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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED

SERVICES ON THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL

COMMAND



DISRUPTION, CHANGE, AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE CENTRAL REGION

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Events in the Central Region have shown how quickly the course of history can change. Decades-old features of the strategic landscape, once thought immutable, have been upended. Since 1979, the Iranian regime has terrorized the region. Its network of proxies exploited openings wherever found, undermining neighboring governments and exporting its unique brand of state-sponsored terror. Its ballistic missile arsenal and one-way attack drones cast a long shadow across the region from Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea. Iran continued to enrich uranium well beyond any civilian use case, employing the specter of nuclear war as a tool of regional and international coercion. The regime's decades-long vision of exporting a radical ideology wreaked havoc on neighboring states and wrought violent confrontation with the United States and its partners. This long-simmering conflict was brought to a full boil on 7 October 2023.

In the years that followed, Iran's proxies were degraded in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, its arsenal of standoff munitions were defeated four times during attempted mass wave attacks against Israel, and its nuclear program suffered a devastating setback during Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER. The regime was down, but not out. It turned its fury inwards, massacring thousands of its own people who were simply demanding a better life, all the while beginning to reconstitute its hard power toolset. United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), at the direction of the President of the United States, initiated Operation EPIC FURY (OEF).

In less than 40 days of major combat operations, USCENTCOM forces systematically dismantled what Iran spent four decades and tens of billions of dollars building. The capabilities on which the regime relied to threaten our forces, coerce our partners, and project power across the region have been substantially degraded. Combined with the damage Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER inflicted on Iran's nuclear program, USCENTCOM assesses that Iran can no longer project power across the region, nor pose the persistent threat to the United States or our partners that it did prior to Operation EPIC FURY. As of this submission, United States air and naval forces continue to enforce the Presidentially directed blockade against Iranian ports and merchant

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vessels while enabling neutral vessels to transit, as Iran attempts to extort global commerce and threaten innocent mariners.

Iran can no longer reliably arm or resupply Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas, or militia groups in Iraq with advanced weapons. These groups, the Iranian Threat Network, have been the backbone of Iran's work to destabilize the region. This dynamic presents an opportunity for a generational shift in the regional balance of power. Sustaining our advantage will require continued enforcement, vigilance against reconstitution, and readiness to act should Tehran choose revenge over restraint. USCENTCOM maintains a ready and resilient posture to deter aggression, defend U.S. forces, enable partners, and provide credible military power, when directed, to support diplomatic efforts and provide the President and Secretary of War with a range of options.

Operation EPIC FURY took place against a backdrop of rapid political and security shifts. In just the preceding five months, Syria's post-Assad transition, peace efforts in Gaza, diplomatic initiatives in Lebanon, and the transition of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) had already represented a significant change in the strategic landscape. OEF has the potential to be the most consequential inflection point yet. As regional and international actors navigate this moment of flux, the region's trajectory will be determined by those who can effectively harness today's momentum – toward a peaceful, integrated region built on commerce, not chaos. USCENTCOM is working closely with partners to drive peaceful, sustainable outcomes to the myriad challenges and opportunities before us. In this environment, risk abounds, but so does opportunity.

Today, the region stands at a decisive moment in history – and so does USCENTCOM's role within it. In the rearview mirror, two decades of Global War on Terror operations fade increasingly in the distance behind us, while the shocks of the past several years, particularly since October 7, continue to reshape power dynamics across the region. We must remain clear-eyed and vigilant. Spoilers are watching for opportunities to exploit sudden shifts, unravel fragile ceasefires, and drive escalation. That reality requires disciplined vigilance and the

ability to adjust posture and readiness on short notice. At the same time, the current environment offers USCENTCOM a generational opening to transform the region by integrating and empowering our allies and partners to assume greater responsibility for their own and the region's security. USCENTCOM, acting as a security integrator and enabler, is encouraging our regional partners who have stepped up to participate in both offensive and defensive operations against Iran during OEF to acquire new capabilities, further integrate their militaries, and pursue peace to enable lasting change.

To manage these risks and capitalize on these opportunities: USCENTCOM is laser-focused on three priorities: 1) Defending the homeland by stopping terror attacks before they reach our borders, 2) Deterring Iran and its proxies, and 3) Preserving America's advantage and position of strength relative to China.

DEFEND THE HOMELAND FORWARD

USCENTCOM is home to over 19 designated foreign terrorist groups. ISIS and Al-Qaeda, though degraded by our persistent counterterrorism (CT) operations, maintain the intent to carry out external operations (EXOPS) against the homeland – and they will seek opportunities to do so if left unchecked. USCENTCOM's mission is to eliminate these threats as close to the source as possible, long before they reach our borders – working by, with, and through partners wherever feasible. This requires close coordination with our regional CT partners along with focused, right-sized application of U.S. military capabilities. We continue to conduct targeted kinetic operations against jihadi terrorist organizations, and we complement these efforts by helping mitigate sources of chaos before they generate transnational threats.

Sustaining Pressure on ISIS at Large. The Islamic State has been extensively reduced. Just a decade ago, ISIS in Iraq and Syria controlled territory spanning hundreds of square miles, counted dozens of thousands of fighters amongst its ranks, and threatened the very sovereignty of much of the Levant. Since then, ISIS's so-called territorial Caliphate was destroyed in 2019, under the leadership of President Trump, the group holds no

territory in the Middle East, and the membership of ISIS Core has dwindled to several hundred scattered remnants. Overall, across Iraq and Syria, ISIS attacks are at their lowest levels since 2013, with a 70% reduction in attacks since 2023. Since January 2025, Combined Joint Task Force – Operational INHERENT RESOLVE’s (CJTF-OIR) efforts have led to 97 ISIS-affiliated personnel killed and almost 900 detained. In Iraq, ISIS has been marginalized thanks to the Iraqi Security Forces and our partners in the Kurdish Peshmerga. In Syria, ISIS has been hit hard, most recently by strikes conducted under Operation HAWKEYE STRIKE, which removed 34 ISIS leaders and operatives.

However, recent attacks by ISIS continue to demonstrate terrorist groups are looking for opportunities to exploit and carry out its violent agenda, as evidenced by their attack in Palmyra, Syria on 13 December 2025, that tragically took the lives of two Iowa National Guardsmen and an American civilian interpreter: SSG Edgar Torres-Tovar, SSG Nate Howard, and Ayad “Eddie” Sakat. In early 2026, a significant percentage of the roughly 23,000 displaced persons at al-Hol, a camp where there are serious concerns about radicalization among the population, dispersed into the local area following the SDF’s withdrawal under military pressure by the Syrian government. These challenges highlight the continued importance of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS), and the need for CJTF-OIR operations to continue.

Addressing ISIS Fighters in Detention. USCENTCOM has consistently pressed the need to accelerate repatriation of displaced persons and detained foreign fighters, the latter of whom languished in detention facilities for years after their capture. I felt so strongly about this issue that I went in person to speak at the United Nations last fall to call on the global community to act quickly and repatriate their citizens. These facilities were under control of our longstanding SDF partners, but the situation changed rapidly in January of this year when the Syrian government moved into SDF-held territory, making the situation suddenly precarious. This spurred USCENTCOM to launch a mission to transfer thousands of ISIS detainees out of Syria to Iraqi custody to mitigate the risk of a mass prison break and resultant large-scale ISIS reconstitution – this would

pose a direct threat to the American homeland and undo years of CJTF-OIR battlefield successes. Upon mission completion, we successfully moved 5,704 ISIS fighters in detention in Syria to Iraqi custody while enabling the FBI to biometrically enroll every individual. Though currently relocated to Iraq – a more secure location removed from volatility in Syria – repatriation remains a shared national security imperative. The international community must act on this veritable ISIS army in detention and repatriate displaced nationals remaining in Syria’s Roj camp to avoid an outcome like al-Hol’s.

Transitioning the D-ISIS Mission. The Government of Iraq’s accomplishments against ISIS and in building national capacity have paved the way for an evolution. Iraqi Security Forces can manage the ISIS threat in Iraq unilaterally, and we are transitioning from coalition operations to a traditional defense relationship. USCENTCOM continues to actively target ISIS and pragmatically expand CT collaboration with the Syrian government. While Damascus officially joined the Global D-ISIS Coalition in November of last year, large parts of Syria remain under marginal state control. Limited external assistance is still critical to prevent ISIS reconstitution.

We have transitioned the OIR headquarters to Jordan. This supports a forward-looking focus on CT, while enabling us to redeploy home personnel and assets from Iraq and allowing OIR to continue its important CT work. Key allies and partners have signaled a continued commitment to counter ISIS together with us in the Central Region based on shared interest in protecting our collective homelands from terrorists planning EXOPS against us. This mission set is an ideal example of partner burden sharing in action. The United States playing a small enabling and convening role enables our partners to do most of the work – an exemplar of a low cost, high return-on-investment line of effort.

Promoting a Unified Syria. The enduring defeat of ISIS is a core U.S. national interest, for which Syria is our center of gravity. Some battle-hardened fighters remain at large as the new Syrian state still strives to assume control. A stable security environment there is essential to maintain pressure on ISIS, as the group is

waiting to exploit blind spots while attention is focused elsewhere. A breakdown of order or return to civil war would provide breathing room for the group to reconstitute.

We continue to pragmatically engage the Syrian government to advance a dignified settlement in the post-Assad era and a peaceful fresh start for Syria. A positive outcome reduces risk to the homeland over the long-term, and USCENTCOM – working with interagency mission partners – is supporting efforts to responsibly build Syrian security capacity through our regional partners.

DETER IRAN AND PROXIES

USCENTCOM remains postured to provide options to the President and Secretary against Iran and its proxies, to include responses to any acts of aggression as directed. In OEF, we set back Iran's conventional military for years, but we must remain vigilant and ready to support diplomatic efforts with a credible deterrence and, if necessary, renewed kinetic response. To this end, USCENTCOM is supercharging innovation efforts and structurally integrating partners to ensure we maximize use of their capabilities and ability to burden share. Our capacity for innovation and network of partners represent two of our most unique advantages.

Operation EPIC FURY. In 38 days of major combat operations in coordination with the Israel Defense Forces, America's servicemembers delivered a long-term rollback of Iran's ability to project power in the region and beyond. Across more than 10,200 sorties and over 13,500 strikes, we targeted the full breadth of the regime's ability to project power.

We damaged or destroyed over 85 percent of Iran's ballistic missile, drone, and naval defense industrial base. More than 1,450 strikes on weapons manufacturing facilities set the regime's ability to build and stockpile ballistic missiles and long-range drones back by years. The factories and technical workforce that produced Iran's ballistic missiles, long-range attack drones, and naval platforms have been degraded to the point that Iran cannot replace its lost capabilities in the near term. We destroyed or buried much of Iran's ballistic missiles,

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launcher vehicles, and long-range attack drones with more than 450 strikes on ballistic missile storage and systems and roughly 800 strikes on Iran's drone-launching units and storage.

In the air domain, Iran's air and air defense forces are functionally and operationally irrelevant. Before OEF, the Iranian Air Force flew between 30 and 100 sorties each day. Today that number is zero. We destroyed or rendered non-mission-capable Iran's fixed-wing airfields, hangars, fuel storage, and munitions stockpiles, and we knocked out 82 percent of its air defense missile systems along with the radar and command architecture that tied them together.

At sea, we destroyed 161 vessels in total across 16 classes of warships, effectively crippling the regime's ability to operate. We eliminated more than 90 percent of Iran's once-massive inventory of over 8,000 naval mines, with more than 700 airstrikes on Iranian naval mine targets. In sum, Iran's navy can no longer claim to be a maritime power, and it cannot project into the Gulf of Oman or the Indian Ocean. Iran retains nuisance capability – harassment, low-end drone and rocket attacks, and residual proxy support – but it no longer possesses the means to threaten major regional operations or to deter U.S. freedom of action in the air or maritime domains.

The second-order effects of OEF are significant. More than 2,000 strikes against Iran's command-and-control structures created leadership vacuums, paralysis, and internal confusion. We have seen reporting of desertions, personnel shortages, and signs of regime desperation in their attempts to compel discipline through arrest and execution. Most importantly for the region's future: Iran will be highly challenged to proliferate advanced weapons to Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas, or the Iraqi militia groups. The supply chain from Tehran to the proxies has been broken.

In short: in 38 days, we rolled back 40 years of Iranian military investment. This result was not foreordained, and it was not without cost. We honor the memories of the 13 service members who paid the ultimate sacrifice during OEF: MAJ Cody Khork, MAJ Jeffrey O'Brien, CW3 Robert Marzan, MSG Nicole

Amor, MSG Noah Tietjens, SGT Declan Coady, SSG Benjamin Pennington, Maj Ariana Savino, Maj John Klinner, Capt Curtis Angst, Capt Seth Koval, MSgt Tyler Simmons, and TSgt Ashley Pruitt represent the very best among us. Their loss reinforces the gravity of what happens next, and that the results of OEF will not be permanent without continued vigilance and purposeful action. We should expect Iran will try to reconstitute what it can, as fast as it can. The speed and depth of that recovery will depend in large part on decisions we and our partners make over the next several years to sustain our advantage and prevent global adversaries from supplying Iran with the means to rearm.

Enhancing Deterrence through Innovation. USCENTCOM is intently focused on getting the latest technology into the warfighter's hands, and fast. For this reason, our Rapid Employment Joint Task Force (RE-JTF) was created to field and operationalize 'best-in-breed' emerging technologies that directly address their needs in cycles of 60 days or less. This JTF fills an existing gap between available warfighting tools generated by America's world-renowned technology sector and the warfighters on the ground.

In alignment with the Department of War's emphasis on establishing drone dominance, as outlined in Executive Order 14307, USCENTCOM has launched a focused effort to leverage innovation as a deterrent to equip our personnel with the latest, most economical, and most combat-effective unmanned systems for use across the spectrum of conflict. To this end, RE-JTF accomplished its first task in establishing a one-way attack UAS Squadron -- Task Force Scorpion Strike (TFSS). Recognizing the existential imperative to develop and employ cost effective means to affect U.S. adversary risk calculus, TFSS employs cheap and lethal drones that begin to flip the risk-reward curve heavily in our nation's favor. This high-return, minimum investment not only places advanced capabilities into the hands of our warfighters, but it also directly supports efforts to strengthen the U.S Defense Industrial Base.

Operation EPIC FURY was a proving ground for RE-JTF and TFSS. It marked the first time U.S. forces employed Group 3 one-way attack drones in combat, and they did so at a cost-per-effect that is an order of

magnitude below the platforms we have traditionally relied upon for comparable missions. Developments on the battlefield proved how the RE-JTF can respond to emerging warfighter requirements. In response to emerging drone threats against our personnel, the RE-JTF rapidly developed and fielded effective countermeasures to key locations, successfully neutralizing the threat.

Capitalizing on Partner Contributions to Regional Air Defense. USCENTCOM has undertaken a focused effort to structurally integrate our partners to enable them to take on a greater role in deterring regional aggression. Underpinning this is the continuous process of enhancing partner capacity, proficiency, and interoperability – at one common, high standard. To this end, we have established Air Defense Combined Command Posts with each of our Patriot-equipped partners and built on this foundation by establishing Combined Air Defense Augmentation Teams (CADATs). These CADATs include teams of U.S. Army air defenders working in partner Patriot units to ensure timely reception of indications and warnings, operational readiness, and deconfliction of shot doctrine.

At the operational level, on top of these tactical successes, we have implemented the Middle East Air Defense-Combined Defense Operations Cell (MEAD-CDOC), hosted at al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. This construct addresses key tactical and operational lessons learned over the past two years. Staffed primarily by partner personnel, the MEAD-CDOC expands our integrated air defense connection from the tactical to the operational level, linking each via our Combined Air Operations Center and partner nation Air Operations Centers/Air Defense Operations Centers to serve as the regional operational level hub for an actualized Middle East air defense umbrella.

Operation EPIC FURY validated, at full scale and in actual combat, a combined Middle East Air Defense (MEAD) network – a concept the region had exercised for years but never fully operationalized. During OEF, for the first time in history, U.S. air defenders stood shoulder to shoulder with partner air defenders across national systems – operationalizing the CADAT program. Over the course of the operation,

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this integrated architecture intercepted over 6,000 one-way attack drones and more than 1,500 ballistic missiles aimed at U.S. forces, Israel, and our Arab partners. Every one of those intercepts was a life saved – ultimately thousands of lives – and together, represents the largest integrated air defense umbrella ever fielded on earth. During my recent visits to the region, this partnership was lauded by our partners’ national and military leaders as unprecedented and invaluable. There are no other efforts I have initiated that have had as high a return on investment as the CADATs and MEAD.

The significance is not just in the numbers. MEAD proved that true air defense interoperability is achievable, affordable relative to its effect, and is the primary reason Iran’s missile and drone salvos produced far less damage than Tehran intended. It further reflects our partners’ readiness to substantively burden share in the air defense domain, creating more strategic flexibility for our Joint Force. The continued maturation of MEAD, and export to other theaters, is one of the single highest-leverage investments the United States can make in regional deterrence and globally.

Security Support to Ending Generational Conflicts. The initiatives outlined above are complemented by USCENTCOM’s direct support to on-going efforts in the Levant to support potential resolution to generational conflicts where Iranian-backed groups have for decades undermined stability, threatened our partners, and killed Americans. Following the agreements brokered between Israel and Lebanon and Israel and Hamas, made possible by U.S. diplomacy, USCENTCOM went to work with the goal of giving peace the greatest chance of success. Our established partnerships in the region served as an invaluable foundation upon which to build coordination, deconfliction, and monitoring organizations that continue to facilitate nearly all aspects of diplomatic engagement. This includes monitoring the established ceasefire in Gaza and supporting existing and potential further diplomatic initiatives in Lebanon, where we have provided tactical deconfliction between parties as a trusted agent. We are mindful that lasting change to these problems will require committed and coordinated action from our allies and partners in the region itself.

Supporting Disarmament of Hezbollah in Lebanon. In Lebanon there remains generational opportunity for meaningful change with President Aoun’s push for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to disarm Hezbollah in accordance with the November 2024 Cessation of Hostilities and current on-going diplomatic initiatives. USCENTCOM has supported the Cessation of Hostilities Supervisory Committee, previously referred to as “the Mechanism” and now called the Lebanon Deconfliction Cell – a novel pathway for groundbreaking deconfliction and coordination while supporting adherence to the agreement. It proved the potential to address longstanding challenges that have shaped Lebanon’s security environment since the 1980s.

While the United States continues to support our Lebanese partners and real progress is underway, important work remains, and unresolved friction points still drive escalation and risk broader instability in the Levant. This was evident when Hezbollah once again put loyalty to the Iranian regime over peace and security for the people of Lebanon and decided to attack Israeli civilians in the country’s northern communities. In the post-OEF environment and as emerging diplomatic initiatives continue to take shape, there remains no alternative to the Lebanese Armed Forces, and U.S. support to the LAF is indispensable. There is no shortage of challenges on the road ahead, but these efforts are crucial to prevent Tehran from once again casting its long shadow across the region, into the Levant, and against the shores of the Mediterranean.

Supporting the President’s 20-Point Peace Plan for Gaza. USCENTCOM continues to play a significant role in supporting the Comprehensive Plan to End the Conflict in Gaza through the Civil-Military Coordination Cell (CMCC) and enabling the International Security Force (ISF). Established last October, the CMCC has grown to include over 72 non-governmental organizations and partner countries. This contingent accounts for more than 500 multinational personnel, and under the leadership of an American general officer they work to preserve the ceasefire, deescalate violations, coordinate humanitarian assistance, and support stability in Gaza and its long-term development. So far, the CMCC has facilitated the delivery of over 58,000 trucks of humanitarian aid, coordinated over 2,140 medical evacuations, and vaccinated over 6,000 children.

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This is in addition to clearing millions of square meters of rubble, reducing terrorist tunnels, and playing a critical role in enabling the return of all deceased hostages to Israel.

USCENTCOM has laid the foundation for the ISF. We've worked with our Jordanian and Egyptian partners to establish ISF training pipelines, staging locations, and logistics networks. We built life support and mission support areas for ISF troop contributions. The inaugural Commander of the ISF is Major General Jasper Jeffers, Commander of Special Operations Command-Central, supported by the Special Operations Command Central core staff. As USCENTCOM has built the structure and framework of the ISF, we look forward to forces from troop contributing partners flowing in to continue the work of implementing the President's 20-Point Peace Plan in Gaza.

Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea. The Houthis retain capabilities that hold our partners' interests at risk, and they continue to expand their influence and ties with a broad range of threat groups along the Red Sea littoral. Though the ceasefire continues to hold following Operation ROUGH RIDER, we continue to closely monitor the situation in Yemen, with a focus on potential threats to the homeland. It is critical that we continue to work with regional partners to ensure that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula does not take advantage of changes in Yemen to reconstitute and again threaten the homeland.

PRESERVING AMERICA'S ADVANTAGE AND POSITION OF STRENGTH RELATIVE TO CHINA

The USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR) has global significance. Our enduring interests and network of partners make it a bulwark against global competitors, who also have substantial interests in the area of responsibility (AOR). China continues to extend its influence through base access agreements, weapons sales, and infrastructure contracts near key maritime transit routes, efforts that can serve as a springboard to challenge American interests. USCENTCOM has established new organizations charged with identifying opportunities and developing options within existing authorities to shore up the U.S. position as partner of

choice and maximize our options and decision space in response to any challenge. Our ability to project strength where our strategic competitors have core interests is vital for ensuring the United States remains the partner of choice and is able to deter, and when necessary, confront any competitor in any AOR.

Improving Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Foreign Military Sales issues are the Achilles heel of burden shifting. With \$325.3 billion worth of U.S. military sales in the region, representing what would be the second largest defense budget on Earth after our own. USCENTCOM is committed to doing everything it can within our own authorities to streamline and expedite FMS and direct commercial sales to our partners and allies in the region. To this end, USCENTCOM has stood up a new organization, Military Group – Central (MILGRPCENT), commanded by a one-star admiral and empowered with the authorities necessary to accelerate execution and improve outcomes. Since its inception, MILGRPCENT has accelerated providing 136,000 munitions to partners and processed sixty-nine urgent letters of request during OEF in response to emerging partner needs. I'd like to note the increased speed in delivering needed capability to partners like Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain since OEF began—a credit to the FMS reforms underway across the Department.

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE: OUR PEOPLE AND PARTNERS

We possess two unique strategic advantages that drive success across these lines of effort. The first is our people – the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians who make up USCENTCOM. Their courage and skill are felt across the region. They are the pilots who boldly executed Operation EPIC FURY and delivered humanitarian aid to partners in need. They are our warrior diplomats on the leading edge of historic peace efforts. They are the ever-watchful protectors of the American homeland, ready at a moment's notice to strike those who wish to do us harm. Our people are our most significant investment, which is why USCENTCOM is promoting a culture of warfighting excellence across the command.

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One example is the *Treasures of the Nation* course now offered to USCENTCOM personnel. Focused on developing five pillars – purpose, integrity, leadership, followership, and discipline – it works to strengthen trust, build resilience, and shape ethical leaders. Our warfighters deserve nothing but the best, and USCENTCOM will ensure their leaders and teammates are empowered to innovate, lead, and succeed as a team.

The second advantage is the unrivaled network of partners with whom we proudly stand. From the Red Sea to Central Asia, the critical support our partners provide comes in many forms, and they have demonstrated time and again that we cannot accomplish our goals in the Central Region alone.

The Levant has been the epicenter of some of the most consequential events in recent history. Since the tragedy of 7 October 2023 and the seismic events that followed, our partnerships have proven invaluable to our collective peace efforts. In addition to our Kurdish and Iraqi partners' D-ISIS contribution and the LAF's efforts to disarm Hezbollah, our partners continue to serve as steady pillars of leadership as we address the region's challenges. Egypt and Jordan, for example, put their full diplomatic weight behind achieving a positive outcome in Gaza. They continue to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid and receive those in need of medical care for onward movement to appropriate facilities. Egypt's support to restoring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and Jordan's battlefield contributions against ISIS in Syria are concrete examples of our partnerships' incalculable value.

In the Gulf, our partners are on the cutting edge of major burden shifting efforts. Late last year, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait both hosted and led exercises to improve our combined counter-drone capabilities. The United Arab Emirates, a partner that has long proven its mettle in combat side-by-side with U.S. and coalition forces, has provided significant assistance to Gaza in support of U.S. objectives and pledged an additional \$1.2B for reconstruction. Qatar and Bahrain's willingness to host groundbreaking air defense coordination cells is the result of decades-long partnerships that are key to USCENTCOM operations, not to mention Bahrain

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being the home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces. Our ability to project strength from these locations is bolstered by our partners' willingness to invest significant financial resources. The U.S.-Qatar Statement of Intent on Defense Cooperation, signed by Secretary Hegseth and Minister Al-Thani in May 2025, as well as the U.S.-Saudi Memoranda of Intent for an unprecedented \$142 billion in defense sales, reflect our Gulf partners' commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation.

In South and Central Asia, USCENTCOM is deepening existing avenues of cooperation and forging new pathways. The shared threat of EXOPS emanating out of Afghanistan continues to be an animating force among our partners. Pakistan, especially, is a critical CT partner that is central to the fight against ISIS-Khorasan in the region. Our strong military-to-military (mil-to-mil) partnership with Islamabad has produced tangible results against high-value individuals with American blood on their hands. It was also key to USCENTCOM's humanitarian support following catastrophic flooding in Pakistan last September. These tangible, mutual wins are direct reflections of our enduring friendship and shared resolve. Our Central Asian partners, likewise, are keeping a wary eye towards Afghanistan-based terrorist threats. This traditional avenue of mil-to-mil cooperation is complemented by an eagerness to support peace initiatives elsewhere – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have both joined the Board of Peace to help drive positive outcomes in Gaza, and Kazakhstan will contribute troops to the International Stabilization Force. There is rapid security sector innovation taking place across Central Asia. Turkmenistan is driving regional innovation in maritime domain awareness in the Caspian Sea, while Tajikistan is becoming a regional hub for aerial drones and additive manufacturing.

CONCLUSION

Under President Trump, the weakening of the Iranian regime's position at home and in its near-abroad have created strategic openings for a safer, more prosperous Middle East free from perpetual conflict. USCENTCOM is laser-focused on seizing these opportunities to set the region on a trajectory toward historic

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and sustainable peace while securing our core national interests. Empowered by our people and our partners, we will defend the homeland, deter Iran and its state-sponsored terror network, and counter China's growing inroads to ensure the United States remains in a position of strength, no matter the theater.

These immense opportunities are tempered by the inherent risks of managing yet unsettled conflicts, and we will remain clear-eyed about the threats we face. Spoilers are watching for opportunities to exploit sudden shifts, unravel fragile ceasefires, and drive escalation – actions that could fundamentally change the region's long-term political and military dynamics against American interests. That reality requires disciplined vigilance and the ability to adjust posture and readiness on short notice. We will strengthen our readiness and be prepared to respond swiftly to any threats against the homeland or our interests. The men and women of U.S. Central Command – our nation's premier warfighters – are up to the task.