

STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III  
COMMANDER  
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND  
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
ON  
THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

26 MAR 2015

(INTENTIONALLY BLANK)

**Introduction:** We are in the midst of one of the most tumultuous periods in history. There is growing unrest throughout much of the world, while a vast array of malevolent actors seek to capitalize on the increasing instability to promote their own interests. This trend is especially pronounced in the Central Region, where state and non-state actors are in conflict, and the resulting turmoil impacts the affected countries and also directly affects the global economy and the security of the United States. In light of this, the U.S. must continue to exert strong leadership and act vigorously to protect our core national interests in this strategically important region. An effective ‘whole of government’ approach is essential. At U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), our aim is to see a positive transformation of the region over time, achieved by, with, and through our regional partners. Despite the challenges that exist in our area of responsibility (AOR), we do see progress being made in some areas, along with many opportunities. We are confident that our actions in pursuit of these opportunities will continue to produce positive results in the coming days.

Looking ahead, our partners will need to assume a larger share of the burden for providing improved stability in the region. Given the stakes involved, we must keep on assisting them in their efforts. At the same time, we have to find additional methods for dealing with the convergence of compound threats under increasing budget and resource constraints. We must be judicious in our decision-making. Particularly during this volatile period, we cannot afford restrictions or reductions that would degrade our military posture and put our core national interests at greater risk. Simply stated, if we hope to achieve improved security which provides for greater stability and prosperity around the globe, then the Central Region must remain a foremost priority.

**A Retrospective Look:** This past year has been especially busy for USCENTCOM. In Afghanistan, we completed our transition from combat operations to our train, advise, and assist (TAA) and counter-terrorism (CT) missions. The Afghans are now in the lead for all security operations. They continue to demonstrate significant capability and a strong desire to build upon the progress achieved over the past 13+ years. In recent months, we also saw significant advancements made on the political front as a new unity government was established. President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah have indicated a strong desire to work closely with USG leadership in pursuit of shared objectives. While much work remains to be done in Afghanistan, I am optimistic that developments will continue to trend in the right direction. At the same time, we are focused on the situation in Iraq and Syria. We responded quickly and effectively to the rapid expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the early summer of 2014. We continue to take the necessary measures to counter this barbaric enemy which operates out of ungoverned and under-governed spaces in both countries. We are currently executing our regional campaign plan to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, and we are doing so with the support of a broad Coalition consisting of 62 other countries and organizations. However, as was clearly stated at the outset, this will take time and we must maintain strategic patience.

We also continue to closely monitor Iran's actions. Our diplomats are working diligently to negotiate an acceptable agreement with respect to Iran's nuclear program, and we hope that they will be successful. But, regardless of the outcome of the P5+1 discussions, our relationship with Iran will remain a challenging one, as we are very concerned by their unhelpful behavior in a number of areas. We also are paying especially close attention to the situation in Yemen.

Recent actions by the Huthis and also al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula coupled with the resignation of President Hadi and the subsequent upheaval in the government are cause for significant and growing concern. If the situation continues to erode, and it remains on a negative trajectory now, Yemen could fracture and we could end up losing a key partner in our counter-terrorism (CT) fight and cede additional ungoverned space for our adversaries to operate out of. Meanwhile, we are also watching with interest what occurs in Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, and other parts of the region.

Without a doubt these are challenging times. There is a great deal at stake for the U.S. and our partner nations. At USCENTCOM, we remain confident that we have the right strategy in place to safeguard our interests, to effectively address challenges and pursue opportunities, and ultimately to accomplish our mission on behalf of the Nation. That said, we depend upon the authorities and funding provided by Congress to execute our strategy and to do what is required to defend our core national interests at home and around the globe. Without question, our ability to do so and our overall readiness are put at grave risk by the continued reductions made to the defense budget, and specifically as a result of the Budget Control Act. We are in the midst of a tumultuous and unpredictable period. We are constantly responding to unforeseen contingencies and facing multiple threats from a wide range of actors that include nation states and transnational extremist groups. We cannot afford to constrict our ability to do so effectively by maintaining across-the-board spending cuts that severely limit our flexibility and authority to apply critical defense resources based on demand and the current security environment. If Sequestration goes back into effect in FY 2016, we will be increasingly vulnerable to external threats.

**USCENTCOM's Mission.** USCENTCOM's mission statement is: *“With national and international partners, USCENTCOM promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters or defeats state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability and prosperity.”*

**Strategic Environment.** The Central Region is an area rich in history, culture, and tradition. It is one of the most strategically important regions, holding well over half of the world's proven oil reserves and plentiful natural gas deposits, which are crucial to the global energy market. The U.S. and our partners have core national interests in this part of the world; interests that include the free flow of resources through key shipping lanes; the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and, the defense of our homeland against the very real and persistent threat of terrorism and extremism. Unfortunately, it also is an area that is plagued by violence and instability, political discord, economic stagnation, resource shortages (e.g., water), ethnic and religious tensions, and wide expanses of ungoverned or under-governed space. Alone or in combination, these provocative factors often make for a volatile environment that puts our interests and those of our partners at risk. Indeed, when things go badly in the Central Region, it has a clear and sizeable impact on the affected countries and other parts of the globe. For this reason it is an area of the world that merits our continued focus.

Of note, more so than in the past, individuals and groups today are coalescing around ethnic and sectarian issues, rather than national identity. This is fracturing institutions (e.g., governments, militaries) along sectarian lines and creating factional rifts within populations. This growing

strain, coupled with other “underlying currents,” fuels much of the tension and conflict that is present today across the USCENTCOM AOR. The principal currents include the growing ethno-sectarian divide; the struggle between moderates and extremists, particularly Islamist-based extremists; rejection of corruption and oppressive governments; and, the “youth bulge,” which reflects the many young, educated, unemployed or under-employed and disenfranchised individuals in the region who are ripe for recruitment by extremist groups. To be effective, our approach in dealing with the challenges that exist in the region must address these complex root causes. In particular, the governments and people of the region must bridge the growing ethno-sectarian divide, elevate the voice of moderates, rid governments of corruption, guard against ungoverned and under-governed spaces, and make sure that young people have better opportunities and are able to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Of course, change will not occur overnight. It will take time to adjust peoples’ mindsets and to counter deeply-engrained prejudices. But, it must be done by the governments and people in the region. Only they can bring about enduring, positive change, with our engagement and support. Indeed, we do have a critical role to play in this important endeavor and we must take action where necessary to counter exigent threats. We are helping our partners to build additional capacity and also foster stronger military-to-military relationships. The goal is to enable them to assume a greater share of the responsibility and do what is required to bring about improved stability in the region.

There are a number of challenges present in the Central Region that require our engagement to mitigate the potential negative effects. These include ongoing operations in Afghanistan, our

activities in Iraq and Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, and our efforts in a host of other locations in USCENTCOM's AOR. Ultimately, our goal in all cases is to move things in the direction of greater stability and to ensure assured access and freedom of movement, recognizing that a secure, stable, and prosperous Central Region is in the best interest of the United States and our partners and allies.

**USCENTCOM Priorities.** Looking ahead, USCENTCOM will remain ready, engaged and vigilant—effectively integrated with other instruments of power; strengthening relationships with partners; and supporting bilateral and multilateral collective defense relationships to counter adversaries, improve security, support enduring stability, and secure our core interests in the Central Region. In support of this vision, the command remains focused on a wide range of issues, activities, and operations, including our priority efforts:

- Degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL in order to prevent the further spread of sectarian-fueled radical extremism, and to mitigate the continuing Iraq-Syria crisis.
- Continue support to Afghanistan, in partnership with NATO, as a regionally integrated, secure, stable and developing country.
- Defeat Al Qaeda, deny violent extremists safe havens and freedom of movement, and limit the reach of terrorists.
- Counter malign Iranian influence, while reducing and mitigating against the negative impacts of surrogates and proxies.
- Support a whole of government approach to developments in Yemen, preventing Yemen from becoming an ungoverned space for AQ/VEOs; retain CT capacity in the region.
- Maintain credible general and specific deterrent capability and capacity to counter Iran.



- Prevent, and if required, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; disrupt their development and prevent their use.
- Protect lines of communication, ensure free use of the shared spaces (including the cyber commons), and secure unimpeded global access for legal commerce.
- Shape, support, and maintain ready, flexible regional Coalitions and partners, as well as cross-CCMD and interagency U.S. whole-of-government teams, to support crisis response; optimize military resources.
- Develop and execute security cooperation programs, improving bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships, building partnered “capacities,” and improving information sharing, security, and stability.

**Critical Focus Areas.** While we remain focused on the broad range of challenges present today in the Central Region, there are particular areas that merit a sizeable portion of our attention and resources. These areas are strategically important because of the potential impact on our core national interests and those of our partners. Below are descriptions of the current critical focus areas, along with a listing of some of the key opportunities that we are actively pursuing in an effort to improve stability in USCENTCOM’s AOR.

**Protection of Nation States.** Historically, nation states have been the dominant players globally. However, in recent years we have witnessed the emergence of transnational extremist groups that desire and, in some cases, demonstrate the ability to operate as major players with unfavorable intentions. In many ways they are attempting to behave like nation states and, in so

doing, they threaten the structures, rules, norms, and values that define the sovereignty of our nation-state based international system.

These transnational violent extremist organizations (VEO) are ideologically opposed to and target the nation states of the Central Region. They conduct attacks and terrorize local populaces in an effort to gain power and influence. This, in turn, weakens the nation states and generates increased instability. This is of obvious concern to us, given that nation states are typically anchors for stability across the globe, with some exceptions (e.g., Iran, Syria). Thus, the U.S. has a vested interest in buttressing our partner nations in the Central Region when necessary as part of a larger ‘whole of government’ effort to build regional stability through effective security assistance and support for inclusive governance.

As directed, we intervene to counter external threats, such as al Qaeda and ISIL. While our primary purpose for doing so is to protect U.S. interests, we also take action to allow time and space for the nation states in the region to build sufficient capacity to protect their own sovereignty. And, we support them through our planned regional engagements, our training and exercise programs, and foreign military sales (FMS) and foreign military financing (FMF) programs; all of which are designed to further enhance our partners nations’ military capacity.

One of the key opportunities that exist amidst the challenges posed by transnational VEOs is to persuade our partners in the region of the urgent need to build their military capacity so that they are better able to defend their own sovereign territory against such threats. Our regional partners are very concerned about the threat posed by ISIL and other VEOs. More importantly, many in

the region recognize that if they do not do something to address the root causes of the growing instability, they can all but guarantee continued political upheaval and anarchy. Again, transformational change can only be achieved by the governments and people of the region. They must decide that the instability caused by the “underlying currents” merits greater action on their part, and they must do more to address the root causes of many of the problems that exist in their region. We can and will support them; but, they must lead the effort.

**Iraq-Syria (Operation Inherent Resolve).** We remain highly focused on the crisis in Iraq and in Syria. Since launching its major offensive from eastern Syria into Iraq in early June, ISIL, which is commonly referred to by our partners in the region as “DA’ESH,” has largely erased the internationally recognized boundary between Iraq and Syria and has sought to establish a proto state in the deserts of eastern Syria and western Iraq. ISIL’s goal is to spur regional instability in order to establish an Islamic Caliphate. To achieve this end, ISIL has employed three primary lines of effort: 1) instill fear and shape the operational environment using unconventional warfare and traditional terrorist tactics; 2) seize and hold territory; and 3) influence, shape, and define the conflict using sophisticated information operations. Importantly, although significantly degraded in recent months, ISIL still possesses the resources and organizational structure to pose a credible threat to the Government of Iraq (GoI). The erosion of Iraqi and regional stability caused by ISIL places extreme political and economic strain on Jordan, Lebanon, under-governed border areas, and, by extension, the broader Gulf and Levant sub-regions.

That said, ISIL is not a monolith; rather it is a symptom of the larger problems that continue to threaten the Central Region. In particular, the growing divide between ethno-sectarian groups and between religious moderates and radical Islamists, have created ideal conditions for a group like ISIL to take root. Over a period of years the previous government alienated important segments of its society, notably the Sunni and Kurdish populations, which resulted in growing disenfranchisement among these groups. ISIL capitalized on this opportunity and launched a successful blitz into Iraq absent much resistance and with support from local Sunnis who viewed ISIL as a means for bringing about a change in their government. The Sunnis simply refused to fight; and, in so doing, they facilitated ISIL's offensive. The remaining Iraqi security forces were largely incapable of mounting a credible defense against ISIL. After we departed Iraq in 2011, the leadership of the country made a series of poor decisions. Among them was the decision to stop training the security forces, to stop maintaining their equipment, and to assign leaders based on sectarian loyalty rather than competence, merit, and experience. As a result, the security forces' skills atrophied and the condition of their vehicles and weapon systems deteriorated. This precipitated a number of defeats early on in ISIL's push towards Baghdad.

This past September, President Obama announced to the American people that the United States, with the support of a broad Coalition, would take action to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy. We are currently in the early stages of our counter-ISIL campaign, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). Our military campaign plan is comprised of five key elements. They will be achieved in a logical progression; although many of the efforts will occur simultaneously or near-simultaneously. First, we must counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Our intent is to employ a Coalition effort in Iraq to halt the advance of

ISIL and to enable the Iraqis to regain their territory and reestablish control over their border. Once we've halted ISIL's advance in Iraq, which we have done, we said that we would need to contain ISIL, and we are doing so with the assistance of our Coalition partners, including Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. We are working with them to ensure they have the capacity to secure their sovereign borders. We also said that we would need to enable the moderate Syrian opposition forces through our train and equip efforts. Our goal is to develop a reliable partner that can assist in countering ISIL on the ground inside of Syria. Eventually we want to eliminate ungoverned spaces out of which ISIL and other terrorist groups have been operating by enabling the indigenous security forces to defend their own sovereign territories. Once we do all of these things, we will have defeated ISIL through a combination of sustained pressure, a systematic dismantling of ISIL's capabilities, and by effectively expanding our regional partners' CT capacities.

Our military campaign is having the desired effects. Iraqi security forces, to include Iraqi Army and Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS) forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, and tribal elements, with the support of U.S. and Coalition air operations, have halted ISIL's advance in Iraq. The enemy is now in a "defensive crouch," and is unable to conduct major operations and seize additional territory. We can expect that ISIL will continue to conduct ineffective counter-attacks and leverage their information operations to amplify the significance of these attacks. However, they are unable to achieve decisive effects. The effort in Iraq continues to represent our main focus. The actions that we are taking now in Syria against ISIL are shaping the conditions in Iraq. Specifically, our precision air strikes are disrupting ISIL's command and control, attriting its forces and leadership, slowing the flow of reinforcements from Syria into Iraq, and interrupting

the resourcing of their operations. The more than 2,600 total air strikes conducted in Iraq and Syria over the past several months have been extremely effective.

Of course, the United States is not doing this alone. Our efforts are intended to enable the broader, 'whole of government' approach that is currently underway among various departments and agencies in the U.S. government. Equally important are the contributions being made by our Coalition partners. Indeed, the Coalition represents the strength and cohesion of our campaign. In particular, the active and public involvement of five Arab-led nations, specifically Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar, has greatly enhanced the fight and sends a clear message to ISIL and other VEOs that their actions will not be tolerated.

Ultimately, the intent of our regional campaign is not simply to destroy ISIL, although that is a primary objective. Even more importantly, we want to do what we can to help change the conditions inside of Iraq and Syria so that what we see happening there now, does not happen again in the future. The key to doing so is enabling indigenous forces to defend their own borders and provide for the security of their sovereign territory. This is the goal of our advise and assist and build partner capacity efforts currently underway in Iraq, and soon in Syria. We are also working with the Government of Iraq (GoI) to train Sunni tribal elements. Equally important, we are providing, in coordination with the GoI, support for the Kurds who continue to play a significant role in the fight against ISIL.

All that said, the effects of our military efforts will be short-lived if the Iraqis do not effectively address their political problems. The crisis in Iraq will not be solved through military means

alone. The Iraqis have a new government and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has vowed to be more inclusive of the Sunnis and the Kurds and other minority groups. We are encouraged by the early steps he has taken to reach out to the Sunnis and Kurds and we are urging him to follow through on pledges made in the near-term. This is not a minor issue, as the government cannot succeed long-term without that support. National reconciliation is absolutely critical to the success of the counter-ISIL campaign.

A key opportunity that exists amidst the challenges posed by ISIL is to create conditions that reduce ungoverned spaces and allow for inclusion, security, and good governance in both Iraq and Syria. We pursue this opportunity, in part, by training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi Security Forces, helping them to re-build their capacity, and restructuring them to ensure greater inclusiveness. With your support, we have also have established a program to train, equip and sustain elements of the Syrian moderate opposition. We anticipate that these forces will make important contributions toward degrading and defeating ISIL, and they also will help to guard against ungoverned spaces, protect local populations, and help to create the conditions for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict in Syria that leads to more responsible and responsive governance.

**Afghanistan (Operation Freedom's Sentinel).** The engagement in Afghanistan remains a top priority. We conducted a successful transition from combat to stability operations, and we continue to help the Afghans to build and mature a capable and sustainable Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Today, the ANSF consists of approximately 326,000 Afghans. They,

not us, are in the lead for all security operations and they are managing to keep the levels of violence comparatively low across the country.

It is also worth noting that the Afghan National Army (ANA) consistently ranks as the country's most respected institution. This popularity largely reflects the improved quality of life that many Afghans are experiencing now as the country becomes increasingly safer and more stable. In recent years, life expectancy rates for Afghans have improved and the infant mortality rate has declined. Opportunities for Afghan women also have expanded; women now represent one-quarter of the labor force and 28% of the National Parliament. And, education and literacy levels have increased. In 2001, 900,000 Afghans were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Today, there are more than 8.0 million students enrolled in school; and, 39% of them are females. Unemployment or underemployment has also decreased from 50% to 35%. By almost all metrics, progress in Afghanistan has been significant over the past 13+ years. Numerous polls conducted in 2014 indicate that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) enjoys tremendous popular support. Polling reports have shown that more than 80% of Afghans believe their lives are improving. This is positive news; however, there is still much work to be done and the Afghans will need to continue to build upon the progress achieved thus far. They recognize this and clearly demonstrate their intent to do the right things going forward.

The Afghans have the capability to provide for the security of their people and they demonstrate this on a daily basis. However, they do still need some help with sustainment; and, that includes resupply operations, particularly to remote or mountainous areas. They need help with fixed-wing and rotary-wing aviation; and also with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance



support. Additionally, due to the delay in government formation, some key leaders who will see the Afghans through the upcoming fighting seasons have only recently assumed their new positions. We will need to work closely with them to enable their success and aid them in building additional needed military capacity. We cannot afford for Afghanistan to once again become a safe haven for extremist groups. Increased instability and diminished security would not only affect Afghanistan, but also the Central Asia region as a whole.

Of course, enduring stability in Afghanistan will not be achieved through military means alone. There must be a credible, reliable, and responsive government in place. Fortunately, after a challenging election, Afghanistan has begun to move forward politically under the National Unity Government led by President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah. Both leaders share similar priorities and beliefs, and they have signaled a strong desire to see the government succeed. They also are actively countering corruption, which represents a principal inhibitor of GIRoA success. Theirs is not an easy undertaking; however, I do believe that they can be effective together.

There is challenging work ahead for the government and people of Afghanistan. However, as I look at the country, I remain cautiously optimistic that developments will continue to trend in the right direction. We have been in Afghanistan for more than 13 years, representing the longest period of continuous conflict fought by our Nation's all-volunteer force. Together with our Afghan and Coalition partners, we have invested many lives and other precious resources with the goal of improving stability in that country, and we want to do all that we can to preserve those hard-earned gains.

Amidst the challenges posed by the current situation in Afghanistan is the opportunity to foster a strong relationship between the United States and Afghanistan and with other partner nations in the Central and South Asia (CASA) sub-region. In particular, this would contribute to improved Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, which would allow for increased counter-terrorism cooperation in the region, along with possibilities for reconciliation. President Ghani, CEO Abdullah, and their new government have indicated their strong desire to work with us and to continue to strengthen our partnership in the coming days. Looking ahead, our intent is to maintain a close relationship with the Afghan government and military as we work together to preserve improved security and stability in the region. At the same time, while the size of our footprint will decrease in the coming years, our continued presence in Afghanistan will allow us to maintain much-needed pressure on al Qaeda and other extremist groups.

**Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO).** As I travel around the region, I routinely hear from senior military leaders that they do not necessarily fear groups like ISIL's military prowess so much as they fear the groups' ideologies. These groups clearly demonstrate their ability to inspire extremist behavior and to recruit individuals in support of their causes.

In recent years, VEOs have increasingly exploited ungoverned or under-governed spaces in USCENTCOM's AOR. The extremists' use of these areas threatens regional security, as well as U.S. core national interests. They are able to plan and launch attacks, undermine local governments, and exercise malign influence from these spaces. At the same time, VEOs and other militant proxies continue to exploit security vacuums in countries experiencing political

transitions and unrest, namely Iraq and Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Lebanon. Chronic instability, disenfranchised populations, and weak regional governments provide new footholds for a resilient and expanding global jihadist movement and an ideal environment for Iran and its allies to aggressively undermine U.S. regional goals.

Of note, ISIL's rise as a competitor to al Qaeda (AQ) has significantly impacted the jihadist landscape. The two groups are now competing for recruits, resources, and publicity. This will likely result in increased terrorist attacks in the near-term as ISIL, AQ, and other elements attempt to out-do one another.

Meanwhile, the AQ movement is becoming more diffuse and decentralized as compared to pre-9/11. The risk of affiliates and allies operating in more areas and increasingly collaborating and coordinating with one another as a transnational loosely-confederated 'syndicate' is cause for concern. The AQ ideology remains persuasive, attracting and radicalizing susceptible individuals in the region. Thus, it is critical that we maintain our vigilance in countering the group and its narrative.

We must also continue to look for ways to effectively counter ISIL. As noted earlier, ISIL seeks to broaden its reach beyond Iraq and Syria, and will try to leverage regional instability to revive a caliphate stretching from Europe to North Africa to South Asia. ISIL has already received pledges of allegiance from smaller jihadist groups in Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, and they have inspired lone-wolf attacks in Algeria and the West.

Other extremist groups have leveraged Syria's security vacuum, including the AQ-affiliated Al Nusrah Front (ANF). As the civil war in Syria continues, ANF will threaten neighboring states, particularly Israel and Lebanon, where the group has launched anti-Hezbollah attacks. The ongoing Syrian conflict has also created a safe haven for the Khorasan Group, a network of veteran AQ operatives, providing them with territory to plot and train for attacks against the West and the U.S. homeland.

The Iraq-Syria area of operations is the premier destination for jihadist foreign fighters, with over 15,000 coming from around the globe, and particularly Africa, Europe, Asia, and North America. The majority of these fighters are joining ISIL's ranks, although some have joined ANF and other Syrian opposition groups. As these conflicts carry on, returning battle-hardened foreign fighters will pose increasing risk to their home countries, including the United States. We must sustain our active measures to address this growing threat.

An important opportunity that exists in the Central Region is to limit the overall reach and effectiveness of VEOs, while also reducing the amount of ungoverned or under-governed space in which these groups typically operate. To do so, many of our partners acknowledge the need to counter radical extremists' ideologies, in part by helping to amplify the voice of moderates in the region. They also recognize the need to limit access to ungoverned and under-governed spaces; thereby diminishing the reach and effectiveness of violent extremists operating in the region. By setting the right conditions and helping to promote the efforts of moderate and influential regional leaders, we may achieve significant and lasting improvements. And, these improvements are likely to have pervasive positive effects on the global security environment.

**Iran.** Iran represents the most significant threat to the Central Region. Our diplomats have been hard at work, trying to reach an agreement with Iran with respect to its nuclear program. The most recent extension allows for continued negotiations through 1 July 2015. While we remain hopeful that the two sides will eventually reach an acceptable deal, it is presently unclear how things will play out. We have to be prepared for what comes next. We will be prepared.

In the meantime, we remain very concerned about Iran's behavior in other areas. Iran continues to pursue policies that threaten U.S. strategic interests and goals throughout the Middle East. In addition to its nuclear program, Iran has a significant cyber capability, as well as the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East. With ranges up to ~ 2,000 km, Iran is able to strike targets throughout the region with increasing precision using creatively adapted foreign technologies to improve its missile arsenal. It also has increased its anti-access area-denial air defense capabilities. Iran is improving its counter-maritime capabilities (e.g., mines, small boats, cruise missiles, submarines), which serve to threaten the flow of global commerce in the Strait of Hormuz. Perhaps most concerning, Iran routinely engages in malign activity through the Iranian Threat Network (ITN) consisting of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and its surrogates, businesses, and logistics support. Iran also engages in malign activity through support to proxy actors such as Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas which threatens the sovereignty and security of Israel.

During the past year, the ITN primarily focused on Sunni groups in the Iraq and Syria-based conflict (including the moderate opposition in Syria) by bolstering the Syrian and Iraqi governments and overseeing engagements involving its own militant forces. Iran also maintains

the ability to expand the scope of its activities. This is troubling as Iranian malign influence is enflaming sectarian tensions that are all too often exploited by violent extremist elements in the region. Needless to say, our relationship with Iran remains a challenging one. We will continue to pay close attention to their actions, and we will remain steadfast with our regional partners and do what we can to help improve their capacity to counter Iran and mitigate the effects of their malign activity.

One of the key opportunities that exist with respect to Iran is the prospect of an acceptable agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program. If the P5+1 are able to reach a long-term resolution, that would represent a step in the right direction and may present an unprecedented opportunity for positive change in the Central Region.

**A Regional Perspective.** In many ways our military-to-military relationships continue to represent the cornerstone of America's partnerships with the nation states in the USCENTCOM AOR. Below are synopses of the status of those relationships, along with the current state of affairs in each of the 20 countries, minus Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and Iran which were addressed in the previous section, "Critical Focus Areas" (see pages 8-21):

**The Gulf States** – The Gulf States have proven to be valuable Coalition partners, engaging in and supporting offensive operations against ISIL and providing the indispensable access, basing and overflight privileges that are critical to the conduct of operations in the region. In recent months, we have seen some improvement in relations between and among the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar after a period of increased tensions. A

convergence of interests, namely the need to counter the increasing threat posed by ISIL and other violent extremists groups, has afforded a unique opportunity to strengthen the Coalition and also contribute to improving stability and security in the broader Middle East region. In many ways, ISIL's expansion in Iraq has forced the Gulf States to take more seriously the threat posed by ISIL and other violent extremist groups. As a result, they have begun to take a more proactive approach to countering extremist financing and foreign fighter facilitation. They must maintain their focus and continue to make much-needed progress in these areas. At the same time, we are strengthening our partners' military capacity as part of a collective security architecture designed to deter and, where necessary, counter Iranian hegemonic ambitions. Going forward, we will play a key role in making sure that our partners remain united on common interests and security challenges.

In late January of this year, the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** (KSA) saw a smooth transition of power, as King Salman bin Abdulaziz ascended to the throne after the death of his brother, King Abdullah. King Salman comes to power during a very challenging period. The threat from ISIL, particularly along Saudi's northern border, and from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Huthis in the south, has led KSA to take a more proactive role in safeguarding the Kingdom's interests in the region. In particular, KSA's prominent role in the campaign against ISIL, to include its participation in air operations in Syria and in support of the Syria Train & Equip program, has paved the way for other Arab nations to join the Coalition efforts to counter ISIL. Recognizing the need for enhanced maritime security in the Gulf, the Saudis assumed command of the Gulf Maritime Security Task Force for the first time this year. Their leadership is critically important in demonstrating the cohesion of the Combined Maritime Forces generally

and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations in particular. Of note, the Saudis have taken a lead role in reconciling the Gulf States. Looking ahead, our continued support of advanced Saudi defense competencies and further improvements in U.S.-Saudi military interoperability are expected to yield positive impacts, which will in turn contribute to greater stability in the region and beyond.

**Kuwait** remains a long-time partner and strong and reliable ally in the region, providing critical support for U.S. and Coalition troops, vehicles, and equipment deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. In addition to providing a permissive environment for our deployed forces in the USCENTCOM AOR, Kuwait plays a significant role in the retrograde of equipment from Afghanistan. They also continue to provide critical basing and access for U.S. forces and capabilities needed to address future contingencies. The Kuwaitis are committed to advancing regional cooperative defense efforts as evidenced by their role as a key interlocutor between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain in response to recent tensions, as well as the extensive preparation they have done to host the Eagle Resolve multi-national training exercise in the spring of 2015. The Kuwaitis also have made significant progress towards reconciling the sub-region's long-standing issues with Iraq, leading Gulf Arab diplomatic outreach efforts with the Government of Iraq. The Kuwaitis remain committed to accommodating all segments of their population to preserve internal stability, particularly Sunnis and Shia; and, this has made them typically measured in their support for Gulf Arab regional initiatives. Overall, Kuwait continues to provide critical support to the U.S. and partner nations while managing these internal political challenges.



Our military-to-military relationship with the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) continues along its historically positive trajectory. UAE's growing concerns regarding the spread of extremist ideologies and the threat that they pose to UAE's internal security and regional stability prompted the Emirates to take an active role in the counter-ISIL campaign. They continue to demonstrate their value as a strategic partner by proactively addressing some of the region's toughest problems. Their military capability is arguably the best among the GCC states. UAE's is also the most expeditionary military, deploying forces in support of operations in Afghanistan and Syria. In addition to their participation in the ongoing air operations in Syria, UAE also has offered to send forces and personnel to support the military advise and assist mission and one of the four training sites in Iraq. Of note, the Emirates have a much broader definition of extremism and they want to expand the counter-ISIL military campaign to include a wide range of groups they perceive as extremist, from Islamist political groups to Salafi jihadist groups. Going forward, we will look to further strengthen our security cooperation partnership with UAE through continued engagement and through our FMS program.

**Qatar** remains one of our most stalwart partners in the Gulf, hosting three of our forward headquarters (USCENTCOM, U.S. Air Forces Central Command, Special Operations Command Central) and facilities and providing us with unimpeded access to the region. The Qataris were among the first to offer a site for the Syria Train & Equip program, along with a place to host the now-established Combined Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (CJIATF) headquarters. Qatar also continues to play an active role in the counter-ISIL campaign. Unlike KSA, Bahrain, and especially UAE, Qatar makes a distinction between Salafi jihadist and political Islamist groups, which creates a challenge in terms of how we approach countering extremist groups in the

region. That said, the Qataris' relationships with a wide range of groups, including more moderate elements, could present potential opportunities.

During the past 12 months, the Qatari Armed Forces have concluded extensive FMS equipment purchases and submitted additional requests. All told, 2014 saw the Qataris allocate billions of dollars to arm their forces with cutting edge American weaponry. This show of renewed and expanding cooperation with the U.S. defense industry clearly reflects the Qataris' drive for greater military interoperability with the United States. Future collaboration with Qatar may see the genesis of a partner force that reflects the United States in organization, arms, and training. We have a long history of cooperation with **Bahrain**, to include hosting the headquarters of the United States Fifth Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces in Manama. Amidst boycotting by opposition members, the Bahraini government held elections in November and December of 2014, which resulted in additional Shia representation. However, there is still significant distrust between the Shia majority and Sunni-led government. The government perceives a direct threat from Shia opposition groups, which it believes are deliberately de-stabilizing the country by attacking the security forces and undermining the economy. The government believes these same Shia opposition groups are influenced and supported by Iran, and that Iran intends to eventually overthrow or supplant it with a Shia government.

Bahrain has been a strong member of the Coalition to counter-ISIL, participating in the initial air strikes into Syria in September of 2014. However, the historically strong relationship between the United States and Bahrain is showing significant strain as the U.S. FMS-hold carries into its third full year. Despite this political challenge, Bahrain continues to pursue the re-supply of

munitions for some of its aviation systems, and it remains firm in its support for U.S. assets at Naval Support Activity Bahrain.

**Oman** continues to thrive as a moderate and peaceful interlocutor to all equity holders in the Arabian Gulf. Exercising a publically-declared non-interventionist foreign policy, the Sultanate maintains a pragmatic relationship with both Iran and the United States. From our perspective, cooperation between Oman and the U.S. remains close with Oman providing regional access through the use of air and sea ports and also freedom of navigation along the Strait of Hormuz. We value the stability and predictability that Oman provides and will strive to maintain our close relationship with the Sultanate. In the meantime, the Omanis are understandably concerned about the deteriorating situation in Yemen. Of note, the Omanis maintain relationships with Iran and all of Yemen's competing factions, including the Huthis. The Omanis are playing a constructive role in helping to manage the volatile situation in Yemen. We will continue to do what we can to support their efforts and to expand our collaboration to improve Oman's border control, counter-terrorism, and maritime security capacity.

**Yemen's** long-term outlook is uncertain based on multiple converging drivers of instability. The Huthi takeover of the government and President Hadi's subsequent resignation created a political power vacuum and reenergized historical north/south tensions. Competing factions, including the Huthis, former-President Saleh loyalists, the Islamist Islah Party, and possibly other groups likely see this as an opportunity to assert control over the long-term. Meanwhile, Hadi moved south, rescinded his resignation, and indicated that he intends to govern from Aden. For now, the Huthis have solidified their position as the dominant force in the capital (Sanaa) and northern

governorates, controlling all governance and security mechanisms. UN-sponsored negotiations over forming some type of transition government are ongoing, but Yemen's multiple competing factions will make political resolution very difficult to achieve. It is unclear if the southerners will simply deny Sanaa's authority or unite and declare independence in the near-term, although there are obvious signs of southern opposition to Huthi rule. Southern leaders are likely waiting to see how the situation develops, including the military's response and external actors' willingness to provide them with support. Additionally, Southern military commanders have indicated that they do not intend to take orders from Sanaa.

Yemen's economy has been in a steady state of deterioration for some time. Declining oil revenues and cuts to foreign assistance have contributed to a fiscal crisis. Meanwhile, rampant unemployment further exacerbates Yemen's problems, including making large segments of the population susceptible to radicalization.

The lack of central government leadership coupled with Huthi expansion [and the evacuation of all U.S. personnel in February 2015] have made it exceedingly difficult for us to [conduct partnered or unilateral CT operations against AQAP]. The Yemeni government has generally curtailed its CT operations, and this has allowed AQAP to regain some of its former territory and increase operations against government and security forces. While some of AQAP's combat power may be preoccupied with the Huthi incursion, their external operations cells remain active, especially in the south. We must figure out how to maintain our CT platform in Yemen in order to counter the threat from AQAP. Also concerning is the influence that Iran has with the Huthis, and the particular threat that poses to Saudi Arabia's southern border. Additionally,

Huthi control of Yemen's Hudaydah Port gives them, and potentially Iran, direct influence over maritime traffic through the Red Sea, which presents a significant vulnerability in terms of the protection of core U.S. national and global economic interests.

**The Levant**— The greater Levant sub-region is struggling to deal with a number of challenges, to include the increasing divide between ethno-sectarian groups, the growing threat posed by ISIL, Al Nusrah Front (ANF) and other violent extremist elements, a growing refugee crisis, and the ongoing civil war in Syria which has now entered into its fourth year. These various crises are straining nation states' economies and worsening the overall security situation. There is also the risk that they will expand further into neighboring areas. We remain highly concerned and continue to do all that we can to assist our partners in the Levant sub-region in their efforts to effectively deal with these and other challenges.

The leadership and people of **Lebanon** continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of continued social, military, and political challenges. This resilience largely reflects the improved performance of the multi-confessional Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which is the most respected institution in the country. That said, Lebanon is challenged by increasing incidents of sectarian violence and terrorist attacks by ISIL and ANF. Thus, our continued support for the LAF's CT operations is critical to ongoing efforts to insulate Lebanon from the conflict in Syria and Iraq. This situation is further exacerbated by a variety of contributing factors, including Lebanese Hezbollah's (LH) involvement in the Syria conflict, the influx of more than one million refugees from Syria, and the presidential vacancy that has remained

unfilled since May 2014. In particular, the absence of a president has put Lebanon's stability at greater risk. It is also breaking down the country's fragile power-sharing consensus.

There is a perception among some Sunnis that the LAF and the Lebanese government favor Shia. Many also believe that the LAF has acquiesced to LH and is unfairly targeting Sunnis. This has led to increasing sectarian violence in traditionally Sunni areas like Aarsal and Tripoli. The growing unrest makes the Sunnis susceptible to extremist messaging by ISIL and other violent extremist elements. The LAF is doing a credible job of managing the current levels of violence inside of the country, in an effort to protect the interests of the Lebanese people. However, this could change if ISIL's narrative begins to resonate with Lebanese Sunnis. ISIL, ANF, and other violent extremist elements are attempting to establish footholds in Lebanon, most notably in the border area adjacent to Syria. Needless to say, the situation in Lebanon remains a very delicate one, and we will remain focused on this important country.

**Jordan** remains a steadfast partner in the Central Region and the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) are among our strongest military partners. The country's civil and military leadership continue to provide a positive example of professionalism and moderation. That said, Jordan does have a large Palestinian and refugee population vulnerable to extremist messaging and influence. This challenge is further exacerbated by a weakened economy and limited economic opportunity in the country.

The Jordanians fought alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan and are currently flying combat sorties as part of the counter-ISIL Coalition. The Jordanians also continue to provide critical

basing support for OIR missions. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the family of the JAF pilot murdered by ISIL. This horrendous crime will only serve to reinforce Coalition unity and resolve. It prompted a significant increase in public support for the counter-ISIL campaign among the Jordanian populace, which before was generally ambivalent and, to some degree, even opposed to military involvement in the current fight. At the request of the Jordanian government, we recently conducted an assessment of the JAF and found several areas where we could assist in increasing their military capacity and improving their interoperability. We are also working to expedite the delivery of their urgent FMS request to enable their continued active support of the counter-ISIL campaign.

Meanwhile, we are doing all that we can to help Jordan to deal with its significant refugee crisis. The refugee population (>600K) has placed an enormous strain on the economy and on host communities. While the Jordanians are to be commended for the professional and compassionate manner in which they are handling this tough challenge, the reality is that, even with international assistance, the Jordanians are struggling to cope with the impacts. Our goal is to help ease the burden on the nation's economy and infrastructure, while doing what we can to further enhance stability and security in the country.

**Egypt** remains an anchor state in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. It is important for a number of reasons, to include the country's geographic location, its enduring peace treaty with Israel, its oversight of the Suez Canal, and its cultural and religious influence across the region and the globe.

Egypt continues to deal with the effects of an improving, yet weak economy, damaged by years of political instability and escalated terrorist violence. President al-Sisi and the government are attempting to strike a balance between promoting representative government and countering what they perceive as a subversive form of political Islam and violent extremism that they maintain has found voice through the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptians believe that political Islam is bound tightly to the violent extremist activity they are witnessing in the Sinai and across mainland Egypt, into neighboring Libya. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the 21 Coptic Christians brutally murdered by ISIL last month in Libya.

Our strategic partnership with Egypt remains highly important and our military-to-military relationship represents a key pillar of that partnership. We have been very encouraged to see progress made by the Egyptians with respect to the current holds on FMF and FMS. We continue to work closely with Egypt's Armed Forces (EAF) to improve the security of their borders, including the Sinai, and to stop the flow of fighters and equipment transiting from Libya and Sudan through Egypt into the Central Region. We need to support the EAF's efforts to secure the Sinai so that it does not become an under-governed safe haven for extremist elements. At the same time, we continue to look for ways to integrate Egypt into the counter-ISIL Coalition and our broader regional counter-terrorism campaign.

**Central and South Asia** (CASA) – The CASA sub-region is adjusting to the shrinking U.S. and international military presence in Afghanistan. The U.S. is now conducting train and advise (TAA) and counter-terrorism missions in Afghanistan, as we normalize our military-to-military relationship. This change has altered the strategic calculus of CASA state and non-state actors as



they look to position themselves to protect their own interests in the event that the Afghan government cannot maintain internal stability. A primary driver of these hedging strategies, uncertainty about the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan post-2014, so far has been countered by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's support for a continued partnership with the U.S. and the international community at large, mainly through his overwhelming support of the NATO Resolute Support TAA mission. Of note, Russia also exerts significant influence in Central Asia through economic, military, and informational means to undermine the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian states. Russia's actions in the Ukraine have placed additional pressure on the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, and this in turn has generated additional challenges for our military-to-military relationships.

At the same time, the CASA sub-region remains an important focus for increased partnerships with the U.S. In particular, concerns regarding border security and the threat from extremist elements have prompted a shared desire for greater cooperation. Going forward, we will look for ways to strengthen our military-to-military partnerships in support of CT, CN, and security assistance efforts.

Violent extremist organizations, to include the remnants of core al-Qaeda (AQ), continue to operate in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and, to a lesser extent, parts of eastern Afghanistan. These groups threaten regional stability, plan attacks against the U.S. and partner interests, and pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Of note, the Taliban insurgency continues to present a credible threat to the Afghan government.

Tension between Pakistan and India also continue to threaten regional stability and largely drives Pakistan's regional strategy, especially as it relates to Afghanistan. Our drawdown from Afghanistan has created an opportunity to normalize our relationships with Pakistan and Afghanistan, and this may, in turn, encourage the two countries to find common ground in countering the VEOs operating in their border region. We are working to identify and facilitate implementation of confidence-and trust-building measures between Pakistan and Afghanistan to further reduce border tensions and increase military cooperation.

Our desired end-state is a stable sub-region characterized by a low risk of conventional or nuclear war, with regional states committed to non-interference with respect to their neighbors' internal affairs, the denial of sanctuary for VEOs, and the non-proliferation of WMD. We will maintain a unilateral capacity to conduct CT operations against high-value targets and groups in the region that pose a threat to the U.S. or our core national interests. To prevent future conflicts, we will also work to improve military-to-military relationships by facilitating more frequent contact between and among the region's military leadership. This includes moving from bilateral to multi-lateral exercises and encouraging multilateral training and operations.

We have made substantial progress in our efforts to strengthen cooperation with **Pakistan** over the past year. We are encouraged by the leaderships' commitment to counter-insurgency operations in the FATA and openness to improve relations with Afghanistan. However, Pakistan continues to face a number of political, economic, and security challenges that threaten to undermine the long-term stability of the state. Violent extremists operating in the country exploit these conditions for their own purposes. This is hindering the security forces' ability to

protect the population from terrorist attacks and prevent extremists from exporting violence across the region.

The U.S.-Pakistan military-to-military relationship continues to improve. Key contributing factors are our FMF, international military education and training, and the Coalition Support Fund. In December 2014, we addressed respective expectations for the scope and scale of our future military-to-military engagements. We also prioritized our security cooperation at the Defense Consultative Group Conference with the goal to help Pakistan to build additional capacity in support of their counter-insurgency and CT operations and other common objectives.

The Pakistani military's recent operations to clear militant strongholds in North Waziristan and other FATA regions and to prevent the militants' return have achieved near-term successes. However, Pakistan will likely continue to face the threat of VEOs for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, more positive rhetoric on Afghan-Pakistan relations from Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, combined with Afghan President Ghani's expressed desire for better relations, may foretell an effort by both sides to develop a more common view of the threat of VEOs operating in the border region. Of note, in response to the tragedy at the Army Public School and College in Peshawar in December of 2014, the leaders of both countries have demonstrated a desire to improve their cooperation going forward. This is encouraging and represents progress; and, USCENTCOM will continue to do our part to help strengthen and ultimately solidify this important relationship.

The U.S. military relationship with **Uzbekistan** has strengthened considerably over the past year with implementation of the first year of the five-year Plan for Military and Military Technical Cooperation. Mutual interests related to improving border security, CT, counter-narcotics, and countering the return of Uzbek fighters from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, underpin our relationship. The provision of Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles through the Excess Defense Articles program improved protection provided to Uzbek security forces. And, expanded U.S. Special Forces training will further improve the Uzbek military's capacity to meet security challenges. Uzbekistan remains committed to ensuring regional stability via continued support for our operations in Afghanistan by providing access to the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). It also provides electricity to northern Afghanistan. As with other countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan continues to prefer bilateral vice multi-lateral military relationships.

Our relationship with **Tajikistan** is advancing steadily in spite of significant Ministry of Defense leadership changes and growing security concerns. We continue to assist the Tajiks in developing the capacity to meet a variety of CT, CN, and border security challenges, while also supporting their development of a peacekeeping capability. Tajikistan provides critical support to ongoing Afghanistan operations by allowing transit along the NDN. That said, the Tajiks are concerned about the near- and long-term effects of the Afghanistan transition on regional security and stability.

The **Kyrgyz Republic** faces many of the same or similar security challenges as its neighbors, particularly with respect to the threat posed by violent extremist elements operating in the region. Bilateral and multi-lateral engagements in the areas of CT, CN, and border security continue on a

case-by-case basis. Our military-to-military relationship with the **Kyrgyz** has been positive. We are assisting them with their development of an explosive ordnance disposal capability. We look forward to full resumption of security cooperation activities, pending the successful outcome of ongoing negotiations for a replacement of the Defense Cooperation Agreement that expired in July of 2014.

Our relationship with **Kazakhstan** is one of the most well developed in the Central Asia sub-region. The Ministry of Defense continues its transformation from a traditional Soviet-style territorial defense role into a more modern, adaptable force capable of meeting multiple, diverse security threats. Furthermore, the Kazaks have proactively sought our assistance in improving their training, personnel management, and logistics capabilities. Kazakhstan remains the largest contributor among the Central Asian states to Afghan stability, providing technical and financial support to the ANSF and educational opportunities in Kazakhstan for young Afghans. We continue to leverage Steppe Eagle, the annual multinational peacekeeping exercise co-sponsored by the U.S. and Kazakhstan, to improve peacekeeping capabilities and to foster regional integration.

**Turkmenistan's** humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and efforts to increase regional economic integration are important to enhancing stability in the Central Asia sub-region. However, Turkmenistan's declared policy of positive neutrality limits our opportunities for substantive military-to-military collaboration. Engagements in the areas of Caspian Sea security, disaster preparedness, medical services readiness, and professional military education continue; however, they are limited. The Turkmen recently expressed a desire to acquire U.S. military

equipment and technology to address threats to their security along their southern border with Afghanistan. We will do what we can to support those requests.

**Our Strategic Approach.** Our ability to effectively employ our “Manage-Prevent-Shape” strategic approach is largely dependent upon the capacity and readiness of our forward-deployed military forces and Service prepositioned materiel capabilities, working in concert with other elements of U.S. power and influence. Equally important are our efforts aimed at building our regional partners’ capacity and strengthening our bilateral and multilateral relationships. This is achieved principally through key leader engagements and our training and joint exercise programs.

**Building Partner Capacity (BPC).** To improve stability in the USCENTCOM AOR and to lessen the need for costly U.S. military intervention, we must be forward-leaning and empower our partners to meet internal security challenges and work collectively to counter common threats. When compared to periods of sustained conflict, BPC is a low-cost and high-return investment. This is especially important in today’s resource-constrained environment. Joint training exercises, key leader engagements, and FMS and FMF programs continue to represent the key pillars of our BPC strategy. Also critical are relevant authorities and programs noted in the FY16 President’s Budget (PB), namely the Global Train and Equip authority, Counter Terrorism Partnerships Fund, and Section 1208 programs. Tangible by-products of our BPC efforts include increased access and influence, enhanced interoperability, and improved security for our forward deployed forces, diplomatic sites, and other U.S. interests. Working “by, with, and through” our regional partners also serves to enhance the legitimacy and durability of our

actions and presence in the region. In the event some type of U.S. involvement is required, having strong partners allows for increased burden sharing and improves the likelihood of success.

**Joint Exercise and Training Program.** The USCENTCOM Joint Exercise and Training Program continues to grow in complexity and relevance with extended participation throughout the USCENTCOM AOR during FY2014 and into the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of FY2015. All five Component Commands developed or continued to execute a robust exercise program across the complete broad spectrum of USCENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation Objectives.

Over the past year, USCENTCOM conducted 45 bilateral and multi-lateral exercises. Key among them was the Eager Lion 14 exercise, which was hosted by Jordan and included naval, air, and land components from 14 different countries operating at 14 locations and totaling over 4,000 personnel from our partner nations and some 4,500 U.S. military and civilian support members. The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise 15, executed in late 2014, took place over 8,000 square miles of navigable waterway and united some 43 nations, including over 7,000 global military service members and over 40 naval vessels and numerous other warfighting assets in defense of the region's maritime commons. All of the exercises had tangible and measurable impacts in terms of advancing our national security objectives, demonstrating mutual commitment to regional security, promoting combined command, control, and communications, and enhancing interoperability. The ability of the counter-ISIL Coalition to conduct very effective, unrehearsed short-notice strike operations in Iraq and Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve is clear evidence of the impact of this vibrant exercise program.

**Required Capabilities.** In order to effectively protect and promote U.S. and partner nation interests in the region, USCENTCOM must maintain a strong presence and be adequately resourced and supported with the necessary posture – forces, equipment, and enablers. Our required capabilities include:

**Forces and Equipment.** Forward-deployed rotational joint forces that include fighter and airlift assets, surveillance platforms, ballistic missile defense assets, naval vessels, ground forces, and cyber teams that are trained, equipped, mission-capable and ready to respond quickly are indispensable to protecting our core interests and supporting and reassuring our partners in the region. A capable force presence forward deployed and enabled by a flexible and distributed footprint with assured access is also required. This ready and capable joint presence can prevent conflict through deterrence, manage crisis escalation through early intervention, and allows for a broader set of response options for consideration by national authorities, in addition to rapid response to crises to quickly achieve stated objectives. We will continue to work with the Department of Defense to determine a sustainable, flexible long-term posture that provides us with the presence, access and partnerships we need for enduring missions and activities in the USCENTCOM AOR.

USCENTCOM requires continued regeneration, reset, and modernization of designated Service prepositioned equipment capability sets. The Services preposition equipment and materiel capabilities as capability sets in support of deploying forces, to provide national leadership the necessary capability and flexibility to respond to a diverse set of crisis scenarios, to include preventing disruptions to trade and security that could have disastrous impacts on the global



economy, and the ability to rapidly provide disaster relief support. The Services aggressively reconstitute and regenerate sustainment stocks depleted over the course of a decade-plus of major combat operations; however, equipment shortfalls continue to impact indirect fire, sustainment, and troop support capabilities. Shortcomings are largely the result of budget cuts that were directed by the Budget Control Act. Service prepositioned sets previously issued by each of the Services over the course of contingency operations require appropriate reset and reconstitution in order to posture the command for future contingency operations.

**Information Operations (IO).** Information Operations (IO) remains a top priority. Our investments in IO thus far have made it USCENTCOM's most cost-effective method and the top non-lethal tool for disrupting extremist activities across the Central Region. We have an enduring responsibility to counter this asymmetric threat and recognize IO will endure beyond major combat and counter-insurgency operations. As ISIL has clearly demonstrated in Iraq and Syria, VEOs continue to expand and increase their speed and effectiveness in the information environment which directly impacts USCENTCOM's mission effectiveness. Our military information support operations (MISO) programs serve as the model for the Department and require baseline funding to allow for sustainment and Department-wide expansion. Our IO efforts are synchronized and carefully nested in support of a broader 'whole of government' approach to countering the extremist threat.

**Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD).** Integrated Air and Missile Defense is increasingly important to us and our regional partners as threat technology improves and systems become more flexible, mobile, survivable, reliable and accurate. Today, the global demand for

ballistic missile defense capabilities far exceeds supply. In particular, there is a need for additional upper- and lower-tier interceptors and surveillance and warning systems. The ability to conduct early detection, identification, and engagement of possible threats is essential. Thus, active measures will need to be taken to address this capability shortage. Providing IAMD protection to deployed U.S. forces and our critical infrastructure is crucial to mission success and provides a visible deterrence to regional aggression. Moreover, it signals U.S. commitment to regional partners and provides flexibility to respond to regional contingencies. Our bases in the USCENTCOM AOR will increasingly be at risk to the ballistic missile threat if we continue along the current trajectory.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) Assets.** Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support continues to be challenged by supply-versus-demand limitations. Due to our counter-ISIL operations, demand for ISR increased substantially, along with the need to maintain a persistent eye on strategic risks and possible threats to U.S. national security interests. Collection in anti-access/area denial environments continues to present a tough challenge. As evidenced by recent events in Iraq and Syria, USCENTCOM's need for ISR and collection platforms does not end once named operations cease. On the contrary, our demand for multi-discipline, low-observable ISR with strike capability that can operate in adverse weather conditions and non-permissive environments is increasing. If we do not meet the requirements, we can expect that our information dominance, situational awareness, and security posture will diminish accordingly. As we reduce our footprint in Afghanistan, it is imperative that our intelligence collection capabilities be constant and robust to support our forces on the ground. Likewise, with respect to Iraq and Syria, there is also a need for a robust ISR capability to

develop and maintain situational awareness of the security environment, particularly in denied and ungoverned spaces and in the absence of a large U.S. ground presence. And, while we are looking to our coalition partners to help fill some of the ISR demand, shortages do remain that will need to be addressed.

Ascertaining malign actor intentions and capabilities remains a challenge. Full-motion video (FMV) has become fundamental to almost all battlefield maneuvers, adversary detection, terrorist pattern of life development, force protection operations, and a myriad of other applications. We use FMV to buy down operational risk and to improve visibility of the security environments where our forces are required to operate. Full-motion video remains critical to our success; although, we certainly recognize that we cannot rely on FMV for every situation.

Human intelligence, satellite, other airborne assets, and other special collection capabilities also remain integral to solving many of our problem sets.

**Cyber Security.** USCENTCOM must be effectively postured and have sufficient capability to counter the growing cyber threat that the United States and our regional partners now face.

Maintaining an effective cyber defense requires the collective efforts of partners who share a common vision and are mutually committed.

Looking ahead, we will need to aggressively improve our cyber posture to mitigate advanced persistent threats to our network and critical information. As the cyber community matures, we will plan, integrate, synchronize, and conduct cyber operations in cooperation with other USG agencies and partner nations. USCENTCOM's cyber activities necessitate the active pursuit of

key requirements, resourcing, training, as well as the build out of our cyber forces and the acquisition of needed cyber capabilities. This requires a multi-disciplined approach to address a diverse and changing threat, adequate resourcing, and a command and control model aligned to the operational chain of command in order to readily receive and synchronize orders and execute cyber operations.

At the same time, we continue to support our regional partners in building their capacity and expertise in the cyber domain. This partner capacity is essential in the cyber domain, as the global economy relies in part on key resources that reside across the Central Region. With Congress' backing, we will continue to focus on cyber defense and cyber security cooperation as key components of our theater strategy.

**Required Authorities and Resources.** The realities of the current fiscal environment continue to impact USCENTCOM headquarters (HQs), our five component commands, established combined/joint task forces, and 18 country teams. Persistent fiscal uncertainty hinders efficient and timely implementation of operational, logistical, tactical, and strategic milestones and objectives. We request your help in addressing the budget uncertainty caused by the Budget Control Act and our dependence on continuing resolutions at the start of the fiscal year.

Provided the right authorities and resources, our world-class DoD Civ-Mil team can and will successfully accomplish any mission. With that in mind, we sincerely appreciate Congress' continued support for key authorities and appropriations needed to sustain current and future

operations in the Central Region and to respond to emerging crises. Collectively, the below required authorities and resources enable our efforts to shape positive outcomes for the future.

**Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)-funded Accounts.** USCENTCOM's programs, operations, and activities are resourced almost exclusively by OCO appropriations vice Baseline funding. This funding strategy potentially impacts our forward-deployed forces and our regional partners. We remain concerned that this approach limits predictability, does not allow for advanced planning, and conveys an unintentional temporary nature to our strategy in the region. All involved stakeholders must work together to develop an enduring approach to resourcing the defense strategy in the USCENTCOM AOR.

**Iraq and Syria Train & Equip Resources.** Continued support for flexible authorities is needed to effectively react to the urgent threat posed by ISIL in Iraq and in Syria. Improving the capacity and effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces, to include Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces, and moderate opposition forces in Syria is key to countering ISIL and other extremists operating in those countries. The Congressional authorities and resourcing provided to initiate the training and equipping of Syrian moderate opposition forces to counter a degraded ISIL and to defend territorial gains will undoubtedly contribute to the ultimate defeat of ISIL and the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Assad Regime. The turnaround of the dire situation in Kobane, Syria is indicative of how, with a fairly limited, precise application of authorities (allowing U.S. aircraft to airdrop donated Kurdish weapons and equipment) and U.S. air support, and a determined and willing partner, ISIL's momentum and narrative were effectively countered.

The Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) and authority demonstrate the United States' commitment, in partnership with the international community and the Government of Iraq, to build a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable Iraq security force. We strongly endorse and support extending the ITEF and establishing the stand-alone Syria Opposition Train and Equip Fund and authority in FY16 to ensure that the ISF and Syrian moderate opposition forces are professional and sufficiently equipped to accomplish their mission, which consists of disrupting, defeating, and ultimately destroying ISIL within their sovereign territories.

The **Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)** remains pivotal to ensuring the continued security and stability of the GIRoA and the ANSF. Historically, ASFF has provided 80-90% of the ANSF operating budget. While future ASFF requests are expected to decrease, they will still remain ANSF's primary funding source for at least the next few years. The ANSF is posturing for long-term supportability through a program of "Improve, Ready, Sustain." They are committed to instilling fiscal discipline as they refine requirements generation and define capabilities in a resource-constrained environment. The U.S. Government and the GIRoA must continue to work hand-in-hand through this period of transition. With continued U.S. support, the ANSF is in a position to maintain stability within Afghanistan, while reducing the influence of malign regional actors.

**Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS).** Our need for continued Congressional funding of FMF programs that support USCENTCOM security cooperation objectives cannot be overstated. The Central Region accounts for more than half of all global FMS. Our partners in the region want U.S. equipment because they recognize that it is

the best in the world. It also represents a very effective means for establishing long-term relationships between the U.S. and our partner nations and ensures greater interoperability between our militaries. We appreciate Congressional support for interagency initiatives to streamline the FMS and FMF process to ensure that we remain the partner of choice for our allies in the region and are able to capitalize on emerging opportunities going forward.

**Excess Defense Articles (EDA)/ Foreign Excess Personal Property (FEPP).** The EDA program has allowed the Department of Defense to transfer materiel determined to be excess to Service requirements. Over the years, EDA has been an integral component in building partner capacity and has proven beneficial in our engagements with our regional partners. We have reaped the benefits of this authority several times in the last year, enabling us to support requirements in Iraq, Uzbekistan, and other countries located within the USCENTCOM AOR or participating in operations with U.S. forces. Several other EDA transfers to the UAE, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Egypt are pending. Of note, USCENTCOM sourced as much EDA directly from Afghanistan as was available without increasing risk to the Services and the State Department at the time of the respective transfers.

In the same light, the FEPP authorization has allowed us to transfer non-military type equipment (e.g., wall lockers, generators, non-tactical vehicles) acquired as part of our base closures and reductions to Iraqi and Afghan security forces, as well as to other Afghan Government Ministries, Kuwait, and Kyrgyzstan. This authority was beneficial in allowing turn-key transfer of select bases while also reducing costs by allowing us to transfer items needed by the host

nation, rather than retrograding those same items to CONUS at a cost higher than their actual value.

**Coalition Support.** Continued Congressional support for Coalition Support authorities and funding, to include the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), the associated Coalition Readiness Support Program (CSRP), and the Lift and Sustain appropriation is key to maintaining effective coalitions and facilitating the participation in combined military operations of coalition partners who would not otherwise be able to participate due to lack of resources. Without coalition partners' participation, U.S. forces would be required to shoulder more of the burden of conducting these operations; and, in some cases, the operations simply could not be accomplished. This would pose additional risks to the safety and security of U.S. forces in theater and adversely impact critical U.S. missions, including the Afghanistan Transition and the campaign to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Financial and logistical support to coalition partner nations helps to ensure interoperability in the execution of current and pending missions; enhances planning and force protection; and, also simplifies logistical support mechanisms; while also improving our collective ability to respond quickly to contingency requirements.

Our requirement to provide logistical support to our coalition partners has not decreased despite the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan. The extension of authorities outlined in Section 1223 of the FY15 NDAA to provide logistical support to our coalition forces participating in military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq will be required to execute the Resolute Support Mission and are increasingly relevant as the counter-ISIL Coalition continues to expand. Our coalition partners have different sets of equipment and differing abilities to wage expeditionary warfare.



As the region changes focus, we must ensure that we maintain the logistics authorities currently in place in order to respond quickly to future contingencies.

**Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP).** As the United States' role in Afghanistan continues to evolve, commanders must retain the flexibility that the CERP provides in order to accomplish their mission under Resolute Support. Urgent humanitarian needs cannot be predicted and will remain a factor as long as we have security forces on the ground in country.

**Military Construction (MILCON).** We continue to leverage existing infrastructure and host nation funding where possible, as well as maritime posture and reach back capabilities to meet steady state and surge requirements. However, in some cases, MILCON is still required to expand infrastructure capabilities to facilitate sustainment support for U.S. forces and operations. Current projects are essential to our contingency and steady state operations and support the defense pillars outlined in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.

**Long-term C4 Sustainment Plan.** USCENTCOM, our Service Components, Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF), and our deployed forces currently rely heavily on command, control, communications, and computer (C4) systems to support operations across the region. These capabilities, primarily resourced through OCO funding, sustain C4 requirements at the HQ and eight of 24 strategic operational locations in the AOR. A diverse and survivable C4 infrastructure, via both SATCOM and terrestrial means, is essential to the successful conduct of missions in the USCENTCOM AOR.

**The U.S. Central Command Team.** At USCENTCOM, we continue to do our part to keep our Nation and our interests around the globe safe and secure. We have an exceptional and enormously capable team and, without question, our greatest assets are our people. We owe it to them to make sure they have everything they need to do their jobs in support of the mission as well and as safely as possible. This includes making sure that they have the best equipment, care and support, and, most importantly, we must guarantee them safe, secure, and respectful environments to live and work in. We should also do what we can to support them when they return from deployments or have completed their service obligations. Likewise, we must ensure that their families are properly cared for and supported.

**Conclusion.** All of us have a vested interest in achieving a stable and secure Central Region, and success will require everyone working together towards this common goal. This is not just the military's responsibility, or the U.S. Government's responsibility, or even America's responsibility alone. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated, "Peace cannot be achieved by one man or one nation. It results from the efforts of men of broad vision and goodwill throughout the world."

That said, the United States, and in particular our military, does have a share in the task at hand. We are uniquely qualified in our ability to lead and also leverage our partners' capabilities, while enabling them to play a larger and more active role in combatting common enemies, addressing challenges, and also actively pursuing the many opportunities that exist in that strategically important part of the world. Only the governments and people of the region can achieve enduring transformational change. But, by supporting them and helping to expand their capacity,

and by providing them with the decision space required to improve conditions and also provide for the security of their sovereign territories, we will help to successfully move the Central Region in the direction of greater stability and security. This remains our ultimate goal.

The year ahead is certain to be an important one throughout the Middle East and parts of Central and South Asia. The consequences of our actions, or lack thereof, will undoubtedly prove significant. Our intent at USCENTCOM is to build upon the progress achieved to date. We will continue to manage existing conflicts and crises, while doing what we can to prevent confrontations and developing situations from worsening and becoming crises. We also will continue to pursue the many opportunities present in the region, recognizing that it is through them that we will shape positive outcomes and achieve improved stability and security throughout our area of responsibility. Finally, we will continue to support the efforts of our U.S. Government colleagues; understanding that the effects of our individual contributions are greatly amplified when we work together in a constructive and collaborative fashion.

Today, more than 78,000 of the very best Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and Civilians assigned to or associated with U.S. Central Command are selflessly serving in difficult and dangerous places around the globe. They continue to do an exceptional job in support of the mission and this great country of ours. Without question, we could not do what we do without them. We are enormously proud of them and their families. They are and will remain our foremost priority.

*USCENTCOM: Ready, Engaged, Vigilant!*