

**Advance Questions for General Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army
Nominee for Commander, U. S. Central Command**

Defense Reforms

The Senate Armed Services Committee has initiated an intensive review of the organization of the Department of Defense—both military and civilian, including the elements created by the Goldwater Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Department of Defense to execute the National Military Strategy in the 21st Century.

Based on your experiences as a senior officer, what challenges have you observed with the current organizational structure, with particular focus on warfighting capabilities, and what modifications, if any, do you think are necessary to the current organizational structure including any Goldwater Nichols Act provisions?

From my perspective, combatant commands are appropriately structured for both peacetime and combat. Combatant commands have served our nation well in the planning and conduct of military operations. While it is true that JTFs are commonly used to direct combat operations, waging and managing wars requires combatant commands. Combatant Commands also are uniquely structured to prevent wars, and if necessary synchronize between numerous, simultaneous campaigns that cross COCOM boundaries. While I agree that we should seek to streamline, simplify, and reduce duplication of staffs at all levels, I believe we should be careful about moving to an organization where the JCS becomes too operational and directive to the COCOMs.

In your view, what modifications to the Unified Command Plan, if any, would enhance the warfighting effectiveness of the Department of Defense?

USCENTCOM has been heavily involved in both the 2013 and 2015 UCP review process. Working together with the services and other combatant commands, we have provided a comprehensive list of recommended changes to the UCP. These have been forwarded to the Secretary of Defense for his consideration. I don't want to get ahead of Secretary Carter by mentioning any specific proposals at this time. Additionally, we are actively participating in the work groups associated with the Department of Defense Organization and Responsibilities Review and are providing our inputs through those working groups.

Relationships

Section 162(b) of title 10, United States Code, provides that the chain of command runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense, and from the Secretary of Defense to the combatant commands. Other sections of law and traditional practice, however, establish important relationships outside the chain of command. Please describe your understanding of the relationship of the Commander, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), to the following officials:

The Secretary of Defense

Subject to direction from the President, the Commander, U.S. Central Command performs duties under the authority, direction and control of the Secretary of Defense. In addition, the Commander, U.S. Central Command is responsible to the Secretary of Defense for the preparedness of the command to carry out its missions.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Chairman is the principle military advisor to the President, National Security Council, and Secretary of Defense. Section 163 of title 10, U.S. Code, allows communication between the President or the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders to flow through the Chairman. As is custom and traditional practice, and as instructed by the Unified Command Plan, I would communicate with the Secretary through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vice Chairman in his absence. I anticipate a close dialogue with the Chairman and Vice Chairman on all significant matters.

The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs

The Secretaries of the military departments are responsible for the administration and support of forces assigned to the combatant commands. Commander U.S. Central Command coordinates closely with the Secretaries to ensure that requirements to organize, train, and equip U.S. forces for Central Command are met. Commander, U.S. Central Command communicates and exchanges information with the Service Chiefs to support their responsibility for organizing, training and equipping U.S. forces. Successful execution of the U.S. Central Command mission responsibilities requires close coordination with the Service Chiefs. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with the Service Chiefs to understand the capabilities of their Services to clearly communicate to them the USCENTCOM theater's requirements, and to ensure effective employment of the Services' capabilities in the joint and coalition execution of the U.S. Central Command mission.

Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

Commander, U.S. Central Command maintains close relationship with all other combatant commanders—functional and geographic. These relationships are critical to the execution of our National Military Strategy, and are characterized by mutual support, frequent contact, and productive exchanges of information on key issues. This is especially true of Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, with whom I will have daily coordination because of concurrent operations within U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility.

Commander, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Resolute Support, Afghanistan / Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan

Commander, U.S. Central Command requires close cooperation with Commander, NATO Resolute Support, Afghanistan / Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan to support and resource the efforts to achieve the goals of the NATO mandate in Afghanistan. The dual-hatted nature of this Commander also means as Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, GEN Nicholson formally reports to Commander, U.S. Central Command, and a strong spirit of collaboration will characterize our interactions.

The respective U.S. Chiefs of Mission within the CENTCOM AOR

I would necessarily have close working relationships with the respective U.S. Chiefs of Mission within the USCENTCOM AOR in order to ensure unity of effort between U.S. military and all other U.S. government activities in those respective countries and across the USCENTCOM AOR.

The respective U.S. Senior Defense Officials/Defense Attachés (SDO/DATT)

I would necessarily have a close working relationship with the respective U.S. Senior Defense Officials/Defense Attachés (SDO/DATT) within the USCENTCOM AOR in order to maintain the SDO/DATT's role a primary military advisor to the respective Ambassador, and to facilitate the SDO/DATT's role a primary conduit between U.S. Central Command and the Ambassador.

Major Challenges and Opportunities

In your view, what are the major challenges and opportunities that would confront you if you are confirmed as the next Commander of CENTCOM?

USCENTCOM's strategic environment is the most unstable it has been in 40 years. Ongoing political transitions, poor economic conditions, civil wars, ethno-sectarian violence, and an expanding global terrorist movement continue to make the region susceptible to prolonged turmoil and instability. An underlying symptom of regional stability is the Sunni-Shia rift which is frequently cited as the source of sectarian violence. This narrative is artfully exploited by extremist organizations such as ISIL and underpins the proxy contests between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Afghanistan remains a significant challenge, its future, and our regional objectives hinge upon the performance of the ANDSF to provide security for the Afghan people. There are, however, opportunities as we see our way through these challenges. We will continue to build strong relationships in the region and remain a steadfast partner through an uncertain transition. We have the opportunity to counter the perception of diminished US engagement and continue to contribute positively to regional stability. By viewing the region holistically, we can identify connections between the disparate conflicts and find ways to cooperate with international partners to work toward enduring solutions.

The President has requested approximately \$610 billion for National Defense in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, to include \$523.9 billion in funding for the base budget for the Department of Defense and \$58.8 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). The 2016 Future Years Defense Program projected about \$17 billion above the current request.

What is your assessment of the impact of potential reductions in the Defense budget on CENTCOM's operational planning, requests for forces, and operating budgets? If confirmed, how would you prioritize the use of available funds?

Presence of the U.S. and the ability to effectively and routinely train with our regional partners is one of the few stabilizing factors in the Middle East, where Russia, Iran, and Violent Extremist Organizations actively vie for influence. Reductions to the Department's budget continue to risk readiness, posture and presence, all of which are needed to sustain a credible deterrent, and support of expeditionary and forward stationed force; continued reductions send a message to both potential adversaries and our key partners regarding our enduring commitment. Over the long-term, decreased investment in posture and presence increases the risk to U.S. forces and personnel, both at home and abroad. Prioritization of funding should be based on long-term National Security and GEF objectives balanced with nearer term impacts of ongoing operations.

In your opinion, what are the considerations or alternatives if an aircraft carrier presence in the Gulf cannot be sustained by the Navy in 2016 and beyond?

The operational impact and subsequent risk of Carrier Strike Group (CSG) gaps cannot be overstated. Given the impact and risk, CENTCOM has postured our Joint Force to offset the loss of power projection with operating concepts that maximize the full potential of the remaining, but limited assets in theater. Force reductions have already decreased our ability to deter malign actors and defend the Arabian Gulf, which directly affects our contingency response capabilities and ultimately our relationships across the AOR. CSG gaps deliver a strategic message about this decreased capability and perceived decline of US interest in the greater Middle East. In addition to posturing our allocated forces to mitigate CSG gaps, we are also increasingly reliant on our closest allies to offset our decreased strike capability. For example, CENTCOM has recently leveraged the French carrier Charles De Gaulle to mitigate the lack of US CSG presence. We will continue to look for similar opportunities in the future.

If Future Years Defense Program requirements are consistently underfunded, what would be your assessment of the level of risk to the U.S. national security objectives in the CENTCOM AOR?

As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recently testified before the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, "It will also be several years before we fully restore full spectrum readiness across the services and replenish our stocks of critical precision munitions." Consistent underfunding of the FYDP only exacerbates these

conditions at a time when USCENTCOM already faces unprecedented risk resulting from reduced posture and presence during a period characterized by rising sectarianism, civil wars, conflict spillover, increasing adversary capabilities and engagement, and humanitarian crises. The complex and dynamic nature of the central region demands consistent, credible U.S. posture and presence in order to accomplish our long-term national security goals. Failure to address the near term issues in the Middle East increases the risk to U.S. national security objectives in the long term. Supporting needed capabilities in the FYDP reduces the chances of strategic surprise and reassures our regional partners that the United States remains engaged and is not abandoning the region.

National Military Strategy

The June 2015 National Military Strategy states: “We are positioning forces where they are most needed, exemplified by our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region as well as our evolving presence in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa” while emphasizing “...we will press forward with the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region...”

What impact, if any, do you anticipate this guidance will have on the operations and activities of CENTCOM?

USCENTCOM has clearly articulated the forces required to maintain a posture and presence in the Middle East and forces required for rapid response. These force levels have been identified against an acceptable level of risk. Clearly, reducing forces below this level increases the associated risk. In an era of declining Department of Defense resources, we must all work together cooperatively to identify areas where we can accept reductions and inform our leadership of where reductions incur increased risk to the security of the nation. I will work to clearly articulate USCENTCOM’s requirements to the Chairman and Secretary and to work innovatively to maintain security levels with less resourcing.

Readiness of Forces

What is your assessment of the readiness of U.S. forces that have been deployed to Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Operation Inherent Resolve, and other operations in the CENTCOM area of responsibilities?

CENTCOM continues to receive ready forces for deployment to the CENTCOM AOR. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen execute complex and diverse missions at very high level of precision. We cannot say enough about the professionalism of the service members and DoD civilians serving in the USCENTCOM AOR.

The environment is as complex as I have ever seen during my years of service. The men and women deployed to the CENTCOM region are delivering effects on a daily basis that are moving the campaign forward. Whether we are discussing strikes, advise and assist, special operations, counter piracy, or training with our allies and partners,

these great Americans (and coalition members) are meeting or exceeding our expectations.

Afghanistan Strategy

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Afghanistan and the nature, size, and scope of the insurgency and the terrorist threat?

A year after the ISAF change of mission, ANDSF is still learning to adapt operations under unprecedented parameters – specifically uncertainty in senior leadership and ANDSF’s independent operations with reduced coalition enablers. ANDSF remains challenged in maintaining security across the country and continued insurgent attacks in population centers increasingly feed a popular perception that the security situation is deteriorating. Although these security incidents represent setbacks in the security environment, they have not yet evolved into a more significant “tipping point” in which cascading effects pose an existential threat to Kabul and threaten the viability of the Afghan state.

The insurgency, despite challenges to Mullah Mansour as emir, remains relatively united since the revelation of former Taliban Emir Mullah Omar’s death. The insurgency’s capacity and capability is largely unchanged, with strength estimated at 20,000 - 40,000 fighters. In 2016, Taliban will likely attempt to capitalize on perceived gains to increasingly threaten key areas. ANDSF, with Coalition enabler support, will likely prevent the Taliban from holding strategic terrain. Of significance is the emergence of IS-Khorasan Province as a competitor to the insurgency, drawing from its resources and distracting operations in some areas. IS-Khorasan likely has less than 3,500 fighters and is expected to remain mostly contained to northeastern Afghanistan due to ANDSF, Coalition, and Taliban operations focusing on quelling IS-Khorasan expansion.

Small pockets of core al Qaeda (AQ) (Arabs who served with the group since prior to 9/11) remain anchored in the AFG/PAK region. Although likely numbering less than 50 individuals, these remaining AQ members are committed to plotting against the U.S. Homeland and Western regional interests. The group has faced significant challenges and has reduced its operational tempo, choosing to focus on self-preservation. AQ is optimistic it can outlast counterterrorism pressure and reemerge following a U.S. withdrawal. AQ can be expected to reenergize should pressure abate. Also of concern, is the establishment of AQ in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), intended by AQ leadership to serve as the AQ’s flagship in South Asia should remaining legacy AQ leadership be killed. AQIS is comprised of Afghans, Pakistanis, and Indians, and has proven adept at conducting high profile attacks in Pakistan.

What is your understanding of U.S. vital interests and Strategic objectives in Afghanistan?

As President Obama reaffirmed on October 15, 2015, current U.S. strategy and objectives in Afghanistan are to disrupt threats posed by al Qaeda, support the Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF), and give the Afghan people the

opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own as a regionally integrated, secure, stable, and developing country. The Afghan government and its people approved U.S. forces to conduct two well-defined and complementary missions as part of Operational Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) to achieve U.S. objectives and build upon the gains of the last 14 years. First, through OFS, U.S. forces are continuing the U.S. counterterrorism mission against al Qaeda, its associates, and other transregional terrorist organizations in Afghanistan to prevent the resurgence of these groups and external plotting against the homeland and U.S. targets and interests in the region. Second, in coordination with NATO Allies and Resolute Support partner nations, U.S. forces are conducting a train, advise, and assist (TAA) mission to continue building the capabilities and long-term sustainability of the ANDSF. The U.S. supports the institutionalization of ANDSF gains by conducting functionally based security force assistance (SFA) as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. U.S. and coalition forces are conducting TAA efforts at the Afghan National Army corps level, the Afghan National Police equivalent level, and with the Afghan security ministries to improve their ability to support and sustain the fighting force. Tactical level TAA is conducted for Afghan special operations units and the Afghan Air Force.

What is your understanding of U.S. strategy to achieve these objectives?

The United States will maintain 5,500 military personnel at a small number of bases in Kabul and Bagram with regional outstations, including in Jalalabad in the east and Kandahar in the south beginning in January 2017.

U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan

In October 2015, President Obama announced that the United States would plan to retain 9,800 U.S. service members in Afghanistan through most of 2016, along with our allies and partners. The mission of the U.S. forces would be training, advising and assisting Afghan security forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against al-Qa'ida. The President also announced that instead of going down to a normal embassy presence in Kabul by the end of 2016, we will maintain 5,500 troops and the mission will not change.

Do you support the President's decision on the size of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in 2016?

I support the President's decision on the size of the U.S. military presence in 2016. The current plan requires a reduction of U.S forces to 5,500 with a Kabul centric presence focused predominantly on ministerial advising, the Afghan Air Force, and the Afghan Special Security Forces by January 2017. By maintaining 9,800 troops through most of 2016 we maintain the ability to conduct train, advise, and assist (TAA) with the Afghan National Army (ANA) at the Corps level and the Afghan National Police (ANP) equivalent level, which proved critical during the 2015 fighting season. In addition, it provides the same amount of counter-terrorism forces throughout most of 2016.

What is your understanding of the pace of withdrawal of U.S. forces in Afghanistan during 2016? Do you agree with this pace of withdrawal?

The pace of the withdrawal will provide the current level of TAA to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) through fighting season 2016 with a responsible transition to the post-2016 presence that will focus on ministerial advising, training the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) and Afghan Air Force (AAF), and counter-terrorism, which I support.

What military activities or lines of effort do you anticipate will be reduced, and to what degree, if U.S. force presence is decreased to 5,500 troops?

The decrease to a force presence of 5,500 troops will require collapsing the Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs) in the East and South and ceasing TAA at the ANA Corps and the ANP Zones.

What, if any, challenges do you foresee, in the implementation of the plan announced by the President?

The challenge will be dependent upon the progress that the ANDSF are able to make from now through 2016 to include sustainment. Continued ANDSF progress and increased proficiency to conduct independent operations in fighting season 2016, and improved sustainment and maintenance systems will enable the further reduction of coalition forces as the ANDSF solidify security gains. However, if the ANDSF demonstrate uneven performance similar to the 2015 fighting season and continue to struggle with their sustainment systems it will be difficult to address those challenges as the TAACs collapse and the focus shifts to ministerial advising.

If confirmed, what plans do you have for addressing those challenges?

If GEN Nicholson determines in either his 90 day assessment or Fall review that sufficient progress has not been made in the ANDSF, I will provide my best military advice to support his recommendations. This may require the ability to maintain TAA at the ANA Corps and ANP Zones which will require maintaining bases and personnel.

What are the challenges and opportunity costs associated with drawing down to 5,500 troops and then subsequently ramping back up to 9,800?

The primary challenge to draw down to 5,500 troops and then to ramp back to 9,800 troops will be to reconstitute the infrastructure that was divested and the contracts that were terminated. This would require re-occupation of locations transferred to the ANDSF and re-establishing contracts to support those locations.

Security Transition in Afghanistan

In mid-2013 the Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) assumed lead responsibility for security throughout Afghanistan. In 2015 the ANDSF assumed sole responsibility for securing their country. Simultaneously, in a period of about two years, U.S. and coalition force presence was reduced from about 140,000 troops to 14,000 troops.

What is your assessment of the performance and capabilities of the ANDSF since assuming full responsibility for Afghanistan's security?

The performance of the ANDSF was uneven during the 2015 fighting season. Afghan security forces successfully demonstrated the ability to plan and conduct large-scale offensive operations across Afghanistan as well as the capability to re-take key terrain following insurgent offensives, such as the ANDSF re-capture of Kunduz City last fall. However, the 2015 fighting season made clear the continued ANDSF challenges in areas such as combat enablers, logistics, ministerial capacity, and leadership. Afghan leadership remains a viable CT partner. However, the ANDSF operational leadership has struggled to keep quality leaders, and many remain untested. Although nepotism and corruption still remains, senior leaders have recently taken steps to rotate Corps commanders, enforce retirement age, and replace underperformers and corrupt leaders. The MoD is aware of its leadership shortcomings and is instituting several leadership schools to improve leadership within its officer corps.

What do you consider to be the most significant challenges the ANDSF face in assuming and maintaining their security responsibilities in the 2016 fighting season and in the next few years?

The ANDSF's greatest challenges are in the areas of leadership, human capital, aerial fires, and sustainability of high casualties. The ANDSF remain in a primarily defensive posture based on static checkpoints, which is a major factor of the ANDSF's high casualty rate. ANDSF leadership must prioritize efforts to move them towards a more offensive posture. In terms of human capital, our efforts should focus more on developing ANDSF institutional capacity to educate their personnel in some of the highly technical jobs within the organization, particularly in intelligence, aviation, and maintenance. Additionally, the ANDSF must continue to address their high attrition rates so that the force is able to grow and consistently perform at an acceptable level. The current operational readiness cycle is not keeping pace with the high operational tempo and attrition, including casualties. Our advisors are working with the Afghan ministries to institute a readiness cycle that can allow for some recovery time from perpetual combat that some units are engaged in. This has to be addressed if we expect the ANDSF to be able to sustain themselves and secure the country. Finally, we must work with the U.S. Government, coalition members, and others to ensure a long-term outlook for equipping the ANDSF, as systems they use today may need replacing in the future. For example, the current aerial fires shortages do not allow the ANDSF to fully support forces against the enemy. The

AAF requires assistance in developing a long-term aviation sustainment plan, including maintenance, parts, and contract support. The support of CAS platforms will be critical in supporting maneuver elements to be integrated into offensive operations. Moreover, a shift to a more maneuver-oriented Afghan National Army may require considering modernization requirements so they have the required capabilities.

What U.S. and coalition enabling capabilities do you believe are most important to supporting ANDSF in providing security for Afghanistan?

Continued provision of intelligence, special operations forces advising, ministry advising and *in extremis* close air support are the most important capabilities we can provide, consistent with Presidential guidance for the mission.

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) provides security within villages and rural areas and has been placed more directly under the command and control of the Afghan Uniform Police. What is your assessment of the effect of the ALP program and do you believe they should be part of the long-term strategy in Afghanistan?

My current assessment of the ALP program is that it is not as effective as it could be. When tactically employed within 1 kilometer of their village as intended, ALP personnel serve an important part of the ANDSF provincial layered security construct as they are familiar with their local area and can identify “bad actors.” However, ALP personnel are often employed away from their villages, and used as personal bodyguards for provincial council members, district governors, and other local power brokers. I understand that Resolute Support advisors are currently working with the Ministry of Interior to implement several reforms intended to improve the ALP. I recognize that the ALP is a controversial organization and I would like to work with Afghan leadership to see if these reforms prove to be meaningful and understand how they see the ALP fitting into the long-term strategy for their country before recommending the United States determine how we see the ALP fitting into our long-term strategy in Afghanistan.

Recently, this Committee received testimony about troubling allegations concerning child sexual abuse by members of the ALP.

In your view, what is the appropriate role for a U.S. military commander who is working with the ALP, when that U.S. officer becomes aware of allegations of child abuse by members of the ALP?

The U.S. Military takes all allegations of sexual abuse very seriously. Upon witnessing or receiving allegations, U.S. Military personnel are required to report any allegations of sexual abuse incidents up their chain of command. If any allegations of abuse involve Afghans, a report must be forwarded to the Commander, U.S. Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A) and copied to the Staff Judge Advocate so that U.S. advisors can notify our Afghan partners and encourage them to investigate the allegation.

If confirmed, what direction would you give to U.S. personnel assigned to your command who become aware of such allegations?

I would continue to tell U.S. personnel to report any suspected violations through their chain of command as soon as they become aware of them.

Under what circumstances would you expect U.S. personnel under your command to intervene to stop such misconduct if they suspect it or observe it?

If U.S. personnel suspect or observe an incident of abuse, they should report it through their chain of command. U.S. advisors will bring an allegation to the attention of the appropriate Afghan officials and encourage the Afghan government to thoroughly investigate the incident and administer justice appropriately. Although we believe such conduct is reprehensible, U.S. coalition forces do not have the legal authority to enforce matters of Afghan domestic law. U.S. service members may intervene to stop the commission of an imminent or ongoing serious offense, including sexual abuse, which they observe, as legally appropriate. I expect our service members to do what is morally correct considering the circumstances surrounding the incident as there could be significant risk to their life and the lives of those with them.

Building and Sustaining the Afghan National Defense Security Forces

The ANDSF are near their target end strength level of 352,000, consisting of an Afghan National Army (ANA) of 195,000 and Afghan National Police (ANP) of 157,000.

In your view, do the ANA and ANP have the right size and capabilities to address the current security situation on the ground in Afghanistan?

Although the ANDSF fighting capacity demonstrated in the 2015 fighting season was inconsistent, I believe these numbers are appropriate given the current conditions on the ground. The Afghan Security Institutions continue to mature in both capacity and capability, but are not at a level in which they can fight, train, and sustain their own force without our support and advising. Once periodic assessments indicate performance is more consistent throughout the ANDSF, with commensurate improvements in security conditions, we can relook the size of the force and make any recommended changes. Capability gaps persist in close air support, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), and special operations forces that will require continued TAA focus for the coming years. In some cases, such as aviation, equipment will not be fully fielded until 2018 or beyond.

What in your view are the greatest challenges to building and sustaining the capabilities of the ANDSF over the next two years?

I believe the greatest challenges facing the ANDSF include ensuring we have adequate Afghanistan Security Forces Fund funding to sustain and modernize the ANDSF; ensuring there is adequate Afghan institutional training capability focused

on their key challenges, such as leadership and shortages of technical skills needed for unit level organic maintenance; implementing an automated integrated pay and personnel system to ensure Congress and international donors have confidence that the approximately \$1 billion per year in pay and personnel costs are not being siphoned off to corruption; and ensuring the \$14 billion of defense items we have provided to the ANDSF are properly sustained with support from DoD experts.

If confirmed, what would be your priorities for building the capabilities of the ANDSF, including the key enablers that the ANDSF need to develop and maintain?

The priorities for building the capabilities of the ANDSF center on achieving sustainable levels of equipment and personnel, and developing effective operational/strategic vision among ANDSF leadership. Developing Afghan aviation capability is a top priority. The first 4 of 20 A-29 fixed wing light air support aircraft were just delivered to Afghanistan following the completion of nearly a year of training in the United States of their pilots. Training of additional pilots is ongoing, with completion of delivery and integration expected in 2018. Additionally, in the last year the AAF has started to integrate armed MD-530 and fixed forward firing Mi-17 helicopters, which are providing critical aerial fires support to ANDSF operations. The ANDSF sustainment systems and personnel training pipeline are not yet mature and require dedicated efforts to ensure appropriate life cycle management of weapons and equipment and personnel development. An example of our investment in Afghan human capital is the recruiting and training of 90 A-29 maintainers through 2018 to provide a self-sustaining capability that does not yet exist. It is also critical to identify gaps in direct and indirect fires, intelligence, medical logistics, and the ability of the ANDSF to generate accurate readiness reporting. Finally, it is important we continue to support efforts to reconstitute their ground force as equipment life cycles, personnel attrition, and combat losses unfold. Any change in prioritization will be done in coordination with GEN Nicholson and his team.

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit in Wales in September 2014, NATO leaders declared “we are adapting our operations, including in Afghanistan, in light of progress made and remaining challenges.” At the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012, the countries participating in the coalition discussed a model for the future size of the ANDSF of around 228,000, a reduction of about one third from the current ANDSF end strength.

What is your understanding regarding current assumptions for the size of the Afghan security forces through 2016 and beyond?

Current international funding provides for an authorized ANDSF strength of 352,000 personnel through 2018 and we are working with partners to extend funding to sustain these levels through 2020. Recent DoD studies and analyses support maintaining the current 352,000 ANDSF authorization, plus 30,000 Afghan Local Police, in order to provide basic security for the country and cope with current and projected insurgent and terrorist threats.

Do you agree that any future reductions in the size of the ANDSF need to be based on the security conditions in Afghanistan at the time those reductions would occur?

Even though the ANDSF performed admirably in 2015, it is clear that Afghanistan has not yet reached an enduring level of security and stability sufficient to justify a reduction of its force levels. The coalition must continue assisting the ANDSF to improve and to optimize its structure, posture, and capabilities. In spite of our considerable progress, challenges exist that require our long-term commitment. It is imperative to move away from the year-to-year planning routine and plan towards a multi-year horizon to facilitate stability of the force and long term planning. This strategic outlook will provide ‘time and space’ for the ANDSF to execute their plans more completely, and develop increased resiliency in its institutions and organizations. Only then, Afghanistan will realize its full potential.

If confirmed, do you agree to conduct a review of the plans for the future ANDSF force levels to assess whether the size and capabilities of those forces are appropriate to address security conditions in Afghanistan after 2016?

Yes. Any decisions for future ANDSF force levels should be based on current threat conditions and force capabilities as laid out in the semi-annual Periodic Mission Review (PMR), and should I judge that additional force structure is required I will make appropriate recommendations to the Secretary of Defense to seek additional funding as part of the annual review of the ANDSF Plan of Record. Working with USFOR-A and the Afghan government, we assess the capabilities and size of the ANDSF to ensure the security of the country and defeat of the insurgency. As you are aware, the enemy situation is ever changing with the extension of fighting seasons and the rise of insurgent forces and we constantly review our plans in light of the environment and situation on the ground. With these constant changes comes the challenge of manning a force for today and attempting to predict an appropriate force for the future.

Train, Advise and Assist Mission

In October 2015, President Obama said that “Our troops are not engaged in major ground combat against the Taliban” while the Afghan forces are “...developing critical capabilities -- intelligence, logistics, aviation, command and control.”

How would you characterize the importance of the advise-and-assist role in support of Afghan security forces?

Training, advising, and assisting the ANDSF and developing the capacity of the Afghan security ministries is a central component of the Resolute Support mission. Advising at the ministry level, ANA Corps and ANP equivalent level, and at the tactical level for the Afghan Air Force and Afghan Special Security Forces is critical to the success of the Afghan security forces. The ANDSF performed inconsistently during 2015, but they continue to improve with train, advise, and assist support from the U.S. and coalition forces.

What is your understanding of the role that U.S. and coalition trainers and advisers will play in building the capabilities of the ANDSF in 2016 and in future years?

The spring 2016 Periodic Mission Review (PMR) will provide insights into the current and projected status of the insurgency and performance of the ANDSF. The performance of the ANDSF during the 2015 fighting season and the 2016 Winter Campaign has continued to be uneven. As a result, the ANDSF will require the train, advise, and assist (TAA) mission to continue throughout 2016 and potentially beyond. As we develop and solidify performance at each level, we will make assessments and recommendations for the future of the TAA mission. As the ANDSF makes consistent, sustainable improvements we will be able to reduce our full time support efforts and transition to a more expeditionary advising as-needed throughout the country.

What is your understanding of the timelines that will be required to develop critical ANDSF capabilities including intelligence, logistics, aviation, command and control?

While it is difficult to provide precise timelines even as we continually assess the capabilities in these and other areas, I assess it will take multiple years to fully develop the capabilities to a point the ANDSF will be able to stand and operate on its own. Currently, the ANDSF has some capabilities in the areas of intelligence, logistics, aviation, and C2, but it is not fully established across the force. As an example, the long-term intelligence development effort will continue through at least 2017 and includes both training and equipping of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) enablers to the Afghan Security Institutions (ASI). The goal is an Afghan Intelligence enterprise that is capable of executing intelligence functions, as well as executing the intelligence functions – planning, collecting, analysis, production and dissemination – to support ANDSF operations. The Intelligence train, advise and assist (TAA) mission is conducted at the ministerial levels, at the Afghan national intelligence centers, and with the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) with support from CENTCOM through intelligence engagement programs. In January 2016, CENTCOM conducted two intelligence affiliation seminars on intelligence analysis and collection management for ANDSF personnel. These seminars provided a structured academic environment that enables GIRoA intelligence personnel to engage in unclassified open forum discussions on various topics with U.S. IC subject matter experts to share tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) as well as lessons learned from past experiences. Seminar modules culminate in practical exercises that allow seminar participants to apply the concepts and tools discussed during seminar. Finally, programs are ongoing pertaining to logistics avionics and other necessary skills and systems.

Recent incidents in both Afghanistan and Iraq indicate that the train, advise, and assist mission may include risks that could result in casualties to U.S. forces.

What is your assessment of the risks involved with the train, advise, and assist mission and what steps can and should be taken, in your opinion, to mitigate those risks?

Although we changed our focus, the enemy did not and Afghanistan will remain a dangerous place for the coalition, Afghan officials, non-governmental organizations, and the men and woman conducting the TAA mission. In order to develop a capable ANDSF at all levels that can function with minimal coalition direct support, we must continue TAA at the lowest levels possible for the near term, consistent with the President's guidance. Currently, the best way to accomplish this task is by maintaining a continuous presence with the ANDSF units; these units, however, are continuously fighting and cannot be pulled off the line to reconstitute and train without jeopardizing overall security. To reduce the immediate risk to our personnel, we have taken steps to vet the units/organizations we partner with, provide security teams to over-watch key engagements, and provide specific guidance to the forces conducting operations with the ANDSF. In the long-term, by having a more capable ANDSF, we mitigate the risk to the personnel on the ground, our vital national interest, and the homeland.

Reconciliation

What is your understanding of the status of talks designed to bring about reconciliation between the Government of Afghanistan and members of the Taliban?

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US, and China has met on 4 occasions between 11 January and 23 February. The intended outcome of these QCG discussions is a complete reconciliation roadmap, which reflects the shared commitment of QCG member countries and sets specific measures necessary to commence Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace talks between GIROA and the Taliban. Members have notionally agreed to general principles of the roadmap and intend to finalize technical details in follow-on meetings. This will enable a supportive environment for reconciliation initiatives in Afghanistan, in the hopes of ultimately establishing lasting regional peace. QCG representatives have called upon Taliban groups to enter into early talks with GIROA to politically resolve their differences and cease violence. They have mutually committed to a robust effort to eliminate all forms of terrorist groups, regardless of their national origins.

How does (1) the fracturing of the Taliban and (2) the emergence of ISIL affect the prospects for reconciliation between the Government of Afghanistan and members of the Taliban?

Some opposition groups have formed in Afghanistan as a result of dissatisfaction with Mullah Mansour being named the new Taliban Emir; the Islamic Emirate High Council represents the most prominent group. This, along with the emergence of IS-Khorasan Province, has led to pockets of "red-on-red" violence in the west and east. However, we judge the distraction of dealing with perceived Taliban fracturing and the emergence of IS-Khorasan will have little impact on near-term reconciliation efforts and the 2016 fighting season since the Taliban are likely confident in their ability to minimize threats to their resources and legitimacy.

What is role of the United States, if any, in reconciliation negotiations?

Ultimately, the threats Afghanistan faces require our sustained attention and forward presence. Reconciliation is a path needed to obtain a negotiated settlement and end the conflict in Afghanistan. Current reconciliation efforts are Afghan-led, Afghan owned initiative. Our forces support President Ghani and his efforts to find a lasting solution to the violence in Afghanistan. We remain ready to assist our partners, as needed.

In your view, what should be the role of Afghanistan's neighbors, in particular Pakistan and China, in the reconciliation process?

Pakistan's involvement in the peace process is critical, and Islamabad continues to support ongoing reconciliation efforts. Pakistan desires a comprehensive and enduring relationship with Afghanistan that contributes to the security and prosperity of the two nations. Stronger ties between the two nations would help reinforce efforts for peace and development in the region. Terrorism is a common enemy of both countries and Pakistan and Afghanistan need to work together to counter it. A negotiated peace is the most viable option to establish lasting stability in Afghanistan. China has asserted its commitment to the nascent peace process as a member of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG). The Afghans are hoping that China will exert greater influence in the talks on Pakistan, which is a Chinese ally. China believes the effort is the right approach to achieve long-term stability in Afghanistan. China has announced strategic economic plans for the Central Asian region and a peaceful Afghanistan could play a bigger role in those plans.

U.S. Security Assistance and Strategic Relationship with Pakistan

What is your assessment of the strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan? What would you consider to be areas of shared strategic interest between the two countries?

The United States-Pakistan strategic relationship has improved considerably since 2011 and maintaining a strong U.S.-Pakistan defense relationship is in our countries' best interest. Likewise, a reliable and mature Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is critical to the United States and vital to regional stability. With regard to our shared strategic interest, Pakistan's counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaign remains vital to targeting militants that threaten the United States and Pakistan. Our security assistance, which focuses on enhancing Pakistani CT and COIN capabilities is critical in this regard.

What do you consider to be the major challenges in the U.S.-Pakistan strategic relationship?

We have been encouraged by Pakistani statements that they intend to target all militants on their soil. In June 2014, Pakistan announced Operation Zarb-e-Azb in which they have undertaken major clearing operations in North Waziristan. Despite

this positive momentum against some militants, particularly al Qaeda (AQ) and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), we remain concerned about the continuing threat to our forces in Afghanistan posed by the Haqqani Network (HQN). We continue to urge Pakistan at the highest levels to take deliberate action against this group.

If confirmed, what changes, if any, would you recommend to enhance U.S. relations with Pakistan, particularly in terms of military-to-military relations?

If confirmed, I would be candid with Pakistan's military leadership. I'll ensure that U.S. national security policy is clearly understood and offer suggestions for improving our mil-to-mil relationship. Additionally, I would work to strengthen the Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relationship by encouraging closer mil-to-mil cooperation as well as confidence building measures and mechanisms to better manage the disputed border. I'll encourage Pakistan to continue to support the Quadrilateral Coordination Group process and to work to bring legitimate Taliban leadership to the table. An agreement of a roadmap would be a significant step in the right direction and all involved parties have responsibilities, especially Pakistan.

Since 2001, the United States has provided significant security assistance to Pakistan including significant funds to reimburse Pakistan for the costs associated with military operations conducted by Pakistan along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

In your view, how effective have operations by the Pakistan military been in disrupting safe havens in western Pakistan?

U.S. security assistance and reimbursements through the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) have been vital tools in Pakistan's CT and COIN operations in the FATA. These operations are intended to disrupt terrorist organizations and place ungoverned areas back under the writ of the state. According to the Pakistani military, their operations have largely cleared the area of insurgents, and the Pakistan government now controls approximately 90 percent of the infrastructure in the FATA. These successes are partially owed to continued U.S. reimbursements through CSF. Particularly with the onset of Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, we have seen further disruption of militant safe havens in North Waziristan. CSF helps sustain Pakistan's large deployments in the FATA, and maintain the high operational tempo required to pressure militant groups. This operation is ongoing, and we urge Pakistan to do more to ensure it is targeting all militant groups, including HQN.

How effective has the assistance and other support that the United States has provided to Pakistan been in promoting U.S. interests?

The Pakistan military continues to play a visible role in efforts to reduce safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, while at the same time actively countering violent extremist organizations, including AQ and the newly-emerged IS-KP. During the most recent fighting season we saw increased collaboration among Afghan and Pakistani military leadership. Commanders at the corps level have met multiple times and continue their efforts to

increase interoperability between the forces. Both countries' military leaders also are working to secure a bilateral border standard operating procedure. In the meantime, we need Pakistan to take decisive actions against the Haqqani Network. The Pakistanis are uniquely positioned to counter HQN, which remains the greatest threat to our forces and long-term stability in Afghanistan.

Do you support conditioning U.S. assistance and other support on Pakistan's continued cooperation in areas that are important to U.S. security interests?

I support clear and effective signaling, both positive and negative, that establishes U.S. credibility with the Pakistan government. For example, the HQN certification requirement included in the FY 2015 and FY 2016 CSF authorization signals to Pakistan how seriously the United States takes the threats our forces face in Afghanistan from this group. At the same time, maintaining security cooperation and assistance will be important for the United States to achieve our other CT and COIN interests that benefit from Pakistan's current operations in the FATA.

What are the risks and benefits, in your view, associated with conditioning U.S. assistance and other support on Pakistan's continued cooperation in areas that are important to U.S. security interests?

The risks and benefits of conditioning our assistance and support to Pakistan vary. The important thing will be for the United States to maintain credibility while still accruing benefits toward our U.S. CT and COIN interests. If we are able to strike such a balance and remain consistent in our bilateral relationship, we may see Pakistan increase its transparency and cooperation with Afghanistan on the full range of security, border control, and economic issues. Likewise, Pakistan may take further action against violent extremist organizations, such as HQN. However, the risks of ineffective and unclear signals and conditioning may risk us losing our access and frank dialogue to Pakistan in areas critical to our U.S. interests, may reduce Pakistan's willingness to continue its CT/COIN operations, and risks our current access to Pakistan Air Lines of Communication and Ground Lines of Communication to support operations in Afghanistan and the region.

Combating Terrorism

Within the CENTCOM AOR, what do you consider to be the highest counterterrorism priorities?

Any threat to the Homeland is our highest priority. Terrorism threats that affect global commerce, regional security and stability are also our highest priorities. USCENTCOM's strategic environment contains converging and compounding threats, instability, and violence as political transitions, civil wars, and aggressive Violent Extremist Organizations, (VEOs) threaten global security and stability, as well as U.S. core national interests and persons. In recent years, VEOs increasingly exploit ungoverned or under-governed spaces in the AOR. They 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.

- VEO incited violence is not regionally contained within the Middle East. Increasingly, splinter groups, affiliates and lone-wolfs have emerged across Western Europe, Africa and North America to threaten democratic ideals and the free flow of global commerce. While disparate and fragmented, these entities remain aligned through Islamic jihadist ideology and objectives to incite fear and create regional political and social instability. Indeed, the export of violent jihadi operatives and tactics from Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Libya and other hotspots to Europe and the Homeland is underway and likely to increase as ISIL, AQ and other VEOs are pressured in their safe havens. This development is a tremendous concern.
- The Iraq / Syria area of operations is the premier destination for jihadist foreign fighters from all over the world. The majority of these fighters are joining ISIL's ranks, although some have joined ANF and other Syrian opposition elements. Returning battle-hardened foreign fighters will pose increasing risk to their home countries, including the US homeland.
- ISIL. ISIL is a competitor to al Qaeda and has significantly changed the jihadist landscape. ISIL desires expanded 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 received pledges of allegiance from smaller jihadist groups in Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan and Algeria and inspired lone wolf attacks in Algeria, the west and the Homeland.
- AQ. AQ is becoming more diffuse and decentralized. The risk of affiliates and allies operating in more areas and increasingly collaborating and coordinating with one another as a transitional loosely-confederated force is cause for concern. The AQ ideology remains persuasive, attracting and radicalizing susceptible individuals in the region. It is critical we maintain our vigilance in countering the group and its narrative. The AQ Shura is largely driven from the Pakistan FATA. The AQ Shura, however is resilient, finding new safe haven in northern Syria.
- Other Extremist Groups.
 - In Yemen, AQAP is growing fueled on continued instability and violence, the lack of any governance and the continuing hostilities between Saudi Arabia, UAE and the Huthis. AQAP, which continues to harbor, foment and plan attacks on western and US persons, has advantaged themselves seizing large swaths of Yemen and erecting governance in captured areas – some of the governance in the Mukallah area is effective and credible.
 - AQ affiliates. 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 Khorason Group, a network of AQ veterans with plans to conduct external attacks into Europe.

What is your assessment of the threat posed by ISIL, al Qaeda and their associated forces to the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests overseas?

ISIL remains a threat to the U.S. Homeland and U.S. interests overseas, and if unchecked, the group will attempt to consolidate its territories to expand its self-declared Islamic Caliphate. ISIL's ability to leverage cyber-space to influence and train sympathizers to conduct lone-wolf style attacks presents the most pressing threat to the U.S. Homeland. Additionally, foreign fighters, including those from Western nations, continue to flow into the region, attracted by the prominence and success of ISIL operations and its so-called "caliphate." The eventual return of these radicalized fighters to their homelands is an increasing threat to U.S. and coalition partners, as demonstrated by the Paris attacks. As ISIL continues to broaden its reach beyond Iraq and Syria, the group is gaining the freedom of movement to train and plan for external operations against Western, regional, and global interests.

Al Qaeda remains avowedly hostile to the U.S. and its allies, convinced that the U.S. is directly and maliciously responsible for the actors, policies, and practices AQ believes are repressing Sunni Muslims around the world. In Syria, AQ's operatives advanced a complex plot to attack commercial aviation, and there is no reason to believe that U.S. airstrikes against those operatives – known as the Khorasan Group – in any way detracted from AQ's intent to target the West. Quite the contrary, Abu Muhammad al Jawlani – the leader of AQ's Syrian affiliate al Nusra Front – has explicitly and publicly stated that the group would be justified in attacking the U.S.

What is your understanding of the Department's role in the U.S. strategy to combat terrorism in the CENTCOM AOR?

Per the Secretary's December 1, 2015 statement before the House Armed Service Committee, the top priority objectives in the CENTCOM area of responsibility are to deter aggression, bolster security of our friends and allies, ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf, check Iran's malign influence, and degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. More specifically with regards to ISIL, the department will continue to take the fight to the enemy, seek to develop capable, motivated local ground forces and set the conditions for a political solution to the civil war in Syria and work towards inclusive governance in Iraq. These objectives mean leveraging all components of national power – diplomatic, intelligence, law enforcement, economic and informational. The United States will continue to provide leadership to the Global Coalition to counter ISIL and will provide a template for nations and multilateral organizations that may support the broader effort to counter violent extremism in the future.

Given your current knowledge of CENTCOM programs, do you believe the Command's resources are aligned in a manner consistent with the appropriate counterterrorism priorities?

Yes. The command is actively optimizing available resources to engage in hostilities across the AOR against terrorist threats to US persons and interests. We are balancing the need for continued operations in AFG with a growing need to advance our capabilities and effectiveness against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, while sustaining an effective effort against AQAP in Yemen. Thus far, we are able to address these threats without receiving additional capacities. However, no optimization plan can account for the ever-changing and evolving threat, which if unchecked, quickly exceeds current capability. In particular, the CT fight exacts a premium on special enabling ISR, PR and SOF assets that bring unprecedented precision and effectiveness to the fight. These capacity challenges will significantly shape the nature and scope of our operations throughout the AOR.

How important to military operations in areas of active hostilities is the ability to detain and question captured individuals?

The ability to detain individuals is essential – a fundamental tenant of fighting and winning the current fight. Detaining enemy combatants for interrogating and exploitation provides otherwise unobtainable actionable intelligence concerning enemy planning, intent, disposition, and readiness. Importantly, detaining and exploiting enemy personnel and materiel prior to turning them over to partner nations is critical – we must retain this policy going forward. In addition, detaining enemy combatants introduces uncertainty into enemy leadership decision making and planning efforts, directly impugns the enemy's strategic messaging while working to undercut their morale.

Related and pertinent is the development of an effective long-term policy for the detainment of enemy combatants which would allow holding certain enemy combatants indefinitely to fuel increased exploitation.

As recent history shows, during conduct of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom exploitation of captured personnel and materiel directly underpinned the operations cycle and follow-on targeting efforts, stoking OPSTEMPO and creating momentum against which the enemy could not counter nor defend.

Working with our Coalition partners, information gained from exploitation of enemy personnel and material adds depth to our intelligence assessment, exposing enemy vulnerabilities, communicating our superiority, uniting the effort and protecting the force.

Syria and Iraq

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Iraq and Syria? What is your understanding of the current U.S. strategy and objectives in Syria and Iraq? What modifications, if any, would you recommend?

With Coalition support, Iraqi and Kurdish Security Forces (ISF/KSF), and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and vetted opposition forces have largely halted the expansion of ISIL's area of control and reclaimed territory. In Iraq, ISIL remains a generally cohesive and capable force; however, losses of previously held territory since June 2015 in Sinjar, Bayji, and Ramadi, and west of Kirkuk City indicate the group is struggling to sustain its defensive posture on multiple fronts. ISIL remains reliant on layered defenses around its strongholds, but will not likely be able to repel sustained ISF offensives supported by the PMF, KSF, and Coalition airstrikes. While ISIL leaders continue to direct operations throughout Iraq from Mosul, the loss of several leaders, including its overall leader for Iraq, and declining freedom of movement, has slowed ISIL's ability to resupply and reinforce elements engaged in protracted battles. Mosul will remain the group's finance hub as ISIL likely will increasingly rely on extortion and tax revenue streams following airstrikes on ISIL's oil infrastructure and production capabilities. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Government continues to face fiscal challenges to resource the anti-ISIL fight due to the effects of volatile global oil prices, which are also affecting its ability to provide more adequate essential services to its people. Recent protests in Baghdad attest to the population's desire for government reforms to fight corruption, which PM Abadi is striving to accomplish amidst sectarian tensions.

The situation in Syria is relatively dynamic, with ISIL, pro-regime forces, opposition, and al-Nusra Front (ANF) all contending for territory in northern Aleppo and eastern Homs provinces. ISIL has lost multiple facilitation routes from Turkey to eastern Syria as a result of opposition gains, resulting in ongoing ISIL efforts to gain access to additional border crossings. In eastern Syria, ISIL retains a significant presence in Raqqah and Dayr az Zawr; however, recent SDF efforts supported by Coalition airstrikes have removed ISIL's overt control of key strongholds in northern Raqqah and Hasakah provinces. Raqqah remains ISIL's primary headquarters in Syria, providing an operational and logistics hub for both Iraq and Syria. Despite airstrikes, ISIL continues to conduct offensive and defensive operations from its territory in eastern Syria. In western Syria, ISIL continues to threaten areas east of Aleppo, but ISIL faces airstrikes and resistance from pro-regime forces, ANF, and opposition elements. Since the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) agreement began on 27 February, the security situation has improved in most areas across the country. The CoH has so far been largely observed by all parties, despite claims of violations by both sides. United Nations humanitarian aid supplies are beginning to flow into previously inaccessible areas and the Red Crescent has asked the Russians to support the flow of its aid into Syria. Russian support has emboldened and allowed the Assad regime to seize the initiative on multiple fronts and Russian equipment continues to flow into the country. Regime ground forces, supported by Russian air strikes, are continuing operations against ANF in Idlib Province and ISIL in eastern Aleppo and eastern Homs Provinces. In northern Aleppo, the YPG remains just west of the opposition-

controlled Azaz point of entry (POE). The most noticeable reduction in fighting has occurred in southern Syria.

U.S. strategy, as part of an international Coalition in a whole of governments approach and by, with and through partner forces, is to ultimately defeat Da'esh. The U.S. also desires a political transition in Syria in order to reestablish representative governance in Syria along the lines of the Geneva Communique, and assist in Iraq achieving inclusive governance capable of meeting the needs of its people and secure its sovereignty. Our objectives in Iraq and Syria are to defeat Da'esh, establish effective, inclusive governance, increase regional stability, and alleviate human suffering. Additionally, we seek to protect the homeland and U.S. citizens and interests abroad. I believe the strategy and objectives are sound.

What do you believe are the major lessons learned from the Iraq invasion and the follow-on efforts to stabilize the country through 2011?

Major combat operations in Iraq in 2003 validated US ability to conduct such operations rapidly and surgically. However, those combat operations were also based on faulty assumptions, which led to policy decisions that in hindsight helped foment an insurgency (e.g. De-Bathification and disbanding the in-place security apparatus, viability of infrastructure). The relearning of counterinsurgency tactics, techniques and practices, a continuing complex and multi-faceted strategic environment, combined with inadequate and poor resourcing for transition to Stability and Reconstruction Operations allowed for the insurgency to last for years. Host-nation partnering and interagency coordination has improved our ability to combine both direct and indirect (lethal and non-lethal) means to target underlying root causes of insurgency to achieve post-combat stability.

What is your assessment of the biggest challenges associated with working with the Government of Iraq and Iraq Security Forces?

The biggest challenges associated with working with the Government of Iraq (GoI) and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are sectarian divides and the divergence of interests between the GoI and Coalition. While the Abadi government represents Iraq, it is largely dominated by Shia interests, and exerts control on central and southern Iraq. The Autonomous Region of Kurdistan is led by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and represents the interests of Iraqi Kurds. ISIL took advantage of perceived Sunni underrepresentation in the GoI and were able to seize western Iraq with relative ease. Like the governing bodies of Iraq, the ISF is comprised of disparate sectarian organizations, such as the Kurdish Peshmerga, Shi'a dominated Iraqi Army, and Sunni tribal forces. As operations advance to regain seized territory, these sectarian frictions increase, especially with the Shi'a dominated Iraqi Army liberating Sunni population centers. Additionally, while the Coalition is focused on dismantling and defeating ISIL, the GoI's desire to do the same is less important than protecting Shi'a power bases. This manifests in the GoI and ISF moving on their own timeline to retake Iraqi territory utilizing different calculus when assessing risk.

In your view, what is the proper role on the United States military in the conflict in Syria?

U.S. Syrian strategy rests on our assessment that the ultimate defeat of ISIL is a political objective that military power supports.. As such, commitments of large “foreign” land forces and military footprints would likely exacerbate longstanding, underlying tensions. Accordingly, a credible indigenous ground force is required in Syria for success. The United States military is helping develop this force. However, there is still insufficient numbers of credible indigenous ground forces at this time. Our Coalition Military Campaign in Syria is directed against DAESH. Other local, regional, and international actors are pursuing objectives and interests which are sometimes at odds with our Coalition goals. We must continue to approach these from the military lens through a whole of government approach. In the meantime we will continue to attrite ISIL leadership and fielded forces, and to degrade and dismantle ISIL as an organization in Syria. . We will remain focused on countering ISIL to ultimately defeat their ability to hold territory and to terrorize the people of Syria, the region, and the world.

The Syria Train & Equip program was suspended in September. However, we continue to re-supply and provide air support to the New Syrian Forces that graduated from the program prior to its suspension and are currently fighting ISIL. A modified Train & Equip should be re-established as soon as possible. Going forward, the program of instruction can focus on tailored classes to train indigenous leaders that can in turn leverage their training to increase the number of fighters engaged in direct combat against ISIL. The Coalition’s campaign against ISIL requires a capable and resilient indigenous force. The T&E is an effective means to meet this requirement.

What is your assessment of the support the United States has provided to the vetted moderate Syrian opposition?

The ultimate defeat of ISIL requires a ground force. Supporting vetted elements of the Vetted Syrian Opposition (VSO) is the best option for the Coalition to meet and defeat ISIL on the battlefield. While the training component of the Syria Train & Equip program was suspended in September 2015, we continued to re-supply and provide air support to the New Syrian Forces who graduated from the program prior to its suspension and are currently fighting ISIL. The provision of support to the VSO is essential to demonstrating the Coalition’s resolve in our CENTCOM Military Coalition Campaign to Defeat ISIL and continues to be instrumental in the survivability of supported VSO elements. Training select individuals to be force multipliers will help expand Coalition support and increase the effectiveness of supported VSO forces.

In your view, what should be NATO’s role with respect to Syria (i.e. should NATO consider a military intervention, the creation of a no-fly zone, or other military operations to protect civilians and support opposition forces)?

NATO, and specifically our NATO ally Turkey, is faced with several challenges: massive refugee migrations, much of it from Syria but also from North

Africa where instability remains a key challenge; Russian aggressiveness along its periphery; and the expressed intent of ISIL to conduct terrorist attacks on the homelands of NATO members. NATO must balance all of these defense requirements with any considerations of future roles.

Northern Syria, in particular, is incredibly fluid and complex, with many groups attempting to secure different outcomes. ISIL sees this area as key terrain, and is fighting hard to retain it. Our forces have made gradual progress to seize key points, and they continue to fight. Our NATO ally, Turkey, geographically adjacent to the conflict zone and operating daily near Russian forces engaged in combat in Syria, is a member of our Coalition and is engaged with us to degrade, destroy and ultimately defeat ISIL. We remain closely partnered with Turkey to mitigate these, and to find operational solutions that advance our Coalition military objectives. NATO and we in the Coalition agree that a political transition in Syria is required to assure the long-term stability of the region. Ultimately Assad's removal, to rid Syria of an autocratic regime whose hostility towards its own people was the original cause of the Syrian Civil War, is essential. However, the Assad regime is still recognized internationally as the legitimate government of Syria. Until the international community is prepared to change its position with regard to the Assad regime, NATO's and the Coalition's best course is supporting the current Cessation of Hostilities effort followed by negotiations leading to Assad's removal.

I do not expect the Cessation of Hostilities to be immediately or fully effective. Even an effective Cessation of Hostilities leaves the requirement for continued prosecution of the Coalition's campaign to Defeat ISIL. Syria has been devastated by years of war and, once war finally ceases, will require many more years to heal.

NATO should continue to support the Coalition, and present a strategic counter to an increasingly aggressive Russia. Russia has reasserted itself on the international stage by use of threat, invasion, and military action in Crimea, Ukraine, and now Syria. NATO can support the Coalition in Syria through the provision of select capabilities now, and can support in the future by contributing the means that will be necessary to conduct stability operations, such as humanitarian support and effective governance.

What additional military steps, if any, should the United States be taking to advance the process for a political solution?

In Iraq, although not perfect, the ISF is driving ISIL from their nation. That is not the case in Syria. Our Syria Train & Equip program is one way that we can generate an indigenous ground force to accomplish Coalition objectives. Our Coalition is now assessing further military operations that can accelerate the campaign. We know that key military objectives are on the horizon: key ISIL territory such as, Mosul, Raqqah, and the Manbij pocket must all be freed from ISIL control. We are collaborating with our partners in the region and seeking further contributions from Coalition members so that we have the right capabilities. We are conducting tailored strikes from the air already, and are developing further options for DoD review to assure our best chance to achieve our campaign objectives. Such options include activities across the range of military domains and environments.

Iran

Iran continues to have a destabilizing agenda in the Middle East through both conventional and unconventional capabilities.

What is your assessment of the military threat posed by Iran?

Iran has a large conventional military, composed of approximately 700,000 personnel divided into two separate militaries--the Islamic Republic of Iran Forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC). The IRGC has an additional estimated 600,000-strong militarized Basij (para-military) Resistance Force for immediate mobilization in a crisis. Tehran's primary conventional power projection means are ballistic missiles and its expanding navy. Its missile inventory is the largest in the Middle East and includes both medium and short range ballistic missiles, many which are increasingly accurate and capable of reaching most key targets in the region; these weapons provide Iran a deep-strike deterrent. Iran's navies are expanding weapons and inventory and have instituted measures to ensure survival beyond an initial strike, through dispersal of its military forces. Iran is able to capitalize on strategic locations (SOH, oil platforms) by threatening to close or attack these areas. Expected military improvements in ballistic and naval cruise missile technologies will strengthen Iranian Anti-Access Area Denial efforts and allow Tehran to threaten adversaries more frequently and with greater lethality.

What is your understanding of the role of CENTCOM in implementing U.S. policy with respect to Iran?

CENTCOM plays a key role in countering malign Iranian influence while maintaining a credible deterrent capability. CENTCOM will continue to closely monitor Iran's actions in the AOR and assess Iranian activity as it relates to US interests. In response to any JCPOA compliance allegations, CENTCOM will provide support as necessary to the Department of State and other government agencies during the dispute resolution process. If necessary, CENTCOM will enforce the stated policy of the United States.

What action, if any, do you believe the United States and the international community could undertake to counter Iran's increasing conventional military capabilities?

Iran has invested significantly in building modern ballistic and cruise missile and unconventional warfare capabilities, and it has already begun increasing resources towards more conventional military spending in the wake of recently lifted sanctions. These forces threaten neighboring GCC countries and undermine Middle Eastern stability, as well as the sanctity of the free flow of commerce. Our focus, in countering increased Iranian conventional capabilities, should be on building the capacity of our regional partners and promoting interoperability with each other and the United States, so they can better collectively provide for their own self-defense in the face of an increasingly aggressive and well-resourced Iran. Simultaneously, we must maintain US presence, so that Iran continues to be deterred, and our allies

continue to be reassured of US support and leadership. That being said, I believe that Iran is unlikely to employ conventional military capability to solidify their regional hegemony. Rather, they will continue to use proxies and unconventional warfare to undermine their regional competitors through malign influence and promoting instability. This makes countering Iranian messaging and proxies as critical as countering their conventional capabilities.

In your view, what risks, if any, are associated with reducing U.S. presence in the Middle East with respect to the threat posed by Iran?

USCENTCOM continues to work hard to sustain enduring military, security, and intelligence ties with our regional partners. Our current posture provides sufficient assurance to our partners of our resolve and capacity to secure our enduring interests. However, any response to crises or conflicts in the region requires access, basing, and overflight authorities. Further reductions of US force presence could jeopardize that assurance, resulting in decreased access to host nation facilities. We must sustain our posture to reduce the risk of miscalculation and to deter Iran from conducting conventional and unconventional acts of aggression, as well as to preserve our ability to provide the Secretary and President with a full range of options in the event of provocation.

We must also keep in mind that further reduction of U.S. presence could provide opportunities that other countries such as the Russia or China could exploit. Proxies of Iran could also exploit the absence of US presence, further exacerbating the sectarian divisions and leading to instability.

In your view, what role, if any, should CENTCOM play in countering Iran's support of international terrorism throughout your area of responsibility?

Iran's support of international terrorism, and specifically within the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility, continues to destabilize its neighbors. Even with successful implementation of the JCPOA, Iran's malign activities to expand its influence continues, through the provision of support to terrorist groups and allied militias. CENTCOM supports vigorous intelligence sharing both with our Inter-Agency partners and our Allies and partners around the world. . In terms of countering Iran's influence directly, we need continued support for full funding on our efforts to Build Partner Capacity (BPC) amongst the Gulf Cooperation Council States and others within the Region. Where US interests are directly threatened we need to maintain the ability to act unilaterally in order to expose, disrupt and reduce their capacity over time; an example would be Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO).

Egypt

What is your assessment of the security situation in Egypt?

The government of Egypt has made significant strides in restoring stability in mainland Egypt following two revolutions. Government efforts to improve the

capabilities and capacities of Egypt's security forces continue to be a top priority. I am obviously concerned by the sustained insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, which poses a persistent threat to civilians, both foreign and domestic, and notably to the Multinational Force Observer mission throughout the Sinai. Of growing significance is the support from Libya-based extremists to Sinai-based groups. As we continue to examine our operational priorities for the CT fight in Libya, it is imperative we work with our Egyptian partners to ensure the threat to their territory is mitigated.

What is your assessment of the U.S.-Egypt security relationship?

The U.S.-Egypt security relationship remains strong. We continue to work closely with Egypt's Armed Forces (EAF) to improve the security of their borders and increase Egypt's capabilities in the counter-terror fight in the Sinai and on the Libyan border. Egypt depends heavily on U.S. assistance for these important regional objectives. CENTCOM enjoys the benefit of a stalwart Arab ally in the region, along with unparalleled access to the Suez Canal and Egyptian airspace.

What is your assessment of the role Egypt plays with respect to regional stability?

Egypt remains an anchor state in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility. The country's geographic location, its enduring peace treaty with Israel, its control of the Suez Canal, and its moderate religious and cultural Pan-Arab influences are key factors in support of regional stability. In addition, Egypt is geographically positioned to act as a buffer in countering the flow of foreign fighters, materiel, and financial support to extremists transiting from Libya through Egypt into the Central Region.

In your view, should the U.S. Government continue to provide Foreign Military Financing funds to the Egyptian military?

Yes. U.S. Government aid and support to Egypt is crucial to our strategic partnership. Our military assistance continues to play a major role in protecting our interests. The \$1.3B in FMF which Egypt receives annually helps to modernize its armed forces and build the capabilities necessary to address our mutual security interests in the region. U.S. assistance supports the EAF's efforts to secure its western border regions and the Sinai Peninsula, both of which are critical to CENTCOM's success in the Coalition Campaign to defeat ISIL. Discontinuing our support to Egypt may force Egypt to seek aid from other countries and likely weaken U.S. influence and jeopardize U.S. access in the Middle East.

What is your assessment of Egypt's counterterrorism operations?

Egypt remains an anchor state in the USCENTCOM AOR. 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. As Egypt continues to struggle with the effects of a weak economy and instability derived from years of political upheaval and violence, President al-Sisi is working to strike a balance between promoting a more representative form of government and combatting what he perceives as a

subversive form of political Islam and transnationally based, locally supported violent extremism. Egyptians believe that political Islam is bound tightly to the VEO activity in the Sinai and across mainland Egypt, into neighboring Libya. In particular, they see Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) and IS-Saini as growing threats, capable of conducting attacks in the region. Although nascent Egyptian CT forces are willing to conduct operations, these operations are characterized by limited duration and effectiveness. Egypt remains cautious in partnering with the USG to combat these threats, and will remain significantly constrained by both capability and capacity to challenge these groups in the near-term. Additionally, internal power disputes between the Egypt MOD and MOI pose considerable challenges in developing a unified way ahead.

Yemen

A civil war between Houthis backed by Iran and President Hadi's forces backed by the Saudi coalition continues without a clear path towards resolution. In addition to the civil war, a number of senior U.S. officials have indicated the most dangerous associated force of Al Qaeda is al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the ongoing conflict has allowed them to expand their footprint in Yemen.

What is your assessment of the threat posed by AQAP to the United States?

AQAP has leveraged the political chaos and security vacuum in Yemen to seize military garrisons, government offices, ports, and energy facilities in the southeastern part of the country and establish a de-facto headquarters in the coastal city of Mukallah. AQAP has used these strongholds to generate funds on the order of millions of dollars, enabling the group to co-opt large portions of the local populace, improve weapons stockpiles, enhance recruitment and training initiatives, and seize additional territory. These developments are particularly disconcerting when you consider AQAP's track record for plotting attacks against the U.S.

While AQAP may be focused on domestic operations at the moment, it remains capable and intent on striking the American Homeland. In fact, AQAP leaders recently issued several public statements threatening the U.S. and highlighting the need to strike our interests at home and abroad. These threats, coupled with AQAP's strong operational security, suggest it could attack the Homeland with little to no warning. If we do not deal with AQAP, it is only a matter of time before the group uses its expanded capabilities and safe haven to attempt another attack against the U.S.

What is your assessment of the efforts of the Saudi coalition to defeat the Houthis in Yemen?

The Saudi-led coalition has seen notable successes in its efforts to restore a legitimate government to Yemen, but it is becoming increasingly clear that this conflict will not be solved via military solution. As the coalition attempts to drive back Houthis-aligned forces, a sincere, open political dialogue is required to bring this conflict to resolution. This must be done with the support of the coalition, its opponents in

Yemen, the international community, and most importantly the Yemeni tribes and peoples. Furthermore, all parties must make a sincere effort to prevent AQAP and the relatively new Islamic State branch in Yemen from exploiting security vulnerabilities to build their own capabilities, which could be leveraged to threaten the region.

What is your assessment of the current U.S. strategy to counter AQAP?

The previous U.S. strategy to counter AQAP worked by, with, and through the government of Yemen and our regional partners to build the capabilities of Yemeni Security Forces to keep AQAP in check. Currently, we have no US presence in Yemen, which has limited our ability to maintain awareness of and keep pressure on AQAP. The effects of this decreased pressure can be seen in AQAP's expansion in eastern and southern Yemen. We continue to work with regional partners to develop counters to AQAP expansion in Yemen and throughout the region.

What is the appropriate role of the U.S. military in countering the threat of AQAP, and how should this role be coordinated with other partners in the region as well as with other agencies and departments in prosecuting an interagency strategy?

The current conflict in Yemen has created a security vacuum AQAP is exploiting. Any effective strategy to counter AQAP expansion must also focus on ending the conflict between the Houthis and the legitimate government of Yemen to reestablish internal security. Recognizing there cannot be an enduring "military" solution to the current crisis in Yemen, we support U.S. and international diplomatic activities to create conditions for a political resolution while concurrently working with our regional partners to keep pressure on AQAP. It is encouraging that we have seen some movement towards a meaningful political dialogue in recent months, but we are acutely aware a lot of work and cooperation is still required. My interagency colleagues and I recognize the criticality of these efforts to the region and pledge our continued emphasis to our efforts in working with all the involved parties.

Central Asian States

What, if any, concerns do you have about Russia attempting to reassert itself in the Central Asian States?

Russia has moved to assert itself in Central Asia through a combination of military, economic, and informational means in an effort to resurrect its great power status and hedge against perceived instability emanating from Afghanistan. Russia has recently touted the idea that the United States is abandoning the region and is leaving behind an unstable situation in Afghanistan which will lead to the potential threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) as well as the Taliban creating instability in Central Asia. This narrative is part of an effort to sow fear and doubt in the minds of Central Asian leaders and create a dependency among regional states for Russia to provide security through Russian troop presence, membership in Russian-led security organizations such as the CSTO, and promises of military equipment. Russia is also pressuring Tajikistan to allow its forces to patrol

its border with Afghanistan. Economically, Russia is promoting the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which currently includes Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia is also pressuring Tajikistan to join. Through the EAEU, Russia hopes to assert regional economic dominance. Taken together, we see Russia attempting to undermine the sovereignty and independence of Central Asian states which are a key U.S. interest. Sustained Russian pressure will make it difficult for the United States to deepen our defense ties and support regional stability. Despite this constraint, we continue to work in areas that promote defense professionalization, professional military education, and build capacity against transnational threats while being mindful of Russia's influence in the region.

Lebanon

Over the past decade, the United States has provided over \$500 million in security assistance to the Government of Lebanon.

In your view, what is the appropriate role for CENTCOM in Lebanon?

CENTCOM's role in Lebanon is to support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) whenever and wherever possible. Despite political and sectarian challenges exacerbated by a nearly two-year presidential vacancy, the LAF continues to achieve operational successes in the C-ISIL fight along the Syrian border and provide for the country's internal security. The LAF enjoys broad public support – partly due to its cross-sectarian make-up and trusted leadership, but also due to its demonstrations of capability and resolve. CENTCOM must continue to support broader USG policy directives by fostering the mil-to-mil relationship with the LAF via the sustained provision of defense articles, services and training through US grant aid. The LAF continually proves its transparency and professionalism in its dealings with US Forces, and CENTCOM support for it will ensure continued stability in Lebanon, and a reduced threat for the state of Israel.

Regional Ballistic Missile Threats and Response

Iran has a large arsenal of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles that are capable of reaching forward-deployed U.S. forces, allies and partners in the region. The Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report of February 2010 stated that the United States intends to pursue a Phased Adaptive Approach to ballistic missile defense against such missile threats in various regions, including the Middle East.

Do you believe that such a phased adaptive approach would provide CENTCOM with the missile defense capabilities needed to defend our forward deployed forces and our allies and partners in the region?

Ballistic missile defense (BMD) is an integral part of U.S. military and diplomatic strategies wherever the United States has security commitments. Regionally based U.S. BMD assets represent a clear signal of commitment to both allies and adversaries. The Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR) directs us to tailor our

missile defense capabilities to the threats and circumstances unique to that region. A more effective BMD system will strengthen deterrence against regional ballistic missile armed adversaries, like Iran, and provide more effective protection should deterrence fail.. This approach must be built on the foundation of strong cooperative relationships with partners and Allies. It must be sufficiently flexible to address other regional actors, as they present ballistic missile threats. As such, our regional partners have made significant bilateral investments in the acquisition and employment of U.S. BMD systems. Recently Saudi Arabia and Yemen have deployed and successfully intercepted ballistic missiles in support of Operation Restore Hope. Additionally, we are working with the Gulf Cooperation Council to develop a region-wide BMD capability, including through the development of a ballistic missile early warning system (BMEWS). Therefore, the tenants of the phased adaptive approach are capable of defending our forward deployed forces, allies and partner nations. However, our ability to pace the threat (in both capability and capacity) continues to be a challenge - sufficiency and cybersecurity are significant challenges that must be addressed and employed across the regional security architecture.

What role do you see for other nations in the AOR to contribute to regional missile defense capabilities, either with their own systems or purchasing U.S. systems (such as UAE interest in purchasing the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system)?

Our partners in the USCENTCOM AOR play a critical role in regional missile defense and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Over the last decade, partner nations such as Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have made extraordinary and impressive strides in developing, procuring and employing advanced missile defense capabilities, building a cadre of capable operators and (to a lesser extent) maintainers via FMS programs, while participating in combined exercises. Currently, these capabilities, in conjunction with U.S. deployed systems, are actively contributing to deterring the Iranian threat and, in some cases, defeating the ballistic missile threat from rogue actors. Future efforts will see each of these nations, to include Qatar, continuing to expand upon their advanced missile defense capabilities. Advanced systems such as THAAD, combined with ongoing, combined operations and expanding interoperability with deployed U.S. BMD units, also augment our own defensive posture in support of deployed forces and key infrastructure. Furthermore, on May 14, 2015 President Obama and the heads of Delegations of Gulf Cooperation Council states reached agreement at Camp David to deepen their strategic partnership in defense and security cooperation. At that summit the leaders agreed to “develop a region-wide BMD capability, including through the development of a ballistic missile early warning system (BMEWS).” We continue to make progress on this important effort.

What is your assessment of the progress in the Middle East towards a Phased Adaptive Approach solution to ballistic missile defense and what are the major impediments to progress?

U.S. BMD deployments in the Arabian Gulf began in the early 1990s, and since then, there has been progress in adding quantitatively and qualitatively to the baseline capabilities in order to keep pace with regional threats. The U.S. inventory in the region includes both land- and sea-based interceptors. The United States currently maintains Aegis BMD-capable ships and Patriot batteries in the Arabian Gulf region for the defense of U.S. core interests in the region. The United States, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia each deploy lower-tier systems capable of point defense of high priority critical assets. Additionally, through separate bilateral agreements, the U.S. shares ballistic missile early warning data that is being used in support of passive and active missile defense activities with several partner nations. Efforts to bolster cybersecurity, while maintaining data-sharing and interoperability, remains one of the top impediments to a phased adaptive approach as the cyber threat in the region continues to grow. Partner nations have purchased numerous missile defense and Command and Control systems through both foreign military sales and via direct commercial sales. As a result, the command, control and communications architectures employed by our regional partners do not universally meet the same level of cybersecurity safeguards required for U.S. missile defense systems. This delta introduces vulnerabilities, effects partner nation integration, and impedes the ability to integrate with U.S. deployed forces across the region.

What suggestions would you have to improve progress towards a coordinated Phased Adaptive Approach in the Middle East?

Recognizing the tremendous investment in the last decade to bolster our missile defense capability in the Middle East, I believe we must maintain our national commitment to providing the most advanced missile defense capabilities in defense of our forward deployed forces, partner nations, and U.S. national interests in the region. The continued proliferation of and improvement in ballistic missile capabilities requires us to continue our efforts to counter these threats with the most advanced weapons systems and best trained military personnel in the world. Likewise, I recommend we continue to support research and development of more advanced systems and asymmetric methods to combat the entire BMD engagement chain in order to stay ahead of the evolving threat and to place ourselves on the right side of the cost curve (missiles vs. interceptors). The contributions from our partner nations are critical in this effort - the tremendous work done by our military and other U.S. intergovernmental agencies to assist in the BMD mission and improve partner nation missile defense capabilities is imperative as we look to the future of missile defense.

Building Partner Capacity and Security Assistance

In the past few years, Congress has provided DOD a number of authorities to provide security assistance to partner nations.

In your view, what should be our strategic objectives in building the capacities of partner nations in the CENTCOM AOR?

Our strategic objectives in building the capacities of partner nations the Central Region continue to focus on those critical capabilities that contribute to our mutual security interests: counter-terrorism, border security, and air & missile defense. Two of the bigger authorities and funds provided to DOD in recent years, ITEF and CTPF, have gone directly toward building these capabilities among our key partners. Additionally, we have used these funds to build partner nation capacity for ongoing challenges to be faced by indigenous forces with US support through host governments. This requires conventional formations to establish a large-scale persistent train and equip relationship with key partners. An example of building partner capability can be seen with the Jordan Operational Engagement Program (JOEP) where we provide equipment and training to Jordanian forces, which improves their capabilities in counter-terror and border security operations. This enables them to work together with other regional partner in counter-ISIL operations.

As commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, you have directed efforts designed to build partner capacity. What are the major lessons learned from your efforts to use the authorities Congress has provided?

USSOCOM provides resources (personnel and equipment) to the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) who execute the Security Cooperation programs in their Area of Responsibilities (AOR). With very few exceptions, USSOCOM does not initiate or request either Title 10 or Title 22 Building Partner Capacity (BPC) projects. Each of the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) work with their respective GCCs to draft multi-year plans to develop partner nation Special Operations Forces (SOF) in their regions.

That being said, I'd like to elaborate on my two key observations: The first is that most of the SOF enterprise is not as familiar or comfortable with the wide range of existing BPC authorities as we should, or rather must, be. All the authorities that the GCCs need already exist, we just need to learn how to use them better to meet our needs. Of the more than 160 congressional statutes that authorize the US government to undertake security cooperation with foreign partners, about 120 of them apply to DoD. Out of those 120 authorities, SOF routinely utilizes fewer than about a dozen for BPC activities. In order to support BPC events proposed by the TSOCs and GCCs, our challenge is to determine which authority and funding source can be used. Admittedly this can be a complicated process since almost all of the available authorities have different submission processes, different deadlines, different eligibilities, different approving authorities, different vetting requirements, and different funding cycles. So, to help our TSOCs sort through the wide range of

available resources, I have made education on security cooperation authorities a priority. Formal training on authorities is now available from Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), and I have created a Security Cooperation Coordination office within my J5 to act as a single-entry point for help on available authorities. USSOCOM is also working closely with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) to improve support to GCC-led Security Cooperation efforts that involve SOF-related defense articles (materiel and training). My second observation that we must recognize and fully appreciate Department of State's (DoS) lead role in ensuring consensus for all BPC projects. While we may want an authority that would enable a quicker response to identified needs (train, equip, advise, etc.), we have learned that our desired end-state of support to a foreign unit must complement the DoS strategic goals for the entire country and region. In summary, the necessary authorities already exist to accomplish any BPC project. We, the GCCs and SOCOM, must improve our ability to fully utilize existing authorities to accomplish BPC efforts in support of broader U.S. policy goals.

Counter Threat Finance

In addition to high profile efforts to disrupt ISIL funding streams as part of the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) campaign, DOD and the Intelligence Community (IC) have invested more resources in identifying and tracking the flow of money associated with terrorist networks and illicit trafficking. Identifying and disrupting key individuals, entities, and facilitation routes enabling the flow of money that supports terrorism, production of IEDs, narco-trafficking, proliferation, and other national security threats could have a significant impact on confronting these threats.

What are your views on the role of DOD in counter threat finance activities?

DoD plays a critical role in USG counter-threat finance (CTF) activities. DoD enables and enhances Interagency (IA) capabilities to: (1) discover vulnerabilities in adversary networks through analysis and collection; (2) conduct planning to synchronize and integrate law enforcement and/or regulatory authorities; (3) build partner nation CTF capacity; (4) further specific cases against individuals operating illicitly in support of an adversary state or network; and (5) provide appropriate financial analysis and support to the development of kinetic targeting. Over the past year, the Department institutionalized CTF as a vital DoD program through the Joint Requirements Oversight Council process. Institutionalizing and operationalizing DOD CTF capabilities are important enablers that will create a CTF trained and resourced force that can identify and degrade current and future threat financing on the 21st century battlefield.

What is your assessment of OIR efforts to disrupt ISIL funding?

CJTF-OIR efforts have addressed all aspects of ISIL funding – from generation and sales through distribution and warfighting sustainment. Targeting ISIL controlled oil fields have significantly disrupted ISIL's capability to generate large revenue streams

from this resource. To increase pressure on ISIL revenue generation the coalition has also targeted several bulk cash sites denying ISIL access to accumulated wealth. Additionally, coalition air strikes on logistical, training and headquarters facilities also imposes cost on ISIL's bottom line, forcing its leadership to make hard decisions about where they allocate their available resources.

Coalition operations against ISIL-controlled oil infrastructure and bulk cash sites have negatively impacted ISIL's finance and logistics networks. While ISIL still controls over 80 percent of Syria's energy resources, infrastructure and assets and while this sector has accounted for 50 percent of ISIL's revenue, these numbers are now in reduction. ISIL oil revenues are down by about 30 percent. The group has cut its fighter salaries in half in some areas, and is burdening the populations under control with extortionist taxes to alleviate economic shortfalls.

Additionally, the coalition has also focused on decreasing liquidity in ISIL-controlled territory by preventing ISIL from acquiring cash. In August 2015, the coalition worked with the Government of Iraq to emplace a ban and hold in escrow the distribution of government salaries into ISIL-held areas, which curtailed ISIL's ability to tax these funds. Finally, recent Coalition strikes against bulk cash sites in Mosul have also incinerated millions of dollars under ISIL's control.

Are there opportunities to replicate or improve upon past network-disruption efforts in impacting facilitation networks?

Yes. Our successes in disrupting facilitation networks working in conjunction with and in support of our Interagency partners provide ample opportunities to expand efforts and results in these areas. We have partnered with USG law enforcement (LE) agencies outside CENTCOM's OIR Joint Operations Area to leverage partner nation law enforcement authorities to disrupt adversary facilitation networks involved in illicit border activities which facilitates and sustain ISIL operations. This proven effort provides a good model of joint LE-DoD efforts which we are institutionalizing and replicating across the USG LE enterprise.

Another example of formalizing IA – USCENTCOM successes against facilitation networks is our leveraging USG Department of Commerce regulatory End-Use Checks in the form of a USCENTCOM Concept of Operations which partners our efforts across the whole of government and has led to the disruption of trans-shipments to our adversaries.

In your view, how should the Department of Defense coordinate and interface with other key agencies, including the Department of Treasury and the Intelligence Community, in conducting counter threat finance activities?

Based upon experiences in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, USCENTCOM champions the "whole-of-government" coordination and unique methods of Interagency-DoD interfacing through a series of initiatives driving collaboration and Intelligence Community support for CTF at every phase of operations and planning. These initiatives include: (1) establishing an office of primary responsibility within the Command for promoting Interagency operational collaboration, intelligence coordination, and planning; (2) hosting Interagency liaison officers as part of the Staff

and; (3) establishing a strategic network of CTF personnel embedded in other branches of the government to pursue actions in support of mutually identified priorities. Furthermore, we integrate inter-agency counterparts into our Battle Rhythm through inclusion in working level communities of interest, our interagency working group, target development and senior level Counter-Terrorism Coordination Board forum, to ensure we are collaborating at every critical decision point - sharing information and coordinating efforts.

Strategic Communications and Information Operations

Over the past decade, DOD has funded an increasing number of military information support operations (formerly known as psychological operations) and influence programs.

What are your assessment of DOD's military information support operations, influence programs, and other information warfare efforts in the CENTCOM AOR?

Good progress has been made and USCENTCOM is seeing some success in combatting ISIL's propaganda and narrative online using our existing programs. We are expanding our cooperation with our Interagency and Coalition partners to achieve our common mission of countering ISIL ideology and propaganda. Our efforts are focused at the tactical and operational level to amplify battlefield successes and counter ISIL's disinformation. We are seeing positive momentum working with regional military partners, who increasingly use their IO training to combat violent extremist messaging.

Looking ahead, we need to continue to improve operating with our interagency and regional partners in a more synchronized manner so that we can dominate the information environment. This will enable us to discredit, erode, and attack ISIL's legitimacy in the eyes of those audiences susceptible to being radicalized.

What unique value should such programs contribute in distinction from strategic communications and influence activities conducted by other government departments and agencies?

Strategic communications are targeted and tailored for select groups and individuals generally comprised of large audiences. Military information operations can be – and frequently are – directed to mass audiences as well as to individuals posting on social media websites. CENTCOM Information Operations focuses its efforts in two main lines of effort: 1) building capacity of regional military partners to conduct IO/MISO for themselves; and 2) supporting on the ground operational activities by amplifying successes and discrediting ISIL's false messaging. We provide fact-based online messaging integrated and synchronized with real-time events, presenting information that regional audiences cannot find elsewhere. CENTCOM has the unique capacity to mobilize indigenous voices leveraging existing regional networks. This provides authenticity and credibility than the USG could not create alone. These efforts organize existing counter-ISIL conversation, supply new content, share successful tactics, and encourage credible voices to move to conversation threads that the

adversary is using for recruitment. CENTCOM programs play an important role in countering the appeal of ISIL's brand, to key audiences in Iraq/Syria, the region and abroad, interrupting the echo chambers of propaganda and disinformation that the group has created. We synchronize our efforts with the new Global Strategic Engagement Cell within the Department of State, meeting several times a week, and are committed to supporting the U.S. whole of government and coalition approach.

ISIL, al Qaeda and affiliated violent extremist groups work hard to appeal to local populations. In several cases throughout the CENTCOM AOR these efforts have allowed violent extremists to establish a safe haven, conduct operations, and expand their recruiting base. The composition and size of these groups in comparison to the U.S. Government permits them to make policy decisions very quickly.

Do you believe CENTCOM and other agencies within the U.S. Government are appropriately organized to respond effectively to the messaging and influence efforts of ISIL, al Qaeda and other affiliated terrorist groups?

CENTCOM is postured to identify and effectively counter adversary disinformation concerning Coalition efforts in Iraq and Syria. We are linked at the operational and strategic level with other departments conducting similar efforts. However, there are times where tactical successes in Iraq and Syria could be better exploited at the strategic communications level. ISIL's messaging and appeal outside Iraq and Syria are a major concern – CENTCOM participated in a series of working groups alongside Department of State and Special Operations Command to address this concern and improve overall USG ability to synchronize efforts and respond more rapidly. We are working a number of initiatives in this regard. The problem is not one of organization or venues to promote cross departmental coordination. Rather, the emerging challenge is creating procedures to rapidly coordinate with the Department of State's Global Engagement Center, Coalition capabilities; such as the Coalition Global Communication Cell in London; the Sawab Center in UAE; the Dubai Regional Media Hub; and others. Establishing and improving these procedures will increase our speed, volume and messaging effectiveness. Numerous efforts are underway to move these issues forward.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capabilities

Over the last 15 years, CENTCOM has received the overwhelming majority of the ISR support that DoD has been able to generate. However, the demand for more ISR has continued to outstrip the supply, even though the Secretary of Defense has taken extraordinary actions to ramp up the acquisition of more and more capable and varied ISR systems. Other combatant commands and other military missions and operations outside of the CENTCOM AOR have gone wanting.

As a military commander, what are the indications that you look for that would suggest you do not have enough ISR?

Over the last 15 years, ISR (and FMV in particular), has become the critical joint enabler for CENTCOM operations across the AOR. FMV is critical to both counterterrorism and conventional combat operations because it is used to establish pattern of life, develop targets, ensure minimal collateral damage, and perform battle damage assessment. The demand for ISR continues to outpace supply across the entire AOR, from OIR to Afghanistan, and from Yemen to the Arabian Gulf. Determining if we have enough ISR is based on intelligence requirements articulated through the collection management process. These quantified intelligence requirements are the demand signal from the warfighter on how much ISR they need to accomplish the mission. The collection management process allows CENTCOM to compare its intelligence requirements against the ISR available in theater, assign ISR assets against these prioritized requirements, and identify the resulting ISR shortfalls.

Do you foresee, and if so to what degree, CENTCOM relinquishing existing ISR systems as demand continues to grow, specifically in northern Africa?

ISR remains a key enabler in both the CT and conventional fights we are concurrently engaged in within the OIR JOA, as well as in Yemen and Afghanistan. Currently every COCOM is operating at a deficit with respect to ISR demand versus assets available. An increase in demand in any theater drives a risk discussion of whether the new requirements will be sourced at the expense of another COCOM's existing capacity. As a result, CENTCOM does not believe there will be any reduction in ISR requirements in the near future. The extension of current operations and force levels in Afghanistan, combined with the growing scope of operations in Iraq/Syria, continues to expand CENTCOM's requirements. Additionally, as operations also expand across the Arabian Peninsula (ex. Yemen and support to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), CENTCOM's ISR requirements will expand in kind – competing with expanding CT efforts in AFRICOM (and perhaps PACOM in the future). As a result, we are not likely to recommend any asset relinquishment from CENTCOM's AOR.

CENTCOM Headquarters

What considerations must be taken into account to determine whether a military headquarters, such as CENTCOM headquarters, has the right number of people?

Traditionally, Combatant command headquarters manpower is determined based on assigned UCP, JSCP, and GEF missions along with the size and complexity of the assigned AOR. When combat operations are necessary, the combatant command headquarters is traditionally augmented by temporary manpower to handle the increased workload of contingency operations. For the last 15 years CENTCOM has continuously been engaged in combat operations throughout our AOR. Since major combat operations with US ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended, CENTCOM has sharply reduced the number of temporary augmentees. Despite the

reduction in temporary manpower, they continue to conduct operations enabling security forces and civil authorities “by, with, and through” our coalition partners to defeat ISIL throughout the AOR. Because the “temporary” combat operations have become more enduring, CENTCOM has had to rely more on its permanent manpower to handle these mission sets and the peacetime workload.

Will you commit to conducting a review of the size of the CENTCOM headquarters?

Yes. Over the past 10 years, CENTCOM has had more than 6 internal and external manpower reviews and studies. Additionally, the 25% management headquarters manpower reduction, mandated by the 2016 NDAA, will necessitate another manpower review.

Interagency Collaboration

The collaboration between U.S. Special Operations Forces, general purpose forces, and other U.S. Government departments and agencies has played a significant role in the success of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in recent years. However, much of this collaboration has been ad hoc in nature.

What do you believe are the most important lessons learned from the collaborative interagency efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere?

Counter Terrorism (CT) operations are intelligence intensive since the greatest challenge is “finding and fixing” the terrorists – an act of extreme complexity and difficulty requiring every intelligence capability and domain at our disposal. The CT paradigm demands the highest art in target discretion, lethality and precision. Each of these attributes demands fused, all-source intelligence assessments to ensure mission success. We have learned that no single Intelligence Community (IC) entity is sufficiently omniscient to provide the required level, depth and TEMPO of intelligence necessary to underpin effective CT operations – mandating close collaboration across the “find, fix and finish” process. Our experiences in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom have highlighted the need for collaborative and synchronized intelligence effort from across the IC to develop the needed intelligence. Only a united effort, synchronized at all levels by professionals from all intelligence domains is sufficient to effectively address this task.

Section 1208 Operations

Section 1208 of the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (Public Law 108-375), as amended by subsequent bills, authorizes support (including training, funding, and equipment) to forces and individuals supporting or facilitating military operations by U.S. Special Operations Forces to combat terrorism.

What is your assessment of this authority?

I am very appreciative of Congress' continued interest in and support for this program. Section 1208 remains a critical tool in our combating terrorism efforts. It allows small-footprint SOF elements to take advantage of the skills and unique attributes of indigenous regular and irregular forces—local area knowledge, access, ethnicity, and language skills to achieve effects that are critical to our mission objectives, especially in remote or denied areas where U.S. formations are infeasible. Our ability to quickly provide enabling support to willing partners under Section 1208 has resulted in hundreds of successful tactical operations. These operations have disrupted terrorist networks and their activities and denied them operating space across a wide range of operating environments, at a fraction of the cost of other programs. As the USSOCOM Commander, the 1208 program is one of my highest priorities.

Prevention of and Response to Sexual Assaults

What is your assessment of the problem of sexual assaults in CENTCOM?

CENTCOM's efforts in encouraging victims to step forward and to protect them once they do, have led to an estimated increase in reporting for CENTCOM over the past 3 years (Reported assaults relative to the average population increased from .08% (FY 13) to .15% (FY15)). This assessment aligns with overall DoD statistics which continue to trend toward increases in victim reporting of sexual assault. The increase in reporting seems to indicate greater support to victims and greater confidence in the military justice system.

There is a positive trend by command climate survey respondents which indicate they feel leadership is firmly committed to preventing sexual assault and if it occurs will hold perpetrators accountable.

What is your assessment of CENTCOM's sexual assault prevention and response program?

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) continues to receive CENTCOM leaders' highest level of attention. Leaders at all levels continue to aggressively execute the Department's five Lines of Effort (LOEs) which include: 1) Prevention, 2) Investigation, 3) Accountability, 4) Advocacy/Victim Assistance, and 5) Assessment. Throughout the AOR, CENTCOM units implement specific and wide-ranging Service initiatives while adhering to the Commander's clearly-stated policy of zero tolerance for sexual harassment and discrimination.

Fundamentally, sexual assault is a safety and readiness issue, and we must continue to address it with efforts at all levels of the chain of command.

What is your view of the provision for restricted and unrestricted reporting of sexual assaults?

I strongly support the current provisions for restricted and unrestricted reporting of sexual assaults. Having these two reporting options will allow us to emphasize a commitment to victim care, while also supporting the victim's desires for privacy. Restricted reporting permits victims of sexual assault to report the crime to specific individuals, allow them a wide range of care (medical, mental health, legal advice, etc.) without notifying command or law enforcement officials. The ability to change to an unrestricted report at any point enables an official investigation to move forward and provides the victims of sexual assault choices and options during a deeply personal and life-changing time.

What is your view about the role of the chain of command in providing necessary support to victims of sexual assault?

CENTCOM's aim is to reduce--with the ultimate goal of eliminating--the crime of sexual assault in the CENTCOM AOR. Their strategic approach to sexual assault is prevention first, but when necessary, focused and unwavering commitment to a victim's care. CENTCOM's chain of command will continue to take deliberate and meaningful actions to prevent sexual assaults, empower victims, facilitate recovery when incidents do occur, and sustain our commitment to holding offenders appropriately accountable for their actions.

What is your view of the adequacy of resources and programs in CENTCOM to provide victims of sexual assault the medical, psychological, and legal help they need?

CENTCOM provides victims adequate resources through robust advocacy, and victim assistance through advertisement and ease of access to resources. The services provided to victims include educational information via written and electronic methods, resources centers in the AOR, legal/victim counsel, medical providers, victim advocates and psychological assistance.

What is your view of CENTCOM initiatives to prevent additional sexual assaults?

CENTCOM has effective initiatives and programs in place to prevent additional sexual assaults. The Headquarters and the Components have initiated several effective training methods, including SAPR Stand-downs, team building events, values-based training, bystander intervention and leadership training. The HQ Command Climate Survey has historically reflected a healthy SAPR environment compared to other DOD Joint units. I believe the training initiatives and leadership involvement has been effective, and I will evaluate and assess all areas with an eye towards continuous improvement immediately upon taking command.

What is your view of the adequacy of the training and resources available to CENTCOM to investigate and prosecute allegations of sexual assault?

I believe that the amount of training and resources in those areas where we have high concentrations of soldiers (Service Components, Joint Task Forces, etc.) is adequate. However, I do have concerns with resources at satellite and remote locations. The emphasis is to mitigate shortages in those locations by focusing on partnership and collaboration with the component headquarters in the AOR. In the event a sexual assault is committed, commanders have the responsibility to hold service members accountable and I will be committed to bringing to bear all resources required at these locations ensuring thorough and complete investigations are conducted.

What is your view about the role of the chain of command in changing the military culture in which these sexual assaults occur?

It is absolutely a responsibility for commanders at every level to promote an environment that respects every member and is intolerant of the disparaging behaviors that may bring about a sexual assault. We must demand service members understand and embody the military core values, and demonstrate the courage to act on these types of issues.

Surveys report that up to 62 percent of victims who report a sexual assault perceive professional or social retaliation for reporting.

If confirmed, what will you do to address the issue of retaliation for reporting a sexual assault?

I will not tolerate retaliation on victims who report or are considering reporting a sexual assault. I know victims often will look to experiences of other survivors as an indication of how they may be treated. Victims must know that they will not be retaliated or blamed for the illegal actions of others. If a member of CENTCOM is found to have retaliated against or socially ostracized a victim, it will result in criminal prosecution under the UCMJ for Article 92, Failure to Obey Orders or Regulations. They will be held accountable for their actions. I will continue GEN Austin's zero tolerance policy for any type of sexual harassment or retaliation.

Sexual assault is a significantly underreported crime in our society and in the military. If confirmed, what will you do to increase reporting of sexual assaults by military victims?

I will continue GEN Austin's policy of zero tolerance for any type of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination backed up by processes that require notification reports to General Officers when an unrestricted sexual assault is reported. CENTCOM fully understands that underreporting of sexual assaults affects CENTCOM's ability to provide services to the victim, as well as hinders the ability to take action against an alleged offender. Military victims must feel they are protected, treated with dignity and respect, and are provided the highest quality of support, advocacy, and care. We

will continue the annual continuum that GEN Austin started that has led to increased reporting. Members of CENTCOM must be trained about the resources available, ways to protect their privacy, and leaders must be supportive. Training will continue to be mandatory for both military and civilian, and will include all ranks. Members of CENTCOM will be educated in the process and leaders will work for their trust. Only then will victims feel more comfortable in reporting. We will also continue to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure personnel command-wide know that reports are taken seriously and justice is pursued is vitally important. While we will protect the innocent victims' identities, case outcomes will be well- publicized. The message will be sent that perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment are held accountable.

In your view, what would be the impact of requiring a judge advocate outside the chain of command, instead of a military commander in the grade of O-6 or above as is currently the Department's policy, to determine whether allegations of sexual assault should be prosecuted?

I believe the Department's current policy is appropriate and properly places the responsibility for making these decisions in our most experienced leaders. Senior Commanders regularly make difficult decisions on military justice matters and rely upon military legal experts to advise them on the merits and options in all cases. Commanders are explicitly charged with maintaining good order and discipline and in my view are fully capable and the proper authority to make that determination.

What additional steps would you take, if confirmed, to address the problem of sexual assaults in CENTCOM?

While there is always more work to do and ways to improve, CENTCOM has established a solid foundation for education, advocacy, and accountability. Reporting has increased and more confidence in the system is shown in recent CENTCOM climate surveys. The system in place will be evaluated and improved upon using experience and lessons learned. Most importantly, I will ensure we provide any assistance necessary to survivors of sexual assault.

What is your assessment of the effect, if any, of recent legislation concerning sexual assault on the capability of CENTCOM commanders to prosecute sexual assault cases?

In my assessment our senior military leaders are fully capable of making difficult decisions with complex facts. Our leaders are supported with well trained personnel to advise them and we continue to aggressively attack the blight of sexual assault. We will continue to support the policy and adapt to changes as they occur. In my opinion our organization is strengthened by providing our military leaders with both the responsibility and authority necessary to ensure that all of our outstanding men and women, our sons and daughters are protected from sexual assault. With the responsibility to protect our service members and their families Commanders should be able to hold accountable those that commit misconduct.

Congressional Oversight

In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of information.

Do you agree, if confirmed for this high position, to appear before this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress?

Yes, if confirmed

Do you agree, when asked, to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the Administration in power?

Yes, if confirmed

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear before this Committee, or designated members of this Committee, and provide information, subject to appropriate and necessary security protection, with respect to your responsibilities as the Commander, CENTCOM?

Yes, if confirmed

Do you agree to ensure that testimony, briefings and other communications of information are provided to this Committee and its staff and other appropriate Committees?

Yes, if confirmed

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

Yes, if confirmed