HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE REAUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

Thursday, April 22, 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-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding], Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren, Peters, Manchin, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND

Chairman Reed: Let me call the hearing to order.

This morning the committee will receive testimony from General McKenzie, Commander, United States Central Command, CENTCOM, and General Townsend, Commander, United States Africa Command, or AFRICOM. Thank you both for your many decades of military service, and please extend our appreciation to the men and women serving under you. And we appreciate very much their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families on behalf of the United States.

Last week, in one of the most challenging decisions facing President Biden, he announced the withdrawal of all forces from Afghanistan by September 11th, 2021. It appears the President concluded that more troops might buy more time and casualties, but more time would not create a government that could defeat the Taliban and effectively govern Afghanistan. The President's decision, however, should be seen as a transition, not closure, and should not mean an end to our counterterrorism efforts. Most importantly, we must ensure that Afghanistan will not be a source of planning, plotting, or projection of terrorist attacks around the globe, including against the homeland. And, General McKenzie, I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on how best to transition to a new counterterrorism
architecture in the region to continue to degrade al-Qaeda, ISIS of Khorasan Province, and other terrorist groups, and prevent their ability to attack the homeland.

Additionally, support to the Afghan forces will remain vital. The intelligence community's Annual Threat Assessment for 2021 noted, "The Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support." I would like to understand plans to continue training and assistance to the Afghan forces in light of the transition, and how we will balance that against the need to conduct robust oversight of funding that we provide to the Afghan Government and forces.

General McKenzie, you are also facing a complex challenge of deterring the threat from Iran and its proxies while the Administration seeks a diplomatic solution to contain the Iranian nuclear threat. I would be interested to hear an update on your progress in meeting these challenges, particularly against the backdrop of indirect talks in Vienna, and the recent attack on the Natanz nuclear facility, and Iran's announcement that they have begun enriching uranium up to 60 percent, which would move it closer than ever before to the 90-percent purity threshold required for weapons-grade uranium.

Turning to AFRICOM, General Townsend, you have said that Al-Shabab is the largest and most violent of al-Qaeda's
branches worldwide, yet the previous Administration chose, with little notice, to remove the vast majority of U.S. troops from Somalia. The Biden Administration is now reviewing that decision as part of a larger assessment of our strategy in Somalia. I hope you will share your views on the current security situation as well as the status of our engagement with our Somali partners, particularly in light of news this week that the Somali federal government has extended the mandates of the president and parliament by 2 years. This move directly undermines the progress made on democratic processes and institutional reforms, and may threaten international support.

As you noted in your testimony, Africa is a vast continent of opportunity and promise, but one that includes many strategic challenges, many of which are overlapping also. Population growth, food insecurity, and impacts from climate change increase instability, drive conflict, and further threaten vulnerable populations. These challenges do not lend themselves to geographic or bureaucratic boundaries. They require well-resourced and well-integrated whole-of-government solutions. I look forward to your views on the importance of investing in diplomacy and development to force long-term stability, as well as an update on AFRICOM’s support to the Interagency in these efforts.

Our competitors recognize that investing in Africa and
the Middle East is in their long-term interests, as evidenced by Chinese and Russian military and economic activity that continues to grow in these critical regions. General Townsend and General McKenzie, I look forward to hearing your views and how we best leverage U.S. views -- U.S. engagement, rather, and investments to create attractive alternatives and ensure we maintain key partnerships and access. I want to thank you again for being here this morning, and I look forward to your testimony.

And before I turn it over to the ranking member, Senator Inhofe, I would like to remind my colleagues that there will be an informal classified briefing immediately following this session in SVC-217, the Office of Senate Security Center. Senator Inhofe?
STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM
OKLAHOMA

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over the past few years, this committee's top priority has been ensuring that we implement the -- there it is -- this document. It has been kind of a -- it is surprising that something that was put together back in 2018 by an equal number of Democrats and Republicans has been so accurate, and we have been using that as a blueprint. And if we are serious about the security of our Nation, we need resources to make the -- this NDA happen, make it a reality. The President's budget request does not meet this standard. Instead, it represents a decline in defense spending, which will have serious implications for our national security. It also means our combatant commanders will have to do more with less, so the standard that was put forth was not met by the President. Our top military commanders have testified in unison in recent weeks that the threats to the United States are growing at an alarming rate. Cutting the defense budget sends exactly the wrong signals to our allies and our adversaries alike.

General Townsend, you highlighted China's growth in -- growing use in Africa as a power projection platform for the military. They have secured their first overseas base in Djibouti. We have been there. We have witnessed that. And
they are aggressively pursuing a base on Africa's west coast, which would be the first time, giving China an enduring naval presence in the southern Atlantic. With less than 6,000 troops on the continent and the continued lack of ISR, I hope DOD's Global Posture Review will ensure your resource shortfalls are being addressed. In CENTCOM, we have the opposite problem. It gets significant resources to counter al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Iranian-backed terrorists.

General McKenzie, in the last year, I understand you have been able to reduce U.S. troop levels in the region, but I worry this Administration's policies in your region are driven more by politics than the national security. First, in Afghanistan, the Administration is, by its own admission, executing a calendar-based drawdown rather than a condition-based one. We know this is true, and we have talked about this for quite a period of time. General McKenzie, you recently stated that the Taliban still has to take action to meet the conditions for U.S. troop withdrawal of the February 2020 agreement. And the arbitrary September the 11th deadline for troop drawdown risks a power vacuum that terrorists will dominate and use to threaten our homeland again. I want to add here that I am extremely disappointed that General Miller has not yet been scheduled to testify publicly before this committee, and I hope that you will work to fix that, General McKenzie.
Secondly, regarding Iran. The Administration is moving quickly to negotiate a quick return to the failed 2015 Iran deal granting Tehran large sanctions relief, even though the nuclear limitations will begin to expire within the next 5 years. As we saw during the Obama Administration, Iran will use sanctions relief to fund terrorist groups, including the ones currently targeting the men and women in uniform that you command. Third, in Yemen, the Administration is pulling back from its -- from our Saudi partners, while, at the same time, the Iran-backed Houthis are escalating their attacks. We should not expect the Saudis to tolerate a perpetual Houthi ballistic missile that -- and armed drone threat on our border. We would not tolerate one on our border. So the United States arms sales restrictions could very well lead the Saudis to seek support from our peer competitors. General McKenzie, I hope you will address these issues and offer your views on how to heighten risk of that and manage that in the year ahead.

So I thank both of you for your testimony and your presence here today, and also in the closed session that we will have, as the chairman mentioned. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe, and let me concur with the ranking member. We have been pressing the Department for General Miller to testify in an open hearing
on Afghanistan well before the decision was made by
President Biden with respect to forces in Afghanistan. And
now with that decision, it is even more important that we
receive direct, in-person communication from General Miller.
The last time we had such an open hearing was, I believe,
with General Nicholson in 2017, so we need to carry out our
duties, the direct contact. And I will once again, General
McKenzie, ask for your assistance and relay that message,
and hopefully General Miller will be here very shortly.

And with that, let me now recognize the witnesses,
beginning with General McKenzie. Thank you, sir.
STATEMENT OF GENERAL KENNETH F. MCKENZIE, JR., USMC, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

General McKenzie: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I appear before you proudly representing the 70,000 men and women of the United States Central Command. It is a great pleasure to be with you here today. It is my duty to testify, of course, but I have to say it is also a privilege to address this body, and all the greater honor to do so beside the commander of U.S. Africa Command, General Steve Townsend. I would also like to recognize my senior enlisted leader, Fleet Master Chief Jamie Herdel of the Navy, who is here with me today, as well as chief legislative assistant, Air Force Colonel Jen Hlavaty.

Since my last testimony, the region has continued to evolve, and it remains as dynamic as ever. With the President's announcement last week, we are focused on working closely with the Afghan Government and our NATO allies to responsibly conclude our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. This is my main effort at present, but it is not my only responsibility. My prepared statement addresses our other missions in some detail.

The United States and our NATO allies sent forces to Afghanistan nearly 20 years ago, and the President has judged the time is now appropriate to redeploy and
reposition these forces so that they are better arrayed to deter adversaries and respond to threats globally, including those in the CENTCOM Command region. Our singular purpose in Afghanistan has been to ensure that al-Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations would never again plot, prepare, and perpetrate attacks against the United States and our allies from the refuge of that country. The campaign has evolved considerably over the years, from active combat operations with U.S. and NATO forces in the lead, to advisory efforts designed to enhance the Afghan national defense and security forces' ability to conduct their own campaigns against violent extremist organizations. That there has not been another 9/11 is not an accident. It is the cumulative product of these efforts.

We will now conclude our Afghanistan-based advise and support mission. We are further planning now for continued counterterrorism operations from within the region, ensuring that the violent extremist organizations fighting for their existence in the hinterlands of Afghanistan remain under persistent surveillance and pressure. Ever since 12 September 2001 when our allies invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, we have done everything in Afghanistan within a partnership framework, and that will not change in the months ahead. We are planning collaboratively with our interagency and international
partners and will take measures to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of all of our forces and those of our partners. This includes positioning significant combat power to guard against the possibility that the Taliban decides to interfere in any way with our orderly redeployment.

I would now like to briefly summarize some other challenges in the region.

While Iran has itself avoided state-on-state attacks on U.S. forces since last January's strikes on the Al Asad and Erbil air bases, it continues to menace regional partners and the free flow of commerce through the use of proxies and the proliferation of armed, unmanned aerial systems and other munitions. Its pursuit of regional hegemony remains the greatest source of instability across the Middle East.

In Iraq and Syria, the campaign to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS has entered a new phase. In Iraq, we are engaged in a strategic dialogue with the Iraqi Government to determine the nature of our security relationship. ISIS' physical caliphate is no more, but its toxic ideology lives on. The problem is especially acute in communities ravaged by conflict and its sprawling camps for displaced persons where ISIS preys upon vulnerable populations.

What has accelerated in the last year is the influence of China and Russia, who, each in their own way, are
attempting to subvert the rules-based international order and to gain strategic influence in the Middle East. China's activity in the region takes the form of economic investment, arm sales, and other overtures. Russia has made an 18th century power play in Syria, propping up the murderous Assad regime. The Middle East remains key terrain, and I believe China and Russia will continue to expand their efforts to improve their position in the region and diminish U.S. standing wherever possible.

The CENTCOM area of responsibility is the most cyber-contested theater in the world. It is also the proving ground for the proliferation and employment of unmanned weaponized systems, many emanating from Iran. This difficult and complex operational environment provides units inside CENTCOM opportunities to operate and to conduct realistic training within an environment that exists nowhere else in the world. I can state as a matter of fact that the units and ships assigned to CENTCOM are as ready as any in the Joint Force.

The weeks and months ahead will see us execute a very complicated and demanding military operation to withdraw U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan. This is presently the main effort of my command, and we have the tools necessary to accomplish this task. With that, I look forward to answering your questions.
[The prepared statement of General McKenzie follows:]
Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General McKenzie.

General Townsend, please.
STATEMENT OF GENERAL STEPHEN TOWNSEND, COMMANDER,
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

General Townsend: Can you hear me?
Chairman Reed: Yes, sir.

General Townsend: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear today. It is a privilege to represent America's exceptional men and women at U.S. Africa Command, who are dedicated to securing U.S. interests and preserving our strategic options on the African continent. This morning I am accompanied by AFRICOM's senior enlisted leader, Marine Corps Sergeant Major Richard Thresher, and one of my key staff advisors, Air Force Colonel Jacqueline Breeden. I am also here this morning with my colleague and friend, General Frank McKenzie, the CENTCOM commander, to discuss shared challenges and opportunities in our areas of responsibility and the high return the American people give of their defense investments around the globe.

Historically, America has not been penalized for underestimating the importance of Africa. Today, we can no longer afford to underestimate the economic opportunity and the strategic consequence that Africa embodies, and which competitors, like China and Russia, fully recognize. Africa is a crossroads of the globe. The recent blockage of the
Suez Canal not only demonstrated the importance of critical sea lines of communication flowing through the Mediterranean and Red Seas, but also around the Cape of Good Hope. Violent extremist organizations, competitor activities, and fragile states are among some of the threats to U.S. interests.

Beyond geography, global population growth is largely African. By 2050, 1 in 4 people on the planet will live in Africa. Rapidly-growing markets, 60 percent of the world's arable land, and vast untapped resources, including strategic rare earth minerals, provide tremendous economic potential. Thirteen of the world's 25 fastest-growing economies are in Africa. Africa's tremendous opportunities are offset by significant challenges, including climate change, food shortages, poverty, ungoverned spaces, historic grievances, and other factors, that make the continent also home to 14 of the world's 20 most fragile countries.

Our strategic competitors are very active in Africa. China has invested heavily in their second continent, where some think tanks call it China's fifth island chain. Russia seeks to exploit instability and fragility for their own gain and at U.S. expense. Iran is increasingly active on the continent. At the same time, African-based violent extremists, like Al-Qaeda affiliates, Al-Shabab and ISIS, thrive in the government's -- in the continent's ungoverned
spaces. They provide the greatest threat to many of our African partners and aspire to kill Americans in Africa, as well as here at home.

Across the diverse continent, U.S. AFRICOM operates with .3 percent of DOD's budget and .3 percent of DOD's manpower. This tiny investment pays enormous dividends as just under 6,000 servicemembers, civilians, and contractors work with our partners, both interagency and foreign, to counter malign actors and transnational threats, respond to crises, and strengthen security forces to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity. AFRICOM works every day to protect America's security and advance our access and influence. We do this arm in arm with the U.S. Interagency and through coordinated action with our allies and partners. What AFRICOM accomplishes with a few people and a few dollars on a continent 3-and-a-half the size of the continental United States is a bargain for the American taxpayer and a low-cost insurance policy for America's security.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thanks for your continued support to our armed forces, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Townsend follows:]
Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General Townsend, and let me remind my colleagues, because this is a hybrid hearing, of our procedures. Rather than using the early bird rule, we will recognize individuals by seniority. We will do the standard 5-minute rounds of questioning, and I ask my colleagues to keep track of the clock. And finally, for everyone to be heard effectively, I would ask all colleagues to please mute your microphones when not speaking. Thank you very much.

General McKenzie, the intelligence community in the 2021 Estimate indicated that al-Qaeda and ISIS remain among the greatest threats to the United States overseas, and also continue to have the intent to project power into the United States. In addition, the Afghan Study Group, led by General Dunford and Senator Ayotte, concluded that U.S. withdrawal -- a complete withdrawal, which is -- I do not think you are contemplating -- a complete withdrawal would allow Al-Qaeda and other elements to restore themselves within 18 to 36 months. Do you agree with these assessments, one, that al-Qaeda and ISIS are probably among the greatest threats, and, two, if unchecked they will revitalize themselves?

General McKenzie: Chairman, I do agree that al-Qaeda and ISIS remain -- have aspirational goals of continuing to attack us, so I completely agree with the intelligence community's estimate.
Chairman Reed: And Director Burns of the CIA indicated in testimony that the very nature of the withdrawal will diminish, to a degree, our ability to collect intelligence. Do you concur with that assessment, too?

General McKenzie: Sir, I do concur with that assessment. We will have -- we will lose the abilities to see completely into Afghanistan.

Chairman Reed: And so the issue before us, very practically, is how do we compensate for those facts on the ground and here. Perhaps you might reserve some more comments to the classified section. How do you intend to compensate so that we can effectively disrupt Al-Qaeda and ISIS?

General McKenzie: Chairman, I will have more pointed comments in our closed session, but briefly, I would tell you it will be difficult. It is not impossible to accomplish this task. A couple of things have changed since 2001 when were last attacked from Afghanistan. First of all, the United States itself is a far harder target than we were in September of 2001. It is more difficult to operate in the United States. It is more difficult to gain access to the United States. So a variety of things have changed inside the United States, and we should always keep that in mind. Additionally, although we are going, in fact, to pull out of Afghanistan, and I am operating under the concept
that for U.S. military presence, zero is going to be zero, and we can talk a little bit more about that in the closed session. We will have -- we will have an architecture in the theater that will allow us to look into Afghanistan. It will not give us the same picture that we have got now. It will allow us to see in. The ranges will be greater, the resources will be greater, the risks will all be greater, but it will be possible to do those things. It is -- it is certainly not impossible, but we will not have the vision that we have now.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General McKenzie. General Townsend, again, thank you for your -- both of you gentlemen for your leadership and your advice to the committee. We have withdrawn, effectively, our forces from Somalia. Can you assess what is the operational effect? And one of the factors that I think you both recognize is that the terrorist threat once was -- seemed to be solely located in the mountains of Afghanistan, but now it is dispersed throughout the entire CENTCOM region. Syria has the capability of generating forces, and Somalia also, with Al-Shabab, has that capability. So can you give us a sense of the effect of the withdrawal on your operations?

General Townsend: Thank you, Chairman. So in the last 60 to 90 days of the previous Administration, we were directed, as you stated, to reposition our forces out of
Somalia. We left a small footprint behind in Mogadishu tied into the embassy there of less than 100. Since that time, we have been commuting to work. We work virtually with our partners from bases in the region, and then we fly in to conduct training and to advise and assist our partners. We have done four such operations in the last roughly 90 days. One of them is ongoing right now, and we are continually revising and improving the way that we do that to make it as effective as we can.

There is no denying that repositioning forces out of Somalia has introduced new layers of complexity and risk. And, as General McKenzie said, our understanding of what is happening in Somalia is less now than it was when we were there on the ground physically located with our partners, so we are working to make this new mode of operation work. At the same time, we are participating in the Global Posture Review with the Department of Defense, and we are presenting -- will be presenting options to the Secretary of Defense on the way ahead. And, of course, I do not want to get ahead of my civilian leadership to address that, but we are working to make it work.

I would say that probably, though, the biggest impact to security in Somalia right now is less Al-Shabab and more so the political dysfunction that exists between the federal government of Somalia and the federal member states, and, as
you mentioned in your opening remarks, the extra-
constitutional extension of the president's term in office.
That is our biggest challenge, I think, right now.

Chairman Reed: Thank you. Ironically or
coincidentally, what you are anticipating and actually
experience at this moment is very much the same situation
that General McKenzie might face, having withdrawn forces
from the most -- from the target country, for want of a
better word. You have to operate on the periphery. You are
doing that, and you face political/cultural issues, and
General McKenzie will face political/cultural issues. So,
again, I think this is a -- we look forward to the
classified session to get more into detail of these
questions. Thank you. Senator Inhofe, please.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chairman. You
hit it right on there. The term that is being used, "over
the horizon," which merely means that you are taking troops
out of the area and conducting your activity from another
country, and that is something that I disagreed with in the
previous Administration. The last Administration pulled
nearly all of the 200 troops that we had in Somalia out, and
that was the previous Administration. I disagreed with that
at that time, and I really think that we were right in
disagreeing with that. History has shown that it does not
work as well from an adjoining country as it does from the
country where the activity is. So I would say -- I would
ask them the -- General Townsend, I know you are going to be
able to do this and will continue to do it, but does an
over-the-horizon counterterrorism strategy in Somalia not
make your job harder? General Townsend.

General Townsend: Ranking Member, I would agree with
the General McKenzie's characterization. It makes it more
difficult. It does not make it impossible.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, well, I understand that, and I
would say the same thing. I know that General McKenzie has
already expressed, yeah, it makes it more difficult, but it
does not make it impossible. You guys are soldiers and you
have a duty to do it, and you will do it. Now, General
McKenzie, are you concerned that we will not be able to
secure and maintain the U.S. embassy? Tell me what -- if
all this happens as it is designed to happen in Afghanistan,
what will be our situation with the embassy?

General McKenzie: Sir, I believe it is -- it is our
desire to retain an embassy presence in Afghanistan.

Senator Inhofe: You got to protect it, right?

General McKenzie: So we do, and of course.

Senator Inhofe: You got to secure it.

General McKenzie: Sir, we do. Of course, protection
of an embassy is the responsibility of the host nation.

Most of our embassies around the world have very little
military presence there because the host nation lives up to their obligations. It is a matter of very much great concern to me, and I think everyone, whether or not the future Government of Afghanistan is going to be able to do that after we leave. That will be determined here over the next -- over the next few weeks as we begin our drawdown and we evaluate the security platform that is there.

Senator Inhofe: Will you be able to make that determination as the drawdown is occurring? My concern is, if we get to the point where we do not have that help, we would be depending on another country to do what we always do on our own, and that is defend and secure the embassies. That concerns you?

General McKenzie: Ranking Member, it does concern me, but I would -- I would say if we have concerns about the physical security of the embassy, the United States will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure the safety of our diplomats. So we will do that based on the security situation as it exists on the ground in Kabul.

Senator Inhofe: And I would hope that you would anticipate that if there are going to be problems or signs of problems as the drawdown continues, that you would be on top of that, and I am sure you will be. In AFRICOM, General Townsend, the Administration is conducting a global force posture review. Now, that actually started in the previous
Administration, and I can remember at that time cautioning the then Secretary of Defense that we do not have a lot of assets there, and we do not have a lot of protection there, and that is something that has concerned me before, and the same concern is out there right now. We have less than, what, 6,000, I guess, personnel? We face the shortfalls and ISR capability. These things are there. What would you say, General Townsend, is your biggest resource gap that we would be -- that would impact your ability to do your job?

General Townsend: Thanks, Ranking Member. As you pointed out, we underwent the blank slate review, or a COCOM review, in the previous Administration, and by the time we got to the end of that, AFRICOM was still largely intact. I think we removed about 365 troops from the continent. As you pointed out, there is just no fat to cut there, and we did lose some funding in the various programs. Again, I do not want to get ahead of the -- my civilian leaders on the Global Posture Review, so I will -- I will defer discussing options about forces and posture.

But I would say that wherever we have forces in Africa, there are three things that we will need there. First would be the proper amount of personnel recovery and casualty evacuation of medical treatment to make sure our troops are properly protected. Second, as you mentioned, is ISR, and with the loss of the OCO and the ISR Transfer Fund, that
puts at risk one of our primary sources of ISR, which is contracted ISR in Africa. And then the third thing I would say would be funding for building partner capacity and exercises with our partners. We do everything in Africa through partners. There is no activity that America conducts unilaterally in the lead for, so building partner capacity is how we help the Africans and our international partners the most. So I would say those are the three things we will need regardless of what our future posture might be.

Senator Inhofe: And I agree wholeheartedly with that, and I am glad that you are coming out forcefully in making those statements. And when you point out that we are in a continent, they are 3-and-a-half times the size of our country. I had not heard that before, and I -- we have got to be aware of that. This is a problem. We need to have resources in there to do the job. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Senator Shaheen, please.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, and thank you, General McKenzie and General Townsend, for your service and for being here this morning. And I especially appreciate whoever at DOD heard us when we said please give us a map that shows not just Russia and Chinese activity, but also shows U.S. activity, and it is pretty dramatic. It does not
take much to take a look at those pictures and see China's influence all in red in Africa and our influence, and that picture says it all. So I very much appreciate that and have used the map that we got from SOUTHCOM to make the argument that we need more investment in Latin America in the Foreign Relations Committee. Can I just ask for whoever is listening, if there are acronyms on the maps, that you give us a key to tell us what those acronyms mean for those of us who are not dealing with them on a daily basis? I would appreciate it.

General McKenzie, I want to begin with you because in your testimony before this committee last year, you indicated that there had been an increase in Iranian activity in Afghanistan, and that posed a potential risk to U.S. forces. Obviously, the decision to withdraw American troops, which I have expressed concern about, has an impact not just on what happens with Afghan forces and the Afghan people, but it also creates a vacuum that allows regional actors, like Iran, and Pakistan, Russia, and China, to fill that vacuum. Can you talk about what you see happening after the U.S. withdraws and what the potential is for those regional actors to come in and influence what happens?

General McKenzie: Certainly. After we complete our withdrawal, I think the country that is probably going to be most affected is Pakistan because of their long contiguous
border with Afghanistan, the fact that the Taliban, largely
centered in eastern Afghanistan, nonetheless maintains some
presents in Pakistan as well. So I think Pakistan is
interested in stability in Afghanistan, and I think it is
going to be very difficult for that stability to remain
after we leave, so I think Pakistan will be very concerned
by that. I would say, frankly, that it is a situation they
have not been terribly helpful on over the last 20 years, so
that is unfortunate for them that some of this is now going
to come back home in a way that they perhaps did not
anticipate.

As for Iran, you know, Iran does not wish us well, has
always wanted to have the ability in Afghanistan to attack
us or to have others attack us should they choose to do so.
That capability remains, is as extant now as it was last
year. Their interest in Afghanistan is the same as
Pakistan's. They want stability in that region. I think
everyone is concerned that, should we leave, should a civil
war ensue, there is the possibility of a mass refugee
movement that could affect all of the nations around
Afghanistan. So I think they are very concerned by that
because they do not see a clear way forward after we reduce
our presence.

Senator Shaheen: And you mentioned ISIS camps in your
opening remarks. One of the concerns, having visited Syria,
that I have, given our withdrawal -- precipitous withdrawal from Syria, has been the failure to address those camps from family and former ISIS members that continue to have thousands of people in them. And is there any international effort to address those camps and to try and resolve how the international community is going to deal with them before they become another threat?

General McKenzie: I wish I could tell you a better news story there, Senator, but I cannot. It is one of my very highest concerns. Al-Hol camp, which you are very familiar with, is probably the poster child for that -- 62,000 people, principally women, principally young children -- and they are at an immediate risk from disease, cholera or coronavirus. But the long-term threat is ISIS radicalization which goes on in that camp, and unless we find a way to pull these children out of that camp, get them back to the nations that they came from, find a way to reintegrate them into civil society, and de-radicalize them, we are giving ourselves a very significant military problem 10 years down the road.

And I know that our diplomats and our people in USAID are working on this very hard. Nations need to step up, claim their people, repatriate those that they can bring home. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of progress on this front. It is one of my very highest concerns in the region.
Senator Shaheen: We actually created a coordinator through the defense authorization bill -- not last year, I think the year before -- to try and address that. I am not aware that anybody has been appointed to that position yet, so hopefully the Administration will move on that. Before I am out of time, General Townsend, I wanted to ask you about what is happening in Ethiopia in the Tigray region, and to what extent the instability there has the potential to create instability in the surrounding countries, and how concerned you are about that.

General Townsend: Ma'am, that probably takes longer than the 10 or 15 seconds I have to give the -- give the answer. Ethiopia is in the midst of several challenges, three or four significant challenges on multiple fronts. It definitely will affect security and stability in the region, and I can answer that more in another venue.

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. And now let me recognize via Webex, Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. General McKenzie, what is your understanding of the assistance that we will be providing to the Afghan security forces after we withdraw? Secretary Austin, he discussed some of this last week at the
joint press conference at NATO. He spoke about training, securing their borders, and saying we will continue to support them in those efforts, also about funding capabilities, to continue paying salaries for the Afghan security forces. So what types of assistance are you seeing that we are still going to be providing and be responsible for?

General McKenzie: Ma'am, let me just begin by saying we are going to go to zero solution in Afghanistan, so whatever we do, it will largely not be done by people on the ground in Afghanistan. We can still do some things from remote locations. We can -- we can work the administration of the Afghan security force funding, which is sort of the bedrock programmatic weapon or tool that we use to support the Afghan military and other things. We will not be able to do it as efficiently as we do now where we have people in the country that can really follow the -- follow the money all the way to its destination, but we can still follow it into the country at least. And we will work tools to mentor from remote locations that will allow us to work with -- work with the Afghans themselves.

Some of this will be contingent on how big the embassy is that remains, and that is still something that is going to be worked out over the next few weeks. So we could have a -- we could have a security cooperation office in the
embassy. We may not have a security cooperation office in the embassy. That will be ultimately a Department of State decision informed by our assessment of the security situation that is there. It will be far more difficult than the way we do business now. Again, it is certainly not impossible. We will not have the oversight that we have now just because we will not have the people on the ground to actually perform those functions.

Senator Fischer: Now, as look at these force posture options over the horizon, I hope you will certainly keep this committee informed about that as plans are finalized. So I would appreciate that from you.

General McKenzie: Yes, ma'am.

Senator Fischer: For both of you, we talk a lot about ISR shortfalls, and I understand that demand always exceeds supply, but can you share with us what percentage of your ISR needs are being met? And also talk a little bit about the operational impact that this has.

General McKenzie: Sure. I will begin. The majority of my operational ISR requirements are being met, not all of them. They are being -- and I will give you a little bit more in the -- in the closed session. You know, we use a variety of manned and unmanned resources to look at -- to look at our problems, and we are most particularly concerned with ISR in areas where we have U.S. and coalition forces in
combat. And, of course, that is in Afghanistan and in Iraq and Syria, and occasionally in Yemen. So there, we very -- we work very hard to make sure we have got the ISR needed to do those things. We take risks sometimes in the ISR that we apply to the Iran problem, simply because I place a higher priority on ensuring that Americans -- where we have Americans on the ground, we want to make sure we have got the resources there that we need to take a look at in order to protect them.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. General Townsend?

General Townsend: Senator, the joint staff has a formula by which they validate our ISR requests. By that formula, we are resourced to about 30 percent, a little less than one-third of our requirement. If I take a hard look at that formula, I could probably get by with less than that. If I take that into account, our resourcing levels approach 40 or 80 percent. Every day in Africa, we have to make decisions about what we will do and what we will not do based on how much ISR we can apply to the day. And we have a -- we do not need a tremendous amount of gray tail or military ISR platforms. We need some of that to protect our troops, but we can do a lot of our work with contracted solutions, which are a good bargain for the taxpayer.

Senator Fischer: But do you -- I guess, do you both believe that having that presence of ISR used against
hostile nations or their proxy forces, that that does act as a deterrent? General McKenzie, would you say that has happened with Iran?

General McKenzie: I can say unequivocally that the maneuver of ISR assets in the summer of 2019 deflected imminent Iranian attack planning.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. General Townsend, do you have any instances of that?

General Townsend: Yes, Senator. So we know that Al-Shabab looks over their shoulder every day at our -- looking for our ISR, and so we know that they limit their activity because of the presence of our ISR.

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator. Now let me recognize via Webex, Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General McKenzie, I have several questions for you related to Israel. What is the status of Israel being moved to CENTCOM, and what do you see as the benefits for Israeli inclusion in CENTCOM? Also, Israel and EUCOM coordinated very closely on ballistic missile defense, including Aegis support from the Mediterranean. How will you ensure continuity of ballistic missile defense with Israel, and will this continue through EUCOM or move to a different direction with CENTCOM?
General McKenzie: Senator, we are in a planning phase right now to move Israel into U.S. Central Command. We are on about a 6-month planning timeline for that. There are -- as you have noted, a number of things have to happen in order to -- in order to make sure that that move goes seamlessly, and I will dress those here in just a moment. But we work closely with European Command and the joint staff based on guidance we have gotten from the Secretary to make sure that that move is -- that move is proceed -- that move proceeds very smoothly and nothing falls through the cracks, particularly those things related to the defense of Israel.

The principal benefit of Israel coming into the Central Command AOR is the fact that most of Israel's threats -- all of Israel's threats really -- emanate from the East, which is in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. Today, I talk a lot to the -- to the Israeli chief of defense. I talk a lot all throughout my command at all levels of the Israeli military about the threats that emanate against them because the threats to Israel have morphed from being, at one time, a purely ballistic missile threat, now to a UAS and a land attack cruise missile threat. So now the threat is far more -- far more diffuse and actually dangerous, so we need -- we need to make sure that we are coordinating fully on all those matters.
We work with European Command to make sure that we transition the defense of Israel to CENTCOM when we are ready to do it. That does involve questions of water space management in the eastern Mediterranean, questions of what ships are going to be available and when. And I am in close contact with General Walters actually as we work through those problems, and we will present a plan to the Secretary a little bit later this year for an initial date when combatant command authority will shift for Israel.

The last point I would just like to make is, the benefit of -- the other benefit of bringing Israel into the -- into the Central Command AOR is it allows further normalization of relations between Israel and various Arab states in the -- in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, and this just recognizes that by placing them all under one combatant command. We were not able to do that in the past, particularly because of strains between Egypt and Israel. We are now well past that. Egypt and Israel function very well together on a -- at a variety of levels, including joint -- including operations against threats in the Sinai.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. General Townsend, in the last decade, China has made significant investments in Africa, and it has been in the form of infrastructure and military installations, as well as significant investment from private firms. I am concerned with perceptions of the
U.S. presence when we are conducting major air operations with significant collateral damage while China builds roads and bridges. What is AFRICOM's strategy for breaking this dynamic? Is this a problem that has a military solution?

General Townsend: Senator, you are right. China has been aggressively investing in the continent with infrastructure, bases, arm sales, training, et cetera. We do not have to compete with China head-to-head, dollar-for-dollar. We can target where our investments are best made. I would not characterize it the way you did about our strikes with significant collateral damage. We do not do very many strikes in Africa. They are limited to Al-Shabab areas in Somalia, and we have very low collateral damage when we do those strikes. I agree with your point, though. There is not a military solution to any of these challenges on the African continent.

Senator Gillibrand: Right.

General Townsend: It is a whole-of-government approach that will be necessary to solve these challenges.

Senator Gillibrand: I was encouraged by your commitment to working with African Union security forces and other nations' militaries, and I do appreciate the fact that we can fight terrorism, but we have to actually stop the social problems at the source. In your opinion, how can we increase cooperation with the African standby force and the
African Union Peace and Security Council? And just to note, in your written statement, you listed extreme poverty, more frequent and intense weather events, and vulnerable and marginalized populations as issues that are contributing to instability in the region and, as a result, terrorism. These obviously sound like political problems and potentially a vacuum that China will be happy to fill with their own investments. So what are your thoughts on this issue, and how do we confront China and make the territory less fertile for VEOs?

General Townsend: Regarding the -- confronting China here, I think we can do that in a targeted way in certain selected countries, and that way we can make our investments count for more. You mentioned several partners -- African partners. We work with all of those partners to advance what we are doing. The United States does not lead any activity. We work through African partners first and international partners second, and I think that is -- and then you mentioned several political problems. I think our administration strategy is the right one: lead with diplomacy, follow with development, secure with defense.

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand. Let me know recognize via Webex, Senator Rounds.
Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you both for your service to our country. Let me begin with a question for General Townsend.

General, the last time that I had an opportunity to visit Djibouti, I noted that at that time, we had a chance to observe the operations that the Chinese were doing with regard to the creation of a naval base, or at least a port there at Djibouti. Can you share with us the current status of the Chinese operations in Djibouti right now with regard to their port and what they are capable of doing with it?

General Townsend: Thank you, Senator. The base in Djibouti -- the Chinese base in Djibouti is named Doraleh Port, or Doraleh Base. What they have done in the last 2 years is completed a very large and capable naval pier that has joined their -- joins their base. This pier has the capability to dock their largest ships to include the Chinese aircraft carrier as well as nuclear submarines. Now, they are finishing that pier now. They are applying the final coats of paint to this thing. I expect that we will see increased Chinese naval presence there. Their presence at Doraleh Base in the past has been largely to secure and sustain their small naval task force that operates in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. I anticipate now with this pier being recently completed, they will increase their naval activity into Djibouti soon.
Senator Rounds: Thank you, General. General McKenzie, I would like to visit with you with regard to the difference between a conditions-based withdrawal and a withdrawal with a date certain, and I recognize that your role here is to follow the directions of the Commander-in-Chief. I respect that, and I know that the President has made the decision to move from a conditions-based withdrawal to a date-certain withdrawal. There is a reason why I think many of us had talked about, and I believe a number of the military officials in the past have discussed the validity of a conditions-based withdrawal, while at the same time recognizing that there is no real good answer to the Afghanistan questions.

Respecting the President's ability to make and having to make this decision, can you share with us a little bit about some of the concerns that you have expressed with regard to the ability of the existing Afghan national forces to be able to respond to aggression by the Taliban, and what the impacts could be in those areas that are not currently under Taliban control with regard to the stability in those villages, those communities, and the impact that could occur for women and children in those regions?

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you. First of all, the decision-making process was very inclusive. I had multiple opportunities to make my views known, and I
appreciate the opportunity to have had those views known. I
cannot share those views with you in this forum, but I would
just tell you that the inclusion and the deliberate and
methodical way that this decision was approached was
heartening for me, at least. I would tell you that my
concern about leaving with a date certain is that after we
withdraw, and we have talked about we are going to go to
zero means zero, that there will be no real U.S. enablers in
Afghanistan. My concern is the ability of the Afghan
military to hold the ground that they are on now without the
support that they have been used to for many years, which we
have weaned them off direct support -- U.S. and coalition
soldiers being present with them on the ground to a point
where now it is intelligence, it is fire support. It is the
enabling things that actually give them an edge over the
Taliban. Now all that will be gone, so I am concerned about
the ability of the Afghan military to hold on after we
leave, the ability of the Afghan air force to fly, in
particular, after we remove the support for those aircraft.
All of those things are factors that will be worked out
here in the -- in the next few months, and we will get an
opportunity to see how the Afghans do.
Your last point on conditions for women and children,
and women, in particular, and the strides -- the great
strides that have been made in education and human rights in
Afghanistan, the levers that we have now will be reduced, but I believe there will still be levers that we can apply, and those levers will be principally diplomatic and economic because if the Taliban or whatever future hybrid government exists in Afghanistan wants to gain global recognition and receive some form of international support, they are going to have to take some actions that would tend to protect those groups. Again, those are things we just cannot know right now.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, General. I most certainly appreciate your responsible comments, and I understand that you did have the ability to give input. And I just simply think that it is important for the American people to understand that the repercussions of this are not going to be pretty, and that we will see reports of atrocities in those areas as committed by the Taliban if these Afghan national forces are not able to hold their own without those U.S. supports that they have become very dependent on.

Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator. Now, let me recognize Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for your service and to the men and women under your command. I do not need to tell either of you that the definition of success in Afghanistan has changed over the 20
years that we have been fighting wars in that part of the world. In October 2001, President Bush set the terms for victory in Afghanistan as bringing Al-Qaeda to justice and ensuring that they could no longer use Afghanistan as a base to launch terrorist attacks on the United States. Coming right to the point, General Townsend, public press reporting states that after a withdrawal from Afghanistan, it would be a 4-hour flight for an MQ-9 to be on station in Afghanistan to do a counterterrorism mission. And my question is, how does that compare to the flight to be on station in Somalia, or Libya, or other places under your command where countering terrorism is a similar mission?

General Townsend: Senator, we also have some pretty long legs to get our ISR on station, although I do not believe 4 hours. Our transit times or more in the realm of 1 to 2 hours one way. We spend 4 hours probably, on average, back and forth, but not as long as you just described.

Senator Blumenthal: General McKenzie, would that length of time enable effective counterterrorism in Afghanistan using the kind of air resources that we have in General Townsend's command?

General McKenzie: Senator, right now in Afghanistan, we principally use MQ-9s and MQ-1s, and the newspaper -- the newspaper story may have said 4 hours. If we get out of
Afghanistan, most likely the transit time will be considerably longer than 4 hours to get in, and I can talk about this in a closed session in a little bit more detail. So I can, in fact, give the persistent overhead coverage that is required. It will simply require far more platforms operating at greater range in order to accomplish that same mission that you can do with fewer platforms because, as you know, the airplane has so long to fly. You can either -- you are going to use that flight time either getting to the objective or what you do on the objective. We want to maximize what you can do on the objective. It will be difficult.

Senator Blumenthal: I would like to hear, and probably it should be in a closed setting with the chairman's and senator's support, what specifically by way of counterterrorism can be done, what the plans are to do it, because I think that is an essential feature of our withdrawal. You said "if," but it is right now planned for September 11th, and I would like to know what our preparations are.

General McKenzie: Sure, I will be happy to discuss that in closed session.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. I think Senator Inhofe alluded to this topic, but, as you know, there have been various reports about attacks on American personnel,
diplomats, members of the intelligence community, perhaps
even military, some of it referred to as the Havana
Syndrome, referring only to those public reports. If there
is any truth to those reports about attacks on American
personnel, do not you think the American people deserve to
know about it?

General McKenzie: Sir, I do, and I track that very --
and I can only speak, of course, to the U.S. Central Command
area of responsibility, and I can give you a little bit more
information in a closed -- in a closed session, but I have
found no evidence of those attacks in U.S. Central Command.
But I can talk a little bit more about it, and I would like
to do so in a closed session.

Senator Blumenthal: I would like to hear about it in
closed session, but I would also like for the American
people to know about it because I think they need and
deserve to know about it. General Townsend, do you have any
comment?

General Townsend: Senator, we have not seen that
phenomenon in AFRICOM in any significant number; in fact,
any number that I am aware of.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. General McKenzie, what
have you seen by way of the Iranian support for proxies and
their attacks on United States personnel under your command,
the malign influence of Iran and their support for those
kinds of attacks on our personnel or our allies and partners?

General McKenzie: So I think, first of all, Iran is not seeking state-on-state conflict with the United States right now. I think they would like to see how the Biden Administration's approach on JCPOA works out for them. At the same time, and this just reflects the contradiction inherent in the way the Iranians think about many of these problems, they want us out of places like Iraq, and they are prepared to take kinetic activity, which they believe they can disavow by their actors, their proxies, acting on the ground to conduct low-level attacks against us. Over last year, in 2020, the Iranians believed they had a political solution to eject us from Iraq. That no longer appears to be a viable way ahead for them, so we are seeing a return to a more kinetic approach, and that has been manifested here over the last few weeks as low-level attacks have begun to crop up in Iraq, attacks that the Iranians would disavow themselves from. We carefully look for attribution in these attacks, and national leadership will eventually make a decision on how to respond.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Thank you both. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. Now let me recognize Senator Ernst, please.
Senate Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, gentlemen, thank you very much for your testimony today. And I do want to take time to thank you, your senior enlisted members, and all of the men and women within your commands for their continued service to our Nation. And I will move into my questions, but what we are doing today, we are obviously discussing the significant challenges that both of you have within your commands. Our national defense strategy is still targeted towards five very real threats -- China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and then, of course, violent extremist groups -- and four of those five challenges operate in both of your AORs, and, of course, the way that we operate and resource your AORs is very different. But, General Townsend, I would like to start with you.

Within AFRICOM, we do have various pockets of activity, and we do engage our special operations forces in those areas. The Lake Chad Basin is a very volatile region, and there are a number of those violent extremist organizations there, such as ISIS, Boko Haram. They are operating within the region, and they are exploiting, of course, the economy, the terrain, and the vulnerable population there. And what is the assessment of the risk these various organizations pose to the U.S., and have we allocated the proper resources necessary to defeat their threats?

General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. You specifically
addressed the Lake Chad Basin, and there we see operations by Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa. A couple of years ago, those two organizations had joined in league with one another. They have split in the last year or two, again, apart. My assessment is that neither -- although they caused tremendous problems there for the countries that all adjoin in the Lake Chad Basin, which is Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon -- all come together right there -- they caused tremendous problems for them. It is my assessment that neither Boko Haram nor ISIS-West Africa today pose a significant threat to U.S. interests. That is not true of other violent extremist organizations in Africa.

Senate Ernst: Mm-hmm. Thank you very much, General. How can we help those countries in that area, be it military or other resources available, through our Federal Government? There are a few of those countries that do have significant resources that could be exploited by China or Russia. What ways can we further support that region, not just military, but other types of supports?

General Townsend: Well, just exactly what you said along the lines of not just military. So there -- a whole-of-government approach in that region would help. We have that now to some degree. I think we can make that more robust. There is a partnership between our Department of State and Department of Defense to provide security
assistance to those countries there. We do that on a bilateral basis directly with those countries. There is a Multinational Joint Task Force that operates in the Lake Chad Basin region. It would not be hard to increase some of our efforts there. I think what we see, particularly with Nigeria, is they are struggling with that particular threat in the Lake Chad Basin and northeast part of their country.

Senate Ernst: All right. Thank you, General. General McKenzie, it was my great honor just several days ago to spend some time in the company of some truly extraordinary women, and these women are -- were Gold Star Wives, and many of them came from our Special Operations Forces. We had an Air Guard member as well as an Army Guard member. And part of the conversation obviously flowed towards the close down of Afghanistan, the withdrawal of troops, and, of course, what we would hope to see as the end to the Global War on Terror. I have concerns about it. I have concerns that we are conceding territory at a great loss of lives. And so if you could indulge me, sir, and address these extraordinary women and their families all across the United States, and just let them know your thoughts and how we can recognize the ultimate sacrifice that their husbands made, and to please let them know that those sacrifices were not in vain.

General McKenzie: Senator, thank you, and certainly the sacrifices have not been in vain. And particularly the
family members of those people who have gone forward to
defend this Nation and have died in so doing, are going to
carry those memories with them for the rest of their lives,
and there is nothing I can do to really make that better.
But what I can tell them is I believe we went to Afghanistan
in a good cause, and I believe we have, in fact, prevented
attacks on the United States from being generated from
Afghanistan for over the last 20 years, and that was
ultimately our base mission for being there.

The long-term view for the War on Terror is this: it
is not going to be bloodless. The War on Terror is probably
not going to end. What we actually seek is the creation of
local security where the threats, as they arise, can be
dealt with indigenously by those countries themselves
without a significant U.S. presence there. We will see a
test of that hypothesis in Afghanistan and in the months
ahead. We also tested it in Iraq where it is moving towards
success. We also tested in Syria and in other places.

Nothing will ever compensate for the loss of a loved one,
and I would not attempt with any words I can say here to try
to -- to try do that.

Senate Ernst: God bless you. Thank you so much.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator

Kaine, please.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member
Inhofe, and thank you, Senator Ernst, for asking that question to the witnesses who are before us today. We appreciate your service. Just a comment. I think we have had a good discussion about the big issue that is, you know, dominating our attention right now -- Afghanistan -- and every concern that anyone I know that has expressed about it is a very legitimate one. There are a lot of concerns. I do support the President's decision, but believe it was a decision made with no particularly wonderful options out there on the table. And I honor the 20 years of service, 10 years to find and kill Bin Laden, and then 10 years to train hundreds of thousands of Afghan security forces. And, General McKenzie, as you mentioned, there will be a test of that security apparatus to determine its efficiency to counter the threat that the Taliban poses, and we will all be paying attention in a significant way.

One thing I would like to just caution against is sometimes, particularly in a military hearing, we will talk about the state beginning on September 11th as a zero solution, and it is true that the President's announced intention is a zero solution with respect to military presence in Afghanistan, except for that necessary to protect our embassy and, if needed, for counterterrorism operations as they arise. But I think it is important for the American public to know that it is not a zero solution
if you look at it from the whole-of-government standpoint, because I think it is very likely that the United States is going to continue to provide significant security assistance to Afghanistan. It is highly likely that we are going to provide significant assistance in the humanitarian, economic, trade, development, and diplomacy space.

And so it is not a zero solution in terms of America's partnership with Afghanistan. I would imagine that when we get to a new status quo in terms of the relationship, the support that we provide for our partner, Afghanistan, will be significant and may be significantly greater than sort of the support we provide to other nations. That remains to be seen, and obviously the effect of that support is being tested, as General McKenzie mentioned.

General McKenzie, you mentioned something about Afghans' neighbors, and I wanted to just dig into that a little bit. You indicated that while they have not all been helpful to the United States, not by a long shot, and they have not necessarily even done what we would hope they might do to assist in Afghanistan, they do help with stability in Afghanistan. They do not see instability there as furthering their interests. And just quickly, I was looking at who Afghanistan -- the Afghan neighbors are. Afghanistan is bordered by six countries: Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, and Iran. Very different
nations, those six, but can I just dig in a little bit with you, General McKenzie, on that? As different as these nations are from each other, and as different as they are in their relationships with the United States, would you say that they all, for their own reasons, would desire stability in Afghanistan and would feel threatened by instability in Afghanistan?

General McKenzie: Senator, I would agree with you completely. I think all, for their own reasons, and, as you noted, those reasons are very different, they all want stability in Afghanistan. And the other thing some of them want, too, is they recognize the vast natural resources that are inherent in Afghanistan, and they seek access to that.

Senator Kaine: In terms of wanting stability, I would imagine that they want stability, again, for their own reasons, but some of the common reasons would be instability could lead to unacceptable refugee flows into neighboring nations if that is not managed, and instability could also lead to the possibility of terrorist or other attacks in their own nations if that is not managed correctly. Are those two of the reasons that they want stability, and are there others why they would want stability?

General McKenzie: Senator, I think those are the two principal reasons, the movement of -- the movement of refugees across national borders, and also the threat of
exportation of ISIS or Al-Qaeda's ideology, you know, from inside Afghanistan. I think those are the two principal reasons.

Senator Kaine: And in terms of those threats, the threat of refugee flows and the threat of terrorist attacks, in many ways, they have more of an existential connection to stability in Afghanistan than the United States does, just because of their proximity to Afghanistan. Is that not correct?

General McKenzie: Senator, I would agree.

Senator Kaine: All right. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I do not have other questions.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Let me now recognize via Webex, Senator Tillis.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding the hearing, and, gentlemen, thank you for being here and for your years of service. General Townsend, I want to talk a little bit about China. In your opening comments, you talked about China's move, I think, in Djibouti as a power projection platform. We know that there is even talk about an Atlantic Coast naval base. How does this play out over the next several years if they continue at their current pace, and what are the real threats to our own national security as a result?

General Townsend: Thanks, Senator Tillis. So we know
that the Chinese desire a network of bases around the globe. How that plays out in Africa is, first, with their base at Doraleh in Djibouti. They have been working on a number of options to get a base elsewhere in Africa, Tanzania -- primarily on the east coast -- the Indian Ocean, and then they have placed a number of bets down along the Atlantic coast. My concern is the greatest along the Atlantic coast of Africa. This is probably -- this is the most significant threat, I think, from China would be to gain a militarily useful naval facility on the Atlantic coast of Africa. And by "militarily useful," I mean something more than a place that they can make port calls and get gas and groceries. I am talking about a port where they can rearm with munitions and repair naval vessels. They are working aggressively to get that, but we have not seen any of that come to fruition yet, and it is my number one global power competition concern.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, General Townsend. General McKenzie, with the withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan, we have received, you know, various estimates of how that is going to play out over the next year or so. I, for one, think that we are going to run into -- that Afghanistan is going to run into serious problems after we completely withdraw our troops, but I am primarily concerned with force protection as we withdraw from the forward-operating bases.
and, ultimately, Kabul. What are we doing? Are we just
going exploit the resources we have on the ground for force
protection? Are we going to surge a bit as we withdraw?
Can you give me some sense and some confidence that we are
going to be able to do this with the full expectation that
the Taliban may take some shots at us on our way out the
door?

General McKenzie: Senator, first of all, we are
prepared if the Taliban want to take shots at us, today, or
after 1 May, or at any point during the withdrawal. The
plan that we have designed and that General Miller will
begin execution of is designed to come out with or without
pressure from the Taliban. And, yes, we will bring
additional resources in in order to protect the force as it
comes out. That is normal in any kind of disengagement
operation. I do not want to go into the details of those
operations right now, but we will bring -- we will have
additional capabilities, and I am confident that we will be
able -- that we will, and our coalition partners will be
able, to extract ourselves. And we look every day, every
hour at force protection in Afghanistan. It has the
complete, undivided attention of General Miller and myself.

Senator Tillis: Well, I hope that any malign
activities on the part of the Taliban are met, and that you
have the authority to exact a cost for any of those.
Hopefully there will not be any, but I am afraid that we will probably see some. General McKenzie, I also wanted to talk about the Abraham Accords. Do you think the other countries that have come to the Accords already, that it has been a positive thing, and what other additional cooperation or participants in the Accords do you think would be helpful as a check against Iran?

General McKenzie: Sir, I think the normalization of relationships between Israel and her Arab neighbors is a -- is a profound step forward. It represents really a new era in the Middle East, and I think that is one of the things that Israel coming into U.S. Central Command as part of a unified command plan shift will also help. So I think, you know, we have got to be patient. It will take time for this to happen, but I would look over time for further nations to join in normalization of relations with Israel, and I think that is a net positive thing for the region.

Senator Tillis: The last question is, with the missile attack or rocket attack out of Syria against Israel just this week, do you -- is that potentially a part of a trend, or do you think that maybe it was just a one-off activity?

General McKenzie: I think it reflects actually incompetence in Syrian air defense where they were responding to Israeli strikes on targets in Syria. They fired their missiles. The missiles went ballistic,
literally, and followed the parabolic trajectory into Israel where they were intercepted. I do not believe it was an intentional attack, but just rather lack of capability on the part of the Syrian air defenders.

Senator Tillis: Okay. Thank you both. Thank you both, gentlemen. Thank you for your service and your leadership. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis. Now let me recognize Senator King via Webex.

Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There has been a lot of discussion today about the September 11th date and the calendar-based withdrawal. I think it is important to recall that the prior Administration initiated a calendar-based leaving -- withdrawal from Afghanistan, and, in fact, that calendar date is 1 week from tomorrow. So we -- the current Administration was, in a sense, boxed in by those negotiations with the Taliban that took place last year, and which, by the way, excluded the Afghan Government. General McKenzie, you used a term earlier in your testimony, "if a civil war ensues." Is there not a civil war going on right at this very moment? There is no doubt that a civil war is going on now and will continue. Is there?

General McKenzie: Sorry. I am probably not the best person to give you an answer to this. I would defer to the diplomats. But we have a constituted-elected government in
place in Afghanistan, and I would -- and so that we have a
-- we have a legal authority in place. So I am not sure
that I would refer to what is going on right now as a civil
war. Others might take a different view of that, but I am
not certain that I would refer to it in that way.

Senator King: It would not -- you do not think the
Taliban is a viable insurgency that is fighting against the
government and the government's reach into the provinces?

General McKenzie: I think the Taliban certainly have a
-- are militarily very capable. I do not know how much of
the actual Afghan population they represent. Polling data
would tell you it is a very low percent if you subjected it
to an honest -- to an honest election, which I know would be
very difficult to accomplish in Afghanistan. But I would
not confuse an insurgency, however capable and lethal, with
a civil war.

Senator King: Well, I will turn the question around.
We have been there 20 years. We have spent over $1
trillion, lost lives, tens of thousands of injuries,
incredible support to the Afghan Government. Why has the
Afghan Government not been able to take hold? My
understanding is, General, that the Taliban controls more
land today than they did last year, and more last year than
they did the year before. They are, in fact, winning. Why
can the Afghan Government not defend itself successfully?
General McKenzie: Sir, our principal objective in Afghanistan has been, and will remain, to prevent al-Qaeda and ISIS from developing attacks against our homeland and those are of our allies --

Senator King: No, I understand that, General. That is not my question. My question is, in your military judgment, why has the Afghan Government not, with all the support that it has had from us, been more successful in beating back the Taliban, when, in fact, over the last dozen years or so, the Taliban has been making steady gains?

General McKenzie: I believe that right now, a rough stasis exists between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan forces. The Taliban has access to offshore havens where they are able to reconstitute where the Government of Afghanistan cannot reach, and it is always very difficult in a counterinsurgency to fight when your opponent has the ability to do those things.

Senator King: Well, I understand that, but it just seems like with all the advantages of the Afghan Government, I am just puzzled as to why they have not -- and you testified that you thought they had the support of the majority of the people -- why they have not been able to be more successful. General Townsend, we have talked a lot about the Chinese activity in Africa. You talked about the purpose appears to be both economic and military. My
question is, do you discern any backlash in these African
countries where the Chinese have made these big loans and
big investments and now the bills are coming due? Are the
Africans having any second thoughts about their engagement
with the Chinese?

General Townsend: Thank you, Senator. Actually, we do see some backlash. You know, you have famous -- heard of the famous debt trap diplomacy that the Chinese have used. That has actually worked against their efforts in a lot of African countries. Our embassies have a very successful program where we now will review any contracts. We have a standing offer to review any contracts that these countries are going to undertake with China to point out the inconsistencies, the potential pitfalls, and the differences often we find between the host nation language translation and the Chinese translation. I think this is a great effort by our Department of State to help these countries make informed decisions on their own.

We see backlash, and we see it in the military sphere. Their equipment frequently breaks within a year or two. It is sitting rusting at the -- on the side of the airfield or the port, and their training has been described to me by one African leader as not much more useful than a Hollywood demonstration. So we are starting to see some pushback by African leaders on the Chinese.
Senator King: Well, I think one way to look at it, and I have talked to leaders throughout Asia, is that we have allies; China has customers. And I think to the extent we can maintain those relationships with those African countries in the long run, I think they are going to prefer our model and our air support. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your service. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Senator Scott, please.

Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. Thank both of you for your service and all the men and women under your command. Just to follow up with General Townsend with what Senator King was saying. What do you -- how are they -- what are you hearing from these leaders in these Afghan -- African countries about how they are going to deal with the debt that the Chinese have done or their relationship? Is there much opposition to what China is doing right now?

General Townsend: I had an African leader tell me a drowning man will reach for any hand, and so I think they are faced with very difficult choices, many of these countries. They have got extreme poverty. They have climate challenges, food shortages. They want to advance the -- their country for their people. Many of them have challenges with violent extremist organizations, and they
need to secure their country, so they will reach out to any offer. Frequently those offers are fastest from China and Russia. We are slower to deliver, in their -- in their estimation, and it is true, and we are more deliberate in that way, and we have more strings attached than the Chinese and the Russians. You know, our strings are related to good behavior and things like that, democratic values, and the Chinese and the Russians attach no such strings other than loans -- loan shark type of lending.

So they reach for whatever assistance they can get. They constantly tell us we would prefer you to be our partner, and many of them do that when they have the ability to do that. But they also will take help from any source, and they will take help from us and help from the Chinese and the Russians all at the same time, and they will reassure us they can manage those relationships, and we try to help them with that.

Senator Scott: So take the Chinese. Are they going to be able to enforce the deals they have -- they have entered into in these countries?

General Townsend: That is a great question, Senator, and I do not know the answer to that. Probably best for the Department of State.

Senator Scott: Okay. General Townsend, you know, Israel -- it seems like Israel's reputation and presence in
Africa is growing, and with the Abraham Accord, you would think it would be a positive. So are you seeing Israel's involvement in Africa growing at all?

General Townsend: We do see Israel. Israel has always been involved in parts of Africa, mostly the northeast and along the Red Sea. We are seeing Israel reach out across Africa in a fairly positive way in most cases, and there -- they are doing some arms sales there. And, quite frankly, I would rather see our African partners buy Israeli drones than Chinese drones.

Senator Scott: Thank you. General McKenzie, how concerned are you about the relationship that Iran is building with China?

General McKenzie: I am very concerned about it. It is too soon to tell, though, if this latest agreement is going to mount into something or nothing at all. I think Iran is always seeking opportunities to buy weapons, you know, and so I think it is interesting, but I am not yet prepared to pass a judgment on it.

Senator Scott: Are you -- are you seeing China's involvement grow -- continuing to grow militarily all across the area you are responsible for?

General McKenzie: In Central Command, China's involvement engagement is principally economic with the debt trap diplomacy that General Townsend discussed in Africa.
We see the same thing across our region. You know, we should not forget that China actually imports a significant fraction of their hydrocarbons from the region, and through the Strait of Hormuz, and from the Arabian Gulf, so they are going to be -- they are very interested in the region. So I think right now what we are seeing is the leading edge of a long-term Chinese plan to firmly establish themselves in the region.

Senator Scott: Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. Now let me recognize via Webex, Senator Warren.

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, General McKenzie and General Townsend, for being here. So, General McKenzie, President Biden recently announced his plans to withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan no later than September 11th, 2021. That is going to mark our longest war ever, so I just want to review what has happened just over the past decade and where we stand right now.

General McKenzie, is it true that the Taliban has more members today than it did 10 years ago?

General McKenzie: The Taliban has 50,000 or so members today. I would have to come back to you on where that stands compared to 10 years ago, Senator.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Senator Warren: Well, actually, I think the number could be as high as 85,000, according to the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, and that is almost triple what it was in 2011. You might want to go back and look at those numbers. And does the Taliban control more of Afghanistan than it did 10 years ago?

General McKenzie: Yes, it does, Senator.

Senator Warren: Yes. And does Pakistan or elements of the Pakistani government still provide support and sanctuary to the Taliban?

General McKenzie: We believe that elements of the Taliban are in Pakistan. Yes, Senator, we do.

Senator Warren: And is corruption in the Afghan Government still endemic?

General McKenzie: The Afghan Government has corruption, significant corruption.

Senator Warren: Yes. And after all this time and all this work to prop up and support the Afghan Government, is it fair to say that Afghans still have little trust in their government and elections just as they did 10 years ago?

General McKenzie: Senator, I would defer to the Department of State for a better commentary on that.

Senator Warren: All right. I think if you check their commentary, they will say yes. The situation in Afghanistan has not improved in the last 10 years, even with our troops
present, and it is clear there is little for us to be gained by a continued U.S. presence there. I strongly support President Biden's decision to withdraw U.S. troops. We should have learned by now that a conditions-based withdrawal is just a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever. Defense officials have come before this committee year after year to proclaim that the U.S. has turned the corner in Afghanistan, but all I see is a vicious cycle that damages our Nation's reputation abroad and keeps our troops in harm's way, while producing little tangible benefit for our security.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield the remainder of my time.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren. Now let me recognize Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you for your service. General McKenzie, I appreciate our discussion yesterday. Let me start with a big kind of picture issue. You are in the Middle East, a lot of energy there. Does it help or hurt the United States of America from a national security and foreign policy perspective that we are now the world's energy superpower, producing more natural gas than Russia, more oil than Saudi Arabia? Does that help our national security posture in the Middle East and other places in the world?
General McKenzie: I would say -- I would think that it helps globally. It certainly helps in the -- in the CENTCOM region.

Senator Sullivan: So do you think it makes sense from a perspective to just unilaterally start reducing the production of American energy? It kills jobs, but I am talking about from the national security perspective, to enable Saudi Arabia and Russia to be bigger energy producers than us. Does that makes sense, from your perspective, national security, your personal opinion?

General McKenzie: Sir, I would -- first, I would defer to Commerce for a more informed opinion.

Senator Sullivan: I am asking as a --

General McKenzie: I would say -- I would say that it is not helpful to the United States.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you. You know, General, this is a very difficult decision, controversial decision. Certainly I wish the President would not have picked September 11th as some kind of date to celebrate. It is not a good date in American history. I think the Taliban is going to have a great propaganda victory by saying 20 years ago there was a victory, now there is a victory. I do not believe that it is a victory, but I hope in the future that the President, Secretary of Defense, even you do not use September 11th as some kind of date we are celebrating here.
for 2021 on the withdrawal of troops. You do not need to comment on that. I just think it is baffling that somehow somebody in the White House thought that was a good day to choose.

One thing that we are hearing, many of our bravest men and women fought. Many died, sacrificed. You know, you start to hear this mantra that, well, they -- if we are pulling out, the Taliban takeover, which is a distinct possibility, that these sacrifices, particularly those who died, died in vain. You know, I had the honor of serving as a staff officer to General Abizaid for 1-and-a-half years when he was CENTCOM commander many years ago. He said something once that really struck me. He said, no American who has ever fought for freedom or the defense of the national security of the United States has ever died in vain. What would you say to the men and women who fought in Afghanistan, wounded families who lost loved ones, about their sacrifice, even though we are leaving?

General McKenzie: Senator, first of all, there is really nothing I can say to replace the empty chair at the table, the loss of a loved one, and I am very much humbled by recognizing that. I cannot improve on what General Abizaid said. In many ways, you know, to fight for freedom is not to give something up in vain. I think it is -- but I think it is a very -- it is still very hard on those people.
As you know, I have been to Afghanistan multiple times, as has General Townsend seated beside me. My son has been to Afghanistan twice, so I am well aware of the burden that has been placed on families of this Nation to support our fight there.

Senator Sullivan: I just want to make sure our message to these families, to the men and women who served, sacrificed, some gave their lives, that it is not going to be your sacrifice did not mean anything. I would agree with General Abizaid. I hope that can be the statement from our military leaders. No American who has ever fought for freedom in the security of this Nation has died in vain, regardless of what happens in Afghanistan in the next 2 to 3 years. Would you -- would you agree with that?

General McKenzie: Senator, I would, certainly.

Senator Sullivan: Would you agree with that, General?


Senator Sullivan: Let me ask one final question. General, you are a Marine. You know honor, courage, and commitment is a cornerstone of our ethos. Semper Fidelis. Do you believe nations have honor?

General McKenzie: I do believe nations have honor.

Senator Sullivan: So one thing that I worry about, given this decision, is that a lot of people who worked with our military, their lives are going to be at risk. The
women who are now parliamentarian, their lives are going to be at risk if the Taliban takes over, which I think is a distinct possibility. I think we should be doing much more and planning much more to try to protect those lives, maybe get them out of Afghanistan if needed. Would you agree with that and if there is a plan to do that? Well, what is the plan to do that right now, and if there is not a plan, would you be able to execute a plan if we were able to keep our word to people who sacrificed and worked with us, who, now their lives are clearly going to be at risk, to help them? Would that not help the honor of America despite leaving?

   General McKenzie: Senator, I know the Department of State is looking at a variety of venues, the Special Immigrant Visa Program, among others, you know, to potentially get people out. We have the capability to do that if so directed.

   Senator Sullivan: I certainly hope we look at doing that in a big way. I think the idea of a year from now or a year-and-a-half from now if the Taliban takes over, which I think is a distinct possibility, and you have people who worked with our troops who are lined up and shot or killed because they worked with Americans, I think that would be a stain on our honor as a Nation, and I hope that we are making plans to avoid that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe and -- for holding this hearing, of course, and I would like to thank Generals Townsend and McKenzie for testifying today, and, of course, for their service to our country. I would like to speak a little bit about maintaining Israel's QME because for decades, maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge has been a bipartisan American foreign policy priority. It has been codified in law since 2008.

In recent years, the combination of Iran acquiring advanced Russian and Chinese systems, transfers of arms to terrorist groups, and an escalating weapons race in the region undermine Israel's QME, and they pose a significant conventional threat to the United States personnel. Just last night, a Syrian surface-to-air missile exploded in Israel, demonstrating the danger of advanced missiles proliferating through the region. So, General McKenzie, what is your assessment of Israel's current QME, and what must be done to maintain it? And do you view the escalating arms race in the region as having a negative impact on Israel's QME?

General McKenzie: Senator, you know, I am newly energized to study the Israeli question because of the movement of Israel into the -- into the Central Command.
under the recent UCP decision, although I have looked at it for several years at U.S. Central Command. I am confident that we will be able to preserve Israel's QME going forward, even considering arms sales to various countries across the region. And we should also reflect that the arm sales to those countries across the region at least partially reflects the increasing normalization of ties between Israel and those nations. Nonetheless, I am absolutely confident that we will be able to retain Israel's military advantage.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. I look forward to revisiting that with you as you move forward. I would like to move next to the MQ-9 production because the MQ-9 is remotely piloted aircraft. It plays a critical role in supporting our current intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance requirements. A key part of the MQ-9's architecture is the mission at Nevada's Creech Air Force Base. As force drawdowns in CENTCOM's area of responsibility have reduced human intelligence availability, signals intelligence capabilities become even more important. Despite this, the prior Administration tried to cut MQ-9 production. So, again, General McKenzie, last year you included additional MQ-9 funding at the top of CENTCOM's unfunded priorities. So how would additional MQ-9 aircraft support your ISR mission, and what would be the impacts or the gaps in your ISR capabilities if that production were to
be suspended without a follow-up plan?

General McKenzie: Senator, the MQ-9, MQ-1, and various other platforms are critical platforms for us in Central Command, particularly for use in the VEO fight. They give us the persistent overhead coverage that we need to go through the find, fix, and finish part of the -- of the equation. So we continue to use them, particularly in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq and Syria, and we have also found the MQ-9 to be valuable in use against Iran. In the summer of 2019, the manipulation of ISR assets in and around the Strait of Hormuz directly deflected Iranian attack planning, so it is useful in a variety of venues for us.

Senator, I also recognize there is a global demand for these resources. Other combatant commands need them. My partner here, General Townsend, needs them in Africa as well. It remains an invaluable platform for us. I also recognize the platform is not viable in a -- in a high-end fight, and there are parts of CENTCOM that could become a high-end fight. There are parts of CENTCOM that are not a high-end fight. The platform is going to remain vital to us as we go forward, particularly as we pull out of Afghanistan, and our ability to maintain persistent overhead coverage will maybe -- will possibly require additional MQ-9s in order -- because of the range of -- range from the base to the place where we will actually be looking. We may
even need more of them in Central Command dedicated to that particular task.

Senator Rosen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that, and glad to do our part in signals and reconnaissance intelligence, and the MQ-9s certainly helps us meet those goals. Thank you. I notice my time has just about expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much, Senator Rosen. And there are several members that are endeavoring to get here, and in order to allow them a fair opportunity, let me ask an additional question or two, and Senator Inhofe joins us. In fact, this is perfect timing because I can now introduce and recognize Senator Kelly. Are you prepared, Senator?

Senator Kelly: I am always ready.

Chairman Reed: Always ready.

Senator Kelly: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, General McKenzie, General Townsend, thank you for your testimony today. So we have seen a range of Gray Zone engagement activities by near peer competitors throughout Africa and the Middle East, from China's pursuit of strategic partnerships with the Iranians and attempts to use infrastructure loans of medical supplies to gain favor on the African continent, to Russia's efforts to establish a foothold in critical mineral extraction and a presence on
NATO's southern edge. The national defense strategy speaks of the need to expand the competitive space. With that in mind, I would like to get both of your thoughts on how the U.S. should be engaging in this environment to build relationships in each of these areas of responsibility with an eye towards countering the opportunistic influence-seeking behaviors by our competitors and discouraging any further escalation. General Townsend?

General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. So you have correctly pointed out that Russia and China are competing deliberately and hard in Africa with the United States. I believe that they are determined to win. China is determined to win that competition. I am a little less concerned about Russia's competition, although it is -- it is not helpful. I think they are exploitative. They are self-interested. I think in many ways they can -- the Russians can be their own worst enemies. I think they are less of a longer-term concern to me than China is. China is a concern today and longer term. They are a learning organization. They are spending a lot of money in Africa. We do not have to outspend them. What we have to do is figure out where we need to out-compete them and how to do that, and how to do that is a whole-of-government solution.

In my view, the first thing I am concerned about with China, number one, is an Atlantic Coast naval base. Number
two, it is their activities in North Africa, and I can discuss that more in a closed session. My third concern would be the influence of Russia in Libya. As the Libyan national government -- there is a sort of forming up now. Maybe there is a path forward there that is better. And my fourth concern would be a Libyan naval -- or a Russian naval base in Sudan on the Red Sea. So those are my top four global power competition concerns with those competitors, and it is a whole-of-government approach I think that will get us there. Most African partners want to partner with us.

Senator Kelly: And when you are thinking about China's desire to have an Atlantic Coast naval base, where do you -- where do you think the most likely place is that they are exploring right now?

General Townsend: Senator, let me say this. They have placed bets from Mauritania in the north to Namibia in the south, and many countries in between. I would really rather dig into those details in closed session.

Senator Kelly: Okay. Thank you. General McKenzie?

General McKenzie: Senator, when we talk about competition against Russia and China in the gray space, clearly we need to think globally, not just in the western Pacific and not just in -- not just in Europe. The principal tools that we use in Central Command range from
exercises with our partners. Everybody wants to exercise
with the United States, so we work those very hard with all
these partners. The other is IMET, bringing their officers
and NCOs to the United States for educational opportunities,
extremely low-cost, extremely high payoff. Everybody wants
to go to a U.S. school if they can have -- a military school
if they have -- if they can have the opportunity to do that.

Additionally, security cooperation. As Steve noted,
everybody wants our weapons. They would prefer to buy from
us. They accept the restrictions that we will place on
those weapons, but we have a variety of tools that we can
employ, and that is just in the military domain. On the
whole-of-government side, I would just call out, too, the
economic aid that we can offer and the work of USAID. All
of those working in concert with us give us significant
advantages that we can apply against Russia and China,
particularly in the Central Command AOR.

Senator Kelly: If we were able to expand those
educational opportunities for foreign, often, officers, but
just military personnel, is the demand -- I mean, how
significant is the demand right now?

General McKenzie: The demand is -- the demand far
outpaces supply. Far outpaces supply.

Senator Kelly: So we could double the --

General McKenzie: You could double, triple. You could
quadruple. You could do a lot of things. The problem really is on our end. I mean, our institutions are good because they are scoped in size, and we recognize that, but nonetheless, there is enormous demand for these.

Senator Kelly: Thank you. I yield back.

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

Senator Tuberville: Well, thank you very much. Very quickly, thanks for being here today. General McKenzie, what is the most important thing we can do to prevent a resurgence of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and are we doing enough?

General McKenzie: I think we are on -- we are on -- we are on track to do that. I think the Iraqis are a lot better at fighting -- at fighting ISIS. We have pulled back from accompanying them in the fight to high-level advising. They can generally master the battlefield and protect their own country, so I think we are in a good place. I think we are in a good place in Iraq. In Syria, we work with our SDF partners to continue the fight against ISIS remnants. They do not hold any ground. You know, there are small, isolated groups of them that operate up and down the Euphrates River, and we go after them pretty hard. And because of that, they are unable to generate attack -- effective attack plans against the United States or our allies.
Senator Tuberville: General Townsend, how will China's growing influence in the region disrupt the U.S.'s abilities to impact long-term strategic goals?

General Townsend: Senator, I think our number one strategic goal for Africa is to ensure that the United States has the access and the strategic influence that we need in the future. That is, I think, the number one concern I have for China's activity in Africa is that they will try to maneuver us or box us out of access and influence. I would say that we have an edge still. As much money as they have invested and as many activities that they are doing, we still have an edge in access and influence.

An example I use is our rescue of an American citizen that was held hostage in Nigeria just last October. In an hour's notice, we asked seven countries for access to their country for armed -- our armed forces to enter their country and do some military activity. In many of these countries, this was done over the phone with literally hours to give us an answer. All seven said yes, and that is an example of the access and influence the United States has today, and we need to work to ensure we have that access and influence in the future. And not all seven of those countries are what we would consider strong and close partners, but they all said yes to that request.

Senator Tuberville: Excellent. Thank you. General
McKenzie, are there effective measures being taken today by CENTCOM to address the individual displaced persons crisis along the Syrian and Iraqi border? If so, how?

General McKenzie: Senator, I remain very concerned about displaced persons in northeast Syria. It is not a military problem. It is really a whole-of-government, and more than that, it is actually an international problem. We have trained the people that were in those camps -- that is our responsibility -- and we prevent external actors from getting in there and causing harm. Nonetheless, those camps are incubators for radical ideology. We need to find a way to return, particularly the children, but also the other members, back to the countries that they came from. And that requires an international effort, and I know the Department of State is working very hard to make that -- to make that happen. It is a tough -- it is an uphill sled, though, trying to make -- trying to achieve that. This is one of my most significant concerns, sir.

Senator Tuberville: Thank you. General Townsend, as we build relationships with African nations, such as Morocco and Algeria, how does this -- how does this strengthen our national security?

General Townsend: Both of those countries sit in a geostrategically important part of Africa. They both have -- Morocco directly watches over the Strait of Gibraltar,
and Algeria is close enough to influence the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Med. So from a geostrategic standpoint, we absolutely need working -- good working relations with those two countries. Morocco is a very strong partner of the United States, probably our number one African partner as far as relationships go. They take great pride in their military being equipped primarily with U.S. equipment and operating at a standard that is equivalent to a NATO standard, so they are very strong partner. Algeria has been -- has had close ties with Russia for decades. However, they have recently been expressing a desire to increase their ties with the United States, and we do have a good working relationship with Algeria on issues of mutual concern.

Senator Tuberville: Do we sell Morocco a lot of arms and equipment?

General Townsend: I am sorry?

Senator Tuberville: Do we sell Morocco a lot of arms and equipment?

General Townsend: We do, and unlike a lot of African partners, they purchase it all with their own money.

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

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville. And now I would like to recognize via Webex, Senator Hawley, please.
Chairman Reed: I know Senator Hawley is trying very quickly to get either to Webex --

Senator Hawley: There we go. Can you hear me now, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Reed: I can, Senator. Please proceed.

Senator Hawley: Okay. Thank you. Thank you so much. Sorry. I could not hear you there. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for being patient with me.

General McKenzie, let me start with you, if I could. Secretary Austin said recently that the United States will be able to maintain counterterrorism capabilities in the region sufficient to ensure Afghanistan cannot become a safe haven for terrorists who threaten our security. Again, that was Secretary Austin. Can you just give me a sense, do you agree with the Secretary's assessment that we can achieve our counterterrorism objectives in Afghanistan even once we complete the drawdown that President Biden has directed?

General McKenzie: Senator, I do agree with that assessment. You know, we will rely on our defense in depth. The changes that have been made to security here in the United States make our homeland a much harder target than it was in 2001. Additionally, the re-basing that we will do across the theater as we pull out of Afghanistan will give
us the capability to go back in as necessary to strike
targets when they need to be struck. I do not want to make
it sound too easy. It is going to be extremely difficult to
do that. It is certainly possible to do that, and we will
have the forces that will allow us to accomplish those
tasks.

Senator Hawley: Thank you for that answer. I am glad
to hear that. What are some of the options, can you give us
a sense, that CENTCOM is evaluating for finding and
neutralizing targets in Afghanistan once we withdraw our
forces?

General McKenzie: Sure. I would prefer to cover it in
detail perhaps in the closed session.

Senator Hawley: Sure.

General McKenzie: But just very broadly, I would tell
you that you always need a combination of -- you want -- the
formula is you have got to -- you got to find them, you got
to fix the target, then you have to finish the target. So
we tend to think in those terms when we talk about the
resources that we need -- that we will need. What you will
need is the ability to bring persistent overhead coverage
in, probably from extended ranges, to still loiter and take
a look at areas that you want -- you want to further
examine. And the reason you are going to need persistent
coverage is, if you plan to strike something, we are going
to strike it in full compliance with the law of armed conflict: low collateral damage and the American way of war. So we are going to make sure if we go after something, it is really what we want to hit, and we are not going to kill innocent people should that be necessary.

So we will do all that from extremely long range and it will be a challenge, but we do have the capability to do it.

We have a number of ways to get to a fixed solution, ranging from a precision strike at very long range to on-the-ground options should those prove necessary. And I would really prefer to talk a little bit more about those in a closed session, sir.

Senator Hawley: Absolutely. Give me a sense, General, if CENTCOM has done a similar analysis to identify ways that we can achieve our counterterrorism objectives in Iraq, should we withdraw our forces there.

General McKenzie: The logic -- the logic is the same. We would -- we would certainly be able to do that, and the logic would be the same.

Senator Hawley: Would you be willing in the appropriate setting to share your findings with the committee in terms of the analysis you have done about how we might achieve that in Iraq?

General McKenzie: Certainly. Of course, right now we do not anticipate withdrawing from Iraq. In fact, we
believe, as a result of the strategic dialogue that was just completed in the last 2 weeks, we will maintain a footprint in Iraq going forward. But certainly, pending approval of the Secretary and further -- you know, and further approval by the Department, we would be willing to do that.

Senator Hawley: Yeah, let me -- let me perhaps rephrase my question. Has CENTCOM done a similar -- you are doing this analysis now for Afghanistan because of the President's order in terms of how we can reposition there to achieve our counterterrorism objectives. Has CENTCOM done a similar analysis for Iraq in the event that our force posture there might change significantly?

General McKenzie: Senator, not vis-a-vis Iraq particularly, although the logic of the argument, the logic of the capability would be the same where there is a target against Afghanistan or Iraq. So the work that we are doing right now would be useful should that prove necessary at some contingent time in the future as yet unplanned.

Senator Hawley: Do you anticipate doing an analysis for the Iraq situation? The reason I am asking, General, it seems that if we are going to have a meaningful discussion about our continued military presence there, we are going to need to know the options, what we can realistically hope to achieve should we draw down or leave entirely.

General McKenzie: Sure. So right now we are not
planning for that in Iraq, is probably the best way to answer your question. We could plan for it very rapidly if so directed, but, again, I note that right now we do plan on maintaining a presence in Iraq into the future, subject to agreements and further discussions with the Government of Iraq.

Senator Hawley: Let me just ask you in the few seconds I have remaining, General, DOD budgeted about $4 billion last year for the Afghan Security Forces Fund. That is just short of the amount that PACOM needs for this year's installment of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. And at the same time, there is strong reason to believe that the Afghan security forces will be significantly reduced, harmed, or just collapse when U.S. troops depart. Here is my question. From a military standpoint, under what conditions would you say that it is no longer advisable for DOD to be investing this amount -- these billions of dollars each year in the Afghan security forces?

General McKenzie: Senator, that is a sort of a future hypothetical question which I try to avoid answering, but I can tell you this. If we do not -- if we do not provide them some support, they certainly will collapse, and I think that is not in our best interests.

Senator Hawley: Yeah. The reason -- as you can probably anticipate, the reason I am asking is I am
concerned that we will continue to pour resources into the
security forces without much return on investment when we
need them. We need those resources very badly in other
theaters, particularly in our pacing theater. I have had
just about used up my time here, I think. In fact, I am
over my time. Thank you, General, for being here. Thank
you, General Townsend, as well. I will have some additional
questions for you in a written setting. And thank you, Mr.
Chairman.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]
Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley. This concludes the open session. Let me yield to Senator Inhofe for any comments he might have.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, I do. I want to make sure the staff, anyone who is here, understands that we have a lot of things -- a lot of questions we want to ask in a closed session. That is going to take place in 217. We have four votes coming up, so it is going to be very convenient to be down there, run up and get our votes and come back, so I would invite all of our members to come to that closed session immediately.

Chairman Reed: Let me echo -- let me echo what Senator Inhofe said. In fact, I was going to say that, but he --

Senator Inhofe: Oh.

[Laughter.]

Chairman Reed: This is sort of ESP, I think. I do not know what is going on. But, yes, we are going to adjourn immediately to SVC-217. We will have a closed session. It will be people coming in and out to vote, but there are many issues we want to cover there. Gentleman, thank you for your testimony, thank you for your service, and for those who serve in your commands.

The open hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]