is a
16 vulnerability that has only increased as a consequence of
17 the pandemic, because so much of our daily lives has
18 migrated online. You know, I have a nine-year-old daughter
19 and a six-year-old son, and they are doing fourth grade and
20 kindergarten, you know, on Zoom, every day. But our
21 enterprises, our institutions -- you know, luckily, the
22 Department of Defense is unclassified networks. While being
23 exposed, we are not compromised. But huge portions of the
24 U.S. Government appear to have been compromised by this, at
25 the unclassified level.

1 So if I am confirmed, it is an issue I need to dig into
2 more deeply, but we need to make sure that our networks are
3 defended and resilient in the face of this, because these
4 attacks by Russia and other countries are not going to go
5 away. China, North Korea, Iran, and non-state actors are
6 all looking to go after us in the cyber domain.

7 Senator Kelly: How did we get here, though? Did we
8 make decisions early on and take basically off-the-shelf
9 technology and modify it for government and defense
10 purposes? Could we have done something different? And if
11 we could have, do we want to make those changes now?

12 Mr. Kahl: So I am not sure about the forensics. You
13 know, I think the autopsy has yet to be conducted. But
14 there are few things that are more important. I know that
15 the Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging
16 Technology, Anne Neuberger, is looking at this issue. I
17 would hope that in really digging into the SolarWinds
18 incident we can answer precisely the questions you raise,
19 which is how did we get so vulnerable, not just our networks
20 but the supply chains, which is how this particular attack
21 happened, and what can we do to make those networks more
22 resilient in the future.

23 So if I am confirmed, I would anticipate participating
24 in that interagency conversation, and as I learn more I
25 would hope to come back to talk to you about it.

1 Senator Kelly: It is critical we figure out a way out
2 of this situation, because if we do not, this is going to
3 continue to happen.

4 So when we spoke yesterday we discussed some
5 technology, like artificial intelligence, just briefly,
6 quantum computing, that is going to define the next century.
7 So how do we align our defense policy to meet the
8 requirements that result from the advancements of these
9 technologies?

10 Mr. Kahl: Well, as you mentioned, Senator, we are only
11 at the very beginning of a whole host of emerging disruptive
12 technologies that will, frankly, define the nature of life
13 for the rest of this century. We are in the process of the
14 digitization of everything. We are literally seeing zeroes
15 and ones turned into living beings, and beings turned into
16 zeroes and ones through things like synthetic biology.
17 Quantum computing is going to revolutionize a whole array of
18 issues with implications for national security.
19 Hypersonics, directed energy -- these are all things.

20 So I think as we craft our National Defense Strategy
21 and then form a budget around that, we have to be
22 prioritizing investments in these areas, because we know
23 that China is. We know they are. We know they are
24 committed to spending hundreds of billions of dollars
25 precisely to plant the flag on the very technologies that

1 they understand will determine the strategic competition for
2 the rest of this century.

3 So if we are not doing the same -- and, by the way, it
4 is not just DoD. We need to be investing in STEM, science
5 and technology education, research and development,
6 investing in our research institutions. It is a whole-of-
7 government effort, because it is a whole-of-government
8 effort in Beijing, so it has to be here.

9 Senator Kelly: Yeah, I could not agree more. I mean,
10 it is what we have done very well as a country for decades
11 -- innovation. And we know that the Chinese will be
12 following us, and the amount of money they spend in research
13 and development now is basically the same as we have over
14 the last couple of years. And, you know, we, fortunately,
15 have the one thing that they do not have, and that is the
16 creativity, and a democracy that allows people to be
17 creative, and, you know, to think outside the box. We have
18 got to invest in that. That includes investing in STEM
19 education and research and development, and to make sure
20 that we have these domestic production capabilities here.
21 That will keep us ahead of our competitors.

22 Thank you for your testimony.

23 Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Now let me
25 recognize the ranking member for his concluding comments.

1 Senator Inhofe: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I
2 think we probably have run out of interest here.

3 Let me just make a comment on why this is important.
4 We have hearings like that, and we want to know, before
5 someone is confirmed, where they stand on these issues, and
6 I think it is perfectly appropriate. In my case I had three
7 questions. I got two answers, and I did not get an answer
8 on the third one. But I am going to remind, in future
9 meetings that we have, what the answer was, to test the
10 consistency of the witness, so we can anticipate that.

11 And then also we had a question that was having to do
12 with triad modernization, by Senator Cotton. Two other
13 members asked the same question. I did not think the
14 answers were complete enough, and if it is all right I would
15 like to recognize Senator Cotton to re-ask that question.

16 Senator Cotton: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Dr. Kahl,
17 I want to be very specific here. You gave evasive answers
18 to Senator Rounds, Senator Cramer, and Senator Tuberville on
19 the ground-based strategic deterrent, the replacement
20 program for the Minuteman missile. We are pleased to hear
21 that you support the triad, as you said, as a general
22 matter, pleased to hear that you have no reason to question
23 Admiral Richard, the commander of Strategic Command, that
24 the Minuteman cannot be extended. But the simple and
25 specific question is, do you or do you not support the

1 continued full funding of the ground-based strategic
2 deterrent as the future of the ground leg of the nuclear
3 triad?

4 Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I am not trying to be
5 evasive. The truth of the matter is my information on the
6 ground-based strategic deterrent, at the classified level,
7 is four years out of date. So it is something I will have
8 to get a classified assessment on it, including the
9 capabilities, the costs, and the life extension program.
10 Based on what I know in the public domain, and what the
11 STRATCOM commander has said, I have no reason to question
12 those modernization efforts.

13 Senator Cotton: Dr. Kahl, we have seen throughout this
14 hearing that you have no issue of expressing your strongly
15 held opinion on matter of defense policy and foreign policy.
16 You were nominated for this position more than two months
17 ago. Is it really your answer to this committee that you do
18 not have a well-informed opinion about whether the ground-
19 based strategic deterrent is the future of the ground leg of
20 the nuclear triad?

21 Mr. Kahl: I have a well-grounded opinion that all
22 three legs of the triad need to be viable. They need to be
23 effective, safe, secure, they need to be credible to our
24 adversaries and our allies. As I said, I have no reason to
25 question the STRATCOM commander's assessment. But as you

1 know, Senator, on nuclear weapons there are issues that are
2 highly classified, and details that I am simply not privy
3 to. So, if confirmed, I will dig into those details and I
4 would be happy to come back to talk to you, or anybody else
5 on this committee, about that, if I am confirmed.

6 Senator Cotton: Well, it sounds like we are not going
7 to get a straight answer. I will take that unwillingness to
8 give a straight answer is that you probably do not think
9 that we should continue to fund the ground-based strategic
10 deterrent, as do many other members of your party, and I
11 suspect that many members of this committee will too.

12 Chairman Reed: Dr. Kahl, do you have anything further
13 in response to the question of the ground-based triad? My
14 sense is that you have given an answer which you are in
15 favor of, but you want to make sure you understand all the
16 facts at the very highest classified levels, because it is
17 critical to not only the three legs but also the sequencing
18 of construction projects, the status of the development of
19 the platforms. If there is a serious issue -- and I am not
20 privy the information, but if there is a serious issue of a
21 platform, that might cause changes within the deployment
22 schedule.

23 So those are very practical concerns, and I think your
24 answer reflected those practical concerns, and also
25 indicated that the triad has to continue to protect the

1 United States. Any comment?

2 Mr. Kahl: No, I agree with all that. I think that the
3 triad has been a tried and true bedrock of our deterrence
4 for decades. I think that it is important to modernize the
5 triad because our adversaries are modernizing their
6 capabilities, and we need a hedge against the possibility
7 that one of the other legs of the triad becomes non-viable.

8 So I support the triad and our modernization efforts.
9 My only reason to be cautious was precisely for the reasons
10 that you identified, which is that there is classified
11 material which is relevant to these systems that I am not
12 privy to. And so, if confirmed, it will be a high priority
13 for me to get more deeply briefed on this, and at that time
14 I would be happy to speak with this committee on that or any
15 other issue. I think one of the things I have enjoyed,
16 frankly, about this hearing is the degree of candor and the
17 range of issues that have been raised.

18 And I will just tell you this, because some of you I
19 know better than others. You know, I am an academic by
20 training, but I made a decision after 9/11 to value public
21 service. And I worked in the Bush administration, an
22 administration I did not agree with on a lot of stuff. But
23 I worked in the Pentagon because I believed in our national
24 security and the patriotic duty of public service.

25 I returned to the Pentagon under a Republican Secretary

1 of Defense, who I think very highly of, Robert Gates, and
2 worked in a nonpartisan and bipartisan way, because I
3 believe in public service, and that no party has a monopoly
4 on good ideas. None of us have cracked the code on some of
5 the toughest challenges we face, whether it be Iran or North
6 Korea or China or Russia or anything else. So we have to be
7 in this together. I know that there are disagreements, but
8 I am also confident that I can work with people that I
9 disagree with, both inside the Pentagon and here in the
10 halls of Congress.

11 So if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I look
12 forward to doing that.

13 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much, Dr. Kahl.
14 It has been a very, very thought-provoking and thoughtful
15 discussion this morning, and much of that because of your
16 abilities and your experience. So we thank you, and at this
17 point I will adjourn the hearing.

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

19

20

21

22

23

24

25