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

Thursday, March 4, 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

If confirmed, Dr. Kahl, you will face a wide range of challenges to global security. Foremost among these is the re-emergence of strategic competition with near-peer rivals, China and Russia. We must adapt to a new security
environment in which our adversaries are rapidly modernizing their military capabilities and are increasingly aggressive in challenging U.S. and allied interests. Our Armed Forces must be prepared to operate in contested environments if our deterrent is to remain credible. This great power rivalry will significantly impact our defense policies across the board.

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

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

In addition to these broad strategic challenges, the new administration must contend with regional destabilization in the Middle East and South Asia, areas in
which Dr. Kahl has extensive experience. These complex, interlocking challenges include deterring threats from Iran, and its proxies, while seeking to contain the Iranian nuclear threat; recalibrating the relationship with Saudi Arabia; and continuing to mature the security relationship with Iraq while keeping pressure on ISIS. In Afghanistan, the administration is reviewing adherence to the May 1st troop withdrawal timeline in the midst of an uptick in Taliban violence across the country.

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

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

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

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

I look forward to your testimony, and let me recognize Senator Inhofe.
STATEMENT OF HON. JIM INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Senator Inhofe:  Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

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

On our call, I told you that I would have a hard time supporting your nomination because of your previous policy positions, unless you have learned from some of the mistakes that you have made, which I will point out. But I also told...
you that I can work with people with whom I disagree, and
people are always talking about that with me and Barbara
Boxer. We got more stuff done than any other two people who
did not agree on anything except infrastructure, but it
worked.

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

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

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

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

You have also been a vocal supporter of the Obama
administration's Iran nuclear deal, which gave Iran over
$100 billion in sanctions relief, part of which Iran used to
fund terrorist groups, the very groups that rocketed
American forces in Iraq just this week.

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

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

Great statement.

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

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

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

Unfortunately, in the past, in many cases, your public policy positions have been couched in partisan politics...
rather than fact-based analysis. I will give you just a few examples because I expect my colleagues will have other examples. I will just give you two here.

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

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

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

Finally, just to hit on some of your previous policy predictions that have proven untrue, you said that ending the Iran deal might lead to war, and that did not happen.
You said the Soleimani strike would force the United States out of Iraq. That did not happen. You wrote that it would be "difficult" to prevent a "massive war" on the Korean peninsula in 2018. That did not happen. You said that moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem would harm relations with Arab states, and, in fact, Arab-Israeli relations have never been better.

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms. Flournoy: Yes, I am.

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

I have known Dr. Kahl for nearly 15 years, and I cannot think of anyone who is more qualified and better suited for this position, particularly at this consequential moment for our country. Dr. Kahl is both a respect policy expert and an extraordinary leader and practitioners. Since receiving his BA in political science from the University of Michigan and his PhD in political science from Columbia University, his career has alternated between being a professor at the
University of Minnesota, Georgetown, and now Stanford, and serving his country in the Department of Defense and in the White House.

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

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

A few examples. In the summer of 2009, he wrote the initial memo that advocated for U.S. support for Israel's Iron Dome rocket defense system, which had been languishing at the Pentagon for years. This got the ball rolling at the NSC, culminating in hundreds of millions of dollars, thanks
to the Congress, in support of a system that helped cement
our defense relationship with Israel and, in fact, saved
countless Israeli lives since then.

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

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

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

Dr. Kahl understands that these positions require not
just drafting good policy but also actually ensuring that
these policies are implemented, to deliver real security
benefits for the nation. He was exceptional in his ability
to develop a vision and road map for his area of responsibility, to work closely with key civilian, military, interagency, international, and I would add, congressional on both sides of the aisle, stakeholders, to get their buy-in and support, and then drive the delivery of outcomes. Dr. Kahl has a record of being a leader who gets results. He is also a leader who wins the respect and admiration of his peers and his subordinates. When I was Under Secretary, we launched a human capital strategy and policy to boost the morale and enhance the performance of the workforce. I decided to pilot the program in the two busiest offices, including Dr. Kahl's Middle East office, to demonstrate that it is possible to take care of your people even as you maintain high-tempo operations.

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

Thanks to his time in academia, and think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for New American Security, Dr. Kahl will also bring a tremendous reservoir of intellectual capital to the position. He has published numerous articles on international security and foreign and defense policy, and has spent the past few years
working on a number of projects, ranging from a book on the geopolitical consequences of COVID-19, a project on the implications of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning on strategic stability and the future of deterrence, and a project providing a theoretical and historical analysis of American grand strategy since 9/11.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes.

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

Mr. Kahl: No.
Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and oversight responsibility makes it important that this committee, its committees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings, reports, records, and other information from the Executive branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify before this committee when requested?

Mr. Kahl: Yes.

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

Mr. Kahl: I do.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes.
Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

Mr. Kahl: They will.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Dr. Kahl, and please go ahead.
STATEMENT OF DR. COLIN H. KAHL, TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

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

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

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

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

I was born and raised in OSD Policy, and I could not be
more humbled by the prospect of leading this great 
organization. I began my government career as an action 
officer in the Pentagon during the Bush administration. I 
returned to serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of 
Defense for the Middle East during the Obama administration, 
working for both Secretary Gates and then Secretary Panetta. 

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

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

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

Beyond the crisis of the moment, the 2018 National
Defense Strategy, for which this committee deserves a great deal of credit, aptly recognized the reality of accelerating great power competition, particularly with China. Successfully competing with China will requires us to lean into our inherent strengths. That means building back better at home, spurring technological innovation, leading with our values, and reinvigorating our unrivaled network of alliances and partners.

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

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

We must also tackle growing threats in the cyber realm. The SolarWinds intrusion is just the latest example of vulnerabilities that have become even more acute as the pandemic has forced entire communities and institutions
online. The Department should adopt a layered approach to respond to cyberattacks, defend our networks and improve their resilience, and work alongside like-minded nations to constrain malign behavior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Kahl, all of us have recognized, and you particularly in your pre-hearing policy questions, China is the top priority and pacing threat, as you described it, and indeed Secretary Austin also called it a pacing threat. In that regard, what would be your assessment of our current
posture in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly the forces and capabilities that are west of the International Date Line, and how does it align with the emerging threat?

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

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

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

Chairman Reed: Since we are all committed, I believe, to a whole-of-government approach to problems, what non-
military aspects of a strategy do you believe need additional attention? That will be one of your responsibilities in the Department, to coordinate with State and other agencies, so do you have a sense of what other factors that we can contribute to our approach?

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

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

But, you know, across the board energy coercion, weaponized corruption, disinformation, cyberattacks, many of these will require acts of diplomacy by the State Department, a reinvigorated development policy to check back against China's influence in the Belt and Road Initiative, for example, a global public health policy that really rolls back the pandemic and demonstrates American leadership, and a government-wide technological policy that keeps us on the cutting edge and protects our cyber networks, et cetera.
So if I am confirmed, a big role of the Under Secretary is to work alongside the interagency. I think I have good, trusting relationships with Secretary Blinken, with Wendy Sherman, if she is confirmed, with many at the White House such as Jake Sullivan and obviously the President. So I think I could work well with our interagency partners.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I think it is, but it will be difficult. I think that it is absolutely essential that we prevent Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon. It is also absolutely
essential that we prioritize the protection of our forces in the Middle East and elsewhere, that are threatened by Iran and its proxies.

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

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

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

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

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

Now here are my three questions, and I structured
these, Dr. Kahl, to be yes-or-no questions, so it should be easy and I ought be able to get all of them in, so you can start the clock here.

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

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

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

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

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

Senator Inhofe: Thank you. You wrote that President Trump's decision to move the Embassy to Jerusalem risked a third Palestinian uprising, and that also, as I said in my opening statement, did not happen. In fact, the Arab-Israeli cooperation has never been better. Do you
acknowledge that your previous assumption that stronger
U.S.-Israeli relations would spark violence and harm
relations with Arab states, were those statements a mistake?
Do you agree with it now?

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I do.

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

Mr. Kahl: I believe that we need to get the nuclear
program in a box, because as troubling as Iran's behavior
is, and it is very troubling, it would be exponentially more
dangerous if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon. So there maybe context in which nuclear-related sanctions are part of a compliance-for-compliance framework, but we should not be loosening sanctions on terrorism or human rights or anything else that checks back Iran's destabilizing activities.

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

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

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

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

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Let me
recognize Senator Shaheen, please.

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

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

Did I understand that correctly?

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

Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. The other issue that we talked about, and you said you thought it was very important, was the continued implementation of the Women,
Peace, and Security Act, to ensure that we are including women in all of our actions through the Department of Defense. Again, you committed that that is a very important step and the Department should continue work in that area. Did I understand that correctly?

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

Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. One of the things that you mentioned in your opening statement was the effectiveness of Russia's hybrid warfare, and we are looking at how we respond and hold Russia accountable for what they have been doing, whether it is the SolarWinds hack or efforts to harass our troops in parts of Europe, I certainly support the sanctions that the administration announced last week, but one of the best ways I think we could hold Russia accountable is to stop the completion of Nord Stream 2, and to take every action possible. And I realize that some of those actions need to be taken with the Department of State, but can you talk about why it would be important for us to shut down Nord Stream 2 and what the impact on Russia would
Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. I share your view that Nord Stream 2 is extraordinarily troubling. I think it would create a type of energy dependence on Russia that would give Russia coercive influence over some of our closest allies. When I was in the Obama administration, traveling around Europe with then Vice President Biden, we repeatedly made the case against Nord Stream 2. I am obviously not privy to the ongoing deliberations in the administration on this issue, but, if confirmed, this is an issue I would continue to push on.

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

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

But right now I think one of the biggest challenges we have in the world is in Syria. I have been disappointed that we do not yet have an envoy to Syria appointed by the administration. But can you talk about what you think our
strategy towards Syria should be and how we develop a comprehensive approach to dealing with it? Because I would argue that neither the Obama administration nor the Trump administration had a real strategy on Syria.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Last year, when the U.S. killed Iran's terrorist mastermind, Qasem Soleimani, you claimed now Trump has started a war with Iran and Iraq. But once again, no war followed.
By contrast, in 2010, as coalition forces withdrew from Iraq, you dismissed concerns about the security situation as exaggerated, and said it was very unlikely to trigger a dramatic uptick in violence.

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

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

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

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

Next poster board, please.

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

And could I have the next board, please?
And just last summer, you approvingly quoted a wild-eyed claim that the Republican Party has a death-cult fealty to President Trump.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I appreciate your candor, Senator. To state the obvious, the last few years have been pretty polarizing on social media. I am sure there are times that I got swept up in that. There were a number of positions that President
Trump took that I strongly opposed. I think the language that I used in opposing those was sometimes disrespectful, and for that I apologize.

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

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

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

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

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

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

When I was at the White House, I supported the 10-year, $38 billion memorandum of understanding with Israel so that
we could continue to enhance our security relationship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. Of course, I am not privy to the classified information on SolarWinds. I am aware of the
open source information on it. My understanding is that DoD unclassified systems, some of them were exposed but none were compromised. But obviously the extent of the SolarWinds intrusion is deeply troubling, and I think it is a reminder of just how large the attack surface for cyberattacks is. I fear that that attack surface has grown substantially over the last year, as so many of our activities have moved online as a consequence of the pandemic. So this is an issue of foremost importance, not just for the Department but across the U.S. Government.

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

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

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

In your answer to the chairman on the discussion on the Iran situation you said it is essential prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. If that is true, why, in 2015, did the Iran deal repeal restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program in a series of ways? First, the U.N.
Security Council resolution endorsing the JCPOA repealed previous U.N. Security Council resolutions prohibiting Iran from ballistic missile testing. Then, within the JCPOA itself, restrictions on selling Iran missile technology disappeared after eight years.

Do you have a response to that?

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

I do believe, based on my experience, that the most enduring solution is a diplomatic one, and I support the Biden administration's compliance-for-compliance approach, which is that if Iran moves in full compliance with its obligations that the United States would reenter the agreement, but as a first step towards a stronger and longer agreement in addressing the ballistic missile issue and other destabilizing activities that Iran is engaged in, because it is very important.
Senator Fischer: We all know that ballistic missiles deliver nuclear warheads. Earlier you said that the nuclear program for Iran should be in a box. Are you going to push and insist that ballistic missiles research and the ability for Iran to obtain ballistic missiles, that is going to be off the table in the future in any discussion with Iran?

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

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

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

Senator Fischer: You know, many of us were surprised when the sunsets for these restrictions were included in the deal. A week before the deal was struck, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff, General Dempsey, testified before this committee that, quote, "Under no circumstances should we relieve pressure on Iran relative to ballistic missile
Mr. Kahl: I do not believe we should lift sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile program. I think we should try to get their ballistic missile capabilities reduced through diplomacy, and, if confirmed, I will work with the interagency to make sure we have a clear-eyed approach which addresses this issue.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: It is not.

Senator Fischer: That surprises me, because it has been the consistent advice that we have received as members
of this committee, from senior military leadership, that we not adopt such a policy. Three members of President Obama's Cabinet -- Secretary Carter, Secretary Kerry, and Secretary Moniz, also reportedly opposed adopting a no-first-use policy. That was in 2016. More recently, an independent assessment performed by the Institute for Defense Analysis concluded that, quote, "The U.S. adoption of a no-first-use policy will not bring about a setting that is more conducive to positive behavior by adversaries or to strengthen relations with allies. In light of already constrained U.S. policy and procedure governing nuclear use, the weight of the evidence indicates significant potential for no-first-use to impart more harm than good," end quote.

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

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

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

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

Would you agree with me that climate change is a
national security threat?

Mr. Kahl: It is.

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

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

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

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

Would you agree with me that white supremacy and far right extremism, lack of sufficient inclusiveness all our
continuing threats to our national security and readiness?

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

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

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

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

I would like to pursue some of our arms sales policies and focus first on Saudi Arabia. You and I discussed this issue yesterday. My own view is that we need to reset our
relationship with Saudi Arabia and recalibrate our sales, in fact, cut significantly some of our arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Can you suggest specifics in that regard, and maybe the threshold question is, do you agree that we ought to recalibrate and reset that relationship?

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

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

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

Senator Blumenthal: And do you think that there is an urgency about this review?
Mr. Kahl: I hope there is. From everything I know from the outside there is, and you have my personal commitment that if I am confirmed I will treat the issue urgently, because it is important to me.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with you that the triad has been a bedrock of deterrence and stability for many decades, and I think that the triad remains -- my personal position is that the triad remains a critical hedge against the possibility of technological modernization by our adversaries could call into question the survivability of any one leg of the triad.
So undoubtedly there will be areas that I am not currently privy to, because I do not have access to classified information, so I look forward to being more deeply briefed on those issues, but that is my position.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Correct.

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

Mr. Kahl: My personal position is that we should not start with a budget number in mind and work backwards to strategy. We should do it the other way around. And, if
confirmed, one of my principal jobs, as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, would be to get the strategy right so that we can discern from that the policies and capabilities and investments that are required, and then the budget flows from that.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Senator, I support the defend-forward position and I agree with you that it generated very impressive results, at least as far as I can tell from open source information, in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles. I think it needs to be part of a layered approach, as I mentioned earlier, that also includes better defense of our
networks, better resilience, and also more concerned diplomacy alongside our allies and partners to shape the rules of the road around cyber so that malign actors pay a heavier price for their activities.

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

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

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

I would like to say, regarding the Iran deal, it placed significant and verifiable constraints on Iran's ability to build nuclear weapons. That was the intent of the Iran deal, because Iran was maybe one or two months from having developed a nuclear weapon. So that was a very critical agreement that we got into, and former President Trump's reckless decision to unilaterally -- unilaterally -- withdraw from the Iran deal has made the world less safe. Instead of isolating Iran, the decision isolated the United
States, and now Iran has begun ramping up uranium enrichment efforts, which is exactly what Dr. Kahl said would happen.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: No.

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

Mr. Kahl: No.

Senator Hirono: Dr. Kahl, I applaud Secretary Austin's recent announcement that the Pentagon will prioritize climate change considerations in its activities, risk assessments, and the next National Defense Strategy, and also the recognition in your opening statement that climate change represents an existential challenge. I have to say
that the Department of Defense is one of the few departments that has actually, through testimony of prior DoD Secretaries and going forward, to acknowledge that climate change poses a threat to the world, not just to our country. So it is an existential challenge.

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

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

But there are some things that were not in the 2018 document that we need to include, and climate change is one of them. And so I would see a principal role of mine is to make sure that climate change is integrated into the National Defense Strategy, and then there will be policies and investments that flow from that. And as I said to Senator Blumenthal, that means that the strategy has to account for the effect that climate change will have on DoD operations, on the contingencies the Department could be called upon to respond to, on DoD infrastructure, and also energy resilience. So I would make sure all those areas are
Senator Hirono: Thank you very much for that kind of commitment. I want to turn briefly to the Indo-Pacific AOR. In fiscal year 2021, NDAA included $2.2 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, PDI, to bolster our alliances in the Indo-Pacific and counter increasingly malign Chinese activities in the region. The INDOPACOM commander, Admiral Davidson, just submitted a report asking for an additional $4.7 billion in fiscal year 2022 for the PDI to continue momentum in this area.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Let me introduce and recognize Senator Ernst.
Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, very much.

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

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

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

So, Mr. Kahl, do you stand by your assessment that the Trump administration was baiting Iran into restarting its nuclear program?
Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. My concern with the maximum pressure campaign was largely that it would have two consequences. One is that it would encourage Iran to re-accelerate its nuclear program, and two, that it would encourage Iran to try to generate counter-leverage by increasing their provocations in the region. Both of those things have happened in the last three years. Iran is a lot closer to the fissile material required for a nuclear weapon than they were at the end of the Obama administration, and we see more attacks against our forces in Iraq. We have seen attacks in the Strait of Hormuz. We have seen more drone attacks and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And so it is a huge problem for us, but one that unfortunately does not require a lot of resources for Iran.
to carry out.

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

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

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

I served in uniform in the Middle East. I have a daughter that is on track to serve in our great Army in just a little over a year. And I will not be supporting your
nomination because I believe that my daughter, her
colleagues, the other young men and women that are choosing
to serve in our armed forces deserve someone that will take
a serious outlook to policy and not put this kind of garbage
out in front of the American public.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

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

President Trump's Secretary of Defense, James Mattis,
who clearly understood Republican legislative opposition to
the JCPOA, advised him to stay in the deal. President
Trump's Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, who clearly
understood Republican legislative opposition to the JCPOA,
advised him to stay in the deal. Head of the Joint Chiefs
of Staff, General Dunford, who clearly understood Republican
opposition to the deal, told President Trump to stay in the
deal. Instead, he backed out of the deal and he shifted the world's attention from Iran's behavior to America's good faith, would American good faith follow a diplomatic deal. So just some basic facts about the deal.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes, it does.

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

Mr. Kahl: No.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: We do.

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

Mr. Kahl: Correct.

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

Mr. Kahl: Correct.

Senator Kaine: And there was an additional element -- some of my colleagues have asked about sunsets -- there was an additional element of the JCPOA that did not sunset, like the open commitment to never purchase, acquire, or develop nuclear weapons. The element that did not sunset was there was about 30 years of enhance inspection and other requirements that Iran had to follow, but at the end of year 30, those enhanced inspections, many of them, or restrictions on centrifuges, progressively expired. By year 30, Iran had pledged, henceforth, it would always follow all
IAEA inspection protocols, including the additional protocol that was developed after North Korea cheated on IAEA inspections. And that was permanent and never sunset. Correct?

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

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

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

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

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

Senator Kaine: I really believe that the controversy over your nomination is essentially a proxy war.
Republicans did not like the Iran deal. They were really happy that President Trump pulled out of it, over the objections of Secretary Mattis, Secretary Tillerson, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dunford. I think the activities in the region have demonstrated that the pulling out of that deal has had very, very negative consequences, and we are living them today. It is a very different reality than it was in 2015.

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

Thank you, Dr. Kahl.

Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

Let me recognize Senator Tillis.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Dr. Kahl, congratulations on your nomination being put forward. I had not thought about talking about the JCPOA, but I really do not think the discussion we are having here today relates to legitimate policy differences on JCPOA. I think it is a series of fact patterns and your communications that are reminiscent of a Trump nominee who ultimately withdrew because of concerns expressed by some of my colleagues on
both sides of the aisle about temperament and positions that
that person took before they were set forth as a nomination.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: So I appreciate that question. I think you
can have confidence because the last time I was a senior
defense official that is how I comported myself. Keep in mind I worked for two Republican Secretaries of Defense. I do not think you will find anybody I worked with, either in the Bush administration or in the Obama administration, when I worked for Secretary Gates, who would accuse me of being partisan in the halls of the Pentagon. I think I had good relationships with the House and Senate committees when I was in office.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: So I think the tweets that you reference were in response to media reports at the time. I mean, as
you know, Senator, the overwhelming consensus of our intelligence community was that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. The Mueller report, which you made reference to, as well as the bipartisan Senate Intelligence report found that members of the Trump campaign were aware of Russian activities, encouraged them, and were eager to benefit from them.

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

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

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

My chief concern at the time, as I am sure you are aware, was with the escalatory dimensions, which is why, of
course, the Bush administration had also not taken a shot. It was not just the Obama administration. And we came very close. As you know, the Iranians retaliated for the strike with a missile salvo against Al Asad Air Base in western Iraq. Fortunately, no servicemembers were killed but dozens suffered brain injuries. And so we came very close to a major shooting war with Iran, and that was my concern.

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

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

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

[Laughter.]

Mr. Kahl: It is a good point.

Senator King: I want to ask a question that we could take an hour or two hours or several days discussing, and I would like you to try to give me an answer in about a minute and half. What does China want? As we try to develop policy with regard to China, I think it is important to understand and appreciate what it is they are seeking, what are their goals. I asked Henry Kissinger that question and
he gave me a very thorough answer. Give me a minute of
thought of what you think the goals of China are which
should inform our foreign and military policy.

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

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

Senator King: Thank you. You mentioned earlier cyber
and you mentioned the Solarium Commission. I appreciate
that. Many of us did a lot of work in that area. One of
the points of emphasis in our report was the importance of
deterrence, the importance of imposing costs on our 
adversaries, on those who would intrude in terms of cyber in 
our country, and also the importance of allies.

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

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

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

But deterrence can also be deterrence by denial, that 
is, adjusting the cost benefit calculation of the adversary 
so that they just do not think it is worth it. And that is 
a mix, I think, of a combination of defense of our networks 
and resilience of those networks, because, frankly, some 
attacks are always going to get through and so you need to 
be able to reconstitute your systems quickly, especially in 
the military domain where seconds matter.
Senator King: Let me move to the allies piece. My sense is that sanctions are much more effective if they are multilateral rather than unilateral, number one, and number two, there is some utility in trying to develop an international set of norms and expectations and guardrails around cyber in order to indicate what the rules of the road are. And we want an adversary who uses cyber as a means of national power to understand that they can become a pariah nation.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: There is no question it is a national security threat for all of the reasons you mentioned.
Changing weather patterns and rising seas are going to displace hundreds of millions of people. You are also likely to see other humanitarian and food crises that drive displacement issues. We have already seen, just our hemisphere, the displacement by recent hurricanes in places like the Northern Triangle and Central America. So this problem is not going to go away and it is going to continue to get worse.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

I was not going to bring up any of the political issues until you responded to Senator Tillis. I just have to address the Russian collusion question. I think he asked a pretty straightforward question, after Russian collusion has been deemed to be basically a lie by the Mueller report and the bipartisan Senate committee report. I think you started out your response to his question about your tweets pretty good, pretty well. You said that they were a reflection of
media reports at the time. I just wish you would have continued to say now that the media have been proven to be liars, I no longer believe that, rather than trying to rationalize it by changing the definition of collusion.

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

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

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

Senator Cramer: Well, if you believe the STRATCOM commander then that is pretty good advice, I would say, and
I will not get further into the funding ramp for GBSD, because we really are, I think, at the end of the rope and cannot change that trajectory much, so I look forward to you digging into that more.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Yeah. I think the Abraham Accords, I give the Trump administration credit for getting the Abraham Accords across the goal line. I think it is the culmination of set of trends, frankly, that have been in the region for about a decade. One is a common assessment of the Iranian
threat, which has moved Israel closer to many of its Arab neighbors. Two is a concern for various extreme forms of Islamism — al Qaeda, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood. And another factor, I think, is a perception that the region needs to rely more on itself, and so that has pushed Israel and its neighbors together.

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

Senator Cramer: Thank you. Now one more thing, because I have really — again, I have enjoyed this very much, this discussion today, especially in the honestly policy disagreements. I really appreciated your answers to Senator Shaheen about Nord Stream 2. And we know this is a continuation of policies by this government, and we have great concern. But it had not occurred to me until just a little bit ago how directly connected Nord Stream 2 is to not only national security but to climate change. And I would like you, if you could, to speak just a little bit on a good alternative to Russian oil to our European allies, and that might be American LNG, which is produced and delivered with about a 46 percent lower emissions, greenhouse gas emissions. So it both is, as I said, a national security benefit as well as a greenhouse gas emissions benefit.
Mr. Kahl: Well, Senator, obviously I am not an environmental expert or an expert on LNG. I do think there is a good argument that LNG is an important bridge fuel to a more carbon-neutral fuel mix, our energy mix, but I would have to look into the issue more to give you a better answer.

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

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

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

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

So while the U.S. arms embargo on Iran remains in place, we cannot succeed alone. Dr. Kahl, if you are
confirmed, how will you work to curb the flow of
conventional weapons to and from Iran?

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

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

Senator Rosen: Building on that, we do need those
partners to deter Iranian aggression, and we want to stop
the transfers of conventional arms to terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, and we want to ensure freedom of navigation in that region's waterways. And so what can we do in that regard?

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes. Well, Senator, this is an issue that is very personal to me. When I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East I was heavily
focused on ensuring Israel's QME, even as we were building up the capabilities of other actors in the region to counterbalance Iran. As you know, there were large arms sales to the UAE, to Saudi Arabia, and others, but as we did that, at least when I was at the Pentagon, we were always mindful that anything we did had to respect our commitment to Israel, to ensure that they remained at the cutting edge and achieved a qualitative military edge against any combination of states in the region.

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

Mr. Kahl: Thank you for that. As I mentioned earlier, I support the defend forward position. I am obviously not privy to classified operations that have happened in the context of that approach, but I support the general approach. I think it is only part of the equation. We not only have to be able to defend forward, we have to be able to engage in offensive action in response to malign activity. We have to be better at defending our networks. The SolarWinds incident is a reminder of the vulnerability across the U.S. Government in that regard. Our networks
have to be more resilient so they bounce back further, and we have to work, as I discussed with Senator King, we have to work alongside our allies on new norms and rules of the road to really constrain our adversaries.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Senator Blackburn: Yes or no?

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

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I think that al Qaeda remains a significant threat to the United States.
Senator Blackburn: You claimed several times that Trump administration responses to Iranian aggression would lead directly to war. Did they?

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

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

Mr. Kahl: It did not.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I think that North Korea --

Senator Blackburn: To China?

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

Senator Blackburn: Okay. Let's talk about Pacific deterrence. Current top Pentagon leadership has identified China as the "pacing challenge" for the Department. If confirmed, how would you work with the combatant commands to balance the long-term vision of policy against the resources that the commanders need right now?
Mr. Kahl: I think China is an example of where we do not have the luxury of choosing between doing things now and also planning for the long term. We have to do both, because China poses a clear and immediate challenge to U.S. interests and allies in the Indo-Pacific, so we have to make sure that right now our forces are ready and lethal, that they are as distributed and resilient as possible, that we are as integrated with our allies and partners as possible, but we also need to be making the investments as a nation and as a department in the types of capabilities down the line that will determine who wins the competition for the 21st century. That means artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and other cutting-edge technologies.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

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

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

So I really enjoyed our conversation last week. As you
know, I have long been concerned about civilians who are harmed as a result of our overseas military operations. I have introduced two separate comprehensive bills to improve transparency and reporting of civilian casualties, as well as strengthen how we investigate and address cases when civilians are harmed by U.S. or U.S.-led military operations.

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

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

Senator Warren: Good. Well, I really appreciate that. You know, over the last several fiscal years Congress has
provided the DoD with funding to make offers ex gratia of payments to civilians harmed in the U.S. and U.S.-led coalition operations, and these are cash payments. Yet as I understand it, very few payments have been made, and no claims process exists.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes, I commit to that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren.

Let me now recognize Senator Tuberville.

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

In 2016, three NATO countries, including the United States, they met their defense spend. Only three. Now we have got most of them involved in it. How do you stand on that?
Mr. Kahl: I think it is important that all the NATO countries live up to their commitments that were made at Wales in 2014, the 2 percent threshold that you mentioned, and I am glad that more of those countries are turning in that direction, but we can do better.

Senator Tuberville: Will you stay on top of it?

Mr. Kahl: Yes, sir.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I think that Yemen is one of the more vexing
and tragic circumstances in the world. The Houthis are not good actors, but the war itself has also brought about the greatest humanitarian disaster in the world, at least pre-COVID, and COVID has actually made it worse. I do not think that our support for the Saudi coalition has been very effective in pushing back Houthi influence. I think the best strategy for reducing Houthi influence is moving towards a peace agreement that changes the nature of that government.

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

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

Anyway, I hope that answers your question.

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville. Senator
Peters, please.

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

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

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

Please explain why you do not have visibility of the casualties when they seem to be fairly clear, and given the casualties, and given the fact that this is a major humanitarian crisis, how would you advise the President and folks at the Department of Defense that we need a policy that is dealing with this, and we need it now?
Mr. Kahl: So I agree with you completely, and I am aware of the estimates that you mentioned. I think the APQ answer was largely in terms of precision, that is, the precise number of civilian casualties may not be known to the Department, but I have no reason to question the outside assessment. It is not just that tens of thousands have been killed and wounded, but millions have been pushed to the brink of starvation, or are starving as we speak. I agree with your assessment, that it is the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet.

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

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

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

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

4 My own view is that we have to rally what used to be
called the free world, that is the other advanced
democracies and like-minded states, to address issues like
cyberattacks, disinformation, but also things like
weaponized corruption, energy coercion, supply chain
vulnerabilities. The dawning recognition among democracies
that they face common challenges from Russia, China, and
other authoritarian powers is an opportunity for us, as the
United States, to lead in all of those areas.

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

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

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

Senator Peters: Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters. Now let me
recognize Senator Sullivan for the traditional five-minute round.

[Laughter.]

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

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

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

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

Mr. Chairman, I have a letter from several Senate
Democrats, many of whom are on this committee, who raised concerns about this nominee, General Tata, who said, quote, "he was not qualified because of his record of inflammatory comments, which disqualify him," and including comments against Members of Congress.

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

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

Senator Kaine, I agree with him a lot. This is a very bipartisan committee. He said your nomination is about the JCPOA. I would say it is actually broader than that. And I do want to correct my friend. The JCPOA was the first agreement in U.S. history that passed with a partisan minority in the House and Senate. So when Senator Kaine says Republicans were against it, Democrats were for it, he is incorrect. A partisan majority of Republicans and Democrats were against it in both the House and the Senate. But I agree with Senator Kaine that the concerns about your
record on Iran are a critical element of your confirmation.

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

Mr. Kahl: Yes.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I support taking action against Iran and its proxies when they threaten our forces. When I was at the Pentagon as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense I supported our action by, with, and through the Iraqis, to go after these proxy networks, to include, in 2011, when we saw
a very concerning increase in rocket attacks that were causing American casualties. I was a strong proponent of hitting back, not just with the Iraqis but unilaterally.

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

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

I have served 26 years in the United States Marine Corps, still serving. Very diverse units, racially [inaudible] arms units. I have seen one serious incident, just in my personal experience of racism, where, as a young Marine, I took action to stamp that out.
What data or information are you basing that statement on? It is a big statement, and I am curious about that.

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

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

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

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

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

Senator Sullivan: So that is what your statement said.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: -- looks at.

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

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

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan: -- Senator Inhofe.

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

Senator Sullivan: That was an important issue.

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

Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this very important hearing, and, Dr. Kahl, good to see you again. We had a great conversation yesterday. Today,
though, I would like to focus on the current pacing threat for the Department of Defense, competition with the PRC. I know you have already had this discussion a little bit today already, and I also thank my colleague from Hawaii, Senator Hirono, for bringing this up also.

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Thank you, Senator. I think the biggest opportunity is the growing concern and recognition that a
more assertive China has produced. That is, I think that a lot of our allies and partners are nervous. Frankly, I think that the pandemic and China's early cover-up of the pandemic and some of its heavy-handed, wolf warrior diplomacy during the pandemic has also created opportunities for us to lean in with countries who are increasing worried about Beijing.

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

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

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

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

22 If confirmed, how would you personally work to increase
23 diversity in the DoD leadership, both civilian and uniform,
24 and include people of color and women so they can contribute
25 to the mission, and ensure that everyone in the Office of
26 the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy has the necessary
Mr. Kahl: I think everybody in the DoD leadership has an obligation to break down barriers to the advancement of women and people of color. I agree 100 percent that the top ranks, both civilian and military, do not reflect the diversity of the United States. I think we are stronger, as a country, when our workforce, including our national security workforce, reflects the full diversity that our country brings to bear. I think that is another one of our asymmetric advantages, one that we are not taking advantage of enough, because there is not enough diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I do.

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

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

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

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

Senator Hawley: So let me ask you this. Our pacing theater is INDOPACOM. You spent your career focused on the Middle East, however. So let me just ask you. I mean, why would we confirm another Middle East hand to lead the
Department of Defense when we are trying to steer the
Department's focus towards PACOM?

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

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

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

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

You said that troops in Afghanistan, troop levels
should be tied to conditions on the ground, and that any withdrawal should support diplomatic efforts and be executed in close consultation with our NATO resolute support partners. Does that mean that you do not support the peace agreement reached by the previous administration?

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

Senator Hawley: How are we going to end it?

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Well, first of all, I need to get briefed on the current threat matrix. A lot of my information on ISIS, Khorasan, or the Taliban or al Qaeda is four years out of date in the classified domain. My belief is that we need to
remain postured in the region to deal with the residual
counterterrorism issues that arise from groups like al Qaeda
and ISIS.

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

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

So how are we going to prioritize the Indo-Pacific, how
are we going to prioritize the growing and, indeed, imminent
security threat from China, while also engaging heavily in
Europe, engaging heavily in CENTCOM, without any rebalancing
in those places? Can you just give me your -- this is,
obviously, a huge problem. The last administration
encountered the same problem. What are your thoughts on
this?
Mr. Kahl: So the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance that the administration released yesterday racked and stacked the regions. You know, we have interests in all the regions -- we are a global power. We have interests everywhere. But there are certain regions where it will need to be more of an economy of effort. And I think the Indo-Pacific is number one with a bullet for security and economic reasons; Europe is probably number two, because of the challenge that Russia poses to us and the NATO alliance, and because NATO is a force multiplier for us, globally. So I would put Indo-Pacific and Europe one and two. The Western Hemisphere is always an interest of ours, going back to the founding of the republic, but more of an economy of effort. And I think we need to right-size our presence in the Middle East and Central Asia, along the lines that we just discussed, precisely because of the accelerating pace of great power competition, which I think the 2018 National Defense Strategy correctly kind of re-centered our focus on that. And, if confirmed, I would look to continue that trend.

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

Chairman Reed: Quickly.

Senator Hawley: Quickly. All right. Not to imitate Senator Sullivan, but I just want to ask you about Israel.
According to news reports, Dr. Kahl, you led the effort to remove recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel from the 2012 Democratic Party platform. You also reportedly staffed the effort to condemn Israel at the U.N. Security Council in late 2016, and, of course, you have spoken about against moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Do you see Israel as a valued partner? I mean, obviously, those positions are in serious tension with the interests and positions of our Israeli partners. Do you see them as a valued partner, and how are you going to respond to their concerns over these positions?

Mr. Kahl: So absolutely, and I had the opportunity earlier to go through my record on supporting Israel, so I will not recapitulate that here, but it is long. I will just say, in 2012, the platform that I was involved in writing simply represented the U.S. official policy at the time, which was the same policy as in the Bush administration, which was not to formally recognize Jerusalem because it was a final status issue. The platform was amended, and I had no problem with the amendment. The embassy has been moved. I support President Biden's policy on that, not to move it back.

So I do not imagine this will cause any concerns in Israel or elsewhere if I were to be confirmed for this position. And just for the record, I had zero involvement
in the U.N. Security Council resolution, in pushing for it
or otherwise, in 2016.

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

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

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

Mr. Kahl: Yeah. First of all, I could not agree with
you more about -- look, I would not describe SolarWinds as a
wake-up call, and I know you are not doing that either. I
think it is just the latest reminder of how vulnerable our
networks are. And as I mentioned earlier, I think this is a
vulnerability that has only increased as a consequence of
the pandemic, because so much of our daily lives has
migrated online. You know, I have a nine-year-old daughter
and a six-year-old son, and they are doing fourth grade and
kindergarten, you know, on Zoom, every day. But our
enterprises, our institutions -- you know, luckily, the
Department of Defense is unclassified networks. While being
exposed, we are not compromised. But huge portions of the
U.S. Government appear to have been compromised by this, at
the unclassified level.
So if I am confirmed, it is an issue I need to dig into more deeply, but we need to make sure that our networks are defended and resilient in the face of this, because these attacks by Russia and other countries are not going to go away. China, North Korea, Iran, and non-state actors are all looking to go after us in the cyber domain.

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

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

So if I am confirmed, I would anticipate participating in that interagency conversation, and as I learn more I would hope to come back to talk to you about it.
Senator Kelly: It is critical we figure out a way out of this situation, because if we do not, this is going to continue to happen.

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

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

Hypersonics, directed energy -- these are all things.

So I think as we craft our National Defense Strategy and then form a budget around that, we have to be prioritizing investments in these areas, because we know that China is. We know they are. We know they are committed to spending hundreds of billions of dollars precisely to plant the flag on the very technologies that
they understand will determine the strategic competition for the rest of this century.

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

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

Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Kahl: Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Now let me recognize the ranking member for his concluding comments.
Senator Inhofe: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we probably have run out of interest here.

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

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

Senator Cotton: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Dr. Kahl, I want to be very specific here. You gave evasive answers to Senator Rounds, Senator Cramer, and Senator Tuberville on the ground-based strategic deterrent, the replacement program for the Minuteman missile. We are pleased to hear that you support the triad, as you said, as a general matter, pleased to hear that you have no reason to question Admiral Richard, the commander of Strategic Command, that the Minuteman cannot be extended. But the simple and specific question is, do you or do you not support the
continued full funding of the ground-based strategic
deterrent as the future of the ground leg of the nuclear
triad?

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

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

Mr. Kahl: I have a well-grounded opinion that all
three legs of the triad need to be viable. They need to be
effective, safe, secure, they need to be credible to our
adversaries and our allies. As I said, I have no reason to
question the STRATCOM commander's assessment. But as you
know, Senator, on nuclear weapons there are issues that are highly classified, and details that I am simply not privy to. So, if confirmed, I will dig into those details and I would be happy to come back to talk to you, or anybody else on this committee, about that, if I am confirmed.

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

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

So those are very practical concerns, and I think your answer reflected those practical concerns, and also indicated that the triad has to continue to protect the
United States. Any comment?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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