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UNITED STATES STRATEGY AND MILITARY OPERATIONS TO COUNTER THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT AND UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD IRAQ AND SYRIA

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 21; JULY 7; SEPTEMBER 16; DECEMBER 9, 2015

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UNITED STATES POLICY IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in room SD–G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Ayotte, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Graham, Cruz, Reed, Nelson, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Kaine, and King.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman MCCAIN. Now that Senator Ernst is here, we can begin.

[Laughter.]

The committee meets today to receive testimony on United States policy in Iraq and Syria.

I want to thank each of our expert witnesses for appearing before us today on this critical and complex topic.

Before I go any further, the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs were invited to appear. Admittedly, very short notice, and we will be asking them to appear after the recess is over, depending on whether the bill is on the floor, or not. But, we certainly would like to hear from the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Today, we have General Jack Keane, former Vice Chief of Staff for the Army and chairman of the Institute for the Study of War.

General Keane, we're pleased you could take time from your duties on FOX News to being with us today.

Dr. Fred Kagan, who is—that's a joke—Dr. Fred Kagan, director——

[Laughter.]

Dr. Fred Kagan, the Director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute; Colonel Derek Harvey, U.S. Army (Retired), Director of the Global Initiative for Civil Society and Conflict at the University of South Florida; and Brian Katulis, who is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress.

Could I point out, for the benefit of my colleagues, that General Keane and Dr. Kagan were key elements and individuals who went over to the White House in 2006 to talk to then-President George W. Bush concerning the need for a surge, that—the strategy in Iraq was failing at that time, and they were two of the major architects—and I know they'll give credit to many others, but two of the

major architects of the surge, which turned out to be, at great sacrifice of American blood and treasure, a success.

The black flags of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are now flying over yet another major Iraqi city, Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar Province, and reports overnight suggest that ISIL now controls the Syrian city of Palmyra, as well. This hearing does not—is not about the fall of any one city, as important as those losses are, but, rather, what these defeats have revealed about the limitations of an overly constrained American air campaign, the weaknesses of Iraqi forces, the growing malign role of Iran, and the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of United States military support of—for our Iraqi and Syrian partners. But, most concerning, it highlights the shortcomings of the administration's indecisive policy, inadequate commitment, and incoherent strategy. This misguided approach has failed to stop, if not fostered, the expansion of ISIL to a dozen countries. The loss of Ramadi, once the symbol of Iraqis working together with brave young Americans in uniform to defeat al-Qaeda, must be recognized as a significant defeat. ISIL's victory gives it the appearance of strength and boosts its ability to recruit more fighters while reinforcing Iran's narrative that only it and its proxies can rescue Iraq.

The fall of Ramadi and capture by ISIL of American-supplied military equipment is another setback for the United States and further undermines our credibility as a reliable strategic partner in the region.

And yet, the Obama administration seems unwilling or unable to grasp the strategic significance. As ISIL terrorists ransacked Ramadi—by the way, the Pentagon's news page ran a story with the headline, "Strategy to Defeat ISIL is Working." Secretary of State John Kerry said Ramadi was a mere "target of opportunity." And 2 days ago, when a review should have been well underway to correct an incoherent strategy that is woefully under-resourced, the White House Press Secretary, Josh Ernst, said, "Are we going to light our hair on fire every time there's a setback?" I would point out for my colleagues that maybe his hair isn't on fire, but there are bodies on fire in the streets of Ramadi as we speak.

The disaster of Ramadi should lead to a complete overhaul of U.S. Strategy. The President has stated, "Our goal is degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL," but neither strategy nor resources support this goal. Our efforts in Iraq may actually be aggravating the conditions that gave rise to ISIL in the first place by relying on brutal Iranian-backed Shi'a militias and insufficiently empowering Sunni Iraqis. At best, this increases Iran's malign influence. At worst, it reinforces ISIL's rhetoric that it is the only force standing against violent sectarian Iranian-backed militias.

President Obama has cleverly maneuvered us into the position that Sunni Iraqis that we—think we support Iran, and Shi'a Iraqis think we support ISIL. But, the situation is far worse in Syria. The Iran-backed Assad regime, together with Iranian proxies like Hezbollah, continues the slaughter that has killed more than 200,000 Syrians and displaced 10 million more. Despite this tragedy, the administration has defined its policy in Syria more by what it will not do rather than the—by the end state we aim to achieve. Although the United States military's train-and-equip pro-

gram for moderate Syrian forces is now finally providing assistance to vetted fighters, the administration still has not decided whether it will defend Syrian opposition against Assad's barrel bombs upon their return to Syria. Refusing to support the forces we train is not only ineffective, it is immoral.

While it is still unclear what President Obama is willing to do in Syria, it is clear our partners do not draw confidence from statements of what we will not do. Ramadi's fall should lead our Nation's leaders to reconsider its indecisive policy and incoherent strategy that has enabled ISIL's expansion, undermined regional stability, strengthened Iran, and harmed America's credibility. What we desperately need is a comprehensive strategy, the decisive application of an increased, but still limited, amount of United States military power, and a concerted effort by the Iraqi Government to recruit, train, and equip Sunni forces. This will require disciplined thinking, clear priorities, a strategy supported by adequate resources, and, most of all, the leadership and resolve of the President to succeed.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on these important questions.

Senator Reed.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, first, let me thank the chairman for calling this timely and very, very important hearing, and also thank Senator Nelson for acting as the Ranking Member today. I have two Appropriations Committee—one Appropriations Committee and one Bank Committee markup, and I apologize, I cannot be here.

With that, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to yield to Senator Nelson.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Nelson.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR BILL NELSON

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

what I'm going to do is just put my statement in the record so we can get on to it.

But, what you underscore is certainly accurate. The fall of Ramadi—what is the Abadi government going to do? Do they have the capability of getting Sunnis to come in and take up the fight against ISIS? And so, we need, as you all testified to us—How far are we along in implementing the counter-ISIS campaign in Iraq? And what has the Abadi government done to empower the Sunni tribes to resist ISIS? And what does Ramadi mean about retaking Mosul? And will these events force Iraq's political leadership to overcome their differences in their attempts at government?

So, with those questions, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Nelson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SENATOR BILL NELSON

I'd like to welcome our witnesses this morning, and thank them for being willing to testify on such short notice.

The recent headlines about the fall of Ramadi, and the brutal massacre of civilians that followed, demonstrate once again the extreme threat that the self-declared Islamic State, or ISIS, poses to the people of Iraq and Syria; to the wider region, extending from North Africa to South Asia; and to the world.

The response in some quarters to this news has been to declare that the entire strategy in Iraq is called into question, or to claim that the Iraq strategy has collapsed.Others, while calling the events in Ramadi a significant setback, argue that the United States should not abandon its Iraq strategy, in particular the fundamental principle that this is not America's war, but Iraq's, though the United States and its coalition partners can help support the Iraqi government in that existential fight.

Accordingly, Ramadi should be seen as a wake up call that the Abadi government needs to do more to include the Sunnis and build the capabilities of the Sunni tribes to take the fight to ISIL.

The committee would be interested in getting our witnesses'perspectiveson the significance of the events in Ramadi within the context of the broader conflict with ISIS.Some of the policy questions that arise include:

- How far along are we in implementing the counter-ISIS campaign in Iraq, how long will it take, and is there a need for strategic patience as we build the military and political capabilities in Iraq required to confront ISIS?
- What has the Abadi Government done to empower the Sunni tribes to resist ISIS, and what more needs to be done?
- What does the fall of Ramadi mean for the campaign to retake Mosul and should there be a shift to an "Anbar First" strategy, which would put off the Mosul offensive until after a counteroffensive to retake Ramadi and other key Sunni cities?
- Will these events force Iraq's political leadership to overcome their differences and govern inclusively, in a manner that addresses long-standing grievances of Sunnis, Kurds, and other minority communities?

I look forward to our witnesses testimony this morning.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

And, you know, Palmyra is one of the historic places on Earth, and, as it's being threatened now, we know what ISIS does to these antiquities. We're about to perhaps, unfortunately, see another destruction of an obviously irreplaceable historic heritage sites that—it would be another great tragedy along the lines of the destruction of the Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, years ago.

Welcome the witnesses.

And, General Keane, we'll begin with you. Thank you, sir.

STATEMENT OF GEN JOHN M. KEANE, USA (RET.), FORMER VICE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY

General KEANE. Thank you, Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Senator Nelson, and distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate you inviting me back to testify.

I was here a few months ago dealing with global security challenges facing the United States. And I must say, I was pretty impressed with the bipartisan support for the challenges our country is facing and the way you're willing to work together to come to grips with it.

I'm honored to be here with my distinguished colleagues. Obviously, I know Fred Kagan and Derek Harvey very well. They're long and close associates. As much as Fred and I may have had some impact on the previous administration in changing their strategy—and there were others who were working towards that end, as well—Derek Harvey, sitting here, was the catalyst for understanding the enemy. He was pushing against the intelligence group think that existed at the time. And he defined that enemy better than anybody did in this town. And that was the beginning of understanding what was happening to us, why it was happening, and what Fred and I thought we could realistically do about it. So, I'm honored to be here with all of them.

I've got some maps up there that you may want to use to get a reference. It's always good to see where things are happening, to understand the scale and magnitude.

You know, approximately 9 months ago, the President announced the U.S. public policy——

Chairman MCCAIN. General, could you give me a second? I don't think we have——

General KEANE. We have to get the chairman maps. Okay.

Approximately 9 months ago, the President announced the U.S. public policy that, along with our coalition partners, the United States would degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS. Weeks later, he changed "destroy ISIS" to "defeat," a more appropriate term.

A strategy was crafted to accomplish this objective, which consisted among some things as humanitarian assistance, undermining the ISIS ideology, countering the finances, providing military assistance to our Iraqi partners, to include airstrikes into Syria, and assisting the Iraqi Government politically to move toward a more representative government, which actually, obviously, led to a change in governments. I cannot address undermining the ideology and the finances in this testimony. It's beyond my expertise.

While there has been some progress and some success, looking at this strategy today, we know now that the conceptual plan is fundamentally flawed. The resources provided to support Iraq are far from adequate. The timing and urgency to provide arms, equipment, and training is insufficient. And, as such, we are not only failing, we are, in fact, losing this war. Moreover, I can say with certainty that this strategy will not defeat ISIS.

As to the concept, ISIS, who is headquartered in Syria, recruits, trains, and resupplies in Syria, controls large swaths of territory in Syria—and you can look at your map there to take a look at that—to include the entire Euphrates River Valley in Syria from Iraq to the Turkish border. It connects now to the Euphrates River Valley in Anbar Province, which leads to the suburbs of Baghdad. And it's currently expanding to the west as far as Damascus. And they just seized, as the Chairman mentioned, Palmyra City and Palmyra Air Base in Central City—in central Syria, aligning the central east-west corridor from Iraq all the way to homes in the west in Syria.

And yet—and yet—we have no strategy to defeat ISIS in Syria. We have no ground force, which is the defeat mechanism. Yes, we have airpower. And, despite the success at Khobani—and yes, we have degraded ISIS command and control in Syria, their logistics, and we have killed many ISIS fighters—but, airpower would not defeat ISIS. It has not been able to deny ISIS freedom of maneuver and the ability to attack at will. Syria is ISIS's sanctuary. We cannot succeed in Iraq if ISIS is allowed to maintain that sanctuary in Syria. We need a strategy now to defeat ISIS in Syria.

As you can see on the map that deals with the global rings—take a look at that—many ISIS—on that ISIS map—ISIS is expanding beyond Iraq and Syria into Sinai, Yemen, Libya, and Afghanistan. This is where they actually have people on the ground, and they have actually provided resources, and they have—actually have a contract written and signed with the people on the ground who are affiliated with them. And they're also inspiring and motivating rad-

ical sympathizers throughout the world, which are depicted in that map on yellow, as we are painfully aware of in Europe and in the United States and Australia. Yet, there is no strategy with our allies to counter that expansion. I would go further to say there is no strategy to counter the destabilization of the Middle East.

As to Iraq, it certainly makes sense to assist Iraq in reclaiming lost territory and avoid deploying United States ground combat units. However, ISIS, despite some setbacks, is on the offense, with the ability to attack at will anyplace, anytime. And, particularly, the fall of Ramadi has exposed the weakness of the current Iraq strategy. It is more than just a setback.

Politically, the administration deserves credit for helping to usher out the Maliki government and bring the new Abadi government in. However, Abadi is isolated, is undermined by Maliki, who is still and remains a nefarious character, and others within Abadi's own party. Abadi is unduly influenced by Iran. And the United States is not nearly as consequential as it should be. A United States objective should be, politically, to reduce Iran's influence. We need a focused diplomatic and political effort with the Abadi government, with the best people we have available to do it.

Militarily, clearly the Iraqi army is a serious problem. While some have fought heroically, many have not. There are serious leadership, discipline, morale, and competence issues. This will take time to fix. But, if we believe that Iraq is important to United States security, then we must help them fix it. And it will take many more trainers and a much more concerted effort to put in the best leaders available.

The Sunni tribal force is almost nonexistent, yet we cannot reclaim the Sunni territory that has been lost, particularly Anbar Province and Mosul, and we cannot hold the territory after we have reclaimed it if we do not have a Sunni tribal force. The Abadi Government must authorize this force, and the United States should arm, equip, and train it. They must know that the Iraqi Government and the United States is behind them. Right now, they know the Iraqi Government is not. Their families are being killed by the hundreds, eventually by the thousands. They are disillusioned by the United States, in terms of its lack of support.

The Peshmerga. They're skilled, they're willed, they will fight. They need arms, and they need advisors, down at the fighting level, to assist them with planning, execution, and to call in airstrikes.

The Shi'a militia are largely protecting Baghdad. Most of what ISIS owns is Sunni territory. If we use the Shi'a militia to reclaim that territory and hold it, Iran has undue influence, politically, in Iraq as a result of it, and the Sunni people will suffer under the hand and the gun of the Shi'a militias. We must, in fact, reduce their influence.

The role of advisors. Advisors are only at brigade headquarters and above, currently. This is flawed. Advisor teams must be with the units that are fighting, at least at the battalion level, which is what we did in the past so successfully. Advisors, as the name implies, helps units plan and execute, and it also builds their confidence in themselves. They are also forward air controllers and can direct airpower as well as attack helicopters. The war in Iraq

is largely close-combat urban warfare, which demands the bombs be guided from our airplanes to the ground by people on the ground. Seventy-five percent of the sorties that we're currently running with our attack aircraft come back without dropping bombs, mostly because they cannot acquire the target or properly identify the target. Forward air controllers fix that problem.

Special Operation Forces direct-action teams should be employed, not as an exception, which is what we successfully saw this last weekend in Syria with the raid, but routinely in Iraq and Syria against the ISIS leadership and critical infrastructure. Similar to what we have done in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past during the surges, when Fred and I were there, as well as Colonel Harvey, we averaged—the surges in Iraq and Afghanistan, we averaged somewhere between eight to ten of these operations a night. In fact, when the UBL raid was taking place in Pakistan, there were nine of these going on in Afghanistan that very night.

We should also do large-scale raids. What does that mean? We should use elements like Rangers to conduct attacks at night over critical infrastructure to kill ISIS fighters who are difficult to dig out with airpower at altitude. These are surprise attacks. They're not intended to stay. They're in and out maybe one night. We stay, at the most, a couple of days, depending on how much of a fight we're getting into.

We desperately need enablers to assist the Iraqi Security Forces. This is crucial support that helps them succeed on the battlefield. What is it? Robust intelligence capability. We have some, but we've got to ramp it up more than what we have. Increased UAVs, not to assist airpower, which we're currently doing in terms of surveillance, but to assist ground forces. That's a different application, and it's a different type of UAV. We need attack aviation. That's Apache helicopters. And we need other helicopters to assist the ground forces. C–130 transports to move troops and supplies and other logistics support. And we need increased U.S. command-and-control headquarters to help control the increase of trainers, advisors, and others that I'm suggesting here.

Obviously, what I am suggesting is increased United States political and military involvement in Iraq, which begins to shore up many of the weaknesses of the current strategy. While I believe we can still do this without U.S. and allied combat brigades, it is much more difficult now than what it was 9 months ago. I believe we have to do some serious contingency planning for the introduction of ground combat brigades, both United States and allied.

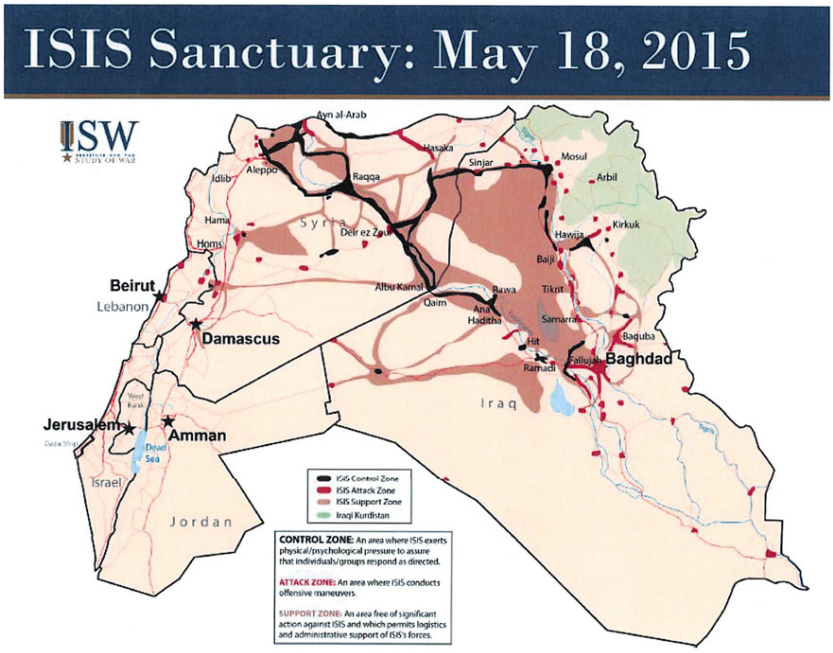
Finally, we need to get past our political psychosis on Iraq which is defined by the questions: Should the United States have gone into Iraq in 2003? Should the United States left Iraq in 2011? While they were crucial U.S. policy decisions, there is—and there is much to learn from them, and we have—we've got to get past it. ISIS is much more than Iraq. Our forces should be what the—our focus should be what the President started out with: defeating ISIS. That will take political will. And war is a test of wills. It will take accepting risk. It will take accepting casualties. It will take focus. And it will take increased U.S. resources. And it will take honest evaluations as—and assessments.

What I fear is this. I hear a disturbing and frightening echo of the summer of 2006, when administration, senior government—when a different administration, senior government officials, and military senior generals came before this committee and, in the face of compelling evidence that our strategy in Iraq was failing, these officials looked at you and defended that strategy and told you that, overall, the strategy was succeeding. You and your predecessors took a strong bipartisan exception to those opinions. Many, as a result of it, wanted to give up on Iraq. Others wanted to do something about fixing the problem.

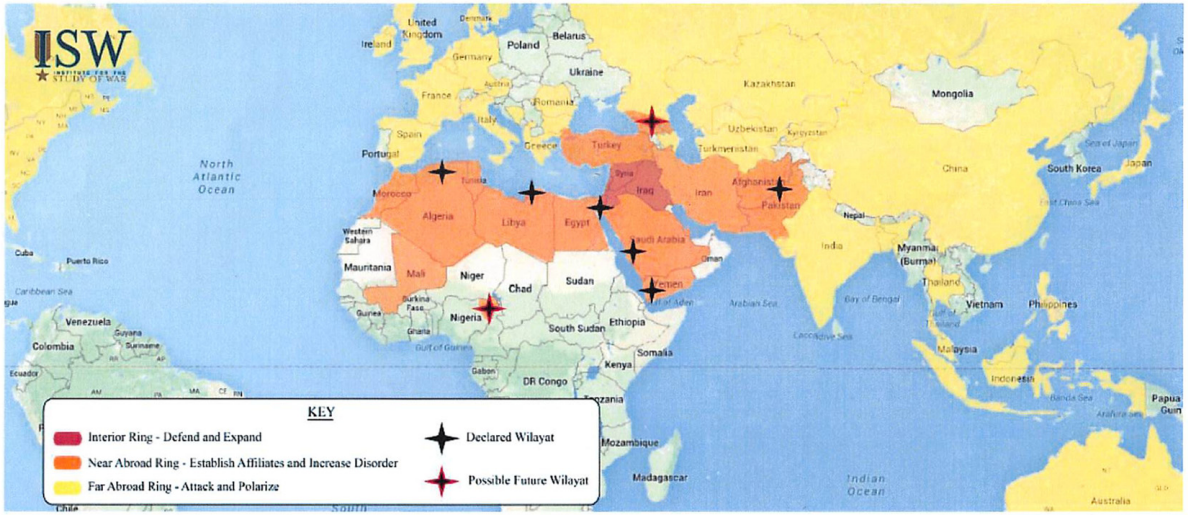
I hope you choose the latter and get on with helping to fix the problem. And I look forward to your questions.

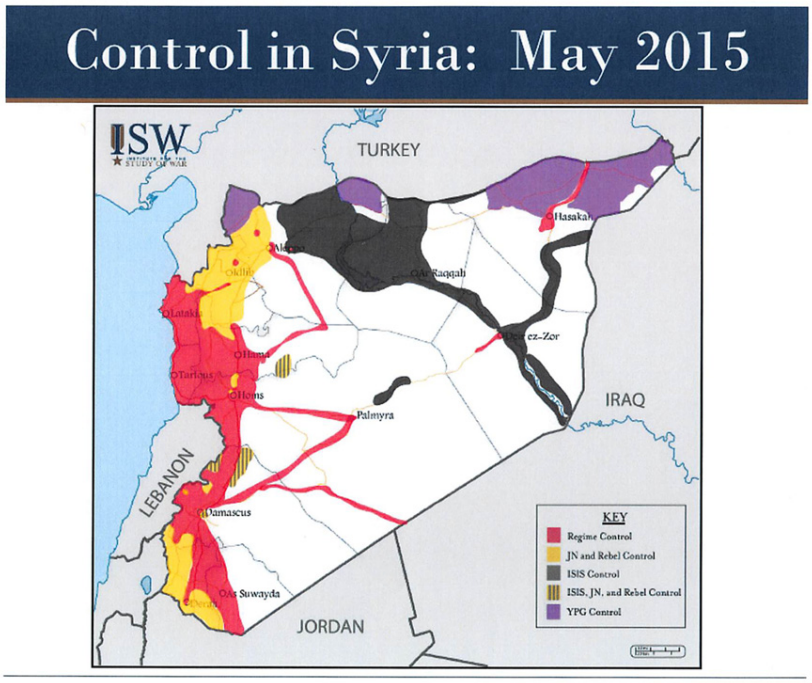
Thank you.

[Supplemental material to the statement of General Keane follows:]



ISIS Global Rings: May 2015





Chairman MCCAIN. Dr. Kagan.

STATEMENT OF DR. FREDERICK W. KAGAN, CHRISTOPHER DELMUTH CHAIR AND DIRECTOR, CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Dr. KAGAN. Mr. Chairman, Senator Nelson, thank you very much for calling this hearing. And thank so many of you for attending. It shows a sense of urgency about the problem on the part of this committee that it's hard to detect in the rest of the administration. So, I'm very grateful to the committee, as always, for the opportunity to speak, but for the attention that it's trying to focus on this problem.

I receive, every day, a superb daily rollup of activities in the region produced by my team in the Critical Threats Project and the team at the Institute for the Study of War. I can't read it all anymore. It's too long. It's too long because the region is engulfed in war. It's sort of hard to tell that from the isolated headlines that pop up and fade away. But, we—this is the regional war. This is the beginning of the regional war. It could get a lot worse, but this is a war that is becoming a sectarian war across the region. It is a war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, fought largely by proxies, but now, dismayingly, also directly. There are some people who think that it's a good thing that the Saudis and others are acting independently. I would suggest that they take a look at the historical efficacy of Saudi military forces and ask themselves if they think that that's really a reed we want to rest our weight on.

And I think we can focus too heavily on what the Iraqi Security Forces are doing, or not doing, as we have in the past. They're not doing enough. Prime Minister Abadi is in a box. We have helped put him there with our policies. So, it's not sufficient just to look at and criticize what the Iraqis are doing. We really do need to look in a mirror and look at what we are doing or not doing.

As I follow the daily reports, I see a coherent enemy strategy across the region. I see deliberate enemy operations, which you can actually depict on a map. And I commend to you a terrific report by the Institute for the Study of War called "ISIS Captures Ramadi," which actually has a military—old-fashioned military-style map showing the ISIS maneuvers, because they are maneuvering. This is not a terrorist organization. This is an army that is conducting military maneuvers on an operational level with a great deal of skill. It is not an accident that Ramadi fell over the weekend and Palmyra fell yesterday. It is not an accident that there were ISIS attacks in Beiji and at the refinery, that there was a prison break in Diyala, that there were threats against the—not the Hajj—a pilgrimage in Baghdad, and then Ramadi was decisively attacked and taken. This was a coherent campaign plan, and a very intelligent one, very well executed. This is a serious threat. What I can't discern from the daily operations, let alone from the statements of the administration, is any coherent American strategy to respond to this threat.

And I want to talk about the threat for a minute. ISIS is one of the most evil organizations that has ever existed in the world. We really have to reckon with that. This is not a minor annoyance. This is not a group that maybe we can negotiate with down the road someday. This is a group that is committed to the destruction of everything decent in the world. And the evidence of that is the wanton destruction, uncalled for even by their own ideology, frankly, of antiquities thousands of years old that represent the heart of the emergence of human civilization in the West. This is a group that sells captives into slavery. It's a major source of financing for them, actually. This is a room—a group that engages deliberately in mass rape. This is a group that conducts mass murder. And this is a group that is calling for and condoning and supporting and encouraging lone-wolf attacks, and it will soon, I think, not be just lone-wolf attacks, in the United States and the west. This is a group of unfathomable evil. Unfortunately, they are extremely effective. And they have a degree of military capability—not terrorist capability—that we have not seen before in an al-Qaeda organization. This is not something where we should be spectators. This is not something where we should just say, as some people do, "Well, just let them kill each other." This is unacceptable, from a moral perspective and from a U.S. national security perspective, to just watch a group like this succeed in this way.

I want to make the point that, of course, any criticism of the White House today is received—at least from our side—is received as a partisan attack. I want to make the point that if that was the case, then I must have been a Democrat in 2006, because we were attacking the Bush administration with the Senator—with the chairman and a number of other members of the committee, as aggressively, or, in fact, more aggressively, than we've ever critiqued

this White House. The fact is that what matters is that the strategy is failing, as it was failing in 2006, only we are in a much worse strategic position today than we ever were in 2006, because it's not just Iraq.

I note that, to speak of the issue of urgency, the Iranians seem to feel a certain sense of urgency about this, as well. And their Minister of Defense, General Dehghan, was in Baghdad over the last few days, signing defense cooperation agreements, ostensibly, but surely working to coordinate Iranian support on the ground. The Foreign Policy Advisor to the Supreme Leader, Velayati, was in Damascus and Beirut, talking with Bashar al-Assad and Hassan Nasrallah, no doubt coordinating plans to, I assume, maintain and increase the military deployment of Hezbollah forces in Syria and possibly ask Assad what his plan is, given the circumstances. Those are very senior leaders. I don't notice that we have sent senior leaders of that rank, or anything close to it, to speak with Prime Minister Abadi. And, of course, we have no one to speak with, effectively, in Syria.

Senator Nelson asked about what this means for the counter-ISIS campaign. It means that the campaign that has been described by the administration and our general officers is completely derailed. I do not believe that there is any reasonable prospect that it will be possible to retake Mosul this year. I think the fight for Ramadi will be hard enough. I think that these operations in and around Ramadi demonstrate that the Iraqi Security Forces, at current levels of United States support, are not capable even of defending their territory against determined ISIS attack, let alone clearing a major ISIS safe haven.

So, we are—our campaign strategy is completely derailed, in my view. I think it was a campaign strategy, as the Chairman pointed out, that was of limited likelihood to be successful, in any event, because it addressed only part of the problem and left a major safe haven effectively untouched. But, such as it was, it's over.

My colleague, Derek Harvey, will speak in some more detail about what kinds of troops and enablers are required. I agree with General Keane—I'm even willing to put a number on the table—I think that we need to have a total of 15- to 20,000 United States troops in Iraq in order to provide the necessary enablers, advisors, and so forth. I think anything less than that is simply unserious.

And I think we really need to do that, because, I think, otherwise, we're looking at an ISIS state that is going to persist. We're looking at an ISIS state that is going to continue to govern territory, that is going to continue to have resources that we simply cannot afford to let an evil enemy of this variety have. And I think it is a major United States national security priority to respond to this, especially as it's become clear that it's beyond the capabilities of the Iraqis.

And lastly, I want to make two larger points that are directly relevant to this committee. One is, you cannot argue for a forceful strategy in Iraq and defend the sequester. Our Armed Forces have been seriously damaged by the sequester. It needs to be removed immediately. In fact, the Armed Forces budget needs to be increased significantly. We are at war, whether we like it or not, and the longer this President refuses to address it, the worse it's going

to be when we become engaged. We need to be preparing for that now.

And lastly, we need to be strengthening our abilities to collect intelligence, and not weakening them. This is not the moment to dismantle our capabilities to see what the enemy is doing. This is the moment to be engaged in wise reform of oversight of the intelligence community. And so, It is ironic that one of your colleagues spent yesterday arguing for the elimination of a program important to our national security.

So, I think there are things that the administration can do and things that Congress can do, but it's going to be a tough fight.

I thank the committee for listening to me this morning.

Chairman MCCAIN. Colonel Harvey.

STATEMENT OF COL DEREK J. HARVEY, USA (RET.), DIRECTOR, GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONFLICT, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Colonel HARVEY. Mr. Chairman, Senator Nelson, and members of the committee, thank you for having me here. I appreciate the opportunity.

I want to begin with focusing on the Islamic State and the trends in Iraq. I believe that, even before the fall of Ramadi, the best that could be said is that Baghdad was holding the line. Even with the success in Tikrit, there's great difficulty in holding that terrain. And even in areas that have been cleared earlier in northern Diyala Province in eastern Saladin, ISIS has worked their way back in. They just changed their profile, went to ground, and now they're infiltrating back in and conducting attacks and rebuilding their capabilities.

Over the past month, they've continued to do shaping operations in the Baghdad area, western Baghdad. In one day, just a couple of days ago, there were eight IEDs, two VBIEDs, and several small-arms skirmishes in Baghdad itself. That's to say nothing about what's going on in Abu Ghraib and other areas around the belts of Baghdad.

They continue to hold the line along the Kurdish front, north in the Nineveh area around Mosul, and they've expanded successfully in other areas, particularly in Syria. They are very good at doing shaping operations. They are taking advantage of their interior lines of communication. They are well armed, well resourced, and well led.

I think the fall of Ramadi should lead to questions about the progress asserted by the Pentagon and the administration. There are two strategically important Sunni Arab cities in Iraq: Mosul, the second largest city, which was a former Ottoman capital, and, of course, Ramadi, which is the capital of the largest geographic province. And ISIS controls Raqqa, which is another provincial capital, but it's in Syria. The fall of Ramadi renews the sense that ISIS has momentum, which is important for rallying Sunni Arabs who may be on the fence in this fight, and also could aid with foreign fighter recruitment and some funding.

without an alternative, Sunni Arabs, tribes, and the peoples in the region, without someone to protect them and lead them, are going to fall into the camp of the Islamic State, particularly as this

campaign becomes increasingly polarized. And the movement of Shi'a militias, Popular Mobilization units, into Anbar Province is going to contribute to this polarization. And I fully expect that the Islamic State, in the near future, will try to conduct operations in Karbala and Najaf to further inflame this fight. That is part of their major strategy, to polarize this fight between the different communities.

Now, I would note that ISIS has many challenges and weaknesses, but the problem is that ISIS is not losing. I believe that the United States has continued to underestimate the Islamic State, which I suspect shows a lack of understanding about the Islamic State, its capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses and how it sees the fight and a path to victory.

We've seen this story before. It's like deja vu, for me. We focus too much on our own activity, our own programs, our own budgets, but we're not focusing on the impact on the enemy. And the enemy has a vote.

From public statements, we're not looking at the right things, and the metrics and measures that are asserted by the military, the Pentagon, are not really appropriate. The number of airstrikes is interesting, but irrelevant. What is the effect on the enemy and its capacity to fight? Stating that ISIS has lost 25 percent of the territory it conquered is interesting, but it's really not relevant, because ISIS did not control eastern Saladin or northern Diyala or some of the other areas, but they're still there. They're contesting, and they're rebuilding, and they're shaping. So, that is a false metric that's been put out.

Striking oil infrastructure in Syria is a good thing, and it's been degraded. But, the enemy has a vote. It's—their efforts there have been complicated. They've reduced their production. But, they've adapted, and, creatively, they have developed miniature mobile refinement capabilities, even using blow-dryer air heaters to make refined product. It is crude, yet it is a sophisticated adaptation. And crude is still going to Turkey. And they are producing enough fuel for their own requirements. They're still earning millions of dollars every month from oil in Syria. It's been degraded, but I think the lower cost of oil on the markets has had just as much of an impact as any operations we've conducted. And again, they have adapted.

The same for funding and foreign fighter flow. They are still very resilient and adaptive in working around the actions that have been taken. And the actions that have been taken on foreign fighter flow and going after finances have been weak and not very assertive, not well resourced. And I'll talk more about that.

ISIS is excelling at a hybrid war. They're fighting conventionally, as needed, they're adapting, and they're employing terrorist techniques—coercion, assassination, subversion—as necessary, depending upon the terrain. It is showing that it can hold key terrain, fight hard, and synchronize operations across space and time. And they respond with agility to secure tactical and operational advantages and overmatch, as we saw in Ramadi. They are very effective, they are well led. They are skilled, and they have professional-quality leadership and command-and-control. And they know the geography, they know the terrain, and they know the human

terrain in these areas very, very, very well. They are ruthless, and they are committed and determined. And they're exhibiting the will to fight. And they're fighting for power, they're fighting for ideological reasons, but, for many Sunni Arabs who are frustrated and angered about their condition in life and how they have been treated by Baghdad, they're fighting for their land, their families, and their future. And they are not motivated by a hardline Salafist Takfiri annihilationist agenda, but they're fighting anyway, because they're fighting for their own lives and their own future, and they're fearful.

There are many Sunni military-aged males, to date, that have not taken sides in this fight. It's just a matter of time, if this polarization continues and we let this drag on, that ISIS will gain more and more recruits from the Iraqi population base. The Iraqi fight with ISIS is not dominated by foreign fighters. This is a homegrown fight, and we have to keep that in mind. ISIS, as Fred mentioned, maintains operational freedom in most of the Sunni Arab provinces, and they appear stronger because, importantly, relatively, their opposition is very weak.

Now, the Sunni Arab political and tribal leaders are weak and divided, and seen as illegitimate by many within these Sunni Arab provinces. And too many Sunni Arabs are on the fence. They've been given no reason to come onto the side of the Baghdad government or to come to us. Prime Minister Abadi's government is weak and divided, and is increasingly undermined by Shi'a opposition. Same with the Iraqi Security Forces that are small, weak, poorly resourced, and not well led. And it will take far too long to train and rebuild them to make a difference this year.

Moreover, I assess that there is a concerted effort to undermine the efficacy of the Iraqi Security Forces by Shi'a militias, Iranian proxies, and some members within the government, including the Dawa Party, particularly some members in the Ministry of Interior. They seek to weaken the Iraqi Security Forces and provide alternative institutions of power that they control.

Again, the coalition is weak. We could talk about that, but there's not a lot of allied cooperation and resources put into this fight.

Lastly, the U.S. lines of operation, for the most part, have been poorly resourced, both in theater and at the interagency level right here in Washington, DC. I do not see the urgency or the resourcing within Treasury or the intelligence community or others to really energy and aggressively go after this fight in this region.

So, although U.S. airstrikes, I believe, have complicated the ISIS operations, the air campaign has not been decisive. It's been relatively small and limited. And the Islamic State, as I mentioned, has been adaptive and creative. Importantly, they remain well armed and well resourced. And our lines of operation, be it counter-finance, counter-foreign-fighter flow, delegitimizing the brand, the training, building of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and the military campaign, at best, appear disjointed, poorly resourced, and lack an effective framework to bring it all together. I think we need to relook this.

And, with that, I'll look forward to your questions.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you.

Mr. Katulis, thank you for being here.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN KATULIS, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

Mr. KATULIS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Nelson and all of your distinguished colleagues. It's a real honor to be here today.

Mr. Chairman, your efforts, over the last few months, to elevate our national security debate have been incredible and very important, the hearings that you held earlier this year and everything that the members of the committee have been doing have been very important for our country as we look at the world and not just the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman, I prepared written testimony. With your permission, I'd like to submit that for the record——

Chairman MCCAIN. Without objection.

Mr. KATULIS.—this afternoon.

It's really an honor, here, to be with the copanelists, who I have great respect for, not only their expertise, but their service to country. And what I wanted to do this morning with my remarks is to try to complement their insights with what I focus on in my own work, which is looking at dynamics within the region and the strategic dynamics, and nesting the problem of Iraq, Syria, and ISIS within that. And, Mr. Chairman, you said, at the outset, beforehand, that you'd like to discuss concrete steps. So, while I give my analysis of what I think is happening in Iraq, Syria, the region, and more broadly, I will offer some ideas that I hope we can discuss, some of which I think members of the panel have proposed in legislation.

The way I see the challenge—and I don't disagree with much of what was said here earlier—the challenge of ISIS, I think, operates on three different levels, or three concentric circles:

The first is Iraq and Syria, quite obviously. That's where the devastation has been astounding over the last few years. And many of the steps, I think, that have been proposed here, in terms of security measures and security cooperation measures, is something that I, frankly—it's a little outside of my expertise to evaluate. I look at the political and strategic dynamics. But, I do think, inside of Iraq, no matter what we've done or what we do in the coming years, every type of security assistance should be implemented with a close eye to internal political and power dynamics. And, at this stunning moment—and what happened in Ramadi, I think, should shock everybody—we should keep an eye on these measures of what we need to do to help our Iraqi partners on the security front, but understand what we have learned over the last 10 years plus, is that the political dynamics are terribly important.

In those regards, what I think we need to do and the Obama administration needs to do is to hold the Iraqi Government accountable for a lot of the ideas that have been discussed, in terms of arming Sunni tribes, building a national guard. If you look at what the Obama administration did last summer—and I was a supporter of this measure of using security assistance as leverage to help the Iraqis create a different type of Iraqi Government—we need to continue that process. When the police in Ramadi were not being fund-

ed, when concepts like the national guard still remain stuck in parliament, it makes it hard for any number of U.S. trainers to actually do their job if those mechanisms are in place.

A second thing I think we need to start to entertain—and I know people are discussing this—is the notion of greater decentralization inside of Iraq, decentralization of authority, in some of the proposals that people have discussed about mechanisms for giving arms directly to Sunni tribes or to Kurdish forces. Again, I think we should consider that and balance it against the overall objective of trying to keep Iraq together.

The second component, obviously, is Syria. And this, in my view, is the weakest link in the overall approach in this first circle. And Mr. Chairman, Senator Kaine, many others, have highlighted this, but we need to do something about this. The gap between the Obama administration's stated goals and what we're actually doing to shape the environment on the ground is alarming. In my view, we need to accelerate that which the administration proposed and you funded, the training and equipping of third-way forces. We need to link these efforts to the broader regional dynamics. What's happening in Syria right now is a very complicated engagement by actors in the region. If you see not only ISIS's gains, but the gains of Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's front, this—these gains don't come from nowhere. They're being offered support from various actors in the region. And the main point is that the end state in Syria, which is often described by the administration in ways that our tactics don't link up with what we want to achieve.

But, the overall point in this first circle—Iraq and Syria—which I hope you take away and I think we need to discuss some more, is, How do you link these problems and how we address them? What worries me is that, quite often, we look at a challenge in Iraq, or a corner of Iraq, but we don't link it to the broader problem of Iraq and Syria. Last summer, ISIS effectively eroded the borders between these two countries. And what we've had over the last year or so is a debate about a series of different tactics, some of which have been implemented, and some have not. And I think if we can all bring our thinking together to talk about, How do we actually have an integrated strategy that focuses on ISIS, both in Iraq and Syria?

On the second level, the regional level—and here I hope we can think a little bit more about this—but, for essentially the last 4 or 5 years, the Middle East has slipped into this period of fragmentation. Not only has Iraq and Syrian state structures collapsed, we've seen Libya and Yemen feel these strains. And a big part of what is going on—and this challenge of ISIS and where it comes from—is the struggle between the regional powers: Iran and Saudi Arabia, but there are other actors, too. Much of it is sectarian, but the conflict is multidimensional. It is multifaceted. Our resources matter, but Iran, Saudi Arabia, others, have been funding their own proxies. And what I think is missing, in terms of the U.S. leadership on all of this, is accounting for all of these efforts. How do we actually better organize and come up with a better strategic conception?

Essentially, since 2003 and the Iraq War, when we made the decision to move from a strategic posture of dual containment of Iran

and Iraq, I think we've been struggling for: What is our overarching strategy in the Middle East? We made some gains at certain periods, as was noted, in the surge in Iraq in 2007–2008, but the broader picture of "What is the United States trying to do in the region?"—I think, still that question has not been answered.

I think the Obama administration, rightfully, has taken some positive steps in the right direction. The building of an anti-ISIL coalition that has 62 countries in it, including key stakeholders in the region, is an important opportunity, one that I don't think has been fully seized yet by the administration. Its engagements in that coalition effort has been episodic. In February, for instance, we had a Countering Violent Extremism Summit. And the questions of "What then, after the summit?" I think remain unanswered, to a large extent.

Just last week was a very important summit with the GCC nations and, I think, an important communique. As with everything in life, and with this administration, the followup is going to be very important. Those commitments, not only to Iraq and the fight in Syria, but the broader fight against ISIS, there needs to be implementation.

Finally, one last point on the equilibrium point, because I know it's a big debate up here, is the question of equilibrium in the broader region. The Obama administration often speaks of its engagement with Iran and the diplomatic engagement on the nuclear front as an opportunity to achieve some new type of equilibrium in the region. I share that aspiration. But, we need to be clear-eyed about how hard that will be at a time when Iran, when other actors in the region, are actually investing in a number of different proxy wars. We need to be clear about how realistic that is and what we're trying to do.

And on the final point, on the international level—and I'll close here—quite clearly, this problem of ISIS is connected in ways that the problems that Derek and General Keane and Dr. Kagan dealt with in the previous decade—it's much more complicated by the fact that you have more than 15,000 foreign fighters flooding into—and perhaps the number is higher. And what I would suggest, at the international level and our analysis, is that the debate about ISIS is terribly important, but it's moving very quickly. The debate that many people are having on Syria right now is the fight between Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIL, and a number of different actors. And I would say that 14 years after 9/11, nearly 14 years, if you look at this broader landscape, beyond Iraq and Syria, and Iraq and Syria as the epicenter, this new trend toward Salafist jihadism, and the growth of it, is something that we actually haven't wrestled with, that we need to widen the landscape and keep focused on it to assess what we're doing and whether we're applying resources to meet those threats.

So, in conclusion, I hope the events of the last week or so and, I hope our discussion today, is a constructive wake-up call about what we can do to move from what I think has been a largely reactive crisis management and somewhat tactical approach to the problem set, not only over the last year or two, but over the last decade. And I hope that the events can motivate all of us, including you, with your leadership, to drive towards the sorts of unity that

we need in things like an Authorization for the Use of Military Force, a national conversation that reinvigorates our sense of purpose. Because, as Derek and others have described, this is a very dangerous adversary. We've not yet created that strategy, the holistic strategy to actually defeat them. And we can.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, I thank you.

Could I mention to my colleagues that a vote is on, and, if you'd like to go and come back, please do so. I'll try to continue the hearing. I may have to pause. But, I know that you have questions for the panel, so maybe we could work it that way, however you'd like.

I'd like to begin by picking up a little bit on what Mr. Katulis just said. This is this whole idea of the perception of Iran and what the prospects are. Because it seems to me that—and the necessity to be clear-eyed about it—because it seems to me that one of the reasons why we were not acting more aggressively against Bashar Assad has got to do with this idea—or, in my view, illusion—that once we conclude the nuclear agreement, there will be a whole new relationship with Iran in the Middle East, which, in my conversations with our friends in the Sunni Arab states, scares the heck out of them.

So, I—maybe I could ask the panel about—it seems to me, in my view, that it is a real impediment to any real significant action in Syria. For example, the Free Syrian Army, what little there is that we are training, we have not told—or, the administration has said there is no policy yet about, when we send these young men that we are training back into Syria, that—whether we would protect them from Bashar Assad's barrel bombing. It seems to me that that—that there's a degree of immorality associated with telling people you're going to train and equip them, and then not protect them from being killed when they go back in, and that they are only to fight ISIS and not Bashar Assad, the father of ISIS.

So, I'd maybe begin with you, General Keane, and—because it—I don't think that Americans are fully aware of this contradiction, here.

General KEANE. Yes. Well, Senator, I agree, in principle, here, with what you're saying.

Just a—so, our audience and the committee can understand, we may forget that, early on in the rebellion against Assad, the momentum was actually on the opposition forces side. Many people in this town were predicting that the regime was going to fall. I think we can all recall that.

Chairman MCCAIN. That was testimony before this committee by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, yes.

General KEANE. And that opposition force came to town here and got many on their dance card to—they needed additional arms and ammunition—specifically, antitank weapons and antiaircraft weapons—to deal with a conventional military. They were stuck with rifles, machine guns, RPGs, and the like. That early encounter in 2012 was denied—late 2011, early 2012. And then the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became convinced that we could actually vet the Free Syrian Army—and I will say that the Institute for the Study of War had some impact on providing them information that

assisted them with that conclusion. And General Petraeus would have met that, when he—as the Director at the time. And he presented a briefing to Secretaries Clinton and Panetta and Dempsey—General Dempsey—and they agreed with him that it was—this force could, in fact, be armed, equipped, and trained robustly. But, the administration did not do that. And, tragically, as a result of that, the Free Syrian Army now is a mere shadow of its former self. There's, frankly, not much of it left.

Chairman MCCAIN. And could I add——

General KEANE. Go ahead.

Chairman MCCAIN.—in desperation, isn't it true that they have now joined forces with al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda-affiliated organization. Is that true?

General KEANE. Well, organizations that were a part of their organization, you know, have broken from them. They were Islamic organizations, not radicalized, and they have joined with Jabhat al-Nusra, who is—who has gained more territories, more aggressive, and has had more success against the regime than any force out there. So, that is true.

And what we're doing is—and I know the committee's been briefed on this—we're attempting to train 5,000 people that would become part of the Free Syrian Army. But, what organization are they going to plug into? And it's totally disconnected, because the Free Syrian Army is not fighting ISIS. They don't have the wherewithal to fight ISIS and the regime. They're fighting the regime. So, we're training forces that will join Free Syrian Army, in theory. And, indeed, they will fight the regime forces, which has nothing to do with ISIS, at the moment. So, that's how flawed the strategy is in Syria. It makes no sense. We don't have ground forces.

As the chairman suggests, Does it make any sense to train these forces, arm them and equip them and provide them some leadership, and then put them back into the fight against Assad's conventional military, which will bomb them and attack them with conventional artillery, mortars, and, obviously, barrel bombs and the like?

So, that strategy in Syria is flawed. And obviously, the only way that ISIS will eventually be defeated in Syria is with some kind of a ground force. Our allies in the region are suggesting to us—and we having—we're not agreeing with them—is that what we should do is deal with Assad, change the momentum against Assad by shutting down his airpower, using no-fly zones and buffer zones to achieve that end, and that change in military—in momentum, militarily on the battlefield can shift the political equation to get some kind of a settlement.

Now, listen, that's arguable whether that's achievable, or not. But, sitting here and doing nothing, and permitting this to go on, I think that's quite irresponsible, in terms of the humanitarian catastrophe that's taking place there, and also that ISIS is expanding and gaining in strength in Syria every single week and month.

So, the Syrian strategy needs to be thought out. It needs to lead to a situation where we have our Arab—where we have a coalition of Arabs in the region, and possibly the Turks participating also. And they would likely ask us to participate in a coalition to deal with ISIS in Syria. And I do think we should listen to them about

dealing with Assad and that regime first, in some limited capacity, to change the political equation.

Chairman MCCAIN. I'm going to have to go vote. I'd like to hear the—from the other witnesses. I'm going to have to go vote.

Senator Ernst.

If someone isn't back yet after you, we will take a brief pause until my return.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. I really do appreciate it very much, and I apologize that I had to step out.

But, I do agree with the panel, that we need a comprehensive strategy. Right now, there is no strategy. As an element and—really, just as an element, I do want to talk a little bit more about arming the Kurds. Of course, this is a passion of mine. So, over the past couple of months, I have been advocating for the administration to increase its support to the Kurdish regional government in Iraq to fight ISIS. And I believe that this is a commonsense proposal, considering the Peshmerga's willingness to fight—they are willing to fight—in close combat. And it is truly unmatched by any other group in that region in the fight against ISIS.

The Kurdish people have been vital in supporting our coalition efforts to defeat ISIS and in providing support to around the 1.6 million displaced persons from Iraq and Syria. And also, for the past quarter century, Iraqi Kurds have proven to be reliable partners by supporting United States interests every time that we have sought their assistance. And I have spoken with many of the men that have served up in that region, and they always state what great allies the Kurds have been to them in our fight. So, they are proven to be great allies of ours.

Earlier this week, former CIA and NSA Director, General Michael Hayden, once again spoke for the need to increase United States support to the Kurds in the fight against ISIS. And, on Tuesday, General Hayden said, "I would double down on the Kurds. Their military has the virtue of showing up when it comes to a fight, and they've been our friends in the area for decades."

I would tend to agree with him. But, I would love to ask each of you to please explain that, if you do agree with General Hayden's assessment or if you disagree, and maybe why. So, please, to the panel—General Keane, if we might start with you.

Thank you.

General KEANE. Yes, certainly I agree with that. The problem we have is—and they've told you, and they've told others, that they're not getting the kinds of arms that they need, the quantity of those arms are not there. We're passing that through the Iraqi Government. We probably should have continued the covert problem—program we did have with—passing it through the Central Intelligence Agency, and we probably would have had them armed by now if we did it robustly. But, they also need advisors. Because, when they're fighting, they need coordination with airpower to make their ground operations that much more effective.

I would say this. As good as the Kurds are, they have, also, a limited interest in what they're willing to fight for inside Iraq. And they certainly are not going to participate in reclaiming Anbar Province and other parts of Iraq. So, yes, we have to do what we

should for the Kurds, but we also need to recognize that a lot more needs to be done with others, as well.

I'll leave it to my colleagues, here, who have more information than I do.

Senator ERNST. Right. Thank you.

Dr. Kagan.

Dr. KAGAN. Thank you, Senator.

I agree with General Keane, especially about the last point. We certainly should help the Kurds defend Kurdistan. There's no question about that. And we could be doing more than we are. But, the Kurds cannot retake Arab Iraq for—on behalf of the Arabs. And I think, in—although the Kurds are not remotely—I don't want to put the Kurds in the category of Shi'a militias, because they absolutely are not, and they don't behave that way. Nevertheless, I think if you saw large Kurdish forces in Mosul for a long period of time, you would find that you would have an ethnic war on your hands that would not be in our interest and would make room for ISIS or its successor to come in. So, I don't think the Kurds could actually do what we need them to do, even if they wanted to.

I would only add that, although I agree that we should—that the Kurds have been very reliable allies, fighting on the ground against our common enemies, they have been less than helpful in Baghdad, repeatedly, and they still are being somewhat less than helpful than they might be, on a number of issues, including demands for oil revenues and various other things.

I do believe that we should assist them in their defense, but I also think that we should use that assistance as leverage to try to get the Kurds to think a little bit more about the interests of Iraq as a whole, from a political standpoint, than they sometimes do.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Colonel Harvey.

Colonel HARVEY. I agree with what has already been said on this issue. I would add that the Sunni Arab communities along the green line, the fault lines, are tremendous numbers of friction points there, about territory, about past grievances. So, we would have to be very careful about how we—how they would be employed. And I think, you know, that's about making sure that there are red lines about how far they could go in coordination, where they are willing to fight along the frontiers where the Islamic State controls land. We do not want to further polarize these communities more than they are already. But, arming them effectively and developing a mechanism to accommodate Baghdad's interest about knowing what's being delivered, but making sure that it gets delivered—we have to figure a way to just get that done and coordinate that, but deliver those weapons that are going to be very important to the defense of those Kurdish lands.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Mr. KATULIS. Very quickly, Senator, three points.

First, in principle, I think it's an idea worth—worthy of consideration. The first point, though—in my recent visits to Kurdistan, the divisions that still exist inside of the Kurdish Peshmerga, and some of the political divisions—the KDP and the PUK having separate lines of control—to actually implement that effectively, they'll need to deal with those divisions.

The second is that you have actors in the region, including us, beyond us, regional actors who have offered some of this support. And sometimes it's been blocked by Baghdad, itself. There are sensitivities to even the proposal, because it leads to questions of, "Oh, are you trying to break up Iraq?" And I think we need to be careful in the presentation of that.

Which leads to a third point relevant to Iraq, to Syria, to the region more broadly. The more that the United States or other actors within the region invest in subnational actors or nonstate actors for the benefit of trying to defeat terrorist organizations like ISIS, there's advantages to that, because oftentimes they're more capable, as we've seen with the Kurdish Peshmerga. There's a potential long-term disadvantage to it, in that the fragmentation of states, the—could accelerate if—if we're working in the short term to defeat a threat and to deal with a counterterrorism issue, but the building blocks that we're putting into place actually then contribute to what I've seen, especially in Syria—and again, I'm not arguing against it; it's just the potential downside risk in the long term, the notion that we could further inadvertently accelerate the fragmentation of these state entities.

Senator ERNST. Well, thank you. I appreciate that very much. And the idea, I believe, and where I am coming from, is that we simply have no strategy in that region, not one that has been communicated clearly to any of us. So, I think establishing at least a safe zone—I do agree that the Peshmerga—their interest is only in Kurdistan, it is not moving out into the rest of Iraq. I understand that. But, at least establishing a safe zone within Iraq that is free of ISIS is a step in the right direction. I think we need to think about that, we need to pursue that.

But, any thoughts on where—just your idea of where the administration needs to go, at this point? I still see some reluctance coming from the administration on admitting that ISIS continues to expand, not just within Iraq, but also globally. I—any thoughts on what we need to do or how we can work with the administration on developing a strategy, one that will work?

Yes, please.

Mr. KATULIS. I would stress, again, where I focus on, which is the regional aspects. I think what the United States can do more of—my colleagues have talked about, militarily and other things—it's beyond my expertise. The fact that the anti-ISIL coalition has five working groups—a military one, one on countering violent extremism, on counterterrorism funding, on foreign fighters and stabilization—I would suggest that those mechanisms are a great template, but also that they've not been used effectively.

And, going back to the point I was trying to make, in the region, that I think it's wise to actually try to channel the resources and the efforts of others to much more constructive ends. We often debate about what we do. And I think we need to do more. That's clear. And I think we need to lead. But, using these mechanisms in the anti-ISIL coalition more effectively, having more followup on things like—we often think it's soft, but it's not—the countering-violent-extremism efforts, it's not sufficient to me to have a 1- or 2-day conference without any clear, precise followups. And I—I mean, I think they're talking about it, but we need to have great

clarity to our regional partners in knowing—those in the coalition—of, "Okay, this is what we're going to do." In the way that General Keane and Derek and Dr. Harvey have talked about—Dr. Kagan have talked about—in the military steps, we also need a campaign that is multifaceted on those regards, that, again, nests at its core what we do, but in partnership with others.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Yes, sir.

Colonel HARVEY. I think that, given the President's strategy and the lines of operation that they have had, I don't think those were ever given an opportunity to succeed, because, even though I thought that they were insufficient to the task last summer, in September, when he declared them, they have not been adequately resourced, organized, or executed, to date. Again, as I said in my opening statement, that's here in Washington, DC, at the interagency level, as well as in theater.

So, if we're not going to be determined to achieve results and have leadership that drives the interagency and makes this a matter of urgency and criticality to the United States, then we're not going to get where we need to go. So, you need to, first, be determined to achieve results.

Two, we need to think about some core objectives here. One, we can fight ISIS and still contain Iran and seek to achieve an independent Iraq that is not a client of Tehran. In order to do that, we need to support Sunni Arab engagement and political inclusion. Without adequate force structure on the ground, and commitment, you cannot get out there and engage with the Sunni Arabs, you can't move around the battlespace. And they won't believe you're serious unless you put enough skin in the game.

And to do that, we're going to need, in my judgment, about 15,000 or more enhancement of U.S. force structure in theater. And to go to what General Keane said, we need probably two brigades, we need aviation—a mixed aviation brigade, you need some artillery, you need enhanced direct-action SOF operational capabilities to—for direct action. Direct action brings you the intelligence, which you then share and allows you to go after those networks.

The Islamic State has not been stressed across its large perimeter that it has, from the Syrian border up along the Kurdish green line. They have tremendous vulnerabilities. But, they have had the initiative, because they have not been pressed along that large frontal area that they have.

Senator ERNST. Sir, so, just to be clear, you are stating that you believe 15,000 additional troops and aviation assets to directly engage ISIS as a combat——

Colonel HARVEY. No, I want them to be there to provide the enablers, support for the Iraqi Security Forces for direct action of the Special Operations Forces for indirect fires, advisors embedded with Iraqi Security Forces or Ministry of Interior elements, in a way that gets us on the ground, can bring in our capabilities. I'm not advising that we put troops on the ground in combat outposts in Ramadi, clearing streets, you know, and communities and neighborhoods in a direct-action way. But, we need to be out there enabling and providing support and protection for Sunni Arab tribal militias, helping them grow and develop, and then that gives us in-

fluence that can reach into the political domain in the—these provinces, but also in Baghdad. It's hard to have influence if you don't have skin in the game.

Senator ERNST. I would agree with that. I would also state, though, that anytime you do engage more of those types of troops on the ground, you may say that it is a train-and-assist mission, and that may be heavier on the assist mission, but we are engaging in combat at that point. I don't think there's any way that you avoid that. And I don't want to mislead the American people, because certainly there is danger anytime that we put troops on the ground. So, I'm not saying I would support, or not support, that measure, but I do believe that you are correct, sir, in that we do need to engage if we expect others to engage. We know that the airstrikes are not doing it. So, thank you for that perspective.

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I want to second what Derek said, and agree with him about the need to deploy forces. I agree with you, and I know that Derek also does, that it's—the purpose of talking about train, advise, and assist, in this context, is not to imply that American troops are not going to be in combat. Of course they are, if we're doing our job. But, I think the point that Derek was trying to make, which is very important, is that we're not anticipating putting American brigades in Ramadi and having them clear, house to house, the way we have done previously.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Dr. KAGAN. That's not what we're looking at.

I have to say, we, as a Nation, are defeated as long as we do not have the will to fight this war. And I would assess right now, we seem to be showing that we do not have the will to fight this war. And until and unless the—beginning with the President, there is a demonstration that we have the will to fight, we are going to lose this war. And so, what Congress has to do, what we all have to do, is find any way that we can to persuade the President to own this fight, to recognize that it's a war, to recognize that we must win, and to help develop the will among the American people to fight this.

Senator ERNST. Thank you very much.

General KEANE. The thing—the only thing I would add is that you do have to look at this strategically. When you think—the World Trade Center in 1993 was the introduction of radical Islam directly against the United States, not using proxies that the Iranians did since 1980. That was followed by Embassy bombings in Africa, the USS *Cole*, and September 11. To date, we've gone through three administrations, and we've never developed a comprehensive strategy to deal with it. We're sitting here today without one, despite all of that killing, despite all of the aggressiveness and assertiveness that this enemy has showed. We have always looked at this narrowly. And it's tragic that we do. And we're more sophisticated than that.

Yes, the solution is right in front of us. When you look at this map—look at—this is just ISIS. If I put al-Qaeda on the map, it would be worse. This is a regional and global problem that can only be solved by those countries who are being affected by this, either directly or indirectly. This is not about the United States dealing with all of this; this is about the United States, when we're hosting

a conference, like we just did, as opposed to shaking hands and slapping everybody on the back, which we did, we should have hosted a conference that came out with a strategy on what to do with this, plans on what to do with this. What is the level of contribution that's going to deal with this? We don't develop that strategy. Together, we can design a comprehensive strategy that does undermine the ideology, that does take their finances away, and that does meet this threat, militarily, where it needs to be met.

We cannot do this by ourselves. We have no comprehensive strategies to deal with radical Islam, to include ISIS. We have no strategy in the region to deal with the morphing of radical Islam, as defined by ISIS and al-Qaeda. We certainly—as we've all been saying, we have no strategy immediately to deal—effective strategy to deal with this issue in Iraq and Syria.

So, I agree with you, that is the start point that we should have to deal with this problem. Then you start to put underneath that those things that make sense. And we've got to bring our allies into this in a very cohesive way. Listen, they've—we have their attention. The Iranians are forcing their attention, ISIS is forcing their attention, and the spread of al-Qaeda. We have to help them organize to do this effort, and bring the means to deal with that. And not all of that is kinetic. And certainly most of it is not U.S. military power.

Senator ERNST. Yes. Thank you very much.

And, General Keane, you brought up Iranian influences. And since I have come into the Senate, I have been very, very concerned about the Iranian influence with the Shi'a militia. Here we have the Shi'a militia pushing back against ISIS, and I would love to hear a little bit more about that Iranian influence with the Shi'a militia. Where do we go from here? Assuming that we do take care of ISIS, the Shi'a are controlling areas, but their intent, I think, could easily turn against American influences, American soldiers that might be on the ground there. So, as we look at arming the Shi'a militia, if we talk about that, engaging with them, just remembering that they are being influenced heavily by the Iranians, and—what would your thoughts be on that?

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I'd like to say I don't think the Shi'a—the Iraqi Shi'a are the problem. And there are elements in the Popular Mobilization Forces and so forth that I think are not pro-Iranian and do not desire to be governed by Iran. We've seen this repeatedly. And, of course, this is the view of Grand Ayatollah Sistani and his—the people who follow him, is that Iraq is an Arab country, it's not a Persian country, and they don't want to be dominated by Persians.

However, the most effective Shi'a militia forces are part of the Iranian military, de facto. The Badr Corps, run by Hadi al-Amiri, reports to Qassem Suleimani, the commander of the Quds Force. Kata'ib Hezbollah, run by Muhandis, reports to Qassem Suleimani, commander of the Quds Force. And we have seen this repeatedly. So, we have—it's not a Shi'a problem. It is a specific problem of Iranian—they're no longer even really proxies. They're now really extensions of the Iranian irregular military forces, and those are the elements that are now leading the charge into Ramadi, which is unacceptable.

They also helped to get us off track by launching the attack on Tikrit on their own, spontaneously, which then failed, and we had to bail them out, which was an enormous positive turning point for us, because it demonstrated the limitations of the ability of those Iranian-controlled Iraqi militias to take this fight to the enemy. We have just not only undone that benefit that we gained from that, but moved many steps back. And if, in fact, these groups are successful in retaking even part of Ramadi, when the troops that we backed failed, it will demonstrate the viability of these elements within Iraq in a catastrophic way that will undermine Prime—any independence Prime Minister Abadi might have, any independence the ISF might have, and be a significant extension of Iranian military power, not just political influence, in the region.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. I'd just——

Senator ERNST. Yes, I—my time is way over, Senator.

Chairman MCCAIN. I was going to say, I'm glad you were able to have——

Senator ERNST. I could go all day.

Chairman McCain:—this encounter. I hope you'll have them over to your house for dinner.

Senator ERNST. I would love that.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Chairman MCCAIN. Before I turn to Senator Kaine—and I apologize for this disjointedness of the votes on the floor—I—maybe, General Keane and Colonel Harvey, particularly you two, can respond to this. I don't know if there's a real logical argument to the—that would counter what has been said here today, as far as the assessment of the overall situation is concerned, because I think the facts on the ground are—would indicate that there's strong support for the argument or the position that you have stated. But yet, we have members of the military, who many years of experience, who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, and yet, as military spokesmen, or even military leaders, make statements that are totally divorced, if not—I won't say "reality," but certainly is directly counter to the testimony that you have given here today. I do not understand it.

Maybe, Colonel Harvey, could I begin with you?

Colonel HARVEY. Sir, what I find is, quite often our commanders and leaders are misreading the operational environment that they're dealing with. They don't understand the enemy well enough. And part of the problem there is, the intelligence that they get is reporting of information, it's not being put in context in a very insightful and deep way to understand how they are organized, how they really think, tactically, operationally, and strategically. It's reporting history rather than thinking about who they really are and what the enemy's doing.

Chairman MCCAIN. Does that account for statements like, "We're winning"?

Colonel HARVEY. Because they're looking at the wrong metrics. As I said in my opening statement, sir, you know, in order to get the context, you really need to deep—have the deep dives and focus in on this, and quit looking at this on a day-to-day basis. And you have to have an operational construct. You have to understand who

the enemy is and how they're going to win. You—and probably we need better alternative analysis about this, and be truthful to ourselves about how we're doing in our lines of operation.

Chairman MCCAIN. So, this is an argument for Team B.

Colonel HARVEY. In part, yes, sir. We had group-think before, in 2005 and 2006. In May have 2006, we were being told that everything's on track——

Chairman MCCAIN. I——

Colonel Harvey:—we're doing fine.

Chairman MCCAIN. I remember it well.

Colonel HARVEY. Yes, sir.

They get built-in assumptions and they're focused in what their mission set is. Where is the order to actually impose our will and defeat the enemy? How are we going to align our force structure and all of our national capabilities, in partnership with allies and folks on the ground that we can count on, to build momentum, to impose our will, to establish security? We don't think in those terms anymore. We talk about management rather than breaking the will of the enemy.

Chairman MCCAIN. General Keane.

General KEANE. Yes, sir. I mean, it—I share your frustration. I know we all share it. We talk about it among ourselves quite a bit. We just had a spokesperson, last week—I think that's probably what you're referring to—who made a report, you know, to the American people at large, that we, in fact, were succeeding against ISIS, that we're pushing back against them, and that they're only capable of conducting small attacks against us.

Chairman MCCAIN. Right——

General KEANE. That hasn't——

Chairman MCCAIN.—before Ramadi fell.

General KEANE. That hasn't been true since we started, and certainly isn't true now. So, one, how do we—this committee members, when I provided testimony in 2006 and we were pushing against the narrative at that time by senior generals and Secretaries of Defense, et cetera, we were asked the same question. How could that be? How could capable people, well-intentioned, be so wrong, in general sense, is the issue. And I think once we make up our minds that we're going to do something inside this military culture, we drive towards it. And we have a tendency, to a fault, to see those indices that contribute to what that mission success is, and to disregard—not wholly, but to minimize those things that are really pushing against it. That's inside our culture.

How do you fix that? One way, and one way only: competent leadership fixes that. You don't permit that to happen, because you are driving honest, tough, deep-dive assessments of what's taking place, "This is what we're trying to do. These are the four things we said we were going to do. How are we doing that?"

How could you ever come to the conclusion that ISIS is losing if it enjoys freedom of maneuver, a principle of warfare, and it can attack, at will, any place of its choosing at any time of its choosing? If a force has that capability to do that, and gets results as a—as a manifestation of that, then that force, in fact, by definition, is winning.

And so, the leader should say to those subordinates below him, say, "What are you talking about? You're—what you're telling me, none of that makes any sense. This is what this force is doing. This is what they're capable of. We have got this wrong, and how are we going to fix it?" That is about competent leadership.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm jealous of my colleague's 13 minutes, and I hope my other colleagues don't come back, and then I may try your patience and go over time.

Dr. Kagan, you said something that I wrote down, just like a bolt of lightning, "We should not just be spectators." You were going through the atrocities that ISIL is committing, and who they are, and how dangerous they are, "We should not just be spectators." We are spectators. Congress—Congress has been a spectator. Since August 8, we've been a spectator.

Absent the one vote, in September, that we took to arm Syrian moderates, there is no evidence that Congress is concerned at all about ISIL. None. Our allies have no evidence that Congress is concerned—as an institution; I'm not talking about individuals—our allies have no evidence that Congress is concerned about ISIL. ISIL has no evidence that Congress is concerned about ISIL. But, most tragically, the thousands of people—United States men and women in service who are deployed and fighting this battle every day, they have no evidence that Congress is concerned about ISIL, in the least.

We've been at war since August 8. Everybody calls it a war. The President calls it a war. Within 2 weeks, the Article 2 mission to defend the Embassy and the Consulate in Arbil were pretty safe. He said, "We've got to go on the offense against ISIL." And Presidents since Jefferson have basically said that was the dividing line between an Article 2 power of the Commander in Chief and an Article 1 power, where Congress has got to declare war or authorize military action.

But, now, for 9 and a half months, we have failed to do what is our fundamental job, what only we are supposed to do—there's not been a declaration of war, there's not been an authorization for use of military force, there's been no House committee action, there's been no House floor debate or vote. There was one committee vote, in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December, but there's been no meaningful floor debate and no meaningful Senate floor action.

How strange it is. We're in a Congress that loves to punch this President as an imperial President, and threaten lawsuits against him when he does stuff without congressional approval. In the most solemn responsibility under Article 1 that Congress has, we have been silent, when we've got all these people overseas who are risking their lives every day, we have been silent. It's Congress that's the spectators. We've got opinions. You know, we'd call the play differently. But, we're spectators when we ought to be decisionmakers.

This is now a war, into the 10th month, without a clear legal basis. I call it extralegal or even illegal. The President, himself, has, in his own words, acknowledged that he's gone past the Article

2 power of imminent defense. The claim that the 2001 or 2002 authorizations cover an organization that didn't form until 2 years after September 11, that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

And yet, Congress has come up with one excuse after another to avoid taking action. The first excuse was this. The leaders—both parties, both houses—the four leaders went to the White House in June and said, "Do not make us take action on this war. You do what you want. Do not make us take action in Congress before the midterm elections." And Congress adjourned, with an ongoing war, 6 weeks before a midterm election. The earliest adjournment since 1960 before a midterm election with an ongoing war, and we haven't done anything about it.

After the mid-term election, then it was, "Well, but now the Senate's going to change hands, so we shouldn't do anything gas a lameduck Senate, because there will be a new Senate." So, we waited til January.

Then we came in, and a lot of folks said, "Well, you know, we shouldn't do our Article 1 job, because the President hasn't sent us a draft authorization." I harshly criticize the administration for not sending in a draft authorization over right when they started this legal action. But, the fact that they didn't doesn't excuse Congress for not doing the job we're supposed to do.

Now there's been an authorization pending before Congress since February 17, more than 3 months, and we still haven't done anything. I don't know what the excuse is now.

I think you can only conclude that we don't want to take it up because we're either indifferent to this threat—and I don't think that's true. I think the real reason is, we don't have the backbone to take it up and do the job that Congress is supposed to do. And what that means is, while we're not doing our job, there are others who are doing their job. We deployed thousands into the theater of battle, two folks who are pilots, off the deck of the Theodore Roosevelt, which was—which is home-ported in Virginia, crashed a plane on takeoff the other day. We're deploying thousands, and they're risking their lives. We have had deaths of American servicemen in connection with Operation Inherent Resolve. We had—have had deaths of American civilians who were held hostage. ISIL didn't start executing American hostages until after we started bombing them on August 8. So, we've had American deaths as a result of this war. We still haven't done anything. We've had over 3,000 airstrikes that the United States has—and we still haven't done anything. Now the costs passed the $2 billion mark in April, and we still haven't done anything.

It's just—I never would have contemplated, before I came to this body, that there would be a situation in which Congress would tolerate an ongoing war and just stand back and say, "Well, I guess the President can just do whatever the President wants to do." It's just not supposed to be that way.

And one of the reasons I'm glad that the Chair called this committee today, as I'm hoping that the challenging events of last weekend—not only the fall of Ramadi, but if you go into the details of that Special Forces operation in Syria—very, very serious. We were lucky that we didn't lose U.S. lives in that operation. It was

very well done. But, this is complicated and detailed, and it's going to go on for a very long time. And I just wonder how much longer Congress is going to just be a spectator.

I mean, we can criticize the White House and the administration strategy—and I'm going to, and we ought to keep doing it if we don't like it—but, we really haven't earned the right—we haven't earned the right to be critics as long as we stand back and don't do the one thing that Congress is supposed to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. I know there's a question in there somewhere.

Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, thank you.

Here's my question. Does the current strategy in Iraq and Syria have any chance to succeed?

General KEANE. Well, Senator, that's really been the basis of our testimony.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I didn't hear it, so just——

General KEANE. I know.

Senator GRAHAM.—say no.

General KEANE. We'll gladly say it again.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, say it again.

General KEANE. And respect you asking the question, quite frankly. The answer is no. It's——

Senator GRAHAM. Does everybody agree the answer is no? Does everybody agree that, in the current configuration, that the problems in Iraq and Syria present a direct threat to the homeland?

General KEANE. Yes.

Dr. KAGAN. Yes.

Colonel HARVEY. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. I had a conversation with the CIA Director, yesterday, who echoed that sentiment. So, the average American needs to understand that failure in Iraq and Syria is putting the Homeland at risk because so many foreign fighters are flowing in, and they have the ability, potentially, to hit us here at home. Is that all correct?

General KEANE. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. And I think, General Keane, you've described this strategy as not enough. Is that correct?

General KEANE. Yes. Absolutely. It's far from it. And we all, collectively, laid out some details to support that.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you see any way to defeat ISIL in Syria without a substantial Arab army involved?

General KEANE. I don't know how you get there. I mean, obviously, if we deployed tens of thousands of troops, ourselves, we could defeat ISIS in Syria. I don't think anybody here would recommend such an event. I think the people who have vested interests there should be involved, and I think they would get involved. I mean, you know that they've said as much, but we have to do something to change the momentum of the Assad regime.

Senator GRAHAM. Dr. Kagan, is it fair to say that no Arab army is going into Syria unless part of the—one of the objectives is to take Assad down?

Dr. KAGAN. Absolutely, Senator. That's going to be a precondition for—

Senator GRAHAM. Because they're not going to just fight ISIL and leave Assad in power, therefore giving the place to Syria. Is that correct?

Dr. KAGAN. On the contrary, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. I mean, to Iran.

Dr. KAGAN. On the contrary, sir. What we're seeing, I think, is increasing levels of support of various varieties to Jabhat al-Nusra as an alternative to the——

Senator GRAHAM. So, I want people to understand that our strategy is to empower a radical Islamic Sunni group to fight Assad rather than having an army on the ground that—made up of allies. Is that fairly accurate?

We're choosing to work with terrorists——

Dr. KAGAN. I think——

Senator GRAHAM.—or somebody's—the Arabs are choosing to work with terrorists, because there's a vacuum created by us.

Dr. KAGAN. I think some people are choosing to work with terrorists because of the vacuum that we have created. I don't think that's the intent of our policy.

Senator GRAHAM. No, but that's the effect of the policy.

Dr. KAGAN. I believe it is, yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. So, we find ourselves where our allies in the region are supporting a terrorist group as a last-resort proposition because America is AWOL.

Colonel Harvey, at the end of the day, do you see a scenario of dislodging ISIL, taking Assad out, that doesn't require a sustained commitment by the world to put Syria back together?

Colonel HARVEY. No, I do not see.

Senator GRAHAM. We're talking years, and billions of dollars.

Colonel HARVEY. I believe so, sir, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. All right. Sir, I don't want to butcher your last name. If this war keeps going on the way it is a year from now, do you worry about Jordan and Lebanon being affected?

Mr. KATULIS. I do, and especially Jordan, a country I've lived in and studied as a Fulbright scholar. We are doing important things to help strengthen that government, but it is feeling the force of not only the——

Senator GRAHAM. If we lost the King of Jordan, we'd be losing one of the most trustworthy allies in the region. Is that correct?

Mr. KATULIS. Correct.

Senator GRAHAM. I was told yesterday that there are more Syrian children in elementary school in Lebanon than Lebanese children. Does that surprise anybody?

Mr. KATULIS. It doesn't surprise me, but it should shock all of us.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, it should shock everybody. I've just made a statement that there are more kids in elementary school in Lebanon from Syria than Lebanese kids. So, if this war continues in its current fashion, it will create unending chaos in the Mideast that will change the map for generations to come. Do you all agree with that?

Mr. KATULIS. Yes.

General KEANE. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. And there is no way to get Iraq right until you deal with Syria in a responsible manner. Is that correct?

General KEANE. That is correct.

Colonel HARVEY. Correct.

Senator GRAHAM. Iran is all in when it comes to Syria. Assad wouldn't last 15 minutes without Iran's help. Do you agree?

Colonel HARVEY. It's been critical to sustaining the Assad regime. They don't——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree that, if we gave Iranians, say, $50 billion as a signing bonus for their nuclear program, it's highly likely that some of that money would go to Assad?

General KEANE. And to the rest of his proxies that are seeking domination of the Middle East.

Senator GRAHAM. Have you seen anything to suggest the Iranians are changing their behavior for the better when it comes to the region?

Dr. KAGAN. On the contrary, sir. They're becoming more aggressive in many facets.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you say they're the most aggressive they've been in modern times?

Dr. KAGAN. Yes, sir.

General KEANE. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you say that the Iranians are directly responsible for topping—toppling a pro-American government in Yemen by supporting the Houthis?

General KEANE. They contributed to it, for sure.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you agree with me that, now that we've lost our eyes and ears in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is growing as a threat to the Homeland?

Colonel HARVEY. Yes.

Dr. KAGAN. Not only that, but ISIS is also gaining position in Yemen.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with me that Syria is now a perfect forum to launch an attack from the United States because there are so many foreign fighters with Western passports?

Colonel HARVEY. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with me that the Shi'a militia on the ground in Iraq are controlled by the Iranians?

Colonel HARVEY. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with me that we're doing permanent damage to the ability of Iraq to reconstruct if we allow the Shi'a militia to continue to have dominance on the battlefield?

General KEANE. Yes.

Colonel HARVEY. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you see any good thing coming from this strategy being continued?

General KEANE. No.

Colonel HARVEY. No, sir.

General KEANE. It's destined to fail.

Senator GRAHAM. And there is a better way. We just have to choose that way.

Colonel HARVEY. Correct, sir.

General KEANE. Correct.

Senator GRAHAM. There is a better way. Do you all agree?

Colonel HARVEY. Yes, sir.

General KEANE. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Any more——

Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here. Thank you for your service and your leadership.

I'd like to ask the panel, first, for your assessment of the current level of success we are seeing in the military campaign against ISIS.

Dr. KAGAN. It is failing, Senator. That's our—I think our assessment, generally, across the board, is that it is failing in Iraq, it is failing in Syria, and it is failing across the board in the region.

Senator CRUZ. Why is it failing?

Dr. KAGAN. In my view, it was ill-conceived to begin with, because it focused exclusively on Iraq. It was badly under-resourced, and excessive restraints and constraints have been put on the limited resources that we were willing to deploy.

Senator CRUZ. Could you please elaborate on the excessive constraints that have been placed on our military?

Dr. KAGAN. Yes, sir.

We have forces in theater that could have made a significant difference, I believe, in the fight for Ramadi, had they been allowed to embed at lower levels, had they been allowed to perform functions of forward air controllers and bring in precision air support, had the—some of the rotary-wing aviation that we have in theater been used in direct support of that fight, had the forces that we have in theater been able to go out to the tribes and reach out to them directly rather than relying on the tribes to come to them. There were a number of things that even this limited force could have done, I think, that would have made a difference. But, the force was probably too limited to be decisive, in any event.

General KEANE. Yes. Now, just to add on to that, I mean—you know, the military—these other components to the President's strategy, as you know—and there's huge problems with them, as well—but the military component is clearly under-resourced. There's not enough trainers, there's not enough advisors. And the role of the advisors is fundamentally flawed, itself. The advisors have to be down where the units are doing the fighting, at least at the battalion level. What reason is that? Because they help them plan, they help them execute, they contribute to their success, they have the capability to call in airstrikes, they have the capability to use drones in support of those ground forces to help acquire intelligence for them, and they can use attack helicopters, as well.

And therefore, the airstrikes that we currently have, which are excellent in taking out command and control, other infrastructure, logistic infrastructures, depots—essentially, facilities—they get—it starts to fall off very rapidly when you're dealing with mobile targets. And then, Senator, the overwhelming amount of combat that takes place, to use military terms, is close combat in urban centers that are populated and where we get—we, our forces, Iraqi forces—get very close to the enemy. To be able to do that, you have to guide the bombs from that airplane, take control of them. And

that's called close air support. That's what we need the forward air controllers for.

So, the effectiveness of our airpower is this: 75 percent of the missions that are flown come back with their bombs, because they cannot acquire the target or properly identify the target so they have some assurances that they're not going to hit—hurt somebody with those bombs that we don't want to be hurt. That changes dramatically if we put those forward air controllers on the ground.

I'll tell you what. If you're fighting as the fighting took place in Ramadi, and, as that fight unfolded, the scenario was—they had prepared, for weeks, to get to Ramadi. This was not due to a sandstorm. This is taking out supporting towns, other attacks, diversionary attacks, that led to, finally, an assault using suicide-bombers' vehicles to do that. If that force had antitank weapons, they could have killed those vehicles. If they had Apache helicopters, they could have killed those vehicles. Those vehicles blew up and destroyed almost entire blocks, and destroyed entire units, because the explosives were so heavy on it.

After that came the fighting forces, themselves. If—again, if we had close air support, we could easily deal with those fighting forces before they actually closed with the Iraqi military. Apache helicopters, close air support, would have significantly impacted them. And then we have a close fight, and assuming the Iraqi forces could deal with that.

But, I would tell you this. Many of those Iraqi forces—it's not reported—did fight heroically in Ramadi. And a lot of them fled. But, that resolve gets stiffened very quickly when they watch those suicide bombers get blown up before they get to them, when they watch those units—those caravans coming down the road after them get blown up before they get to them, because we have proper surveillance, we have resources that can deal with that—antitank guided missiles and the like. We start to change the dimension on the battlefield very significantly as a result of providing them with the proper resources.

These are the constraints that are out there that are manifesting itself in the behavior of the Iraqi Security Forces. They have their own problems—leadership, discipline, morale, and competence. I'm not suggesting that they don't. But, there's a lot we could do that could make a difference.

Senator CRUZ. Let me ask one final question, which is: The administration is currently declining to arm the Kurds. The Peshmerga are fighting ISIS. They are effective fighters. They have been allies of America. In my judgment, the policy of not arming the Kurds makes very little sense. I would be interested in the panel's assessment of, Should we be arming the Kurds? And is the current policy reasonable and effective in defeating ISIS?

Dr. KAGAN. Sir, we—I think it's a consensus on the panel that we should be helping the Kurds defend themselves, but that the Kurds will not be able to be effective partners in retaking the portions of Arab Iraq that ISIS now controls, but that certainly we should be helping the Kurds defend themselves, I think.

Chairman MCCAIN. Could I point out the—actually, we're not refusing to arm the Kurds. The problem is, it goes through Baghdad, and the Kurds continue to complain that there is not the kind of

facilitation of the delivery of those weapons. But, the Senator's point is, for all practical purposes, I think, correct.

Senator King.

Senator KING. One of the—a phrase you just used struck a chord with me. It—there was weeks in preparation for going to Ramadi—raises the question of intelligence. And, General Keane, would you comment? Do we have adequate intelligence? Do we have any intelligence? And have we become too reliant on signals intelligence and, therefore, don't have human beings giving us information?

General KEANE. Yes, I mean, that's a great question. And it's more appropriately put to the military leaders when they come in here, because they have the details of it, and—but, this much I do know. My sensing, from talking to my sources, is the intelligence function is not robust enough. And it—yes, we are relying on national intelligence sources and some regional intelligence sources. Some of that is surveillance, some of that is, you know, signals intelligence, as well. But, there's a lot more that we can do to assist them. We use surveillance a lot to assist the use of airpower, because it's not controlled by forward air controllers. We need different kinds of surveillance in there to assist ground forces.

When we were fighting in Iraq, and now finishing up in Afghanistan, our maneuver units used different kinds of drones. They've much smaller. They don't stay up, necessarily, as long as the ones that assist the airpower function. And they assist the ground commanders. That kind of capability there, controlled by United States, would dramatically make a difference for the ground forces that are in the fight, because that would give them the ability to see the preparations the enemy is making, to see the execution before they—it impacts on them, and, most importantly, to do something about it.

I think the entire intelligence function has got to be put under review. We have a tendency to focus on other things that are kinetic——

Senator KING. Right.

General KEANE.—but the intelligence function, in this kind of warfare, is significant, in terms of its enhancing ground forces and air forces to be able to use their capabilities to the fullest.

Senator KING. And it's unfortunate that we continue to—we seem to continue to be surprised.

Did you——

Colonel HARVEY. Sir, if I could, on the Ramadi issue, just—I'm at the University of South Florida, and, you know, we drafted a paper outlining that Ramadi was going to fall, early last week, and we were looking at data that's only available to us through open-source information, but understanding the enemy, their intent, trying to get inside how they're orchestrating the fight. And it's not just about having the intelligence, it's knowing what to do with the information and how to think about it.

The warnings were there, the indicators were there. If we could see it, at the University of South Florida, and others here in—like the Institute for the Study of War, I think, also saw that—then we shouldn't have been making public statements, midweek, officially saying that Ramadi was not going to fall, that it wasn't really under threat, because that creates another problem of its own, be-

cause then you have the collapse, and it looks like there's a real problem in our communication and understanding at the most—highest levels of our government.

Senator KING. Well, and also it makes the ISIS look invincible and more powerful, and that's—helps in their recruiting, and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

You've made a strong case for things like close air support, forward controllers, all of those kinds of things. But, isn't one of the fundamental problems—we could have all of those assets, but, if the Iraqi Security Forces don't have the will to fight, and if the local population doesn't have the—any confidence in the government in Baghdad, it's still a very difficult, if not impossible, proposition. Can you give me some thoughts on that?

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I agree with the statement that you made. If those two conditions are true, then it's difficult, to impossible. I don't think it's true that the Iraqi forces don't have the will to fight. I think they do have the will to fight. But, I think, as General Keane pointed out and as we've seen repeatedly, will to fight is one thing, belief in your ability to succeed is another critical component to will to fight. And that's one of the things that we have provided, historically, to our allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also to NATO allies and various other partners who rely on our overmatching military capabilities just as much as the Iraqis would. We can make it so that the Iraqis don't have to worry about being overrun. That's what we used to do. We are allowing them to be overrun in these circumstances. And that erodes their will to fight, significantly.

Your point about the political accommodation is also incredibly important. We absolutely need to have an Iraqi Government that is prepared to reach out to Sunni effectively. And we haven't seen that. Unfortunately, the more that we try to subcontract these conflicts to local forces in preference to our own——

Senator KING. Then you're talking about the——

Dr. KAGAN.—you get a——

Senator KING.—Shi'a militia.

Dr. KAGAN. Exactly, sir.

Senator KING. Which only exacerbates the sectarian conflict, which makes ISIS look good to the Sunni chiefs in Anbar.

Dr. KAGAN. Or more tolerable, perhaps, than the alternatives.

Senator KING. Yes. I don't think they look good to anybody.

Dr. KAGAN. Yes, sir.

Senator KING. It's—but, if they don't have confidence—I mean, isn't that one of the fundamental problems here, is that ISIS has been swimming in, if not a friendly sea, at least a neutral sea, in terms of the Sunni provinces?

Dr. KAGAN. I think it's a very fearful sea. And I think that that's—you know, we shouldn't forget that terrorism works both ways, and these guys are incredibly brutal in dealing with the populations that they control. So, people are going to require a certain amount of assurance that, if they rise up against these guys, that they will win, because it—the alternative is that they will be completely destroyed as communities.

General KEANE. You know, the other thing is, the force that we had in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Force that took us—it took us a

while to get them to be effective, to be frank about it. And one of the things that made them very effective during the surge period, where General Petraeus changed the dimension on the battlefield, and he said, "We're not just going to provide them advisors, we're going to ask them to fight side by side with us"—platoon, side by side; company, side by side; battalion, side by side. That dimension exponentially increased the capability of the force, because they could see what right looked like. They could see it. It was right there. A sergeant could see a U.S. sergeant's performance, how he acted under stress. Soldiers could see it. Other leaders could see their counterparts' performance.

So, that force grew rather dramatically, and we were there multiple weeks throughout 2007 and 2008, the three of us on this side of the table. And that was an effective force. And I can tell you for a fact, because I saw it with my own eyes, I saw battalion commanders, brigade commanders, and division commanders distinguish themselves in combat and under significant stress. And we felt good about that force. We were saying, "Wow, they finally—they've got it together." What happened to that force? Well, so much attention has been placed on Maliki's malice in what he did to undermine his political opponents. He destroyed that force, because he saw those distinguished leaders, who were accomplished as a result of their performance on the battlefield, and their people were devoted to them—he saw them as threats to him, politically as well as his political opponents. And he undermined that force. He purged that force.

So, that force is not there, the one that we used to have. He put in these political phonies and cranks and other people who didn't have the military competence. Well, that—changing leadership and getting that leadership back, and others who are willing to have that kind of commitment and competence, that takes a little time to fix. But, the fact that we did have it, Senator, at one time, and it was pretty good, tells you that there is something there that we can work with, and we can get it back there. Whether that can be done in time is another issue.

Senator KING. Looks around—I may be the chair now, so I'm going to give myself another 10 seconds.

One simple question, though. In 2007–2008, how many Americans were in Iraq?

General KEANE. Certainly. I mean, we had somewhere in the neighborhood—correct me if I'm wrong, guys—about 130,000 in Iraq. And that's how that force grew to the—but, what I'm saying to you is that, when we finished, when we had completed our involvement in Iraq, the force that we'd left there was a capable force, the Iraqi Security Force.

Senator KING. I understand that. The question is, What do we have to do to rebuild it? That's the question.

I'm out of time.

Senator SULLIVAN [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your testimony.

I wanted to talk at—initially, about the issue of credibility. There's been a lot of discussion about how we've lost credibility with our allies in places like Syria. But, I also want to talk about the importance of the issue of credibility with the American people.

And there has been, I think, a narrative in the administration that has not been helpful, in that there's been an emphasis on the fact that we are now—our combat role in the Middle East is now finished. Well, of course, it isn't finished. Just tell that to the pilots who are flying daily missions. We think of combat in terms of the infantry soldiers, but a lot of times we forget the brave men and women who are flying these missions, daily. And they're—that's combat. And obviously, also, with the recent Delta Force mission by some very brave Americans, that's boots on the ground. So, we're in combat. We even have boots on the ground, but there's still this narrative that somehow we're done.

So, General Keane, what I wanted to ask you, first of all, is, Do you think that this narrative, which is a false one, in my view, has inhibited our ability to actually develop a robust strategy we're talking about? Do we need JTACs, do we need other forces on the ground? And yet, we're competing with a narrative from the White House that says, "No, no, no, no, we're done." And it seems to me that would be a limiting factor to developing a strategy that ultimately is—would do what we all want it to do, which is protect America's national security interests.

General KEANE. Well, yes, I certainly—when I look at it and try to speculate about what is driving some of our decisions, what is driving our narrative, you know, one of the things I've observed since I've been closer to it in recent years than when I was when I was a younger officer, is that most administrations, Democratic or Republican, have a tendency to overreact to what took place in the previous administration. And I think this one is no exception to that, making a—making it a principle of the administration to have a guarantor that we will not be involved in any military activity in the Middle East or in South Asia that could lead to another protracted war. And I think that's probably good—a good principle. But, the issue is, that should not trump what's necessary to do, given the fact that ISIS represents a new organization——

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

General KEANE.—with new leadership, a new vision, in terms of its global and regional strategy, and that it is a barbaric organization committing genocide, assassination, enslavement of women, and raping of women, as we all know, and that it is fully intent on conducting a religious war based on their ideology. And we cannot let the rearview mirror of Iraq and Afghanistan so disincentivize us to deal with the reality of what this is. And I'm convinced that the American people, when we inform them——

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

General KEANE.—and we educate them, and we take them through this—I mean, I dealt with the Bush administration. They never truly explained what radical Islam is and why it was so dangerous. We never truly took apart the ideology.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

General KEANE. We never truly fashioned a strategy to deal with it in a comprehensive way.

Senator SULLIVAN. Can I—I'd like to follow up——

General KEANE. Here we sit, with the same problem today.

Senator SULLIVAN. I think that's a great point, and it's something that I think—my own view is that you're directly on point. If we

level with the American people, talk about the threats, talk about the strategy, that—it's really important—many of you have been raising that—I think everybody recognizes what we—you know, once we lay that out, what we would or wouldn't have to do to address it.

So, let me ask a kind of a related question for Mr. Kagan. You've written on the long war, the idea of—that I think sometimes we look at what's going on with ISIS and other issues in the Middle East and think, "Hey, we're going to have this done in a couple of months—18 months, 20 months, maybe a couple of years." Do you think that there is an importance to having the leadership, both in terms of Congress, but particularly the executive branch, talk more broadly—and again, level with the American people—about that this might be a generational conflict, this might be akin to the Cold War, where we've got to lay out a broad strategy—and, Mr. Katulis, I think your point, early on in your testimony, about the need for a strategic concept is so important—lay out a strategy that the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the American people can get behind, and then execute it. And level with the American people that this might not be done in 18 months.

So, would any of you care—Mr. Kagan, I know you've written about the long war. Could you—would you feel free to talk about that?

And, Mr. Katulis, I'd be very interested—when you talked about the strategic concept. What is it? Obviously, 20 seconds left, that's a big topic. But, if you could point us in the direction of your writings or some principles that all of you have thought about, I think that would be very helpful.

Mr. Kagan?

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I mean, this is a generational struggle that we're in, at least. It may be longer than——

Senator SULLIVAN. But, we don't talk about it that way, do we——

Dr. KAGAN. No, on the——

Senator SULLIVAN.—very much?

Dr. KAGAN.—contrary. I think your first—the point that you opened with is a very important one, that when the administration's narrative is that we're ending the wars, it is impossible to develop an—a coherent strategy for fighting the wars. And we do need to understand that this is a war. This is—these are battle fronts on a common war that is going to last for a long time. And we don't get to end it unless we win. But, you don't get to decide—we may not be interested in war, but war is interested in us. And this is going to continue to be a problem. And we need to level with the American people, as you say, as a basis for developing any kind of strategy. I totally agree with you.

Mr. KATULIS. I think we need to define what we want to achieve. Quite often over the last 14 years, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, now with ISIL, we define our objectives in terms of what we're going to counter and defeat. That's important. But, what has been missing, I think, comprehensively, whether it's in a particular theater, like Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan, is the definition of what we actually need to leave behind in those societies, how we help others help themselves.

I do believe, at certain points—President Bush certainly did this; certain points, President Obama does this—talks about the long-term nature of this. If you look at their planning documents, at least, for the anti-ISIL strategy, it doesn't say, "Let's end this." As the administration used to say about Afghanistan and Iraq, "We're going to end it at a particular period of time." It extends into who will be the next President.

But, your point is terribly important, and I have written several articles and a book about this, too. It's important, because, for our own society, there is a new generation, called Millennials, that are actually, this year, in number, larger than the Baby Boomers or—I'm a Generation X-er. Our leaders aren't messaging in a cohesive way. And I think part of it is the partisanship that we have in our politics and other things. And I—I'm a strong centrist internationalist. I believe that we need to bring the American people along with us.

And something Senator Kaine has said here earlier and before is that the debate that we need to be having on the authorization of the use of military force, and action on it—this is a moment which has not been seized. You could criticize the administration or you could criticize whomever in Congress. There's been this muddle. And I think part of the reason, it goes back to, we actually haven't defined for the American public, in the way that Fred and others have argued here, that the United States has a special leadership role in the world. Our leadership—countries in the region are still looking to us to actually do more. But, we need to actually take those steps beyond the questions on military and security steps, which are terribly important. We need to actually, then, talk about, How do we defeat these ideologies? We've done it before, with Nazism or Communism. You know, they're on the margins. Our model is much better. Our values are better. But, what happened to the battle of ideas? We had that debate for a couple of years after September 11. We kind of rediscovered it for a little bit. But, I think our ADD, our attention deficit disorder, in our own society—and that's what I would say is, as thought leaders, as leaders in Congress, we all have a responsibility to continue to talk about this in a sustained way.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Senator KAINE [presiding]. We've all had one round, but if anybody has a second round—I'm just going to seize the moment, here, to continue for a few minutes, if we can.

I'm interested—we've had visits in the Senate Foreign Relations from leaders that are our allies—King—the King of Jordan, in January; the Emir of Qatar, in February. We've had discussions with Saudi leadership, including the Saudi Ambassador. And every time we have these discussions, I ask them, "Tell us what you think the role of the United States should be, vis-a-vis ISIL, the battle against ISIL." And, in particular, because this is a point of difference among some on the Foreign Relations Committee, I've asked about the—their thought about American ground troops. I want to tell you what they've said, but then I'm curious about your opinions about what they've said.

The King of Jordan said, "That would be a mistake. This is our battle, not yours. And if it gets positioned as the United States against ISIL, then that will not be a helpful thing. If it's—we stand up against the terrorist threat in our own region, and the United States helps us in a vigorous way, but clearly a supporter, not the main driver, that's the way this should position, and significant U.S. ground troops would—just like the United States is doing 90 percent of the airstrikes, the significant U.S. ground troops would make this the United States against ISIL."

The Emir of Qatar said, similarly, "If there's significant ground troop presence from the United States, this will be the—a recruiting bonanza for ISIL."

In Saudi Arabia—and this—the meetings with the Saudis occurred right after the Saudis had gone in a major way into Yemen, but—so, they're—you know, they're willing, at least somewhere, to take some significant military action to deal with threats in their own region, but they also said, "U.S. ground troops against ISIL would be problematic."

Now, I don't—you know, I'm not—I didn't read that to say, "not even one," or "under no circumstances." But, they were very wary about the notion of U.S. ground troops.

So, we're trying to work that out on the Foreign Relations Committee as we think about an authorization. Are they right? Are they wrong? Of, if they're right, how would you square that with what a U.S. presence, U.S. support should mean?

Mr. KATULIS. If I could start. It's why I—the thrust of my remarks were on this coalition.

I actually think, for all of the criticisms of the Obama administration's strategy, some of which I share, this is the one component that simply did not exist before. It's one that has been underutilized, I believe. I do think that things like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit last week, though there were a lot of optics and news articles about it, there is a conversation to try to build on, What can we do in partnership with them?

So, I think if there's one thing we should have learned from 2003 to 2010 or '11 in Iraq, is that, yes, U.S. forces can have an important impact on the security situation there. But, there's also downsides to having such a visible presence.

I don't think anyone on the panel—unless I misheard it—was talking about ever going back to, say, a 2006–2007 posture. But, I do think striking the right balance is the key question. I think the administration has been understandably reticent about what it does in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and other places, given the unforced errors on the part of the United States. But, this regional dynamic has shifted quite a lot, which is what I was trying to emphasize.

The region, itself, recognizes that the United States, in a very visible presence on the ground, does have significant downsides for their own legitimacy with their own populations. The region also is taking action in what it sees as its own self-interest. What I was trying to say, in terms of a multidimensional—it's not only security support; it's investment in media campaigns and different political forces across the region.

Where I think the U.S. strategy right now—and again, it's more honed in on what my expertise and focus is—where we need to enhance it more is working with those reliable partners, from Jordan to the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia to a number of different allies, including the Kurds we've talked about, and some of the Iraqis, to actually take what has been a significantly larger amount of resources in energy and activity and channel it towards more constructive purposes. I don't see that happening in Yemen right now. I don't see that happening yet in Syria. And I don't see that happening in many other theaters.

So, I think the basic answer to the question—the leaders that you spoke with, I think, are reflecting a very popular view at the popular level in their countries, as well. They understand that, for whatever happened in the Iraq War, the surge, and other things, the United States is better sort of seen as a backbone of support behind them, as opposed to visibly out in the front.

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I think we need to distinguish between the ideal and reality. Ideally, of course it would be better for regional states to take care of regional problems, and regional militaries to be involved, with a caveat that we do have a regional war going on, and the regional actors we're talking about are being seen as on one side of that. So, we need to think about what the Iranian reaction would be to Saudi divisions deploying into Iraq on behalf of the Iraqis. I don't think we would enjoy that very much. And I think it might be worse, actually, than the Iranian reaction to the deployment of U.S. forces in there. So, it's a complicated dynamic.

But, look, in the world of reality, the Jordanians, they don't have the forces to do this. The Saudis don't have—the regional militaries are not capable of providing the kind of assistance to Iraq that we can provide. They don't have it in their force structure, they don't have it in their——

Senator KAINE. How about the Turks?

Dr. KAGAN. The Turks might be able to provide some element of it, although no one provides the capability that the United States provides to its allies, including the Turks, and they would still be dependent on us.

But, again, the—I'm really not sure that the optics of the return of the Ottoman Empire in force to Iraq would be better than the optics of having a limited number of American troops on the ground there. So, I think that the regional leaders you're talking to are expressing an ideal version of a strategy which we would all like to see, but it's not in accord with reality.

And, as you think about an AUMF, I would say an AUMF in which Congress micromanages what forces can or cannot be sent, and thereby, in my opinion, infringes somewhat on the prerogative of the President to choose how to fight a war that Congress authorizes, but also, in this circumstances, that would constrain the deployment of American ground forces when they are so clearly necessary, would be extremely damaging.

Colonel HARVEY. Senator Kaine, if I could.

This reminds me of the myth that I heard in Iraq about: United States forces were the generator of the antibodies that caused the insurgency. It was a real misreading of what was going on in Iraq in the drivers of the fight.

We have to be focused on what are U.S. interests and how do we defeat this enemy. And the seeds of strategic failure are found in failing to define that enemy, define our interests, the costs, and the risks. And if we do those things, and we think about our interests, it will drive us to engage more seriously than we have, in my mind. I think it's a very similar situation today. We study radicalization, recruitment for the foreign fighter flow. The United States presence in Iraq is not going to dramatically increase the foreign fighter flow. It is being driven by a range of issues and the different types of recruits that are being pulled in from Tunisia and elsewhere. The driver within Iraq is not the United States presence, it's Shi'a domination, it's the fear for their future and their own lives and lack of political inclusion, et cetera. That's the issue we need to get our head around.

General KEANE. Yes, I agree with what everybody's said here, and I think we talk past each other a little bit on this issue. No one here, certainly, is advocating that we should have ground units that are occupying towns and villages, and securing them, and therefore, protecting them from ISIS attack that would put us right in the mainstream of defending against ISIS. Now, I think that's unnecessary, and it would be a mistake. But also, when we have a policy that says "no boots on the ground," that doesn't make any sense, either, because it denies us from having advisors that have a role to play, it denies us with—from forward air controllers that have a role to play, as we pointed out, and other military capabilities that are unique to us. And we've elaborated on what they are. They are significant enablers that make—would make a difference in what the 60 nations have agreed to do, which is support the Iraqi ground forces, as imperfect as they are. But, let's give them a better hand to play than what we are doing. And I don't believe there is a single nation that would object to anything of what we are describing is—are enablers that would make a difference.

Second, when it comes to Syria, I think this is a difference. And if you spoke to them about that, you know what their view is about Assad. We've already dealt with that in the regime. And they know full well that the deal with ISIS in Syria, this is going to take a ground force, and they would have to contribute to that ground force. I would think that they would logically ask us to participate in that with them. We would—I don't think we would necessarily have to be the largest contributor, but I think we would have to participate. And I think they would reasonably want us, too, because of our experience and our capabilities, if we would actually lead it. Maybe not.

But, I think those two things would probably be on the table for discussion. And I think it's reasonable that that kind of allocation of United States capability and leadership to deal with ISIS in Syria is, in fact, an eventuality.

Senator KAINE. Senator Blumenthal, do you have questions for the panel?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I do. Thank you very much.

Thank you all for being here and for your very thoughtful and eloquent remarks. I was here for the beginning remarks. Unfortunately, as so often happens here, I was diverted to another committee meeting after our vote.

I want to come back to what Mr. Kagan was describing as the "evil" of ISIS/ISIL and the absolutely horrid, unspeakable acts of brutality that they commit—mass rape, mass murder. And I agree with you that they are one of the most evil, maybe the most evil institution in history. We can argue about it. But, when I go home this weekend, most folks are going to ask me, What's the threat to the United States? And 50 years from now, others will be sitting where you are, and where I am, talking about probably other evil institutions that are committing mass brutality. Because that seems to be, unfortunately and tragically, the nature of the human condition. It's happened throughout our history. And I think the ordinary person in Connecticut over the Memorial Day weekend is going to wonder what our role should be in stopping that from occurring unless there is a threat to this country. So, perhaps you and others on the panel could tell me what I should tell the people of Connecticut about why the United States should be involved, whether it is Special Operations Forces or better air support or whatever the involvement is, and why that matters to our security.

Dr. KAGAN. Senator, I think it's a fair question. And, as a Connecticut native, I'm—I am concerned about what you have to tell the Connecticut people to get them onboard with this.

May I start by saying—as I was driving down to Virginia the other day, I drove past the Holocaust Museum, and I saw, again, the sign that's up there that is always there, which is "Never Again." And I would submit that we need—one of the things we need to tell the American people is that America is not historically a country that watches these kinds of atrocities on this scale occur and does nothing. It actually is a core American value to take a stand against these kind of—we do it very late, we did—we try to talk ourselves out of it, we have long arguments about it, but, ultimately, we generally do it. And that's one of the things that makes us America. And I think we really shouldn't lose sight of that moral imperative as we talk about this.

But, your comments are very well taken, sir. The reality is, ISIS poses a clear and present danger to the United States Homeland. It has already been encouraging, condoning, and applauding lone-wolf attacks here. It has made it clear that it has the objective of attacking America and the West, that it is actively recruiting cells in America and the West. And it will do that with the resources of a ministate behind it, which is something that we have never seen before with al-Qaeda. This is not a group of bandits hanging out in the mountains in Afghanistan. And that attack was devastating enough. But, if we reflect on the resources that ISIS has access to, controlling Mosul, Fallujah, Ramadi, al-Raqqa, oil infrastructure, the resources that were in various universities in Mosul and so forth, that—thousands of fighters, tens of thousands of recruits—this is an army, and this is an army that is very sophisticated and has an ability to conduct operational military planning and execute it that is in advance of anything that I've seen from any of these groups. And it has declared its intention to come after the United States, and shown a willingness to do that. That is something that I think the people of Connecticut need to be concerned about.

General KEANE. Yes, I would certainly agree with what Fred is saying, is that it should be a concern to us, in a couple of ways. Certainly, what they are doing to motivate and inspire others who are not necessarily in the region but are in other countries and are—can identify with this movement, and many of them are self-radicalized or possibly they're already radicalized, but they're motivated to take action, and take violent action. We've seen plenty of evidence of that.

And the longer you permit the organization to succeed—can you imagine what has gone out on the Internet from ISIS around the world as a result of their success in Ramadi, and how that has motivated others, that ISIS, in fact, is winning, and they're standing up against the United States, they're standing up against these strong allies of the United States in the region and Europe, and they're actually winning? So, there's huge danger there. As long as you let this organization stay and we don't decapitate it, then they—the motivation and inspiration of self-radicalization continues to grow. That's one thing.

The second thing is, in the region itself—and we showed on a map—they're moving into other countries at the same time they're defending what they have in Syria and Iraq, and expanding in those countries. This is what makes this organization so very different than what we've dealt with in the past. And they're looking at Libya as a—because of the social and political upheaval in Libya—and there's hardly a government there and anybody to push back on it—they're going to put huge resources in there. Why are we concerned about that? Our interests in the region, our interests in North Africa, that would be on the southern tip of NATO there, not too many miles away from Italy. In Afghanistan, they have expanded rapidly, beyond most of our expectations, I would assume, into eight provinces in Afghanistan. Now, we have interests in Afghanistan, for obvious reasons.

So, this is a movement that we can tie directly to the security of the American people and to our national security objectives of the United States in this region and in South Asia.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So, it—if I can put it a different way, just to conclude, it's more than—and, by the way, American values are directly and inevitably linked to stopping human atrocities. I agree totally with you, Mr. Kagan. But, our interests go beyond that—those values. And, by the way, all of the reasons that you've articulated are the reasons that I voted for the training and equipping measures that have been implemented. But, my frustration is that, as you also have observed, there is a huge gap between the goals and missions that we've outlined for the United States and the actual action that we're undertaking. The train-and-equip activities are way behind what we might have hoped by this point, and there's no clear timetable for really achieving the level of capability that we expected or hoped.

So, I think this has been a very sobering morning, and I thank you all for being here.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN [presiding]. Well, I also want to thank the witnesses. It's been, I think, very helpful to all members. This is

not an issue that's going away, so I'm sure we'll be seeing you again.

Thank you.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the committee adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

UNITED STATES STRATEGY IN IRAQ, SYRIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Senator INHOFE. General Keane, what is the perception of the United States military and our current use of force in Iraq and Syria in the Middle East? Do you think we have a commitment issue?

General Keane did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

2. Senator INHOFE. General Keane, Dr. Kagan, Colonel Harvey, and Mr. Katulis, in your opinion, what should be the political objectives of United States policy in the Middle East, how does Iraq and Syria play into that strategy, and what is your assessment of how well we are doing at achieving them?

General Keane did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

Dr. Kagan did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

Colonel Harvey did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

Mr. KATULIS. United States political objectives in the Middle East are to help foster more stable, inclusive, and pluralistic societies throughout the region. This task is not an easy one, and will take years if not decades to fully realize.

Iraq and Syria today are the exact opposites of what the United States wants to see in the Middle East—violentand unstable, with exclusionary politics fostering deep divisions and endangering minority populations likeChristians and Yazidis.

A key component of United States strategy in Iraq is to try and foster a more inclusive government under Prime MinisterAbadi that will give all Iraqis a stake in their political system. It is less clear how the U.S. aims to achieve amore stable, inclusive, and pluralistic Syria given the strategy currently in place.

In Iraq, the United States has done fairly well given the tools at hand in trying to create a more inclusive andpluralistic politics. We played a major role in pushing Prime Minister Maliki out of power and putting PrimeMinister Abadi in, which remains a major step forward. But since then, Iraqi politics has largely stymied ourefforts to encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive Iraq through legislative measures like the Iraqi NationalGuard proposal.

3. Senator INHOFE. Colonel Harvey, the current plan is to train and equip about 5,000 moderate opposition fighters in Syria a year. Do you believe that goal is achievable and will it make a difference?

Colonel Harvey did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

FALL OF RAMADI

4. Senator INHOFE. General Keane, what are your thoughts on the Iraqi security forces retreat out of Ramadi?

General Keane did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

IRAN IN IRAQ

5. Senator INHOFE. Dr. Kagan, General Petraeus said he thinks Iran is as big of a threat as ISIL to the long-term future of Iraq. Do you agree?

Dr. Kagan did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

6. Senator INHOFE. Dr. Kagan, what are Iranian intentions in Iraq? What is our leverage to counter Iranian influence in Iraq?

Dr. Kagan did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

U.S MILITARY MISSION AND THE IRAQI SECURITY FORCE

7. Senator INHOFE. Colonel Harvey, has the sectarian configuration of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) changed since their collapse under the pressure of ISIL last year—have they become more balanced and inclusive or more Shia-dominated? How would you go about helping the Iraqi security forces become more integrated and more inclusive?

Colonel Harvey did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

8. Senator INHOFE. Colonel Harvey, what kind of force protection concerns do you have for United States forces in Iraq?

Colonel Harvey did not respond in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.

COUNTER-ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL) STRATEGY

TUESDAY, JULY 7, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in room SD–G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators McCain, Sessions, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed, Nelson, Manchin, Gillibrand, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, and Heinrich.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, good morning.

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today, as soon as the media allows us to see the witnesses, to receive testimony on the U.S. strategy to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

I am grateful to our distinguished witnesses for appearing before us today.

The risk posed by ISIL must be seen in the context of what many of America's most accomplished leaders and foreign policy experts have described as the most complex and uncertain international environment since the end of World War II. All across the globe, America's interests in security and stability are at risk.

As part of a broader strategy to dominate eastern Europe, Vladimir Putin's Russia continues its onslaught in Ukraine, with Russian troops and equipment leading an asymmetric campaign to undermine Ukraine's Government and independence as the United States has refused the Ukrainians weapons for its defense.

China's destabilizing behavior also poses a growing challenge to United States national interests: its reclamation and militarization of vast land features in the South China Sea, its continued military buildup, and of course, its blatant and undeterred cyber attacks against the United States.

Iran is expanding its malign activities and hegemonic ambitions across the Middle East, as we see clearly in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere, and yet, some in the administration seem to operate under the delusion that a nuclear agreement could lead to a new modus vivendi with the Islamic Republic.

In Syria, Bashar Assad's slaughter of his own people, which has been the single greatest contributor to the rise and continued success of ISIL, goes on and on and on, aided by Russia, Iran, and

Hezbollah. For 4 years, the President has said Assad must go as a part of a political transition in Syria, but conditions on the ground have never allowed it. Tragically, that remains true today.

What each of these growing threats has in common is a failure of deterrence, brought on by a dangerous perception of American weakness and lack of resolve, which our adversaries have taken as a provocative invitation for hostility.

When it comes to ISIL, President Obama's comments yesterday at the Pentagon reveal the disturbing degree of self-delusion that characterizes the administration's thinking. It is right but ultimately irrelevant to point out, as the President did, that we have conducted thousands of airstrikes, taken out many ISIL fighters and much equipment, and pushed it out of some territory. None of the so-called progress that the President cited suggests that we are on a path to success.

Since U.S. and coalition air strikes began last year, ISIL has continued to enjoy battlefield successes, including taking Ramadi and other key terrain in Iraq, holding over half the territory in Syria, and controlling every border post between Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the longer ISIL remains undefeated in Iraq and Syria, the more potent its message is to those around the world who may be radicalized and inspired to join the group and spread violence and mayhem on its behalf.

It is not that we are doing nothing; it is that there is no compelling reason to believe that anything we are doing currently will be sufficient to achieve the President's long-stated goal of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL, either in the short term or the long term. Our means and our current level of effort are not aligned with our ends. That suggests we are not winning, and when you are not winning in war, you are losing.

The reality today is that ISIL continues to gain territory in Iraq and Syria, while expanding its influence and presence across the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. There is no responsible ground force in either Iraq or Syria that is both willing and able to take territory away from ISIL and hold it, and none of our current training efforts of moderate Syrians, Sunni tribes, or Iraqi Security Forces are as yet capable of producing such a ground force. It is unclear why the latest gradual escalation of effort, the deployment of a few hundred additional advisors to Anbar, will make a difference that our previous efforts failed to achieve.

While our coalition may own the skies, as the President said yesterday, our air campaign against ISIL continues to be limited significantly by overly restrictive rules of engagement and a lack of ground intelligence, which only gets worse as ISIL moves into urban areas to avoid coalition bombing. Any pilot will tell you that they are only as good as the targets they receive, and when three-quarters of our air missions against ISIL still return to base without dropping weapons, that is indicative of a fundamental problem with our air campaign.

What is worse, none of our efforts against ISIL in Iraq can succeed while the conflict in Syria continues, and with it the conditions for ISIL's continued growth, recruitment, and radicalization of Muslims around the world. As published media reports indicate, our Syrian train and equip program is anemic and struggling be-

cause our stated goal does not include going after Assad and his regime forces, and we still do not provide the forces we are training with the enabling capabilities to succeed in any engagement they may face inside Syria.

Given the poor numbers of recruited and trained Syrian fighters thus far, I am doubtful we can achieve our goal of training a few thousand this year. But even if the program achieves its goal, it is doubtful that it will make a strategic difference on the battlefield. Yes, we need a political solution in Syria. But no such solution is possible with Bashar Assad still in power. Unless and until the United States leads a coalition effort to put far greater battlefield pressure on Assad, a political solution will never be within reach, the conflict will grind on, and ISIL will thrive.

The lack of a coherent strategy has resulted in the spread of ISIL around the world, to Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, and even to Afghanistan, where I visited last weekend. Afghanistan is certainly not Iraq, but the parallels are eerily familiar. As in Iraq, the United States is contemplating a drastic reduction in force presence that places at risk the hard-won gains of the last decade. While Afghanistan's security forces are improving in quality, they are still missing the same set of key capabilities the Iraqis were missing when the United States withdrew in 2011, including intelligence, aviation, special operations, and logistics capabilities. At the current pace, our military commanders know these capabilities will remain critically underdeveloped at the end of 2016, when President Obama has announced that United States and coalition forces will dramatically downsize to a presence solely in Kabul.

We have seen this movie before. If we make the same mistakes, we should expect similarly tragic results. I do not want to attend another hearing like this with your successors trying to figure out a strategy to clean up after avoidable mistakes. What that means is that the President must provide our commanders on the ground with necessary forces, capabilities, and the authorities to help our Afghan partners in continuing to secure their country and defeat our terrorist enemies together.

ISIL is not 10 feet tall. It can be and must be defeated. But that will never happen if we continue to delude ourselves about our current campaign. The President is fond of the truism that there is no military solution to ISIL or any other problem. What he has so often failed to realize is that there is sometimes a major military dimension to achieving a political solution. This was the critical lesson that the United States learned in the Iraq surge. We must learn again. Security on the ground is a precondition to political reconciliation, not the other way around.

The unfortunate irony is that a President elected in opposition to the war in Iraq is repeating some of its worst strategic mistakes. What is worse, despite obvious indications that the current strategy against ISIL is failing, he has yet to find the courage of his predecessor to admit mistakes and choose a new direction. This needs to happen sooner rather than later, or the disaster the next President will inherit in the Middle East but also far beyond it will be overwhelming.

It is clear we are living in a time of unprecedented turmoil. We see it on our television screens every day: ISIL's spread across the

Middle East, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and China's maritime expansion in Asia.

Once again, I thank our witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

Senator Reed?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Secretary Carter, General Dempsey. Thank you.

This morning's hearing is an important opportunity for this committee to hear from the administration regarding its strategy to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL. It follows up on the committee's hearing in May with outside witnesses regarding the counter-ISIL strategy.

ISIL, with its violent, extremist ideology and brutal military capabilities, poses a clear threat to the stability of the Middle East, Africa, and beyond, and a threat to the United States and our partners' interests in those regions and, indeed, even in the Homeland. ISIL's campaign to establish a caliphate threatens to create a breeding ground for training extremist fighters, attracting foreign fighters intent on returning to Western countries to carry out attacks, and inspiring others in the United States and elsewhere to commit violence. The American people recognize the threat posed by ISIL but, at the same time, are appropriately wary, after nearly a decade and a half of United States military involvement overseas, about being drawn deeper into a seemingly intractable Middle East conflict.

As part of the administration's whole-of-government strategy, the Department of Defense (DOD) has the lead for two of the nine lines of effort against ISIL and plays a supporting role for the efforts of a number of other departments and agencies. This committee has provided essential resources to the Department to implement the strategy through funding of the overseas contingency operations fund, including the President's request for both the Iraq and Syria train and equip funds and $1 billion for the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund. However, the severe cuts mandated by sequestration puts at risk the ability of the civilian departments of our Government, including the State Department, the United States Agency for International Aid and Development, and the Department of Homeland Security, and Treasury Department to carry out fully the other seven lines of effort that comprise our counter-ISIL strategy. The effect of sequestration could be that the United States Government is having to fight ISIL literally with one hand tied behind its back. The success of the strategy depends on getting both our military and civilian departments the necessary resources to confront ISIL.

At this committee's hearing in May, several witnesses called for expanding the United States military involvement in Iraq and Syria in response to ISIL's seizure of the Anbar provincial capital of Ramadi and ISIL's gains in Syria. The President's announcement last month of an additional 450 United States troops to be deployed to Iraq to train and assist Iraqi Security Forces begins to address the critical need to bring local Sunni tribes into the fight against ISIL. We will be interested in hearing from our witnesses

what additional steps they would recommend for expanding the presence of Sunni fighters in the Iraqi Security Forces and to ensure that Kurdish Peshmerga receive expeditiously the weapons they need to counter ISIL in the fight.

In many respects, the current challenges in Iraq result from two intersecting forces: the rise of ISIL and the deterioration of the Iraqi security forces and complementary governmental capacities. Many of the factors and personalities forming ISIL can be traced to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Planning for that war failed to account for deep-seated sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia within the region, which gave rise to grievances that fueled the rise of ISIL. In addition, many of the factors contributing to the deterioration of Iraq Security Forces can be traced to the actions of Prime Minister Maliki, in particular his replacement of competent leaders in the military with cronies loyal to himself.

Iran's role in Iraq and the broader region must never be forgotten either. Many of the aforementioned actions by Maliki were at the behest of Iran or certainly with their acquiescence. Iran's influence on Iraq's political decisionmaking can be seen even prior to the 2008 visit of the Iranian President Ahmadinejad to Baghdad. Today, Iran has its own military boots on the ground in both Iraq and Syria, and it continues to support its proxies. We must keep a close eye on Iran and assess carefully their interests at the tactical and strategic level.

As we work with the coalition to counter the threat of ISIL, it will be useful to obtain your perspective on these and other factors as we endeavor to reshape our policies and our strategy.

Ultimately, though, one of the key lessons from the Iraq war is that no amount of United States or coalition military assistance or boots on the ground will lead to the lasting defeat of violent extremism if the underlying political causes that allow such extremism to arise and thrive are not addressed. In Iraq, the Abadi Government must continue to take substantive steps to govern in a more inclusive manner, address longstanding grievances of Iraq's sectarian and ethnic minorities, expand the integration of Sunnis and Kurds into Iraq's military and political structures, and disarm Iranian-backed Shia militias.

In Syria, moderate and extreme elements to the opposition have made tactical gains against ISIL and the regime, but ISIL remains the dominant force in western Syria. Absent a moderate opposition that is willing to and capable of taking territory from ISIL and holding it, any change in the status quo is unlikely. Bolstered by critical outside assistance, the Assad regime remains in the seat of power in Damascus, but has ceded territory in recent months. Despite these territorial shifts in the ground battle in Syria, a defeat on the battlefield is not the most likely end to the battle in Syria. A political solution that addresses grievances and a broad range of constituencies in Syria is the only pathway to a sustainable solution.

When I met with military and political leaders in Iraq earlier this year, they emphasized that United States and coalition forces are at the beginning of a multiyear campaign against ISIL. They stressed the need for strategic patience. I hope our witnesses today

will provide their perspective on just where we are in the long fight and what to expect in the coming months and years ahead.

I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you.

I welcome the witnesses. Secretary Carter?

STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, and members of this committee. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to address your questions and concerns about this campaign.

I want to especially thank the chairman for going to Afghanistan over his Fourth of July weekend, which I appreciate. Visiting the troops means a lot to us, sir.

As all of you know from your travels around the world, there is a high demand everywhere in the world for American leadership, from Asia, where I saw some of you in May, to Europe, where I was 2 weeks ago. The Obama administration and the members of this committee have helped ensure that we meet that demand, and I thank you for that.

The same is true in the Middle East where we are standing by our friends like Israel, working to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and otherwise exercising malign influence and confronting ISIL, which is the subject of this hearing.

It was also the subject of a meeting yesterday at the Pentagon where President Obama and Chairman Dempsey and I discussed our counter-ISIL campaign with senior defense and interagency leaders. We all agreed that ISIL represents a grave threat and that it must be and will be dealt a lasting defeat. That is our objective, which is shared by a global coalition that reflects both the worldwide consensus on the need to counter ISIL and the practical requirement for others to do their part. The administration's strategy to achieve that objective, as the Joint Chiefs' doctrinal definition of strategy puts it, integrates all the Nation's strengths and instruments of power, as has been noted. It is executed through nine synchronized lines of effort.

The first and arguably the most critical line of effort is the political one, as has also been noted, which is led by the State Department. This line involves building more effective, inclusive, and multi-sectarian governance in Iraq.

At the same time, the United States continues to work diplomatically to bring about a political transition from Bashar al-Assad to a more inclusive government with which we can also work to defeat ISIL.

The next two lines of effort are interconnected: to deny ISIL safe haven and to build partner capacity in Iraq and Syria. Both are led by DOD which, alongside coalition partners, is conducting an air campaign, advising, and assisting Iraqi security forces on the ground, and training and equipping vetted local forces in Iraq and for Syria.

Before I go on, let me say that these first three political and military lines of effort have to be in sync, a point that has been made

already. That is a challenge but one we are working through with our partners in the coalition, on the ground, and around our Government.

The fourth line of effort is enhancing intelligence collection on ISIL, which is led by the National Counterterrorism Center.

The fifth line of effort, disrupting ISIL's finances, is co-led by Treasury and State.

Lines of effort six and seven, both co-led by State and the National Counterterrorism Center, are to counter ISIL's messaging and disrupt the flow of foreign fighters to and from ISIL, both of which are critical in today's connected and networked world.

The eighth line of effort, providing humanitarian support to those affected by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, is led by State and AID.

Finally, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Justice work together to protect the homeland, the ninth line of effort, by disrupting terrorist threats. In addition to our full-spectrum cooperative relationship with Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies, DOD personnel continue to strike ISIL elements in Iraq and Syria.

The effective execution of all nine lines of effort by the United States and its coalition partners is necessary to ensure ISIL's lasting defeat.

I want to add briefly that there are important classified dimensions to our approach to ISIL and to the Middle East more broadly, Mr. Chairman, that we will not be able to discuss in this meeting but can discuss separately.

Let me turn to the execution of the two lines of effort on which DOD leads, which our personnel have been performing with the excellence we all expect of the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

American servicemembers and their coalition partners have conducted over 5,000 airstrikes. That air campaign has produced some clear tactical results: limiting ISIL's freedom of movement, constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters, and degrading its command and control. Coalition air support has also enabled gains by local forces in Iraq and Syria, including Syrian Kurdish and Arab forces who recently took the key border town of Tal Abyad from ISIL, cut off one of its key lines of communication and supply, and put ISIL on the defensive and its stronghold Raqqah under pressure.

Those examples demonstrate again that where we have a credible ground force, working in a coordinated way with the coalition air campaign, ISIL has suffered. That is what makes the third line of effort, developing the capacity and capabilities of local forces, so important. Indeed, we know from recent experience that success against ISIL requires capable local ground forces. We know from our history in the region that putting U.S. combat troops on the ground as a substitute for local forces will not produce enduring results.

That is why we are bolstering Iraq's security forces and building moderate, vetted Syrian opposition forces. But both of these efforts need strengthening.

In Iraq, the Iraqi security forces were severely degraded after four divisions dissolved and Mosul fell a year ago this June. Our efforts to build partner capacity and advise and assist ongoing operations involve around 3,550 American personnel at 6 locations around the country. Their training work has been slowed, however, by a lack of trainees. As of June 30th, we have only received enough trainees to be able to train about 8,800 Iraqi army soldiers and Peshmerga forces, in addition to some 2,000 CTS personnel. Another 4,000 soldiers, including 600 CTS personnel, are in training. I have told Iraqi leaders that while the United States is open to supporting Iraq more than we already are, we must also see a greater commitment from all parts of the Iraqi Government.

We are also in the early stages of our train and equip mission in Syria. 3 months into our program, training is underway, and we are working to screen and vet almost 7,000 volunteers to ensure that they are committed to fighting ISIL, pass a counterintelligence screening, and meet standards prescribed by U.S. law regarding the law of armed conflict and necessitated by operations. As of July 3rd, we are currently training about 60 fighters. This number is much smaller than we had hoped for at this point, partly because of the vetting standards I just described.

But we know this program is essential. We need a partner on the ground in Syria to assure ISIL's lasting defeat. As training progresses, we are learning more about the opposition groups and building important relationships, which increases our ability to attract recruits and provides valuable intelligence for counter-ISIL operations.

We are also working to equip vetted local forces. In Iraq, after earlier delays, we are expediting delivery of essential equipment and materiel to the Iraqi Security Forces and working with the Government of Iraq to ensure this equipment is quickly passed to Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni tribal forces. In Syria, we will begin equipping forces as soon as they complete training.

We are constantly assessing this approach. We did so after the fall of Ramadi, continued through yesterday with President Obama at the Pentagon. The strategy is the right one, but its execution can and will be strengthened, especially on the ground.

In Iraq, we are focused on increasing participation in and throughput of our training facilities. An example of this is our effort at Taqaddum, which has been noted, in Anbar Province, where we recently deployed approximately 350 of the additional 450 American personnel authorized.

We assessed our presence at this military base would provide access to thousands of previously unreachable Sunni tribesmen. This is in support of the Iraqi Government's own initiative to increase outreach to the Anbar tribes. As of mid-June, the Iraqi Government has enrolled and armed an initial group of 800 Sunni fighters at Taqaddum, and we are supporting the Iraqi training of 500 additional fighters now at Taqaddum. The Iraqis have already identified 500 more trainees that will follow the current group, and we will continue to work to ensure that these Sunni fighters, which are critical to the success of our campaign, have the training and equipment needed to effectively fight ISIL. I should also note that the Anbar operations center is located at Taqaddum, which is an-

other reason for that particular geography, so that we can advise and assist the Iraqi commanders there commanding Sunni forces.

In Syria, we seek to capitalize on the recent successes in Kobani and Tal Abyad and continue to strike ISIL's nerve center in Raqqah. At the same time, we are looking for ways to streamline our train and equip program's vetting process, which I noted earlier, to get more recruits into the training pipeline. We are also refining our curriculum, expanding our outreach to the moderate opposition, and incorporating lessons learned from the first training class. I am happy to speak about that more.

In conclusion, I sought to describe to you clearly the strategy, DOD's execution of its critical lines of effort, and where our execution can and will and must be strengthened.

Achieving ISIL's lasting defeat will require continued commitment, steady leadership from the United States and our global coalition, hard work by our men and women in uniform, essential complementary and synchronized efforts along the other seven lines of effort and, most importantly, commitment and sacrifice by Iraqis and Syrians. Together and with your continuing support for the men and women of DOD, for which we are ever grateful, we will achieve ISIL's lasting defeat.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Carter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee: thank you for the invitation and for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

As all of you know, there is high demand for American leadership in the world—from Asia, where I saw some of you in May, to Europe, where I was two weeks ago. The Obama Administration and the members of this committee have helped ensure the United States meets that demand. Thank you.

COUNTER-ISIL LINES OF EFFORT

The same is true in the Middle East, where we are standing by our friends, like Israel, working to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and confronting ISIL, which is the subject of this hearing. It was also the subject of a meeting yesterday at the Pentagon where President Obama, Chairman Dempsey, and I discussed our counter-ISIL campaign with senior defense and interagency leaders. We all agreed that ISIL presents a grave threat. And that it must be—and will be—dealt a lasting defeat.

That is our objective, which is shared by a global coalition that reflects both the world-wide consensus on the need to counter ISIL and the practical requirement for others to do their part. The administration's strategy to achieve that objective—as the Joint Chiefs' doctrinal definition of strategy puts it—integrates all our nation's strengths and instruments of power. And it is executed through nine, synchronized lines of effort.

The first, and arguably most, critical line of effort is the political one, which is led by the State Department. This line involves building more effective, inclusive, and multi-sectarian governance in Iraq.

At the same time, the United States continues to work diplomatically to bring about a political transition from Bashar al-Assad to a more inclusive government with which we can also work to defeat ISIL.

The next two lines of effort are interconnected—to deny ISIL safe haven, and to build partner capacity in Iraq and Syria. Both are led by DOD, which, alongside coalition partners, is conducting an air campaign, advising and assisting Iraqi Security Forces on the ground, and training and equipping vetted local forces in Iraq and for Syria.

Before I go on, let me say that these first three political and military lines of effort must be in sync. That's a challenge, but one that we are working through with our partners in the interagency, in the coalition, and on the ground.

The fourth line of effort is enhancing intelligence collection on ISIL, led by the National Counterterrorism Center. The fifth line of effort, disrupting ISIL's finances, is co-led by Treasury and State.

Lines of effort six and seven, both co-led by State and the National Counterterrorism Center, are to counter ISIL's messaging and disrupt the flow of foreign fighters to and from ISIL, both of which are critical in today's connected and networked world. The eighth line of effort, providing humanitarian support to those affected by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, is led by State and USAID.

Finally, the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and the Department of Justice are working together to protect the homeland—the ninth line of effort—by disrupting terrorist threats. In addition to our full-spectrum cooperative relationship with DHS and other law enforcement agencies, DOD personnel continue to strike ISIL elements in Iraq and Syria.

The effective execution of all nine of these lines of effort by the United States and its coalition partners is necessary to ensure ISIL's lasting defeat.

I want to briefly add that there are important classified dimensions to our approach to ISIL and to the Middle East more broadly, Mr. Chairman, that we won't be able to discuss in this setting.

EXECUTION OF DOD'S LINES OF EFFORT

Let me turn to the execution of the two lines of effort on which DOD leads, which our personnel have been performing with the excellence we all expect of the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

American service members, and their coalition partners, have conducted over 5,000 airstrikes. That air campaign has produced some clear tactical results: limiting ISIL's freedom of movement, constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters, and degrading its command and control. Coalition air support has also enabled gains by local forces in Iraq and Syria, including Syrian Kurdish and Arab forces, who recently took the key border town of Tal Abyad from ISIL, cut one of its key lines of communication and supply, and put ISIL on the defensive and its stronghold in Raqqah under pressure.

Those examples demonstrate, again, that where we have had a credible ground force working in a coordinated way with the coalition air campaign, ISIL has suffered. That is what makes the third line of effort—developing the capacity and capabilities of local ground forces—so important. Indeed, we know from recent experience that success against ISIL requires capable local ground forces. And we know from our history in the region that putting U.S. combat troops on the ground as a substitute for local forces will not produce enduring results.

That's why we're bolstering Iraq's security forces and building moderate, vetted Syrian opposition forces. But both of these efforts need strengthening.

In Iraq, the Iraqi security forces were severely degraded after four divisions dissolved and Mosul fell a year ago this June. Our efforts to build partner capacity and advise and assist ongoing operations involve around 3,550 American personnel at six locations around the country. Their training work has been slowed, however, by a lack of trainees: as of June 30, we've only received enough trainees to be able to train about 8,800 Iraqi Army soldiers and Peshmerga forces, in addition to some 2,000 CTS personnel. Another 4,000 soldiers, including 600 CTS personnel, were in training. I've told Iraqi leaders that while the United States is open to supporting Iraq more than we already are, we must see a greater commitment from all parts of the Iraqi government.

We're also in the early stages of our train-and-equip mission in Syria. Three months into our program, training is underway, and we are working to screen and vet almost 7,000 volunteers to ensure they are committed to fighting ISIL, pass a counterintelligence screening, and meet standards prescribed by U.S. law and necessitated by operations. As of July 3, we are currently training about 60 fighters. This number is much smaller than we hoped for at this point, partly because of the vetting standards I just described.

But we know this program is essential: we need a partner on the ground in Syria to assure ISIL's lasting defeat. And, as training progresses, we are learning more about the opposition groups and building important relationships, which increases our ability to attract recruits and provides valuable intelligence for counter-ISIL operations.

We are also working to equip vetted local forces. In Iraq, after earlier delays, we're expediting delivery of essential equipment and materiel to the Iraqi Security Forces—and working with the Government of Iraq to ensure this equipment is quickly passed to Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni tribal forces. In Syria, we will begin equipping forces as they complete training.

STRENGTHENING EXECUTION

We are constantly assessing our approach—we did so after the fall of Ramadi, and continued through yesterday with President Obama at the Pentagon. The strategy is the right one, but its execution can and will be strengthened . . . especially on the ground.

In Iraq, we're focused on increasing participation in and throughput of our training facilities. An example of this is our effort at Taqqadum in Anbar Province, where we recently deployed approximately 350 of the additional 450 American personnel authorized.

While not yet at full operating capacity, we assessed our presence at this Iraqi military base would provide access to thousands of previously unreachable Sunni tribesmen. This is in support of the Iraqi government's own initiative to increase outreach to the Anbar tribes. As of mid-June, the Iraqi government has enrolled and armed an initial group of 800 Sunni fighters at Taqaddum, and we are supporting the Iraqi training of 500 additional fighters now at Taqaddum. The Iraqis have already identified 500 more trainees that will follow the current group, so we are pleased with our early efforts. We will continue to work to ensure that these Sunni fighters, which are critical to the success of our campaign, have the training and equipment needed to effectively fight ISIL.

In Syria, we seek to capitalize on recent successes in Kobane and Tal Abyad and continue to strike ISIL's nerve center in Raqqah. At the same time, we are looking for ways to streamline our train and equip program's vetting process to get more recruits into the training pipeline. We are also refining our curriculum, expanding our outreach to the moderate opposition, and incorporating lessons learned from the first training class.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have sought to describe to you clearly our strategy, the Department of Defense's execution of its critical lines of effort, and where our execution can—and will—be strengthened.

Achieving ISIL's lasting defeat will require continued commitment . . . steady leadership—from the United States and our global coalition . . . hard work by our men and women in uniform . . . essential complementary and synchronized efforts along the other seven lines of effort . . . and, most importantly, commitment and sacrifice by brave Iraqis and Syrians. Together, and with your continuing support for the men and women of the Department of Defense, for which we are ever grateful, we will achieve ISIL's lasting defeat.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. General Dempsey?

STATEMENT OF GEN MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

General DEMPSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Reed and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to come back and to chat with you today about the military component of our strategy against ISIL.

Our starting point has to be the strategic picture in context. I have said before that the global security environment is as uncertain as I have ever seen it. The world is rapidly changing everywhere, and we are seeing significant shifts in an already complex strategic landscape. ISIL is one of many concerns. As the chairman mentioned, we are contending with Russia's revanchism in eastern Europe, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, Iran's malign activities in the Middle East, technical advancements by North Korea, rising aggression of non-state networks, and a rapidly leveling playing field in cyber and in space. While our potential adversaries grow stronger, many of our allies are becoming increasingly dependent on the United States and on our assistance, and some of our comparative military advantages have begun to erode. What

makes this uniquely complicated is that these trends are manifesting themselves simultaneously.

Within the Middle East, I characterize three converging sets of complexity.

First, several governments are struggling for political legitimacy because they are not sufficiently pluralistic or they are not sufficiently accountable to their citizens.

Second, the centuries old Sunni/Shia struggle is very evident. Weak states are less able to assert independence amid the tug of war between sectarian regional powers.

Third, we are seeing rising competition between moderate and radical elements of Islam, and ISIL and others are taking advantage of that competition.

Within this evolving global context, the role the U.S. military is taking against the trans-regional threat of ISIL is appropriately matched to the complexity of the environment and is at a level of effort that is sustainable over time.

Military power alone, as we have said, will not solve ISIL. I do not think anyone here would disagree with that. All nine lines of effort need to be considered in the aggregate. This campaign focuses on actively reinforcing and hardening our partners in the region who must and in most cases are taking responsibility for their own security, and that is an important point. Enduring stability cannot be imposed in the Middle East from the outside in. The fight is enabled by the coalition, but it must be owned by those regional stakeholders.

It bears repeating that this is the beginning of a complex, nonlinear campaign that will require a sustained effort over an extended period of time. We have to be just as agile as the network of terrorists we face. We are constantly evaluating our approach and making sure we are resourcing it appropriately, balanced with our other global commitments.

But 4 years and counting of budget uncertainty have made this balance distinctly harder.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you, General.

Mr. Secretary, let me clear up a couple of points before we get into the strategy. You have stated before you would recommend a veto of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to the President. Is that your position?

Secretary CARTER. He restated his position yesterday, and I support it. I am happy to give the reasons for that, if you would like, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Sure, but you might answer also when you answer, do you choose between fully funding the President's defense budget request with Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding or funding defense at sequestration levels?

Secretary CARTER. Well, the short answer is I am hoping we can do better than that.

My view has not changed since I came up here a few months ago on this issue. The chairman alluded to the problem. I very much hope that a way will be found to come together and get beyond the gridlock that we have and to give us a budget, a normal budget

process, that provides a stable runway for the Department. I will explain why that is so important.

We have been going 1 year at a time budgetarily now for several years straight, and it is extremely disruptive to the operations of the Department. It is managerially inefficient because we are doing this herky-jerky process. It is difficult to have a multiyear national defense strategy, which we must have, with a 1-year-at-a-time perspective. It is difficult to run large programs, shipbuilding programs, aircraft programs efficiently in a 1-year-at-a-time budget.

I also believe, Mr. Chairman, that our people deserve better. That is, they need a horizon in front of them—our military people and their families.

Last, I travel around the world, as you all do, and it is embarrassing that we cannot in successive years now pull ourselves together before an overall budget approach that allows us to do what we need to do, which is we program in a multiyear manner, not in a 1-year-at-a-time manner.

So for all those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I just appeal. It is not something that I have any particular expertise in, and it is obviously much bigger than defense because, as noted, the success of this campaign and the success of our National security hinges importantly, very importantly on this Department, the Department that I lead, but also on law enforcement and homeland security and diplomacy.

Chairman MCCAIN. I understand.

Secretary CARTER. So I am hoping, Mr. Chairman, that we can do better than that choice and that we do not continue down what I have called a road to nowhere.

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, you may be presented with that choice, and I would also add this is an authorizing bill. The Appropriations Committee is where the money is.

But just very quickly, in your confirmation hearing, you stated in response to my question about whether we should arm the Ukrainians, quote, I am very much inclined in that direction, Mr. Chairman, because I think we need to support the Ukrainians in defending themselves. The nature of those arms I cannot say right now. I have not confirmed with—but I am inclined in the direction providing with arms, including to get to what your question is, lethal arms. Do you still have that position?

Secretary CARTER. I have not changed my thinking in those months, and I had the occasion to talk to the Ukrainian Minister of Defense just the other week——

Chairman MCCAIN. Fine. I am just asking whether you still want to support them—arming them or not. That is a pretty straightforward question.

Secretary CARTER. We are considering that. We have not made a decision in that regard.

Chairman MCCAIN. Are you still——

Secretary CARTER. We are providing——

Chairman MCCAIN. Are you still inclined to providing arms to the Ukrainians? Please, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary CARTER. Yes. I have not changed my view.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you. That was it. That was a simple answer to a simple question.

Secretary CARTER. But if I can just——

Chairman MCCAIN. No, because I have only got 2 minutes left. Thank you.

Five thousand airstrikes have been conducted, 75 percent of the airstrikes return without having dropped a weapon. If there was ever a compelling argument for forward air controllers, it seems to me that is the case.

You mentioned we are currently training about 60 fighters. I got to tell you after 4 years, Mr. Secretary, that is not a very impressive number. Is it true that with these people that you are training and equipping to fight in Syria—is it true that you are telling them they are only there to fight ISIS and not Bashar Assad? Is that true?

Secretary CARTER. Yes. We are telling them that we are arming and training them in the first instance to go after ISIL and not the Assad regime. That is our priority and these are people who are inclined in that direction and come from areas that have been overrun by ISIL——

Chairman MCCAIN. So in other words, if they are barrel-bombed by Bashar Assad, they are not——

Secretary CARTER. I think we have some obligation to them once they are inserted in the field.

Chairman MCCAIN. Is that to defend them against barrel-bombing?

Secretary CARTER. Well, that decision will be made when we introduce fighters into the field.

Chairman MCCAIN. That is of small comfort to those people you are recruiting right now that that decision will be made later on. Is that fair to these young men to say we are sending you in to fight ISIS only, and by the way, we will decide on the policy whether to defend you if you are barrel-bombed?

Secretary CARTER. They know that we will provide support to them. Exactly what kind of support——

Chairman MCCAIN. Does that mean you will defend them against Bashar Assad's barrel-bombing? Mr. Secretary, this is not a very pleasant exchange. I would like to have answers to questions. Will we tell them that we will defend them against Bashar Assad's barrel-bombing?

Secretary CARTER. I think we have an obligation to help them——

Chairman MCCAIN. Will we tell them that?

Secretary CARTER. We have not told them that.

Chairman MCCAIN. You have not told them that. So you are recruiting people and not telling them that they are going to defend them because you have not made the decision yet. Yet, you want to train them quickly and send them in.

Now, there is success on the part of an outfit called the Army of Conquest, which is funded and trained and equipped mostly by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and perhaps others. They are succeeding. If there are battlefield games, they are achieving them. Does the United States have any relationship with that outfit? Because they are fighting against Bashar Assad as well as ISIS.

Secretary CARTER. I will have to get back to you on the answer to that question because who has that contact is something that we would have to discuss separately, Mr. Chairman.

[The information referred to follows:]

The Department of Defense does not maintain a relationship with the Army of Conquest, which is an extremist-led alliance that includes Ahrar al-Sham and the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusrah Front. The Department is open to training a variety of Syrian oppositionist groups as long as they meet United States vetting standards and are willing to work within the Department's training, equipping, and support program, consistent with Section 1209 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015.

Chairman MCCAIN. The answer is——

Secretary CARTER. Can I go back——

Chairman MCCAIN. Go ahead.

Secretary CARTER. Can I go back, Mr. Chairman? You mentioned the question of air sorties and which fraction of them result in strikes, and I would like to explain those numbers to you a bit.

In the case where the airstrikes are mounted—and I will ask the Chairman to elaborate further on this. In the case where the airstrikes are conducted in a deliberate manner, that is, one knows at the time the aircraft embarks on the sortie what the target will be—in those cases, 93 percent of the time they are concluding the sortie.

When it comes to dynamic targeting, the fraction is much lower. It is about 37 percent. The reason for that is that in the case of dynamic targeting, by its nature the aircraft is deployed with the expectation that a target of opportunity—let us say something that is moving on the ground or a developing tactical situation will provide the opportunity for a strike. That does not happen all the time, but it does happen about 37 percent of the time, a fraction, I should note, that is much higher than it was in Afghanistan where we did the same thing. We routinely flew sorties in order to capitalize upon fleeting opportunities or developing opportunities. So our experience here is, in fact, better than it is in Afghanistan. But anyway, that is what explains——

Chairman MCCAIN. Any experienced pilot will tell you that if you have a forward air controller on the ground to identify those targets, then the number of targets hit is dramatically increased. We have no forward air controllers on the ground, and that, I can tell you, is incredibly frustrating to the young pilots who are flying these 6½ hour sorties who feel that they are not achieving anything, Mr. Secretary. You might want to talk to them as well since they are the ones that are doing the fighting.

Secretary CARTER. If I can address the question of JTACS, I think that is a fundamental one, Mr. Chairman, and since you have raised it, let me go back to the fundamentals of the strategy which are to support capable and motivated ground forces while we fight when we find them. We are supporting such capable and effective ground forces. For example, just to give one example, the Kurds in northern Syria now.

Chairman MCCAIN. Mr. Secretary, my time is way up. But that has nothing to do with not having forward air controllers on the ground. I hate to cut you short but we are 3 minutes——

Secretary CARTER. I am just saying we do not rule that out and our strategy does not——

Chairman MCCAIN. You never rule it out. It has not happened. Senator Reed?

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I was struck by your statement. You said that the first and most critical line with our efforts is a political one led by the State Department. In your colloquy with the chairman, you pointed out that there are challenges with respect to year-to-year OCO funding that is being proposed. But State does not even have an option to that source of funding.

So are you concerned that they might be so resource-deprived under the Budget Control Act that they could not be the primary—

Secretary CARTER. I am. The State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, other agencies that are critical to protecting us against ISIL and other threats—they need resources too. So that is another reason why I appeal for an overall budget perspective. I realize it involves lots of moving parts and would require a major coming together to release the gridlock of the last few years, but I really appeal for that not just for my own Department, but for the rest of the national security establishment. I think it is critical.

Senator REED. Shifting now to the training effort in Iraq, one of the first issues was the composition of the provisional forces that rallied a year ago to try to defend Baghdad. It is overwhelming Shia. Now we are beginning to see Sunnis appear.

First, is that the deliberate cooperation of the government in Baghdad? Are they finally getting the message that they have to have the support of the Sunni community? Second, are you beginning to see a trend that is a positive one in the sense of the overall participation of Sunnis?

Secretary CARTER. We see the commitment of Prime Minister Abadi, so different from the behavior of his predecessor, to engage in a multi-sectarian way in the fight against ISIL. That includes the Kurds and it includes Sunnis. Now, that has gone slowly, which explains why the numbers are small. We expect them to grow. We hope they grow. But what we need from the Iraqi Government is the enrollment of Sunnis in the Iraqi Security Forces and the commitment of the Iraqi Government to pay them, to equip them with our help which we provide.

Then to get back to the chairman's question about direct support to them, when we have effective ground forces under the control of the Iraqi Government, we are prepared to do more to support them, but we need to have those effective ground forces because local forces on the ground, we know from experience, is the only way to create a lasting defeat of ISIL. That is what the strategy is all about.

Senator REED. General Dempsey, can you comment on your perception of the situation in terms of Sunni forces in Anbar Province particularly and the government in Baghdad's relationship with them, expediting weapons, providing support more than rhetorically but actually?

General DEMPSEY. I can, Senator. Thanks.

As the Secretary mentioned, the good intentions of Prime Minister Abadi have not always been met with activity at echelons or levels of bureaucracy beneath him. So there was a period of time when, frankly, we had the capability to bring them in but we could

not generate the recruits. That situation has improved I think probably as a result of their failure in Ramadi, and what we see now is a renewed effort by the prime minister to empower his ISF, his Iraqi Security Force, leaders to reach out to the Sunni tribes and to arm them. It is our policy to do that through the central government, not directly because our objective is a unified Iraq. If it became clear that that was not going to happen, we would have to reconsider the campaign.

Senator REED. One of the observations is the leadership at the tactical level all the way up to brigade and division of the Iraqi Security Forces continually seems to be unimpressive. Are there active changes going on right now to ensure that the leadership at the brigade/division level is competent? In fact, it is just startling because it appears that ISIL—in fact, there was some indication there were former Ba'athist officers operating with them—are much more operationally and tactically capable than the Iraqi Security Forces. Your comments.

General DEMPSEY. I do, sir. You know, we tend to look at the tactical shifting and who owns how much territory and how many airstrikes, for example. But we also need to watch Iraqi leadership changes. Recently we received an open source report that their chief of defense would be retired. We consider that to be a very positive thing. There are issues up and down the chain of command.

We also watch carefully the distribution of their budget, how much money is going into the ministry of defense, how much is going into the popular mobilization force, how oil is being generated and the revenues shared. We watch the influence of the ministry of defense, whether the ISF is the dominant force for the Government of Iraq or whether that dominance is shifting to the popular mobilization forces, the relationship of the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police, and we watch the activities of the Shia militia. In every case, there are positive indications, and in every case there are indications that concern us.

Senator REED. Quickly, Mr. Secretary, because there is just a moment left. The issues come up about the training and equipping of forces going into Syria—I would presume the General might want to comment also—that part of the plan to insert these forces would be to protect them as much as possible from any type of response, to focus them on ISIL but also to put them in places in the country where they would be much less likely to be engaged. But if they were engaged, they would not only have the right to defend themselves, but my presumption would be we would assist them in defending themselves from attack. Is that a fair estimate?

Secretary CARTER. That is my feeling. That is what I said, that I think we have an obligation to do so. You are right. I do not expect that occasion to arise anytime soon.

To get to the chairman's point earlier, in the very first vetting, the thing, Mr. Chairman, that made the numbers so small—and I said the number is 60, and I can look out at your faces and you have the same reaction I do, which is that that is an awfully small number. Why is that number so small, this in the first class? The reason for that has to do with the criteria we apply—and some of this is the law—to these recruits. We do counterintelligence screen-

ing. We make sure that they, for example, are not going to pose a green on blue threat to their trainers, that they do not have any history of atrocities. These are all things that are required of us, and that they are willing to engage in the campaign in a way that is compliant with the law of armed conflict. All of this is the legal and I would say principled—I am not arguing with it—policies of the United States as far as those fighters are concerned. That is why 60 of them got out the other end of the process.

Now, General Nagata, who is doing the training—I indicated he has got 7,000 more—expects that we will do better as we get better, and that number 60, which is not impressive, will get larger over time as he learns more, to get to the chairman's earlier point, about the groups that are willing to cooperate with us. But when we do get them, they will deserve our support and we will give our support to them. It is going to take some time, obviously, to get the numbers up to the point where they can really have an effect.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Secretary CARTER. I should point out, by the way, while we are talking about fighting in Syria, while these numbers are small, this particular train and equip—I just need to point out that there are other capable ground forces fighting both the regime and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), some of which we can support and do support with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), airstrikes, and so forth. I gave the example of the Syrian Kurds. But we would like to see more, and we are trying to get better at training them because the number 60, as you all recognize, is not an impressive number.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Sessions?

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, this is a tough job you have undertaken, but as my wife reminds me when I complain, do not blame me. You asked for the job. But I am not sure you asked for it. You were asked to take the job.

But at any rate, Senator McCain's opening comment is exceedingly important. It goes to the key of what we are here for. The whole purpose of this hearing is how to confront and stop ISIS and the Levant. So we want to talk about that, not all these other strategies, General Dempsey, other threats around the world. We need a strategy on this problem and I am deeply disappointed. I do not see the confidence in your testimony or General Dempsey's testimony. I believe we are carrying out a strategy that the President has, and I do not believe it has sufficient respect for the use of military force necessary to be successful. I mean, I hate to be a critic about this. This is important.

Senator McCain warned in 2011 we should not pull out all our troops and we needed to remain engaged in that country. He has also warned you if we do it in Afghanistan, the same thing is liable to happen there, both of which would be tragedies of monumental proportions considering how much we have invested, the soldiers General Dempsey led in Iraq.

So I am not happy about this. I think "delusion" is a word that is too accurate. So I just wanted to say that here at the beginning. I hope we will get into more details about what you plan to do to

reverse this action. At some point, the President is going to have to change his mind, it seems to me. He cannot just function based on a campaign promise when the reality is different.

Secretary CARTER. Would you like me to address that? It is a very fair question. Let me just go back to the issue of the strategy, and then I will say something about Afghanistan.

The strategy for defeating ISIL on the ground in Syria and Iraq is to train and then enable local forces. That takes some time.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I am aware of that. General Dempsey was training the Iraqi forces 8 years ago. I visited him in Iraq. That was his primary responsibility. We have been training them for nearly a decade and that is not the problem right now. I think the problem is confidence within the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi soldiers that they are going to be supported and that they are going to be victorious. If they had that confidence, you would get more recruits.

Secretary CARTER. I agree with that, and that is what was lacking under Maliki. You are absolutely right.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, you just said the strategy—I believe you used the word "strategy"—is to support capable and motivated ground forces where we find them. Well, I think General Stewart a few months ago testified, the new Defense Intelligence Agency head, who was there in the al Anbar region and led the effort that the forces—when they turned it around in Iraq. General Dempsey, you remember that effort. He said, when pressed—I felt that he was reluctant because it was not the administration policy. But he acknowledged that when you have embedded soldiers, forward observers, the United States forces embedded with troops moving out into combat situations, that those Iraqi troops will perform better. Do you agree with that, General Dempsey?

General DEMPSEY. I agree that there are points on the battlefield where the presence of forward observers, JTACS, embedded, SOF forces, would make them more capable.

Senator SESSIONS. So is our strategy now—does it remain that we will not do that?

General DEMPSEY. I can tell you that I have not recommended it. Whether we do it or not, I am telling you that I have not recommended it, Senator. I can explain why, if you would like.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I would like to know why.

General DEMPSEY. Okay. Let us take the issue of airpower because it seems to be the most prominent one. At a similar period in the Afghanistan conflict in 2012, the number of aircraft that returned with their ordnance because there were not targets available on the ground was 83 percent. It is 65 percent in Iraq right now.

The JTACS and the special force observers are not a silver bullet to the destruction of ISIL. The silver bullet is getting the Iraqis to fight.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I totally agree with that. I just believe that if we had a few forces, a thousand forces, in Mosul, Mosul never would have fallen. So now our policy is to try to take back this territory? What is the reluctance to use our special forces here?

This is what bothers me. I understand the problem in Syria and I am dubious about what we ought to do about Syria. I do not know. We probably should not have involved ourselves in Libya. But we committed our Nation in Iraq, General. We have been deeply committed for over a decade there. So is it now our policy that you are refusing to even allow special forces to be embedded with, say, two special forces with 600 Iraqi troops in a battalion? You are rejecting that idea?

General DEMPSEY. What I have recommended is that if we find a unit which is led and is responsive and has an offensive mission where we can enable them or increase their likelihood of success, then I will make that recommendation. But to restore or to put embedded advisors in on a habitual basis, the environment is just not simply set to do that. By the way, it is not reluctance. We have 1,600 pilots flying over Iraq and Syria today. We have 3,500 boots-on-the-ground doing train, advise, and assist.

Senator SESSIONS. So if we had a few advisors in the Iraqi battalions, you are saying that that would not make a positive impact on their morale and their capabilities to actually win?

General DEMPSEY. What I am saying, Senator, is that for a brief, temporal tactical gain, we should wait until we see a strategic opportunity to do that.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I would think if we started having some wins, ISIS would have fewer recruits and we would have better morale with the Iraqi recruits too and they would fight better. It is the chicken and egg perhaps, but I think it is very important. I hope you will reevaluate that and recommend to the President we do that because I think without that, we are not going to be effective.

Thank you very much.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Manchin?

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to both of you for being here and the service to our country. I appreciate it very much.

As you can tell, this is a pretty sensitive subject and it is a very concerning subject to all of us.

As I go around the State of West Virginia, my little State—it is a very hawkish State and a very patriotic State and a lot of veterans—I speak to all of them. They are confused right now. They really are and you heard the frustration coming out.

But basically Iraq is not a united country. You have the Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Kurds. I think, Secretary Carter, you have said that until they have the will—and I think, General Dempsey, you have said the same thing—until Iraq has the will to fight. But which group has the will to fight to defend the other group? That is what we are having a problem. I think it has been said, well, if you have a group that is fighting—and the Kurds want to fight—why do we still have to make them go through the Baghdad centralized government in order for them to get the weapons they need to defend themselves and be aggressive? So they are confused about that.

They are confused about in Syria trying to spend the money to find people to train, when you acknowledge that we only had 60 of them successful right now and the amount of effort we are

spending there. But yet, I think you said you had the Syrian Kurds that were fighting and some things of that sort.

I do not know and then I am asked the question. They said we continue to keep trying to train and arm the Iraqis, and it seems like all they are doing is supplying ISIL with the equipment that the Americans are giving them. When are we ever going to stop giving equipment to the people that will not defend it and fight for it?

So I guess talking at your level, are you talking to the White House about rethinking the whole Iraqi position as far as one centralized government, one Iraq, or maybe a separated Iraq?

Secretary CARTER. I think we are all aware that it is very difficult to govern Iraq in a multi-sectarian manner. We thought about all the alternatives to that. I think we all have actually for years, and I am sure all of you have as well. We are trying to assist Prime Minister Abadi in governing in a different way from the way Maliki governed which, as Senator Sessions noted, led to the disintegration of the Iraqi Security Forces, the sectarian coloration of them, and that is what ultimately led to their collapse in Sunni territory.

Senator MANCHIN. Secretary Carter, if I can ask this question also along those lines. I have been asked the question. You just reminded me. They said did we not see signs that Maliki was incompetent, that he would have gone strictly to a sectarian position, as he did, not for a strong, united Iraq. With all the people we have had there, did we not see that coming and could not have averted that from happening?

Secretary CARTER. I can only speak for myself in that regard. I was not closely involved in it at the time. I certainly had that concern about Mr. Maliki, and I know that many of you met with him. I met with him several times, and it was quite apparent to me.

Now, Prime Minister Abadi says he has a different intention, which is to govern Iraq from the center but in a decentralized enough way that the Kurds, the Sunnis, and the Shia each have enough space to carry on their own welfare in the way that they wish, but there is a single, integral Iraqi state. That is what he says he is working towards, and we are supporting him in that regard. That is why, for example, when we provide arms to the Kurds, we do it with the consent of the Iraqi Government in order to indicate that we support the idea of a single Iraqi Government in Baghdad but we also want the Kurds in the fight and armed. That has not delayed our arming of the Kurds.

Senator MANCHIN. It seems like the biggest problem we have is with the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Secretary CARTER. Then the Sunnis and the Shiites, and this is why it is so important to take the time to train a truly multi-sectarian Iraqi force. There are elements of the Iraqi forces that have that right character, for example, their CTS.

So our strategy, just to go to the beginning, is to train and equip those local forces. They are essential. Then we can help them. It is a chicken and egg thing except that you need to have the capable and motivated ground force. Then we can enable it rather than to substitute for it, which does not lead to a lasting result.

Senator MANCHIN. I would think, General Dempsey, it has been pointed out here that we have spent multiple years, 10 years plus, a trillion dollars, lost a lot of lives in Iraq, and we had 100,000 troops there at one time trying to train and defend and get them motivated. That did not work. So that is the hard question. I mean, how do you go home and answer that? How do I go home and answer that we are going to try this over again? Maybe we will do a better job of retraining. I think that was the frustration you have seen coming out of Senator Sessions.

General DEMPSEY. Well, sure, but I think it is probably worth mentioning that my judgment about how this will evolve over time is that it is a generational issue. It is trans-regional, Senator. There are elements of it in Afghanistan. We see it in Iraq and Syria. We see it in the Sinai. We see it in Libya and we cannot just focus like a laser beam on one part of it. There has to be pressure to cross it. So what we are trying to do is achieve an enduring defeat, which means we have to work it through partners because they have more to gain and more to lose. Finally, we have to find a sustainable level of effort since I do believe this is a generational challenge.

Senator MANCHIN. I just think that basically my question would be, overall are we trying to defend the British lines that were drawn 100 years ago and putting people in a territory that they do not believe that that is their country? I mean, why are we forcing something upon people that do not want to accept it?

General DEMPSEY. I will just follow up with you. I also share that concern, that the Mideast will never be the Mideast again. So everything that I recommend to the Secretary and to the President is recommended with the intention of being flexible enough that we can build upon it if we do find that inclusive national unity government in Iraq or not.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. I cannot help but mention the situation was stabilized after the surge and we had won. We predicted if everybody was pulled out, that the situation would descend into chaos. It is a fact that thanks to General Petraeus and the surge and great sacrifice, the Iraq war was won. To ignore that in that conversation, General Dempsey, is to me intellectually dishonest.

Senator Ayotte?

Senator REED. Mr. Chairman, just for the record, President George W. Bush signed an agreement with the Maliki Government to withdraw all forces.

Chairman MCCAIN. We will have this debate later on, but it was clear that we could have and everybody knows they could have and the people who were there know they could have.

Senator Ayotte?

Senator AYOTTE. I want to thank both of you for being here, for your service to the country. We appreciate it.

I wanted to ask you, Secretary Carter. You had said in answer to Senator Manchin that, in fact, the arms that we are providing to the Kurds, we are doing so with the consent of the Iraqi Central Government. Does that mean we are doing it directly or are we going still through the Iraqi Central Government?

Secretary CARTER. First of all, we are not the only ones. But we and others basically convey the weapons directly to the Kurds, but we inform the Iraqi Government and get their formal consent to it. So it does not delay the arming of the Kurds. We are trying to stick up for basically the central government.

Senator AYOTTE. Because previously we had heard complaints about it originally going through the Iraqi Central Government and then to the Kurds. So I am glad to hear that we are directly providing it to the Kurds, letting the Iraqi Central Government know what we are providing.

Secretary CARTER. Mr. Barzhani was here in town. You may have met with him a few weeks ago. He was grateful for what was being provided, and he noted that the delays, which was the principal problem that were experienced early on, are not being experienced now either in the shipment of our equipment or that of others, for example, the Germans providing anti-tank munitions, which they value very much.

But we are trying to stick up for the principle that Iraq is a single, unitary, multi-sectarian state, and difficult as that may be, that is much preferred to the alternative, which is the sectarian disintegration of Iraq.

Senator AYOTTE. Let me follow up. So clearly the Kurds are capable and motivated. At this point, are they receiving all of the weapons that they have asked for? Because as I understood it, ISIS unfortunately has captured some of the armaments that we left in Iraq and some of them heavy armaments. The Kurds are quite effective, but it is hard if you are out-armed. Are they now receiving—what have they requested that we are not providing? If so, why?

Secretary CARTER. I will let Chairman Dempsey answer that.

Again, just to say it is not just us. I think there are more than 12 nations overall arming the Kurds. I noted I was with the German defense minister over in Germany last week, and she was providing to the Kurds these critical anti-tank weapons of a kind the Germans make that is especially effective. So it is not just us. The Kurds are an example of what we are looking for, which is an effective ground force that will stick up for itself, hold together, take and hold territory. That is why we are providing them with support.

Senator AYOTTE. So we agree with that. I think that there has been broad agreement on that, and so we just want to make sure that they have what they need.

General DEMPSEY. Senator, I am not aware of anything that they have asked for that we have not provided. We probably have not provided in the quantity that they may have desired, MRAPs for example, and we are working to address those quantity issues.

Senator AYOTTE. I wanted to follow up on a different topic because, General Dempsey, you mentioned in your testimony some of the other challenges we face around the world, including the malign influence of Iran. Recently—I read it today in the press that, in fact, Iran was actually pushing for the lifting of the arms embargo at the UN and also the resolution that bans Iran from developing ballistic missiles. So I wanted to get both of your thoughts on those two issues. As we look at Iran's malign influence in the

region, as far as I can tell, we still see Iran not only supporting the Assad regime, Hezbollah, the Huthi rebels, and also we have heard reports on the Taliban undermining our interests. So your thoughts on those two issues?

Secretary CARTER. I will start, Marty, if it is okay.

You are right. I cannot speak to what is going on in the negotiations. Secretary Kerry is conducting those negotiations. But I agree with your perspective, namely that we have serious concerns with Iranian malign activities outside of the nuclear issue, which is the focus of those talks. It is in several different locations around the region. Whatever happens as far as an agreement over the nuclear program with respect to Iran is concerned, I think we—and certainly I feel this—have a clear duty in DOD, first of all, to defend our friends and allies, keep a robust posture in the Gulf—our friends and allies, to include especially Israel—maintain our robust posture, and continue to maintain the military means to strike Iran's nuclear program if we were ordered to do so. We work on all three of those things, and we will work on them whether or not an agreement is reached in Geneva.

Senator AYOTTE. So just to be clear, Mr. Secretary, it does not sound like, based on what you are saying, given their malign activities in the region, that it would be a good idea to lift the arms embargo right now on what Iran receives. Would you agree with me on that?

Secretary CARTER. No. We want them to continue to be isolated as a military and limited in terms of the kind of equipment and materiel they are able to get.

Senator AYOTTE. Also, can you explain to us why is it important that we also continue to stop them from having an ICBM program? Because we know they have one.

Secretary CARTER. Yes. Well, the reason that we want to stop Iran from having an ICBM program is that the "I" in ICBM stands for "intercontinental," which means having the capability to fly from Iran to the United States, and we do not want that. That is why we oppose ICBMs.

Mr. Chairman, do you want to add anything on any of those points?

General DEMPSEY. Just to answer your question because you posed it to both of us. Under no circumstances should we relieve pressure on Iran relative to ballistic missile capabilities and arms trafficking.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you.

I also just wanted to point out something, Secretary Carter, when the chairman had asked you about the defense authorization. One thing that I think needs to be pointed out, the President has said he will veto it. The defense authorization received 71 votes in the Senate. I would describe that as very bipartisan. So it troubles me that he would seek to veto something that received 71 votes.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Donnelly?

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you.

I just got back from Iraq with Senator Kaine, who led our trip. One of the meetings we had was with a number of the Sunni tribal leaders, and some of them were from the Haditha area. In talking

to them, they said, we have stood with you. We have faith with you, but we have people who are now eating grass in our town. We have no food. We have no supplies, and we have been told the only airlifts that can come in would be on military transport. Is there anything you can do to help feed our people? So I wanted to put that before you to see if there is something we can do to be of aid to these individuals.

Secretary CARTER. I will say something about that and then ask the chairman if he wants to add.

First of all, I want to thank you, Senator Donnelly, also Senator Kaine, for traveling there. We appreciate it. On behalf of the 3,550 members of our Armed Forces that are in Iraq and conducting this fight, thank you for taking the time to go visit them this Fourth of July weekend.

The humanitarian situation is yet another tragic consequence of what has gone on in ISIL. It remains one of the coalition's efforts, as I indicated in my opening statement, to relieve the humanitarian situation. That is very difficult to do when there is not order and control on the ground. So this is why we need to get a security situation that is stable, ground forces that are capable of seizing territory, holding territory, and governing. That is the only way to get the humanitarian situation turned around either in Iraq or in Syria. It is very sad and it is tragic. In the case of Iraq, as has been noted, something brought about by the reemergence of sectarianism in a really tragic way.

Chairman, do you want to add anything?

General DEMPSEY. One of the reasons we went to Taqaddum Air Base, also locally called Habineyeh, is to advise and assist in the Anbar operations center, which is where these kind of issues should actually migrate through. You should be interested to know the Iraqis have the capability to address that. They have C–130J, state-of-the-art——

Senator DONNELLY. I know they do but they are not.

General DEMPSEY. Yes. Well, we will pass it to the guy who is embedded.

Senator DONNELLY. When you are hungry, your stomach does not tell you want Iraqi food or United States food. You just want help. One of the bonds created with these tribal leaders is they said, we have always felt we could count on you.

To follow up on that, as we look at Ramadi and other areas in the Iraqi armed forces, one of the great tragedies of this whole thing was that the number of ISIS fighters in Ramadi was extraordinarily insignificant in terms of the overall number, but the Iraqi forces headed the other way. So I wanted to hear your thoughts on making sure that the Iraqi forces know that there is no back door anymore. There is only one way through Ramadi and that is forward.

Secretary CARTER. I will say something about that, and then, Chairman, you may want to add.

The way you recount the fall of Ramadi is exactly correct. Ramadi needs to be retaken, and the way to do it is to have a force under the competent command and control of Iraqi Security Forces commanders, which has been a challenge, and a plan and the means to, as you say, make sure that they do not bog down and

they are able to take Ramadi and move through Ramadi. This will be a test of the competence of the Iraqi Security Forces, and it is a test that they must pass. Therefore, our and the coalition's involvement is to try to train and equip and support them to be successful, and we are going to take the time and encourage them to take the time so that the operation, when they do conduct it, is successful.

Senator DONNELLY. One of the side spin-offs, when it is successful and Ramadi is taken back, is that ISIS will then look for a quick PR claim somewhere else. So I just want to make sure that we are ready in surrounding towns and in surrounding areas, that when Ramadi falls, we know they are going to step somewhere else and that we have a plan in place to protect those other towns as well.

General DEMPSEY. The Ramadi campaign which about a month ago was about to be executed precipitously, actually with our help, is now a very deliberate campaign, first to isolate it and then to go back and recapture it with a supporting effort in Fallujah. So our presence in the Anbar operations center is allowing the Iraqi Security Forces to take a more deliberate campaign approach and to avoid the very toothpaste aspect of the way ISIL squirts around the battlefield when you squeeze it in one place and it turns up in another. But this is very much us helping them understand the threat and formulate a campaign to address it so that they get credit for it and that they become credible to the people of Al Anbar Province.

Senator DONNELLY. Well, as I am sure you know, the Sunni tribal leaders—they have a tremendous value for the relationship they have established over the years with the United States, established in blood and treasure. So what gives them confidence more than anything is knowing that not that our soldiers are in the front, not that our soldiers are in the combat, but that we are there to help guide and help provide advice and help provide a plan and help provide air cover is the other thing that they talked to us about. They said, you have no idea how our spirits soar when we see your air assets. So they want to make sure that all of that is going to be in place as we move forward. Then they are willing to buy in. If not, they feel their families are exposed.

One last thing I wanted to ask you—I see my time is running short—and that is in Syria. You do not have to answer this. I will ask it on a second round. The question comes up so when Assad goes, if Assad goes, how does the space get filled with people who we think can be of help as opposed to Nusra or ISIS? I know that is the tremendous challenge you have too. It seems like we are getting further behind the curve as opposed to in front of the curve on that question.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Cotton?

Senator COTTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, Mr. Chairman, thank you for appearing today, for your testimony.

I would like to associate myself with the remarks that Chairman McCain made earlier today about arming the Ukrainian Government. He and I traveled there last month, as far as east as we

could go to Dnipopetrovsk. We saw very brave and skilled soldiers. We saw them doing things like constructing unmanned aerial vehicles out of Styrofoam to meet their needs. In addition to the lethal aid they need, they also still need a substantial amount of nonlethal aid. Some soldiers have the improved first aid kits that our soldiers have been carrying overseas. Some soldiers have first aid kits that look like they came out of the prop scenes in MASH, in addition to radar systems and radios and so forth.

But moving on to the Islamic State, one point that I do not think has been discussed here today is the Islamic State in Egypt. There have been a series of spectacular terrorist attacks in the Sinai peninsula. The Islamic State takes credit for those attacks. We still have the multinational force and observers in the Sinai peninsula, almost 1,800 soldiers, 1,200 of which are American personnel.

Secretary Carter, General Dempsey, can you explain to us what steps we have taken to ensure that our troops in the Sinai peninsula are adequately protected and are working with the Egyptian security forces to not just defend themselves, to try to defeat the Islamic State in the Sinai peninsula?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you. Let me address the Ukraine part first, and then the Chairman can address Sinai.

First of all, thank you for going to Ukraine. I have been there many times. The government there and the people there, particularly in the western part of Ukraine—Vladimir Putin's conduct there has had the opposite of whatever effect he thought it might have in terms of attracting Ukraine in the direction of Russia. He has strengthened the feeling among Ukrainians, particularly in the western part of the country, that they want to have a future that they determine, that is not determined from outside.

To get to your point, we are constantly assessing—and this gets back to the chairman's earlier point—the kind of assistance that we provide to the Ukrainians. The principal kind of assistance, however—I will come back to the military part in a moment, but I cannot emphasize the importance of economic assistance to Ukraine, and that is largely in the hands of the Europeans and so also are the sanctions against Russia. That is really the main event, and I cannot emphasize enough the importance of that because that is mostly a matter for the European Union (EU) rather than the United States. We are less directly involved, but we certainly support the European Union (EU) both in its sanctions against Russia, which we share, but theirs are more important because their volume of trade is greater, and also their efforts to strengthen the Ukrainian Government and economy, support reform there and the independence of Ukraine.

I did talk to, as I mentioned, the defense minister there about what he needed, and his principal focus was on training. So as I said, we will constantly reassess that, but we are assessing that. I am open to what we do in the future. I have indicated that. I continue to indicate that. But his emphasis was on training, and we have trainers now in Yavoriv, which is the principal training range there. That is much appreciated. He was asking me and us for more of that kind of training. I think we will continue to do that and to support the Ukrainian military.

I should say that the defense minister of Ukraine used to be the interior minister, which is a very good combination because the Russian and separatist threat is a hybrid kind of threat, hybrid in the sense that it is signified by the little green men phenomenon, a combination of the exercise of malign influence through sort of KGB-type tactics on the one hand and battlefield operations on the other. He is somebody who really understands that kind of hybrid warfare. That is really where he wants our help.

Senator COTTON. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I do not mean to cut you off, but I do have other questions.

General DEMPSEY. On the MFO, about 9 months ago, anticipating and watching the intel stream about the radicalization of the Sinai and the fact that the Egyptian armed forces had moved resources to their western border, we actually did a joint staff integrated vulnerability assessment. As a result of that, we introduced Blue Force Tracker raid towers, changed movement techniques, enhanced their communications, put in some counter-mortar radars, things that you are very familiar with.

We also have been in touch with our Egyptian armed forces colleagues. They have increased the number of Egyptian—they have brought back Egyptian armed forces into the Sinai. They accompany us on our movements when we make them. Of course, we recently released some of the capabilities that have been withheld from them so that they could address their terrorist threat in the Sinai.

Senator COTTON. You are confident that American personnel in the Sinai currently has adequate protection against terrorist there?

General DEMPSEY. I am confident that they are adequately protected today, but I fully expect that threat to increase. In fact, I recently had a conversation with the Secretary about the future of the MFO mission which really has not changed in the last 50 years.

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

I would now like to move to the heart of the Middle East and the Islamic State. For the record, I think the Islamic State is a grave and growing threat. But until they develop their own ballistic missile program and until they have thousands of centrifuges and tons of uranium, I believe the Islamic Republic will be a graver threat than the Islamic State, that is, the Islamic Republic of Iran. My objections to the course we have taken in the nuclear negotiations are well known, and I will not repeat them here. But I will note that Iran remains an anti-American, terror-sponsoring outlaw regime that is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans from Lebanon to Iraq, Afghanistan.

General Dempsey, you served three different tours in or associated with Iraq. How many American soldiers died at the hands of Iranian militias or explosively formed projectiles during your command?

General DEMPSEY. Yes. I recently heard both the Chief of Staff of the Army and the current U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander put that number at about 500.

Senator COTTON. Hundreds of Americans died and probably thousands were wounded or suspected of being wounded. What should we say to their families, the families who lost soldiers at the

hands of Iranian militias or Iranian roadside bombs, once we reach a deal that is going to give Iran tens of billions of dollars in sanctions relief and international legitimacy without them changing their behavior?

General DEMPSEY. I would tell you what I have told them, is that solving the nuclear issue diplomatically is a positive outcome. But make no mistake about it. There are at least five other malign activities in which Iran is engaged that cause me grave security concerns, and we will not take our eye off those five. You know what they are: ballistic missiles, sea-based mines, cyber activities, arms trafficking, and surrogates and proxies.

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Hirono?

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, for being here and for your commitment.

General Dempsey, you testified before the House Armed Services Committee that—I quote—I would not recommend we put United States forces in harm's way—where you were talking about Iraq—simply to stiffen the spine of local forces. You continued, if their spine is not stiffened by the threat of ISIL on their way of life, nothing we do is going to stiffen their spine.

So, General Dempsey, what is it going to take to stiffen the spines of the local forces?

General DEMPSEY. Actually, Senator, what I said was that if it takes us to stiffen their spine in the face of a threat that is existential to them, then it does not seem to me that they are going to be stiffened.

But I do think—you asked me what—the things that we are doing—and I mentioned a few of them earlier about expanding our network of points where we touch them, help them train, and help them target, and help them understand how they integrate with each other, army and police—I think those things have had the effect of giving them greater confidence. I just made the point that I do not think the added step of accompanying them into combat would make a strategic difference except if we get to the point where there is a major offensive that we think could be increased in terms of its probability of success by our presence.

Senator HIRONO. So as far as you are concerned, we are doing those—taking those steps that will enable them to be able to fight for themselves because I agree with you that there is no number of our troops that we can send there that will result in a lasting kind of situation.

You also talked about your recent trip to Israel where you discussed various scenarios involving Assad's departure. I do not know whether Assad's departure is anywhere in the near future, but let us assume that there is a departure. How would his departure affect the dynamics of what happens in Syria? Would ISIL step in to fill the power vacuum? How would Assad's departure change our strategy regarding ISIL?

General DEMPSEY. So let me tell you about our military planning efforts. our Israeli counterparts and our Jordanian counterparts very much believe that the possibility of either the regime collapsing or enclaving itself in Tardis, Latakia, Homs, and Hama is

possible. So they were very eager to have consultations with us about what that would precipitate. Your description of it is one that at least our regional partners express, which is to say we do not want this to be a foot race, if it occurs, between Al Nusra and ISIL and Ansara, all of these other groups converging on Damascus.

I will not sit here today and tell you that I have the answer to that, but I will tell you that we are in consultations, even as I sit here, with the Turks, the Israelis, and the Jordanians about that scenario.

Senator HIRONO. So what you are doing is to prepare for that possible eventuality and to ensure that these other groups do not just step in and take over. But let us say that—well, let me put it this way. If Assad departs, does that somehow make our mission against ISIL simpler, easier to target? Is that a way to think about it?

General DEMPSEY. I am on a roll. That is a subject of great debate actually. The debate is framed somewhat this way. Is the presence of Assad the catalyst for these issues, these radical ideologies, and violent extremist organizations? Or did they emanate somehow else and they simply use the presence of the Assad regime as a recruiting tool? Depending on how you answer that question will largely shape how you think about solving the problems.

The situation militarily is such that what we are trying to provide with partners is options, that is to say, we are trying to form a network of partners, partners that we may not have conceived before like the YPG, the Syrian Kurds in and around Kobani and over to the east bank of the Euphrates River. We are trying to provide options that will allow us to shape and to react, depending on what the internal situation—how it evolves, and we are working most closely with those who border Syria who have, again, the most to gain and the most to lose.

Senator HIRONO. Turning to the training that we are doing with the moderate Syrian forces, we recognize that you are having great difficulty while training not only the Syrians but also in Iraq. You have described this as a generational challenge. So while we are slowly training the local forces to fight for themselves, what are some of the other things that we need to be doing contemporaneously? Is it those nine action items that need to be occurring at the same time as——

Secretary CARTER. It is. For example, Senator, if I may, in recognition of the fact that it is going to take some time to build the forces that defeat ISIL in the territory of Syria and Iraq, that is a fact. We are going to do that. I am sure we will be successful at that, but it is going to take some time. We need to defend ourselves in the meantime because there are parts of ISIL that would like to attack us and our friends around the world. That is where Homeland Security and the FBI and the rest of our efforts to protect ourselves come in. So on the one hand, we need to go to the territory where ISIL arose and defeat it there, and we will do that. But at the same time and in the meantime, we need to continue to defend our people and our country against these guys. Some of them have the ambition to go to Syria, train, and come back to the

United States. You see that already in Europe. We see some signs of that in the United States.

That is why I was so laborious in describing the nine lines of effort. The ones we are talking about that we have principal responsibility are two of those nine. But the others really are critical as well because, as Senator Cotton said a moment ago, ISIL is a grave threat. These guys do want to do us harm and our friends and allies in the region.

If I can say something about this. You asked about the Assad regime and the Chairman answered that. Obviously, what we would like to see occur is for Assad to leave the scene but for the state of Syria not to disintegrate completely because we know what is down that road: sectarian disintegration. Now, that is a diplomatic task that is underway, as the Chairman indicated, and that is the outcome that would be by far preferable I think not only for the United States and our National security interests, but for the people of Syria who are suffering so terribly now. There are so many refugees and it is really a tragic situation in the human sense. But Assad needs to go, but the structures of governance need to stay or we hope they will stay because we know what life is like without structures of governance in the Middle East.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Rounds?

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, first of all, let me just say thank you for your service to the country.

We find ourselves, as you have stated, in a very precarious position in a number of areas. General Dempsey, as I sat here and listened to your assessment of the world today from your point of view, it was alarming to find at location after location we find ourselves being challenged and we find ourselves being pressured into positions that perhaps 10 years ago we would not have found ourselves in, whether it be with regard to the Pacific Rim areas or whether we find ourselves in the Ukraine area and so forth. Our challenges are many. Yet, at the same time, it does not appear that this has come in as a surprise.

As you moved farther along and specifically into the area that we had today, which was in terms of our challenges with ISIL and defeating ISIL, it seems to me that we have found ourselves once again in a position where there really were not surprises. But I am just curious. The Secretary stated that in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces were severely degraded after four divisions dissolved and Mosul fell a year ago this June. The Secretary was not in his position at the time. You were, sir. Was that a surprise to you?

General DEMPSEY. Well, they collapsed because of poor governance and sectarianism. I was surprised at the rapidity of it. I suppose I would suggest to you that the degree to which the leadership had been changed out for all the wrong reasons by the Maliki government were the conditions under which that occurred.

Senator ROUNDS. If the four divisions that were lost there—if they were there today, would four divisions—does that make a difference between us moving forward with the defeat of ISIS, or is that not the right number? What is the right number that it is

going to take in terms of boots on the ground, not American boots on the ground, but literally allied forces on the ground? What is the number that it takes in order to move forward with whatever strategies are in place if there are strategies in place? I am assuming that we will get into that. What is the number that we want to see on the ground?

General DEMPSEY. The Commander of CENTCOM has testified that to recapture Mosul eventually, he believes he will need approximately nine brigades worth of security forces, six from the Government of Iraq and three from the Kurdish region. That would be for Mosul. Then, of course, restoration of the border, which would be the ultimate step, restoration of their sovereign territory defined as the border between Syria and Iraq, that would be largely a Federal police or border issue, and I am not aware that that number has been identified. But the initial goal is to form or re-green, re-equip nine brigades.

Senator ROUNDS. What is the timeframe that that can be accomplished in?

General DEMPSEY. Putting a temporal dimension on this is risky at best. Because the campaign is dependent on a coalition and it is dependent on the network of actors that include the Sunni tribes, the Iraqi Security Forces themselves, the counter-terrorist service, and the Kurds, the act of describing when those groups could all come together to establish the conditions to do this is just difficult to pin down. Even if I knew the answer to that question, I would be loathe to report it to you in an open hearing. But I have said from the beginning that it was probably a 3-year effort to restore sovereignty to Iraq, and we are 8 months into that.

Senator ROUNDS. General, we pride ourselves and then we point out the fact that we truly do have the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. Yet, right now we find ourselves, as the President stated some time ago—he called ISIS the Jayvee team. Clearly that is not the position that I think the administration would take today. We have identified that they are clearly a threat.

We have identified a nine-point plan here, Mr. Secretary, in which you have identified all of the things that have to happen, including the defense of our country from these individuals. At what point during this 3-year timeframe—or what is the possibility during this 3-year timeframe that the patience that you have shown, General, and that the Secretary has alluded to here to build this up—what is the probability that this timeframe gets away from us? Are we in the position to make this thing last for 3 years without literally upping on our own point in order to defend ourselves? At what point does it look like we are going to have to amp this thing up using our own resources to a greater degree than what we have today?

General DEMPSEY. I said 3 years for Iraq, and I have also described ISIL in general as a generational problem because of its allure in, notably, the Sunni sect of Islam. Look, we just have to have a Sunni partner in order to address this challenge of ISIL. So although I have said 3 years for Iraq, it is more like a generation, which I suppose is loosely defined as 20 years, to address the violent extremist allure of ISIL in the Sunni world, and that allure

will only be stripped away when someone actually takes care of them and governs them.

But to your question, are there points at which we should and would consider the introduction of additional U.S. military combat capabilities? The answer is yes. I think you have seen us do that in the raid that we conducted into Syria to capture and kill the group affiliated with Abu Sayyaf, the financial network of ISIL. I think that we are always on the alert or always on the lookout for those opportunities and can use our capabilities as necessary to deal with those.

Senator ROUNDS. You feel that you are in a politically appropriate position and that you would have the backing to step in when needed to take care of the problem when the time is right?

General DEMPSEY. I cannot answer what answer I would receive. I have the confidence that my recommendation would be accepted and debated in the context of everything else we are doing.

General DEMPSEY. Let me out here if I may, Senator. I think that part of our strategy is to look for opportunities to do more in the sense of creating capable ground forces that we can support. So we kind of welcome those opportunities. We are taking those opportunities in the case of Syria. So I do not want to speak for the Chairman, but in terms of is the opportunity to do more in that sense, not as a substitute for local people, but as a way of enabling them and assisting them, that really is the strategy. So I think we welcome those opportunities when we find them. We are trying to create those opportunities in the Sunni areas, as was noted earlier. We are taking some opportunities in the Kurdish area, and we hope that we have more, including in Syria.

Senator ROUNDS. Mr. Chairman, my time has expired, but I would make one comment, and that is it appears to me that if our strategy is waiting on other people to get their stuff in order, it does not seem to be as practical as taking advantage of and literally going out and proactively taking care of the problem, if need be. We have the greatest fighting force in the world, and the last thing in the world I want to see is to have them engage boots-on-the-ground. But if it means boots on the ground or additional folks there fighting there, as opposed to having a successful attack on this Homeland, then I think we all agree on what we ought to be doing. I just hope that the strategy includes that as a possibility.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Heinrich?

Senator HEINRICH. Secretary, Chairman, welcome to you both. Thank you very much for your service.

Let me start by saying that surge or no surge, I think it is pretty clear, at least to my constituents, that the Iraq war remains one of the greatest United States foreign policy mistakes of the last century and one that I hope we have learned a few lessons from.

I want to follow up, Secretary, on what Senator Hirono raised. One lesson that I believe we should have learned by now is that eliminating one terrible Middle Eastern dictator can too often lead to even more brutal influences filling the leadership vacuum. We have seen that play out too many times. We have seen it to some extent in both Iraq and Libya.

Should we be concerned that Syria post-Assad reality could create a vacuum that ISIL is in a far better position to fill than any

of the other regional forces? I think we should be almost as concerned with forces like Al-Nusra Front. If Assad does fall, should we not have more than discussions on the table? Should we not have a plan to make sure that some amount of governance remains particularly in Damascus?

Secretary CARTER. Well, yes, we should and we do. That is our strategy with respect to the political transition. Now, for reasons that are easy to understand, our influence with Bashar Assad—ours, that is, United States influence—is not great. So we are trying to influence those who would influence him to remove himself from the Government of Damascus while keeping intact the structures of governance for the very reason you adduce, which is we know what happens in these Middle Eastern countries when the structures of government disintegrate. We would like to not see that happen in Syria, even though we know that the persistence of Assad at the helm in Damascus is in fact a fuel for ISIS and others who are fighting him. So he needs to go to remove that fuel, but we do not want to see the structures of governance go at the same time. That is the challenge, but that is what we are trying to achieve.

Senator HEINRICH. Well, I think that is certainly the right goal. I just want to make sure we are prepared for that because we have sort of missed that ball in the past. Syria is an enormous country, and if we saw Damascus lose its governance capability, the implications for the entire region and the world would be enormous.

Secretary Carter, as you mentioned as well, to be successful on the ground against ISIL, the fight needs to be led by local capable ground forces. I do not think we should give in to impatience. These should not be Western forces. These should not be American forces. We have certainly heard that from our partners in places like Jordan. This means that we have to place a great deal of emphasis on training motivated and reliable partners, and you have gone a little bit over the small number of Iraqi Security Forces recruited, what some of those challenges are, the bottleneck related to the vetting process.

But are there other factors that you would attribute for the lack of trainees? I guess one of the questions I have related to that is what steps, in addition to the steps that you are taking, is the Iraqi Government taking to address the shortfall in order to meet those kind of training targets we would like to see?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Senator.

I think in Iraq the principal limiting factor on Sunni trainees, which is one of our focuses, has been their belief that the government in Baghdad was not fully supportive of them. That is the challenge before Prime Minister Abadi. He says he wants to do that, and that is critical because only Sunnis can take back Anbar. Only Sunnis can govern Anbar when it is all over. So if we are going to wrest Anbar from the likes of ISIL, which we must do, we must have Sunnis on our side. So Abadi is saying all the right things. As the chairman noted, we are trying to support him in doing all the right things.

Senator HEINRICH. Mr. Secretary, I agree with you wholeheartedly in your analysis. I guess my concern is, is Abadi doing

enough to begin to generate confidence in the Sunni population in that region?

Secretary CARTER. I think he is doing everything he personally can. I think he is challenged in Baghdad by others who would have it the old way, the sectarian way. So he is not able to make everything happen when and as he said. We have had some delays and some frustration as a result of that. I think things are getting better. We are getting more trainees. It was noted earlier that there is some confidence among Sunni tribes that we will help them train, equip them, support them, and get them back in the fight, and that there is a future for them not even withstanding the difficulties of multi-sectarian governance in Iraq. That is the path we are on.

In the meantime, just to get back to something that Senator Rounds said, I think—and I said this before. I just want to restate it—we need to take action to defend ourselves against ISIL not just in Iraq and Syria but elsewhere, particularly foreign fighters, even as we defeat them in the place from which they arose. They have metastasized now. They aspire to be a global network. We have to fight them where they are, and we cannot wait for that. We need to do that, and by the way, we do that every day, even this past weekend.

Senator HEINRICH. Secretary, I want to leave you with one last question. It is a very general one. You may have seen the "Politico" article from a couple of days ago that examined what it called the Daesh effect, and it is sort of a modern example of the ancient proverb that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Whether it is Hamas or Al Nusra or Iran, there are a number of entities that may be enemies of the United States, certainly enemies of our allies, that currently share the same opposition to ISIL, or Daesh. What are your thoughts on that observation generally, and would you not agree that it is that reality that is part of the reason why this is such a complicated nut to crack?

Secretary CARTER. It is a reason why it is complicated. Again, sectarianism is what brought us to this point. So we are willing to and we are and have supported elements of the Iraqi Security Forces that have a very large Shia composition to them, but if and only if they are under the direction and control of the Government of Iraq. There are Shia forces in Iraq that are not under the direction and control, and we will not support them because that is sectarianism. That is sectarian civil war. We know it leads down that road, and we are trying to stop Iraq from going down that road.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Ernst?

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Secretary and Chairman, for being with us today. I appreciate your efforts in this area.

Secretary Carter, I would like to start with you because right now I am very confused. You had stated earlier and then you affirmed to Senator Ayotte that we are directly arming the Kurds in consultation with the Iraqi Government. Would you state that again, please, sir?

Secretary CARTER. Yes. You are using the word "directly," and she used the word "directly" and I did too. But let me just be clear about that, which is that we do it in a way that does not delay the

shipments and does not narrow down the shipments at all but is by, through, and with the Government of Iraq. We are sticking with that principle not because we do not want to help the Kurds and we do not want to help them in a timely way, but because we also want to stick up for the principle of multi-sectarianism. So that is the reason. But we are insistent that it not lead to delays.

As I said, I spoke to Mr. Barzhani when he was over here and I made sure that he is getting the right kind of equipment not just from us but the Germans and all the others who are arming him in a timely manner. They are getting that equipment and they are performing extremely well with it.

Let me see if the Chair wants to add anything about the method of arming.

Senator ERNST. So we are arming the Kurds. It is not being delayed. I know that was stated earlier that there are no significant delays because I do want to emphasize that over the last several months, a number of my colleagues and I have been working on legislation to directly arm the Kurds in consultation with the Iraqi Government.

I know that you and Secretary Kerry also had very strongly worded letters to the chairman of this committee emphasizing that we should not be directly arming the Kurds in consultation with the Iraqi Government because there were no delays. Yet, the President now has come out and said that we will be arming them in an expedited manner. Well, if there were no delays, I do not understand why now we need an additional several hundred members of our armed services on the ground in Iraq and that we are expediting the process. If there were no delays, we do not need to be expediting the process.

So I just needed to clarify that because it was stated a number of times that we were directly arming the Kurds, which Secretary Kerry had said last year he does not have the authority, the President does not have the authority to do. I still believe we need to be directly arming them in consultation with the Iraqi Government.

Following the fall of Ramadi, General Dempsey, you stated that if the Kurds fail to take measures to be more inclusive with Sunnis, Kurds, or other groups, U.S. support for the central government could be curtailed. Sir, considering the fall of the most western part of Iraq to ISIS, that did not trigger a decision point on the part of the Iraqi Government and its commitment to Iraq. I am just not sure what else the Iraqi Government needs to fail at before the administration changes its strategy and how we support our willing partners in Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga. They are willing partners and I think we need to do more for them.

We cannot defeat ISIS in Iraq by continuing to beg, hope, and pray that the sectarian Iraqi Government, which is still overshadowed—we have heard it a number of times—by previous Prime Minister Maliki and Iran. We do not think they would vigorously defend the Iraqi people equally. I do not believe they will.

But we have talked also about being more inclusive. That was mentioned again. "More inclusive." I hear this time and time again. But I would like a definition of what does "more inclusive" look like

and how do we measure "more inclusive." Gentlemen, if you would address that please.

Secretary CARTER. I would begin by noting the words of Prime Minister Abadi when he was here. I think he used the word "decentralized" Iraq, and that is one in which there is a central government in Baghdad and an integral state of Iraq, but there is substantial opportunity for self-determination around the country among Sunnis, among Shias, and among Kurds. It seems to me that is a wise way of approaching what multi-sectarianism means. I think a government in Baghdad that allows the different parties there a degree of self-determination to maintain security within their own territory and to govern themselves, share in things like the oil wealth in the country and so forth, that is what he says he is for, and that is the way he described it when he was here in Washington to all of that.

That is in my judgment certainly better than the alternative, which is sectarian disintegration, which could still occur in Iraq. But I think we all, looking into that abyss, know what resides there. It is further violence for the citizens of Iraq and further opportunity for groups like ISIL that are not preoccupied with the long-term welfare of the territories they occupy. They want to use them for further violence.

So that is Prime Minister Abadi's definition, and I think we are trying support him in his aspiration to make good on that definition.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

General, anything to add there?

General DEMPSEY. Just militarily what we will be watching for in terms of the intentions of the Government of Iraq and its control over groups that are not directly responsive to the Ministry of Defense is whether there is retribution, whether they allow—it was Tikrit I was speaking about I think, Senator. As these families come back to Tikrit after it was recaptured, I think we are watching and it is worth watching on whether they are able to return to their homes or not. I think the same will be true once Ramadi is recaptured, and we will probably be watching how the campaign in Fallujah unfolds to ensure that the popular mobilization forces propagate a campaign that is not characterized by retribution and dramatic collateral damage. Those are all things to watch carefully.

Senator ERNST. I think we have willing partners there. I think we need to assist those willing partners.

One further comment, too, just very briefly. You had stated you have not seen a request list from the Kurds on the type of equipment and arms that they need. Is that correct?

Secretary CARTER. No. I have seen such requests. We have honored such requests. We have shipped a lot of equipment. I should once again repeat. It is not just the United States. There are a number of countries that are equipping the Kurds, and in some cases, they prefer the equipment of other countries, for example, German anti-tank weapons. That is absolutely fine with us, and the Germans are providing those.

Senator ERNST. That is one thing I know that President Barzhani had also presented to us during his visit with the members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. I just wanted to

make sure that we were clear on that and that they have provided a list of equipment.

Secretary CARTER. They did. We discussed exactly the same list, and I have discussed it with others, for example, the German defense minister. I mentioned, when I was in Germany a couple of weeks ago, her commitment to do exactly the same, and they have done a great job of equipping the Kurds. That is an example of a competent ground force that also governs within the territory that it controls, and that is really what we are looking for in that entire region. It is going to be hard to get but that is what we are looking for.

Senator ERNST. Well, they are there and I know they are willing.

So thank you, gentlemen, very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses today.

I have a number of questions and concerns about the ongoing mission against ISIL which I will address, but I have to begin by just saying my concerns about the administration's strategy pale—pale—next to my concerns about Congress and what Congress is doing.

What Congress is supposed to do is to provide a budget to you to defend the Nation and win this battle, and Congress is supposed to authorize a war that is now 11 months in. We have not done either. We are not giving you a budget. We are using a gimmick, and whether the gimmick is the gimmicks of the past, continuing resolutions, or the current gimmick du jour, which is a use of nonrecurring OCO funding, we are not giving you the budget. We are not doing it because—let us just be blunt—Congress to this point has decided that the budget caps enacted in August 2011 is a higher national priority than defeating ISIL. As long as we view that as a higher national priority than defeating ISIL, we are not going to give you the budget that you need.

It is my hope, as you testified, Secretary Carter, that we will find a better path, something like a Murray-Ryan budget deal. I know the chair has been significant in speaking out for this as well. But we are not doing what we ought to be doing on the budget side.

We are also not doing what we ought to be doing under Article 1, Section 8, which is declaring war. Tomorrow is the 11-month anniversary of the initiation of the bombing campaign in Sinjar and Irbil. We have spent $3 billion. We have 3,500 people deployed away from their families risking their lives. Aside from a single vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December, there has not been House committee action or floor debate of any significance. There has not been any meaningful debate on the Senate floor about whether or not we should be engaged in this war, even though three-quarters of the Members of Congress, by my estimation, believe that there should be U.S. military action against ISIL with some differences in detail. But we do not want to have a debate and vote because we do not want to put our names on it. We do not want to be held accountable for a vote.

So we can criticize all we want, and I will get into some criticisms. But bottom line, Congress is not doing either of the two

things we are uniquely supposed to do: provide your budget to win and authorize war. I think we can make our criticisms have a much greater legitimacy if as an institution we would do what we are supposed to do.

I just returned from the region, and just some quick summaries. Senator Donnelly mentioned it. We are achieving some significant successes against ISIL in some parts of the battlefield in Iraq and Syria largely in the areas where we are relying on partners with the Kurds, the KRG regional government in Iraq and then Kurds in the north of Syria.

President Barzhani. We met him on Sunday in Irbil. I guess two Sundays ago. He said this, and this is very important, especially for any who would say the United States does not have a strategy. He said thank you to the United States of America. If the President had not started a bombing campaign on August 8th near Irbil, we might not be here today. That bombing campaign likely helped save the existence of the KRG, which has been a good partner. They lead with that. They do not lead with we are not getting weapons. They do not lead with we do not like working with Baghdad. They lead with thank you to the United States for helping save us, save our region, save our way of life. That is important for us to acknowledge because that was not by accident. That is a strategy. We helped save an important ally by acting, the President acting when he did.

There are challenges too. The Iraqi unification challenge was very patent as we met with Prime Minister Abadi. There are mixed reviews. Positive on the intent but mixed on the follow-through. In the Sunni area in particular, a lot of criticism. Some support the Anbar governor, supports what Prime Minister Abadi is doing but a lot of the tribal leaders do not, and a lot of the tribal leaders do not think we are doing what we can do. When they look at what we are doing with the Kurds and they compare with what we are not doing with them, it sticks in their craw.

Finally, the challenges in Syria are significant.

Let me ask you this question. Today, front page article in the "Washington Post" dealing with the routing of ISIL in northern Syria. Quote: The unexpected route of Islamic State forces across a wide arc of territory in the northeastern Syria heartland has exposed vulnerabilities in the ranks of the militants and also the limits of the United States-led strategy devised to confront them. Islamic State fighters had been driven out of a third of their flagship province of Raqqah in recent weeks by a Kurdish-led force that has emerged as one of the most effective American partners in the war. The offensive, backed by United States airstrikes, has deprived the militants of control of their most important border crossing with Turkey and forced them onto the defensive in their self-proclaimed capital of Raqqah City, something that would have been unthinkable as recently as a month ago. That is what is happening right now.

But every success has a challenge, and there is a worm in this apple and the worm is this. As we have succeeded in our partnership with the Kurds in northern Syria, it has caused grave concern by the Turkish Government. It has caused grave concern by a number of the other Sunni forces in Syria that we are partnering with.

How do we continue to manage the Kurds to be successful in the battle against ISIL and partner with them to be successful without causing additional undue challenges in our effort to also help Sunnis be successful against ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you. By the way, thank you once again for traveling there. I know it is much appreciated.

Let me start with the Turks. Turkey has a long common border with both Syria and Iraq, which has remained disturbingly permeable to foreign fighters and to resupply throughout the course of this conflict. We have some people actually talking to the Turks just today, as the Chairman alluded to a while ago, in order to try to get the Turks to up their game. They are a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally. They have a strong stake in things, in stability to their south. I believe they could do more along the border.

In the meantime, it is true. The Kurds are acting and because the Kurds are capable of acting, we are supporting them. That is successful and it does threaten Raqqah.

I think the tension with respect to the Sunnis is best managed in the way that we are hoping Prime Minister Abadi will manage it, namely by letting them each succeed within their own territory, defeat ISIL, and have substantial—his word is "decentralization" of governance in Iraq that allows them a substantial opportunity to determine their own destiny within the territory that they control. That is what multi-sectarianism in Iraq would mean. As you indicated, it is a lot tougher in Syria, but that is the objective that we have, to have Sunnis—I would like to see the Sunni tribal leaders that you met with be as successful as the Kurds are. We would welcome that. That is what we are trying to stimulate in al Taqaddum and so forth, and we are willing to do more, as the Chairman indicated and I indicated, when we have a capable ground force that we can support the way we did support over the weekend the Kurds in the north with air power.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I also want to just agree with a line of your questioning earlier. I think it would be absolutely foolish for us to not clarify the rules of engagement for the Syrian trained folks inserted back in the field to make clear that the United States will support them if they come under attack by the Assad regime. For them to go back in without a guarantee on that score, we would lose all credibility if we do not provide that. I just would encourage the administration to clarify that aspect of the rules of engagement. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. I thank you, Senator. I have been asking that question for a long time, and I keep getting the answer, well, we have not made that policy decision. It is shameful—shameful—to send people in and not assure them that we will defend them against attacks by barrel bombs.

Senator Graham?

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

To build on what we were just talking about, do we have the legal authority to assist the Free Syrian Army that we train against Assad? Is there a doubt about that?

Secretary CARTER. I am not sure about the legalities of it, Senator, to be quite honest.

Senator GRAHAM. Let us just put it this way. If there is any doubt about whether or not we have the legal authority to protect the troops we train against Assad, please let the committee know. You do not have to answer right now, but that is a big decision. If there is a lack of legal authority, I want to know why and what can we do to fix it.

Secretary CARTER. I appreciate it, and I will take that back. I appreciate that thought.

[The information referred to follows:]

Although we would have to evaluate the facts and circumstances present at the time, we have concluded that we have sufficient legal authority to provide combat support to Syrian fighters that DOD has vetted, or vetted and trained, who come under attack by Syrian government forces, consistent with the right of United States self-defense, if the United States action is necessary to effectively address the threat posed by ISIL to the United States and Iraq and meets the international law requirements of necessity and proportionality.

Senator GRAHAM. General Dempsey, thank you for decades of service. I really appreciate that.

General Dempsey, would you agree that there are more terrorist organizations with more safe havens, with more weapons, with more capability, with more men to strike the homeland than any time since September 11?

General DEMPSEY. Thank you for your service. I know you retired recently.

Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe that ISIL is expanding in other countries as we speak?

General DEMPSEY. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. When it comes to Iraq, do you both agree that partitioning Iraq into three separate countries is probably not a viable strategy?

Secretary CARTER. I certainly agree with that, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree that the Sunni world would object to giving the southern part of Iraq to Iran? That is what would happen—right—if we partitioned the south. Do you all agree with that?

Secretary CARTER. That sounds like sectarianism to me, and we know what lies down that road.

Senator GRAHAM. An independent Kurdistan is going to create a lot of upheaval with Turkey and the region at large. Do you agree with that? A separate, independent state.

Secretary CARTER. For the Turks, a separate, independent state would be very problematic, and within Iraq, I think a substantial autonomy within a decentralized but integral Iraq is still possible. That is what Abadi is trying to do.

Senator GRAHAM. I agree. Do you agree with that, General?

General DEMPSEY. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. So partitioning I think is not a viable strategy.

As to the Kurds, do you either one of you believe that the Kurds have the ability, will to go into liberate Ramadi?

Secretary CARTER. I will start that. I think they may have the ability, and we are, obviously, trying to facilitate their movement south. Whether they have the will is another matter. The only reason that I say that is that they are getting, at that point, to the edge of the territory that is Kurdish.

Senator GRAHAM. That is my point. For anybody to suggest that the Kurds are the answer to all of our problems, they do not, quite frankly, know the Mideast. I mean, the Kurds are not going to liberate Syria. Do you all agree with that? They will be part of the component, but they are not going to be the liberating force.

Secretary CARTER. Right, part of the component, absolutely.

Senator GRAHAM. As to Assad, what is more likely? President Obama leaves office in 2017 or Assad goes first?

Secretary CARTER. Well, it is certain that President Obama will leave office.

Senator GRAHAM. No, I know that.

Secretary CARTER. So that is an easy question. But turning to whether Assad will be in power then——

Senator GRAHAM. Who leaves first? Obama or Assad?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I certainly hope it is Assad.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, I do but I do not think so.

So the bottom line, if Assad stays in power, do you worry about Jordan and Lebanon being a victim of the war in Syria if it continues the way it is going, that Jordan and Lebanon will become a casualty of the war in Syria?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I think Jordan and Lebanon are already suffering from the effects of war in Syria. They are hosting refugees.

Senator GRAHAM. Right. It could even get worse.

Secretary CARTER. That is exactly the concern we should all have. One of the concerns we should have about what is going on in Syria—it is not just the Syrian people, it is the neighbors as well.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you agree with me that no Arab force is going to go in and fight ISIL alone unless you put Assad on the table?

Secretary CARTER. I see what you are getting at and it gets back to our train and equip program. We are finding people whose principal security fear for their own people—and this is really for their own villages—is ISIL. So they are willing to go and fight against ISIL. There are others who want to fight against Assad, and that is another matter entirely.

Senator GRAHAM. Here is my point. They are recruiting more foreign fighters than we are training Free Syrian Army. The math does not work. This is never going to result in Assad or ISIL being degraded or destroyed. The only way I see ISIL to be degraded or destroyed is for a ground force, regional in nature, to go into Syria. Do you agree with me that no ground force made up of Turks, Saudis, Egyptians, you name it are going into Syria to fight ISIL unless one of the goals is to replace Assad? They are not going to give half of Syria to Iran.

Secretary CARTER. That sounds sensible to me, and I certainly wish that such a force would be created. One of the great disappointments in all of this is that the Sunni world more broadly is not more involved in this fight.

Senator GRAHAM. Let us dig into that for a moment. If we went to Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia tomorrow and said we would like to use your armies, we will be integrated, would you agree with me

for them to say yes, that we would have to make Assad a target of that army? Are we willing to do that?

Secretary CARTER. Let us see. I would guess that—it is very hypothetical because, sadly, none of them has indicated their willingness to do anything of that kind under any circumstances.

But I see what you are driving at, which is will the rest of the Sunni Middle East participate in this conflict. I certainly wish they would. The one answer I know, Senator, is for the Turks. The Turks have stated their position, which is that they definitely want Assad to go, and the conditions for any other participation so far have been that they want to fight against Assad.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I would suggest you do the following. You travel a lot. We went to Qatar. We went to Saudi Arabia. We went all over the Mideast. They told us to a person we would gladly join forces with you upon the condition that Assad is part of the target set. Nobody in the United States will tell them whether or not we are willing to take Assad on militarily as part of the ground force.

So I would suggest instead of being upset with the Sunni Arab world, that our problems lie within ourselves, that we are not putting Assad on the table militarily. Do you agree with that? Do you think Assad is on the table militarily?

Secretary CARTER. Senator, as I am sure you know, his position on the battlefield is more tenuous today than it has been for a long time.

Senator GRAHAM. But the point is, is our efforts designed to take Assad out militarily, or are we focusing just on ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. No. Our approach has been, as I think has been stated clearly for some time, to try to find a political exit for Bashar Assad rather than a United States-led military exit. That is the approach.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Nelson?

Senator NELSON. Thank you, and thank you both of you for your decades of service, and that includes you, Mr. Secretary, because you have given decades.

I want to follow up on that line of questioning. So if Assad exited tomorrow, what would be the likely strategy that we would use going forward?

Secretary CARTER. Our strategy would be to encourage the moderate opposition to partner with the structures of the government of Damascus not directly associated with Assad or with his deplorable behavior—and I think we can determine what that is—keep the structures of government in place, unify with the moderate Syrian opposition, and create a new government which is more reflective of the aspirations of the populace than Assad's is. Then they would, in turn, need to go and reclaim their territory from ISIL. I think the United States and the rest of the international coalition would be pleased to support them in that.

Senator NELSON. Does Assad exiting sooner rather than later create conditions that are so chaotic for the interest of the United States or is the interest of the United States in him leaving sooner than later?

Secretary CARTER. I think sooner and in a way, as I indicated. The reason, to get back to the earlier line of questioning, for a po-

litical rather than a military transition—for us to support and seek that—is that it is less disruptive, less chaotic, less sparks, sectarianism, and therefore violence. That is why it is much to be preferred over a simple toppling of Assad because you do not know what is on the other side of a simple toppling of Assad. So I know it is unsatisfying to talk about a political transition when he himself gives very little indication of wanting to do that, but that is much to be preferred if we can have that. Otherwise, we know what happens when these countries disintegrate.

Senator NELSON. Were a political solution to be found for his exit which, of course, is going to be difficult with Iran being his mentor, but Vladimir Putin could be instrumental in arranging some kind of exit strategy—but were it to be a political solution, do you think it reasonable that there would be some accommodation so that the Alawite minority would not be slaughtered?

Secretary CARTER. I think there has to be that ingredient. I mean, first of all, the Alawite community will fight for the territory in the northwest. But once again, that is just further conflict, further civil war. Ethnic cleansing of any kind is the kind of thing you could see on the other side of a collapse there. We know how tragic that is for people.

Senator NELSON. What would his arranged exit do with regard to Hezbollah, and will they resist it the whole way?

Secretary CARTER. Hezbollah has been one of the principal supporters of the Assad regime. So they do not give any indication of welcoming the path that we are discussing here.

The Russians perhaps. I know that we have been in contact with the Russians about that over the years, and certainly I think that they would, if they threw their weight behind such a transition, be influential with Assad. So I certainly hope they would but I have no confidence, as I sit here right now, that they will.

Senator NELSON. Mr. Secretary, when you look at a map like this, a map of Syria that I assume you handed out—somebody did—that is a mess. Maybe it is the only solution is the solution of a political exit for Assad so that we can go after these extremist elements.

By the way, I had to leave the committee to do an interview on CNN, and the whole focus that they wanted to jump on was your statement earlier in the hearing that we had only trained up 60. But I pointed out to them what you said was the vetting is very difficult, and in fact, we are vetting some several thousands additional and the vetting is a lot more tortuous because you certainly do not want to have a guy trained up and then he turns around and aims his gun back at us.

In Iraq, do you think that this new prime minister has the capability of getting out of his Shiite mold, and does he have the capability of bringing in all Shiites with all of the Iranian influence in his government in order to reach out with an olive branch to the Sunnis?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you.

With respect to the first part of your remarks, I am always going to be truthful with you, and the number is 60. I think we have conceded that number before, but I said it today and I will always tell the truth. That is a small class. It results from the fact that that

is the number that got through the very rigorous vetting and selection process we have. General Nagata, who runs that program, believes that he has learned a lot. He has 7,000 behind that. So I expect those numbers to increase. But I wanted to tell the truth and I did tell the truth. We expect that number to improve, but you deserve to know where things stand and I am telling you where things stand.

With respect to Abadi, there I would say also that he has indicated to us—and he was here in Washington. I believe he spoke to many of you as well—his intention to proceed in a way that is distinctly different from the way his predecessor proceeded and which led to the situation we now have in Iraq. We are certainly supporting him in that regard, but one can see that his intentions are contested in Baghdad. So we continue to support him. We continue to think, to get back to the earlier line of questions, that a multisectarian future for Iraq is the best for stability and peace and the best for the defeat of ISIL. But he will have some substantial influence over that, but it is clear he does not have absolute control in Baghdad. We are supporting him.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Lee?

Senator LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, for being here today.

General Dempsey, I especially want to thank you for your decades of service to your country and to the cause of freedom. We wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors. I am not sure whether this will be the last time we are privileged to speak with you in a hearing, but regardless, please know how much we appreciate all you have done for our country.

I want to thank the men and women who are deployed in Iraq and in so many other places in the Middle East and for their service to our country. Although they have not been labeled "combat troops," they are still operating under dangerous and uncertain circumstances and are far removed from their families and from the people they love.

I want to follow up on the discussion between Senator McCain and Secretary Carter on how we might support Syrian rebels once they return from training. Mr. Secretary, you stated that you believe we have an obligation to those we train to provide them with protection. I agree with that, and I also believe we have an obligation to let the American people know and that you have an obligation to let Congress know and help us to fully understand what this strategy entails, what that means, and the funding, the time, and the effort that providing any such protection might entail and what it will necessitate.

So can you tell us when will DOD fully explain to the American people and to Congress what the strategy will involve, what it is going to cost our Government? I have said this before, but this is something that should have been made clear last year when the President came up with this plan. But regardless, it is better late than never. It is good that we do it now rather than not at all. Can you tell us when that might occur?

Secretary CARTER. I will continuously tell you what is going on over there with respect to what we are doing in Iraq and what we

are doing with respect to Syria. We are going to have to—as I said, I think we have an obligation to support those fighters when they go in. We are going to have to decide exactly under what conditions and what way we will make that tactical decision when we introduce them.

But I think the main thing is that we increase that number from what is now a very small number—and I am not surprised that it is running on television—into a much larger number. I think we can do that. The officer who runs this program believes that he will be able to do that. We will keep you apprised of our progress, and I will tell you every day what I know, as I have done here today.

Senator LEE. Thank you. I appreciate that and look forward to that.

Now, United States strategy in Syria is to empower the, quote/unquote, moderate opposition to defeat ISIS and to put enough pressure on the Assad regime to achieve some type of negotiated peace settlement. For the sake of discussion, let us say these moderates are successful in degrading ISIS to the point that they are no longer a factor in Syria. What does pressuring Assad or his supporters into a negotiated settlement look like at that point, especially given the military support from Iran and Hezbollah that they currently enjoy? Specifically, what role will the United States play in bringing about the pressure and support to achieve this kind of settlement?

Secretary CARTER. I think the way it would look, the outcome that we are aiming for is one in which Bashar al Assad and those who have been associated with his atrocities in Syria are removed, but the structures of government in Damascus and in Iraq that remain continue on in an inclusively governed way that is multi-sectarian, to include Alawites and others, and that can then turn to the task of regaining its sovereign territory from ISIL to the east in a project that would look like what we are working with Baghdad to accomplish to its west in Iraq. That is the post-Assad transition that would be the best for the Syrian people and the best for our counter-ISIL strategy.

Senator LEE. By the way, do you believe the 2001 authorization for the use of military force gives authority necessary to engage the Assad regime forces that may come into conflict with any rebels we may train?

Secretary CARTER. I am going to be very careful about how I answer a legal question in that regard, and I would prefer to get back to you in that regard.

Senator LEE. Okay.

[The information follows:]

The Administration's position is that the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) would provide authority to conduct military operations in defense of U.S.—or coalition-trained forces against ISIL, the Nusrah Front, and other groups that are either part of or associated forces of al-Qaeda in the same manner as it does for ongoing U.S. operations against those groups. The Administration has not interpreted the 2001 AUMF to provide authority to engage Syrian government forces to defend DOD-trained Syrian fighters.

However, we have concluded that we have sufficient legal authority to provide combat support to Syrian fighters that DOD has vetted, or vetted and trained, who come under attack by Syrian government forces, consistent with the right of United States self-defense, if the United States action is necessary to effectively address the

threat posed by ISIL to the United States and Iraq and meets the international law requirements of necessity and proportionality.

Senator LEE. Now, Mr. Secretary, what level of command and control in your opinion does ISIS leadership have over these various affiliate groups across the Middle East and northern Africa, as well as lone wolf individuals or groups in Europe and the western hemisphere?

Secretary CARTER. It is mixed. But in the main—not entirely, but in the main—what one sees is a mixture of groups that were already radicalized and already intent upon attacking the West or attacking Western interests or destabilizing places in the Middle East rebranding themselves as ISIL because of this seeming success it had. Then to get to the lone wolf part, you see people who have had no training, no association with it, including Americans, who go on the Internet and find themselves enthralled because whatever lost souls they are, enthralled by the violence or whatever associated with ISIL and self-radicalized and unfortunately undertake to do violence. So you see that spectrum there. You do see some effort by ISIL, meaning ISIL in Syria and Iraq, to command and control but it is not exclusively that way.

I say all this because that is very distinctly different from the al Qaeda model. The al Qaeda model was a very hierarchical, very clear command and control type terrorist enemy. That meant they had discipline, and it meant they could take on big things like September 11. But it also meant that when we started to go after them, they were vulnerable to attacks on the command and control structure and on their logistics structure. ISIL is more resilient because it is more decentralized and informal in that sense. It takes a different kind of campaign. We are highly aware of that, as is law enforcement, by the way.

Senator LEE. Thank you. I see my time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED [presiding]: Chairman McCain asked that I recognize Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your service to this country. I especially want to thank you, General Dempsey, for the many, many years that you have served the people of this country and the military families that have been under you. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Carter, earlier Senator Rounds had a conversation with General Dempsey about the act of patience and time. I know the General has counseled patience and he has discussed time. What role do you see time playing in our strategy? You know, do you we have a strategy on forces, on containing ISIL? Are we going to allow them to be able to maintain control of territory for the next 3 to 5 years? Is that going to be acceptable to us? Do you see risks with that type of strategy?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I think we are going to continue to strike and apply pressure to ISIL throughout this period. We are doing it now. We do it every day. It has had some effect. We are going to continue every single day, as we did over this past weekend, to defend ourselves against ISIL, including these homegrown people. All that will go on and has to go on because we have to protect ourselves in the meantime.

What takes the time—and I think this is what the Chairman was getting at—is—and this is just in the nature of things—getting a lasting result. A lasting result is one where not only is ISIL defeated but they stay defeated. In order for them to stay defeated, there has to be somebody on that territory who is keeping the peace and governing and replacing ISIL in the territory. That takes some time. We are working with the Kurds to do that. We are working with Sunni tribes. But that is in the nature of things. We want that to go as quickly as possible and we are hastening that to the best of our ability, as are other members of the coalition. But that is the thing that takes the time to build.

But in the meantime, we have to protect ourselves and we have to keep pressure on ISIL. We will be doing that constantly.

Senator FISCHER. I agree with you on that.

Oh, General.

General DEMPSEY. Would you mind?

Senator FISCHER. Certainly.

General DEMPSEY. Because I have thought about this a lot. Your question is really whether patience increases risk. That is really your question. I think patience probably does increase risk to the mission somewhat because it extends the time when other things could happen. Right? But I think were we to take more responsibility directly and unilaterally, that would certainly increase risk in another way. It increases risk to our force and increases risk to the other missions that we are held accountable to accomplish globally.

What I get paid for is to give advice to the Secretary of Defense with the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the President on managing risk. So to your question, does risk increase due to patience, of course. But the alternative increases risk in other ways, and it is our job to manage that risk.

Senator FISCHER. As you look at managing that risk and you look at balancing it, how do you reach a decision where you can maintain that patience when you know that when ISIL controls that territory that they have now and they continue to advance in other areas, whether it would be in the region or in Russia, that that is a recruitment item for them, that it will inspire attacks, whether it is in that region or elsewhere around the world? How do you balance that and have the risk that we face in our homeland continue what I think would continue to grow because of possibly an overabundance of patience?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, I will keep at it because, as I said, this is the issue on which the campaign turns. Correct?

So what you have to be assured of is that as we manage risk, we look at those things which could threaten U.S. persons and facilities around the globe and the Homeland. Where we see risk accruing that could have threatened that national security interest, there is no hesitance for us to act unilaterally and decisively.

On the other hand, this campaign is built on the premise that it relies upon other actors. That necessarily requires a degree of patience that we need to nurture, we need to reinforce, and we need to understand in the context of the other things we are trying to accomplish not only in the Middle East but globally.

So if you are suggesting that ISIL's threat to the homeland could increase because of this patience, I concede that risk. We take on board the responsibility to manage it. But I would also suggest to you that we would contribute mightily to ISIL's message as a movement were we to confront them directly on the ground in Iraq and Syria.

Senator FISCHER. If we look at patience, if we look at restraint, do you not think that with our restraint we are in many ways encouraging the Iraqis to look elsewhere and to especially look to Iran and invite them into Iraq where they are because they know that Iran will be there fighting a common enemy that they both face at this point? Are we not opening that door to Iran with this what I kind of view as an overabundance of patience, which to me is the greatest risk?

General DEMPSEY. When you look at what we are doing—by the way, the Government of Iraq has been reaching out to Iran since roughly 2004. They have probably increased their outreach to Iran, but it has very little to do with what we are doing or not doing. It has everything to do with the fact that they believe that their future is—that it is their turn and that their particular form of governance, which is not yet inclusive as it needs to be, is the right form of governance. So they were going to do this whether we are there or not and whatever manner in which we exert our influence.

Senator FISCHER. So they have boots on the ground in Iraq through no action of the United States or inaction by the United States.

General DEMPSEY. I would say the advisors that have been sent, the ISR that they are flying, and some of the other capabilities they provided to the Government of Iraq—I would agree with you, that they would have provided that whether we were there——

Senator FISCHER. It was a question. It was not a statement on my part.

General DEMPSEY. Oh. The answer is yes, they would have been there regardless of our actions.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Senator Sullivan, please.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for the testimony today.

General Dempsey, I want to join my colleagues in commending you for your decades of service.

Secretary Carter, it was good getting caught up last week. I appreciate your outstanding service as well to our country.

There has been a lot of criticism of the President when he, in August 2014 and then just a couple of weeks ago at the G7 meeting, talked about how we do not have a strategy yet with regard to ISIS. He said that in 2014 and he said it again just a couple weeks ago.

What he really has not been criticized for and I think is something that I would like to get your view on is each time he has talked about the lack of a strategy, he has essentially kind of put it on your plate. Each time he said, well, the guys at DOD are kind of coming up with options. We still have not gotten them yet. DOD is working this. He literally said that, a version of that, in August

2014 and in June 2015. Did it take DOD a year to come up with a strategy to defeat ISIS?

Secretary CARTER. First of all, thank you for your conversation. Thanks for everything you are doing, especially with respect to our Asia-Pacific strategy, Senator. I am very grateful for that and your travels there and your leadership.

We just spoke yesterday at the Pentagon with the President about his strategy. The strategy is the one that——

Senator SULLIVAN. That you laid out.

Secretary CARTER.—I described today.

Senator SULLIVAN. Okay. So he——

Secretary CARTER. By the way, he described 8 or 9 months ago and that does not—and this is important. It involves us, and we have an important role.

Senator SULLIVAN. Right.

Secretary CARTER. But it involves other parts of the Government as well. That is one of the reasons to keep laboriously citing nine lines of effort. There really are nine lines of effort. We do not directly, for example, try to interdict self-radicalized Americans. The FBI does that. We do not do that. But we have to do that while we are working on these difficult problems of Iraq.

Senator SULLIVAN. No, Mr. Secretary, I agree 100 percent with that, and that is why to me, again, it was a little bit—and maybe you just cannot answer the question directly. I wish you would. It just goes to some of the process here. The fact that the President for years has essentially been saying we do not have a strategy and it is because the guys over at DOD still have not given me one to me is not—A, it is not how we develop strategy. As you just mentioned, this strategy needs to be all instruments of American power. The military is clearly one, but we need economic, energy, finance, diplomatic, the whole list. That, of course, has to be developed by the White House, not by DOD.

So I do not think it took a year for the Pentagon to come up with a strategy, despite the fact that the President, each time he said we do not have a strategy, said that it was essentially your fault. I do not think it was your fault. I think it was the White House's fault. You know, I just want to be on record saying that I think that is unfair criticism to be put on the Chairman or the Secretary to say we do not have a strategy yet and it is because DOD—but I guess he now can say we do have a strategy. Is this his strategy?

Secretary CARTER. This is the strategy, and it is devised by the President and the White House. We play a role in it. So I did not observe any waiting for us to come up with a strategy.

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, he actually said it twice.

Secretary CARTER. The strategy that I have described, the nine lines of effort, was I think first described the end of last summer. It makes common sense that our strategy has all the parts that the nine lines of effort describe. Yesterday's meeting was to give him an update and to get his guidance on how we go forward. We did that. It happened to be at the Pentagon, and the focus was on the two of the nine lines of effort that we are responsible for, but there were other members of the national security community, which is essential to this, who were present and participated in that discussion.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, you do not to have to answer this, but I do not want to assume it took a year for the military to come up with options for the President.

General DEMPSEY. Well, no, I would be happy to answer it because we are frequently and constantly adapting options. But the context of when he said that was he had asked us is there something more we need to be doing with the Sunni tribes. That is the context of the question. So the real issue is whether we should be doing more with the Sunni tribes, and the outcome of that conversation and the planning that went into it was the Taqaddum Air Base train, advise, and assist platform.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

I know there has been some discussion with regard to the NDAA, and I think it is a good bill, a very bipartisan bill. Senator Reed and Chairman McCain should be commended for the great work they did.

One of the things that we try and do in the bill in a number of areas is bolster the credibility where the United States is seen as having a strategy both supported by the executive branch and the legislative branch. Some of us think that our credibility in certain areas of the world has been weak, and it has been one of the weaknesses of our national security and foreign policy strategy.

But we tried to do that in a number of areas, and I just want to provide two examples. You kind of hinted at one, Mr. Secretary, the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. There is some strong language in there about the support for that from Congress, very bipartisan, and how we need to be increasing troops in the Asia-Pacific.

Also very much a focus that I think is an area that, Mr. Secretary, you have said we are late in the game in the Arctic. You may have seen—if you have not, I would recommend you take a look at it. "Newsweek" this week talks about a cover story on the Arctic. The title is actually "In the Race to Control the Arctic, the United States Lags Behind." It talks about how this is developing as the new great game and Kipling's famous phrase about a critical strategic area, how the Russians are very, very involved in the Arctic. Mr. Chairman, you actually in testimony in front of this committee talked about the four new combat brigades that they are standing up, a new Arctic brigade, their exercise in the last couple months. Then the Commandant of the Coast Guard is essentially saying it is a new geopolitical cold war the United States is in danger of loosing. We are not even playing in this game at all.

So I just wanted to ask a final comment, Mr. Chairman. You talked about managing risks, Mr. Chairman. Would removing our only airborne brigade, BCT, in the Arctic, our only BCT in the Asia-Pacific—what would that do to our credibility? Would that bolster our credibility in the Arctic or Asia-Pacific with regard to the rebalance?

You talked about managing risk. It certainly seems to me, as Vladimir Putin is militarizing this part of the world, if we are actually removing forces—removing forces—our only Arctic-trained forces, that is a way to increase risk because we know he views weakness as being provocative. They are making a move in the

Arctic. If we start withdrawing troops, the 425 in particular, I think that heightens risk.

Would either of you care to comment on that?

General DEMPSEY. Yes. I think it increases risk, but some of the decisions—and you are talking about the Army in this case, but some of the choices that the Service Chiefs are going to have to make, as we continue to go down in terms of resources—you know, the Army is tasked with going from 490,000 active where they are today to 450,000 in the next 2 years. They have to come from some place.

Senator SULLIVAN. But to put that BCT on the block first to me is inviting—A, Congress is saying do not do it in the NDAA. But, second, that is going to undermine our credibility not only in the Arctic. It is going to undermine our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific strategy. Those are PACOM forces.

General DEMPSEY. I am not going to predispose the Army's decision, although it sounds like you may already have some insight.

Senator SULLIVAN. No, I do not. I am just making sure the Army does not make a strategic blunder.

General DEMPSEY. Right. Although I will tell you this, Senator, we are familiar with Congress telling us no on the reforms that we are making not because we are trying to cut ourselves apart, but because we have $1 trillion—that is a "T" not a "B"—$1 trillion less in budget authority over 10 years. We have some from the beginning it is a disaster.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just do want to mention that if we are looking at BCTs going to the area where Congress has actually said we need to increase forces, having our only Asia-Pacific Arctic capability which, as you know, General, you cannot develop overnight, and our only airborne capability in the entire Asia-Pacific—to me that would be a strategic blunder. I think Congress sometimes comes in and has broader strategic insights than the military has on occasion, not always. But in my view, this time is one of them.

Senator REED. On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me thank you for your testimony. I personally want to thank you for your service to the Nation, both of you, particularly, General Dempsey, as you conclude your uniformed service.

Again with Chairman McCain's direction, I will adjourn the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the committee adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR KELLY AYOTTE

RELIANCE ON SHIA MILITIAS AN IRAN THREATENS FUTURE OF IRAQ

1. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, do you agree that Baghdad's reliance on Shia militias and Iran represents a threat to the viability of a unified, stable, multi-sectarian Iraq?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, I have concerns about the sectarian nature of Iran's approach in Iraq. It stands in contrast to the Department's approach to work by, with, and through a unified, multi-sectarian government in Baghdad. I also believe that Prime Minister Abadi is committed to a decentralized, federalized, but multi-sectarian single state which would not be beholden to Iranian interests. I have seen some progress, but more time is needed for him to implement his agenda of political reform.

The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—which includes some Iranian-backed militias, have played a role in stemming the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's advance but are not envisioned to remain part of the forces the Government of Iraq (GOI) relies on in the future. It is important to distinguish between the PMF and Iranian-backed/controlled elements. Many of the fighters in the PMF are Iraqi nationalists who have volunteered to defend their country in response to Grand Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa last summer, are working within the Iraqi chain of command, and are conducting operations in Anbar at the request of local officials. The GOI envisions that many of the militia forces who responded to the emergency will return home and be demobilized or formally recruited into the Iraqi security forces or integrated into the National Guard, once the necessary legislation is passed.

General DEMPSEY. Reliance on a quasi-government paramilitary undermines public confidence in the legitimate armed forces and the government of Iraq and increases the risk of battlefield atrocities that serve to enflame sectarian tensions.

2. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, why is Baghdad so reliant on Shiite militias?

Secretary CARTER. Baghdad does leverage the Shiite militias' capabilities to wage the counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fight. Baghdad also uses the Iraqi Army, the Counterterrorism Service, the Kurdish Peshmerga, and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to counter ISIL. The PMF is a predominantly Shia force but also includes some Sunni fighters. The PMF has seen some success as a ground force in preventing ISIL's continued advance, and in reclaiming some territory. Prime Minister Abadi has made progress in recent months in expanding the number of Sunni fighters, including from the contested Anbar province, enrolled in the PMF.

Each of these groups is critical to success in the counter-ISIL fight. The United States continues to advocate that the Government of Iraq pursue an inclusive, multi-sectarian approach, including in its security forces.

General DEMPSEY. In some situations, the Shia militias have demonstrated great tenacity in their fights against ISIL, leading them to have success against ISIL in situations where a better-equipped ISF did not. But Iraq's future cannot run through militias so we must continue to assist the ISF in becoming and remaining the credible security force of the Government of Iraq.

3. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what additional steps can we take to more effectively and quickly reduce Baghdad's reliance on Shiite militias?

Secretary CARTER. Two important additional steps need to be taken to reduce Baghdad's reliance on Shiite militias. First, Sunni fighters need to be trained and equipped more quickly. Prime Minister Abadi has made progress in recent months in expanding the number of Sunni fighters enrolled as part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The Department is pressing the Government of Iraq to ensure that the Ministry of Defense is equipping Sunni tribal fighters appropriately. Second, establishing an Iraqi National Guard would be a key mechanism to integrate Shia and Sunni PMF forces and incorporate federal and provincial leadership. The Government of Iraq is considering establishment of a National Guard, which I believe will achieve the Prime Minister's overall goal of bolstering a federal state in Iraq with multi-sectarian security forces. The Department is encouraging the Iraqi government to accelerate approval of a National Guard.

General DEMPSEY. Two important additional steps need to be taken to reduce Baghdad's reliance on Shiite militias. First, we need to continue to push the GOI to accelerate training and equipping of Sunni fighters. Prime Minister Abadi has made progress in recent months in expanding the number of Sunni fighters enrolled as part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). We are also pressing the Iraqi government to ensure that the Ministry of Defense is appropriately equipping Sunni tribal fighters. Second, we believe the establishment of an Iraqi National Guard is a key mechanism needed to integrate Shia and Sunni PMF forces into an Iraqi organization that has both federal and provincial leadership. The Government of Iraq is considering the establishment of a National Guard, which is a critical piece of legislation that would help achieve the Prime Minister's overall goal of bolstering a federal state in Iraq with multi-sectarian security forces. We are pushing the Iraqi government to accelerate approval of a National Guard.

EFFECTIVENESS AND INTENSITY OF AIR CAMPAIGN

4. Senator AYOTTE. General Dempsey, what percentage of United States sorties over Iraq and Syria return without engaging the enemy? What explains that number? How has that percentage changed over time?

General DEMPSEY. US sorties are flown to conduct both deliberate strikes with pre-planned targets and dynamic strikes where the aircraft engages targets only if they are presented. From the commencement of airstrikes on 8 August 14 to 1 July 15, only 7 percent of aircraft flying deliberate strike sorties returned without expending their ordnance. Approximately 63 percent of aircraft flying dynamic strike missions returned without expending munitions. This percentage has stayed relatively constant since combat operations commenced. Of note, during a comparable timeframe in Afghanistan, 83 percent of aircraft flying dynamic strike missions returned with their munitions.

Targeting and dynamic engagements are by nature fluid processes. Aircraft conducting dynamic targeting missions are present to deliver ordnance on targets should the opportunity arise—targets are not programmed prior to the mission so employment of ordnance is not guaranteed. Beyond the type of mission flown, other factors reduce the number of munitions employed, such as adverse weather, lack of positive identifications, not having the right type of weapons for the target type and the ever present collateral damage concerns.

Strike aircraft can and do supports ground forces even without dropping ordnance. Aircraft are able to conduct should of presence missions and provide valuable armed over watch in support of ground forces. Aircraft flying dynamic targeting mission are often able to achieve desired outcomes without dropping ordnance.

RUSSIAN VIOLATION OF THE INF-UNITED STATES RESPONSES

5. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what specific steps is the United States taking in response to Russia's Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces violation?

Secretary CARTER. The Administration is pursuing a three-pronged approach, including continuing diplomatic efforts, economic countermeasures, and military countermeasures. A wide range of potential military response options are being considered.

All the options under consideration are designed to ensure that Russia gains no significant military advantage from its Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty violation. In terms of military responses, those options that are compliant with the INF Treaty are under consideration, as I continue to believe that the INF Treaty serves our interests and those of our allies. The United States will not take any action inconsistent with our obligations under the INF Treaty as long as those obligations remain in force.

However the INF Treaty is a two-way street. As I have said repeatedly, we will not allow the Russian Federation to gain a significant military advantage through its violation of an arms control treaty.

Russia remains in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty while, despite Russian claims to the contrary, the United States remains in full compliance with its obligations.

General DEMPSEY. We are considering a wide range of potential military response options, but no decisions have been made.

All the military options under consideration are designed to ensure that Russia gains no significant military advantage from its violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. We are currently considering those options that are compliant with the INF Treaty, as we continue to believe the Treaty serves our interests and those of our allies and Russia. The United States will not take any action inconsistent with our obligations under the INF Treaty, as long as those obligations remain in force.

Military options we are considering fall into three broad categories: Active defenses to counter intermediate- range ground-launched cruise missiles; counterforce capabilities to prevent intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile attacks; and countervailing strike capabilities to enhance U.S. or allied forces.

AFGHANISTAN

6. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, do you believe the United States transition in Afghanistan should be calendar or conditions-based?

Secretary CARTER. I have seen that calendar-based timelines have had a focusing effect in Afghanistan and have led to positive outcomes. As part of the current plan, the Department continually assesses the conditions on the ground and the capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to ensure the strategy enhances security and stability in Afghanistan and to be able to recommend adjustments if necessary.

General DEMPSEY. Time is in fact a condition; in Afghanistan it has enabled ownership of the tactical fight by the ANDSF. We have seen that calendar-based

timelines have had a focusing effect in Afghanistan and have led to positive outcomes. Yet as I have said before, a plan is something you adjust over time. As part of our current plan, we continually assess the conditions on the ground and the capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to maintain security and stability in Afghanistan.

7. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, would you describe the current withdrawal plan as calendar or condition-based?

Secretary CARTER. The current drawdown plan uses a time-phased approach for the withdrawal of United States forces to achieve a more normalized relationship with the Afghan government now that the combat mission has ended. The approach also factors in changing conditions on the ground, allowing for adjustments if necessary. I have seen that calendar-based timelines have helped the Afghan government, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), and the United States focus on what is needed to continue to progress. As part of this plan and the ongoing train, advise, and assist mission, the Department continues to assess ANDSF progress and remaining capability gaps to ensure that they can make progress stick.

General DEMPSEY. We use calendar-based timelines to focus our assessment of Afghanistan government's progress. Our decisions have seen that calendar-based timelines have helped the Afghan government and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) focus on what they need to achieve. As part of this plan and the ongoing train, advise, and assist mission, we continue to assess ANDSF progress and remaining capability gaps to ensure that the process is sustainable and make recommended changes to current plans as warranted.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JONI ERNST

UNITED STATES COUNTER-ISIL STRATEGY AND IRAQI GOVERNANCE

8. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, how are the President's nine lines of effort against ISIL being measured for success?

Secretary CARTER. The Department measures the effectiveness of our efforts to degrade and destroy ISIL by our ability to train and equip—in quantity and quality—effective partner forces and the ability of these forces to engage and defeat ISIL and retake territory. Similarly the success of the air campaign against ISIL is measured through the Coalition's ability to identify and destroy ISIL targets that degrade the capacity of the organization to wage the current fight and to eliminate threats to the homeland. The nine lines of effort are complementary and require constant synchronization, which is led by the National Security Council and in close coordination between Secretary Kerry and myself. Secretary Kerry and I also constantly work with our colleagues in the Intelligence Community to assess the impact of these actions on ISIL, and to recalibrate our efforts as appropriate to have maximum effect.

General DEMPSEY. The National Security Council is responsible for the coordination and synchronization of the nine lines of effort to degrade and destroy ISIL. The Department of Defense is responsible for two of the nine lines: to deny ISIL safe haven and to build partner capacity in Iraq and Syria. Alongside our coalition partners, we measure the effectiveness of our efforts by our ability to train and equip partner forces and their ability to engage and defeat ISIL; limiting ISIL's freedom of movement; constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters; and degrading its command and control.

9. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, how do the Departments coordinate (amongst themselves and with foreign partners) to avoid unnecessary duplication of activities under the nine lines of effort?

Secretary CARTER. United States departments and agencies with equities in the counter-ISIL effort are in constant communication concerning actions taken in support of the lines of effort (LOEs) to ensure we maximize the effect of our efforts and avoid duplication. Each LOE has a designated lead, and the lead department or agency coordinates actions it plans to undertake to accomplish the goals associated with that LOE. The lead department or agency for each LOE is responsible for marshalling the relevant expertise and resources from within the United States Government and implementing the LOE. The interagency conducts frequent coordination and synchronization meetings to ensure relevant parties have insight into actions taken to execute individual LOEs and the broader strategy.

The activities of our foreign partners are coordinated through Ambassador McGurk in his role as the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. He is tasked with coordinating the complementary activities of the more than 60 coalition countries that participate in five efforts: 1) providing military support to our partners; 2) impeding the flow of foreign fighters; 3) stopping ISIL's financing and funding; 4) addressing humanitarian crises in the region; and 5) exposing ISIL's true nature. Ambassador McGurk convenes regular meetings around the world to help ensure that coalition countries are undertaking activities in a methodical fashion that synchronizes with United States efforts to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.

10. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, what is the United States strategy to address ISIL attacks outside of Syria/Iraq (e.g. Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen)?

Secretary CARTER. The whole-of-government counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) strategy consists of nine lines of effort. This is a global strategy that applies wherever there is a threat from ISIL, not just Iraq and Syria. The nature of our specific actions will vary according to the situation and it will take time to fully implement the strategy.

The current focus of the counter-ISIL coalition's efforts is Iraq and Syria. The Administration also continues to assess the threat posed by ISIL in other places, to consult with allies and other partners, and to develop options to address ISIL's expansion.

The only way to achieve a lasting victory against ISIL is to work with local forces and partners in the region. In Libya, for example, the Department will be far better positioned to assist the Libyans in their fight against terrorists nationwide once they come together to form an inclusive unity government that is a willing and capable partner. The Administration is working hard, along with many other members of the international community, to get the warring factions in Libya to come to an agreement on a unity government.

In Tunisia, in the wake of the attacks at the Bardo Museum and hotels in Sousse, the Department is reinforcing its support of the Tunisian military's efforts to counter violent extremism within its borders. The Department is partnering with Tunisia to enhance its security sector development and build its internal capacity, with a focus on border security programs that augment current efforts by the Tunisians and international community to reduce trans-national trafficking and provide increased situational awareness.

Although implementing the strategy will take time, the Administration will assess and monitor the threat to the United States and its allies posed by ISIL, wherever its elements might be found. The Administration will not hesitate to take action when necessary. The recent strike against an al Qaeda-associated militant in Libya demonstrates the commitment to confronting threats to the United States wherever they are found, and Libya is no exception, despite the current turmoil there.

11. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, you testified "I've told Iraqi leaders that while the United States is open to supporting Iraq more than we already are, we must see a greater commitment from all parts of the Iraqi Government". What specific area of the Iraqi Government is a greater commitment required?

Secretary CARTER. Additional progress is needed on the inclusion of all ethno-sectarian groups into the Iraqi political process. Specifically, Prime Minister Abadi is committed to political inclusion, but his biggest challenge is getting the rest of the government, including the Iraqi Council of Representatives, to pass critical legislation that would engender greater stability in Iraq. Most importantly, this includes passage of a National Guard law, which is currently pending in Iraq's Council of Representatives after completing two readings on the floor. This legislation would be a key tool to help integrate Shia and Sunni Popular Mobilization Forces into an Iraqi organization that has both federal and provincial leadership as well as an important step towards a stable, multi-sectarian Iraqi state.

Additionally, although there has been some progress in generating capacity in the Iraqi Security Forces through the building partner capacity (BPC) efforts in Iraq, these BPC activities have the capacity to train more Iraq Security Forces personnel. The Government of Iraq, specifically the Ministry of Defense and the Iraqi Security Forces, need to commit to sending additional personnel to these sites.

12. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, does the battlefield situation on the ground dictate the circumstances to where you would recommend to the President he should directly arm the Iraqi Kurds and Sunni tribes?

Secretary CARTER. The battlefield situation informs the efforts to train and equip the Iraqi Kurds and Sunni tribes. The United States is assisting all of the Iraqi Se-

curity Forces to deny Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) safe haven. This effort allows space for the Iraqis to generate forces to go on the offensive against ISIL. The best way to defeat ISIL and enable a stable, multi-sectarian Iraqi state is to work by, with, and through the Government of Iraq to deliver arms to the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish forces and Sunni tribes.

General DEMPSEY. The battlefield situation informs the focus of our efforts to train and equip the Iraqi Kurds and Sunni tribes. The United States is broadly assisting Iraqi Security Forces in efforts to deny Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) safe haven, and this is allowing space for the Iraqis to generate forces to go on the offensive against ISIL. We continue to believe that the best way to defeat the ISIL and enable a stable, multi-sectarian Iraqi state is to work by, with, and through the Government of Iraq to deliver arms to the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish forces and Sunni tribes.

13. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, under what battlefield situation would you recommend to the President he should directly arm the Iraqi Kurds and Sunni tribes?

Secretary CARTER. The most effective means of delivering the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) a lasting defeat is to work by, with, and through the Iraqi government. The current battlefield situation and outlook for the campaign against ISIL are not cause to change this approach.

The Government of Iraq has supported the arming of the Kurdish Peshmerga to combat ISIL. A significant amount of military assistance has been provided to the Kurdish Regional Government. The Government of Iraq has also made progress in recent months to incorporate more Sunni tribal fighters into the Popular Mobilization Forces. The Government of Iraq has also provided weapons to tribal elements in Anbar operating with the Iraqi Security Forces. These actions demonstrate the Government of Iraq's intent to allow weapons to go to both the Kurds and Sunni tribes in the collective effort to defeat ISIL.

General DEMPSEY. We continue to believe that the most effective means of providing United States support to Kurdish security forces and Sunni tribes is to work by, with, and through the Iraqi government.

As evidenced by the significant sums of military assistance provided to the Kurdish Regional Government, the Government of Iraq has supported the arming of the Kurdish Peshmerga to combat ISIL. The Government of Iraq has also made progress in recent months to incorporate more Sunni tribal fighters into the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), including by providing weapons to tribal elements in Anbar operating with the Iraqi Security Forces. These actions demonstrate the Government of Iraq's intent to allow weapons to go to both the Kurds and Sunni tribes in the collective effort to defeat ISIL.

14. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, can Prime Minister Abadi executive order the creation of the Sunni National Guard?

Secretary CARTER. Prime Minister Abadi has used his executive authority to restructure Iraq's security forces over the past year. He has created the Popular Mobilization Forces and recruited a significant number of Sunnis to this effort. I would defer to the State Department on the question of whether, under the Iraqi constitution, Prime Minister Abadi could create the National Guard by executive order.

15. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, have you recommended to Prime Minister Abadi or to the President that Prime Minister Abadi executive order the creation of the Sunni National Guard?

Secretary CARTER. I defer this answer to the State Department which is responsible for making recommendations on this and other diplomatic issues. I would note that the Prime Minister has used his executive authority to re-structure Iraq's security forces over the past year—for example, the creation of the Popular Mobilization Forces, for which a significant number of Sunnis have been recruited. The National Guard proposal in Iraq is one of several legislative reforms aimed at decentralizing Iraqi governance. It is envisioned that the National Guard will represent each of Iraq's 18 provinces and the proposal should ultimately take shape through action from Iraq's legislative branch, the Council of Representatives.

General DEMPSEY. We would refer you to the State Department who has the lead for making political recommendations on this and other diplomatic issues.

However, we would note that the Prime Minister has used his executive authority to re-structure Iraq's Security Forces (ISF) over the past year—for example, the creation of the Popular Mobilization Forces, for which a significant number of Sunnis have been recruited. Additionally, since it is envisioned that the National Guard will represent each of Iraq's 18 provinces, which makes it one of several proposed legisla-

tive reforms aimed at decentralizing Iraq's governance, we believe that it should ultimately take full shape through action from Iraq's legislative branch, the Council of Representatives.

16. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, does Hadi al-Amiri's growing influence within the Iraqi Government improve inclusiveness or reduce sectarian tension for the Iraqi people?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

17. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, do you believe Hadi al-Amiri has the greatest influence in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

IRAQ TRAIN AND EQUIP

18. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, is the Department directly arming the Kurdistan Regional Government or any other units associated with the Iraqi Government?

Secretary CARTER. United States policy is to work in coordination with the Government of Iraq on assistance to the Kurdish Regional Government. Elements of the Kurdistan Regional Government are among the recipients of support provided by the Department of Defense. Such support included arms and ammunition.

19. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, what is the step-by-step process from United States custody to Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government custody of weapons and equipment provided through the Iraq Train and Equip program or any other program in which the United States provides weapons and equipment to the Kurdistan Regional Government or associated forces?

Secretary CARTER. There are several mechanisms for delivery of equipment to Kurdish forces; however, regardless of the mechanism, all equipment is coordinated by, with, and through the Government of Iraq (GOI).

First, we purchase weapons and equipment using the Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF). Items are delivered first to Kuwait for inventory and packaging; they are then moved forward into Iraq under the control of Combined Joint Task Force-Iraq (CJTF–I), Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Iraq (CJFLCC–I), and the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC–I); and finally they are signed over to Peshmerga units through the GOI. To date, United States Government, GOI, and Peshmerga representatives have all been present in Erbil to accept transfers.

Second, weapons and equipment have been provided to Kurdish forces under Presidential Drawdown, Excess Defense Article, and Foreign Military Financing authorities. The GOI submits a Letter of Request (LOR) and signs a letter of offer and acceptance (LOA). United States Central Command and CJTF–I facilitate delivery of those items to Erbil, where United States Government, GOI, and Peshmerga representatives transfer deliveries through the GOI to the Kurdish forces.

Finally, weapons and equipment have been provided to Kurdish forces through the Kurdish Resupply Task Force, for which the United States coordinates donations and arranges for transportation of donated items.

Regardless of their origin, a diplomatic clearance request must be submitted to the GOI for the incoming defense articles. The next step is to fly the equipment to Baghdad for customs inspection, which may last 24 hours, but it only averages 2–4 hours. Finally, the equipment is flown to Erbil, where it is received by a logistics representative from the Kurdish Regional Government.

20. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, on June 10, 2015, the President announced that he was "expediting" the delivery of weapons and equipment to the Kurdistan Regional Government. How has the process of delivering weapons, equipment, and training to the Kurdistan Regional Government changed since he made this announcement?

Secretary CARTER. The process of delivering equipment has not changed, but the Department has worked to accelerate delivery under the existing process in two ways since the President's announcement. First, the United States has worked with the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to accelerate the transfer of items to the KRG. Second, when production lines are not current or the type of equipment needed is not in stock, the President has directed, as he has at certain junctures in the past, the Department to expedite and prioritize production for counter-Islamic State needs or to look to other countries to provide weapons expeditiously.

General DEMPSEY. The process of delivering equipment has not changed, but we have worked to accelerate delivery under the existing process in two ways since the President's announcement. First, the United States has worked with the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to accelerate the transfer of items to the KRG. Second, when production lines are not current or we do not possess in our stocks the type of equipment needed, the President has directed, as he has at certain junctures in the past, us to expedite and prioritize production for counter-ISIL needs or to look to other countries to provide weapons expeditiously to the counter-ISIL fight.

21. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what delays or inefficiencies were resolved as a result of expediting weapons and equipment to the Kurdistan Regional Government?

Secretary CARTER. Putting pressure on both US and Government of Iraq (GOI) systems to accelerate or simply put more focus on items intended for delivery to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) helped synchronize activities within the US and Coalition side of the process. The synchronized activities helped streamline processes on the Iraqi side so that these items were still delivered "by, with, and through" the GoI. These deliveries were then synchronized with other demands from within Iraq and USG.

The challenges are equally due to the need to develop Iraqi and KRG operational (predictive) planning capability as it is the shortage of stock pertaining to the demands of the day. In that context, these items were delivered in relatively short order from the time the request had been officially received through Iraq and/or Combined Joint Task Force representation. Items may not be immediately available as every requirement is identified. Production lines may not be current and we have to turn them back on. The Department may not possess in the stocks the type of equipment used by a foreign entity. The President has directed, as he has at certain junctures in the past, to expedite production or to look to other countries to provide weapons expeditiously.

General DEMPSEY. Putting pressure on both United States and Government of Iraq (GOI) systems to accelerate delivery, or simply to put more focus on timely delivery of weapons and equipment to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), helped synchronize activities within the United States and Coalition side of the process. Iraqi processes were also streamlined in that the weapons and equipment were still delivered "by, with, and through" the GOI—and were synchronized with other demands from within Iraq and the United States. In addition, the status of production lines can affect delivery times. Sometimes, production lines are not current and we have to turn them back on, or we do not possess in U.S. stocks the type of equipment used by a particular foreign country. The President has directed, as he has at certain junctures in the past, to expedite production or look to other countries to provide weapons expeditiously in the counter-ISIL fight. Moreover, because not all requirements can be filled as soon as they are identified, we continue to work with the GOI and the KRG to develop operational (predictive) planning capabilities. In that context, weapons and equipment have been delivered in relatively short order from the time the requests were received.

22. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, do you support directly arming the Sunni tribal forces?

Secretary CARTER. No. Directly arming specific groups without coordinating with the Government of Iraq (GOI) would undermine United States efforts to foster a unified, multi-sectarian government, which I view as a necessary step in the overall effort to deliver a lasting defeat to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). At this time, direct arming of Sunni tribal forces or any sub-group of Iraqi Security Forces would be counter-productive to the overall goal of countering the ISIL. In order to achieve lasting effects against ISIL, all elements of the GOI must work together.

General DEMPSEY. No. Directly arming specific groups without coordinating with the Government of Iraq (GOI) would undermine United States efforts to foster a unified, multi-sectarian government, which we view as a necessary step in the overall effort to counter ISIL. At this time, direct arming of Sunni tribal forces or any sub-group of Iraqi Security Forces would be counter-productive to the overall goal of countering the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In order to achieve lasting effects against ISIL, all elements of the GOI must work together.

23. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, is it a requirement Iraqi Sunni tribal forces are provided with weapons and equipment in a sufficient quantity and in a timely manner to ultimately defeat ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, the inclusion of Sunni tribal forces in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and their training and equipping in a timely manner is critical to reaching the overall goal of defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

United States policy remains that the Government of Iraq (GOI) must concur with provision of all equipment and weapons to the Sunni tribal forces. Despite a slow start on GOI arming of Sunni tribes, trends are moving in the right direction—the number of armed Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar has tripled since April, and the United States presence at Taqaddum Air Base is helping to foster greater GOI support to the Sunni tribal forces. In fact, the GOI has distributed weapons to more than 800 Sunni forces in recent weeks, and several hundred Sunni forces are currently receiving training at Taqaddum.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, the inclusion of Sunni tribal forces in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and their training and equipping in a timely manner is critical to reaching the overall goal of defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

United States policy remains that the Government of Iraq (GOI) must concur with all equipment and weapons that DOD provides to the Sunni tribal forces. Despite a slow start on GOI arming of Sunni tribes, trends are moving in the right direction—the number of armed Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar has tripled since April—and our presence at Taqaddum Air Base is helping to foster greater GOI support to the Sunni tribal forces. In fact, the GOI has distributed weapons to more than 800 Sunni forces in recent weeks, and several hundred Sunni forces are currently receiving training at Taqaddum.

24. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what confidence do you have that the Iraqi Government can provide Sunni tribal forces with weapons and equipment in a sufficient quantity and in a timely manner to ultimately defeat ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I have confidence that Prime Minister Abadi and his government are working to provide sufficient weapons and equipment to the Sunni tribes in a timely manner. Despite a slow start on GOI arming of Sunni tribes, trends are moving in the right direction—the number of armed Sunni forces in Anbar has tripled since April—and United States forces presence at Taqaddum Air Base is helping. In fact, the GOI has distributed weapons to more than 800 Sunni forces in recent weeks, and several hundred Sunni forces are currently receiving training at Taqaddum. The Department will continue to evaluate whether this initiative moves forward at a sufficient pace to ultimately defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is also important to note that the pace of equipping is not the only variable that will determine success against ISIL.

General DEMPSEY. We have confidence that Prime Minister Abadi and his government are working to provide sufficient weapons and equipment to the Sunni tribes in a timely manner. Despite a slow start on GOI arming of Sunni tribes, trends are moving in the right direction—the number of armed Sunni forces in Anbar has tripled since April—and United States forces presence at Taqaddum Air Base is helping. In fact, the GOI has distributed weapons to more than 800 Sunni forces in recent weeks, and several hundred Sunni forces are currently receiving training at Taqaddum. We will continue to evaluate whether this initiative moves forward at a sufficient pace to make the necessary progress to ultimately defeat ISIL. It is also important to note that the pace of equipping is not the only variable that will determine success against ISIL.

25. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, would the Department require congressional authorization to directly arm the Sunni tribal forces in consultation with the Iraqi Government?

Secretary CARTER. No, the Department has sufficient authorities under the Iraq Train and Equip Fund authority to provide assistance to military and other security forces of or associated with the Government of Iraq, including Kurdish and tribal security forces or other local security forces, with a national security mission. No additional authorities are needed.

26. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, what coalition nations are directly arming the Kurdistan Regional Government?

Secretary CARTER. Coalition partners have provided weapons and/or equipment to the Peshmerga through the Government of Iraq (GOI) using either the United States-directed resupply task force or by coordinating directly with the GOI in Baghdad. The donating countries to date are: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Jordan, Macedonia, and the United Kingdom.

27. Senator ERNST. General Dempsey, does the wide variety in types of ammunition, weapons, and equipment provided to the Kurdistan Regional Government have a negative impact on combat operations or coalition training of Peshmerga?

General DEMPSEY. The ammunition, weapons, and equipment provided to the Peshmerga has been in direct response to specific requests for those items by the Kurdistan Regional Government. In addition, the United States has provided "train the trainer" capabilities to Coalition partners training Peshmerga forces on the employment of delivered arms, ammunition, and materiel (AAM). Our assessment is the various AAM that the United States and partner-nations have donated and delivered to Kurdish/Peshmerga forces have directly contributed to the combat effectiveness of the Peshmerga against ISIL.

IRAQI SHIA MILITIAS ALSO KNOWN AS POPULAR MOBILIZATION FORCES

28. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what is the impact of Shia militia recruiting on the ability of the Iraqi Government to recruit Iraqis for the Iraqi Security Force?

Secretary CARTER. The Department does not have a clear picture of Shia militia recruiting and the impact of Shia militia recruiting on the ability of the Iraqi Government to recruit Iraqis for the Iraqi Security Force (ISF). In part, this is because the United States is not involved in ISF recruiting. The Department is training, equipping, advising, and assisting forces that have been properly vetted after being recruited by the Government of Iraq. The Department does know that, in some instances, salary payments from Shia groups have been a significant inducement for recruits.

General DEMPSEY. These is a little evidence that PMF recruitment efforts have severely altered the Iraqi Government's ability to acquire recruits for Iraqi Security Forces, but if ISF losses mount alongside PMF successes or large pay and equipment gaps between the two groups arise, it may have a significant impact in the future.

29. Senator ERNST. General Dempsey, outside of Baghdad, where do Shia militias have greater numerical strength and/or greater combat capability, than the ISF?

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

30. Senator ERNST. General Dempsey, at what point do you assess Shia militias and Popular Mobilization Forces will have numerical superiority or greater combat power over the Iraqi Security Forces?

General DEMPSEY. We do not assess this scenario is likely in the near future.

31. Senator ERNST. General Dempsey, what is the fastest growing military organization in Iraq—ISIL, Shia militias/Popular Mobilization Forces, Peshmerga, or Iraqi Security Forces?

General DEMPSEY. The PMF has been the fastest growing force since June 2014 as they have gone from nothing to having tens of thousands of fighters. However, recruitment has leveled off. None of the groups are currently experiencing rapid growth.

32. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, approximately how much funding does Iran provide the Iraqi Security Forces to fight ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

33. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, please describe the influence Iran has in deciding who is provided with weapons and equipment provided by the Iraqi Government?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

34. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what types of heavy weapons and equipment are provided by the Iraqi Government to the Popular Mobilization Forces?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

35. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, does the Iraqi Government provide certain types of weapons and equipment to the Popular Mobilization Forces which they do not provide to the Peshmerga?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

General DEMPSEY. No, Baghdad has provided similar weapons and equipment to both the PMF and Peshmerga forces in the past, but provides them more consistently to PMF engaged in current operations.

36. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, in what ways are the combat power of the Popular Mobilization Forces greater than the combat power of the Peshmerga?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

General DEMPSEY. The PMF has more consistent access to armored vehicles, tanks and anti-tanks weapons. It also enjoys better access to Iraqi ammunition supplies.

37. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter, would the seizure of Kirkuk Province by Shia militias be a positive development for United States interests?

Secretary CARTER. No. An internal struggle for control of Kirkuk between Shia and Kurdish forces would run counter to United States interests in Iraq and the region. I believe that a stable, multi-sectarian Iraq is the only way to ensure the long-term defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In keeping with this, I believe that a coordinated effort by all of Iraq's security forces, to include Kurdish and Popular Mobilization Forces, working together and with the central government to drive out ISIL forces, would affirm the Government of Iraq's efforts toward inclusivity and be consistent with United States interests.

38. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, how would using Iraqi Kurdistan as a coalition base of operations to support Operation Inherent Resolve enhance the coalition's ability to degrade and defeat ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. The United States and Coalition already use the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as a base of operations to support Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). This access is integral to the success of OIR. Current efforts include, but are not limited to, the train and equip site in Erbil, which supports the training and equipping of Kurdish forces, and Coalition advise and assist activities throughout Kurdish areas in Iraq support operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The Department continues to evaluate whether basing other activities in this region would enhance the coalition's ability to degrade and defeat ISIL in the future, but no additional determinations have been made at this time.

General DEMPSEY. Areas of Iraq populated by the Kurdish people have been used by Coalition forces, since the outset of Operations INHERENT RESOLVE, to support counter-ISIL operations. We are constantly evaluating our forward basing strategy to provide the President the best military advice for effective operations to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

CENTCOM BASING

39. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, how would expanding the use of Iraqi Kurdistan as a base of operations to support United States operations in the Middle East enhance our ability to defeat ISIL and check Iran's influence in the Middle East?

Secretary CARTER. I do not believe that expanding the use of Iraqi Kurdistan as a base of operations is necessary at this time to defeat the Islamic State and check malign Iranian influence in the region. The Department is providing a significant amount of support to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. I believe our advise and assist as well as our train and equip efforts throughout the Iraqi Kurdistan Region are currently aligned appropriately to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Department is constantly evaluating the implementation of the campaign to ensure it is meeting the campaign's objectives.

General DEMPSEY. We are confident that we have arrayed out forces and capabilities in the region in the most effective manner to enable counter-ISIL operations and reduce Iran's malign influence throughout the Middle East. Moving forward, we continue to evaluate our forward basing strategy to provide the President the best military advice for effective operations to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, as well as to check Iran's influence in the region.

40. Senator ERNST. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, have you recommended to the President he should expand basing and support operations in Iraqi Kurdistan to enhance operations against ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. At this time, I have not recommended expanding our current posture in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The Department is providing a significant amount of support to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. I believe our advise and assist

as well as our train and equip efforts throughout the Iraqi Kurdistan Region are currently aligned appropriately to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Department is constantly evaluating the implementation of the campaign to ensure it is meeting the campaign's objectives.

General DEMPSEY. Iraqi Kurdistan is a critical basing area in DOD's strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. We are confident that we have arrayed our forces and capabilities in the region in the most effective manner to enable counter-ISIL operations. Moving forward, we will continue to evaluate our forward basing strategy to provide the President the best military advice to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR SENATOR TED CRUZ

ISIS CENTER OF GRAVITY

41. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, has the Joint Staff determined the Center of Gravity to meet the President's directive to "ultimately defeat" ISIS? If so, what do you assess as the ISIS Center of Gravity? Is the United States military properly positioned to target the Center of Gravity, or will the effort be led by one of the directors of the seven other lines of operations?

General DEMPSEY. We assess ISIL's has two interconnected centers of gravity to achieve its strategic goal of restoring the Islamic Caliphate. The first CoG is ISIL's territorial control in Iraq and Syria whereby ISIL governs by forces and where it has active, passive, and tacit support of the population. The second CoG is ISIL's extremist ideology and its ability to promote it within Iraq and Syria as well as externally to aspiring jihadists.

ACQUISITION OF UNITED STATES EQUIPMENT BY IRANIAN BACKED MILITIAS

42. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, how much United States equipment has been provided by Baghdad to Iranian-backed Shia militias?

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

43. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, how much United States equipment has Iranian-backed Shia militias obtained from other means?

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

SUPPORT TO IRAQI GOVERNMENTAL FORCES

44. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, in May, you stated that Iraqi Security Forces "just showed no will to fight" in explaining the Islamic State's victory at Ramadi. You added, "They withdrew from the site, and that says to me, and I think to most of us, that we have an issue with the will of the Iraqis to fight ISIS and defend themselves." Is it conceivable that those you identified as Iraqi Security Forces in Anbar province did not fight because the Central Government in Baghdad did not provide those forces the military equipment and support to do so effectively, or do you attribute their failure primarily to a lack of will?

Secretary CARTER. The withdrawal from Ramadi in May by the Iraqi Security Force (ISF) was due to a combination of lack of proper support and eroded will to fight after eight months of grinding, continuous battle with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This incident illustrates the importance of a capable and motivated Iraqi ground force that is adequately resourced and supported by the central government. The forces that fled Ramadi were led poorly, did not receive regular supplies of weapons or equipment, and did not have valuable intelligence information about their adversaries. ISIL also continues to show that it is an adaptive and tenacious adversary. It has used a variety of tactics in Ramadi, such as suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices, to great effect. Overall, I believe that these issues, combined with the general problem of a hollow ISF, contributed to the ISF's decision to retreat from Ramadi.

LACK OF PARTNERS IN THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

45. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, Sunni tribes in Iraq can be fickle; after years of disenfranchisement under former Prime Minister Maliki, they seem very unlikely to side with the increasingly sectarian and Shiite Iraqi Security Forces against ISIS. In fact, we have seen Sunni tribes in Anbar and other parts of Western Iraq pledg-

ing their loyalty to ISIS.[1] Not only must this flow of Sunni tribes to our adversary be stemmed inside Iraq, true gains against ISIS might require an external, designated Sunni Arab partner to stabilize western Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Kurds have proven time and again that they are the most reliable and effective anti-ISIS fighting force on the ground in Iraq. They have held their lines against thousands of ISIS jihadists, and have made significant counter-attacks, reducing the territorial gains of ISIS. Yet, as you confirmed in the hearing, the United States does not provide direct armament to the Iraqi Kurds, and everything flows through Baghdad. We do not embed forward observers to coordinate air strikes against ISIS. We do not truly partner with this fighting force which has stood beside us resolutely and steadfastly, from the ouster of Saddam Hussein until now.

Would you agree that we need a Sunni Arab force that we can partner with to stabilize the Sunni Arab portions of Iraq?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, a Sunni force that is part of a multi-sectarian military security force controlled and supported by the Government of Iraq is a necessary component of our campaign to repel the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and stabilize Sunni portions of Iraq. This is why the Department of Defense is working by, with, and through the Government of Iraq to train and equip Sunni tribal fighters in Iraq. At al Asad and Taqaddum air bases in Anbar province, United States and Coalition advisors are working with Iraqi Security Forces to recruit, train, and equip fighters in the fight against ISIL.

46. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, do you think a Sunni Arab force has a real chance of stabilizing Iraq while a civil war continues in Syria? How will that Sunni Arab force interact and coordinate with Kurd forces?

Secretary CARTER. Continued conflict and instability in Syria will present challenges to the Iraqi government even after ISIL is dislodged from Iraq. However, a Government of Iraq that effectively controls and supports the multi-sectarian security forces of Iraq—to include Sunni and Shia Popular Mobilization Forces, the Iraqi Army, the Counterterrorism Service, Kurdish forces, and other local forces such as police—has the capability to repel ISIL and hold Iraqi territory despite a continuing civil war in Syria. Our efforts in Iraq and Syria are complementary. Our Syria strategy has three major components: airstrikes against ISIL, building a ground force, and pushing for a negotiated political transition. Iraqi and Kurdish forces on both sides of the border continue to demonstrate a willingness to work together through coordinated planning and operations in the fight against ISIL.

47. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, do you think there is any scenario where relative peace returns to the region while Assad holds on to power?

General DEMPSEY. Such a scenario is highly unlikely.

COUNTERING THE JIHADI NARRATIVE

48. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, it seems that ISIS is just one franchise of the global jihadist movement, and that there is a more decisive battlefield than the physical ground in Raqqa, Mosul, and Ramadi that ISIS currently controls. Like the Cold War, this true battlefield is the war of ideas between the Western ideals of peaceful self-determination, individual dignity, and freedom of religion against a totalitarian ideology espoused by violent Islamic extremists who kill anyone who opposes them or takes part in any activity they deem un-Islamic.

We can't counter the global jihadi narrative because we won't acknowledge its theological and ideological roots. We have seen a steady stream of foreign fighters pour into Iraq and Syria, and despite the fact that we have killed about 13,000 fighters, ISIS has recruited over 4,000 westerners and continues to recruit about 1,000 fighters a month. We have utterly failed to discredit the global jihadi narrative. We have failed to highlight and discredit the charlatans who stitch together these interpretations of the Koran and the Hadith to sanction morally repugnant actions against unbelievers in name of Islam.

What are you doing to deconstruct, understand, and counter this narrative?

General DEMPSEY. The Department works directly in conjunction with Department of State, who has been tasked as the lead to counter ISIL's narrative through the Information Coordination Cell (ICC). In addition to our work within the ICC construct, the Department participates in multiple forums and works with both

[1] "Sunni Tribes in Iraq's Anbar Province Pledge Support to ISIL", Al Jazeera America Staff, 04 June 2015, *http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/4/sunni-tribes-in-anbar-iraq-pledge-support-to-isil.html*

inter-agency partners and academia to analyze ISIL's propaganda network. The main challenge today is the size and pace of communications in social media. The information environment has moved beyond largely non-interactive television and static websites to social media that can be accessed almost instantaneously, by anyone, at almost any time. Our ability to assess the social media environment is extremely challenging because of its global scale and dynamic, continuously-evolving nature. USCENTCOM serves as the Department's operational lead across multiple efforts to blunt ISIL's narrative. Based upon the diffuse nature of the information environment, which does not respect geographic boundaries, the Joint Staff looks to synchronize Counter-ISIL efforts with other Combatant Commands.

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

49. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, reportedly, there are now nearly 1.8 million refugees/IDPs in northern Iraq, under the purview of the KRG (which itself only has a population of approximately 5 million). If those refugees (of which the overwhelming majority are Iraqi IDPs) are not properly cared for, they will become a ripe terrorist recruiting pool for generations.

Do you feel that you have complete transparency as to what, if anything, the central government in Baghdad is doing to assist their fellow Kurdish Iraqis in managing this crisis? Is that process completely transparent? Is the burden of assisting these refugees and IDP's being equitably distributed between the central government in Iraq and the KRG?

Secretary CARTER. The Government of Iraq (GOI) provides a significant level of transparency regarding its humanitarian assistance efforts. GOI has provided humanitarian assistance to Iraqi internally displaced persons located in northern Iraq and has coordinated on multiple occasions with Kurdish forces and the Coalition to airlift life-saving humanitarian supplies to civilians located in northern Iraq. I would also note that the GOI is experiencing a severe financial crisis due to low oil prices, diminished capacity, and the ongoing counter-ISIL fight.

50. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, what are we doing to assist the Governments of Jordan and Turkey with the enormous numbers of IDPs they have absorbed in this conflict?

Secretary CARTER. I remain concerned by the refugee crisis facing our partners in the Middle East, including Turkey, where nearly 2 million refugees from Syria and Iraq are living, and Jordan, where 627,000 Syrian refugees have registered through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in addition to the hundreds of thousands of additional refugees who have not registered. The Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development are best postured, however, to provide details about the funding and assistance provided to these partners to support their response to the refugee crisis.

The Department of Defense closely coordinates with and provides support to many of these interagency efforts. In Jordan, for example, the Department engages with the Jordan Armed Forces, through the United States Embassy in Amman, to ensure United States humanitarian assistance is able to flow into southern Syria in order to meet the needs of Syrians who might otherwise choose to seek refuge in Jordan, thereby lessening the burden that additional refugees would pose on our regional partners.

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR WEAPONS GOING TO KURDS

51. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, what is the process of approving which weapons get to the KRG? Who decides which weapons requested by the Kurds should go to them? Is it the White House, the Pentagon, or Baghdad? Please describe the efforts to ensure accurate and transparent accountability of weapons requested, approved, and then actually delivered to the KRG. How much time is required for each of the phases, from request, through to final delivery?

Secretary CARTER. The process for approving weapons for Kurdish forces starts with a request for equipment from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Department of Defense experts on the ground, including representatives from the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR), the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Iraq (CJFLCC–I), and the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC–I) then validate the request by ensuring it aligns with operational requirements, and then the consent of the Government of Iraq (GOI) is obtained with regard to the validated list. This process typically takes one-to-two weeks from receipt of a new list until GOI consent.

There are several mechanisms by which the Department facilitates the delivery of defense equipment to Kurdish forces; regardless of the mechanism, all equipment is coordinated by, with, and through the GOI.

First, the Department purchases weapons and equipment using the Iraq Train and Equip Funds. Items are delivered first to Kuwait for inventory and packaging; they are then moved forward into Iraq under the control of CJTF–OIR,CFLCC–I, and OSC–I; and finally they are signed over to Peshmerga units through the GOI. United States Government, GOI, and Peshmerga representatives are all present in Erbil to accept transfers.

Second, for weapons and equipment being provided to Kurdish forces under Presidential Drawdown, Excess Defense Article, and Foreign Military Financing authorities, the GOI submits a Letter of Request (LOR) and signs a letter of offer and acceptance (LOA). United States Central Command and CJTF–OIR facilitate delivery of those items to Erbil, where United States Government, GOI, and Peshmerga representatives transfer deliveries through the GOI to the Kurdish forces.

Finally, some weapons and equipment are provided to Kurdish forces through the Kurdish Resupply Task Force, for which the United States coordinates donations and arranges for transportation of donated items. Once a coalition partner has committed to donate defense equipment, and transportation has been arranged, a diplomatic clearance request is submitted to the GOI for the incoming flight. That process can take up to 10 days but usually takes a week. The next step is to fly the equipment to Baghdad for a customs inspection, which can take up to 24 hours, but it takes only 2–4 hours, on average. Finally, the equipment is flown to Erbil, where it is received by a logistics representative from the Kurdish Regional Government.

KRG REPRESENTATION AT FUTURE COUNTER-ISIS COALITION MEETINGS

52. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, despite numerous requests from all levels of the Kurdistan Regional Government to participate as part of the Iraqi delegation to meetings of the Counter-ISIS Coalition, their requests have been denied. President Obama has "commended the bravery of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces" for the critical role they play, and yet, it is understood that Baghdad has refused this access. How can the administration claim that support for an inclusive Iraqi Government is paramount to the success of the campaign, unless it also supports KRG inclusion in all aspects of the discussions? What can you do to ensure that the Kurds are included in the Iraqi delegation?

Secretary CARTER. The United States Government is not in a position to prescribe who the Government of Iraq (GOI) includes in its own diplomatic delegations. The GOI, like any sovereign government, is responsible for representing Iraq in meetings with other sovereign governments. The United States Government does, however, encourage the GOI to continue building inclusive governance that represents and is responsive to all of its citizens. The current GOI is led by a Council of Ministers that includes ministers from each of Iraq's major societal components. Senior leaders representing the major Kurdish political parties are included in this group. These leaders also govern the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Coordinating closely with the GOI, the United States Government, including the Department of Defense, also maintains a direct relationship with Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) leadership, both through the KRG mission in Washington and through President Barzani in Erbil.

LONG-RANGE ANTI-TANK WEAPONS TO COUNTER ARMORED VEHICLE BORN IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (VBIED)

53. Senator CRUZ. General Dempsey, ISIS has captured over 1,000 armored vehicles. ISIS is also making make-shift armored vehicles with after-market armor. The Kurds report that they cannot repel attacks by these vehicles with light arms like AK–47s, or even with RPGs. The Kurds report the Milan rocket provided by Germany and Italy is the best defense but they do not have enough of them. While we have supplied AT–4s to help Kurdish forces counter this threat, those handheld anti-tank missiles are too short-ranged to provide adequate standoff from these large, heavily armored VBIEDs. Are you considering giving them longer range anti-tank systems such as the Javelin, or is there anything else the United States can provide to counter this significant threat?

General DEMPSEY. We have gone to great lengths to address the priority needs of the KSF. We are providing the Iraqi and Kurdish forces a variety of anti-tank VBIED systems such as 40 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, 1,000 AT–4 anti-tank systems, and anti-tank ammunition. Furthermore, we continue to seek effective coalition donations for the Kurdish forces by engaging our coalition partners (like Germany and Italy) to provide defensive systems such as the Milan rocket that

have sufficient range to counter the threats posed by make-shift armored vehicles. To date, the KSF have received approximately 80 percent of more than 6 million pounds of weapons (over 55,000 weapons) and ammunition (over 48 million rounds) donated by the coalition. This support has helped the KSF to regain virtually all of the territory that had been lost to ISIL.

NON-LETHAL ENABLERS FOR KURDISH FORCES

54. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, the Kurds report significant shortages in non-lethal defense items that are nevertheless critical to their success. This includes helmets, body armor, and night vision goggles. Due to limitations on their ability to buy such equipment on the open market and the fact that their budget is severely strained, they are hoping to receive these from the coalition. What have you told them you plan to do to help them correct these critical shortages?

Secretary CARTER. The Department plans to provide adequate defense equipment, including non-lethal items, to Kurdish forces through the Iraq Train and Equip Fund authority, coalition donations, or other authorities, in coordination with the Government of Iraq.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

COUNTER-ISIS STRATEGY

55. Senator SHAHEEN. Secretary Carter, I understand DOD is the lead for two of the nine lines of effort in the fight against ISIS. How will the reimposition of the Budget Control Act caps affect the overall counterterrorism strategy against ISIS, whether or not DOD is provided with additional OCO funding? How important is the whole-of-government approach to the ISIS strategy, to include the efforts of DOD, State, Treasury, Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Community?

Secretary CARTER. Allowing sequestration to return would deprive U.S. forces of what they need to accomplish their missions around the world, including current operations in the Middle East. The short-term impacts of a return to the Budget Control Act caps would affect all aspects of the Department. The President's Budget for fiscal year 2016 is roughly $35 billion above sequestration-level caps. More than one-third of the cuts in fiscal year 2016 would have to come from the Operation and Maintenance accounts, with unavoidable reductions in readiness and our ability to shape world events in the interests of the United States. The longer-term impact of sequestration would damage our national security, ultimately resulting in a military that is too small and insufficiently equipped to implement our defense strategy fully. The Department would be forced to make trade-offs between forward presence and readiness, as well as between the capability and capacity of the Joint Force—these trade-offs would have consequences for United States missions across the globe, including in the Middle East.

The President's whole-of-government approach to the counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) strategy is critical to its success. The contributions of other Departments and Agencies include diplomatic action, humanitarian assistance, financial measures to undermine ISIL, initiatives to stem the flow of foreign fighters, and expanded intelligence collection against ISIL. This mission of defeating ISIL cannot be achieved without all these efforts. There is an enduring connection between our nation's military efforts and those non-military instruments of national power, and it is essential to resource our interagency partners at the levels requested in the President's Budget.

56. Senator SHAHEEN. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, what is your assessment of United States efforts to counter ISIS propaganda campaigns and to delegitimize ISIS in the eyes of those who might otherwise be drawn to their message? Do you believe there is sufficient cooperation between the State Department and the Department of Defense as well as coordination with our allies?

Secretary CARTER. The Department has worked closely with the Information Coordination Cell within the State Department Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, and with other United States Government communicators including the Broadcasting Board of Governors, to ensure Department of Defense counter-propaganda efforts both nest within and support broader interagency strategies. The modern information environment offers unique challenges to the United States Government—information operations have moved beyond largely non-interactive television and static websites to social media that can be accessed almost instantaneously, by anyone, at almost any time. The ability to assess the social media environment is extremely challenging because of its global scale and dynamic, continu-

ously evolving nature. The Department is working both to ensure counter-propaganda efforts are agile and responsive to emerging technologies, and to develop innovative ways to assess their effectiveness in this constantly changing environment.

General DEMPSEY. The Department of Defense continues to seek ways we can support Department of State in countering ISIS propaganda campaigns and delegitimize ISIS through our unique authorities and resources. ISIS continues to successfully leverage the information environment to its advantage. The online space, in particular, is dynamic and its global span is challenging. Adversary efforts in the information environment are unencumbered by legal or policy concerns, very cheap to execute, efforts and policies need to evolve in order to combat this threat. We continue to made strides in learning more about the social media environment, and from a whole of government perspective, how we can collectively assess the effectiveness of our efforts.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TIM KAINE

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

57. Senator KAINE. Secretary Carter, during my recent trip to the Iraq and Turkey, my staff was briefed on details regarding support for the Syrian militia forces we are training. Specifically, we discussed the issue surrounding the Rules of Engagement prohibiting the use of United States airpower to assist in defending United States-trained Syrian militias against attack by forces from the Assad regime. The Special Operations Forces charged with this training explained that the prohibition was severely damaging the credibility of U.S. commitment to the trainees and likely hampering our recruitment efforts.

Can you confirm whether such a restriction on supporting U.S.-trained Syrian forces with defensive fires against the Assad regime's forces exists within the current Rules of Engagement? Will the DOD change this rule? If so, when? If not, what steps should the Senate Armed Service Committee take to remove the restriction and ultimately provide the full spectrum of support and protection to the forces we train and put in harm's way?

Secretary CARTER. The current Operation INHERENT RESOLVE rules of engagement (ROE) are classified. My staff can provide additional information regarding those ROE in a classified setting. No action by the Committee is necessary. The Administration has concluded that there is sufficient legal authority to provide combat support to Syrian fighters that DOD has vetted, or vetted and trained, who come under attack by Syrian government forces, consistent with the right of U.S. self-defense, if the U.S. action is necessary to effectively address the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to the United States and Iraq and meets the international law requirements of necessity and proportionality.

UNITED STATES MILITARY OPERATIONS TO COUNTER THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:53 a.m. in Room SD–106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Lee, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, CHAIRMAN

Senator MCCAIN. Well, good morning, all. The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today to receive testimony on the United States strategy and military operations to counter the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant, or ISIL.

I want to thank our witnesses, Under Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, for appearing before us today, and their continued service to our Nation.

It's been 1 year—it's been 1 year since President Obama spoke to the Nation about the threat posed by ISIL and increased United States military operations against us. Many of us believe that the goal the President laid out, quote, "to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL" is right. Many of us agree with a military strategy that seeks to empower local forces in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIL with United States and coalition training, equipment, assistance, and airpower. One year into this campaign, it seems impossible to assert that ISIL is losing and that we are winning. If you're not winning in this kind of warfare, you are losing. Stalemate is not success.

It is accurate that we have conducted thousands of airstrikes against ISIL, trucks and fighters, bunkers and buildings. This conjures the illusion of progress, but what effect has that had? ISIL has lost some territory on the margin, mainly to Kurdish and Shiite forces, but ISIL has consolidated control of its core territories and expanded its control in Syria. It continues to dominate Sunni Arab areas in both Iraq and Syria. It maintains control of key cities, like Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi. Efforts to retake those territories appear to have stalled entirely.

Meanwhile, ISIL is expanding globally. It's now operating in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt. Other radical Islamic groups, like Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia, have pledged allegiance to ISIL. This appearance of success only enhances ISIL's ability to radicalize, recruit, and grow.

Published media reports suggest that the CIA's [Central Intelligence Agency] estimates of ISIL's manpower has remained constant, despite United States airstrikes, which suggests that either they were wrong, to begin with, or that ISIL is replacing its losses in real time. Neither is good. Indeed, this committee is disturbed by recent whistleblower allegations that officials at Central Command skewed intelligence assessments to paint an overly positive picture of conditions on the ground. We are currently investigating these allegations, which we take with the utmost seriousness. The Department of Defense should, as well. If true, these—those responsible must be held accountable.

Ultimately, it's not—ultimately, it's not that we are doing nothing to counter ISIL, it is that there is no compelling reason to believe that anything we are currently doing will be sufficient to achieve our strategic objective of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL. The United States and our partners do not have the initiative. Our enemies do. They're capitalizing on our inadequate policy to maintain and enhance their initiative, as they have for the past 4 years. Indeed, the situation on the ground is now taking yet another dramatic turn for the worst, as several recent events make clear.

Recent published reports state that United States officials believe that ISIL is using mustard gas and may even be manufacturing these chemical weapons by themselves. Whether ISIL is manufacturing chemical weapons themselves or acquired from former or current stocks maintained by Bashar Assad, this is a potential nightmare scenario for our partners in the Middle East and for us. At the same time, the United States effort to train and equip Syrian rebels to fight ISIL is clearly and unfortunately failing. The goal was 3,000 fighters in the first year. Instead, this program has trained and equipped only 54 fighters, some of whom were killed or captured by al-Qaeda as soon as they returned to Syria. This program the administration promised would result in a viable indigenous ground force in Syria has yet to produce any significant effects on the battlefield. To be sure, the fixation with perfect vetting, both in the Congress and the administration, is contributing to this failure. But, far worse has been the administration's requirement that this new Syrian force could only fight ISIL, not the Assad regime, which has killed far more Syrians than ISIL, and the President's refusal, until just week's ago, to authorize the close air support and other military assistance to ensure our Syrian partners would be successful.

Unfortunately, these contradictions were clear from the beginning, and many members of this committee warned the administration to change course. Their failure to do so has squandered a lot of time, money, and, worst of all, credibility. For this committee to continue supporting this program, we need some major changes.

Into this vacuum has now stepped Vladimir Putin. As in Ukraine and elsewhere, he perceives the administration's inaction and cau-

tion as weakness, and he is taking advantage. According to media reports, Putin has deployed strike aircraft, T–90 tanks, Howitzers, armored personnel carriers, Russian marines, and housing for up to 1,500 personnel in military bases in western Syria. This is an expansion of Russian power in the Middle East that we have not seen in 4 decades, and it will allow Putin to further prop up Assad, fuel his indiscriminate killing machine, play kingmaker in any transition, undermine United States goals, policy, and operations, and ultimately prolong this horrific conflict. The main beneficiary will be ISIL.

Many of us have said from the beginning—from the beginning—that the conflict in Syria would not be contained. For 4 years, we have seen evidence of that: the hundreds of thousands dead, the millions of driven and displaced people, the use of chemical weapons, and the rise of the worst terrorist army in the world. Now we are seeing the latest manifestation of this failed policy—the flood of people pouring out of the Middle East—that has led to the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

The administration has promised to accept 10,000 refugees in the coming year. That's a noble gesture. But, unless we address the cause of this crisis, which is the continued grinding conflict in Syria, the refugees will keep coming, ISIL will grow stronger, the Middle East will descend further into chaos, and United States national security interests will be put at greater risk.

For 4 years, we have been told that there is no military solution to this conflict, as if anyone believes there is; and there are no good options, if anybody—as if anybody believes there are; that our influence is limited, as if that has not always been the case; that we will not succeed overnight, as if our problem is one of time, not policy; and that we cannot solve every problem in the Middle East, as if that absolves us of our responsibility to make the situation better, where we can.

This is not a question of our capacity or our capabilities or our options. We have options between doing nothing and invading Iraq and Syria. Many members of this committee have suggested such options, for years now, and they are still relevant. We need to put an end to Assad's ability to use airpower against his people, especially the use of horrific barrel bombs. Shoot down planes that drop barrel bombs that slaughter innocent civilians. It's one of the leading killers of innocent civilians. We need to help establish safe zones, inside Syria, where refugees and displaced people can be secure. We need forward air controllers to add precision and lethality to our air campaign. We need to make significant changes in order to improve and rapidly expand our training of Syrian and Iraqi forces. While no one believes that we need to invade Iraq or Syria, the fact is that we will likely need additional United States Special Forces and military advisors to be successful.

I hope our witnesses will not repeat our desired policy goals and a list of tactical achievements and talk about, quote, "nine lines of effort." We have heard all of that before, but we have yet to hear a theory of victory. I hope to hear one today.

Senator Reed.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, welcome.

This morning's hearing continues the committee's review of United States military operations to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and its growth in the broader Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Through its extreme ideological and brutal tactics, including the reported development and use of chemical weapons, ISIL has gained control over portions of Syria and Iraq effectively erasing the border between these countries. This violent extremist group has slaughtered civilians, enslaved women and girls, and carried out horrific attacks in ethnic and religious minorities, and broadcast its barbaric acts on social media. To escape the violence of ISIL, the Assad regime, and multiple other armed elements, millions have been displaced or fled outside Iraq and Syria. The crush of fleeing refugees into Europe has only added to the sense of urgency regarding the need to restore security in the region.

The military campaign against ISIL remains complex, with no easy answers. While the coalition has had success in pushing ISIL out of some territory, including gains by the Kurdish Peshmerga in the north, the retaking of Tikrit by Iraqi Security Forces, and the Syrian Kurds' removal of ISIL along sections of the border with Turkey, the self-described Islamic State continues to hold key cities, including al-Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. The Iraq Security Forces' counteroffensive to take back Ramadi has struggled over the last few months, and Bashir remains contested. At the same time, Iranian-backed Shi'a militias have stalled in operations near Fallujah. Despite its recent setbacks, ISIL is consolidating its control over the local populations in the areas that it holds in both Syria and Iraq.

The agreement between the United States and Turkey, expanding access to land and use of Turkish airbases and seeking to create an ISIL-free zone on the Syrian side of the border, is an important step forward. However, the provocative deployment by Russia of additional military forces to bases in Syria, under the guise of assisting in countering ISIL efforts, appears to be an effort by Putin to prop up the Assad regime, further complicating efforts to restore security in Syria.

These events have raised concerns over whether the current level of our efforts against ISIL is sufficient. A critical issue for the military lines of effort within the counter-ISIL strategy is the progress of the United States Train and Equip Programs for coalition-backed forces in both Iraq and Syria. While the United States-led air campaign has had an effect in degrading ISIL, effective local forces that can take full advantage of coalition airpower, seize ground from ISIL, and then hold it, are essential to success.

In Iraq, operations to take Anbar require recruiting significant numbers of Sunnis into the Iraqi Security Forces and equipping them to resist the ISIL threat. I am concerned by reports that Sunni recruitment has fallen short of its targets and that the Government of Iraq has been slow in delivering equipment for arming Sunni forces.

In Syria, the DOD [Department of Defense] Syria Train and Equip Program, according to public reports, has experienced a vari-

ety of setbacks. We'll be interested in your assessment of this effort. Quite interested.

General, I also hope you will address what you believe might be done to intensify military operations to counter the ISIL threat. For example, would you support a more active role for United States military personnel in facilitating the engagement with Sunni tribes, or providing advisors within the Iraqi Ministry of Defense to build institutional capacity, or accompanying Iraqi Security Forces, on a limited basis, when direct contact with the enemy is not anticipated?

The ISIL problem is not geographically bounded by Syria and Iraq. indeed, as the Chairman has pointed out, ISIL-inspired or -directed groups have appeared in Yemen, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, the Horn of Africa, and the Caucasus, and elsewhere. General, I am interested in your assessment of the group's growth in the region and how CENTCOM [United States Central Command] is contributing to transregional efforts to combat the group.

Ultimately, the success of the counter-ISIL effort will depend on a number of nonmilitary factors also, including whether the reforms Prime Minister Abadi has initiated are implemented and result in an Iraqi government that is more inclusive and responsive to the concerns of the Sunnis, Kurds, religious minorities, and other factions in Iraq society; whether the international coalition, including states in the region, can effectively counter ISIL's propaganda, financing, and the spread of its extreme ideology; and whether a political solution can be found for the crisis in Syria. These issues are the primary responsibility of departments other than Department of Defense, but I assume our witnesses would agree that these issues are integral to our comprehensive approach to countering the ISIL threat.

General Austin, I hope that you will also, to the extent possible, given the ongoing review by the Inspector General, address questions involving intelligence assessments with respect to ISIL. It is important that we wait for the Inspector General's investigation before—complete it—before making a judgment, but I have no doubt that you will take such allegations as seriously as we do in Congress. We take them very seriously. Like Senator McCain, I expect the committee will be kept apprised of this investigation as it continues, and be active, in terms of the recommendations.

Let me thank both witnesses for their testimony this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Ms. Wormuth.

STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTINE E. WORMUTH, UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

Ms. WORMUTH. Thank you, Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed, as well as members of this committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to give you an update on the military aspects of our counter-ISIL campaign.

It's also a pleasure, as always, to be here with General Austin. We work very closely together every day on a range of issues, so it's nice to be here with him today.

As the Chairman said, it's been just over a year since the United States and a coalition of nations began the military campaign

against ISIL. When we began that campaign about a year ago, ISIL was pushing into Kurdish territory in northern Iraq and pushing towards Baghdad. Over the past 12 months, ISIL has lost territory in both Syria and Iraq, despite advances it's made in Ramadi and Palmyra. Progress has been slow, but steady.

There have definitely been setbacks in the past year. While not 10 feet tall, ISIL remains a thinking enemy that adapts to evolving conditions on the battlefield. Our Train and Equip Programs in Iraq and Syria have faced challenges. In Iraq, the pace of our program has moved more slowly than we'd like, and, in Syria, the stringent vetting criteria we're using at the outset of the program has contributed to smaller numbers than we'd hoped for. As the military campaign continues in both countries, we expect there will continue to be challenges clearing and holding territory.

But, we've also seen progress in the past year. You're all familiar with the successful operations to take back Kurdish territory in Iraq, to defeat ISIL in Khobani, and to, more recently, retake Tikrit, as well as other successful engagements.

On the political front, Prime Minister Abadi continues to demonstrate the resolve necessary to confront ISIL, and he is striving to manage what is a very difficult political landscape in Baghdad.

In Syria, we've seen some opportunities emerge that we didn't envision a year ago, particularly in the northern part of the country, where Syrian Kurds, working with Syrian Arabs, have successfully pressured ISIL along the Turkish border.

Over a year ago, the President outlined a whole-of-government strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, and he emphasized it would be a multiyear campaign. When Secretary Carter was here in July, he outlined the nine lines of effort that comprise our strategy, so I won't go over them again in detail, but I would emphasize it will take more than the military campaign to be successful. We also need to dry up ISIL's finances, we need to stop the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria, in particular, protect the United States from potential attacks from ISIL, provide humanitarian assistance in areas that we are taking back from ISIL, and find a way to more effectively counter ISIL's very successful messaging campaign.

As Secretary Carter said to the committee in July, the administration believes we have the right strategy in place. We're now focused on implementing the strategy as effectively as possible. This is very much an interagency effort, with increasingly better synchronization against all of—across all of the departments and agencies that are involved. In fact, Secretary Carter and Secretary Kerry have been meeting together with their senior staffs to monitor and identify issues in the campaign. They're meeting tomorrow with NCTC [National Counterterrorism Center] to focus in particular on foreign fighters.

DOD, as you know, is responsible for two of the lines of effort inside the strategy: denying ISIL safe haven and building partner capacity. So, I'd like to speak briefly to those areas, and General Austin will also elaborate.

The coalition campaign has degraded ISIL's military capacity, has removed some of its key leaders and enabled gains by local forces in Iraq and Syria. The ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] has re-

gained control of Tikrit from ISIL earlier this year. Syrian Kurds and Sunni Arab partners have recently taken the key border town in Syria of Tal Abyad, which severed one of ISIL's key lines of communication and supply, and put ISIL on the defensive, and also put more pressure on its stronghold, Raqqa, in Syria. These examples demonstrate how, when we have credible ground forces and we support them with our airpower, ISIL can suffer.

We're also working hard to build the capacity of our partner forces on the ground. Since we began our efforts, we've now trained and equipped more than six brigades and provided training to more than 13,000 Iraqi personnel—Iraqi army, Kurdish Peshmerga, and counterterrorism service personnel—and we have more in the pipeline. As Secretary Carter said in July, however, training for the Iraqi army has been slowed by a lack of trainees coming into the training sites.

Over the last several weeks, we've had better participation from Iraqi units at the training sites, and Iraq has actually expanded the pool of units that are eligible for training. Some of the units we have trained are now participating more directly in the fight in areas such as Ramadi, and early indications are that they are performing well in combat missions. But, as you all know, they face a difficult fight ahead, and strong leadership of these forces is going to be essential.

Our forces on the ground at al-Assad and Taqqatum Airbases, are involved in advising and training Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar Province, both through providing direct training and also through train-the-trainer type of assistance with the Iraqi Security Forces. In terms of equipping these Sunni tribal fighters, we've recently delivered a battalion's worth of equipment to Iraqi officials working with us there on those two airbases to distribute the equipment to fighters. We're also now overseeing the distribution of the Government of Iraq's equipment to these Sunni tribal fighters from these bases. So, through these kinds of efforts, we now have more than 4,000 Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar Province.

We're also still in the early stages of our Train and Equip Program in Syria. This effort, I think it's important to highlight, is just one element of what we're trying to do in the larger campaign in Syria, which includes an increasing number of airstrikes as well as supporting partner forces on the ground, like the Syrian Kurds, the YPG [People's Protection Units], Sunni Arabs, and other local forces, such as Turkomans, for example, to try to put pressure on ISIL in northeastern Syria. These efforts have substantially rolled ISIL back in this area, and have had significant impacts on ISIL's freedom of movement and supply lines.

As of September 15th, our Train and Equip Program, the specific program we have, we're now currently training more than 100 fighters, and we have additional recruits in the pipeline. This number is definitely smaller than we had hoped for, in part because, as the Chairman and others have noted, we put our trainees through a very rigorous screening process to meet standards that are very appropriately laid out in U.S. law. We've closely aligned all of our efforts in all of these areas with our 62-country coalition. As an example of how we're doing that, Turkey's recent decision to provide us access to bases at Incirlik and elsewhere has enabled us

to expand the fight and is strengthening the cohesion of our efforts in Syria.

Before turning to General Austin, I want to address Russia's involvement in Syria. We're closely tracking Russia's recent efforts to deploy additional military equipment and personnel to Syria, and we're in close touch with our allies and partners about these developments. Both Russia and Iran have continued to support, politically and militarily, the Assad regime, which has systemically murdered its own people and helped create the conditions of the current conflict and the rise of ISIL. What we need in Syria urgently is a political solution to the conflict through a transition away from Assad. Any actions that empower the regime to escalate the conflict are unwelcome and would be destabilizing and counterproductive.

This is clearly a very difficult challenge that we face. We're not going to solve it quickly, but we have the right components in place to advance our objectives, and we're dynamically adjusting our campaign to a rapidly changing battlefield. Achieving a lasting defeat against ISIL is going to require continued commitment, strong leadership from us and the global coalition, as well as commitment and sacrifice from local forces in Iraq and Syria.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wormuth follows:]

THE PREPARED STATEMENT BY HON. CHRISTINE E. WORMUTH

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear in front of the Committee today to provide an update on our counter-ISIL campaign.

It has been just over a year since the United States and a coalition of nations began the military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). When we began the campaign, ISIL was pushing into Kurdish territory in northern Iraq and toward Baghdad. Over the past 12 months, ISIL has lost territory in both Syria and Iraq despite advances in Ramadi and Palmyra. Progress has been slow but steady. The 62-member international coalition to defeat ISIL in Iraq and Syria—galvanized by the threat ISIL poses to all of our nations—remains strong.

There have been setbacks along the way. While not 10 feet tall, ISIL remains an adaptive adversary that can still conduct offensive operations—as we saw in Ramadi. ISIL is a thinking enemy that adapts to evolving conditions on the battlefield. Our train and equip programs in Iraq and Syria have faced challenges—in Iraq the pace of the program has moved more slowly than we would like, and in Syria we use stringent vetting criteria that at the outset of the program have contributed to smaller numbers than we hoped for. As the campaign continues in both countries, we expect there to be continued challenges in clearing and holding territory.

We have also seen progress during the past year. You all are familiar with the successful operations to take back Kurdish territory in Iraq, defeat ISIL in Kobane, and retake Tikrit—as well as other successful engagements. On the political front, Prime Minister Abadi in Iraq continues to demonstrate the resolve necessary to confront ISIL and is striving to manage the challenging political landscape in Baghdad. In Syria, we have seen opportunities emerge that we did not envision a year ago, particularly in the northern tier of the country, where Syrian Kurds have successfully pressured ISIL along the Turkish border and, working with Syrian Arabs, have also applied pressure southward toward Raqqa.

Over a year ago the President outlined a whole of government strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, and he emphasized it would be a multi-year campaign. Secretary Carter outlined the nine lines of effort that comprise our strategy in detail for you in July, so I won't go over them again except to emphasize that it will take more than just the military campaign to be successful. We also will need to dry up ISIL's finances, stop the flows of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria in particular, protect the United States from potential ISIL attacks, provide humanitarian assistance to rebuild areas cleared of ISIL forces, and find ways to more effectively counter ISIL's very successful messaging campaign.

As Secretary Carter told this committee in July, the Administration believes it has the right strategy in place. We are now focused on ways to improve the implementation of the strategy—this means constantly evaluating our approach and adapting it as conditions evolve, opportunities arise, and challenges emerge. This is truly an interagency effort, with increasingly better synchronization across departments and agencies to improve the execution of the strategy. Secretary Carter and Secretary Kerry have been regularly reviewing the implementation of the counter-ISIL campaign, including a meeting tomorrow with NCTC on foreign fighters.

The Department of Defense, as you know, is responsible for two lines of effort inside that strategy—denying ISIL safe haven in Iraq and Syria, and building partner capacity so that local forces can defeat ISIL on the ground. I'd like to briefly update you on our activities in both of these areas.

The coalition air campaign has degraded ISIL's military capacity, removed some key leaders, and enabled gains by local forces in Iraq and Syria. Iraqi Security Forces regained control of Tikrit from ISIL earlier this year, and Syrian Kurds and their Sunni Arab partners recently took the key border town of Tal Abyad from ISIL, severing one of its key lines of communication and supply, and putting ISIL on the defensive and its stronghold in Raqqah under pressure. Those examples demonstrate, again, that where we have had a credible ground force supported by coalition air power, ISIL has suffered.

We are also working hard to build the capacity of partner forces on the ground. Since we began our efforts, we have equipped more than six brigades and provided training to nearly 13,000 Iraqi personnel, including Kurds—with more currently in the pipeline. Training for the Iraqi Army, however, has been slowed by a lack of trainees as the Secretary of Defense made clear in his July testimony before this committee.

Over the last several weeks we have had better participation from Iraqi units at BPC sites and Iraq has expanded the training pool to a wider set of existing units. The Iraqis are also being more aggressive about planning ahead to put additional units in training, which should increase the efficiency of the training effort. Some of the units we have trained are now participating more directly in the fight in areas such as Ramadi. Initial indications are that they are performing well in combat missions, but they face a difficult fight ahead and strong leadership will be essential.

United States forces on the ground at al Asad and Taqaddum airbases are involved in advising and training of Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar province—both through direct training and "train-the-trainer" efforts with the Iraqi Security Forces. In terms of equipping these forces, we've recently delivered a battalion's worth of equipment to Iraqi officials working with us there to distribute to Sunni tribal fighters. We are also overseeing distribution of the Government of Iraq's equipment to tribal fighters from these bases. Through efforts like this, there are now more than four thousand equipped Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar.

We are also still in the early stages of our Train and Equip mission in Syria. This effort is just one element of our larger campaign in Syria, which includes an increasing number of airstrikes as well as efforts on the ground with the Syrian Kurds, Sunni Arab, and other local forces to put pressure on ISIL in northeastern Syria. These efforts have substantially rolled ISIL back in this area and had significant impacts on ISIL's freedom of movement and lines of communication. As of September 15, through our T&E program we are currently training more than 100 fighters with additional recruits in the pipeline. This number is much smaller than we hoped for at this point, partly because we put our volunteers through a very vigorous screening process to meet standards very appropriately set by U.S. law. We are closely aligned with the coalition on all of these efforts. As an example, Turkey's recent decision to provide access and basing at Incirlik has enabled us to expand our fight against ISIL and further strengthen the cohesion of our efforts in Syria.

Before turning to General Austin, I also want to address Russia's involvement in Syria.

We are closely tracking Russia's recent efforts to deploy additional military equipment and personnel to Syria, and we are in close touch with our allies and partners about these developments. Russian and Iranian support to Asad and his regime has prolonged the conflict in Syria. Both have continued to support, politically and militarily, a regime that has systematically murdered its own people, creating the conditions for the current conflict and the rise of ISIL. What is needed in Syria, urgently, is a political solution to the conflict through a political transition away from Asad. Any actions that empower the regime to escalate the conflict are unwelcome, as they would be destabilizing and counterproductive.

In closing, let me state the obvious: this is a difficult problem. We will not solve it quickly, but we have the right components in place to advance our objectives, and

we are dynamically adjusting our campaign to deal with a rapidly changing battlefield. Achieving a lasting defeat against ISIL is going to require continued commitment and steady leadership from the United States and the global coalition, as well as commitment and sacrifice on the part of local forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. General Austin.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA, COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

General AUSTIN. Good morning, Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, and distinguished members of the committee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to provide a current update on the progress achieved over the past year in support of the ongoing campaign to counter ISIL, or Daesh, in Iraq and Syria.

I'm pleased to appear here this morning alongside Ms. Christine Wormuth. Ms. Wormuth is widely respected throughout the Department of Defense, and we are most grateful to her for her continued and strong support of our efforts at CENTCOM. I'll join Christine in making a few brief opening comments, and then we're prepared to answer your questions.

Before providing a brief update on the counter-ISIL campaign, I did want to quickly address an important issue. As the Chairman mentioned, there is an ongoing DOD IG [Inspector General] investigation looking into allegations concerning the processing of intelligence information by CENTCOM's Intelligence Director. Because the allegations are currently under investigation, it would be premature and inappropriate for me to discuss this matter. What I will say is, I welcome the DOD IG's oversight, and, once the investigation is complete, based upon the findings, you can be assured that I will take appropriate actions.

Again, I cannot speak to the specifics of the allegations; however, I would like to take this opportunity to provide some clarity with respect to how we use intelligence products in the critical work that we do.

Because of the nature of our mission at CENTCOM, we do have, and rely on, a robust intelligence enterprise to support the Command. There are over 1,200 seasoned intelligence professionals that make up that enterprise, and they do exceptional work. As a commander, I greatly value and seek their input and insights. I use the assessments that they provide me to—together with the inputs that I receive from a variety of sources that include my commanders on the ground who I talk to almost every single day, and I consider this broad range of inputs when making my decisions.

You know, there's been a lot of speculation in the media about the allegations made to the DOD IG; and one in particular, I believe, should be addressed and corrected for the record. Some have expressed concern that CENTCOM intelligence reports are sent directly to the President. This is not accurate. As the Office of the Director of National Intelligence put out to the media last week, and I quote, "None of the combatant commands are permitted to engage directly in the President's daily brief process. Rather, reports are produced by the combatant commands and funneled through the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] to ensure that all

substantive deliberations and final contributions are appropriately coordinated," end quote.

Again, I cannot comment on the specific allegations. We will need to wait for the DOD IG to complete its investigation. But, I did want to provide this additional clarification.

Ladies and gentlemen, with respect to the ongoing operations in Iraq and Syria today, despite some slow movement at the tactical level, we continue to make progress across the battlespace in support of the broader United States Government strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. Key to the enduring success of the military campaign is sustained pressure on ISIL, both from the air and on the ground. The approach that we adopted relies on indigenous forces to create and sustain this pressure while also curbing the flow of foreign fighters and cutting off the enemy's ability to resource himself.

In recent months, Iraq's Security Forces have experienced some setbacks. This is to be expected in the early stages of a fight as complex as this one. But, overall, enabled by coalition airstrikes and our advise-and-assist in building partner capacity efforts, the Iraqis continue to make progress.

In northern Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga have performed exceptionally well, and the Kurdish-Arab coalition in northeast Syria is also achieving substantial effects. In fact, over the past several months, they've retaken more than 17,000 square kilometers of terrain from the enemy. The effects that they have achieved serve to create significant opportunities that, if pursued, could prove devastating for the enemy. The intent of the military campaign is to degrade and ultimately defeat the enemy through our own actions and by enabling and supporting the efforts of our coalition partners and the indigenous forces in Iraq and Syria. Again, progress is being made, and this is evidenced by what we see happening in the air and on the ground in both countries.

I would also point out that the progress reflects, in large part, the many contributions made by our coalition partners. The 60-plus-nation coalition represents the strength of this campaign, and we remain grateful for their strong support. Success in this campaign will require the continued support of our coalition partners along with the support of other elements of the U.S. Government and the international community. More importantly, it will require that the Iraqis do what is necessary to address their political challenges. National reconciliation is absolutely essential to the success in the counter-ISIL campaign.

We said at the outset that the military campaign to counter ISIL would take time. It will take time. We should expect that there will be occasional setbacks along the way, particularly in the early stages. We also need to keep in mind that we are supporting and enabling this effort. Our partners, not us, are in the lead. It is taking a bit longer to get things done, but it must be this way if we are to achieve lasting and positive effects.

Fortunately, amidst all the—amidst the many challenges that exist in Iraq and Syria, we find opportunities and we remain confident that our actions in pursuit of these opportunities will continue to produce positive results in the coming days.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Reed, members of the committee, I want to thank you once again for the strong support that you show to our servicemembers, our civilians, and their families. They are truly exceptional, and they are making important and lasting contributions to the overall effort.

Again, we appreciate your support. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

THE PREPARED OPENING STATEMENT BY GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III

INTRODUCTION

We have completed the first year of a multi-year campaign designed to counter and militarily defeat the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIL), which is commonly referred to by our partners in the region as "Daesh." This terrorist organization presents a very real threat to stability and security in Iraq and Syria and other parts of the Central Region and beyond; and, it also poses a potential threat to the United States homeland and our core national interests in the region. Today, despite some slow movement at the tactical level, we continue to make progress across the battlespace in Iraq and Syria in support of the broader USG strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. We have achieved measurable effects against this enemy; and, looking ahead, we are postured to continue to make progress on multiple fronts across the combined joint operations area. Key to the enduring success of the military campaign is sustained pressure on ISIL, both from the air and on the ground; and, using indigenous forces to help create and sustain that pressure, while also curbing the flow of foreign fighters and cutting off the enemy's ability to resource himself.

Today, although ISIL is still able to conduct attacks and incite terror, the organization's overall capability has been disrupted. While Iraq's security forces have experienced some setbacks, they continue to make progress, enabled by Coalition airstrikes and our advise and assist and building partner capacity efforts. They have executed a number of Coalition-enabled operations against the enemy. In northern Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga have performed exceptionally well. The Kurdish-Arab Coalition in northeast Syria also is achieving substantial effects.

Of course, the military piece is just one component of the broader Counter-ISIL Strategy which consists of nine lines of effort (LOE), to be executed by all elements of the U.S. Government and with the support of our Coalition partners. The military is responsible for two of the nine lines of effort. We are responsible for LOE #2—"Denying ISIL Safe Haven," and that is being accomplished through our support to indigenous ground forces in Iraq and Syria, primarily through our precision airstrikes, employment of available Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets, and our advise and assist efforts at operational headquarters. We also are responsible for LOE #3—"Building Partner Capacity," which includes our train and equip programs for both Iraq and Syria and ongoing advise and assist efforts for Iraq. We must succeed at both in order to set conditions for the military defeat of ISIL. However, a lasting defeat of this enemy will require a 'whole of government' effort across all nine LOEs. Most notably, we will need to see stable and inclusive governments in place in Iraq and Syria; and, we will have to curb the flow of foreign fighters, cut off ISIL's resourcing and financing, and effectively counter the enemy's information operations.

We are still in the early stages of this campaign and there is tough work ahead, and success will require strategic patience. But, the 60-plus nation Counter-ISIL Coalition remains strong and the indigenous ground forces, with the support of Coalition air operations and our advise and assist and building partner capacity efforts, continue to make progress across the battlespace in Iraq and Syria.

THE ROAD TO MOSUL, JUNE 2014

On June 10th, 2014, the city of Mosul, Iraq fell to the terrorist organization, ISIL or "Daesh." Within days, most of Iraq's security forces had withdrawn from northern Iraq, ISIL was making a strong push towards Erbil and Baghdad, and the country was in crisis. The U.S., with the support of partner nations, responded quickly and decisively to address the burgeoning crisis.

Key also was understanding the root causes of the instability that enabled ISIL's rapid push south and west towards the capital city. ISIL was not a monolith, as it has sometimes been described. What we saw unfold in the initial stages of the

conflict in Iraq was less a reflection of ISIL's military might and more the result of the Sunnis simply refusing to stop the organization's advance through the country. Over a period of years, the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Maliki had alienated the Sunni and Kurdish populations. This led to growing unrest and security seams. ISIL saw the opportunity and launched their attack into Iraq absent resistance from the Sunnis who viewed ISIL as a means for bringing about a change in their government. The majority of the Sunnis simply refused to fight for Prime Minister Maliki. They allowed—and in some cases facilitated—ISIL's push through the country.

Unfortunately, the security forces were largely incapable of mounting a credible defense against ISIL. After we departed in 2011, their skills quickly atrophied. The leadership of the country made a series of poor decisions; among them was the decision to stop training the Iraqi security forces and to stop maintaining their equipment. They, in turn, suffered a number of defeats early on in ISIL's push towards Baghdad.

THE REGIONAL CAMPAIGN PLAN TO COUNTER ISIL:

One year ago, in September 2014, President Obama announced to the American people that the United States, with the support of a broad Coalition, would take action to degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained whole-of-government strategy. The military effort represents one element of this broader strategy; and, we are currently in the early stages of our counter-ISIL military campaign, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The objective of the military campaign is to defeat the enemy through our own actions and by enabling the efforts of our Coalition partners and the indigenous forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria. The plan consists of a framework with five key elements: COUNTER (HALT), CONTAIN, ENABLE, ELIMINATE, DEFEAT. Many of the efforts are occurring simultaneously or near-simultaneously; and, progress is being achieved in all areas.

HALTING ISIL'S ADVANCE

We said that we would first have to halt ISIL's advance; and, we have done this in Iraq. The enemy is no longer able to conduct large-scale operations and to seize and hold large swaths of new terrain. While ISIL is still capable of exploiting weaknesses in counter-ISIL forces and they can and do operate freely in uncontested terrain, the enemy's focus has shifted primarily to defending territory in Iraq. Even in areas where we see increased ISIL activity, like at Ramadi and Bayji, we assess that the intent of these operations is simply to hold the terrain and occupy the Iraqi security forces.

A key element of the ongoing effort to degrade ISIL's capability is our **Coalition-led air operations,** which have been extraordinarily effective. Since commencing airstrikes on 8 August 2014 and 23 September 2014 in Iraq and Syria, respectively, Coalition air crews from 14 partner nations have conducted more than 6,900 total strikes. They are taking the fight to the enemy in a significant way, and have greatly enhanced the reach and effectiveness of the indigenous ground forces.

Coalition airstrikes in support of OIR have proven to be some of the most precise and disciplined in the history of warfare [>95% effectiveness rating]. The high level of precision seeks to minimize collateral damage, even as we preserve an unprecedented tempo in targeting ISIL's warfighting capability. This is especially important given the highly-charged sectarian undercurrents at play in the region. We also are taking advantage of our access to the airbase in Incirlik, Turkey, and maximizing the additional assets of our partners in Syria. Turkey is now conducting strikes in Syria, along with a number of other Coalition partners; and, there are a few countries that are contemplating joining them.

ISIL is a terrorist organization that, in the early stages of this fight, was attempting to behave like a conventional military. As the Coalition increased pressure on the enemy, ISIL reverted back to operating like an irregular force in many ways, just as we anticipated. Given the nature of the enemy and the nature of this fight, our air crews are required to maintain near-constant overhead coverage as they pursue dynamic targeting opportunities. Their contribution to the campaign cannot be overstated. The combination of the increasingly effective air campaign and the growing numbers of indigenous ground forces affords us more opportunities to pressure ISIL.

Over the past year, Coalition airstrikes have effectively disrupted ISIL's command and control, interrupted the resourcing of their operations, and attrited their forces and senior leadership. ISIL's leadership network has been impacted; and, though the organization has demonstrated the ability to replace leaders killed or wounded in action, the replacements are likely to be less skilled and less experienced. More-

over, reflections of recent strikes indicate a growing level of distrust, fear of spies, and paranoia across ISIL's leadership.

Though degrading the enemy will remain a key task throughout the full duration of the military campaign, our efforts to date have effectively halted ISIL's advance in Iraq and forced the enemy to fight mainly defensive operations to prevent further loss of territory and access to critical lines of communication.

CONTAINING ISIL

In addition to halting ISIL's advance in Iraq, it is imperative that we continue to help to protect our regional partners' borders and sovereign spaces. ISIL has eroded stability in the region, placing neighboring countries, including Jordan and Lebanon, at risk. We continue to provide critical support to our partners in an effort to bolster their defenses and enable their activities and operations aimed at countering ISIL.

Ultimately, we also want to gain control over the remaining border crossing sites inside of Syria in order to reduce the flow of foreign fighters. To date, Coalition-enabled efforts by anti-ISIL forces have disrupted some key lines of communication between Turkey and Syria and Syria and Iraq. These critical efforts must continue in earnest.

ENABLING THE INDIGENOUS FORCES

We said that we would have to enable the efforts of the indigenous forces; and, we are doing so in a number of ways. The pace of the campaign will be dictated by these indigenous forces. We are teaching, coaching and mentoring them through our Advise and Assist efforts. Our advisors are co-located with the Iraqi leadership at the Baghdad Operations Center and the Anbar

Operations Center and they have helped the Iraqis to plan and oversee multiple ground operations. We also are assisting the Iraqis in their efforts to regenerate and restructure their security forces through our Building Partner Capacity (BPC) program. To date, nearly 13,000 Iraqi soldiers have been trained at multiple BPC sites in Iraq, and more than 3,000 are currently undergoing training, which includes training to maintain their equipment. Coalition-trained Iraqi Army forces are currently involved in ongoing operations and holding their ground. That said, the Iraqis' decision to not accept any risk around Baghdad by repositioning forces to fight ISIL will continue to limit their ability to generate sufficient combat power. The Iraqis must recruit and train new forces. Our BPC and advise and assist efforts are making a difference, but until the Iraqis commit to a more rapid force generation, gains will likely remain limited.

We also are in the process of assisting with the training and equipping of Sunni tribal fighters. *More than 3,100* fighters have successfully completed training; and, 750 additional fighters are scheduled to undergo training in the coming weeks. This effort represents a potential 'game-changer,' if coupled with meaningful reconciliation by the Government of Iraq, as the GoI cannot be successful long-term without the support of its Sunni citizens.

We also are in the process of training and equipping vetted moderate Syrian opposition forces through our **Syria Train & Equip program.** Although the program got off to a slow start, in large part due to the complex nature of the undertaking, we remain confident that it will pay dividends going forward. The forces trained will be additive to and may enable efforts already underway by Syrian Kurds, Syrian Arabs, and other anti-ISIL forces. At the same time, we are seeing a shift in momentum in Syria; and, we are looking for ways to build upon the gains achieved thus far.

Of note, over the past several months, the Syrian Kurds, have performed exceptionally well in northeast Syria. They, along with associated Arab elements, have retaken some 17,000 square kilometers from the enemy. This presents a significant opportunity and potential inflection point in the Counter-ISIL Campaign. There is the potential to isolate the capital and remove ISIL from the remaining stretch of border between Syria and Turkey that it still controls. Counter-ISIL operations in this stretch of territory could deal a strategic and ideological blow to ISIL.

ELIMINATING UNGOVERNED SPACE

Through our own actions and by enabling the efforts of our Coalition partners and the indigenous forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria, we have disrupted ISIL's capability and eliminating the enemy's access to ungoverned spaces and to key border crossings and supply routes in both countries. These efforts will continue to prove essential to the overall success of the Counter-ISIL Campaign.

DEFEATING ISIL

We are seeing progress being made in our pursuit of our stated objectives. Last year, we saw ISIL moving in large convoys unimpeded throughout Iraq with black flags flying. Iraq's security forces were in tatters and the troops either refused or were incapable of defending against the onslaught by ISIL. Since then, with the help of the United States-led Coalition, the Iraqis have taken some steps towards rebuilding their forces. The introduction of new commanders has been particularly helpful. The Iraqis also sent a portion of their forces through training at our BPC sites; although, they are not filling the classes to capacity and they do need to do a better job of recruitment and force generation. In terms of progress achieved, the Iraqis have planned and executed a number Coalition-enabled military operations, and they have retaken terrain previously lost to ISIL. Meanwhile, ISIL's movement is more restricted, and they are adjusting their patterns of activity to avoid being targeted by Coalition aircraft and anti-ISIL forces. There is still a great deal of work to be done and a long road ahead, but at the one-year mark, we are seeing signs of progress in our military campaign.

THE COUNTER-ISIL COALITION

Of course, the United States is not doing this alone. The contributions being made by our Coalition partners are essential to our success. Indeed, the 60-plus nation Counter-ISIL Coalition represents the strength and cohesion of our campaign. In particular, the active and public involvement of our regional partners, along with a large number of international partner nations, has greatly enhanced the fight and sends a clear message to ISIL and other violent extremist organizations that their actions will not be tolerated.

EXISTING POLITICAL CHALLENGES

We have made measurable progress over the past year. Indeed, we have set conditions for further progress across all nine lines of effort. We must build upon the successes achieved to date and take definitive action in key areas. These areas include the disruption of the flow of foreign fighters, improved counter-messaging, and government reforms and reconciliation.

Most notably, the effects of our military efforts will be short-lived if the Iraqis do not address their political problems. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has vowed to be more inclusive of the Sunnis and Kurds and other minority groups. We are encouraged by the early steps he has taken to reach out to the Sunnis and Kurds and we are urging him to follow through on pledges made in the near-term. We also are encouraged by his efforts to enact much-needed reforms in the government. If effectively implemented, these reforms will address endemic problems in Iraq's political and economic sectors over the long-term. Enacting the reforms will not be an easy undertaking. However, these efforts are very important. National reconciliation remains critical to the success of the counter-ISIL campaign.

OUR COLLECTIVE GOAL: THE ULTIMATE DEFEAT OF ISIL

We said that the military campaign would take time, and it will take time. We should expect there will be occasional setbacks along the way, and particularly in these early stages as we coach and mentor a force that is actively working to regenerate capability after years of neglect and poor leadership. We also need to keep in mind that we are supporting and enabling this effort. We are executing this campaign by, with, and through the indigenous forces; and, our partners are in the lead. It must be this way if we are to achieve lasting positive effects. It is taking a bit longer to get things done as a result; but, the indigenous forces are making progress, and they continue to build capability.

Our mission is clear and that is to degrade and militarily defeat ISIL. In the process, we want to help to change the conditions inside of Iraq and Syria, so that what we see happening there now, does not happen again in the future. We have the right strategy and the right approach to achieve this desired endstate; but, it will take time. Despite the challenges that exist, we do see progress being made, along with many opportunities. We are confident that our actions in pursuit of these opportunities will continue to produce positive results in the coming months.

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, thank you, General Austin and Ms. Wormuth.

I must say, I've been a member of this committee for nearly 30 years, and I have never heard testimony like this. Never.

General Austin, on September 9th, 1 week ago, Chairman Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the fight against ISIL was, quote, "tactically stalemated" with no, quote, "dramatic gains on either side." So, obviously, you and the outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have a very different view of what the situation is.

So, with all this progress that you're citing and—how long do you think it's going to take for us to defeat ISIL and to restore stability in Iraq and Syria?

General AUSTIN. Sir, it will take years. If I may——

Chairman MCCAIN. Take years. Okay.

General AUSTIN.—if I may comment on the Chairman's comments?

As I spoke to the Chairman yesterday—and we did talk about this issue, and I—when I took—went back and took a look at what he said, he also said ISIL's future is increasingly dim as more nations join the anti-ISIL effort. Although it is tactically stalemated, with no dramatic gains on either side, ISIL will move at the speed of its governance, not at the speed of its military capability. I agree with the Chairman, sir, on the issue of—there haven't been any dramatic gains on either side.

Chairman MCCAIN. Dramatic? Yeah, that's different from, quote, "tactically stalemated," please, General. That's what—Chairman Dempsey. Chairman Dunford said exactly the same thing. So, there's clearly a disconnect between your view and that of our outgoing and incoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

So, really, in your view, everything should remain as it is. For example, do you think we should have a no-fly zone in Syria?

General AUSTIN. That's a policy decision, and——

Chairman MCCAIN. Would you recommend a no-fly zone in Syria?

General AUSTIN. I would not recommend that at this point, sir.

Chairman MCCAIN. Would you—not at this point, 4 years later—would you recommend telling—setting up a buffer zone in Syria, where these refugees might be able to come and be protected from the attacks and slaughter of Bashar Assad?

General AUSTIN. It will take a ground force to be able to protect refugees if we do that, sir.

Chairman MCCAIN. Would you support a buffer zone, which would then protect some of these refugees who are being barrel-bombed and slaughtered by Bashar Assad?

General AUSTIN. I don't see the force available to be able to protect them, currently, sir, so I would not recommend that at this point in time.

Chairman MCCAIN. So, we wouldn't be able to shoot down Bashar Assad's aircraft as they barrel bomb and slaughter innocent men, women, and children. Is that correct? We don't have the capability to protect them.

General AUSTIN. We clearly have capability, yes, sir. We do.

Chairman MCCAIN. But, you wouldn't recommend such action.

General AUSTIN. I would not recommend a buffer zone, at this point, sir.

Chairman MCCAIN. I see. So, basically, General, what you're telling us is that everything's fine, as we see hundreds of thousands

of refugees leave and flood Europe, as we're seeing, now, 250,000 Syrians slaughtered, as you see more and more Iranian control of the Shiite militia that are the only ones that are really doing the fighting besides the Peshmerga. As I say, I have never seen a hearing that is as divorced from the reality of every outside expert and what you are saying.

Does the massive flow of refugees from Syria have any effect on what you think we should be doing in Syria?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I want to be clear that I believe that this is a horrible tragedy, and this is a thing that the entire international community is going to have to continue to work together on. So, there's always—we would hope that, as these refugees continue to be disadvantaged, that we see more countries joining in to assist in the——

Chairman MCCAIN. So, you would not—you would not support a policy that would help protect these refugees from being slaughtered by Bashar Assad with his barrel bombs?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I—it's always in the best—our best interest to help protect civilians. But, again, I would not recommend a buffer zone, at this point in time.

Chairman MCCAIN. So, everything is really going well.

General AUSTIN. No, sir, that's not——

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, then if things aren't going well, and we have had, quote, "setbacks," and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff says it's tactically stalemated, and you think everything is going well as—pursuing the strategy and tactics on the ground that we are——

General Austin, I respectfully disagree. I respectfully, fundamentally disagree. This is an abject failure. The refugees are the result of it. This is a result of leaving Iraq. You were there at the meeting when Maliki told Senator Graham and I that, if the others agreed, he would agree to keep a residual force there. We never gave him the forces that we wanted to leave behind, which then set in place the departure of United States completely from Iraq and set the table for the catastrophe that we are seeing.

This is—as I say, I have not attended a hearing that is so grossly distorted as the view of a terrible and tragic situation as I have seen from the witnesses. By the way, Senator Graham and I predicted every single thing that is happening now. I predict that, unless we do something different, it will remain, as General Dempsey said, stalemated, which means tragedy.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Both Madam Secretary and General Austin, about a year ago or more, there was real concern that, essentially, Baghdad could fall into—to ISIL, that they were virtually unstoppable. At this point, your assessment of the security, at least at Baghdad, has that been improved?

General AUSTIN. Sir, it has been greatly improved.

Senator REED. Going forward now to one of the fundamental issues is—and I think it's related to the comments that both you and General Dempsey have made—is—who is—who will have the advantage, going forward, in terms of the use of time? ISIL or Iraqi forces supported by the United States? What's your view on that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think, clearly, it's the Iraqi forces supported by not only the United States, but the 60-plus-nation coalition.

Senator REED. Now, one of the things that has been suggested at—but—not only suggested, but recommended strongly to the Iraqi government is they create a—national guard units, Sunni units as well as others, but formally allied with the government; and that legislation is bogged down in their parliament. Is that accurate?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator REED. So, we are—you know, we could do more, essentially, if the Iraqis were willing to make some changes, in terms of their policies. For example, we could at least contemplate the use of advisors with these National Guard—Iraqi National Guard units—to be brokers, in terms of distributing equipment, as well as tactical advice. Is that something that's possible if we get cooperation?

General AUSTIN. It's clearly possible. Yes, sir.

Senator REED. Is it something you would consider if it——

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, it is.

Senator REED. Yeah. One of the factors, too—and it's—this is a constant source of inquiry—is that, in fact, recently the Iraqi parliament, I think, rendered a scathing report about Prime Minister Maliki's leadership, or lack of leadership, effectively sort of suggesting that whatever he said couldn't be trusted. Is that, you know, your estimate of his role of leading up to this crisis, in fact over many years?

General AUSTIN. Sir, what we saw from the former Prime Minister was increasingly sectarian behavior and a number of bad decisions that led to the atrophy of his security forces. So.

Senator REED. In fact, according to this report, as I've seen in the media, that they attribute most of the blame for the disintegration of the Iraqi Security Forces at Maliki's doorstep, at no one else. Is that at least accurate for their—the feeling in Iraq?

General AUSTIN. I'd say it's primarily his responsibility. Those who he appointed in key leader positions enabled that, as well.

Senator REED. In terms of your campaign plan, the sense I have is that you have tried to exploit the area where we have the most interest against ISIL, and that's Iraq, while maintaining as much pressure as possible in Syria. Is that the general outlines of the campaign plan? So that we would expect—and, frankly, of us—agree—we—I don't think anyone's seen the progress they'd like to see, but the first progress would essentially come in Iraq, and then would lead to a better position against ISIL in Syria. Is that accurate?

General AUSTIN. It is, sir. In Iraq, there is a government for us to work with initially. There were some forces for us to begin—to begin to work with. Of course, we had access to things that could enable us to get our—to get the work done. Our shaping operations in Syria enabled our work in Iraq, and are still enabling it.

As we get increasing resources, we're able to increase the tempo in Syria. So, I think we'll have greater effects, going forward.

Senator REED. Just, finally, any general comments. Because one of the recent developments is the fact that Turkey now is allowing

operations out of Incirlik. They also seem to be much more cooperative, in an operational sense. What do you expect, in the next, say, 6 months, that will translate to on the ground?

General AUSTIN. I think it'll translate to a lot more pressure on key areas in Syria, sir, like the city of Raqqa, which has long been a—an ISIL stronghold. So, because of that access, we'll have the ability to increase the pace and focus on key places in Syria. So, that'll certainly shape things in Iraq.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary and General.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, when Senator Carter was here before this committee in July, he testified that there were only about 60 Syrian fighters that had been trained in our Train and Equip Program, and reinserted. We've heard reports about the attacks on those individuals when they were reinserted back into Syria. Can you tell us what the total number of trained fighters remains?

General AUSTIN. It's a small number. The ones that are in the fight is—we're talking four or five.

Senator FISCHER. A New York Times report on September 6 indicated that, among the lessons learned from that experience, was that these fighters should be returned to Syria in larger numbers than the 60, obviously larger than the four or five that are there. Do you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. I agree with that, Senator. Whenever that's possible, it is in our best interest to make sure that we have an element that can protect itself. Also, it can go in and combine efforts with other elements that are on the ground.

Senator FISCHER. How do you plan to achieve that? How are you going to increase the number of fighters when we're looking at the really tough security screening processes that are in place now? How are we going to achieve that? How long will that take? You mentioned earlier about increasing resources. I took that to mean increasing the number of fighters that you would place in Syria, and the effect they would have. So, what's the time period we're looking at, here, and how are you going to do it? Because I don't think it's been at all successful yet.

General AUSTIN. I—and I certainly agree with you that this is—this—the new Syrian force program has gotten off to a slow start. But, I think it's important to remember that this element is designed to be a complement to all the other things that we're doing. So, we're going to use, and we are using, every tool that we have available to us in our inventory. Our strategy is—or our approach is to utilize indigenous forces to complement our work from the air on the ground. As we——

Senator FISCHER. It's—if I can interrupt you on that point, I'd—and I'd like to get back to your answer. When you say to "complement the work on the ground with airstrikes"—did I hear—did I just hear you say that?

General AUSTIN. That—the—they have to work in tandem. The——

Senator FISCHER. So, if they're going to work in tandem—there's a new article out today. Are we going to change strategy? Be-

cause—I think it's in Foreign Policy today that—it says the United States is drawing up a new plan that's going to send these trained fighters into Syria that are going to help direct airstrikes. Is that report correct?

General AUSTIN. I would just say that—ma'am, we'll continue to look at the best ways to—the best means to employ these forces as we go forward. We'll capitalize on lessons learned.

Again, it is really about the full complement of indigenous forces that we have available to work with. As we mentioned earlier, the YPG, or the Syrian Kurds, and some Arabs and Turkomen, have done tremendous work in northeast Syria, and they have pushed ISIL back from the border. They're currently somewhere around 40 kilometers or so north of the capital—the—ISIL's capital city of Raqqa. They'll continue to pressure ISIL. So, the new Syrian force is additive to that effort.

Senator FISCHER. So, with the fighters that we're training and equipping, is it still the goal to have about 12,000 of them there? Is that still the goal? What's the expectation, then, for them?

General AUSTIN. Well, we certainly won't—at the pace we're going, we won't reach the goal that we had initially established for ourselves, but the—the overall goal is to make sure that we have enough mass to be able to get work done on the ground. Whether it's YPG elements or other elements that are able to help us, you know, we can still achieve, and are achieving, the same effects. It's not aspirational. We're actually doing this today. I think that's lost on a lot of people.

Senator FISCHER. Is the strategy changing for the work on the ground that you're asking for these fighters?

General AUSTIN. We continue to look at the best means to employ them. We will do what—ma'am, what you would expect us to do, and make adjustments as opportunities present themselves.

Senator FISCHER. Okay. Thank you, sir.

Chairman MCCAIN. General, I'd—just to follow up, there's an—Foreign Policy says, "Anxious to avoid another damaging setback for the training effort, the White House and the Pentagon are looking at attaching small numbers of fighters to larger established forces in northern Syria to ensure the rebels are better protected on the battlefield by more numerous experienced troops." Can you confirm or deny that that option is being looked at?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator——

Chairman MCCAIN. Okay.

Ms. WORMUTH.—we are reviewing the way forward with——

Chairman MCCAIN. I'm asking if that option is being considered.

Ms. WORMUTH. We are looking at a range of options. One of the options is——

Chairman MCCAIN. I am asking—look, I'm not asking you to come before this committee and obfuscate. I'm asking you a direct question. Is the Pentagon looking at that option? Yes or no?

Ms. WORMUTH. We are looking at that option as——

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you very much.

Ms. WORMUTH.—well as others.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you very much.

Senator Nelson.

Senator NELSON. General, it's my understanding that General Dempsey recently said that if the United States really seized control of the campaign against ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], we can speed up ISIS defeat, but that it would come at a great cost to our servicemembers, and that another group with another name and ideology would just be back in a couple of years. Isn't that what you and—understand General Dempsey to have said, and that you have reaffirmed that here today?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, it is. I think it's important that the people in the country and in the region take ownership and work to put in place lasting solutions. If we don't do that, we will be back in another 2 or 3 years.

Senator NELSON. Because of that campaign against ISIS, it must be won by our coalition partners and the Iraqis, not just us.

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator NELSON. Would you care to read that statement again for clarity in your response to the Chairman's question that General Dempsey had said, in its full context?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

[Pause.]

General AUSTIN. Sir, what the Chairman said was: ISIL's future is increasingly dim as more nations join the anti-ISIL effort. He further stated that, although the fight right now is tactically stalemated, with no dramatic gains on either side, Iraq will move at the speed of its governance and not at the speed of its military capability.

Senator NELSON. Mr. Chairman, I have the transcript here in front of the committee. I would like to reinsert this transmit of General Dempsey, with your permission.

Chairman MCCAIN. Absolutely. Along with that, we will include the assessments by General Keane, General Petraeus, the architect of the surge, and all others who observed this debacle.

Senator NELSON. Of course.

Chairman MCCAIN. Of course.

[The information referred to follows:]

STATEMENT OF GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA, CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES AT HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON COUNTER-ISIL (ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT) STRATEGY ON JULY 7, 2015.

Thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member Reed and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to come back and to chat with you today about the military component of our strategy against ISIL.

Our starting point has to be the strategic picture in context. I have said before that the global security environment is as uncertain as I have ever seen it. The world is rapidly changing everywhere, and we are seeing significant shifts in an already complex strategic landscape. ISIL is one of many concerns. As the chairman mentioned, we are contending with Russia's revanchism in eastern Europe, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, Iran's malign activities in the Middle East, technical advancements by North Korea, rising aggression of non-state networks, and a rapidly leveling playing field in cyber and in space. While our potential adversaries grow stronger, many of our allies are becoming increasingly dependent on the United States and on our assistance, and some of our comparative military advantages have begun to erode. What makes this uniquely complicated is that these trends are manifesting themselves simultaneously.

Within the Middle East, I characterize three converging sets of complexity.

First, several governments are struggling for political legitimacy because they are not sufficiently pluralistic or they are not sufficiently accountable to their citizens.

Second, the centuries old Sunni/Shiite struggle is very evident. Weak states are less able to assert independence amid the tug of war between sectarian regional powers.

Third, we are seeing rising competition between moderate and radical elements of Islam, and ISIL and others are taking advantage of that competition.

Within this evolving global context, the role the United States military is taking against the trans-regional threat of ISIL is appropriately matched to the complexity of the environment and is at a level of effort that is sustainable over time.

Military power alone, as we have said, will not solve ISIL. I do not think anyone here would disagree with that. All nine lines of effort need to be considered in the aggregate. This campaign focuses on actively reinforcing and hardening our partners in the region who must and in most cases are taking responsibility for their own security. That is an important point. Enduring stability cannot be imposed in the Middle East from the outside in. The fight is enabled by the coalition, but it must be owned by those regional stakeholders.

It bears repeating that this is the beginning of a complex, nonlinear campaign that will require a sustained effort over an extended period of time. We have to be just as agile as the network of terrorists we face. We are constantly evaluating our approach and making sure we are resourcing it appropriately, balanced with our other global commitments.

But 4 years and counting of budget uncertainty have made this balance distinctly harder.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.

Senator NELSON. General, give us your assessment that Russia is building up the military base and sending soldiers and weapons into Syria to prop up Assad—under, I might say, the guise of fighting ISIS.

General AUSTIN. Sir, we are witnessing a buildup of forces in Syria by Russia. As you know, they have been there all along, but they are increasing their footprint. What they've stated is that they're—they want to focus on helping to counter ISIL, as I understand it. That's left to be seen. As you know, Russia is not very transparent. So, we really don't know what their true intentions are. But, the introduction of—potential introduction of additional capability and operations utilizing that capability could increase the friction in that battlespace significantly.

Senator NELSON. General, the Senate Defense Authorization bill calls for 30-percent reduction in headquarters staff across the Department of Defense, starting with a 7-and-a-half-percent cut in fiscal year 2016. What impact will that cut have on your ability to conduct operations? What is CENTCOM [United States Central Command], if you want to submit for the record, planning to do to make that cut?

General AUSTIN. Sir, if you take a look at what's going on in our region currently, you know, from Pakistan, Afghanistan, to Yemen, to Iraq and Syria, and to increased tensions in other places throughout the region, it's clear that we have a very active region. So, in order to manage the things that we need to manage and work with our partner nations in the region, we need an appropriate staff to be able to do that. I fully understand and appreciate, you know, the pressure that the departments—Department is under, in terms of, you know, the reduction of the top line on the budget. So, we have to do what we can do and need to do to tighten our belts. I appreciate that. But, it makes it increasingly difficult to get things done.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, General.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. I want to thank the Chairman.

I want to thank both of you for being here today, and for your service.

I wanted to follow up and ask about—General, I believe you testified about the effectiveness of the Syrian Kurds right now in Syria, in pushing back ISIL. Are we providing support and weapons to the Syrian Kurds? What assistance are we giving them, given that, as I heard your testimony—when Senator Fischer asked me—we only have, as I understand it, four or five of United States-trained Syrian fighters in this fight. So, what are we doing to support the Syrian Kurds if they are effectively pushing back ISIL on the ground?

General AUSTIN. We are providing them a tremendous amount of air support, which is what they wanted most. As you will recall, ma'am, these—this is the element—well, a portion of this element were the folks that hung on at Khobani—valiantly. It was doubtful, at that point, as to whether or not they would be able to survive in that environment and continue to do things. Well, they continued on, and they increased their size and activity, and they've made a significant difference in the northeast part of the country.

So, what they've asked from us over time is sustained airpower, sustained strikes. They have benefited from those strikes. Because of their aggressiveness, they've made a tremendous difference in the northeast.

Senator AYOTTE. So, just to be clear, they haven't asked for arms? How does Turkey—how is Turkey acting on the ground, here, in terms of, obviously—first of all, I want to know: What have the Syrian Kurds asked for that we haven't given them? I understand the air support. But, also, how do you view Turkey's role in all of this? Because, as I see it right now, this four or five United States-trained fighters—let's not kid ourselves, that's a joke. So, if they're the only force on the ground doing something right now, what more can we do to help them?

General AUSTIN. They—up to this point, they have not asked us for arms, but it doesn't mean that they won't, ma'am. I think—and, of course, you know, as we go forward, there are things that we can do to continue to help—as they try to get supplies into northern Syria, work with the Kurds in the—in northern Iraq to help make sure that we have lines of communication that facilitate that. We're doing that.

They will also need to partner with Syrian Arabs in the area. They're doing that. We are working with Syrian Arabs, developing relationships, as well. So, I think it's a combination of all of these forces that's going—that are going to make a difference, going forward.

Again, we expect our footprint with the new Syrian forces to grow over time. And——

Senator AYOTTE. So, can you help me on Turkey, what role Turkey is playing, or not playing, here, that we would like to see Turkey play?

General AUSTIN. As you know, Senator, Turkey has just recently come onboard and given us access to their bases, which is a tremendous capability. It shortens the legs of flights that our fighter pilots will have to fly. It allows us to be more responsive. they also are flying strikes in our formations, and focused on elements—ISIL

elements in Syria, thus far. So, they are adding value. What we've asked them to do, as well, is to continue to tighten up, or abate, the flow of foreign fighters and lethal accelerants coming across the border.

Senator AYOTTE. So, I want to ask, before we leave, what role is Iran playing right now in Syria? How much support are they providing for the Assad regime? How do we evaluate their significance in fueling this conflict? Also, their support for Hezbollah, what has—what role is Hezbollah playing, in terms of supporting the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. Well, we know that Iran has been instrumental in providing support to Syria throughout. We see, increasingly, that they would like to provide—they want to provide more support. What that will mean in the future, I don't know. But, they are active in Syria.

Senator AYOTTE. So, perhaps if they had more cash and money, they might—they would like to provide more support to the Assad regime.

General AUSTIN. That would be—my assumption would be that that would be the case.

Senator AYOTTE. I wanted to also ask with—as—are issues with these trained fighters—are we going to provide—if they're under attack—I guess we've got four or five of them, but if, for some reason, we were able to get more of them trained, what are we going to do to support them or protect them?

General AUSTIN. Oh, we will provide air support and ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] to—overwatch and air support to protect them. With the first class that we put in, we did—we have done that already. So, we are committed to doing that, going forward.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator McCaskill.

Senator MCCASKILL. I'm worried, like the rest of my colleagues—and there have been a number of questions on this already—about the Train and Equip mission. You know, there's good news and there's bad news about America's military. The good news is, is if you give them a job, they figure out a way to get it done. The bad news is, sometimes you give them a job and they are not willing to say when it's not going to work. At what point in time, General Austin, do you envision us admitting that, while all good intentions and on paper all of the work was done, but the job of finding willing fighters that can be screened appropriately when you have the vast majority, who feel victimized by the current situation in Syria, are running for the exits? At what point in time, and what is the discussion ongoing, about the $600 million you're requesting for next year? That seems very unrealistic to me, in terms of a request. If, at this juncture, we've successfully completed five to six, and I believe you said—I—the last information I had, Ms. Wormuth, was 100—you said "more than 100." What is the number?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator McCaskill, it's between 100 and 120——

Senator MCCASKILL. Okay.

Ms. WORMUTH.—basically.

Senator MCCASKILL. So, we're counting, on our fingers and toes at this point, when we had envisioned 5,400 by the end of the year.

I—I'm just worried that this is one of those instances where the good news about our military is dominating, "We can do this. We can do this," and the practical realities of this strategy aren't being fully embraced.

General AUSTIN. Thank you, Senator. You know, I absolutely agree with you, we have the finest troops in the world, and they will figure out a way to get the job done, one way or the other. Again, what our Special Operations Forces have done in northern Syria is—they didn't wait for the new Syrian force program, or Train and Equip Program, to fully develop. At the very outset, they began to engage elements like the YPG, and enable those elements. They are making a difference on the battlefield. So—and there are tens of thousands of the YPG out there that are, right now, fighting ISIL. So, because the new—the Syria Train and Equip Program is slower getting started than we'd like for it to be, that doesn't mean that we're not creating effects on the battlefield.

Senator MCCASKILL. I just want to make sure, General Austin—I mean, I know the Chairman feels strongly about the success of the surge, and there was a lot of incredible American heroes that were part of that surge. But, the other part of the surge we don't talk about as frequently is that we paid a lot of people. We paid a lot of people to help us during the surge. Is this money that we're setting aside for Train and Equip, would it be better off in direct compensation to some of that YPG force?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator McCaskill, can I try to address this a little bit?

As General Austin said, we are reviewing the program, and we're looking at a range of options. Our Train and Equip Program is part of a broader effort that we're prosecuting with the YPG, with the Syrian Arab coalition, and so on. We're looking at how to have our train and equip program effectively enable those other efforts. I think, as we go forward and look at what our options are, we'll absolutely want to look at the resources we've requested for the next year, and how that fits in.

But, the forces that we are training, while right now are small in number and clearly are not going to reach the numbers that we had planned for, are nevertheless getting terrific training and very good equipment, and, as such, will be able to really be force multipliers of those other groups on the ground that have been very effective, like the Syrian Arab coalition——

Senator MCCASKILL. I just——

Ms. WORMUTH.—for example.

Senator MCCASKILL. If we end up at the end of the year with us bragging about the difference between 100 and 120, it's time for a new plan.

Ms. WORMUTH. I certainly do not mean to be bragging. We—the program is much smaller than we hoped.

Senator MCCASKILL. Yeah.

Ms. WORMUTH. We're not bragging.

Senator MCCASKILL. I don't have much time left, but I want to just—I know—understand from your testimony, General Austin, you can't comment about the IG investigation into this accusation that people are putting pressure on intelligence analysts to change the tenor of their reports. It's a serious allegation that strikes at

the core of our government, in terms of our ability to oversee and make decisions around the use of our military.

I want to say—at the end of this investigation, when you can discuss it, I want to just put on the record that I, for one, am going to be watching very carefully about any potential retaliation against any of the men or women that may have come forward with allegations. They're—it is incredibly important that whistleblowers be protected in this space. Depending on what the investigation finds, I understand that maybe there—you know, there are other factors I'm not aware of, but I just wanted to put on the record that I will be paying very close attention to how these whistleblowers are treated in the aftermath of this investigation.

General AUSTIN. I absolutely share your concern, Senator. You have my—I will assure you that we will do everything within our power to ensure that the whistleblowers remain protected and that there is no retaliation. This is absolutely important.

Again, you know, we need oversight by organizations like the IG, and so we welcome that, and we're going to cooperate fully, and we'll make sure that we abide by the spirit of this investigation.

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Sessions.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Chairman McCain. I think the grim nature of your remarks are justified.

Ms. Wormuth, how long has it been since we've had this Train and Equip Program in effect?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator, we started—we started the actual training earlier this spring.

Senator SESSIONS. Well——

Ms. WORMUTH. So, we started the program in December, when we got authority from Congress.

Senator SESSIONS. Right.

Ms. WORMUTH. We spent time putting together——

Senator SESSIONS. So, you have to——

Ms. WORMUTH.—the training——

Senator SESSIONS.—say we started in December. That's when it was authorized and funding——

Ms. WORMUTH. Yes, sir.

Senator SESSIONS.—is provided. We have to acknowledge, this is a total failure. It's just a failure. I wish it weren't so, but that's the fact. So, it is time to—way past time to react to that failure.

I just would say, the whole idea that we've got to wait for the locals to take ownership and to take the lead and do this kind of activity without any leadership support sufficient from the United States or our allies is also a failure. They're not able to organize well. Mosul has fallen. There's a—divisions within Iraq that make it very difficult. So, I just wish it weren't so, but I'm afraid that's the reality we are dealing with.

We now have, I believe the U.N. says, 4 million refugees, 7 million displaced persons. It's obvious to me that this is a humanitarian catastrophe. We need to deal with it in an honest way. The most effective and honest way is to keep people as close to home as possible. If they can't stay in their homes because of violence and war, then they ought to be kept as close to home as possible.

I talked to a senior European official recently, and he told me that this refugee crisis is the greatest threat to Europe since World War II. I don't see any plan to make it any better.

General Austin, we've got to consider creating safe zones within Syria. I understand there are some places in Syria now that refugees can stay. we're going to have to keep—we can't have millions and millions of people walking into Europe. This goes without—it's hardly worth discussing.

So, I am really worried about this, and wish that we could—we'd already done much better. By being so slow to act initially, this is what has resulted. Now the situation is far more grim than it should be, in my opinion.

General Austin, I do tend to agree with you that a defeat of ISIL is not the end of the problems in the Middle East. We've gotten a spasm of extremism that witnesses have told us may be going on for 50 years. Would you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. I absolutely agree, Senator.

Senator SESSIONS. One victory here doesn't mean it's a total victory. There'll be another problem somewhere else as long as this ideology is out there.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator SESSIONS. I just believe, Ms. Wormuth, that we need a strategy, an understood strategy, bipartisan, in this Congress, with our allies around the world, to confront this long-term, multi-decade threat to the western democratic order and to try to help protect people in the Middle East from this disaster.

So, I want to ask you, Do we have a strategy of that kind that our allies and the United States and Congress and Republicans and Democrats understand and agree on?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator, I think—we have a strategy to defeat ISIL, ultimately, in the Middle East, where—it's largely in the Middle East, but it's obviously spreading to other areas. There are other dynamics in the Middle East, obviously, that are a part of this. There's the broader Sunni/Shi'a sectarian conflict that has gone on for decades. There are the fact that many of the governments in that region are not very representative and have internal policies that don't give much freedoms to their people, so they're—part of—that's part of what's creating——

Senator SESSIONS. Well——

Ms. WORMUTH.—the problem in the Middle East——

Senator SESSIONS. I know.

Ms. WORMUTH.—as well. A big part of our relationships with these countries is talking to them about the importance of more democratic approaches.

Senator SESSIONS. Well said, in one sense. However, does that mean that we don't support the King of Jordan?

Ms. WORMUTH. Jordan is——

Senator SESSIONS. No, I'm just asking rhetorically, okay?

Ms. WORMUTH. Uh-huh.

Senator SESSIONS. No, we've got to have a more realistic policy than that.

I was just reading Henry Kissinger's book on order, and he, just last night, hit the part about George Kennan and the containment strategy that maintained Western unity, free world against the

communist totalitarians. It went on for 50 years almost, ended up when he was successful. This is the way it was expressed. Soviet expansionism, according to Kennan, was real and inherent. The conflict was inherent in the two ideologies. It's incompatible, totalitarian communism and constitutional democracy. I—and he said it—but it could be, quote, "contained by an adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points," close quote. I don't sense that we have any such strategy. I'm sorry we don't. I think, also, that radical Islam, Shari'ah Law, is part—essential component—is incompatible with constitutional democracy, and we need to work better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you both for being here.

Since Senator Sessions' comment about communism and containment is a good segue into my first question, which is for Ms. WORMUTH. Why do you believe that, 4 years into this conflict, that Russia is deploying materiel and increased shipments to the Assad regime and really setting up shop in Syria in a way that they haven't over the last 4 years?

Ms. WORMUTH. Well, Russia has certainly been a supporter of the Assad regime for some time. I think Putin has spoken more publicly about the role Russia has played to date. I think part of what may be happening, part of Putin's calculus may be, that Assad's regime has been under greater threat in the last several months, as ISIL has advanced in places like Padmorf—or Palmyra, excuse me—and Tadmor. So, Putin may be nervous about the stability of the Assad regime, and may be trying to shore it up.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, given that, how do we assess the possibility that the Assad regime might fall?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think, at this point, the—the assessments I've read are that the regime actually still has considerable strength, in terms of its military forces. It's still the most powerful military force on the ground. The support it receives from Iran and Russia remains significant. So, there have certainly been battlefield losses that are concerning, but—and we are looking at, obviously, how to deal with—we are planning and thinking about the potential for a significant retrenchment. But, I think the assessment right now is that the regime is not in imminent danger of falling

Senator SHAHEEN. So, if Russia deploys air defense systems in Syria—maybe this is a question for you, General Austin—are we concerned that they'll threaten our coalition aircraft?

General AUSTIN. That—if they're trying to operate in the same space, Senator, that possibility is clearly there.

Senator SHAHEEN. How are we thinking about responding to that?

General AUSTIN. Well——

Senator SHAHEEN. For either of you.

Ms. WORMUTH. I think we're still in the early stages of what exactly Russia is doing. But, one—at the diplomatic level, we're making very clear that deployments that are going to shore up the regime and draw out the conflict, are counterproductive and destabilizing, and that if this is really about Russia trying to join the

fight against ISIL, then we would expect the kinds of military capabilities they deploy to be consistent with that.

Senator SHAHEEN. So, how are we making that clear to Russia?

Ms. WORMUTH. Well, there are a number of channels, but, in particular, Secretary Kerry speaks to his counterpart very regularly and has been making that point very clear. Then I would say, on the military side—and I'm sure General Austin can elaborate on this—if, in fact, it gets to a point where we see Russian aircraft operating in that area, we would, I would imagine, need to set up some sort of deconfliction mechanism so that we can continue our counter-ISIL campaign there.

Senator SHAHEEN. General Austin?

General AUSTIN. We know how to do that, Senator. You know, my utmost concern is protection of my—of our troops. We're going to make sure that we have the ability to protect ourselves at all time. You know, there are, on occasion, Syrian aircraft that are flying in, you know, spaces that are not too distant from where we're operating, but we're able to make sure that, number one, we maintain vigilance and, number two, we keep the—you know, the battlespace—we work in the battlespace in such a way that we avoid conflict, avoid encounter, if at all possible.

Senator SHAHEEN. So, I appreciate that that has been our policy, to date. Given the total failure of our ability to influence the outcome of the Syrian Civil War, are we assessing whether we should take a different response with respect to Assad? Engaging with the Syrian troops?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think we continue to look—we continue to believe that what would be the best solution is to get a political transition and get Assad out of the government while retaining the governance structure so that you don't have a situation of chaos on the ground.

Russia, with its relationship with the regime, could potentially contribute to helping find that solution. That would be a valuable contribution from Russia, as opposed to——

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, it would be, but there's no incentive, at this point, for Russia to do that——

Ms. WORMUTH. I think——

Senator SHAHEEN.—is there?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think they——

Senator SHAHEEN. What's the incentive?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think their incentive would be to have—they want, more than anything, a more stable Syria, and they are quite fearful of ISIL, as well. I mean, they have many, many Chechens in Russia. They are just as concerned about foreign fighter flows from ISIL as we are. So, I think Russia does have an interest in having a more stable Syria. A constructive way for them to engage would be to work with us, and other countries who would like to see a transition there, to try to come up with a diplomatic way to make that transition happen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I certainly think that would be a positive outcome, but it's not clear to me that we've seen any action, in the last 4 and a half years, to suggest that Russia's going to play a more positive role.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Rounds.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, thank you for your service.

In both Syria and in Iraq, we have displaced individuals that clearly are part of the discussion on the worldwide stage, individuals moving into Europe. I'm curious, in terms of the numbers right now—and this would be a question for either of you—but, do we have an update on the total number of individuals who are displaced between Syria and Iraq that you can share with us this morning?

Ms. WORMUTH. I believe, Senator, that it's around 4 million. It's a very large number. I mean, there are more than a million——

Senator ROUNDS. No, that would be in—from Syria.

Ms. WORMUTH. I thought it was from Syria and Iraq. But, for example, there's more than a million refugees in Turkey right now. There are many hundreds of thousands, if not a million, refugees in Jordan. So, the neighboring countries are already hosting very large numbers of refugees: Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

Senator ROUNDS. Before we're done, could you maybe just check and see if the numbers that you're providing are——

Ms. WORMUTH. Happy to do that.

Senator ROUNDS.—are up to date? What I'm curious about are the number of individuals displaced both in Syria and the number of individuals who are displaced in Iraq, but still perhaps in Iraq.

Ms. WORMUTH. We can get you that right now.

[The information referred to follows:]

The number of Syrian refugees is approximately 4 million. There are an estimated additional 7.6 million Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of Iraqi IDPs is nearly 3.2 million.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you. I would appreciate that.

General, the reason for my question is that the—it would appear that, as this number is a significant number, most certainly they are part of any concern with regard to military operations, regardless of where you're at, and our desire not to do more harm than good in what we provide. Yet, at the same time, one of our expectations is that we're doing ongoing air operations throughout the area. We don't want to get into areas where we're going to actually cause more damage. Yet, right now you're challenged because you really don't have the forward air observers that would make it more efficient than what you've got today. Can you share with us a little bit about what you're doing to try to improve that situation, and how you would like to see that handled?

General AUSTIN. Sir, we routinely use all of our intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] and manned aircraft, to make sure that we understand what's going on on the ground before we employ weapons. We are diligent in our efforts there—not overly cautious, to the point where we—we're not able to take advantage of opportunities to engage the enemy, but we are very, very mindful of, you know, the possibility of committing civilian casualties there.

Senator ROUNDS. But, at this time, sir, it's fair to say that we're not using any of our own forward air observers yet at all. We don't have any forward air observers on the ground at all.

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir. Our JTACS [Joint Terminal Attack Controllers] are operating in the command centers. Now, what that does is, it allows the JTACs to have visibility over, you know, what's going on in the target area, but it also enables him to gain visibility of where the friendly troops are. This is one of the biggest challenges that we encounter throughout this battlespace. In a lot of cases, the folks we're trying to help don't have a good handle on where their people are, and that slows down the—you know, our ability to engage.

Senator ROUNDS. Currently, when you are training individuals in Iraq, and those who want to fight, back in Syria—we understand, and I think there's—I don't think there's anybody out here that's disagreeing with the fact that we're not on schedule for getting the number that we want to have trained. Is that—that is a fair assessment yet, in terms of the number of individuals that we want to have trained that are both Iraqi nations and Syrian nationals?

General AUSTIN. I'm sorry, sir. I'm struggling with my sign, there.

But, you're right, sir. We would like to see a lot more forces available to be trained. We're encouraging the Government of Iraq to recruit those forces, bring them onboard so we can get them into training centers. What we've discovered—not discovered, but we knew this, going in—is that those forces that have been trained by us are doing pretty well on the battlefield.

Senator ROUNDS. Fair to say, though, General, that one of the problems we've got, particularly with Syrian fighters is—is that, in our ability to actually discern which ones we can use and which ones we're not using, based upon our review of their background and what they intend to do—if they want to go in and fight Assad, basically it's eliminating them from being part of our team. Fair to say, at this point?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir. We're focused on countering ISIL.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Both of you have testified that our very strict vetting process has resulted in far fewer fighters to—for us to train. Does this mean that we're turning away thousands of potential fighters?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator, I would say two things. One, because the authority we have focuses our program on fighting ISIL, there are a number of individuals who might like to receive training from the United States—or equipment, for that matter—but, they want to fight the regime. That's not the focus of our program. Then, in the other—the other way the standards affect the recruiting pool is, obviously we want to make sure that we have confidence in the people we bring into our program, and that we can give them equipment and trust them to use that appropriately, trust them to fight on the battlefield in a way that's consistent with the laws of armed conflict. In many cases, people who might be interested in volunteering don't meet those standards or are younger than—young—you know, are under the age of 18, for example, or who are otherwise not medically qualified.

Senator HIRONO. So, is one of the assessments that you're doing is to review whether or not we're being unrealistic and—regarding the kinds of factors that we want you to take into consideration before you will train a particular individual? Is that one of the areas that you are looking to, which may require congressional action?

Ms. WORMUTH. We certainly are looking at our recruiting and screening process all of the time. Even before, frankly, the first class was reinserted, we were looking at how to speed up our recruiting process and speed up the screening process. We are looking at the kinds of criteria that we have in place, but I think our view is that, right now, our criteria are very consistent with the requirements that Congress gave us. If we were to loosen them, for example, I think we would absolutely have to come back to you all and ask for——

Senator HIRONO. Well, and that is my question, whether or not you're seriously considering asking us to reevaluate the criteria that Congress established.

Now, I know we're talking today a lot about what's going on on the ground, but our concern is also—and you mentioned this in your testimony, that you're looking for more effective ways to counter ISIL's very effective messaging campaign. There are concerns about ISIL's ability to motivate lone wolves who will take action without ever having direct contact with ISIL. So—taking actions in our country as well as elsewhere—so, what are some of the effective ways that you are countering ISIL's messaging strategy?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think we are taking some steps that are effective, but we need to do more. Part of what—we have been working, for example, closely with a number of countries in the coalition to identify communicators inside of those communities who have credibility with Muslim populations and who will be able to lay out a compelling—compelling reasons why ISIL's theology is completely bankrupt. So, we've been working with governments to counter violent extremism, we have been working to get our messages out about military successes that we have more effectively. But, a lot of it is working with the private—sort of the private sector and civil society to try to get the right kinds of messengers to speak to these kinds of groups. It's a very challenging part of our effort, and I think we need to do more there.

Senator HIRONO. I completely agree with that, because—I do think that the lone-wolf phenomenon and the problem is one that we really don't have a very good handle on.

General, I think you mentioned that you thought that there were signs that Iran would like to be more active in supporting Syria, and possibly that, because of the agreement and their getting their hands on more money as the sanctions get lifted, you said you saw some signs of that, that Iran would like to do more. So, what are these signs that you were referring to? Because we know that Iran is already supporting Syria. So, you know, are you expecting that they're going to put billions more into their support of Assad?

General AUSTIN. They are already supporting Syria. So——

Senator HIRONO. Yes.

General AUSTIN.—you're exactly right.

As things become more dynamic in Syria, and the regime is increasingly challenged, it's my assessment that Iran will want to continue to try to shore them up in a greater way.

Senator HIRONO. It's not as though our country is going to just stand by idly while Iran proceeds with that kind of a program, correct? We're not going to just sit there——

Ms. WORMUTH. No, certainly——

Senator HIRONO.—while they do that.

Ms. WORMUTH.—not. I mean, we absolutely are very focused on countering Iran's malign activities in Syria as well as the broader region. We have sanctions of our own that are in place to try to block arms, for example, going to countries. We have interdicted, or worked with folks in the coalition to interdict, weapons going from Iran to the Houthis, for example. We would continue to try to use those kinds of tools to limit Iran's ability to support the Syrians.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Lee.

Senator LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing.

Thank you, Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, for taking the time today to answer our questions. It's deeply appreciated.

It's been 1 year since President Obama announced to the world that the United States would undertake a strategy to degrade and defeat ISIS in order to return some semblance of stability to Iraq and create an environment that could lead to a negotiated end to the civil war in Syria.

It was my belief that President Obama's overall goal and the strategy he outlined to achieve that goal may have been beset from the outset by some flawed assumptions, some contradictions, and perhaps an excessive reliance on political forecasting in a region of the world that is anything but easy to predict. Now this, compounded by a string of recent events, is why I think it may be time for us to reassess the way the United States views this conflict and chooses to respond to it. I think we need to start by making clear-eyed threat assessments and prioritizing U.S. national security interests.

General Austin, what's your assessment of the most significant threats that the conflict in Syria and Iraq pose to the security of United States citizens and our freedoms? In other words, at the end of the day, what needs to be accomplished for the U.S. Government to fulfill and to perform its constitutional duty to protect the people of the United States and our interests?

General AUSTIN. This is—thank you, Senator—this is a transnational threat. If left unchecked, it will continue to expand and to try to take up or occupy territory and governing. In doing so, it will try to erase international boundaries, it will try to do a number of things that will cause tremendous pain and suffering throughout the region. It will also export terror—my belief, it will export terror to other parts of the world, and particularly to places like our homeland. We see the beginnings of this in this lone-wolf activity that we talk about. We also see what—we are concerned about individuals who go into Iraq and Syria and fight as a part

of this effort, and return—or potentially return back to our homeland, and bring those skills back with them.

So, this is a—it is a threat to us, and I think the threat will continue to increase.

Senator LEE. Now, the administration's strategy is to create an environment in Syria that will be likely to lead to a negotiated settlement of the Civil War, and result in the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power in Damascus. In your professional military opinion, General Austin, and given your knowledge of the region, what level of pressure would need to be leveraged against Mr. Assad and his supporters in order for them to capitulate, especially as many Alawites and other minority groups view some opposition groups as a threat to their survival? How much investment would need—would be needed from the coalition countries in order to provide security and stability in a hypothetical post-Assad Syria?

General AUSTIN. I think that Assad would only be willing, as you have stated, Senator, to come to the table to negotiate a settlement if he feels like he is threatened. As things continue to develop in the country, you know, we see a number of elements—al-Nusra Front, others that are fighting the regime, ISIL—you know, their efforts come together and place increasing pressure on Assad. He is losing—he still has significant capability, but he's losing capability every day.

Now, the wildcard is when countries like Iran, or potentially Russia, would—could possibly move in and shore him up. It could extend things for a bit of time.

Now, in a post-Assad environment, we have to consider that there are a number of elements there that will continue to be there and will continue to fight. Al-Nusra is one of those elements. If there are remnants of ISIL there, they'll continue to fight. So, it will require some sort of stability force to go in and make sure that, whatever the transition government looks like, it has the ability to do its job. So.

Senator LEE. Thank you, General Austin.

I see my time's expired. Thank you, Chairman.

Senator REED [presiding]. Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Great. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Thanks, to our witnesses.

I'm going to start with a compliment, but then I'm going to revert to form of everybody else on the committee and express some major concerns.

The complement was, I was in Irbil, Baghdad, Kuwait, Jordan, and Turkey in late June and early July, and I was in President Barzani's office, in Irbil, and he said, "If President Obama had not started the bombing campaign on Mount Sinjar on August 8th, we would not be here today." He meant "we," the Kurdish people in Kurdistan. He wanted us to extend our thanks back to the administration and Congress. I also saw a joint operations command at the airport in Irbil with a very close coordination between United States forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga that was very impressive.

However, everywhere else I traveled—to Baghdad and to the other parts of the region—it seems like there's major problems. The

effort to retake Ramadi that was begun in mid-July is apparently not going that well, and in Syria, absent some successes in the Kurdish area near Khobani, has been very, very disastrous.

I was not an original supporter when Senator McCain raised the idea of a no-fly humanitarian zone, in the fall of 2013. I listened to General Dempsey tell us why that was not a good idea, and I generally agreed with him. But, by the time Senator King and I went to Lebanon, in February of 2014, and saw a million refugees already into Lebanon, I became converted. When Senator McCain pushed the idea of a humanitarian zone first, there was only about 750,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey. There's now 1.8 million. It will be 2 million soon. There's 4 million—the number is 4 million Syrians have fled outside the country, and there are 7.8 million internally displaced Syrians in the country. They could easily leave the country, as well. A humanitarian zone in northern Syria would be very difficult to do, but I think the benefit of that, compared with 4 million and then climbing to—it could be 6, it could be 7, it could be 8 million refugees, some of whom could be very, very dangerous, leaving the country—I think we would have been wise to do it when Senator McCain suggested it, and I think we would be still be wise to do it. From having met with a number of Syrian refugees in Gaziantep, Turkey, an awful lot of those who fled the country would go back if they felt that there was a place where basic needs would be met and they would be safe. So, I would encourage that. That's not your decision to make. I would encourage that—the administration.

Let me talk about the—General Austin, you said, a second ago, in response, I think, to Senator McCain's question, that you thought the war would—the war against ISIL would go on for years. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, it is.

Senator KAINE. Just editorial comment. I don't think "go on for years" and "the chances of success of ISIL are dimmed," I don't think those are compatible statements. That was a quote from Chairman Dempsey, that ISIL's chances of success are dimming, the war is going to go on for years. I don't think those are really compatible statements.

It seems like the ISIL threat is expanding geographically. We're talking heavily about Iraq and Syria here, but there is ISIL presence in Libya that we're paying attention to. There's ISIL presence in Afghanistan, largely disaffected Taliban who are moving over and claiming allegiance to ISIL. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIL, not yet threatening the United States, as far as I know. There may be some ISIL presence in Yemen. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. That is correct, sir, there is.

Senator KAINE. So, the potential battlefield against ISIL is expanding. We're actually, maybe, engaging in some new activity. My understanding—General Austin, you indicated we have undertaken airstrikes to support trained Syrians in Syria, when they have been threatened by al-Nusra, correct?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator KAINE. We are also prepared, as of a change in policy from early August, to undertake airstrikes to protect those Syrian fighters if they fall under threat and attack by the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. That's correct, sir.

Senator KAINE. Now, I tactically completely agree with that, but I've got to ask, What is the legal precedent for the United States undertaking military action against forces of the Assad regime?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator, our determination is that, as you know very well, we can defend against ISIL and al-Nusra under the 2001 AUMF [the Authorization for Use of Military Force], and, if our forces are attacked by the regime in a—particular circumstances, we could—the President could exercise his Article 2 rights under the Constitution.

Senator KAINE. If our forces—if the U.S. is attacked——

Ms. WORMUTH. I'm sorry. If——

Senator KAINE.—Article 2 comes into play.

Ms. WORMUTH. I meant our forces, meaning the T&E [Train and Equip Program] forces that we've trained.

Senator KAINE. Yeah. I will just say, I have not seen an interpretation of Article 2—ever—that would allow the United States to undertake action under Article 2 to protect others' fighters. I just—you can take action under Article 2 to protect the U.S. The President doesn't need to ask anybody's permission for that. But, to undertake action to protect others' fighters, I've never seen an interpretation of Article 2 that would do this.

The last thing I'll say, Mr. Chair, and set aside, there's a lot more criticism that I would get into here and that a lot of us have, but I worry that Congress is criticizing you as if we were editorial writers. We've got a lot of opinions. We're acting like fans in the stands. We still have not authorized this war. We still have not authorized this war. I believe it is being carried out in violation of basic legal principles, because Congress has not done what Congress is supposed to do. We can be fans in the stands and throw all the criticisms we want, but we are in the 14th month of an undeclared war that is based upon a legal justification that's specious, in my view. But, Congress has allowed it to happen, completely giving up their Article 1 responsibilities. Now that we've been told that the war is going to go on for years, my question is, just to my colleagues, How long are we going to allow a President to wage an executive war without a congressional authorization? I think we're afraid to touch this.

So, we can criticize this all we want. We'll have many more hearings like this over the course of a number of years. I'm sure we'll have critical things to say. But, if we're not willing to do our constitutional duty, I mean, why are we here? We're not fans. We're supposed to be the owners of this team.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

On behalf of the Chairman, I would recognize Senator Cotton.

Senator COTTON. If that's the question, I will say the answer is: Wars are not won with paper resolutions, they are won with iron resolution. That is clearly lacking in our strategy right now against the Islamic State.

General Austin, Ms. Wormuth, thank you for coming. General Austin, in particular, for all the thousands of troopers you represent, for your service and their service.

I want to speak briefly about the reports that there may have been some efforts to cook the books about our performance in the campaign against the Islamic State. I know in your opening statement you acknowledged this, acknowledged the problem. There is ongoing investigations, to include with the IG. But, you have an ongoing challenge in your intelligence reporting and the way that affects your operations as well as the command climate. So, putting aside the IG investigation, could you just tell us what steps you're taking to confront those challenges that you face on a daily basis?

General AUSTIN. I have recently and continue to emphasize, Senator, to all of my subordinates, that my expectation is that I get candid and accurate intelligence assessments, you know, from my staff. I've also emphasized to my entire command, as I have in every command that I've had, that the welfare of my people is extremely important to me. So, you know, I care about my people. My expectation is that they have a climate that's conducive to providing for a good, healthy, sound work environment for them.

Senator COTTON. Thank you. I mean, I would have to say, too, as someone who regularly consumes intelligence community products on the Islamic State and our campaign against them as a member of this committee and a member of the Intelligence Committee, I was very surprised to hear allegations that books are being cooked, because those products are not painting a very pretty picture of how this campaign is going.

General Austin, I want to move now to events in Syria, and, in particular, Russia's military buildup. Published reports have said, in the last couple of weeks, to include admissions of senior Russian officials, that Russia is sending aircraft there, air defense systems, armored personnel carriers, main battle tanks now, in addition to life support systems, like modular housing, that are clearly designed for a large and continued presence. How many airstrikes are—is the coalition conducting on a daily basis right now in Syria?

General AUSTIN. We're conducting, overall, about 24 or so airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, and about a third of those are in Syria. So.

Senator COTTON. What efforts, if any, do we have underway to deconflict this battlespace now that we have hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Russians running around with air defense systems and battle tanks and personnel carriers?

General AUSTIN. Well, we continue to—from a military perspective, we continue to look at what the possibilities for encounters are, Senator. We have—we make sure that we have measures in place to ensure that we don't have an inadvertent encounter with either Russia—a Russian aircraft or a Syrian aircraft.

Senator COTTON. Do our pilots have to have 100-percent positive identification that there is no Russian on a target before they can strike that target?

General AUSTIN. Well, we've not—the Russians, to my knowledge, have not started operations, as of this point, so we've not had to encounter that yet. But, clearly, these are things that, from a tactical perspective, that we will continue to work and think through. So.

Senator COTTON. Assad's other main supporter inside of Syria is Iran, and specifically the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Quds

Force, which has been present in Syria for years. Do our pilots have to have 100-percent positive identification to—that there is no Iranian forces on a target before they strike that target?

General AUSTIN. Our pilots have to have 100-percent—well, they have to have certainty, Senator, that there are ISIL targets there that'll be engaged. Since, as you know, we can see what we're shooting at or what we're engaging, this is not an issue. So.

Senator COTTON. Ms. Wormuth, there was a report recently in the media that Russia offered, in 2012, to help the West remove Assad from power, and that the United States declined that offer because we believed that Assad would fall of his own accord. Is that an accurate report?

Ms. WORMUTH. I don't believe that's an accurate report, but that's obviously from several years ago, and I wasn't in this position at that time. So, I don't believe it's accurate, but we're—I don't believe it's accurate.

Senator COTTON. Do you believe that Iran and their proxies can be a partner in the fight against the Islamic State in any way in Iraq or Syria?

Ms. WORMUTH. No, not really. I mean, we're not cooperating with Iran right now in Iraq, for example. We are deconflicting for—you know, as you know well, they certainly have a role with the—some of the Shiite militia on the ground, some of the popular—the popular mobilization forces. But, we are not cooperating, and I don't see Iran as having a productive role in either Iraq or Syria.

Senator COTTON. Thank you. I would agree, given the fact that their militias in Iraq had to rely on United States airpower, and now they appear to be relying on Russian forces in Iran to back up their hapless efforts, that they aren't going to be a partner. Trying to rely on Iran to defeat the Islamic State is like trying to rely on gasoline to put out a fire.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Cotton.

On behalf of the Chairman, Senator King.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General, I just want to touch, for a few moments, on the intelligence issue. I consider this extremely grave, a grave issue, because if we don't have reliable intelligence, as policymakers, and if the President doesn't have reliable intelligence, we can't make good policy. This keeps happening. I mean, this goes back to the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, the Iraq War. This allegation is—these allegations are extremely serious, and I hope you will—I understand we have an IG investigation, but, as a commanding officer, I would hope that you would just be all over this.

I want to ask you a direct question. Have you ever ordered, suggested, or hinted to any of the intelligence command that they should sweeten the intelligence reports in order to portray a more positive view of the success of our efforts in Iraq or Syria?

General AUSTIN. Absolutely not, Senator King. Absolutely not.

Senator KING. Well, I just hope that you will just stay on this, because, as you know better than any of us, if you don't have good intelligence, you're not only going into the battle blind in—if it's cooked intelligence, you're going into the battle with one hand tied behind your back. So, I just—I am extremely concerned about this issue.

This is a question for the record. You used the term "progress" in your statement a number of times, progress here and progress there. Not now, but for the record, I would like a very specific list of what you consider "progress," where we are—where we are succeeding. Because, generally, it doesn't look like that. It looks more like a stalemate. I think, again, we should have this information. I know some of it is in your testimony, but I'd like, if you could, just a one-pager on where you think progress has been made.

[The information referred to follows:]

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

9 November 2015

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-2508

Dear Senator King:

Thank you for your thoughtful questions during the 16 September hearing on the U.S. Strategy to Counter ISIL. I share your concerns and can assure you that we are doing everything within available authorities to ensure success in this critical fight.

At the hearing, you requested specific numbers in response to Ms. Wormuth's comment that the Iraqis are enrolling more people into the building partner capacity (BPC) sites and employing them in the fight. To date, approximately 3,000 are in the training pipeline and more than 15,000 have graduated. In total, since January 2015, the Coalition training mission has helped to build the capacity of Iraq's security forces by training six Iraqi Army brigades, eight Peshmerga battalions, 2,100 Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) operators, 100 Federal Police, and more than 2,500 Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). By the end of the year, we expect to train four additional Peshmerga battalions, 500+ CTS, 100 Federal Police, and one battalion of PMF.

The accomplishments listed below are provided in response to your request for a specific list of what I consider progress in the Counter-ISIL Campaign:

Objective: Establish Coalition and Employ Forces

- Establishment, integration, and employment of a 60-plus nation Counter-ISIL Coalition
- Thirty nations support military actions to include target sharing and engagement
- Dedicated foreign staff officers embedded into Headquarters, USCENTCOM/Combined Forces Command (CFC) as the Coalition Strategy Planning Group (CSPG)
- Combined Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) established to direct comprehensive operations and enhance Iraqi Security Force (ISF) capabilities at Building Partner Capacity (BPC) sites
- Secured the support of the Turks to station Coalition air assets and operate out of Turkish air bases; has significantly shortened the distances traveled by some of our air crews

Objective: Increase Regional Partner Capacity

- Established seven advise/assist BPC sites in Iraq with 17 Coalition nations contributing to the effort in various ways
- Advising and assisting ISF forces as they planned, rehearsed, and now are executing the Ramadi counterattack

- Used Iraqi Train & Equipping Fund (ITEF) funds to arm and equip ISF, Kurdish Peshmerga, and Sunni tribal militia with sets of equipment sufficient to outfit eight brigade-sized elements
- Increased Sunni participation in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF); improved the ratio from 1:12 to 1:8; doubled to almost 8,000in six months
- Providing direct support to an established coalition of anti-ISIL forces (includes Syrian Kurds, Syrian Arabs, Christians, Turkmen) conducting operations in northern Syria
- Provided 50 tons of ammunition to the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC) that is now using that ammunition to conduct operations along the Mar'a Line

Objective: Improve Iraqi and Regional Partner Security

- Increased tribal participation in Anbar operations; arming and training 2,000 tribal fighters following successful tribal engagements in Anbar and Ninewa
- Conducted humanitarian/disaster relief operations in support of Iraqi communities
- Improving and enhancing key regional partners' ability to defend their borders against ISIL, including Jordan and Lebanon
- Improved Jordanian Armed Forces' (JAF) and Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) ability to defend against ISIL threats through operations SYBIL HUNTER & LION HUNTER
- Enabled the efforts of the counter-ISIL forces in northern Syria that have effectively closed most of the major crossing sites between Syria and Turkey, thereby slowing down the flow of foreign fighters.
- Reduced sectarian messaging and misinformation by local media through increased collaboration and assistance efforts between the U.S.-led Coalition and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MOD)

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Military Effectiveness

- Halted ISIL's southern/eastern advances to Baghdad and enabled the ISF's effective defense of the capital city
- Prevented ISIL from conducting large-scale assaults/operational maneuvers against the ISF
- Greatly complicating ISIL's ability to respond effectively when confronted by an opposing ground force
- Destroyed thousands of vehicles and pieces of equipment used by ISIL

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Freedom of Maneuver in Iraq and Syria

- Supported and enabled the successful seizure by the Iraqi Counterterrorism Services (CTS) and Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) of Bayji City and the Bayji Oil Refinery (BOR)
- Supporting and enabling the Iraqi security forces in the conduct of the Ramadi counterattack; providing intelligence and air support
- Enabled Iraq's security forces in the conduct of the counterattack to retake control of the Mosul Dam; taking measures to ensure structural integrity of the dam
- Provided much-needed relief in support of the Sinjar Mountain Yazidis and enabled the eventual liberation of Sinjar Mountain

- Supported and enabled the efforts of the YPG in northeast Syria which has secured ~17,000 square kilometers of territory previously held by ISIL
- Ensured the successful defense of Kobane, Syria, primarily through the employment of devastating airstrikes
- Enabled the successful liberation of Tikrit, the capital of Salah ad Din Province
- Ensured the GoI retained control of the Haditha Dam (second largest hydroelectric dam in Iraq)
- Supported and enabled Peshmerga operations resulting in the removal of ISIL from Mount Zummar, Kisik Junction and Kirkuk
- Supported the successful ISF disruption of ISIL operations spanning from Balad to Samarra to Tikrit
- Promulgated one million attributed Arabic language messages on social media; led to mobilization of four hundred indigenous online users reposting counter ISIL messages

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Organizational Capabilities

- Degraded ISIL senior leadership; successfully targeted 100+ high value individuals
- Removed several thousand ISIL fighters and dozens of localized ISIL leaders from the battlefield through precision airstrikes (provincial and operational cadres)
- Degraded ISIL's ability to "govern" by denying exploitation of critical infrastructure
- Degraded ISIL's funding and supply networks through Coalition airstrikes in Syria
- Degrading ISIL's ability to collect and refine petroleum products

We've been clear from the outset in stating that the campaign to counter and ultimately defeat ISIL represents a long-term endeavor. The list above reflects the progress achieved in just over a year's time. Already we have greatly degraded ISIL's capability and we are now putting pressure on this enemy on multiple fronts. I remain confident that we have the right approach and we will continue to achieve the desired effects against ISIL. Thank you again for your interest and for your continued, strong support for our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, civilians and their families. If I can provide any additional information or assist you further, please do not hesitate to contact me or the members of my legislative affairs staff.

Sincerely,

LLOYD J. AUSTIN III
General, U.S. Army

General AUSTIN. Be happy to provide that, sir. We'll get that to you right away.

Senator KING. Thank you. I think, from a broad question of policy—and this comes off of a lot of the other discussion we've had—Assad and ISIS are evil twins. ISIS largely came into existence in reaction to Assad. In retrospect—and, like Senator Kaine, I was one who was very reluctant about getting involved—but, in retrospect, the longer we've left Assad there, it has created a situation, both a humanitarian crisis and a situation, that has allowed al-Nusra and ISIL—ISIL didn't even exist when we first started having these hearings—and it's allowed them to—it's given them an enemy and an opportunity to make hay with the population.

So, a strategy that ignores Assad—and, for example, trains troops to go into Syria to only fight ISIL, but not Assad, I just think in—I'm—I think we now need to recognize that that's not a logical strategy. Part of good strategic thinking is that you modify

your strategy according to the—according to changed circumstances. The circumstances are—and you mentioned he's losing his capabilities every day. I'm sorry, General, I've been hearing that at every hearing since 2013, "Assad is about to go, he's about to collapse." I know you didn't say that today, but we've got to find a strategy that allows us to move Assad aside in some way, working with the Russians, if necessary, or the Iranians, if necessary, because he's the irritant that's keeping this thing stirred up.

Then, finally, in terms of our troops, the fundamental problem, it seems to me, is we're not going to defeat ISIS with just airpower. Everybody knows that. We're trying to rely on a weak force in Iraq and no force in Syria. How do we refine this strategy, General? You know that we—in order to root them out of Mosul, Iraq, or anyplace else, you're going to have to have troops on the ground. We don't want them to be Americans. How do we break through this? Clearly, the Train and Equip is just too little, too late. Your thoughts.

General AUSTIN. We're going to need a greater commitment from the partners that we're enabling, Senator. You know, again, if the Iraqis make the commitment to put more troops through the Train and Equip Program, we'll get them trained and equipped, and we'll get them into the fight.

Senator KING. Are there signs that the Iraqis are willing to do that? Do they want Mosul back?

General AUSTIN. I think so. I certainly think so. They want to stabilize Anbar first, and then take on Mosul. But, yes, I believe that.

Senator KING. Ms. Wormuth, give me some thoughts on the overall strategy here.

Ms. WORMUTH. Certainly, Senator. I was going to say, in terms of getting more Iraqis into the fight, they are, as I said, increase—they're opening the aperture, in terms of which units they're putting into our training sites. So, that's going to help, I think, create additional troops on the ground.

Senator KING. I'd like specific numbers on that, by the way, for the record.

[The information referred to can be found on page 155.]

Ms. WORMUTH. Certainly. Certainly.

They are—we see them starting to now plan ahead, in terms of which units are going into the training pipeline, which, again, I think indicates a greater sense of urgency on their part.

On the Syrian side of the ledger, I would say it is clearly harder to find partners on the ground on the Syrian side of the ledger. But, one of the things that we didn't envision a year ago was the partnership, if you will, that we have of our airpower with the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian Arab coalition that are operating with them. That group, on its own, won't be enough, but we are continuing to look for opportunities like that, even as we review our own Train and Equip Program.

Senator KING. Well, I would join in Senator Kaine's remarks that I really think you need to rethink a strategy about a safe zone, a no-fly zone, some protection from Assad's barrel bombs. This is some—I hate it when the Chairman's right, but he's been talking about this for 2 years, and I—in retrospect, I think he was right.

We've allowed this to just—the atrocity to go on too long, and it's impacting us, it's impacting the rest of Europe. I really think that there should be a rethinking of the nonintervention strategy, not on—not in terms of troops, but in terms of airpower in order to level the playing field, bring pressure on Assad and the Russians, so that we can get a negotiated agreement. Because it doesn't seem to be a prospect now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Again, upon—on behalf of the Chairman, Senator Tillis.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Ms. Wormuth, you made a—in your opening statement—I'm—apologize that I had to step out; I had to go to a Judiciary Committee meeting—but, you made a comment in your opening statement that I want to focus a little bit of time on through a series of questions that—hopefully, I can get brief remarks.

You said that ISIS is not 10 feet tall. The reason that I have a concern with that kind of statement is that it kind of—it's reminiscent of characterizing them as the JV team. They are a very serious threat.

Before I go forward, General Austin, I neglected to do what I always do when I see people in uniform. Thank you for your service. I know you guys are a part of the solution.

But, when we say that ISIS is not 10 feet tall, they are the richest threat group of this kind in human history. Through the seizure of assets for the Iraqi National Bank, I think they seized some $820 million. Last week, we just had a memorial for 9/11. It's estimated that the 9/11 attacks cost about $500,000. Through that one asset seizure, if my math is right, that equates to about 1,600 9/11s, having the resources to strike that kind of damage in our homeland, in the Middle East, in Europe, and other places. I think that we need to recognize them as one of the single greatest threats that we have today. Of course we have Russia and North Korea, Iran. But, they're at the front line for people that we have to take seriously. We have to figure out when we're making progress and when we're not. That leads to my questions.

Do you feel like you're over your—over the last 24, 36 month, whatever time horizon, General Austin, makes sense to you—does ISIS control more or less territory, or do they have greater or less influence in other areas that are emerging as potential strongholds for ISIS in the future? More or less?

General AUSTIN. Less in Iraq.

Senator TILLIS. What's the net? Because we know they're expanding elsewhere. We know they're changing jerseys in Afghanistan from al-Qaeda and other groups and Taliban into ISIS. We've got them operating in other areas. So, what's the net? More or less?

General AUSTIN. It would be more if you consider——

Senator TILLIS. Okay.

Do they have—if you were to compare their resources—their economic resources over the last 24 or 36 months—do they have more or less dollars to support their terrorist operations?

General AUSTIN. Less. We have targeted their resources. I think—they make money, as you know, Senator, off things like oil collection-—

Senator TILLIS. Antiquity sales, kidnappings——

General AUSTIN. Right, right. So, we have long—I have said, on a number of occasions, not only do we have to stop the flow of foreign fighters, but we have to take away this enemy's ability to finance the——

Senator TILLIS. Okay.

Another measure. I'm trying to come up with this concept of a dashboard so that when we have the next committee hearing meeting, I can ask you the same series of questions and see where the trends are. Do they have more or less influence—are they—I—they seem to be winning on social media, in terms of reaching out to people in the homeland, reaching out to people in Europe. About 6 hours ago, it was posted that some 15-year-old girl murdered her mother in Europe, was convicted of murder as a result of being radicalized by some of the social media presence. Have we stemmed the tide on their continued expansion of the use of social media to radicalize people internationally and in the homeland?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think they do have a more effective countermessaging campaign at this point.

Senator TILLIS. Yeah.

Ms. WORMUTH. That's an area we need to——

Senator TILLIS. It seems——

Ms. WORMUTH.—work on.

Senator TILLIS.—to be growing. It doesn't—it seems like, again, in terms of trends, the ground that they're taking, the places they're heavily influencing, social media—I mean, this is a—an organization that is trending in the wrong direction against the greatest superpower that's ever existed.

I want to go back to chemical weapons. Do you think that—there's been reports—I want to—I only want to talk about confirmed reports—do you think that their use of chemical weapons have increased over the last 24 months or are beginning to see evidence that they're being used in certain areas in Syria and Iraq? More or less?

Ms. WORMUTH. Senator, given that they had no apparent use of chemical weapons at the outset, there have been——

Senator TILLIS. So, now there's more.

Ms. WORMUTH.—some indications——

Senator TILLIS. Okay.

Then, the last question I have is how we're working—I understand that most of the problem has to deal with the fact that Iraq has failed to do what they need to do to engage the Sunni population, but they haven't done it. So, over the course of the last 24–36 months, has the Sunni population been more or less inclined to side with ISIS where the conflicts are arising in Iraq?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think we've seen considerable outreach from Prime Minister Abadi——

Senator TILLIS. Has it worked?

Ms. WORMUTH.—to the Sunni community. There are now 4,000 Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar that we didn't have 6 months ago.

Senator TILLIS. So, you feel like we're winning, in terms of engaging the hearts and minds of the Sunni population?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think we're bringing more Sunni tribal fighters into the fight.

Senator TILLIS. Okay.

General AUSTIN. I would agree that they're less inclined to—in Iraq—to side with ISIL. They've seen what ISIL brings to the table. Most of the Sunnis don't want that, going forward. But, they do want to be included in the Government of Iraq. So.

Senator TILLIS. I think that they should be if we're going to have a long-term strategy that has productive engagement.

Thank you very much. I'm sorry, Ranking Member, for going over my time.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Tillis.

Senator King has requested an additional question.

Senator King——

Senator KING. Not a question, Mr. Chairman.

I want to submit for the record an extraordinary speech by Robert Gates in 1992, when he was head of the CIA, on the danger of the politicization of intelligence. It's prescient and brilliant, which is not surprising, coming from Robert Gates. I just want to submit it for the record.

Thank you.

Senator REED. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information referred to follows:]

Guarding Against Politicization,
A message to analysts

GUARDING AGAINST POLITICIZATION

Robert M. Gates

The following remarks by the Director of Central Intelligence were made on 16 March 1992 in the CIA auditorium.

Bourne Cockran wrote to Winston Churchill in 1895 that, "What the people really want to hear is the truth—it is the exciting thing—speak the simple truth." Twenty years later, Churchill himself wrote, "The truth is incontrovertible; panic may resent it; ignorance may deride it; malice may destroy it, but there it is." Truth, insofar as we can determine it, is what our work is all about. Indeed our own main entrance is dominated by the chiseled words, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Because seeking truth is what we are all about as an institution, as professionals, and as individuals, the possibility—even the perception—that that quest may be tainted deeply troubles us, as it long has and as it should.

The problem of politicization is as old as the intelligence business. The missile gap in the late 1950s, the disputes over our work on Vietnam in the 1960s, the criticisms of pandering to Nixon and Kissinger on detente in the early 1970s, that we were foils for the Carter administration on energy in the late 1970s—all these controversies and more—predated the 1980s. For as long as intelligence data has been collected and analyzed by human beings, it has been susceptible to their biases.

Politicization can manifest itself in many ways, but in each case it boils down to the same essential elements: "Almost all agree that it involves deliberately distorting analysis or judgments to favor a preferred line of thinking irrespective of evidence. Most consider 'classic' politicization to be only that which occurs if products are forced to conform to policymakers' views. A number believe politicization also results from management pressures to define and drive certain lines of analysis and substantive viewpoints. Still others believe that changes in tone or emphasis made during the normal review or coordination process, and limited means for expressing alternative viewpoints, also constitute forms of politicization."

This has been an issue with which all of us have long grappled, but never as publicly, or as pointedly, as in my confirmation hearings last fall. I know that for many of you, the segments devoted to politicization were wrenching, embarrassing, and even humiliating at times. They pitted friends and colleagues against one another. I know too that there were strong views on all sides of the debate back here in the ranks.

While I believed, and argued, that the specific allegations were unfair and untrue, I came away from that experience determined not only to find better ways to pre-

vent the reality of policy-driven bias, but also to reexamine how we deal with perceptions of politicization.

I also came away with a renewed belief that by dealing forthrightly with the politicization issue, we will also be strengthening our ability to fulfill our purpose—to provide the highest quality intelligence, accurate and relevant intelligence, to policymakers.

As a result of those hearings, one of my first moves upon becoming Director of Central Intelligence was to instruct the Deputy Director for Intelligence to form a task force to address politicization and to work with members of the Directorate of Intelligence to come up with recommendations for future action. In my view, the report provided valuable insights into the issue and prescribed a variety of measures to address many of the concerns associated with politicization. I thank the task force members for their effort and encourage those of you who have not yet read the report or my resulting decision memorandum to do so.

In their report, the task force found a persistent and impressive commitment to objectivity, high ethical standards, and professionalism in the DI. They found that most analysts and managers remain determined to resist direct or indirect pressures from policy officials for products that conform to their views. Moreover, they concluded that politicization is not perceived to be a pervasive problem by most in the DI. Indeed, it is not a problem at all in some areas.

But, the task force did find that concerns about politicization are serious enough to warrant action. Furthermore, most of these concerns relate to internally generated distortions. Over half the respondents to the task force's survey said that forcing a product to conform to a view thought to be held by a manager higher up the chain of command occurs often enough to be of concern. Most of the charges raised in discussions with the task force revolved around internal distortions generated during the review and coordination process.

I agree with the task force that this level of concern is disturbing, that it goes beyond the degree of frustration that is inherent to the review process, and that it demands the immediate attention of Agency management at all levels.

While my comments to you today fulfill a promise I made to Congress several months ago and respond in part to the task force's recommendations, I believe I would have scheduled this address regardless. In the short time that I have been back at the Agency, I have become more aware of the profound impact the issue of politicization has had on the morale of analysts and managers alike. It is not a concern to be dismissed with token gestures. Politicization is a serious matter, and it has no place at CIA or in the Intelligence Community.

As best we can, we must engage in a candid discussion of the issue, devise effective measures to prevent it from occurring, and resolve to deal decisively with any circumstances that may foster distortions in our analysis. I hope that our encounter today will launch a process of greater openness and dialogue.

The DDI and I have accepted the task force recommendations in their totality, but before I discuss the specifics, I would like to talk with you further about politicization and the challenge it poses for us as intelligence analysts. The issue of politicization has dogged American intelligence for years and reflects the fact that although we belong to an institution with established norms and procedures, we are all human and prone to make mistakes and errors in judgment.

Although the task force study focused on the DI, I believe we must include the National Intelligence Officers and the National Intelligence Council in the discussion of politicization. They, too, are engaged in analysis and—given their frequent contact with high-level policymakers—their work is also vulnerable to distortion.

Let's start by defining the policymakers' proper role in the intelligence process. I believe that most of you would agree that policymakers should be able to request intelligence products that address the issues they are dealing with on a daily basis. Such tasking is an integral part of the intelligence process. If we ignore policymaker interests, then our products become irrelevant in the formulation of our government's foreign policies. I think we also all would concur that a policymaker should not dictate the line of march that he or she expects our analysis to take. Nor should we withhold our assessments because they convey bad news or may not be well received.

The challenge for us as analysts, then, is to produce intelligence that objectively assesses relevant policy issues—whether it supports or undermines current policy trends—and to ensure that our product is read and valued by the policymakers concerned. Ensuring objectivity means that we explore the issue fully, looking at and vetting all the available evidence and identifying where gaps, blindspots, or alternative scenarios exist. Our task is to facilitate an understanding of the realities of a particular situation and its implications for U.S. policy.

Getting the policymaker to read our product should not jeopardize our objectivity; it does not mean sugarcoating our analysis. On the contrary, it means providing a frank, evenhanded discussion of the issues. If we know that a policymaker holds a certain viewpoint on an issue that is different from our analysis, we ought not lightly dismiss that view but rather address its strengths and weaknesses and then provide the evidence and reasoning behind our own judgment. I believe such an approach enhances our credibility and value. I realize, however, that in many cases the issues may not be clear-cut. In such situations, we owe it to ourselves to discuss fully how best to approach the subject before we even set pen to paper. In no instance should we alter our judgments to make a product more palatable to a policymaker.

In dealing with policymakers, we also need to keep in mind our role as intelligence analysts. Managers and analysts alike should meet with policymakers on a regular basis to exchange views and explore new ideas. In today's changing world, however, we must guard against taking on tasks that do not deal with intelligence topics and may be intended instead to drive a specific policy agenda. Managers and analysts need to discuss such situations candidly and design products that address only the intelligence issues at hand.

This brings me to the second aspect of politicization identified by the task force—the apparent lack of understanding and confidence between a number of DI analysts and managers. Somehow some seem to have lost the ability to discuss the substantive or structural aspects of an intelligence product frankly and in an atmosphere of trust. The task force report indicates that such circumstances exist in enough offices to be of concern. Apparently we have lost a sense of professional collegiality and find ourselves, in many instances, adopting a them-against-us mentality which fosters perceptions of distortions in the intelligence process. No one has a monopoly on the truth; we are all learning new things every day. Although some may be more experienced than others, no one person should impose his or her view on another. Dialogue must take place, each participant must be open to new ideas, and well-grounded alternative views must be represented. There are many managers and analysts who understand this; unfortunately, many do not.

If an analyst and manager or two analytical, groups interpret information differently and can't come to a common understanding, the situation can degenerate into a perception of politicization. If one group or one person forces his or her line of analysis out over another, whether by force of his or her position in the management structure or through control of dissemination channels, it can leave the perception that that person or group has politicized the process.

I believe the first line of defense against politicization and analytic distortions is our own personal integrity; I want to spend some time talking about how each of us must work to ensure the highest integrity in our work.

Let me talk for a moment to our managers. I believe that managers are in a special position, particularly branch chiefs, because they are the ultimate arbiters in any analytical disagreements. They are also the ones who are charged with teaching and counseling our analysts.

As I see it, managers have three critical responsibilities to prevent distortions and corruptions of our products. First, managers have to challenge all of the analysis that comes through them to ensure its basic analytic soundness, logical validity, and clarity. As part of this, managers should always require analysts to defend their work.

Second, managers must strive to be open to new ideas and new lines of analysis from any source. We cannot simply stick with our previous conceptions and hope to keep pace with our rapidly changing environment. In the past year, many of the old assumptions that helped us in our analysis have been invalidated.

Third, I would also strongly concur with the task force in its conclusion that poor communication is the key source of the widespread concern within the DI about politicization.

Managers must strive in every interaction they have with analysts and managers to ensure all communications are clear. Managers must be able to state clearly why they disagree with a judgment, or how they want a logical argument reconstructed. We cannot simply say we don't like it and we'll know what we want when we see it. That is more than a cop-out, that is a prescription for trouble.

Let me emphasize this last responsibility. Managers, particularly those who are teaching our less experienced analysts how to do basic intelligence analysis, cannot afford poor communications. Managers should be showing analysts the bows and whys behind their decisions, not just telling them to change words. If you can't tell an analyst why you don't believe his or her arguments, or if you can't offer a logical counterargument, then you should take more time to construct your own analysis.

Most managers in the DI face difficult and highly stressful demands on their time. In a directorate in which, at each level, the manager is expected to be part expert, part editor, and part bureaucrat, they are sometimes tempted to give the people-management side of their jobs short shrift. Frequently, the result is that suspicions of base motives arise when there are simply differences of view:

- This happens when a division chief is too timid—or thinks he or she is too busy—to sit down with the analyst and go over comments on a paper.
- It happens when a senior manager makes cryptic or offensive comments on drafts.
- It happens when the office director sits on a paper indefinitely because he or she lacks the courage to tell an analyst and his or her management that it is simply unworkable or irrelevant.
- It happens when an analyst responds to a reviewer with legitimate questions or counterarguments, only to discover he or she has been branded as uncooperative and unwilling to take criticism.
- It happens when subordinate managers are afraid to give bad news, or to admit to their own mistakes, and instead pin everything unpleasant on someone higher up the chain.
- It happens when there are so many layers of excessive review that some kind of misunderstanding somewhere along the way is inevitable.
- It happens when any manager becomes so intent on "making a call" or "sharpening the judgments" or "defining the office view" that he or she oversimplifies the argument or fails to provide alternative views.

I think you get the idea. Perceptions of politicization or other kinds of intentional distortion tend to arise in the absence of an open, creative environment that encourages give-and-take. The manager who allows the press of business and the frequent need to push and prod for the best possible product to cause him or her to behave rudely, abruptly, or imperiously, does so at considerable peril to his or her reputation for objectivity. I know also that what is necessary is not the practice of some awkward, feel-good management technique. It is simply a matter of treating people the right way—with professional respect, civility, and confidence in their integrity and capabilities.

Managers must create an environment in which analysts feel comfortable airing substantive differences. Managers must listen; they must talk; they must erode some of the hierarchy. They must create a sense of joint ownership of ideas. Managers need to create an atmosphere in which people can, approach them without fear of retribution. Managers must—I repeat must—create a barrier-free environment for ideas.

Now let me address our analysts. Analysts have their own responsibilities to prevent distortions and politicization from creeping into our analysis. First and foremost, analysts must be able to construct clearly a logical analysis of an issue. This includes not only the ability to write a clear argument, but an ability to examine one's own biases, assumptions and limitations.

Second, when an analyst sends forward a work to management, he or she should be prepared and expect to defend that analysis.

Third, every analyst must approach editing, coordination, and review as a process to improve a piece. An analyst must see the process as a team effort, with coordinating analysts and managers as team members who will offer input that must be considered and dealt with. No analyst should think that his or her view of the world is the only correct view, or that the opinions and arguments of others are not worthy of consideration. We must always keep our minds open. As Judge Learned Hand wrote, "Opinions are at best provisional hypotheses, incompletely tested. The more they are tested, after the tests are well scrutinized, the more assurance we may assume, but they are never absolutes. So, we must be tolerant of opposite opinions or varying opinions by the very fact of our incredulity of our own."

Last, and this is an important point, analysts must always challenge the arguments and opinions of others, including their managers. An analyst should not expect his or her analysis to go unchallenged, and he or she should not be willing to accept the analysis of others without challenge. By questioning managers and other analysts on the reasons underlying their comments and judgments, especially those in conflict with our own, we learn to look at issues in new ways—sometimes ways that are better. You should rightly question anyone who cannot defend or explain the reasons behind disagreements with your analysis.

Also, unwarranted concerns about politicization can arise when analysts themselves fail to understand their role in the process. We do produce a corporate product. If the policymaker wants the opinion of a single individual, he or she can (and frequently does) consult any one of a dozen outside experts on any given issue. Your

work, on the other hand, counts because it represents the well-considered view of an entire directorate and, in the case of National Estimates, the entire Intelligence Community. Analysts themselves must play a critical role in making the system work. They must do their part to help foster an open environment. Analysts must understand and practice the corporate concept. They must discard the academic mindset that says their work is their own, and they must take into account the views of others during the coordination process.

What, then, can we do together to counter both real and perceived distortion of the analytical product? For starters, we can all recommit ourselves to a solid professional ethic and a high degree of collegiality. Distortion of analysis is much less likely, and much easier to spot, if there is a concerted effort at all levels to observe basic standards:

- We must make explicit what is not known and clearly distinguish between fact, inference, and judgment.
- We must recommit ourselves to the good oldfashioned scientific method—the testing of alternative hypotheses against the evidence.
- We should provide an outlet for different interpretations, theories, or predictions in our mainline publications, not just in a staff note or a piece at the back of a monthly.
- While we strive for sharp and focused judgments for a clear assessment of likelihood, we must not dismiss alternatives or exaggerate our certainty under the guise of making the "tough calls." We are analysts, not umpires, and the game does not depend on our providing a single judgment. As Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "Certitude is not the test of certainty. We have been cocksure of many things that were not so."
- We must protect ourselves from groupthink, an institutional mindset, or personal bias. We must also avoid the temptation to weight our arguments or our case as a corrective to the perceived failings of others.
- We must view coordination as an important step in ensuring that all views have been considered. Indeed, the task force found that refusal to alter a view or take into account the views of others during the coordination process frequently leads to charges of distortion or politicization.

But, above all, we must build an atmosphere of confidence and trust between analysts and managers. This requires a renewed commitment to accountability, expertise, and intellectual honesty. Accountability means standing behind the intelligence that one sends forward and being held responsible for any distortions that have been imposed upon it. It is not producing analysis designed to please one's superiors; nor does it mean that a branch, division, or office's analysis must always be right. Accountability requires that analysts and managers understand each other's viewpoints and work together in producing the best analysis they can.

In doing so, we rely on expertise. Managers should ensure that analysts are given opportunities to build and hone their substantive expertise and analytic skills. Managers are chosen to manage their analysts, not to become superanalysts themselves. In helping their analysts develop, managers can build a reserve of trust. Analysts, for their part, must dedicate themselves to becoming experts on their subject and sharpening their critical thinking skills. This takes talent; this takes hard work; this takes dedication; and, not least, this takes time! It follows that managers will demonstrate increased confidence in analysts of such proven expertise.

Finally, we all need to recognize biases and blindspots—in ourselves and in others—viewing them not as weaknesses but as opportunities to grow. Such an approach would allow us to deal more openly with others and foster a more collegial give-and-take among analysts and managers. Greater intellectual honesty on everyone's part can make the process less bureaucratic, less hierarchical, and less of a win-lose situation.

By improving analyst-manager trust, I believe that concerns about the review process skewing intelligence can be lessened. Moreover, in the scope of a more collegial relationship, a manager challenging assumptions should not be seen as a threat by analysts. On balance, it is the managers who bear the greater burden of responsibility in the review process, and they need to have a sound basis for their actions. In editing and revising intelligence products, I expect managers to explain their changes in face-to-face exchanges with their analysts and to be willing to admit when a revision is unwarranted. In turn, I expect analysts to use evidence and logic when arguing against proposed revisions in substance, to be open to new approaches and ideas, and to guard against purely defensive reactions. Expertise is a requirement, but analysts must not become so wedded to their views that they exclude well-grounded, alternative arguments.

The issue of analyst-manager communications is paralleled in the DI–NIC relationship, where NIOs review drafts submitted by DI analysts. A majority of the time, the process works smoothly. In some instances, however, tensions have flared over disagreements on substantive changes. Both sides must endeavor to communicate openly to resolve differences in views or outline alternative scenarios. Moreover, the NIOs' access to the DCI is not exclusive; analysts are welcome to bring their concerns about the estimative process directly to me.

I would like also to address the special obligations and responsibilities that fall on the Directorate of Intelligence and Directorate of Operations when CIA is involved in a covert action. For the DO, a covert action activity does not absolve it of its foreign intelligence reporting responsibilities. It must meet its professional obligation to report as accurately and as fully on an area or problem in which a covert action is under way, as on any other subject. The DO's task is made harder and scrutiny will be all the more intense because inevitably the DO will be working against the perception that its reporting is skewed by involvement in a covert action. In truth, it is only human nature to expect that those who are trying to implement a policy will develop strong opinions about, and even attachments to, that policy. We would be fooling ourselves if we tried to deny that reality. But all the more reason for the DO, as professional intelligence officers, to assert their own first obligation to seek and report the truth. All the more reason that we must reaffirm that those who are responsible for covert action must not be in a position to produce, coordinate, or disseminate anything that is, or looks like, finished intelligence. At the same time, DI analysts must seek out the expertise in the DO, including in areas where covert action is involved, where operations and reports officers have great experience, expertise, and day-to-day working insights. A special burden falls on the leaders of joint DO–DI Centers, who must ensure that neither the perception nor the reality of politicization gets a toehold.

There is one other potential problem that I need to talk about. As we all know, the DO frequently has information that for one reason or another is not formally disseminated. This may be especially true in cases involving covert action. The DO, in those cases, must make sure that the relevant analysts are made privy to the information they need to strengthen their analytical understanding and work.

In discussing this topic, I would be remiss in not stating that, with a few exceptions, we have a long history of effectively making this partnership between the DO and the DI work—where the DI has earned a well-deserved reputation for independence and insight and the DO for reporting unblinkingly and accurately even when involved in covert action.

In its examination of politicization, the task force concluded that "the solution to the problem of politicization, broadly defined, is not so much a matter of mechanisms as it is confidence in the integrity and capabilities of our people. For our recommendations to yield positive results, every Agency employee from the DCI on down must demonstrate adherence to the principles of integrity on which objective analysis rests, and civility, which fosters a trusting, creative environment."

While I agree that, first and foremost, attitudes must change to help us overcome the unease that politicization has produced among Agency employees, concrete steps should be taken to set a process of reconciliation and dialogue in motion. As I noted earlier, I fully endorse the task force's recommended actions. At the risk of reciting a laundry list of new initiatives, I would like to outline for you the measures that I have undertaken in an effort to address the problem of politicization.

As a first step, I pledge to you today my firm commitment to ensure that analytic objectivity is at the core of every finished intelligence product and that the importance of people-oriented management is instilled at every supervisory level. I want to see this Agency excel in its mission; but to do so, its personnel must have a sense of value and feel that their contribution matters. I expect every manager in this organization to echo my commitment and foster an atmosphere of confidence and trust.

To strengthen management skills and enforce accountability for good management, I have directed the DDI to initiate a zero-based study of DI management practices, to mandate that performance appraisal reports explicitly cite deficiencies in management related to charges of politicization, and to support initiatives to secure better feedback from personnel—such as the evaluation forms being developed by the DI/MAG.

In an effort to assist managers in cultivating the analytic talent of the people under their supervision, I have asked the DDI to ensure that DI managers devote greater attention and resources to practical on-the-job training of analysts—showing them how to gather evidence, assess sources, make judgments, and write up or brief their analysis, our so-called "tradecraft." The DDI also should develop a DI "tradecraft" manual and work with the Office of Training and Education to enhance

the "tradecraft" training that analysts receive in formal courses. In addition, managers should rely more frequently on the expertise and experience of senior analysts to assist in developing new analysts.

As a means of minimizing the chances for distortions and misperceptions caused by the review process, I have directed the DDI to institute practical measures to reduce layers of review, encourage greater flexibility and variety of formatting, and encourage fuller debate of substantive issues. To achieve these goals, a DI task force will be established to study the directorate's review and coordination process. At the risk of prejudging the task force's findings, I expect to see a noticeable reduction in the layers of review. In addition, I have asked the DDI to reserve his own substantive review to sensitive products intended for high-level consumers. I have not and will not become involved in the review process.

To ensure that our consumers get the benefit of differing analytic perspectives and to demonstrate the directorate's openness to new ideas and thoughtful alternative viewpoints, I have asked the DDI to restate his support for the inclusion of well-reasoned, relevant, and factually supported alternative views in mainline products, and to appoint a committee to develop practical means to accomplish this goal.

In an effort to remain vigilant to future instances of politicization, I have directed all major analytic components to establish and publicize procedures—within the chain of command—to deal with allegations of politicization. I also asked the DDI to appoint a fulltime ombudsman to serve as an independent, informal counselor for those with complaints about politicization, and he has asked Dave Peterson to take on that job. Dave will have access to me, the DDCI, the DDI, and all DI analytic products; he will counsel, arbitrate, or offer recommendations and have the authority to initiate inquiries into real or perceived problem areas. While Dave will be administratively located in the DI, he will be responsible for dealing with concerns about or allegations of politicization from throughout the Agency, as well as the NIC and estimative process.He will also publish an annual report that includes an assessment of the current level of concern and the effectiveness of measures being taken to alleviate it.

I have directed that several other measures be taken to guard against politicization becoming a problem in the future. IG studies of analytic components shall specifically consider the effectiveness of the review and coordination processes, and the DDI should make relevant portions of IG studies of DI components available to a wider audience within the DI. The DDI should also mandate wider dissemination of studies by the Product Evaluation Staff, as well as increase the studies' emphasis on distortions of the product and process and on the use of alternative analysis. As a follow-up to the task force's efforts, a survey of DI analysts and managers should be conducted a year from now on the issue of politicization.

Finally, the DDI and I are committed to encouraging open and continuing discussion throughout the DI and the NIC of politicization and will promptly take steps when allegations of problems arise, particularly in centers and task forces involved with DO operations. Specifically, I have asked the DDI to encourage all components to discuss politicization in general, and as it pertains to specific substantive issues, and to mandate that officers engaged in the conduct of covert action in areas where policy implementation and analytic functions are integrated shall not be involved in the formal coordination of finished analytic products. The DDI, the NIC Chairman, and the Deputy Director for Operations currently are developing guidelines to ensure that the entire intelligence production process, including the preparation of regular intelligence analysis, National Intelligence Estimates, briefings, etc., including in the DCI centers, are insulated from the influence of those with responsibility for implementing and supervising covert action.

I, better than anyone, know that this directorate lives and breathes skepticism. It is, after all, our stock in trade. No area is so subject to skepticism—even cynicism—than senior-level rhetoric. "Show me" is the watchword. So it should be. I intend to monitor closely the implementation of these instructions and ensure that they are carried out. This will be no paper exercise. Actions at every level and a sustained commitment will be required and, as we go along, the DDI and I will continue to welcome ideas in implementing the recommendations.

At the same time, you and I both know that this kind of problem cannot be directed away. You cannot order integrity, you cannot demand that a culture preserve its ethics. In the end, preventing distortion of our analysis depends on where all of us draw the line day in and day out. We must draw a line:

- Between producing a corporate product and suppressing different views.
- Between adjusting stylistic presentation to anticipate your consumer's predilections, and changing the analysis to pander to them.
- Between making order out of chaos and suppressing legitimate debate.
- Between viewing reporting critically and using evidence selectively.

- Between avoiding wishy-washiness and pretending to be more certain than we are.
- Between being a team player and being a careerist.
- Between maintaining efficiency and suppressing legitimate debate.
- Between providing leadership and fostering a fearful, oppressive climate.

I wish I could look back on my career in the DI—from analyst to DDI—and say that in each and every case over 25 years I have always drawn all these lines in all the right places. I can tell you, however, that as DCI I intend to do everything in my power to guarantee that analytic objectivity remains the most important of the core values of the Central Intelligence Agency.

It is my sincere hope that the steps I have outlined will help alleviate the underlying causes of and concerns about politicization. Let me reiterate. In our efforts to be policy-relevant, we should not allow our analysis to become skewed in favor of one policy option or another. Nor should the views of one individual—manager or analyst—prevail when wellsourced, well-reasoned arguments support a different set of judgments. We must improve the analyst-manager relationship, and the burden is largely on those who lead. Collegiality and honesty should be two key watchwords in our dealings. We must also avoid ascribing base motives to those with whom we disagree. Moreover, the analytic process should vigorously scrutinize all available evidence, including clandestine reporting, to ensure that underlying policy goals are not distorting our analysis.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the underlying key to dealing with this issue of politicization is respect for individuals, trust in their judgment, confidence in their capabilities, and concern for their well-being. Managers must tell employees what is expected of them, and they must hold them responsible for following through. At the same time, however, managers must give employees the trust and confidence, as well as the training and control, they need to carry out the task. They must reward employees for their competence, creativity, and commitment to the analytic process.

I want respect for the employee again to become a central value of this organization, and I want that value to run deep. Many managers pay lipservice to this. I want all of us to deliver, and I think we should be held accountable for doing so. Because trust begets trust, I am certain perceptions of politicization would be reduced in the process.

I will make a commitment to you today. My door is always open to discuss this issue with you. If you believe your work is being distorted and you are not satisfied your managers are seriously addressing your concerns, I want to hear from you.

I am very proud of the Directorate of Intelligence. I served in it; I led it; and I used its analysis to frame policy. I want to see it—and the people in it—prosper. I have always been greatly impressed with the breadth and depth of expertise in the DI. I do not want anybody—inside or outside the Agency—to believe this expertise is tarnished by political considerations.

I was uncertain how to present my message today—how exactly to say what I wanted to convey. So, I did what I have often done for years. I turned to the DI for help. I asked two members of the politicization task force each to give me a draft of what they thought I should say, and I asked them to choose two analysts—unknown to me—to do the same.. My remarks today are an amalgam of those four drafts and my own views. Though many of the words today originally were not mine, I believe wholeheartedly in what they express. The sentiments, the views, are mine if not every word. Those who helped me know who they are, and I thank them.

Let me conclude then by simply reiterating that the absolute integrity of our analysis is the most important of the core values of the Central Intelligence Agency. Policymakers, the Congress, and the American people must know that our views—right or wrong—represent our best and most objective possible effort to describe the threats and opportunities facing the United States. They must know our assessments are the product of the highest quality and the most honest intelligence analysis available anywhere in the world. Thank you.

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Senator REED. On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me thank the witnesses and adjourn the hearing.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JIM INHOFE

ISIL CAPABILITIES

1. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, what are ISIL capabilities today compared to last year with regards to the number of fighters, combat and support equipment, weapons and ammunition, supply lines, and areas controlled?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

2. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, has the flow of foreign fighters increased or decreased over the past year? How is that determined?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

3. Senator INHOFE. General Austin and Secretary Wormuth, how is ISIL funding their operations? Where are they getting their weapons and ammunition?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
Ms. WORMUTH. [Deleted.]

4. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, what are ISIL's centers of gravity and how is the coalition going after those centers? Are we effective?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

5. Senator INHOFE. General Austin and Secretary Wormuth, does ISIL has access to chemical or biological weapons? If yes, have they used them? What is the likelihood of ISIL expanding their use in the region and outside the region? What are the implications?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
Ms. WORMUTH. [Deleted.]

SYRIA

6. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, what are our strategic objectives in Syria and what are our specific objectives with regards to ISIL and Assad? Are any of these objectives at odds with each other?
General AUSTIN. Our strategic military objectives in Syria are to degrade, dismantle and ultimately defeat ISIL in Syria through air strikes and other support to indigenous moderate Syrian forces.
With regard to the Asad Regime, our military strategy is designed to shape the conditions that will lead to an eventual managed political transition of government that is capable of providing security and governance for the Syrian people.
These objectives support ongoing diplomatic efforts to change the course in Syria. These military objectives complement one another by contributing to the desired end state of a secure Syria and enhanced regional security.

7. Senator INHOFE. Secretary Wormuth, is the refugee crisis being caused by Assad, ISIL, or both? Can the flow of refugees be stopped without addressing the Assad regime and ISIL operations in Syria?
Ms. WORMUTH. The Syrian refugee crisis is an urgent humanitarian problem with complex causes. Four years of violence perpetrated by the Assad regime on its own population, as well as the recent barbaric extremism demonstrated by ISIL, have contributed to this humanitarian situation.
There can be no viable solution in Syria without a negotiated settlement and transition of power between the regime and opposition forces. A lasting solution to the refugee problem will not be achieved until a political solution is reached and the Syrian people no longer feel threatened by their government or extremist groups such as ISIL.

8. Senator INHOFE. Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, what is your assessment of what Russia is trying to accomplish in Syria through its military buildup of equipment and offensive capabilities? How does that impact United States objectives in Syria and the region?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
Ms. WORMUTH. Russia's military buildup in Syria likely has several aims. Russia would like to protect its access to airfields and seaports in the Eastern Mediterranean, protect the Syrian government that enables Russian presence in Syria, portray itself as a security guarantor in the region, and engage in counter-terror operations.

Russia has said publicly that it intends to combat ISIL and other extremist groups; however, it is clear that Russia and Assad do not distinguish between ISIL and the more moderate Syrian opposition groups.

Russia's presence in Syria does not change United States objectives. We will continue our efforts to degrade and defeat ISIL, which poses a threat to the United States and the international community. We also will continue to engage with moderate opposition forces fighting ISIL inside of Syria, and we will continue to be the largest donor in addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria, and beyond its borders. We, unlike Russia, are joined by a coalition of 65 partners in those efforts. Furthermore, any military-to-military discussions that the Department of Defense may have with Russia regarding its presence in Syria will focus on safety procedures for coalition and United States personnel engaged in military operations in Syria. In no way will this take away from our strong condemnation of Russian actions in Ukraine, or change our sanctions and security support in response to those destabilizing actions. Russian responsibilities to uphold the Minsk agreements and to redress its illegal attempted annexation of Crimea are still valid, and our policies have not changed. We will continue our strong support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

9. Senator INHOFE. Secretary Wormuth, in your assessment, who fills the void if Assad is removed?

Ms. WORMUTH. [Deleted.]

10. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, what coordination or communication have you had with your Russian counterparts?

General AUSTIN. Answer updated to reflect current operations. My staff participated in OSD-level discussions with the Russians on safety procedures for flight operations in Syria. I signed the Memorandum of Understanding on 20 October; the agreement regulates all aircraft and drone flights over Syria.

11. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, does the presence of Russian military to United States and coalition forces increase the potential for conflict with Russia and/or Assad's forces?

General AUSTIN. We are actively exploring mechanisms to de-conflict Coalition and Russian military operations in Syria to prevent miscalculation, ensure safety of flight, and promote desired battlefield effects against the enemy, ISIL.

IRAQ

12. Senator INHOFE. General Austin, do they still need this type of support today? What happens in the long term if we again remove our support too soon?

General AUSTIN. Yes, our coalition training and equipping efforts are still necessary to build combat forces capable of opposing ISIL and liberating areas under ISIL control. Additionally, the Iraqi military will continue to rely on United States and Coalition air strikes to degrade ISIL's command and control, military capabilities, and sustainment and inhibit the enemy's freedom of movement. Air strikes thereby provide the Iraqi Army with the time and space needed to build combat power and confidence.

Furthermore, based on recent history, we assess that removing Coalition support prematurely risks creating a void that will be quickly filled by others such as Iran, Russia, and/or China. In the absence of Coalition support, Iranian influence could serve to further repress the Sunni population and potentially ignite increased sectarian conflict in the region.

13. Senator INHOFE. General Austin and Secretary Wormuth, what is the current presence of Iranian forces in Iraq? What is your assessment of Iranian long term objective in Iraq? How does that impact United States objective in Iraq and the region?

General AUSTIN. We assess there are several hundred Iranian officials in Iraq. This includes both Qods Force and regular Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel providing oversight, guidance, weapons, and sometimes direct operational support using UAVs, artillery, and other military systems. These personnel coordinate operations with elements of Iraq's security forces. Iran refuses to support operations in which the United States is involved. Iranians operate almost exclusively in support of the most militant elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces, such as Kata'ib Hizballah, Asaib Ahl al Haqq, Badr Organization, the Imam Ali Brigades, and others. Qods Force Commander Soleimani frequently travels to Iraq to oversee these efforts.

Iran likely seeks to incorporate Iraq into what it calls the "axis of resistance" against the West. This axis includes Iran, Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, responsive proxies throughout the region, and the recent inclusion of Russia which acts to weaken Western and Allied influence. As such, Iran seeks the following in Iraq: a Shiite Islamist-dominated central government with minimal Sunni involvement; security forces dominated by Iranian allies; minimal United States or Western presence; a protected Shiite population and Shiite holy sites; a neutralized ISIL threat; a viable economic partner; and a secure border.

While Iran and the United States share the goal of defeating ISIL, Iran's long-term intent for Iraq is at odds with the United States vision of an independent, inclusive, representative government which operates according to international norms and is at peace with its neighbors. Iran seeks to maintain Iraq as a client state with minimal association with either the West or its Sunni neighbors. As Iran pursues these objectives, its close collaboration with Shiite militant groups presents a clear threat to the stability and security of Iraq. These forces act as Iran's action arm and do not consider themselves accountable to international law or the Government of Iraq (GoI), and often complicate Iraqi military operations as evident in the Iranian-backed Shiite Militant Groups' focus on Fallujah while the GoI struggles to make progress in Ramadi. Over the long term, Iran's efforts to create a second security establishment that answers to Tehran further reduces the GoI's ability to recruit, train, and employ an effective cross-sectarian security force. Moreover, it limits the government's ability to act against corruption, terrorism, sectarianism, and instability, while offering Iran a lever of military power it can leverage against the GoI or any group that acts against Iran's interests.

Ms. WORMUTH. [Deleted.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROGER WICKER

SYRIA POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

14. Senator WICKER. General Austin, I'd like to discuss some bigger picture issues about Syria. It appears to me that a decisive strategy to counter ISIL requires strategic clarity on our desired political end-state in Syria. In January of this year, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger testified to this committee that: "*Today . . . a situation like Syria where the two main contenders are violently opposed to America, violently opposed to each other, and a victory for either of them is not in our interests.*" General Mattis also testified to this committee in January that: "*I think in this case we have to get to a very detailed level of understanding what is the political objective we are out to accomplish. Frankly I don't know what it is right now.*" Has the President told you what our political objectives are in Syria right now?

General AUSTIN. The President has been clear in his guidance: "We will degrade and ultimately destroy Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant." "In Syria, the only way that the civil war will end—and in a way so that the Syrian people can unite against ISIL—is an inclusive political transition to a new government, without Bashar Assad—a government that serves all Syrians." "It's going to require us to stabilize Syria in some fashion, and stabilizing Syria in some fashion means that we've got to get moderate Sunnis who are able to govern and offer a real alternative and competition to what ISIL has been doing in some of these spaces."

15. Senator WICKER. General Austin, what should our political objectives be in Syria—what is in the realm of the achievable?

General AUSTIN. I would defer to our civilian leadership to determine our political objectives. United States Central Command conducts military activities in support of set policy objectives. However, I do believe the common objective is the defeat of ISIL and a peaceful transition to a new government—without Bashar Assad—a government that serves all Syrians.

16. Senator WICKER. General Austin, what are the objectives of our current air campaign in Syria and is the effort robust enough to achieve them?

General AUSTIN. The objective of our air efforts in Syria and Iraq is one part of the larger Coalition campaign to degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIL. Air power provides critical enabling support, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and kinetic fires; through air interdiction of critical ISIL capabilities. While air power alone will not be able to achieve the campaign's overall objectives, our current air operations have degraded ISIL's ability to spread its influence within the region while at the same time generating additional time and space

to allow the indigenous forces to build needed capability to effectively degrade and defeat ISIL.

"IRAQ FIRST STRATEGY"

17. Senator WICKER. The Obama Administration has indicated an "Iraq First" strategy and the subsequent military campaign in Syria seems ill-defined. General Austin, what are the consequences of having a strategy that is divided by what is to the enemy a nonexistent border and also dividing it sequentially ("Iraq First") as the Administration has done?

General AUSTIN. We view Iraq and Syria as one battlespace with respect to the fight against ISIL. However, there are differences between them in terms of access, availability of reliable ground forces, support from the governments, etc. We stated at the outset that Iraq is the main effort because there is a government that we can work with and some amount of reliable ground forces. Further, the Government of Iraq asked for our support and the support of our Coalition partners. Because they requested our presence, we have greater access, freedom of movement, and we're able to provide much-needed support by way of training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. Meanwhile, in Syria, we continue to put pressure on the enemy and limit his ability to operate in ungoverned spaces. By doing so, and by doing what is necessary to reestablish the border between Syria and Iraq, we will curb ISIL's ability to send in reinforcements and resupplies from Syria to Iraq. This will in turn alleviate the pressure from ISIL in Iraq and enable the Iraqi security forces to effectively counter the enemy and provide for the defense of their sovereign territory.

SYRIA REGIME CHANGE

18. Senator WICKER. General Austin, how does the United States not having the explicit goal of removing Assad affect support for United States efforts in Syria—by Arab and European coalition members and by Syrians who would like to be part of the moderate Syrian opposition?

General AUSTIN. We currently have 30 nations in the military coalition participating in combat operations, and that includes six regional partners. This strong and cohesive coalition maintains the shared goal to degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIL in accordance with various national policies.

That said, all countries have their own perspectives and their own priorities. The issue of Assad and the role he will play in Syria going forward is a very emotional one. Most will agree that there can be no future for Syria with Assad in power. However, there are some differences in opinion among members of the Coalition and regional partners with respect to how and when that transition should occur. We have to balance our campaign objectives with these diverse national caveats to ensure Coalition cohesion remains strong.

19. Senator WICKER. General Austin, in your military judgement, how does the presence of Russian combat troops undermine the moderate Syrian opposition?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

TRAINING AND EQUIPPING MODERATE FORCES

20. Senator WICKER. General Austin, what kind of support is essential to ensure the success of trained and equipped moderate opposition fighters we send back to Syria?

General AUSTIN. In order to maximize the potential for success, it is essential to provide Coalition trained New Syrian Forces reinserted back into Syria ammunition, materiel support, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support, operational guidance, and fires support to fight ISIL. Even with Coalition support, training the New Syrian Forces and inserting them back into Syria is a long-term effort that requires time to achieve results. The option of Coalition boots on the ground should be retained as we seek to build our understanding of opposition groups. This option would allow us to find, understand, and create linkages with existing tribal networks. This will aid our effort to curb the flow of lethal aid and fighters into Iraq and Syria.

21. Senator WICKER. General Austin, can they survive without that support?

General AUSTIN. Most Moderate Syrian Opposition forces fighting in Syria are poorly led, trained, and equipped. However, they are resourceful, adaptable, and dedicated to their cause. Yes, they can survive without Coalition support. However, the lack of or the provision of inadequate Coalition support could drive them to align with more extremist forces to ensure survivability and secure the resources

they need to sustain the fight. Moderate Syrian Opposition forces require significant external support if they are to generate the required combat power to gain the initiative, draw fighters to their cause, and conduct offensive operations.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MIKE ROUNDS

NUMBER OF DISPLACED PERSONS

22. Senator ROUNDS. Secretary Wormuth, what is the number of displaced persons associated with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Indclude: 1. Number by country, 2. Number by category to include as a minimum the number displaced internally and the number of refugees by country, and 3. The number of religious minorities, e.g. Yazidis in either category

Ms. WORMUTH.

Iraq

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), nearly 3.2 million Iraqis have been internally displaced since January 2014. For Iraqi refugees, the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) monitors refugees in Jordan, Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 50,856 Iraqis have registered as refugees in Jordan since January 2013. In August 2015, UNHCR estimate that there were 144,000 Iraqis residing in Turkey. Humanitarian assistance is provided based on need, not ethnicity or religion. The Department of State (PRM) does not retain data of displaced persons based on ethnicity or religion, such as Yazidi persons displaced or held captive.

Afghanistan

Since 2002 with the fall of the Taliban, nearly 6 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan. Despite the large number of returnees, there are still 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and nearly 1 million registered Afghan refugees in Iran, the two countries that host significant numbers of Afghan refugees. Many of these refugees left Afghanistan at the time of the Soviet invasion. As of June 2015, there are approximately 950,000 internally displaced persons in Afghanistan due to conflict. The Department of State (PRM) does not retain data regarding religious minorities in the registered Afghan refugee population, or those internally displaced.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JONI ERNST

TURKEY AND THE C–ISIL EFFORT

23. Senator ERNST. General Austin, while I am glad to hear Turkey is taking some steps to tighten its borders and conducting operations against ISIL, it appears as though the Turkish government has mostly mobilized its political, military, and security apparatus not primarily to assist the coalition in defeating ISIS—but to fight the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK), destroy Kurdish political involvement in Turkish politics, prosecute media outlets critical of the Turkish government, arrest teenage boys for Facebook posts and journalist trying to do their jobs and report the news. As Turkish President Erdogan continues to focus and escalate his military operations against the PKK and the Kurdish opposition, what do you assess are the near and long term consequences to the stability of the counter-ISIL coalition and the coalitions overall effort to defeat ISIL?

General AUSTIN. Turkey's continued support is vital to maintaining pressure on ISIL, and the Turks' provision of bases for Coalition air operations and humanitarian support, access to border crossing sites, overflight authorizations, etc. continue to pay significant dividends. We condemn recent PKK terrorist attacks within Turkey and respect Turkey's right to self-defense. Any Turkish military response to those attacks is separate from their contributions to the counter-ISIL campaign. That said, turkey's actions directed at the PKK do serve to complicate an already complicated situation. It diverts much-needed resources and attention away from the primary focus which is the fight against ISIL. Although the conflict between the Turks and the PKK does not appear to threaten the cohesion of the Counter-ISIL Coalition, it does risk causing increased friction between the Syrian Kurds (YPG) and the Turks and potentially between the Kurds and the United States and other members of the coalition. Prior to the resumption of hostilities between the parties, a ceasefire had been in place since 2013. Ideally, we would like to see the Turks and the PKK return to a cease fire agreement.

24. Senator ERNST. General Austin, do you believe it would be in the best interests of the counter-ISIL coalition and for the overall fight against ISIS if the Turkish government and PKK both immediately returned to the peace table and to a ceasefire?

General AUSTIN. It would be in the best interest of our partner nations, the people of the region, and the Counter-ISIL campaign if the competing parties would come together and find a peaceful resolution to their conflicts.

25. Senator ERNST. General Austin, does your Turkish military counterpart consult or coordinate with you regarding Turkey's military operations against the PKK?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

26. Senator ERNST. General Austin, is United States Central Command (CENTCOM) providing any form of assistance to Turkey in support of Turkey's operations against PKK militants in Iraq or Turkey?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

27. Senator ERNST. General Austin, if CENTCOM is providing any form of assistance to Turkey in support of Turkey's operations against PKK militants in Iraq or Turkey, what kind of assistance does CENTCOM provide to support Turkey's operations against the PKK?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

IRAQ

28. Senator ERNST. General Austin, a few months ago, while speaking in Iraqi Kurdistan, General David Petraeus said that Iran ultimately poses a greater long-term threat to Iraq's stability than ISIL.[1] Do you agree with this assessment?

General AUSTIN. What I believe General Petraeus said during his Washington Post interview was that Shiite Militia, some backed by Iran, are the foremost threat to Iraq's long-term stability. I do agree with that statement. Meanwhile, ISIL and other Sunni extremist groups threaten Iraq's stability now. Unless they are defeated or marginalized, they will continue to leverage deep-seated Sunni-Shiite tensions and broader Arab-Kurd tensions in order to maintain support in Sunni regions.

29. Senator ERNST. General Austin, a few months ago, while speaking in Iraqi Kurdistan, General David Petraeus said that Iran ultimately poses a greater long-term threat to Iraq's stability than ISIS. If you agree with this assessment, please elaborate on why and how you are working to reduce this long-term threat to United States interests and to our Iraqi allies?

General AUSTIN. N/A. Refer to questions 28 and 30

30. Senator ERNST. General Austin, a few months ago, while speaking in Iraqi Kurdistan, General David Petraeus said that Iran ultimately poses a greater long-term threat to Iraq's stability than ISIS. If you do not agree with this assessment, please elaborate on who is the greatest long-term threat to Iraq's stability.

General AUSTIN. I believe the greatest long-term threat to Iraq's instability is its own inability to resolve its Sunni-Shiite sectarian issues. The primary challenge remains reconciliation and overcoming the mistrust and rivalry among ethno-sectarian groups that have intensified by many years of conflict.

31. Senator ERNST. General Austin, for fiscal year 2015, the Department received $1.6 billion for the Iraq Train and Equip Fund to train-and-equip the Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, Sunni tribes, and other local forces. I continue to see photographs in the open source media displaying Iranian controlled Iraqi Shiite militias with United States weapons and equipment. Are you arming Iranian controlled or supported Iraqi Shiite militias with American weapons and equipment?

General AUSTIN. The United States provides weapons and equipment directly to the Government of Iraq who then distributes it to forces that have been vetted consistent with Section 1236 and Leahy Laws and are under the direct command and control of the Government of Iraq in support of the Counter-ISIL. The United States does not provide support of any kind to Iranian-backed Shiite militants.

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[1] Liz Sly, "Petraeus: The Islamic State isn't our biggest problem in Iraq", Washington Post, March 20, 2015. *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/20/petraeus-the-islamic-state-isnt-our-biggest-problem-in-iraq/*

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General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

33. Senator ERNST. General Austin, for fiscal year 2015, the Department received $1.6 billion for the Iraq Train and Equip Fund to train-and-equip the Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, Sunni tribes, and other local forces. I continue to see photographs in the open source media of Iranian controlled Iraqi Shiite militias with United States weapons and equipment. What types of United States weapons and equipment are being obtained by Iranian controlled Shiite militias?

General AUSTIN. Based on open source reporting, we assess Shiite militias have obtained, or at least have access to, limited numbers of M–198 towed howitzers, M113 armored personnel carriers, Navistar 7000 general purpose trucks, M1A1 main battle tanks, High Mobility, Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV), Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP), M4 carbines, and M16 rifles.

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General AUSTIN. I share your concern when I see these kinds of photographs in the open source media and assure you we adhere to stringent vetting and accountability procedures. We are also working diligently with the Government of Iraq to identify losses, assess the cause of the losses, and implement measures to prevent these groups from obtaining United States weapons and equipment in the future. Senior level discussions between the United States ambassador and senior Iraqi leadership have taken place to impress upon the Government of Iraq the need for accurate accountability. In addition, all United States-provided defense articles, whether purchased with Iraqi funding or granted to Iraq, are accounted for under federally-mandated End Use Management procedures that we believe the Iraqis are complying with.

35. Senator ERNST. General Austin, there continue to be reports of ISIL using chemical agents to attack the Kurdish Peshmerga. Do you support providing Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) equipment and other CBRN defensive equipment to Peshmerga forces to enhance their force protection?

General AUSTIN. The chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threat is one of many threats to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). I support the providing CBRN protective equipment to the Peshmerga through the Government of Iraq via the Iraq Train and Equip Fund authorized by the 2015 Department of Defense Appropriations Act.

36. Senator ERNST. General Austin, this week Lieutenant General Stewart, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, in reference to the integrity of Iraq and Syria, said, "I'm having a tough time seeing it come back together."[2] That he was "wrestling with the idea that the Kurds will come back to a central government of Iraq."[3] Do you agree with that overall assessment?

General AUSTIN. We continue to encourage cooperation and support for a unified Iraq. However, I assess there will be continued friction between Arabs and Kurds over a number of territorial and legislative issues. The Counter-ISIL Coalition has been successful in supporting a unified government through our training and equipping "by, with and through" the Government of Iraq (GoI). To date the GoI and the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga have cooperated and coordinated in support of the Counter-ISIL campaign and we will continue to encourage this cooperation.

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[2] Ken Dilanian, "DIA chief: Iraq and Syria may not survive as states", Military Times, September 10, 2015. *http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/09/10/dia-chief-iraq-and-syria-may-not-survive_states/72027834/*

[3] Ken Dilanian, "DIA chief: Iraq and Syria may not survive as states", Military Times, September 10, 2015. http*://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/09/10/dia-chief-iraq-and-syria-may-not-survive_states/72027834/*

ADVERSARY EFFORTS IN SYRIA

37. Senator ERNST. General Austin, over the past few years, Iran and Russia have been crucial to the survival of the Assad regime. On the ground, Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, has been key in defending the Assad regime in ground combat over the past few years. According to recent statements by the DOD, Russia is establishing a forward operating base in Syria, sending in additional Russian military personnel and advanced military equipment. Is there trilateral cooperation between Assad, Iran, and Russia in efforts to conduct military operations against the Syrian opposition? If so, could you describe some of these efforts and how vital they are to the survival of the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

38. Senator ERNST. General Austin, over the past few years, Iran and Russia have been crucial to the survival of the Assad regime. On the ground, Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, has been key in defending the Assad regime in ground combat over the past few years. According to recent statements by the DOD, Russia is establishing a forward operating base in Syria, sending in additional Russian military personnel and advanced military equipment. If there is trilateral cooperation between Assad, Iran, and Russia in efforts to conduct military operations against the Syrian opposition, please describe some of these efforts and how vital they are to the survival of the Assad regime.

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

39. Senator ERNST. General Austin, over the past few years, Iran and Russia have been crucial to the survival of the Assad regime. On the ground, Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, has been key in defending the Assad regime in ground combat over the past few years. According to recent statements by the DOD, Russia is establishing a forward operating base in Syria, sending in additional Russian military personnel and advanced military equipment. Do you believe Russia, in the near-term, will commit conventional forces to ground combat in support of the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

40. Senator ERNST. General Austin, over the past few years, Iran and Russia have been crucial to the survival of the Assad regime. On the ground, Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, has been key in defending the Assad regime in ground combat over the past few years. According to recent statements by the DOD, Russia is establishing a forward operating base in Syria, sending in additional Russian military personnel and advanced military equipment. Under what conditions do you believe Russia would commit conventional forces to ground combat in support of the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

41. Senator ERNST. General Austin, during the Hearing, GEN Austin, you told the Committee that the effort in training Syrian fighters against ISIL have fallen short and that other options were being explored to retool the program. Please describe in detail the different courses of action you recommended to deploy a credible moderate Syrian opposition force to defeat ISIL.

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

42. Senator ERNST. General Austin, regarding the Administration's deal with Iran—I am concerned of potential consequences to our national security and the security of our allies in the Middle East brought by the prospect of providing Iran with potentially up to $150 billion in sanctions relief. While a nuclear Iran would be the most dangerous outcome we could face—Iran, through its proxies in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, have been able to dominate much of the Middle East with AK–47s, RPGs, Katyusha rockets, and a lot of other unsophisticated military hardware. Specifically, how may Iran's ability to better support the Assad regime and Shiite militias in Iraq alter the battlefield in Syria and Iraq?

General AUSTIN. Certainly our regional partners are concerned about the threat of Iran having a nuclear weapon. Some of our Gulf Cooperation Council partners do also acknowledge that the lifting of sanctions could be economically beneficial to the region if Iran adheres to the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). That said, none view the nuclear issue as being the only concern with respect to Iran. They are also very concerned about Iran's other malign activities, including the activities of Iran's Qods Forces, Iran's advanced cyber and theater ballistic missile capabilities, and their ability to mine the Straits. We continue to assure our partners that we share an interest in stability and non-proliferation in the

region and intend to work closely together to further strengthen security cooperation in that strategically-important region.

43. Senator ERNST. General Austin, what are the risks and concerns voiced by your Arab military counterparts in the Middle East regarding the president's Iran Nuclear Agreement?

General AUSTIN. Certainly our regional partners are concerned about the threat of Iran having a nuclear weapon. Some of our Gulf Cooperation Council partners do also acknowledge that the lifting of sanctions could be economically beneficial to the region if Iran adheres to the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). That said, none view the nuclear issue as being the only concern with respect to Iran. They are also very concerned about Iran's other malign activities, including the activities of Iran's Qods Forces, Iran's advanced cyber and theater ballistic missile capabilities, and their ability to mine the Straits. We continue to assure our partners that we share an interest in stability and non-proliferation in the region and intend to work closely together to further strengthen security cooperation in that strategically-important region.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MIKE LEE

PROGRESS IN IRAQ

44. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, you stated in front of the House Armed Services Committee in early March that: "ISIL's momentum has been blunted, its ability to mass and maneuver forces has been degraded, and its leadership cells have been pressured or eliminated, its command and control and supply lines have been disrupted. In short, we have put ISIL on the defensive." A little more than two months later, ISIS fighters routed ISF forces and overtook Ramadi, causing the Iraqi government to reconsider plans to attempt retaking Mosul and focus on western Iraq. Do you still stand by your March assessment of the progress made in Iraq in light of the fall of Ramadi and its failure to be recaptured? If your assessment was correct in March, what changed between March and May that allowed for this ISIS advance to occur?

Ms. WORMUTH. Yes, I stand by our March assessment. When we began the campaign against ISIL over a year ago, ISIL was pushing into Kurdish territory in northern Iraq and toward Baghdad. Over the past several months, ISIL has lost territory in both Syria and Iraq despite advances in Ramadi and Palmyra. We anticipated there would be setbacks in some areas while we make advances in others throughout this campaign. While Ramadi is an example of a setback and the unique challenges we face in western Iraq, it does not negate the progress we have made in other areas of the campaign including northeastern Syria and northern Iraq.

POLITICAL SOLUTION

45. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, the administration has stated repeatedly that there must be a political solution to the crisis in Syria and Iraq, and that this solution must be driven largely by countries in the Arab world and Europe whose security and economies are more directly threatened and whose historical, ethnic, and religious ties give them a better position for mediation. What more needs to be done by these nations politically and militarily to more effectively leverage their positions? What further can the United States do to encourage and facilitate such actions by these countries? Do these countries, who are all concerned about regional stability, share the United States' priority of defeating ISIS, or do they prioritize other actions in the region?

Ms. WORMUTH. As President Obama has said, there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Therefore we continue to support a political solution to the conflict in Syria through a genuine political transition away from President Assad. We have urged all concerned governments, including our Arab and European partners, to support this objective, including support to the United Nations' (UN's) initiative to broker a political transition.

Additionally, more than 60 countries are participating in the coalition, which includes European and Arab countries, and they share our priority of defeating ISIL. Like the United States, many countries must balance focus on the ISIL threat with other national security priorities to include the growing impact of refugees. Despite this balancing effort, the Coalition remains firmly committed to countering ISIL as a step to stabilizing the region. From a military perspective, we currently have sufficient forces to enable large portions of the plan, though we continue to work with partners to fill shortfalls. The recent addition of Turkey to the military campaign

has helped fill gaps in the air campaign both because of the aircraft they are providing and, perhaps more significantly, because the basing access they have granted significantly enhances the Coalition's operational flexibility and logistical efficiencies. In addition, the State Department and Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL have organized five separate working groups, ranging from countering foreign fighters to stabilization efforts. These working groups provide forums by which the United States and its partners share information on a regular, recurring basis regarding the requirements for success in the overall campaign. I refer you to the State Department for more details on the political actions of the coalition.

ARMING OF ISIS

46. Senator LEE. General Austin, what is your assessment of United States and coalition efforts to disrupt the funding, recruitment, and arming of ISIS fighters? Have we seen increases or decreases in ISIS force structure in the past year, and are we effectively identifying and moving to dismantle the sources of weapons and finances for ISIS?

General AUSTIN. The efforts of the United States-led Coalition, in support of the indigenous forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria, are having a measurable impact on ISIL's overall capability. We've removed some 20,000 enemy fighters from the battlefield; and, they continue to recruit additional fighters and move them across the border, primarily from Turkey into Syria and then into Iraq. Additionally, though our airstrikes have had a significant impact in terms of degrading ISIL's weapon production facilities, the enemy is still able to smuggle explosives precursors, as well as rockets/mortars and small arms, across the Turkish border. Furthermore, we cannot rule out the likelihood of ISIL exploiting gray arms dealers and the black market to supplement its military needs in Syria and Iraq.

Of note, over the past several months, we have slowed ISIL's ability to generate revenue by targeting the group's oil and gas production capacity and we continue to work to disrupt their ability to export/sell these products. From a whole of government perspective, we are actively disrupting ISIL's revenue generation on a daily basis (e.g., sale of antiquities, foreign donors, and extortion and taxation system). We have also made great strides in our efforts to close the major crossing sites between Turkey and Syria, which ISIL uses to funnel needed additional fighters, equipment, supplies and revenue. To date, continuing efforts by the Turks and anti-ISIL forces in northern Syria have secured 75% of these crossing sites. Over time, these efforts are expected to greatly decrease the number of foreign fighters entering the country.

47. Senator LEE. General Austin, since ISIS, as far as we know, is not producing its own weapons and military equipment, what are the primary sources of their arms and why has it been so difficult to starve out their weapons and equipment?

General AUSTIN. ISIL primarily procures weapons from battlefield seizures of military weapons and equipment, both in Syria and in Iraq. Additionally, we cannot rule out the likelihood of ISIL exploiting gray arms dealers and the black market to supplement its military needs in both countries.

ISF

48. Senator LEE. General Austin, one of the key factors in the failure of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) over the past year and a half has been a "lack of will to fight", as General Dempsey has called it. We can spend billions of dollars arming and training these individuals, as we did in the past decade, but these efforts will be futile if the individuals being trained are not adequately lead or if they don't believe that the sacrifices they are being called to make are worthwhile. What is your assessment of the ISF's leadership and their willingness to fight for the political leaders in Baghdad? Is the general population that comprises and supports the ISF interested in fighting ISIS to retake western and northern parts of Iraq, or are they more concerned with securing and defending their current holdings?

General AUSTIN. The ISF is comprised of and led by individuals with varying ethnic and sectarian interests. Although their interests align in terms of protecting their respective ethno-sectarian power bases and population centers, there are clear delineations in regards to protecting areas dominated by other ethnicities. The Shiite, for example, are not inclined to fight (and risk their lives) to liberate and hold Sunni areas. There are also varying degrees of capability among the different elements of Iraq's security forces. Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS), for example, have performed very well to date, as have those units trained by the Coalition through our building partner capacity program; in contrast, some elements of the

ISF have performed less well and have shown less willingness to take the fight to the enemy. These elements, generally speaking, suffer from weak leadership. Strong and capable leadership will prove absolutely essential to the Iraqis' success going forward.

49. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, has the Iraqi government been successful in integrating more of Iraq's Sunni population into the ISF or in working with Sunni tribes in contested areas? Does the Iraqi government's reliance on Shiite militias and close connections to Iran further alienate Sunni groups who may otherwise be inclined to fight ISIS?

Ms. WORMUTH. We believe Prime Minister Abadi is committed to integrating Sunnis into Iraq's security forces. Prime Minister Abadi has taken positive steps to integrate the Sunni population, including his five-point plan to stabilize Anbar and outreach to Sunnis, commitment to passing a National Guard law, and push for political reforms. The Iraqis have now enrolled more than 6,000 Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar, which has been helped by our presence at Habbiniyah/Taqaddum since this summer, and we expect this number to increase as the campaign evolves. Additionally, Sunni's are being trained as local police with the expectation they will be critical to the post-ISIL hold plan post-ISIL. The Department of Defense (DoD) remains concerned about the role of Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq because they have been known to intimidate politicians, undermine state control, and attempt to thwart the Prime Minister's positive outreach to Sunnis. DoD does not, however, believe there is an over-reliance on Shiite militias by the Iraqi government. The Iraqi Army and the Counterterrorism Service, in addition to the police, have played a lead role in operations in and around Ramadi. With coalition air and advising support, these forces have been making slow, but steady progress in re-claiming this key Sunni area from ISIL.

DOD STRATEGY

50. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, you stated in front of the House Armed Services Committee in March that the DOD is working with agencies across the nine lines of effort in Syria and Iraq to defeat ISIS. Which of these lines of effort have been completed or are moving at an acceptable pace in the right direction, and which lines of effort have been the most difficult to achieve? How would you assess progress on the first two lines of effort-supporting effective governance in Iraq and denying ISIL safe-haven?

Ms. WORMUTH. In general, progress across the nine lines of effort has been slow, but steady. Secretary Carter meets frequently with his counterparts to assess progress and challenges across the other lines of effort, and we are continuously adapting our efforts as the campaign evolves. There have certainly been setbacks in the past year as ISIL has adapted to evolving conditions on the battlefield, and I would not assess any line of effort to have been completed. We continue to face challenges, particularly in the messaging space. As the military campaign to deny ISIL safe haven continues, the Department of Defense (DoD) expects that there will continue to be challenges clearing and holding territory. But DoD has also seen progress in the past year, including the successful operations to recapture Kurdish territory in Iraq, to defeat ISIL in Kobani, recently to retake Tikrit, and other successful engagements such as the seizure of Sinjar and al-Hawl. On the political front, Prime Minister Abadi continues to demonstrate the resolve necessary to confront ISIL and is striving to manage a very difficult political landscape in Baghdad. The U.S. Government, with the State Department in the lead, has focused on bolstering support for PM Abadi.

51. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, what would be the impact on coalition strategy, especially the goals of a political transition in Syria and an inclusive government in Baghdad, if Iran uses access to new assets to increase its support of President Assad, Hezbollah, and the Shiite militias in Iraq?

Ms. WORMUTH. Our Coalition strategy, to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), remains sound regardless if Iran takes actions that inflame regional tensions or that run counter to United States national interests. We assess that Iran will use the preponderance of sanctions relief from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to address its significant domestic and infrastructure needs; however, we also expect Iran to apply some funds to its security services. Iran's support for Assad, the Lebanese Hizballah, and Shiite militias in Iraq is well known. The United States will continue to use its posture, preparations, plans, and partnerships to address the threats posed by Iran to United States interests in the Middle East. We remain keenly aware of Iran's support for militants and

terrorists, its provocative naval activity, and the threats posed by its conventional military forces. The United States will continue to support efforts to hold Iran accountable for its destabilizing behavior. We will also work through the United Nations to enforce non-nuclear sanctions and will maintain appropriate United States sanctions against Iran in response to its terrorist activities, human rights abuses, and ballistic missile program.

JCPOA

52. Senator LEE. General Austin, as the commander of Central Command, you are responsible for safeguarding U.S. Forces and our interests in the region as well as planning for future contingencies and giving advice on how certain actions by the U.S. Government will impact your ability to execute missions. The success or failure of the JCPOA (the Iran agreement), will have a significant impact on the threats our forces are posturing for in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. How often were you consulted by members of the State Department negotiating team during the negotiations for the JCPOA?

General AUSTIN. No one from the State Department consulted with me during the negotiations for the JCPOA.

TURKEY

53. Senator LEE. The United States has placed specific emphasis on engaging Turkey and incorporating them into the fight against ISIS. This puts us in an awkward position with our Kurdish allies, who have been the most effective fighters against ISIS and who are regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Turkish government. While the Kurds have seemingly prioritized fighting against ISIS forces threatening historically Kurdish lands, the Turkish government and many opposition groups in Syria place an equal or greater priority on fighting Assad forces-a priority shared with many extremist groups. General Austin, how does the United States, and how do you as commander of CENTCOM, deal with these competing priorities and sometimes-contradictory alliances when trying to coordinate coalition missions? What has been most problematic for you in managing these relationships?

General AUSTIN. We manage these challenges through open, honest, and frequent communications with and among our coalition partners and we make sure to involve them in the decision-making process as often as possible. U.S. interests are always our top priority and we do our best to work with our partners to mitigate any issues. Ultimately, the primary objective that binds the coalition together is the defeat of ISIL. To achieve lasting effects against ISIL requires credible and reliable forces on the ground and building the capacity of these forces takes time. The strength of the coalition is its cohesion. We anticipate, identify, and react to challenges as a group and work together to accomplish our shared mission.

54. Senator LEE. Secretary Wormuth, you were at the forefront of negotiating with Turkey this summer to increase their involvement with the coalition. What was discussed in your meetings in regards to the Kurd's involvement in this coalition, and what were the specific demands of the Turkish government regarding policy towards President Assad?

Ms. WORMUTH. Our discussions this summer focused on both parties' desire to intensify our cooperation against ISIL. Turkey agreed to allow the United States access to air bases in Turkey and committed Turkish aircraft to Coalition strike missions.

We were clear that the Coalition will continue to support the efforts of counter-ISIL forces in northern Syria, which includes Syrian Kurdish, Arab, and Turkoman fighters. We also communicated to Turkey and others the importance of avoiding tensions and provocative actions among those engaged in the fight against ISIL. Turkey had no specific demands in regards to President Assad.

We support Turkey's right to self-defense and proportionate response to terrorism, and we encourage a return by both sides to the peace process. Turkey's counter-ISIL strikes are fully integrated into the Coalition; its national counter-PKK strikes are separate and de-conflicted from Coalition air operations.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

COOKING THE BOOKS ON INTELLIGENCE

The Department of Defense Inspector General's investigation into CENTCOM's intelligence assessments is extremely concerning. The American people need confidence that DOD's intelligence products are apolitical assessments that allow hon-

est debate and, ultimately, the best-informed decision making. The intelligence community does not exist to mischaracterize a policy to suit a political agenda.

The fight against ISIS is one of the most serious challenges to our national security, and Congress demands the unvarnished facts on President Obama's now year-long effort to combat them. Frankly, there is an enormous disconnect between the reports from the Department of Defense and the information widely available in the media. In August, for example, the DOD claimed that ISIS "can no longer operate freely in roughly 25 to 30 percent of populated areas of Iraqi territory where it once could,"[4] while the same press release failed to comment on ISIS's growing influence in Libya, Yemen, the Caucuses, and even Europe.[5]

55. Senator CRUZ. General Austin, I understand there are limitations to what you can say about an ongoing investigation. However, it is important that we know your personal guidance regarding the intelligence estimates prepared by your command. Have you ever directed and guided your senior intelligence officers what on what acceptable reports will or will not include? Have you ever given tacit or overt instructions to omit any items from reports that reflect negatively on the campaign efforts to date?

General AUSTIN. No, I have never directed and guided any intelligence officers, on my staff or otherwise, on what was acceptable to include or not include in their reports, nor have I given tacit or overt instructions to omit any items from reports that reflect negatively on Counter-ISIL Campaign efforts. I have made it clear to my staff from day one of command that I expect them to provide me with honest and unvarnished assessments.

56. Senator CRUZ. General Austin, how confident are you that the problems with CENTCOM's intelligence products now under investigation are confined to the mission against ISIS? What assurances can you provide that there is no contagion into other areas for which CENTCOM is responsible? Please specifically address the current assessment of Russia's activities in Syria, and the current assessment of the potential nuclear dimensions of Iran's nuclear program.

General AUSTIN. These allegations are currently being investigated by the DoDIG; therefore, it is premature to state that there are, in fact, problems with CENTCOM's intelligence products. That said, because of the breadth and nature of the mission at CENTCOM we do rely on a robust intelligence enterprise to support the command. Our team of seasoned intelligence professionals does exceptional work. As a commander, I greatly value and seek their input and insights. I consider their assessments, along with inputs that I receive from a variety of other sources that include senior LNOs from other USG agencies and my commanders on the ground who I talk with on almost a daily basis. I consider this full range of inputs when making my decisions.

As for Russia's activities in Syria and Iran's nuclear program, I stand by the intelligence that has been produced and the statements I have made to date.

57. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Wormuth, in July Secretary Carter and General Dempsey outlined 9 lines of effort to combat ISIS. I find it strange to hear the Defense Secretary tell Congress that the most important line of effort in a war against radical Islamic extremists is led by the State Department, while ISIS beheads, rapes, tortures its victims; holds entire cities that once belonged to a sovereign nation, and expands its influence beyond the region. It underscores that the Obama Administration's entire approach to ISIS is convoluted and incoherent. Which agency is running the war against ISIS within our government, the State Department or Department of Defense? What efforts are being made within DOD to address that this campaign now spans across at least three Combatant Commands?

Ms. WORMUTH. The President's strategy to defeat ISIL is, and must be, a whole-of government-effort that integrates all the nation's strengths and instruments of power. This war cannot be won through military power alone. Building a more effective, inclusive, and multi-sectarian governance in Iraq is fundamental to ensure that ISIL cannot leverage sectarian grievances to propagate its influence. Similarly, the campaign cannot be successful without a political transition from Bashar al-Assad to a more inclusive government in Syria. In addition to these critical political efforts led by the State Department, the Department of Defense leads the military efforts to deny ISIL safe haven and to build partner capacity in Iraq and Syria. The DOD, working with coalition partners, is conducting a major air campaign against ISIL, advising and assisting Iraqi security forces on the ground, and training and equip-

[4] *http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814—Inherent-Resolve.*
[5] *http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.663214.*

ping vetted local forces. Each of these lines of effort are interdependent and synchronized across the interagency and combatant commands to ensure sustainable military and non-military progress.

INTENT OF RUSSIAN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEMS

There have been numerous reports about Russia increasing military assistance to the Assad regime in recent days and weeks. It is clear at this point that the Russians have no interest in seeing the conflict end or helping to broker an agreement where Assad leaves power. However, one aspect about the increasing Russian intervention in Syria truly concerns me, and the Obama Administration has not adequately addressed it.

Last week, there were several news reports that in addition to the tanks, marines, and other weapons that the Russians have been sending to Syria, they have deployed more anti-aircraft systems, operated by Russian troops.[6] I find this particularly troubling.

This is clearly a message to us. ISIS has no air force for the Russians to target. This can't be viewed in isolation to the larger trend that Russia is severing all ties to the West, stoking anti-Western sentiments across the globe, and digging in for a protracted ideological war against the United States. In Syria, it seems that Putin is trying to give us a reason to pause, even though we haven't been targeting Assad's forces, by placing assets that he could use to kill Americans flying missions against ISIS in Syria, as well as prevent the United States from actively targeting Assad in the future. This is another example of ineffective, weak, and incoherent strategy that invites adversaries to seize the initiative.

58. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Wormuth, you stated that "we're in close touch with our allies and partners about these developments." Unfortunately, Putin doesn't care about us being in touch with our allies; he understands that we won't respond, and because we show weakness he does what he wants. He's doing it in Ukraine, he's doing it in the Arctic, and he's doing it here. Ms. Wormuth, what tangible steps are you taking in response to Russia's deployment of anti-aircraft systems into Syria?

Ms. WORMUTH. I will not go into the specific U.S. military responses to threats or systems in an open forum, but I am confident that the United States military has the capabilities to address Russia's anti-aircraft systems.

In Syria, United States and Coalition aircraft always have the right to defend themselves if attacked. The United States and the Coalition will continue our ongoing air operations as we have from the very beginning.

The Department of Defense is open to having limited technical air protocol discussions to ensure the safety of our pilots and our Coalition. These communications would be solely focused on safety and would not constitute cooperation with Russia. In no way will this take away from our strong condemnation of Russia's actions in Ukraine and the steps we are taking in response to those destabilizing activities.

59. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Wormuth, what recommendation would you make if a Russian missile shot down an American aircraft over ISIS controlled territory?

Ms. WORMUTH. If a Russian missile intentionally shot down a United States aircraft, I would recommend a swift and forceful response. I will not get into the details of what specific measures the United States would take, and the final decision on a response would be the President's.

60. Senator CRUZ. General Austin, have the Russians messaged or threatened American forces with this deployment of air defenses? Have they actively targeted or locked onto U.S. aircraft with radar systems, either in this region or elsewhere?

General AUSTIN. I am not aware of any incidents where the Russians directly messaged or threatened United States forces and they have not actively targeted or locked onto United States aircraft.

61. Senator CRUZ. General Austin, are you confident that our recovery capabilities in Syria are adequate to prevent Islamists from capturing an Airman that has to eject over ISIS controlled territory?

General AUSTIN. I will not put a single U.S. service member in harm's way without sufficient capability in place to support them and that includes quick reaction forces and personnel recovery capabilities. U.S. Central Command is prepared to

[6] *http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/11/us-mideast-crisis-syria-arms-idUSKCN0RB1Q020150911*

dedicate all available resources in the event we have to conduct a personnel recovery operation for U.S. and Coalition air crews flying in harm's way in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.

UNITED STATES STRATEGY TO COUNTER THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT AND UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD IRAQ AND SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:34 a.m. in Room SD–106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony on the ongoing efforts of the United States to combat ISIL [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant] as well as United States policy toward Iraq, Syria, and the broader Middle East.

We welcome our distinguished witnesses and thank them for their appearance today as well as for their continued service to our Nation.

This morning, our hearts are with the loved ones of the 224 people killed aboard a Russian airliner over Egypt, of the 43 people killed in bombings in Beirut, of the 130 people killed in Paris, and of the 14 people killed in San Bernardino. Each one of these atrocities committed or inspired by ISIL has occurred in just the month and a half since the Secretary last appeared before this committee. A year and a half since he appeared, and all of these things have happened. Whatever illusions anyone may have had that our national security was not at stake in the conflict in Iraq and Syria or that ISIL was somehow contained, these attacks make it clear that ISIL's threat against our homeland is real, direct, and growing, that we are not winning this war, and that time is not on our side.

Americans have never been more worried about being attacked than at any time since the months that followed September 11th, 2001. Today's hearing is essential to help the American people and their elected representatives understand what the Department of

Defense [DOD] is doing to protect our Nation from this new terrorist threat.

The administration says it has a strategy to destroy ISIL which it has called, quote, "an indirect approach," unquote. This means that, instead of taking the fight to ISIL more directly, the administration seeks to build up local ground forces in Iraq and Syria, to support them with United States and coalition airpower, to enable our local partners to liberate their own lands, and to create conditions for lasting political settlements. Much of this is what many of us have been advocating for years. To be sure, we are making some progress. As I recently saw on a visit to Iraq with Senator Lindsey Graham, the recent operation to retake Sinjar was important. Iraqi forces are closing in on Ramadi, though they still have not finished the job. Our counterterrorism operations are taking a lot of ISIL fighters off the battlefield in Iraq and Syria.

All of this represents tactical progress, and it is a testament to our civilian and military leaders as well as thousands of U.S. troops hoping—helping to take the fight to ISIL every day. However, significant challenges remain. The Iraqi Government is weak and beholden to Iran. The training of Iraqi Security Forces [ISF] has been slow. The building of support for the Sunni tribal forces, even slower. At the current pace, U.N. [United Nations]—U.S. commanders estimate that ISIL will still control Mosul at the end of next year.

In Syria, what the administration calls its "strategy" looks more like a hope. We will not destroy ISIL until Raqqa, the capital of the caliphate, falls. But, there is still no ground force that is both willing and able to retake Raqqa, nor is there a realistic prospect of one emerging soon.

The Syrian Kurds could take Raqqa, but won't. The Syrian Sunni Arabs want to, but can't, partly due to our failure to support them. What's worse, our military and diplomatic efforts are misaligned. Russia and Iraq are doubling down on Bashar Assad. Russia's airstrikes are still overwhelmingly directed at coalition-supported groups, and more talks in Vienna will not convince Vladimir Putin to abandon his idea of Russia's national interests in Syria. We need leverage to do that, but nothing we are doing, military or otherwise, is creating the necessary conditions, both in Putin's mind as well as on the ground in Syria, to achieve a favorable political settlement. As a result, the conflict will likely grind on, ISIL will grow stronger, and the refugees will keep coming.

Meanwhile, ISIS [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria] is metastasizing across the region—in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and, perhaps most worryingly, in Libya. In short, the threat is growing and evolving faster than the administration's efforts to counter it.

The broader shortcomings of the administration's approach has to do with two assumptions it appears to be making.

The first is that time is on our side, that we can afford to play out their indirect approach for years while ISIL continues to hold key terrain, such as Raqqa and Mosul. Time has never been on our side in this conflict, and it certainly is not now, after Sinai, Paris, and San Bernardino.

The second assumption is that we should not put U.S. forces on the ground, because that's what ISIL wants. It is true that ISIL seeks an apocalyptic conflict with the West, but another key pillar of ISIL's ideology is the creation of the caliphate. So, as long as ISIL can claim to possess its caliphate, it projects an aura of success that is its most powerful tool of radicalization and recruitment. There are no local forces that are able and willing to destroy ISIL's caliphate on the ground. If we will not commit our own forces, then we are accepting the existence of the caliphate.

On Sunday, President Obama once again resorted to the strawman argument that his critics want to invade Iraq and Syria with 100,000 United States troops. No one—no one is calling for that. What we do need in Iraq is several thousand additional United States troops to improve and accelerate the training of Iraqi forces, especially Sunni tribal fighters, embed with and advise Iraqi units closer to the fight, call in airstrikes from forward positions, and conduct counterterrorism operations. Once ISIL is destroyed in Iraq, we must keep a residual force there, as we should have done before. If we leave again, the threat will return, and we will have to intervene again. Iraqis must win the peace, but America has a major stake in their success, and a unique role to play in helping them. To do so, we must be present.

In Syria, the United States needs a coherent strategy to destroy ISIL and end the civil war as soon as possible. Our military efforts must create the conditions for this outcome. America must work with its coalition partners to establish and protect zones inside Syria where refugees can be safe, to deny the Assad regime the use of airpower and barrel bombs, and to impose costs on Russia for targeting moderate opposition groups.

Ultimately, to destroy ISIL in Syria, we will need a multinational ground force primarily made up of Sunni, Arab, and European forces, but with a strong United States component, to do what no local force now can or will: retake Raqqa, destroy ISIL's caliphate in Syria, and prepare for a long-term stabilization effort.

Beyond Iraq and Syria, we need to seize the initiative and roll back ISIS—ISIL's regional expansion. This will require a greater forward presence of U.S. military and intelligence teams that can map its networks, destroy them as part of a broader strategy to support countries and building just and inclusive governments.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, we have known each other for many years. I know you to be a skilled and dedicated public servant. I think you are performing to the best of your abilities as Secretary of Defense, and I value our partnership on many issues. It is true that you have made four appearances before this committee as Secretary. But, when you were nominated for your position, you agreed to, quote, "appear and testify, upon request, before this committee." Since your last testimony, as I mentioned, we have seen ISIL launch or inspire attacks in the sky over Egypt, in Beirut, in Paris, and here at home, in San Bernardino. We have also heard the administration roll out additional actions that it claims are needed to address this threat. If we are truly at war against ISIL, as the President says, then we will continue to expect the Secretary of Defense to provide regular updates to the

Senate Armed Services Committee on the progress of that war. This is your responsibility to us so we can perform our responsibilities on behalf of those who elected us.

Senator Reed.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Let me welcome Secretary Ash Carter and General Paul Selva.

This morning's hearing is extraordinarily timely, in light of several recent and very disturbing events, including ISIL claiming responsibility for the bombing of the Russian airliner, the attacks on innocent civilians in Beirut and Paris, and the deadly attack in San Bernardino by what appears to be self-radicalized individuals. Our hearts go out to the victims of these terrible and senseless tragedies.

As the President outlined in his speech to the Nation on Sunday, it is critical that the U.S.-led 60-plus-nation coalition for defeating ISIL pursue a multidimensional approach. The United States and its coalition partners are intensifying their efforts to degrade ISIL militarily and deny their leaders any safe havens, to cut off ISIL financing, to interdict the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL-controlled territories, and to counter the spread of ISIL's murderous ideology that the President accurately characterized as part of a cult of death. Such an approach will require the careful coordination of military, intelligence, diplomatic, and law enforcement efforts to combat ISIL across the departments of the United States Government and within our coalition.

Recently, the administration announced a number of steps to intensify our military efforts in Iraq and Syria. These include the deployment of A–10s to Turkey, the addition of Special Operations Forces in northern Syria to assist local forces, and, most recently, an announcement by you, Secretary Carter, of the intent to deploy, in full coordination with the Government of Iraq, an expeditionary targeting force to assist the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces in removing ISIL leaders from the battlefield. In addition, coalition partners, including Britain, France, and Germany, have stepped up their contributions to the fight against ISIL since the Paris attacks. I welcome—and I think we all do—these continuing efforts to reevaluate and enhance our military campaign, and would be interested in any further steps that may be under consideration to intensify the military pressure on ISIL in Iraq and Syria. I think we all agree that that intensity has to be increased significantly and rapidly.

At the same time, a sustainable defeat of ISIL in the region requires that ground combat forces be primarily local forces, though United States Forces can, and I think should, provide critical advice, assistance, and enablers to assist these forces and go where they must go to assist these local forces. Putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, as has been suggested, I think, by all my colleagues, in Iraq and Syria, could play, directly or indirectly, into ISIL's propaganda war.

It's also clear that a sustainable outcome will only be possible with more inclusive governance by the Haider al-Abadi government in Baghdad and a political transition in Syria that puts an end to

the brutality of the Assad regime. Russia's direct engagement in the Syrian conflict will continue to further reduce the chances of achieving an acceptable political solution, so long as the Russians remain focused on attacking the moderate Syrian opposition and claiming to be joining an anti-ISIL fight, where they are, in effect, trying to degrade the anti-ISIL—Assad forces.

We will be interested in hearing from our witnesses regarding the progress of the campaign to defeat ISIL, the status of our efforts to train, equip, and assist local forces in Syria and Iraq, and then having—training them to help them seize territory and hold territory taken from ISIL control.

General, I hope you can also address whether we now have the right command structure for Operation Inherent Resolve and whether our military commanders in theater have the flexibility they need to carry out the campaign plan.

Finally, the committee would be interested to get an assessment from our witnesses of the factors contributing to the expansion of ISIL and associated groups beyond the Syria-Iraq region, as the Chairman has pointed out, and what the Department needs to counter this threat that is burgeoning throughout the region.

Again, thank you to the witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Welcome, Secretary Carter and General Selva.

STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE; ACCOMPANIED BY GENERAL PAUL J. SELVA, USAF, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Secretary CARTER. Thank you. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the U.S. counter-ISIL military campaign with Vice Chairman Paul Selva, here. Chairman Joseph Dunford is, as you know, currently visiting our troops deployed around the world this holiday season, conveying to them the thanks of a grateful Nation for all they do in our defense. I will soon be doing the same.

Chairman, you're right, and Ranking Member Reed, we are intensifying the campaign, and have, in the six weeks since I appeared before you last time. I'm happy to be here today to describe what we're doing. It's very much along the lines of what you just described. That is, forces to accompany, to call an airstrike, to conduct counterterrorism strikes, and train and equip. So, I'll describe those actions which we're taking.

Because the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino were an assault upon the civilization that we defend, ISIL requires, and it will receive, a lasting defeat. The President has directed us to intensify and adapt the military campaign——, or, I'm sorry, had directed us to intensify the military campaign before the Paris attacks. The necessity of accelerating our efforts, as we're doing, has only been made more plain by the recent attacks.

We are urging others in the region and around the world to do the same, because those attacks further highlighted the stakes that not just the United States, but the world, has in this fight. The defense of the homeland must be strengthened, to be sure. But, it is absolutely necessary to defeat ISIL in its parent tumor in Syria

and Iraq, and also to take necessary action wherever else in the world this evil organization metastasizes. Achieving these objectives means leveraging all the components of our Nation's might, as the Chairman noted: diplomatic, military, and law enforcement, homeland security, intelligence, economic, informational. That's the right overall approach, for three principal reasons:

First, the strategy takes the fight to the enemy where they are, which we must do.

Second, it seeks to develop capable, motivated, local ground forces as the only force that can assure a lasting victory. U.S. and international coalition forces can and will do more to enable them, but we cannot substitute for them.

Third, it seeks to set the conditions for a political solution to the civil war in Syria and for inclusive governance in Iraq, both of which are essential, because they're the only durable ways to prevent a future ISIL-like organization from re-emerging there. That's why the diplomatic work led by Secretary John Kerry is the first and absolutely critical line of effort.

The Defense Department, of course, is centrally responsible for the military campaign, which is the focus of my statement today. Through our and our coalition partners' actions, the military campaign must and will deny ISIL any safe territorial haven, kill or capture its leadership and forces, and destroy its organization, all while we seek to identify and then enable motivated local forces on the ground who can expel ISIL from the territory it now controls, hold it, and govern it, and ensure that victory sticks.

Militarily, we're taking new steps each week to gather momentum on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq. I'll take a few extra minutes this morning to give as much detail as possible about the new things we're doing, applying multiple pressures on multiple fronts simultaneously to accelerate ISIL's defeat.

The reality is, we're at war. That's how our troops feel about it, because they're taking the fight to ISIL every day, applying the might of the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

In northern Syria, local forces, with our support, are fighting along the Ma'ra line, engaging ISIL in the last remaining pocket of access into Turkey. Meanwhile, a coalition of Syrian Arabs that we helped equip in northeastern Syria are fighting alongside Kurdish forces and have recaptured important terrain, most recently pushing ISIL out of the town of al-Hawl and at least 900 square kilometers of surrounding territory. They're now focused on moving south to isolate ISIL's so-called capital of Raqqa, with the ultimate objective of collapsing its control over the city.

To build on that, President Obama, on my and Chairman Dunford's advice, ordered United States Special Operations Forces to go into Syria to support the fight against ISIL. American special operators bring a unique set of capabilities that make them force multipliers, such as intelligence-gathering, targeting, and enabling local forces. Where we find further opportunity to leverage such capability, we will not hesitate to expand it.

Next, in the south of Syria, we're also taking advantage of opportunities to enable indigenous fighters trained and equipped by us and other coalition partners to conduct strikes inside Syria. We're

also enhancing Jordan's border control and defenses with additional military assets and planning assistance.

Turning to northern Iraq, Peshmerga units, with the help of United States power, airpower, and advisors, have retaken the town of Sinjar, cutting the main line of communication between Raqqa and Mosul, which are the two largest cities under ISIL's control. To move people and supplies, ISIL must now rely on backroads, where we will locate and destroy them.

Elsewhere in Iraq, we have about 3,500 troops at six locations in support of Iraqi Security Forces. There, we've been providing increased lethal fire and augmenting the existing training, advising, and assisting program. We're prepared to do more as Iraq shows capability and motivation in the counter-ISIL fight and in resolving its political divisions.

After a frustratingly long time, we are starting to see some movement in the operation to recapture Ramadi. Over the past several months, the coalition has provided specialized training and equipment, including combat engineering techniques, like in-stride breeching and bulldozing, and munitions, like AT–4 shoulder-fired missiles, to stop truck bombs, to the Iraqi Army and its counterterrorism service units that are now beginning to enter Ramadi neighborhoods from multiple directions. In fact, in the last 24 hours, the ISF retook the Anbar Operations Center on the northern bank of the Euphrates River, across from Ramadi's city center. It is an important step, but there's still tough fighting ahead. ISIL has counterattacked several times, but, thus far, the ISF has shown resilience.

The United States is prepared to assist the Iraqi Army with additional unique capabilities to help them finish the job, including attack helicopters and accompanying advisors, if circumstances dictate and if requested by Prime Minister Abadi.

I mention all this because it represents how we've adapted in the way we support our Iraqi partners, and it shows that training, advising, and assisting helps, and works. We will do more of what works, going forward.

While we're focused on making additional tactical gains, the overall progress in the Sunni-populated areas of Iraq has been slow, much to Prime Minister Abadi's and our frustration. Indeed, with respect to Sunni tribal forces, we are urging the Iraqi Government to do more to recruit, train, arm, mobilize, and pay Sunni popular mobilization fighters in their communities. We continue to engage the Iraqi Government at all levels to move forward on this critically important aspect of the counter-ISIL campaign, including working with Sunni local police to ensure that there's an Iraqi hold force to sustain future gains.

Next, in full coordination, again, with the Government of Iraq, we're deploying a specialized expeditionary targeting force to assist the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga forces and put even more pressure on ISIL through a variety of raids and intelligence-gathering missions. This force will also be in a position to conduct unilateral operations in Syria.

In Iraq, the force will operate at the invitation of the Iraqi Government and focus on defending its borders and building the ISF's ability to conduct similar operations. We will not be discussing spe-

cifics of this expeditionary targeting force, or its operations, in unclassified settings, both to protect our forces and to preserve the element of surprise. We want this expeditionary targeting force to make ISIL and its leaders wonder, when they go to bed at night, who's going to be coming in the window.

Chairman Dunford and I recognize that, in principle, there are alternatives to the strategic approach we have adopted to drive ISIL from Syrian and Iraqi territory, including the introduction of a significant foreign ground force, hypothetically international, but including United States Forces, even in the absence of capable, motivated, local ground forces.

While we certainly have the capability to furnish a U.S. component to such a ground force, we have not recommended this course of action, for several reasons. In the near term, it would be a significant undertaking that, much as we may wish otherwise, realistically we would embark upon largely by ourselves. It would be ceding our comparative advantage of Special Forces, mobility, and firepower, instead fighting on the enemy's terms.

In the medium term, by seeming to Americanize the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, we could well turn those fighting ISIL, or inclined to resist their rule, into fighting us instead. As Chairman Dunford testified last week, quote, "ISIL would love nothing more than a large presence of United States forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria so that they could have a call to jihad."

Lastly, in the long term, there would still remain the problem of securing and governing the territory. These must be done by local forces. So, in the end, while we can enable them, we cannot substitute for them.

Next, momentum on the ground, as I've described, in both Syria and Iraq has been enabled by greatly increased coalition airstrikes. Additional strike aircraft we've deployed to Incirlik Airbase in Turkey, along with improved intelligence, allowed us, in November, to significantly increase our airstrikes against ISIL to the highest level since the start of our operations in August 2014. Moreover, because of improved intelligence and understanding of ISIL's operations, we've intensified the air campaign against ISIL's war-sustaining oil enterprise, a critical pillar of ISIL's financial infrastructure. In addition to destroying fixed facilities, like wells and processing facilities, we've destroyed nearly 400 of ISIL's oil tanker trucks, reducing a major source of its daily revenues. There is more to come, too.

We're also improving our capability to eliminate ISIL's leadership. Since I last appeared before this committee, in late October, we have removed two more key ISIL figures from the battlefield; namely, "Jihadi John," an ISIL executioner, and Abu Nabil, ISIL's leader in Libya. Like previous actions, these strikes serve notice to ISIL that no target is beyond our reach.

As our military campaign intensifies on the ground and in the air, the Defense Department is also developing more strategic options in the cyberdomain.

These, then, are just nine areas of the adaptations we've made over the past six weeks to accelerate this campaign and to see momentum build. President Barack Obama is committed to doing what it takes as opportunities arise, as we see what works, and as

the enemy adapts, until ISIL is defeated in a lasting way. The President has consistently supported the recommendations from me and General Dunford, and we know he is prepared for us to bring him more. We will.

At the same time that we're constantly looking to do more in the fight—in this fight, the world must do the same. The international community, including our allies and partners, has to step up before another attack like Paris. France was galvanized by the attack on its capital, and intensified its role. Britain has now expanded its air campaign to strike ISIL in Syria. Italy has deployed its most elite police units, like the Carabinieri, to assist in Iraq. Germany is now making additional contributions. The Netherlands is actively considering doing more, as well.

But, we all—let me repeat that—all must do more. Turkey must do more to control its often porous border. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states joined the air portion of the campaign in the early days—only the air part—but have since been preoccupied by the conflict in Yemen, both in the air and on the ground. Just this past week, I personally reached out to my counterparts in forty countries around the world in the coalition and asked them to contribute more—in many case, contribute much more—to enhancing the fight against ISIL. The types of things I've requested from our partners include Special Operations Forces, strike and reconnaissance aircraft, weapons, and munitions, training assistance, and other items.

Meanwhile, as the Chairman noted, Russia, which is publicly committed to defeating ISIL, has instead largely attacked opposition forces. It's time for Russia to focus on the right side of this fight.

Before I conclude, I'd like to respectfully request the committee's attention to matters that bear upon our security and its responsibilities:

First, over a month ago, I submitted a request to the four congressional defense committees, including this one, to release holds on the final tranche of funds in the Syria equipping program; that is, some $116 million. We need these funds to provide and transport ammunition, weapons, and other equipment to further enable the progress being made against ISIL in Syria by partners like the Syrian Arab Coalition. All four committees have failed to act on that request. I ask you to release these holds, urgently. We should not be impeding the very momentum we are trying to build.

Next is the necessity to fill key vacancies in the Defense Department's critical leadership positions. I have appeared before this committee, as noted, six times over the last ten months—four times on the Middle East, and twice in just the last six weeks, on ISIL. While this committee has held 58 full hearings over the last year, only three have been confirmation hearings for DOD civilian leaders. DOD currently has 16 nominees awaiting the constitutional advice and consent of the Senate. Twelve of these 16 are still awaiting even a hearing, including our nominees to be Secretary of the Army, the Under Secretaries of each of our three military departments—Army, Navy, and Air Force—and the Under Secretaries of both Intelligence and Personnel and Readiness. These positions should be filled by confirmed nominees, especially in a time

of conflict. So, I welcome that the process is now moving, and I urge it to move quickly for all of our civilian nominees and also for our senior military nominations that will be made early next year.

Finally, as I conclude, I want to commend this committee on last month's budget deal, which is the kind of deal I called for back in March. It was a consequential agreement for the Nation's security. As current funding for the government is set to expire, it is vital that the two houses now conclude work on funding all of the government, consistent with the budget deal. Now is not the time for more gridlock.

I thank this committee in advance for your efforts, because funding this budget deal is what our national security demands, and it sends the right message to our troops, our allies, and our enemies in this time of broad global national security challenges, and especially in this war.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Carter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, Members of the Committee: Thank you for inviting me to discuss the United States counter-ISIL military campaign with Vice Chairman Paul Selva. Chairman Dunford is, as you know, currently visiting our troops deployed around the world this holiday season, conveying to them the thanks of a grateful nation for all they do in our defense. I will soon be doing the same.

The attacks in Paris and San Bernardino were an assault on the civilization we defend. ISIL requires, and it will receive, a lasting defeat. The President had directed us to intensify and adapt the military campaign before the Paris attacks. The necessity of accelerating our efforts, as we're doing, has only been made more plain by the recent attacks. We are urging others in the region and around the world to do the same, because those attacks further highlighted the stakes that not just the United States but the world has in this fight.

The defense of the homeland must be strengthened, to be sure, but it is absolutely necessary to defeat ISIL in its parent tumor in Syria and Iraq, and also to take necessary action wherever else in the world this evil organization metastasizes. Achieving these objectives means leveraging all the components of our nation's might—diplomatic, military, law enforcement, homeland security, intelligence, economic, informational.

That's the right strategic approach for three principal reasons. First, it takes the fight to the enemy where they are, as we must do.

Second, it seeks to develop capable, motivated, local ground forces—as the only force that can assure a lasting victory. U.S. and international coalition forces can and will do more to enable them, but we cannot substitute for them.

Third, it seeks to set the conditions for a political solution to the civil war in Syria and for inclusive governance in Iraq, which are essential because they are the only durable ways to prevent a future ISIL-like organization from re-emerging there. That's why the diplomatic work, led by Secretary Kerry and the State Department, is the first and absolutely critical line of effort in our strategy.

The Defense Department is, of course, centrally responsible for the military campaign—the focus of my statement today. Through our and our coalition partners' actions, the military campaign must and will deny ISIL any safe territorial haven, kill or capture its leadership and forces, and destroy its organization—all while we seek to identify and then enable capable, motivated local forces on the ground who can expel ISIL from the territory it now controls, hold and govern it, and ensure that victory sticks.

Militarily, we are taking new steps each week to gather momentum on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq. I will take a few extra minutes this morning to give as much detail as possible about the new things we are doing—applying multiple pressures, on multiple fronts, simultaneously—to accelerate ISIL's defeat.

The reality is, we are at war. That's how our troops feel about it, because they're taking the fight to ISIL every day—applying the might of the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

In northern Syria, local forces, with our support, are fighting along the Ma'ra line, engaging ISIL in the last remaining pocket of access into Turkey. Meanwhile, a coalition of Syrian Arabs that we helped equip in Northeastern Syria are fighting alongside Kurdish forces and have recaptured important terrain, most recently pushing ISIL out of the town of Al Hawl and at least 900 square kilometers of surrounding territory. They are now focused on moving south to isolate ISIL's so-called capital of Raqqa, with the ultimate objective of collapsing its control over the city.

To build on that, President Obama, on my and Chairman Dunford's advice, ordered United States special operations forces to go into Syria to support the fight against ISIL. American special operators bring a unique set of capabilities that make them force multipliers, such as intelligence gathering, targeting, and enabling local forces. Where we find further opportunity to leverage such capability, we will not hesitate to expand it.

Next, in the south of Syria, we are also taking advantage of opportunities to enable indigenous fighters, trained and equipped by us and other Coalition partners, to conduct strikes inside Syria. We are also enhancing Jordan's border control and defenses with additional military assets and planning assistance.

Turning to northern Iraq, Peshmerga units, with the help of United States air power and advisers, have retaken the town of Sinjar, cutting the main line of communication between Raqqa and Mosul, the two largest cities under ISIL's control. To move people and supplies, ISIL now must rely on backroads, where we will locate and destroy them.

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After a frustratingly long time, we are starting to see some movement in the operation to recapture Ramadi. Over the past several months, the coalition has provided specialized training and equipment—including combat engineering techniques like in-stride breaching and bulldozing, and munitions like AT–4 shoulder-fired missiles to stop truck bombs—to the Iraqi Army and counter-terrorism service units that are now beginning to enter Ramadi neighborhoods from multiple directions.

In fact, in the last 24 hours, the ISF retook the Anbar Operations Center on the northern bank of the Euphrates River across from Ramadi's city center. This is an important step, but there is still tough fighting ahead. ISIL has counter-attacked several times, but thus far the ISF has shown resilience. The United States is prepared to assist the Iraqi Army with additional unique capabilities to help them finish the job, including attack helicopters and accompanying advisors, if requested by Prime Minister Abadi.

I mention all this because it represents how we've adapted in the way we support our Iraqi partners. It shows that training, advising, and assisting is the right approach. We will do more of what works going forward.

While we are focused on making additional tactical gains, the overall progress in the Sunni-populated areas of Iraq has been slow, much to our and Prime Minister Abadi's frustration. Indeed, with respect to Sunni tribal forces, we would like to see the government do more to recruit, train, arm, and mobilize Sunni popular mobilization fighters in their communities. We continue to engage the Iraqi Government at all levels to move forward on this critically important aspect of the counter-ISIL campaign, including working with Sunni local police to ensure there is an Iraqi hold force to sustain any future gains.

Next, in full coordination with the government of Iraq, we're deploying a specialized expeditionary targeting force to assist the ISF and Kurdish Peshmerga forces and to put even more pressure on ISIL through a variety of raids and intelligence gathering. While this force will also be in a position to conduct unilateral operations in Syria, in Iraq the force will operate at the invitation of the Iraqi Government and focus on defending its borders and building the ISF's ability to conduct similar operations. We will not be discussing specifics of this expeditionary targeting force or its operations in unclassified settings, both to protect our forces and preserve the element of surprise. We want this expeditionary targeting force to make ISIL and its leaders wonder when they go to bed at night, who's going to be coming in the window?

Chairman Dunford and I recognize that in principle there are alternatives to the strategic approach we have adopted to drive ISIL from Syrian and Iraqi territory—including the introduction of a significant foreign ground force, hypothetically international but including U.S. Forces, even in the absence of capable, motivated, local ground forces. While we certainly have the capability to furnish a U.S. component

to such a ground force, we have not recommended this course of action for several reasons:

In the near-term, it would be a significant undertaking that, realistically, we would have to do largely by ourselves; and it would be ceding our comparative advantage of special forces, mobility, and firepower, instead fighting on the enemy's terms.

In the medium-term, by seeming to Americanize the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, we could well turn those fighting ISIL or inclined to resist their rule into fighting us instead. As Chairman Dunford testified last week, ISIL "would love nothing more than a large presence of United States forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria, so that they could have a call to jihad."

Lastly, in the long-term, there would still remain the problem of securing and governing the territory—these must be done by local forces. So in the end, while we can enable them, we cannot substitute for them.

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Moreover, because of improved intelligence and understanding of ISIL's operations, we've intensified the air campaign against ISIL's war-sustaining oil enterprise, a critical pillar of ISIL's financial infrastructure. In addition to destroying fixed facilities like wells and processing facilities, we've destroyed nearly 400 of ISIL's oil tanker trucks, reducing a major source of its daily revenues. There's more to come too.

We're also improving our capability to eliminate ISIL's leadership. Since I last appeared before this committee in late October, we have removed two more key ISIL figures from the battlefield—Mohammed Emwazi, a.k.a "Jihadi John," an ISIL executioner; and Abu Nabil, ISIL's leader in Libya. Like previous actions, these strikes serve notice to ISIL that no target is beyond our reach.

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These are just nine areas of the adaptations we've made over the past six weeks to accelerate this campaign, and we've seen momentum build. President Obama is committed to doing what it takes—as opportunities arise, as we see what works, and as the enemy adapts—until ISIL is defeated in a lasting way. The President has consistently supported the recommendations from me and General Dunford and we know he is prepared for us to bring him more. We will.

At the same time that we're constantly looking to do more in this fight, the world must do the same. The international community—including our allies and partners—has to step up before another attack like Paris.

France has been galvanized by the attacks in its capital, and the French have intensified their role. Britain has now expanded its air campaign to strike ISIL in Syria. Italy has deployed its most elite police units, the Carabinieri, to assist in Iraq. Germany is now making additional contributions. The Netherlands is actively considering doing more as well.

But we all, let me repeat that, we all must do more. Turkey must do more to control its often porous border. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states joined the air campaign in the early days, but have since been pre-occupied by the conflict in Yemen. Just this past week, I personally reached out to some 40 countries around the world to ask them to contribute, and in many cases contribute more, to enhancing the fight against ISIL. The types of things I've requested from our partners include special operations forces, strike and reconnaissance aircraft, and weapons and munitions.

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First, over a month ago I submitted a request to the four Congressional defense committees, including this one, to release 'holds' on the final tranche of funds in the Syria equipping program—that is, some $116 million dollars. We need these funds to provide and transport ammunition, weapons, and other equipment to further enable the progress being made against ISIL in Syria by partners like the Syrian Arab Coalition. The committees have failed to act on that request, and I ask you to release these holds urgently. We should not be impeding the very momentum we are trying to build.

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DOD currently has 16 nominees awaiting the Constitutional advice and consent of the Senate. Twelve of those 16 are still awaiting even a hearing—including our nominees to be Secretary of the Army, the Under Secretaries of each of our three military departments—Army, Navy, and Air Force—and the Under Secretaries of both Intelligence and Personnel and Readiness. These positions should be filled by confirmed nominees, especially in a time of conflict. So I welcome that the process is now moving, and I urge it to move quickly for all of our civilian nominees, and also for senior military nominations that will be made next year.

Finally, as I conclude, I want to commend this committee on last month's budget deal, which is the kind of deal I called for back in March. It was a consequential agreement for the nation's security.

As current funding for government is set to expire, it is vital that the two houses now conclude work on funding all of government consistent with the budget deal. Now is not the time for games. I thank this committee in advance for your efforts, because funding this budget deal is what our national security demands. It sends the right message to our troops, our allies and our enemies in this time of broad national security challenges—and conflict.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response—Mr. Secretary—in response to your last two points, one on the funding, we just received that request last week, but you know very well it's a result of the absolute failure of the expenditure of what was judged then to be $43 million and four or five people were trained. We don't want to approve of something like that again. We want to—if you want that kind of funding to train and equip, we want to know what the plan is, and we don't want to see a repetition of the testimony by the head of Central Command who said, "Well, we have four or five less, and we've spent $43 million." We have an obligation to the taxpayers.

On the nominees, there is four pending before the

United States Senate today, and there is four more who will be having hearings this afternoon, which takes care of half of yours.

I'm not going to waste the time of the committee to go back and forth about threats of vetoes that, in the view of the majority of this committee, were totally unjustified on the part of the President, including the failure, still—still, despite your appearance in my office with the President's counterterrorism person, that you were going to send me a plan, you were going to send this committee a plan on the closure of Guantanamo. We still haven't gotten that plan, Mr. Secretary.

So, if you're a little bit concerned about a lack of movement, I've been a little concerned about a lack of movement on Guantanamo for the last seven years.

Secretary CARTER. Right.

Chairman MCCAIN. So, I will do what I can to get the four that are pending before the Senate today confirmed by the Senate, and I will—we will be having a hearing this afternoon on the four additional ones.

So——

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate that.

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you.

Mr. Secretary, on the 1st of December, before the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman J. Randy Forbes asked General

Dunford, quote, "Have we currently contained ISIL?" General Dunford, "We have not contained ISIL." Mr. Secretary, do you agree with General Dunford?

Secretary CARTER. I agree with that General Dunford said, yes.

Chairman MCCAIN. So, if we have not contained ISIL, how are we to know—believe that we are succeeding against ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I think that we are building momentum against ISIL. I'm going to be very careful about describing the—I have described the trajectory of that success all around Iraq and Syria, some actions we're taking in Libya. It's not my principal responsibility, but I met, yesterday, with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], the Director of National Intelligence, and other officials, to talk about what we could do more to strengthen the defense of the homeland, as the Department of Defense. But, in our principal responsibility, which is to take the fight to Syria and Iraq, I've described the actions that we've taken just since——

Chairman MCCAIN. And——

Secretary CARTER.—I appeared last time, and I think they are building momentum——

Chairman MCCAIN. Thank you. How long do you think it'll be before we retake Mosul or Raqqa?

Secretary CARTER. With respect to Mosul, Mr. Chairman, it is hard to say, because it—that depends much on the progress of the Iraqi Security Forces, which I described, in building themselves into a more capable combat force.

With respect to Ramadi, as I described——

Chairman MCCAIN. Raqqa. Raqqa. Raqqa.

Secretary CARTER. Oh, Raqqa. Well, Raqqa, there the—and you noted this, yourself, Mr. Chairman—the Syrian Kurds to the north have done an excellent job of clearing their territory. We're going to——

Chairman MCCAIN. They're not going to——

Secretary CARTER.—work with the Syrian Arabs——

Chairman MCCAIN. They're not going to go into Raqqa, and you and I know that.

Secretary CARTER. They're not going to go to Raqqa. No, no, no. No. It's—the Syrian Arab—it would be the Syrian Arabs.

Chairman MCCAIN. I guess the point is, Mr. Secretary, here we are with attacks on the homeland, the United States of America. We have not contained ISIL. We have no timeline—the timeline I was given when Senator Graham and I went over there was at least the end of next year before Mosul, and there is no plan, no strategy, to retake Raqqa. I think it's pretty obvious to all that, as long as they have a caliphate base, then they are able to orchestrate attacks such as they've successfully achieved in the last several weeks, whether it be the—Ankara, Russian airliner, southern Beirut, Paris, or San Bernardino. So, here we are with a—and you described some measures that are probably very helpful, but with no timeline of which to take out the caliphate from which there are many things happening, including, according to news reports, developing chemical weapons. So—and this is why I'm really puzzled.

This morning, by the way, on one of the news shows, former head of the United States Army—Chief of Staff of the United States

Army, General Ray Odierno, said we ought to have American contingent of troops on the ground. I, frankly, do not understand the logic in your statement about—said, while you certainly have the capability to furnish a U.S. component in such a ground force, "we've not recommended, because it would be a significant undertaking." I agree. "We would have to do it largely by ourselves." I do not agree. "It would be ceding our comparative advantage"? We'd be—"And the meaning—in the medium term, it would seem to Americanize the conflicts." Does somehow—does anybody really believe that if the United States struck back against the people that just slaughtered some American in San Bernardino, that somehow that would encourage them? What encourages them, Mr. Secretary, is success. They have a pretty serious record, here, of success, just in the last several—couple of months since you were here.

So, I do not understand why in the world you wouldn't want, as General Jack Keane, the architect of the surge, the successful surge, and others, military leaders, including, this morning, former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, a small component of American forces with an international force which could be—if the United States had the credibility, could be gathered and then go in and take out this caliphate. As long as the caliphate—I know of no expert who doesn't believe that, as long as this caliphate exists in Raqqa, they're going to be able to orchestrate attacks and metastasize, and maybe even move to Libya.

So, maybe you can help the committee out again that this would somehow cede a comparative advantage if we went in with a large Arab force—the Turks and Egyptians, even, and other Sunni nations—and go in there and take those people out. There's 20 to 30,000 of them that—it's—they are not giants. So—but, finally——

Secretary CARTER. May I——

Chairman MCCAIN.—someone's going to have to convince me that airpower alone, and Special Operations Forces, are going to succeed in the short term in order to prevent further things, such as San Bernardino. I'd love to hear you response.

Secretary CARTER. A couple of things, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, to your main point about more American forces—and I would say Special Forces, but others, as well, that train, advise, assist, and accompany—they're not Special Forces—we are doing——

Chairman MCCAIN. I was talking about a multinational force.

Secretary CARTER. Well, there, Mr. Chairman, as I indicated, I, too, wish that particularly the Sunni Arab nations of the Gulf would do more. And going way back——

Chairman MCCAIN. They are willing to do so.

Secretary CARTER.—to March——

Chairman MCCAIN.—if there's——

Secretary CARTER. I've had lengthy conversations with——

Chairman MCCAIN. So have I.

Secretary CARTER.—representatives there. Well, I have to say that I have consistently emphasized to them that they have a unique role, here, and also, insofar as they're concerned about Iran, which is another concern they have—and, by the way, that we have, also—totally different, but serious, subject also—that what

I've emphasized to them is that we don't like it, but the Iranians are in the game, on the ground. I very much would like, and we would very much welcome—and we've repeatedly said this—working with those countries on the ground, because we believe, as you noted, that they have—would have a distinctive advantage in a ground fight.

With respect to the Europeans, the Europeans have, generally speaking, offered to do more within their capabilities and capacities. I will note here—and there—this is uneven across Europe, but, in general, I am quite concerned with the level of investment that Europe is making in its militaries and its alliance and partnership therefore with the United States. There is much more that their economies would enable them to do, and that their history, as standing up for the same kind of civilized values that we stand up with, really require of them. So, while we're getting more from the Europeans—and I indicated I've asked for more—I'd like there to be still more. So, in that sense, I completely am with you.

I just—I simply in—on the basis of my urgent and persistent consultations with them, am less—have less high hopes, perhaps, than you that they would assemble such a force. We would certainly welcome that.

With that, I also don't want to——

Chairman MCCAIN. Could I just say that I urgently and fervently asked you for a strategy that you can tell us when we're going to take Mosul, when we're going to take Raqqa, and when we're going to wipe out this caliphate. Frankly, I have not seen that.

General, did you want to add anything?

General SELVA. Sir, I would add three points.

First, I agree completely that defending the homeland is our top priority.

Second, taking the fight——

Chairman MCCAIN. That's helpful.

General SELVA.—taking the fight to the caliphate is what is going on today in Iraq and Syria. The combination of increasing the momentum with the movements in Iraq in Baiji, as well as in Ramadi, and partnering with Sunni——

Chairman MCCAIN. Again, General, there is no timeline for Mosul and Raqqa, which is the basis of the caliphate.

General SELVA. Sir, the fight on the ground defines the progress we will make against the caliphate. We have put significant pressure on northern Syria. We have taken—with Syrian Arab coalition partners, have taken significant ground in the north and the east of Syria. They are using the equipment that we have provided to put pressure on ISIL's main lines of communication between Raqqa and Mosul. To provide a timeline would deny the fact that the enemy on the ground gets a vote, but they do not have freedom of maneuver. They do not have operational freedom of maneuver, they do not have tactical freedom of maneuver.

Chairman MCCAIN. General, they were just able to orchestrate an attack in San Bernardino, California.

My time is long ago expired.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, we've all come to the conclusion we need American forces on the ground. The question, very generically, is how many, and what are they going to do? This is a unique situation, but we've got some analogies, or at least examples. One, in Enduring Freedom, we sent in specialized teams of U.S. personnel and—airpower—and, together with local forces, were able to disrupt and then ultimately defeat the Taliban. In Iraqi Freedom, we sent in conventional forces, we won a very swift and brilliant conventional victory, and then were confronted with instability and counter-insurgency. It would seem to me that you're tending to favor the former model, which would be to have specialized troops in there with our airpower, et cetera, and that the constraining factor right now is the local indigenous forces on the ground, particularly Arab forces—not Kurdish forces, but Arab forces. I am told there's about 100, sort of, new Syrian fighters that have been trained, that are on the ground, that are the potential. Can you elaborate on those comments?

Secretary CARTER. I can. First of all, with respect to the Afghan experience, I agree with your general analysis of the history of those two incidents. That was a circumstance, in 2001 and 2002, where we were able, very rapidly and extremely effectively, to leverage a preexisting indigenous force—namely, largely the Northern Alliance—which we had, over the previous, geez, decade or so, built up in order to fight the Soviets. They actually succeeding at expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan. That force, that organization, and other organizations of the so-called Mujahideen in those days, we could quickly link up with again. By providing them—enabling, exactly in this manner, they would advance. That would cause the Taliban to expose their positions, and we could cream them from the air. So, that was a perfect example—ideal. We'd like to replicate that. Of course, in this current circumstance in Syria and Iraq, we're having to build those forces, and they don't exist in the same way that they did in the Northern Alliance.

With respect to the new Syrian forces—and it gets back to the funding issue—we did change our approach to training and equipping Syrian forces. Our early experience there was disappointing. I've said that. I always told you I'm going to be very honest about things. That didn't work out very well, because we were trying to build units from scratch. What our—the new approach—and by—the one we're asking you to fund, and we are providing—I'm willing to send up a team today to brief you further on what we're looking for. But, we really need this agility if we're going to fight a war, so I'd plead with you to take the briefings or whatever. We have a reason for requesting this money. It's different from the old program. We learned our lesson. We're doing something different, which is this. We're taking units that have already formed and have undertaken to combat ISIL. The Syrian Arab coalition is an example of that. Instead of making—trying to create a brand new force or recruit a brand new force—and then put them, including by being on the ground with them, but especially equipping them and providing them with airpower, amplifying their power. We hope—and this gets to the Chairman's question about a timeline for Raqqa—the—that if we make them successful as they move fur-

ther south—remember, now these are Syrian Arabs, not Kurds—the Chairman rightly noted wouldn't be appropriate for us——

Senator REED. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—to attack largely Arab Raqqa—that they and their success will build, so to speak, a snowball that accumulates more fighters as they go. As that accumulates and there are more of them, we'll do more in—to fall in behind them, with the objective, then, of them taking Raqqa, which would be a very important victory in the heart of ISIL territory.

Senator REED. Thank you.

General, quickly, the command arrangements. General Sean MacFarland is now the joint commander with operational control both in Iraq and Syria, I understand. Are you satisfied, and General Dunford satisfied, that you have the best framework for command now to integrate all of the DOD elements and ancillary elements you need?

General SELVA. Yes, sir. The Joint Task Force command structure in Baghdad that covers both Iraq and Syria is more than adequate to cover the military maneuver that's required and to orchestrate the forces that are required, and has the support of Central Command's headquarters as a oversight and supporting headquarters.

Senator REED. They have the flexibility to make critical decisions in a timely way without sort of second-guessing up and down the line?

General SELVA. Yes, sir.

Senator REED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Sessions.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate your remarks. There's a great deal of frustration, Secretary Carter, and concern that we're drifting and reacting and not in—don't have the kind of plan that will lead to success, number one.

Number two, I understand now the President says he wants an authorization of force. But, because of the difficulties and bungling I think that we've seen so far, we're going to have to know what you're going to do, how you're going to do it, how it's going to be successful. That is not clear. It's not clear to the American people. It's not clear to Congress, not clear to our European allies, our allies in the Middle East, or our enemies. That's a problem we've got. It's just very real.

Secondly, I think that Secretary Bob Gates was correct to say we need an overarching strategy for this whole deal with Islamic extremism in maybe 20, 30, 50 years. We've used the word "containment" to deal with that. However, that does not mean that, in a long-term strategy of containment of extremism, that we don't have to act decisively and militarily now.

I just think, and I shared with you, that we're—I believe the Defense Department is underestimating the significance of the refugee crisis, the impact it's having in Europe, the impact it's having in the United States, what's happening from all this disorder and the flee of human beings and the deaths that's being caused and the humanitarian disaster that's out there.

So, it seems to me, does it not to you, that a prompt, decisive action to create safe zones in Syria, where people don't have to flee their home country, can be kept safe there, would be positive as a matter of humanity and as a military possibility?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Senator. I'll begin, including on the safe zones, and then perhaps ask the Vice Chairman to add in. He's done a lot of work on that, as well.

I'll just note, with respect to the AUMF [Authorization for Use of Military Force], that we have the—I'm not a lawyer, but I'm told, and I'm glad, otherwise it would be a problem—we have the authority, legal authority, to do what we want to do. The AUMF, as I've testified, that the President submitted would also allow us to do everything we need to do in this campaign.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, just don't blame the Congress——

Secretary CARTER. And——

Senator SESSIONS.—for not rubberstamping it immediately——

Secretary CARTER. Yeah. No, I understand——

Senator SESSIONS.—if we don't understand what the——

Secretary CARTER. I think it's okay. In fact, I didn't even mention it, for just that—for just that reason.

You're right. I—I associate myself with you about acting decisively. I do recognize that there may be decades of combating radicalism, in general. But, we need to go after ISIL in its parent tumor, in Iraq and Syria, now, and urgently. So, I associate myself with that point of view.

Refugees is a tragic matter. By the way, I—just a reminder that only about half of other refugees are actually from Syria. They are also, importantly, from Libya, from Afghanistan, from throughout Africa. While there are women and children and—caught up in this circumstance, the great bulk of them are young people, mostly male, and professionally oriented, who are looking for work. That's why German companies are at the train station, recruiting them off the trains for their companies. That's the reality. But, what does that mean for the countries from which they come? It's a tremendous talent drain, as well as a humanitarian issue. So, all the more reason why in Syria, to the extent that's part of—a major part of the refugee crisis, we have to get an end to the civil war there and get a government that can govern decently. Assad's government is not that.

With respect to safe zones, we have thought about that. I've certainly thought about that a great deal. I'll begin and describe—the concept of a safe zone would be to create a patch of Syria that—wherein people who are inclined to go there could go there and be protected. They would need to be protected, because you can foresee that at least ISIL and other radical groups, and quite possibly elements of the Assad regime, would undertake to prove that it wasn't safe. So, it would have to be made safe, and that takes us back to the question of who—what's the—an appropriate force of that size to protect a zone of that size? It's—in our estimates, it's substantial. Again, I don't see, much as I wish otherwise, anybody offering to furnish that force.

I also think we have thought about who might want to reside in such a zone. I think it would undesirable if it became a place into which people were pushed, say, from Turkey or Europe, expelled,

so to speak, into this zone. I don't know what the people who now live in the zone would think about other people coming into the zone. That would have to be taken into account—and whether other people want to live there.

So, it's—so, we have thought about it. It's complicated. We have not recommended that, because it's an undertaking of substantial scale, wherein I—my judgment, the costs outweigh the benefits.

Let me ask General Selva——

Senator SESSIONS. Just—before you answer, on—a major European Ambassador told me that the Europeans have recommended that, and the United States has said no. Is that correct?

Secretary CARTER. No European defense leader has indicated a willingness to do that and contribute to a force to do that.

Senator SESSIONS. Well, I asked him twice. I said, "So, you've recommended that, and the United States is the one saying no?" That's what he said, "Yes."

Secretary CARTER. I haven't observed that, no.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator McCaskill.

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you.

If you would disagree with any of these statements, I'm going to summarize a letter that General Lloyd Austin sent to Senator King about what is the situation in the fight against ISIL.

Number one, ISIL is losing territory. Correct? I won't go into all the details that delineate the territory they've lost, but—because I don't want to take the time, but certainly it's factually available to any member of the committee or any American.

Secondly, ISIL is losing leadership. Correct?

Secretary CARTER. Yes.

Senator MCCASKILL. We've—we have, in fact, taken out more than 100 of ISIL's leadership, including the Special Ops taking out their chief financial officer, where we gained a great deal of intelligence about what was funding ISIL. Secondly, air strikes taking out their online recruiting campaign, the cyber caliphate, and also the top commander in Libya. Correct?

Secretary CARTER. That—that's—and "Jihadi John," the executioner, another one of note. But, there are many, yes.

Senator MCCASKILL. We have taken—and they are losing funding, correct?

Secretary CARTER. That is correct.

Senator MCCASKILL. We have—the coalition airstrikes have destroyed hundreds of oil transport trucks just in the last 30 days——

Secretary CARTER. That's——

Senator MCCASKILL.—correct?

Secretary CARTER.—true.

Senator MCCASKILL. In addition to oil operations infrastructure that we have taken out with our airstrikes.

Secretary CARTER. True also.

Senator MCCASKILL. Okay. So, one of our colleagues, who is not here today, which is interesting, considering this would be a pretty important hearing if you're running for President, he has said, quote—this is Senator Cruz—has said, "We will utterly destroy ISIS. We will carpet-bomb them into oblivion. I don't know if sand can glow in the dark, but we're going to find out."

How many women and children would be involved if we carpet-bombed the areas where ISIS is currently a stronghold? What are we talking about, in terms of lives lost of women and children in those areas? Does anybody have an estimate?

Secretary CARTER. I—Senator, I'll let General Selva speak that. That is, of course, not our approach. We are very effective from the air, but we take some——

Senator MCCASKILL. We're surgical.

Secretary CARTER.—which is able to be effective. We're able to be effective, while minimizing collateral damage.

Senator MCCASKILL. One of the reasons the locations we took out was so important is, now we've forced their transport trucks out into the open, where we can find them and take them out; whereas, when they're in the city center, we'd kill thousands of innocent people, correct?

General SELVA. Senator, our process is to be as deliberate as possible, as careful as we can, with the intelligence that we have, and to discriminately strike targets and avoid civilian collateral damage. That has been our process since day one. It has proven very effective. I—that's where I would end the comment.

Senator MCCASKILL. Isn't the biggest danger to the homeland the ability of this extreme jihad viewpoint being transferred to Americans and them become radicalized and do what these people did in San Bernardino? Isn't that the biggest threat to our homeland?

General SELVA. Senator, it's clear from ISIL's strategy that their objective is to cause us to engage in what they believe is an apocalyptic war with the West. Anything that we do to feed that particular frame of thinking counters our national security. We have to be very careful about how we prosecute a campaign that appears to be an indiscriminate attempt to attack ISIL and the population that surrounds it.

Senator MCCASKILL. If we did an indiscriminate carpet-bombing of a major area, and killed thousands of women and children, would you assume that would have some impact on their ability to recruit misguided barbarians, like this couple that took out more than a dozen innocent people last week? I would have to assume it would put their recruiting on steroids.

General SELVA. Senator, I'm going to avoid anything hypothetical. What I would say categorically is, the process you described as your hypothetical question is not the way that we apply force in combat. It isn't now, nor will it ever be.

Senator MCCASKILL. Ever.

General SELVA. No, ma'am.

Senator MCCASKILL. If we cleared out Raqqa, which I have no doubt that our military could do, if we could—cleared our Raqqa or Ramadi, do we have any local force capable of providing security on the ground in those locations ongoing?

General SELVA. Senator, I can't talk about specifically about Raqqa, because we don't have that kind of intelligence on Raqqa. In the case of Ramadi, there is a Sunni—predominantly Sunni police force that is ready to follow in behind the force that is attempting to take Ramadi back, and it is the intention of the Iraqi Government to put that police force in place. I don't, at this instant, have the numbers. I can provide them for you if you'd like them.

Senator MCCASKILL. But, in Raqqa, are we aware of any force that is available to secure and hold Raqqa if we were able to take it out, or would we have to stay as long as it took?

General SELVA. The forces that we are aware of at this point are the Syrian Democratic Forces that are working with Kurdish partners that are willing to put pressure on Raqqa. It's not clear that that force is large enough to be the hold force and the security force that would follow. That is one of the reasons that we have advocated and gotten authorities to put Special Ops Forces into Syria to build that depth of intelligence to understand which forces are available to put increasing pressure and a hold force into Raqqa.

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you very much.

Chairman MCCAIN. You don't want to neglect World War II, General Selva, as far as carpet-bombing is concerned.

Senator Sullivan has asked for—to take precedence over his colleagues.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Fix this mic, here. Thanks. Having a mic issue.

Mr. Secretary, General, good to see you.

You know, I think one of the things that's—you're hearing here is a common theme, really from all our colleagues, is a sense of urgency. So, you're laying out the strategy. I think some of the elements that you've highlighted in your testimony look like they're useful elements of strategy, but they're—there's a strong belief that there's a lack of sense of urgency, here. I think one only had to watch the press conference between President—with President Obama and President Francois Hollande, and you saw one leader who was very urgent, he was going around the world trying to get our allies motivated on this, and you saw another leader—unfortunately, it was our President—was very passive. I think, no matter what the strategy is, if there's not engaged American leadership, serious leadership, that people believe that we're in there and committed to the strategy, we're not going to be able to do any of these things. We've talked about an Arab army force. They're not going to follow unless they believe we're fully committed. So, I think that's one of the elements of the frustration that you see among the members on the committee today.

Let me ask you, in terms of strategy. Now, this is a bit of a difficult question, but let's say that there's another, kind of, San Bernardino event, but maybe much bigger, in our country, maybe 200 Americans killed, an ISIS-directed attack on Americans. Would we keep the same strategy right now, or would we keep the same strategic patience, as the White House calls it? Assume you had a crystal ball and you saw that coming two weeks from now or three weeks from now, where 200 Americans are killed by—would you be satisfied that this should be the strategy?

Secretary CARTER. As far as the military campaign is concerned, Senator, I just want to say, I share your sense of urgency. As far as——

Senator SULLIVAN. But, it doesn't seem like the President does. I think that's a real common—even members of his own party have indicated that.

Secretary CARTER. He has encouraged General Dunford and me, and we have encouraged all of our subordinate commanders, as

was asked—said before, to propose ways to accelerate the campaign. The—he has approved all the ones we've proposed so far. We expect to propose more, as I indicated, and to gather momentum in this campaign.

With respect to others following——

Senator SULLIVAN. So, let me ask just the question I—if you can address the question I asked. Assume there's a Paris-like attack, 200 Americans killed. God forbid it happens, right? None of us want that to happen. But, let's say that happens and it's directed by ISIS. Would you go back to the President, saying, "Keep the same strategy"?

Secretary CARTER. Well, look, Senator, if I had more to recommend to him to accelerate the defeat of ISIL in Syria and Iraq, I'd be doing it now.

Senator SULLIVAN. But, isn't that the key question? That we want to make sure we don't have 200 Americans killed in an ISIS-like attack, so we should be doing everything now so we don't have to be motivated to do it once it happens?

Secretary CARTER. I think—again, on the military campaign, it is as I said. With respect to homeland security—and here, I'd have to refer you to Secretary——

Senator SULLIVAN. But, they're all related——

Secretary CARTER.—Jeh Johnson—of course—and so forth. I know that you all are considering various provisions in the law that affect visa waivers and so forth. I think there are probably some improvements and steps that can be taken in that direction. If there are, again, I would refer you to Secretary Johnson and Director James Comey and Attorney General Loretta Lynch and others on that. I——

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, Mr. Secretary, I just—I think it's important. We can't wait for an attack—a big attack—we've already just had one—on our country to get the President engaged and more urgent. I think that's the frustration that you're seeing.

Let me ask a related question on urgency. Do you believe that the longer ISIS holds territory, that that increases risk to the homeland? Do you think that's a—so, if they hold more territory, and they continue to do so, does that increase risk to our citizens here at home?

Secretary CARTER. Whenever a terrorist group finds safe haven somewhere from which to plot against the United States, that's a danger to the United States. We've been pursuing such groups for—since 9/11, and actually before, and we have to do that with respect to ISIL today. So, yes, that's absolutely right.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here. I appreciate very much your service, too.

Secretary Carter, I think that, you know, all—you can—the frustration—I can just speak for the constituents in West Virginia, all the good people and all the military that we have from West Virginia. We're just—they ask me the question, "What's the end game this time? Is it going to repeat what we've done before? Are we

going to get bogged down for 10 years or more again? American men and women in our National Guard people put on the front line, in jeopardy?" So, if ISIS and/or Assad would fall, if we're able to make that transition, how do we prevent that being filled by another terrorist group? Because, you know, we started out with the Taliban we heard about first, then al-Qaeda, then all the spinoffs of al-Qaeda, and then ISIS came about. So, they believe that, basically, when you cut the head off, you can't kill the snake. That's what they're concerned about. How do you ever have an end game that has any type of normalty—or normalty from that area, if it's even possible?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I've been speaking, obviously, mostly of the military campaign and the urgent need——

Senator MANCHIN. Yeah.

Secretary CARTER.—to crush ISIL. You're asking a—the—a very good question. I said the political line of effort is fundamental here, because, in order to have what you're correctly identifying as the end state that will keep the peace in the long run, there has to be, first of all, in Syria, a political transition from Assad to a government that includes some of the opposition—the moderate opposition that's been countering him, and preserves some of the structure of the Government of Syria so people can have a government there that functions and is decent.

In Iraq, a government along the lines that Prime Minister Abadi says—and I believe he's genuine, he's trying to create there, which is one he—he calls it, I think, a decentralized Iraq, namely one in which the different sectarian elements of Iraqi territory, mainly Sunnis and Shiites and Kurds, can remain one state, but have enough autonomy within their different areas that they're not going at each other. That's absolutely fundamental in both——

Senator MANCHIN. Mr. Secretary——

Secretary CARTER.—of those places.

Senator MANCHIN. Mr. Secretary, if I could ask this question. I think the perfect—have we identified anybody—any group that we think's—can take over if Assad's put aside to where the—I mean, are we able to come to an agreement—and we have to come to agreement, I would assume—with Russia? Because they're much involved in that. Iran seems to be having an awful lot of input in that. Are we three going to be able to come to agreement of a new leadership in that—that's going to bring the rebel—so-called friendly rebels in and everyone turns their efforts towards ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I'd have to refer you to Secretary Kerry on that matter. But, it—I think that's exactly what he's trying to do. In addition to the three parties you mentioned—namely, us and the Russians and the Iranians—and, of course, the Russians and the Iranians are on the—working in the wrong direction at the moment, so it means getting them turned around. But, also I might note, all the Gulf—Sunni Gulf states that we've talked about, otherwise, would need to be involved, as well. That's the end state that will keep the peace in Syria.

Senator MANCHIN. Can you give me—I understand that they're currently meeting in Saudi Arabia now, talking about all of these things that we're talking about right now. Why hasn't the YPG [People's Protection Units] or the Syrian Kurds been involved in

these talks? Why do you think they haven't—which has seemed to be the most effective ground troops we have in Syria right now—of them leading the charges, and they're not even asked to be at the table. Would that be because we're trying to please the Saudis and not upset the Turks? Or——

Secretary CARTER. Can I get back to you on that question? I don't know where, diplomatically—I mean, we are obviously in touch with them. We are—and Secretary Kerry knows that and is——

Senator MANCHIN. Sure.

Secretary CARTER.—involved with them. I simply——

Senator MANCHIN. Sure.

Secretary CARTER.—would have to give you——

Senator MANCHIN. The other thing I'd——

Secretary CARTER.—a considered answer.

[The information referred to follows:]

The State Department is ably leading these talks and would be best positioned to respond to this question.

Senator MANCHIN.—like to get your opinion on is that—you know, we've been talking about, "What do we do for the visas—visa waivers?" I've had a lot of conversation with different people from that part of the world that basically have located in West Virginia. They understand that we have to have a much tougher, much stronger vetting process, or—they don't want to relax that at all.

The other thing they would be acceptable to is biometric scanning. I'm thinking biometric scanning—people can change their name, they can change their appearance, they can't change who they are. To me, I think the American people would be a lot more comfortable if we go down that path and says, "There will be no more visas coming to this country unless you've had biometric scanning and we know who you are." That's something that's accepted, I think, in—is it—is that something that you think, in your thought process, would be feasible, we could do?

Secretary CARTER. I really would need to defer you to the Department of Homeland Security and so forth on that, Senator. Very good question. I just simply don't know a good answer.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. I want to thank you both for being here.

General Selva, could you tell us what percentage of U.S. sorties are returning in the fight right now against ISIS without dropping munitions?

General SELVA. Madam Senator, it depends on which day and which target set we're talking about, but roughly 40 percent come back every day not having struck dynamic targets, with weapons still aboard.

Senator AYOTTE. So, let me ask you this. We asked Central Command recently whether or not the Department of Defense JTACs [Joint Terminal Attack Controllers] are operating outside of operations centers. Basically, what we heard back is that they weren't. So, I would like to hear from you, Secretary Carter, and you, General Selva—I mean, we know that the—one of the things that makes our airstrikes even more effective are the forward air controllers on the ground calling them in. What is our position, in fact, on embedding JTACs, whether it's with the Kurds or Iraqi forces,

so that we can more effectively bomb ISIS and take out the most productive targets to defeat them?

Secretary CARTER. First, I'll note a very good memory I have of your coming to the Pentagon with a number of JTACs——

Senator AYOTTE. I did.

Secretary CARTER.—a couple of months ago.

Senator AYOTTE. I appreciate—we met with the JTAC Associations. Thank you for doing that.

Secretary CARTER. Oh, thank you. It was very grateful, and they're great people, because they represent veterans of a great capability. And a—that's—we talk about American comparative advantage, this is one of the things we are incomparably good at and that is very effective when we do it.

The answer to your question is yes, we are—I want to be careful about what we're doing actually today, as I speak, but we are doing that, accompanying. People who have those—and, by the way, other skills—intelligence skills and other skills that allow us to leverage a local force and make it much more powerful by bringing in the full weight of America—America's might behind it. It's the JTACs and those kind of skills that create that connection between a motivated local force and the might of American power.

General Selva, do you want to say anything about JTACs?

General SELVA. Senator, in areas where we're not able to accompany to the nearest point of contact, we have actually trained Syrian Arabs, members of the New Syrian Forces, as well as our Iraqi partners, to provide the kind of precision target identification that's necessary. Then we're passing that pack through JTACs to be vetted in Ops Centers.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I'm glad to hear this, because what we were hearing before is that they were only in the Ops Centers. Obviously, when possible, getting them at the battalion level is going to make the difference. So, we can train all the other people we want, but we know our guys are the best, and women who do this. That they're going to be able to call in these airstrikes. We've got 40 percent returning. We can increase that percentage dramatically by having the right information on the ground.

One question I've gotten a lot of is—you know, I saw, in your testimony, Secretary Carter, that we've taken out 400 ISIS fuel trucks at this point. I appreciated the report that there were 116 of those taken out with the help of A–10s. But, why did it take so long for us to go after assets like the fuel trucks, knowing where they were? I think there's a lot of people that have asked that. Are we going to be more aggressive in really going after these assets, going forward?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, we're going to be more aggressive, but—and what made it possible was intelligence that we didn't have before. That is what allowed us to identify those parts of the oil infrastructure that are being used to fund ISIL. We greatly increased our insight into that infrastructure in recent months. This is one of the ways that, as our intelligence, which I have to say, when I started out, had a lot of improvement to be done in—there, in terms of collection and graininess of data and so forth—is getting a lot better. That is also a huge enabler. Because when those JTACs call in airstrikes, it's based upon an intelligence foundation.

That's getting—that is what made the critical difference in our ability to go after the energy infrastructure——

Senator AYOTTE. So, I don't want to—I don't want to interrupt, but I need to, since my time is almost up, and a really important topic before we leave, and that's Iran. We've now been informed that Iran has made another missile test, on November 21st. We know that previously they made a missile test on October 10th, in violation of existing U.N. resolutions. As far as I can tell, in raising this with the administration, nothing has been happening. No response. These are certainly—our own Ambassador to the U.N. has said the October 10th, clear violation of the U.N. resolution. You and I have talked, Secretary Carter, about the importance of stopping them from having ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missiles] capability. Yet, they continue to test, in violation of U.N. resolutions. What's our response?

Secretary CARTER. Well, what we're doing, in the Defense Department—and you may remember, we discussed this shortly after the nuclear deal was made with Iran—is, basically, we continue to deter Iran to counter its malign influence, to have a military presence in the region, which is oriented not only toward the urgent need to defeat ISIL in its homeland, but we also have to remember we need to deter and counter Iran, as well.

As far as its ballistic missile program is concerned, as you know, we're making some improvements in our—both qualitative and quantitative—in our missile defense system. That's principally oriented towards North Korea at the moment, but it's also a capability that will be relevant against Iran, in the unfortunate event which—sometime in the future they were able, as we discussed earlier, to field an ICBM.

On the specific matter of this missile test, I'd refer you to the U.S./U.N. or our—or the State Department on that. But, on the military side, we are continuing unchanged in our need to deter and counter Iranian malign influence in the region.

Senator AYOTTE. Let me just say this. I'm all for—I've been long supporting enhancing our missile defense system in this country, but there already are existing U.N. resolutions that they're in violation of, that—in testing these missiles. If we don't respond to their violations in a very forceful way, then this agreement—we might as well—you know, this—tear this JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] up, because it doesn't matter, because this issue is already a demonstration of them really backing off on international commitments with this agreement pending.

Chairman MCCAIN. Before I recognize Senator Donnelly, Mr. Secretary, you may want to correct the record. We all knew those fuel trucks were moving back and forth. We've seen them. We knew it. A decision was not made by the White House to attack them. I think you may want to correct the record, because I certainly knew——

Secretary CARTER. Well, I can——

Chairman MCCAIN.—that the fuel trucks were——

Secretary CARTER. Not a matter of correction at all. I can clarify, if you—if that would help.

The—that is the case. And the—what the air commanders were able to do is identify those trucks—and in a classified setting, I can

describe exactly how that information was obtained—which were directly supporting ISIL. We have and continue to try to withhold attacks upon that part of the general infrastructure—energy, electricity, water, et cetera—that is also necessary for the people of Syria. We're trying to peel off that which is—which ISIL uses in command and controls for its own revenue source. We are now able to make that distinction, which is what enabled the airstrikes, Chairman.

With regard to where that intelligence came from and so forth, I'd be happy to have somebody come up and tell you in a classified manner.

Chairman MCCAIN. I'll be glad to. But, I repeat, we knew those fuel trucks were moving back and forth. We saw them. Through ISR [Intelligence Surveillance, and Reconnaissance]—and the decision was not made in the White House to attack them or not. You can't tell me they were moving all that stuff back and forth for over a year and we didn't know about it. I mean, it's just not possible, given our technologically—capabilities. But, I'll be glad to hear additional information. But, I was told directly, in Iraq, that we didn't attack them because the decision had not been made to attack them, and they didn't want to harm anybody. So, I'll be glad to call those people a liar that briefed me that were doing those attacks.

Senator Donnelly.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you said before that none of the European defense ministers has offered to provide troops to creating a safe zone. Have you asked any of them to provide troops for creating a safe zone and to provide an area for Syrian refugees?

Secretary CARTER. We've talked to them about all kinds of capabilities. As I indicated——

Senator DONNELLY. Did you ask any of them to provide troops to help create a safe zone?

Secretary CARTER. Well, we believe that a—the costs outweigh the benefits——

Senator DONNELLY. So, you——

Secretary CARTER.—of a safe zone. So, that is——

Senator DONNELLY. So, it's safe to say——

Secretary CARTER.—not something——

Senator DONNELLY.—we did not ask them.

Secretary CARTER. We—I have not asked them for forces for that undertaking. I have asked them persistently for forces of all kinds for undertakings where we think the benefits outweigh the costs. There are many of those.

Senator DONNELLY. What are the answers that you're getting from the French, from the English, from the Saudis, from the Jordanians?

Secretary CARTER. It varies. But, just to—the French, as I mentioned, were truly galvanized. I spoke several times to the French Defense Minister. He came here to the United States. We've talked. They're doing a great deal more. I'm sorry about the circumstances that galvanized them——

Senator DONNELLY. My expectation——

Secretary CARTER.—but I appreciate the help.

Senator DONNELLY.—is that if you asked the French Defense Minister for troops for a safe zone, he would probably offer them.

Additionally, what I'm trying to find out is—I believe also, like you and like others, when ISIS holds ground, it makes it more dangerous for our own country, because they have a safe haven to work out of. So, I have confidence that we're working in Iraq to move them out of Iraq. Then we look at Syria. So, we talk about 100 people in training. They have 20,000 on the ISIS side. How do we get to Raqqa, and when do we get to Raqqa, when we are training 100 people? Where do the other people come from?

Secretary CARTER. The people that we are now not only training—in fact, not even principally training, but equipping and enabling, are Syrian Arab forces that are working with the Kurdish YPG in the northern part of Syria. They are prepared to advance. They already have, as I indicated, advanced south. We are enabling them. We're doing more to enable them. As they do more, we will do yet more to enable them.

Senator DONNELLY. Do we have any timeline——

Secretary CARTER. They're the right force to do it, if I may say, because they're Syrian Arabs.

Senator DONNELLY. Well, you know, I was in Saudi Arabia, and they said, "We want to put in troops to help." Maybe they told you different. Maybe they wouldn't actually do it. But, they said they want to put in troops to help. King Abdullah, in Jordan, said, "We want to put in troops to help." So, you have Sunnis in Jordan, you have Sunnis in Saudi Arabia who want to put in troops to move the ball to head toward Raqqa. So, you have other groups that want to help, as well. Do you not want their help, or do you not think that they——

Secretary CARTER. We welcome everything King Abdullah is doing, and are very grateful to it. As I said, I've spoken to the Saudis, and I remind you that the—that we had a—the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] leaders to Camp David, back in—geez, that was—I think it was April or so—and specifically talked to them about the creation of a Sunni-Arab combined force. So—and that has not——

Senator DONNELLY. So, why can't we——

Secretary CARTER.—materialized among them.

Senator DONNELLY.—get that off the ground? Isn't that the force that gets to Raqqa?

Secretary CARTER. Well, it depends on—from one to another. I would prefer to speak about part of this—these things privately.

Senator DONNELLY. That's fine.

Secretary CARTER. But, one thing that's very clear, in the case of the Saudis, just to—since you mentioned them, has been the Yemen situation, which has preoccupied a lot of the time and energy of their forces, as well as their leadership.

Senator DONNELLY. I also spoke with some of the Sunni tribal leaders today. They still have extraordinary humanitarian needs. Do we have a plan to work to meet those? Because they still have people who are starving.

Secretary CARTER. Yeah, there is. It's a—State Department, AID [Agency for International Development], and various international donors are part of that. I can't speak to that authoritatively. Sec-

retary Kerry could. But, it's important to note, from the military point of view, from our point of view, because it's an important part of holding territory once it's taken. To give you an example, when Tikrit was retaken, it was important that order be kept, that services be restored, and that humanitarian assistance be rendered. That's why people are moving back into Tikrit——

Senator DONNELLY. I apologize, Mr. Secretary. I have a vote I have to get to. I just want to finish up by saying this. It is strongly believed, by me and many others, that, as long as Raqqa is held and other areas are held, that dramatically increases the chance of another attack in our country. When we ask, "When are we going to get to Raqqa and move them out?"—it's not because we're trying to find a date, it's because it's extraordinarily dangerous to the citizens of this country that they're there. So, the sooner the better that we clear up the clutter with the Saudis, the Jordanians, and move on that city.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary CARTER. Amen.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you mentioned the targeting force. What impact do you expect that force to have on the battlefield?

Secretary CARTER. I'm sorry. Well, I'm hoping it has a very great effect. That's what it's designed to do. I believe it will. The—it—the—we envision a variety of missions for—I want to be careful what I say here—that range from interdicting individuals on the move, leaders on the move, to the kind of—well, let me give you two examples where we've already employed this technique, because, again, I want to be very careful about operational security here. This is a no-kidding, you know, force that'll be doing important things. But, to—I think it would help everyone to understand. If you remember the raid that killed Abu Sayyaf, that's an example of the kind of thing that this force could do. Another one was the freeing of 70 prisoners—ISIL prisoners in which a very heroic action was taken by a soldier, Joshua——

Senator FISCHER. Correct.

Secretary CARTER.—Wheeler——

Senator FISCHER. We've seen——

Secretary CARTER. So, there's an example of the kinds of things that can be done. It puts the leadership on notice. It'll get valuable intelligence. It'll free people, in the case of that kind of mission. So, there's a variety of missions, and I——

Senator FISCHER. Correct. I—if I can, we've seen those two raids in the last year and a half. Would you anticipate that we're going to see a greater frequency with this force in the days and weeks and months ahead?

Secretary CARTER. That's absolutely the intent, Senator.

Senator FISCHER. I would hope we could have general conversations—I realize the sensitivity of this force, but I would hope we could have general conversations about them so we could lay out truly what the goals are when we're talking about the force. Do you have any immediate goals in mind for this targeting force that you can speak about in a—general terms at this point?

Secretary CARTER. In general terms, they fall in the categories I described: intelligence-gathering, interdiction of leadership, key nodes, facilitation—and certainly, for you, we can discuss more in a classified setting also. But, that's the kind of thing that—it's actually a really—to me, to all of us, a very flexible and potent tool. So, it would learn from experience. By using it, one raid builds on another. You know, the Abu Sayyaf raid built on things, because we gained understanding, as has been reported.

Senator FISCHER. You said that we will do more of what works, going forward. So, I hope, in a more classified setting, you can lay out those goals so that we can have something to measure the success or failure of these raids by them in the future.

I was also interested in knowing, as the number of raids are increasing, will General MacFarland receive any authority to help to plan and order the—that these raids be carried out, then?

Secretary CARTER. Yeah, General MacFarland is in overall charge of the campaign there. I've made that very clear. I have great confidence in him, and it's why I created that role, so that we would have one senior leader in charge of the entire campaign, covering both Syria and Iraq. That is General MacFarland, who has—who is extremely experienced.

Senator FISCHER. Will he be able to approve those raids by himself, or will he need to come to you or the President?

Secretary CARTER. In many cases, this would be something that he and General—I think General Austin, remember, also in the chain of command—otherwise, when—if they come to me for approval of things that they think require my approval, that's fine, too. But, there will, and there has to be, a certain amount of delegation of authority, here, so that the—because, for one thing, one expects that raids build upon themselves, and so you can't—you're going to want to strike again after you're struck once, on the basis of what you've learned from the first strike. So, we need to have some significant authority in there.

Senator FISCHER. When you said it—it's "fine, too" if they come to you, do you—don't you have that laid out what a——

Secretary CARTER. We do.

Senator FISCHER.—certain plan would be that would require——

Secretary CARTER. Yes, we——

Senator FISCHER.—the General, then, to come to you?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, we do. It's based on their judgment about whether approval at my level is required. That's as—I mean, that's generally true. It's perfectly appropriate in this case.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED [presiding]. On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator King.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Before beginning my questions, several references have been made to a letter, which I received in early November from General Austin, which laid out a series of steps that had been taken. I'd like to submit that letter for the record, please.

Senator REED. Without objection.

Senator KING. Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
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7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
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9 November 2015

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-2508

Dear Senator King:

Thank you for your thoughtful questions during the 16 September hearing on the U.S. Strategy to Counter ISIL. I share your concerns and can assure you that we are doing everything within available authorities to ensure success in this critical fight.

At the hearing, you requested specific numbers in response to Ms. Wormuth's comment that the Iraqis are enrolling more people into the building partner capacity (BPC) sites and employing them in the fight. To date, approximately 3,000 are in the training pipeline and more than 15,000 have graduated. In total, since January 2015, the Coalition training mission has helped to build the capacity of Iraq's security forces by training six Iraqi Army brigades, eight Peshmerga battalions, 2,100 Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) operators, 100 Federal Police, and more than 2,500 Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). By the end of the year, we expect to train four additional Peshmerga battalions, 500+ CTS, 100 Federal Police, and one battalion of PMF.

The accomplishments listed below are provided in response to your request for a specific list of what I consider progress in the Counter-ISIL Campaign:

Objective: Establish Coalition and Employ Forces

- Establishment, integration, and employment of a 60-plus nation Counter-ISIL Coalition
- Thirty nations support military actions to include target sharing and engagement
- Dedicated foreign staff officers embedded into Headquarters, USCENTCOM/Combined Forces Command (CFC) as the Coalition Strategy Planning Group (CSPG)
- Combined Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) established to direct comprehensive operations and enhance Iraqi Security Force (ISF) capabilities at Building Partner Capacity (BPC) sites
- Secured the support of the Turks to station Coalition air assets and operate out of Turkish air bases; has significantly shortened the distances traveled by some of our air crews

Objective: Increase Regional Partner Capacity

- Established seven advise/assist BPC sites in Iraq with 17 Coalition nations contributing to the effort in various ways
- Advising and assisting ISF forces as they planned, rehearsed, and now are executing the Ramadi counterattack

- Used Iraqi Train & Equipping Fund (ITEF) funds to arm and equip ISF, Kurdish Peshmerga, and Sunni tribal militia with sets of equipment sufficient to outfit eight brigade-sized elements
- Increased Sunni participation in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF); improved the ratio from 1:12 to 1:8; doubled to almost 8,000in six months
- Providing direct support to an established coalition of anti-ISIL forces (includes Syrian Kurds, Syrian Arabs, Christians, Turkmen) conducting operations in northern Syria
- Provided 50 tons of ammunition to the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC) that is now using that ammunition to conduct operations along the Mar'a Line

Objective: Improve Iraqi and Regional Partner Security

- Increased tribal participation in Anbar operations; arming and training 2,000 tribal fighters following successful tribal engagements in Anbar and Ninewa
- Conducted humanitarian/disaster relief operations in support of Iraqi communities
- Improving and enhancing key regional partners' ability to defend their borders against ISIL, including Jordan and Lebanon
- Improved Jordanian Armed Forces' (JAF) and Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) ability to defend against ISIL threats through operations SYBIL HUNTER & LION HUNTER
- Enabled the efforts of the counter-ISIL forces in northern Syria that have effectively closed most of the major crossing sites between Syria and Turkey, thereby slowing down the flow of foreign fighters.
- Reduced sectarian messaging and misinformation by local media through increased collaboration and assistance efforts between the U.S.-led Coalition and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MOD)

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Military Effectiveness

- Halted ISIL's southern/eastern advances to Baghdad and enabled the ISF's effective defense of the capital city
- Prevented ISIL from conducting large-scale assaults/operational maneuvers against the ISF
- Greatly complicating ISIL's ability to respond effectively when confronted by an opposing ground force
- Destroyed thousands of vehicles and pieces of equipment used by ISIL

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Freedom of Maneuver in Iraq and Syria

- Supported and enabled the successful seizure by the Iraqi Counterterrorism Services (CTS) and Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) of Bayji City and the Bayji Oil Refinery (BOR)
- Supporting and enabling the Iraqi security forces in the conduct of the Ramadi counterattack; providing intelligence and air support
- Enabled Iraq's security forces in the conduct of the counterattack to retake control of the Mosul Dam; taking measures to ensure structural integrity of the dam
- Provided much-needed relief in support of the Sinjar Mountain Yazidis and enabled the eventual liberation of Sinjar Mountain

- Supported and enabled the efforts of the YPG in northeast Syria which has secured ~17,000 square kilometers of territory previously held by ISIL
- Ensured the successful defense of Kobane, Syria, primarily through the employment of devastating airstrikes
- Enabled the successful liberation of Tikrit, the capital of Salah ad Din Province
- Ensured the GoI retained control of the Haditha Dam (second largest hydroelectric dam in Iraq)
- Supported and enabled Peshmerga operations resulting in the removal of ISIL from Mount Zummar, Kisik Junction and Kirkuk
- Supported the successful ISF disruption of ISIL operations spanning from Balad to Samarra to Tikrit
- Promulgated one million attributed Arabic language messages on social media; led to mobilization of four hundred indigenous online users reposting counter ISIL messages

Objective: Degrade ISIL's Organizational Capabilities

- Degraded ISIL senior leadership; successfully targeted 100+ high value individuals
- Removed several thousand ISIL fighters and dozens of localized ISIL leaders from the battlefield through precision airstrikes (provincial and operational cadres)
- Degraded ISIL's ability to "govern" by denying exploitation of critical infrastructure
- Degraded ISIL's funding and supply networks through Coalition airstrikes in Syria
- Degrading ISIL's ability to collect and refine petroleum products

We've been clear from the outset in stating that the campaign to counter and ultimately defeat ISIL represents a long-term endeavor. The list above reflects the progress achieved in just over a year's time. Already we have greatly degraded ISIL's capability and we are now putting pressure on this enemy on multiple fronts. I remain confident that we have the right approach and we will continue to achieve the desired effects against ISIL. Thank you again for your interest and for your continued, strong support for our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, civilians and their families. If I can provide any additional information or assist you further, please do not hesitate to contact me or the members of my legislative affairs staff.

Sincerely,

LLOYD J. AUSTIN III
General, U.S. Army

Senator KING. Mr. Secretary, it strikes me that this is an exceedingly complex challenge. I guess that's pretty obvious. But, part of the problem is, we want to defeat ISIS, but we want to do it in such a way that doesn't propagate their ideology around the Muslim world. That really makes it very difficult. I think the San Bernardino attack is a good example. There's no evidence that I've heard that that attack was directed by ISIS. Instead, these people were self-radicalized and took it upon themselves to perform these heinous acts.

The question is, How do we keep moderate Muslims, the vast majority of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, from falling into the ISIS trap? ISIS has made it clear that part of their strategy

is to provoke us to Westernizing this conflict and making it a war of America and the West against Islam, and thereby pushing heretofore moderate Muslims in their direction. So, this gets to the question of, How do we take Raqqa, for example? My understanding is that there's no inclination to use a large contingent of U.S. troops, but there is a recognition, as the President has already acknowledged, that there are places for U.S. troops in a Special Forces kind of setting. Is this the kind of calculation that you're making?

Secretary CARTER. That's exactly correct, yes.

Senator KING. How do we—the gap in the strategy, it seems to me, from the beginning—and I say "gap," that's not a criticism, that's just the fact—is, Where do we get ground troops in Syria? Ground troops are available in—Arab ground troops, Muslim ground troops, are available in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces and the Peshmerga. In Syria, there's not an available force. That's why, it seems to me, the whole issue of getting rid of Assad is a key part of this calculation, that Assad is the lightning rod that, in effect, created ISIS, in part. If we can work with other parties, particularly Russia, to move Assad off the stage, then you've got an Arab army, a Muslim army, in Syria. It's the—all of the opposition, except perhaps Jabhat al-Nusra, and the Syrian army. That's why, it seems to me, that's a key part of it. But, the question that our colleagues are asking is: time. We—somehow we've got to accelerate the timetable. We can't wait years for Assad to leave and we turn the guns of the opposition and the Syrian army on ISIL. Would you—do you share that——

Secretary CARTER. I do. I mean, I—as you can hear, I'm all for urgency and acceleration of the military campaign. I'd like to see that, too, on the political side. It's trickier. Secretary Kerry's trying to work toward that end. But, it is exactly as you say. If we could get a political transition that brought the Syrian armed forces, that part of which it would be appropriate to carry forward into a new Syria, plus the moderate opposition, you'd have a force that could both clear Syrian territory of radicals and eliminate the civil war, which is what fuels the violent—this extremism, in the first place——

Senator KING. Do——

Secretary CARTER.—and have a governance of Syria that the Syrian people deserve.

Senator KING. But, there's one piece of this—and you've mentioned it—you listed a long series of things that we needed to do, and, at the very end, you said, "information." That's where we're losing right now. I heard a figure recently that ISIS posts something like 90,000 posts a day in social media. Just reading a piece about a young man in the United States, 17 years old, who found this ISIS community online, and he's being encouraged to move forward. I know it's not in the Department of Defense, but we—this country has to do a much better job, it seems to me, of countering the story that ISIS is telling to attract young people across the world. We're not only engaged in a military war, here, we're engaged in a war of ideas. Right now, I think we're—it's somewhere close to a stalemate on the military side, but we're losing the war of ideas.

Secretary CARTER. May I just note, Senator, that it is for that very reason that yesterday I got together with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the FBI, the Director of National Intelligence, and we were talking exactly about that, how—what—the information war. Now, you're right, it's not principally a defense thing. We don't operate here at home. We do operate in the cyberdomain. I alluded to that. You know, we're at war, and we have authorities to use our Cyber Command in this case, and are identifying opportunities to do that. At the same time, I just—I have to say, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence are working intensely—they were before San Bernardino, they're working now—and hence the—on exactly this question of these people who are——

Senator KING. If we——

Secretary CARTER.—sitting with a keyboard somewhere in the United States.

Senator KING. If we win a town in Syria and lose 10,000 kids in France or Belgium or Florida or Ohio, that's not victory. I'd hope, in the councils of war, you will continue to press that point of view.

Secretary CARTER. Will do.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Wicker, please.

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much.

Mr. Secretary, always good to have you back. I do echo what Senator McCain said, and I hope you'll come back more often and share with us your thoughts.

Let me let you be explicit on the issue of Bashar Assad, because I hear and I read in the paper—for example, December 7, Bloomberg said, "Obama no longer seems sure Assad should go." Is that true? Do you believe that Mr. Assad should explicitly be removed from power? Or is there a growing feeling that perhaps we ought to team up with Assad?

Secretary CARTER. I think—and I don't want to speak for him, but I think what Secretary Kerry is trying to engineer is the departure of Assad in a way that everyone can support, which, by the way, includes the Russians, who have a lot of influence with Assad, so there—it's important to see if you can get them on the right side of history, here—and that accomplishes that—and this is important, quite apart from the atrocities that Assad has committed—in a way that removes him while the structures of the Syrian state are still relatively intact, because, to get back to what Senator King was saying a moment ago, we do want—we do need there to be, after Assad, an—a Government of Syria that is inclusive, that involves the forces that have been fighting each other, fighting ISIL and governing the territory decently. That is exactly the transition that Secretary Kerry is working——

Senator WICKER. Much like we needed in Iraq after the successful invasion. I think I understand what you're saying. But, let's get your testimony on this. To your knowledge, is the President still resolute in saying that Assad should go and that a solution is not that we should begin to work with him?

Secretary CARTER. No, I—a political transition in which Assad leaves power and is replaced by a more inclusive form of government is the outcome that we're trying to——

Senator WICKER. A political solution in which Assad stays in power, is that acceptable to you?

Secretary CARTER. I think what—no, Secretary—what Secretary——

Senator WICKER. Is it acceptable to the President?

Secretary CARTER. Well, what Secretary Kerry is trying to arrange is——

Senator WICKER. I understand what your testimony just was. I'm—but, I'm wondering—we need to get this on the record, and Americans need an answer to this. Is the President steadfast in having a goal that includes Mr. Assad being removed from power?

Secretary CARTER. Well, that's the path that he has—that's the kind of political transition that he has Secretary of—Kerry seeking, yes.

Senator WICKER. Would you agree that it would be very difficult to convince Syrian rebels to fight only ISIS if—and not Assad—if that were a direction in which the administration should——

Secretary CARTER. We actually have experience in exactly that matter, and——

Senator WICKER. What is your experience?

Secretary CARTER. The experience is that they're—that it's easier to find fighters who are intent upon fighting Assad than to find ones that are intent upon fighting ISIL.

Senator WICKER. Do you believe Mr. Assad should be removed from power?

Secretary CARTER. Yeah. I think that to have a decent government there that is in—that brings the moderate opposition into governance there is going to require the departure of Assad. The how, the when, the where, and so forth, is something that Secretary Kerry is negotiating.

Senator WICKER. Yeah, I——

Secretary CARTER. You know, the——

Senator WICKER.—I understand.

Secretary CARTER.—civil war has gone on a long time, and he's been a lightning rod in that civil war. If we want to get it behind us and defeat ISIL and get peace in Syria, I think that's going to be necessary, yeah.

Senator WICKER. Well—very good. I may try to follow up with some questions on the record there.

Let me ask you about no-fly zones. I understand we've had some testimony today about safe zones. I'll ask you first, Mr. Secretary, and then if you want to ask the General to add his thoughts, that would be good.

Safe zone—I mean, no-fly zones would allow Syrians to stay in their own country instead of seeking to become refugees anywhere. They would allow Syrian opposition leaders to exercise sovereignty over Syrian territory. Do you and our coalition partners have the pilots, personnel, and equipment required to establish no-fly zones? In particular—I think maybe earlier, while I was out of the room, there was an attempt to get you to discuss the coalition partners that might be able to enforce this. Do you believe President Putin

would challenge our air dominance there and the clearly defined no-fly zones that we would be seeking to enforce?

First you, Secretary Carter.

Secretary CARTER. Sure. On no-fly zones, that's something that I've discussed for the committee before. That's not a step we have recommended—again, because the benefits don't warrant it, in light of the costs. I can explain more, but I'm going to ask General Selva, who's done a lot of work on that kind of thing, to comment further.

With respect to the Russians, also, he can comment on the Memorandum of Understanding there, and it—and the working relationship we have with the Russian military in the air in—over Syria right now.

Senator WICKER. Fair enough.

General?

General SELVA. Senator, we have the military capacity to impose a no-fly zone. The question that we need to ask is, Do we have the political and policy backdrop with which to do so? I don't mean that in the case of our government, but in the case of the governments who would challenge the no-fly zone. So, if we're asking the question, Could we do it?—the answer is yes. Are we willing to engage the potential of a conflict—a direct conflict with the Syrian Integrated Air Defense System or Syrian forces, or, by corollary, a miscalculation with the Russians, should they choose to contest the no-fly zone? Those are the questions that have been posed, asked, and answered.

So, military capacity, we have the capacity to do this. We have not recommended it, because the political situation on the ground, and the potential for miscalculation and loss of American life in the air in an attempt to defend the no-fly zone, don't warrant the no-fly zone, given the fact that, on the ground, the forces would still contest the safe zone on the ground.

Senator WICKER. Well, I'm way over my time, but let me just say that the Secretary mentioned the cost and benefit. When I think of the benefit that we could have had in the United States not to be faced with this refugee crisis, the benefit to Europe if we had given Syrians a place where they could live in their own country safely, away from these barrel bombs and the—and these attacks on civilians, it just seems to me that the benefit of doing so, even now, but certainly having done so over time, would have been so enormous that it would have justified whatever cost we might have had to risk.

So, thank you very much for your answers.

I appreciate the Chair indulging me.

Chairman MCCAIN [presiding]. General, I must say, it's one of the more embarrassing statements I've ever heard from a uniformed military officer, that we are worried about Syria and Russia's reaction to saving the lives of thousands and thousands of Syrians who are being barrel-bombed and massacred. So far, 240,000 of them. Remarkable performance.

Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary and General Selva, for being here.

Mr. Secretary, you noted in your testimony that Russia, which has publicly committed to defeating ISIL, has instead largely attacked opposition forces. You said, "It's time for Russia to focus on the right side of this fight." What's it going to take to have Russia turn its attention to fighting ISIL rather than propping up Assad?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I can't speak for the Russians, but I have spoken to the Russians, and I have explained to them why their actions are wrongheaded and counterproductive even from the point of view of their own security, because it fuels the civil war in Syria, which we've discussed, which is the underlying cause of the radicalization that gave rise to ISIL, which is the very thing they fear. So, their actions are—as I—the phrase I've used is "pouring gasoline on the civil war in Syria."

Senator HIRONO. So—I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary—so, is Russia fully engaged in the discussions to end the—with us, with Secretary Kerry and the—some of the other parties that are—that need to be at the table, in ending the civil war in Syria? Are they fully engaged in that?

Secretary CARTER. I don't want to speak for Secretary Kerry in that regard—fully engaged. They are certainly engaged. He's talking to them along the lines that we discussed, along with a range of other parties that will be necessary to a final political transition, here.

Senator HIRONO. I think there are a lot of people who agree with the assessment that ending the civil war in Syria is one of the keys in enabling the United States, as well as Russia and our other partners, some 60-plus, to focus on defeating ISIL. I think that that is generally acknowledged, and I certainly agree with that.

One of the advantages that ISIL has its ability to recruit young men and women and influence actors around the world through its online media campaign. San Bernardino is just the most recent example. In your opinion, how can we counter this or overcome the effectiveness of ISIL's online presence? I realize that this is an issue that should be addressed, not just by—perhaps not even mainly by you, but FBI and the Director of National Intelligence, Homeland Security, with whom you met. So, what do we have to do to debase ISIL's ability and its success in motivating lone wolves in our country and all across the world in committing terrorist acts?

Secretary CARTER. Well, you're right. Here at home, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security and Director of National Intelligence are working along those lines at—to identify those who are self-radicalizing or plotting using the Internet. I wouldn't want to speak for them. They're—I can only tell you that they're intent upon solving that problem.

There is a role, I would say, not in that fight, but it is related to the fight we are waging, because it's why I think it's important to strike at and eliminate the parent tumor in Syria and Iraq, because that's part of the creation of the narrative that fuels the Internet, which fuels even lone wolves, and also, where we are able to, to eliminate people who are trying to recruit our people.

I think the Chairman referred, earlier, to the elimination of Junaid Hussain, which I reported to you when I was last up here.

He was somebody who was trying to recruit Americans to attack Americans. No doubt about it.

So, there are some things even we can do—well, not only "even we" we can do as the Department of Defense to assist in this. But, this—a big effort by Director Comey and Secretary Johnson and the Director of National Intelligence, the Director of Central Intelligence, on this effort. Now, it began well before San Bernardino, but San Bernardino illustrates why this is no-kidding important thing to do.

Senator HIRONO. Would you say that debasing the ability of ISIL to motivate lone wolves—what—people who don't even have any direct contact with ISIL, but who have access to their ideology and through the Internet—that this is more of a whole-of-government approach that we need to take that includes law enforcement and—local law enforcement as well as people in the community?

Secretary CARTER. Yes. This whole campaign really is a whole-of-government campaign. Has to be. In today's world, all these pieces need to be connected.

Senator HIRONO. Mr. Chairman, my timing—the timer is not working, so I have absolutely no idea how much time I have left. Well, in that case, I will stop here.

[Laughter.]

Chairman MCCAIN.—I'd say to the Senator.

Senator HIRONO. I just have one last question, that—we talk about defeating ISIL. Really, what does that look like? I mean, what does defeating ISIL look like?

Secretary CARTER. In——

Senator HIRONO. Including the—preventing the ability of them to encourage the lone-wolf actors all across the world.

Secretary CARTER. In Iraq and Syria, which, as I said, is necessary—not sufficient, but necessary—it means destroying their organization, their leadership, their ability to control territory, their ability to have a source of revenue, and their ability to claim that they're anything but a bunch of barbarians, their state. That's what eliminating them—and that's the end state that we're seeking in Iraq and Syria. Of course, to make that stick gets us back to what others have been talking about, the political dimension of it. But, from the military point of view, that's the objective.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Cotton.

Senator COTTON. I'd like to return to this question of no-fly zones. General Selva, your testimony is that United States has the military capability to impose a no-fly zone over Syria.

General SELVA. Yes, sir.

Senator COTTON. A little over two weeks ago, Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft for violating Turkish airspace. How many Russian aircrafts have violated Turkish airspace since that incident?

General SELVA. None that I know of.

Senator COTTON. Do you think we can infer a lesson from Vladimir Putin's conduct in the aftermath of that shootdown, since he had repeatedly violated Turkish airspace beforehand?

General SELVA. I think I'd be very careful in inferring his decision process to that particular set of circumstances, because what the Russians have done, as a consequence of that shootdown, is to

beef up their integrated air defense. They've brought surface-to-air missiles into their base in Latakia, they've installed surface-to-air missiles around Aleppo. They have worked with Syrian partners, and the Syrian partners now have their radars active, which they didn't have just a few weeks ago.

So, I think it's—it is that set of consequences, when we think about no-fly zones, that we have to factor into our calculus. If a no-fly zone is to be defended, and it is to have effect on the ground, the consequences of activity by surface-to-air missile systems and air-defense aircraft have to be factored into the equation. We have the capability to deal with those. The consequence is a direct confrontation with Russia or Syria.

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

Secretary Carter, I noticed that you were smirking at my question. Could I get your take on that?

Secretary CARTER. No, I was—I'm sorry, I was smiling at the General's——

Senator COTTON. I think it might deserve a smirk. I'm not——

Secretary CARTER.—directly, but it's hard to——

Senator COTTON.—rebuking you.

Secretary CARTER. No, no, no. I was smiling about inferring Vladimir Putin's intentions. I—and I—he rightly said, it's a little hard to know. That's all. I was just——

Senator COTTON. Well, I would submit that he repeatedly violated Turkish airspace until Turkey defended its airspace, and he has not done that—done so since then, and that maybe we can learn a lesson from that.

I also want to return to the point that Senator Ayotte was discussing about the oil trucks that we struck shortly after the Paris attacks. I believe it was a little over 100. Can you explain why that didn't happen earlier? I mean, why that didn't happen six months ago, a year ago?

General SELVA. There are two principal reasons. First is the development of the actual intelligence as to the contribution of those particular routes to the finances of ISIL. With respect to the Chairman, those are—that black-and-gray economy in oil across the region——

Senator COTTON. I—so, I understand that, and I understand that intelligence can often be hard to develop, especially when you don't have a presence on the ground. But, I don't understand what's hard to develop intelligence about tanker trucks leaving refineries in ISIS-controlled space.

General SELVA. The second point, Senator, is that, in an effort to minimize the civilian casualties, the drivers of those trucks are not necessarily adherents to ISIL's ideology, but are Syrians trying to make——

Senator COTTON. I have no doubt about that.

General SELVA. So——

Senator COTTON. They're probably Syrians who are driving trucks, and Islamic State said, "Drive this truck or we're going to kill you and cut the heads off your kids."

General SELVA. So, I actually visited with the unit that prosecuted the attacks on the bulk of those vehicles. They used a set of tactics, techniques, and procedures [TTPs] that warned the driv-

ers in advance so they could flee their trucks, and then destroyed the trucks in situ. We are looking for more opportunities to do exactly the same thing so that we don't alienate the civilian population, those that are not ISIL adherents.

Senator COTTON. I——

General SELVA. We'll continue to degrade the infrastructure for production——

Senator COTTON. I strongly support that. I'm aware of the TTPs you're discussing, but those are things that our Air Force have done for a long time to minimize civilian casualties. We didn't just develop these TTPs in the last month, did we? I mean, we could leaflet civilians 6 months ago or 12 months ago, right?

General SELVA. They are not new TTPs, but the opportunities and the places with which to use them are a product of the intelligence that we developed from our understanding of the oil infrastructure and distribution network that supports it.

Senator COTTON. I'd like to talk about, now, the rules-of-engagement decision-making authority. One constant thing I've heard from senior commanders down to low-level troops in my travels in the region and here in the United States is that decisions that were being made in the middle part of the last decade by O–5s are now being made by three- and four-star generals, or even civilians, in Washington, and that the rules of engagement [ROE] have been incredibly restrictive—as the example, this oil tanker truck example. Secretary Carter, do you care to comment on what I've been hearing from troops directly on my trips——

Secretary CARTER. I'll start, and then I do want General Selva to represent professional military judgment in this matter, so I'd like him—to give him the opportunity to speak, as well.

The commanders there, the air commanders, have told me—and I'll let—and General Selva and General Dunford have reported to me about limitations on the effectiveness of the air campaign. I have asked about whether our rules of engagement are a limiting factor that is stopping them from being more effective. Just two things I'd say about that, and then I'll let General Selva go into it ion more detail.

They have not changed over time. By the way, they are not—these are not things that are approved in Washington or anything, they're—these are things that are done by the air operators in theater, which is appropriate. The—in—the things that have really enabled our air—well, let me put—turn it around and say, the things that have limited it from time to time, our air campaign, have been, first of all, annoyingly, weather. That was true a month and a half ago, for a couple of weeks. But, then more—and that's important—more fundamentally has been intelligence. We've gotten a lot better intelligence picture now, and therefore are able to conduct more effective strikes, which is one reason why we're able to be—to conduct more strikes, absorb more air capability, because we can get into Incirlik, from which the sorties were shorter, absorb more capability from the French and others, and put it to good use, because we could develop the targets. I always say it's better to have more airplanes than targets, than targets than airplanes. So, on some days, a sortie goes out for dynamic targeting, as opposed to deliberate targeting. Deliberate targeting, the bombs are almost al-

ways dropped. More than 90 percent. Dynamic targeting is where you go out there and hope that a target that you're thinking might develop actually does develop. That's an important thing to do, because it's what stops ISIL from being able to use the roads safely, having to drive at night with their lights off, all that kind of stuff. You don't always find those targets. So, sometimes the airplanes come back with their bombs on them. It's intelligence that makes all the difference.

General, please.

General SELVA. Senator, I haven't met a soldier, sailor, airman, or marine who wouldn't ask for looser ROE in any active fight. But, having consulted with the commanders, from the JTF [Joint Task Force] all the way up to Central Command, I know of no rules-of-engagement restrictions that have prevented us from striking targets and that prevented our forces from being as effective as they can be on the ground. I've consulted with all of them.

Senator COTTON. Thank you.

I'm over time. But, Senator Reed, if I can have one moment to ask a more lighthearted question of General Selva.

For 60 years, NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command] and the Air Force has been tracking Santa over the skies of North America. Can you assure the boys and girls of this country that NORAD and the Air Force are fully prepared to track Santa once again?

General SELVA. I don't have a complete intelligence report, Senator, but I understand that the reindeer have been, in fact, fed their quantity of oats and are prepared for the delivery of all of those gifts to those who have been nice and not naughty.

Senator COTTON. Well, I think it's a welcome reminder that, while most Americans are at home enjoying Christmas with their families, that our airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines, whether they're in NORAD or around the world, are out there keeping us safe and defending our values and what makes this country great.

General SELVA. Sir, not to extend the questioning and the answering, but I did spend my Thanksgiving with our troops in Iraq, in Baghdad, Taji, and Arrow, and I can report to you that their moral is high, and they did phone home and talk to the people who love them.

Senator REED [presiding]. Thank you very much for reminding us of the service and sacrifice of so many, Senator.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, Senator Nelson, please.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carter, I gave a speech recently and showed the map of Syria and Iraq and the area that ISIS used to occupy that it no longer occupies and the area that it occupies now that it did not occupy. The difference is dramatic, that you all have shrunk the territorial occupation of ISIS. You are to be congratulated on that.

But, at the end of the day, as you all have already testified, Syria is not going to be able to contain ISIS until at least there is a plan for the exit of President Assad. Now, when that occurs, what is the Arab force that is going to be on the ground, with the guidance of our Special Operations Forces—what is—give me a concept of what that makeup is of that Arab force.

Secretary CARTER. Well, it's a very good question, and it gets to the issue of the end state of the campaign, here, and the critical political ingredient, because a political transition in Syria is essential to a durable end state to this. Because it's the civil war in Syria that started this whole business in Syria. That would mean—and, at that time, the force that is now not available because they're fighting each other, but that could fight ISIL, is the combination of Syrian forces and the moderate opposition that is now fighting in Syria. If there's a political settlement, that—in the meantime, we're using forces—some Kurds up north, the YPG, and we're trying to accumulate additional Syrian Arabs who want to take their homes back from ISIL. But, the civil war is, meanwhile, using up a lot of combat power that could potentially be used against ISIL.

Senator NELSON. So, you really believe that, once there's a path for Assad to leave, that Syrian Government forces, which include Alawites, which are Shiites, are going to join up with the opposition Sunni forces to go after ISIL.

Secretary CARTER. The political transition is exactly to have a Syria that is once again whole, multisectarian for sure, like all those states over there, with all the complications that go with that, and that we see in Iraq. But, that, as an alternative to sectarianism and the continuation of sectarian civil——

Senator NELSON. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—war, yes.

Senator NELSON. So, go over to Iraq. Is that anti-sectarian? Is it working, with the forces on the ground that we're supporting from the air?

Secretary CARTER. Well, first of all, Prime Minister Abadi—I've spoken to him frequently; I'll have an opportunity to speak to him in coming days when I, too, will be visiting our troops in theater—is committed precisely to that kind of vision for Iraq. I believe him. I've talked to him——

Senator NELSON. Do you think he——

Secretary CARTER. Well, that's the—whether he can pull it off in Baghdad is obviously a difficult matter for him. We are supporting him in that regard, because we believe that the alternative, which is further sectarian division, civil war, cleansing, and so forth—we've seen that before. If he can keep his vision of an Iraq, which, as he called it, is decentralized, so it's not everybody under the thumb of Baghdad, because he knows the Kurds and the Sunnis won't go for that—but, still, the ability to retain an integral state that keeps peace within its borders—that's what he's——

Senator NELSON. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—committed to. That's the end state we also want in Iraq.

Senator NELSON. Right. So, it's possible that, with Assad leaving Syria, you could get Syria under control, but everything could go haywire in Iraq.

Secretary CARTER. They are two separate dynamics. There's one thing I'll mention that I mentioned when I was with you six weeks ago, and we have—and has subsequently come to pass. I was talking about the importance of getting the town of Sinjar—you're talking about territory, but the—but, you know, a lot of that territory

is empty, and it's the towns that matter. The critical crossing of Sinjar—now, what is Sinjar? Sinjar is a place in between Mosul and Raqqa. The—to cut ISIL into its Syrian branch and stop them from cross-feeding is a—the objective of taking Sinjar. So, in the end, the political end states are different for Syria and Iraq, absolutely.

Senator NELSON. Understand.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, just one quick question, because the Department of Defense has asked for $116 million reprogramming to keep the effort of General Mike Nagata's training program. Do you support the restarting of that program?

Secretary CARTER. I urgently support that funding. I—but, I don't describe it, and the documents we sent you don't describe it, as a restarting of the old program. As I described earlier, we learned from the old program. It had some success, but not nearly what we had hoped for. I've told you that that—for me, that was a disappointment. So, I'm very up front about that. But, what we're asking for is that—is funds that were previously earmarked for that to an approach that we think is more effective, which is precisely one of the ones I've been describing today. That's why we would urgently like that fund.

I just—you know, I mean, people decry micromanagement, but micromanagement also comes from—can come from many sources. I would urge you, please, to avoid that, give us that funding that we've requested. We submitted the paperwork—I know the Chairman said, a week ago, and I—I apologize if it was that recently. My understanding was, it was more than that. But, this is a war, and I'd simply urge you—I know you're very busy people who have lots of things to do, but if you can please give that your earliest attention.

Chairman MCCAIN [presiding]. We will, Mr. Secretary. We also, obviously, as I mentioned before, would like to know the details of how it's used. I think that's appropriate. I thank you.

Secretary CARTER. Fair enough.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Tillis.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you both for being here today.

On November the 12th, the President answered the question, "Is ISIS gaining strength?" by saying, "I don't think they're gaining strength, and I believe we've contained them." Now, two weeks before that interview, in Ankara we saw two bombs kill 102 people, in the Sinai we saw 224 people lose their lives when the Russian jetliner was downed. On the day of his interview, in Beirut, two suicide bombers killed 43. Then the day after his interview, a wave of six terrorist attacks killed 130 in Paris. Then on December 2, 14 Americans were killed.

Right now, in another committee hearing down at Judiciary Committee—I stepped in for a minute before I came back here—Director Comey said that America is at its highest threat level since 9/11.

So, I'm trying to square the statement made by our President on November 12th, that they're not gaining strength and that we have contained them, with a comment that you made in the opening, I think, in response to Chairman—the Chairman's question about

how we contain them. What am I missing, in terms of you saying that we haven't contained them, the President says that we have and that they're not gaining strength, with the events that we've—I've just summarized there? Secretary Carter, I'll start with you, and then General Selva.

Secretary CARTER. Well, we have to defeat ISIL. And——

Senator TILLIS. I agree with that, but——

Secretary CARTER.—and that——

Senator TILLIS.—a part of it is—excuse me, because I want to try to stick to the time—a part of it has to do with the President acknowledging the current situation. Do you agree with his characterization that they're not gaining strengthen——

Secretary CARTER. The——

Senator TILLIS.—and we've contained them?

Secretary CARTER. The President has asked me, and asked our military leaders, to give him recommendations, and to keep giving him recommendations, to defeat ISIL. That—and he has approved all the ones that we've taken to him. We expect to take more. And I think that's——

Senator TILLIS. Secretary Carter——

Secretary CARTER.—that's the——

Senator TILLIS.—have you told the President that they're not gaining strength and that we've contained them?

Secretary CARTER. I have not used—General Dunford said, last—talked about tactical containment versus strategic containment, if we're going to use that word. I kind of like the word "defeat," myself, Senator.

Senator TILLIS. General Selva, I want to ask you a question about some of the airstrikes. I know that you were talking about the rules of engagement. And it seems to make sense to try and protect the civilian drivers in the tankers, et cetera.

Back in June, the military officials acknowledged that 75 percent of the planes flying combat missions returned without dropping their weapons. You, in response to Senator Ayotte's questions, said that that's now about 40 percent. What's changed?

General SELVA. Senator, we've increased the number of deliberate strikes, preplanned designated targets, as opposed to having airplanes looking for dynamic targets in the environment. We have sufficient airpower in the region to accomplish both. But, in any case of dynamic targeting, some of those airplanes are always going to come back with their ordnance because targets don't present themselves.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Former Deputy Director Mike Morell, of the CIA, made, in a comment on November the 25th, that we didn't go after oil wells, actually hitting oil wells that ISIS controls, because we didn't want to do environmental damage and we didn't want to destroy infrastructure. Are those still key factors in whether or not you go after ISIS targets?

General SELVA. I don't know of the rules of engagement that he's talking about, but, as we develop deliberate targets, we do bring environmental considerations into the factors that we consider, but they do not limit us from striking the infrastructure. They just change the way we strike it. So, we try to do as little environ-

mental damage as possible, but still limit the capacity of the well to produce.

Senator TILLIS. Secretary Carter, maybe just to close out with this, just to go back to defining the problem. If we shift—and you made the distinction between tactical and strategic containment—but, if we shift to a global perspective, away from the narrow focus of, maybe, tactically, what we're doing in Iraq and Syria, is there any grounds for describing ISIS as "contained"?

Secretary CARTER. I'll let General Dunford, who's not here, speak for himself. I described, and I think we need to be concerned about—we've talked about metastasis to the homeland, and we've talked about the necessity of getting the parent tumor. We have not discussed as much the necessity of going after ISIL elsewhere. I mentioned Libya. We took out its leader in Libya. We're going to have to do more in Libya. ISIL is becoming a magnet for groups that previously existed, in some cases, that are now rebranding themselves as ISIL. But, it's worse than that, because in—they're also gaining energy from the movement in Iraq and Syria, which is why we need to destroy it in Iraq and Syria. But, this is a worldwide phenomenon. And I've talked to leaders—I was recently talking to some leaders in southeast Asia, actually, about many things, but one of the things they raised is concern about little patches of ISIL and self-radicalization of the kind that we find.

So, in the Internet Age and the Social Media Age, terrorism doesn't have any geographic bounds. So, I think we have to recognize it while we need to attack it geographically on the ground in Syria and Iraq. That is necessary, it's not sufficient.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman MCCAIN [presiding]. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to your—to our witnesses, for your service and your testimony.

Secretary Carter, do you agree with a recent study done by the RAND Corporation suggesting that it would be wise for Congress to pass a new Authorization for Use of Military Force against ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I haven't seen that study, Senator. I have testified in favor of the AUMF that the President submitted, and I welcome that. It's not necessary, literally, in the sense that we're able to conduct our campaign.

Senator KAINE. The RAND—the study—I would just encourage you to take a look, because I think it backs up——

Secretary CARTER. Will do.

Senator KAINE.—backs up your position; it was reported two days ago—says that an authorization by Congress would send a message of resolve to our allies——

Secretary CARTER. Would do.

Senator KAINE.—send a message of resolve to ISIL, it would send a message of resolve to the troops.

Secretary CARTER. Troops.

Senator KAINE. RAND, which is, you know, not biased on the legal analysis, said that, at a minimum, the connection of the battle against ISIL to the 2001 and 2002 authorizations requires, quote, "legal gymnastics" that it would be wise to clear up.

Secretary Carter, what message does it send to the 3600 troops that are deployed overseas in this fight at the holidays, and to the families of the 11 servicemembers who have lost their lives in Operation Inherent Resolve, and five others who have been wounded, that Congress has been unwilling to debate and vote upon this war in the 16 months since it started?

Secretary CARTER. I think that the passage of an AUMF, as you indicate—and this is one of the reasons why I testified in favor of it, would be a signal of resolve and support to our troops. Therefore, I think it's—it is desirable. By the way, a signal of resolve to our enemies.

I should say, that's not the only thing. I think when you visit them, as some of you have done in the last week, when you hold a hearing like this and show that you care what they're doing, when you go back to your bases and—at home and tell them how proud you are of them, the family members that are back here—all that stuff's incredibly important. They need to know we're behind them. And, you know, I always tell our people, "I'm 1,000 percent behind you." And——

Senator KAINE. Let me——

Secretary CARTER.—if this would add to it——

Senator KAINE. Let me ask you this.

Secretary CARTER.—that's good.

Senator KAINE. It—our Chairman, Senator McCain, was quoted last week—now, this was not an approving quote, this was a critical quote, in the same way that I am critical of the current status of affairs where Congress has been silent for 16 months—the quote was that a congressional vote to authorize war against ISIL doesn't seem forthcoming now, because of politics here, and that it, quote, "may require an attack on the United States of America to force such a vote." Would it wise for Congress to wait that long?

Secretary CARTER. Again, I—I'm—I am in favor of the one that the President submitted. I think, on balance, it would be a positive thing and a sign that the country's behind the troops. And, provided it allowed me and General Selva and our military leaders to do what we think is needed to defeat ISIL—provided it does that, it—I think the signal it sends of resolve by this country is a good thing.

Senator KAINE. At least three nations on the U.N. Security Council—England, France, and, I'm very sorry to say, Russia—have submitted to their legislative bodies the—a—for a debate and vote, their engagement in military action in Syria and Iraq. And other nations, such as Germany, have done the same. The President started the war against ISIL 16 months ago yesterday. There's only been one vote in the Senate—it was a Senate Foreign Relations Committee vote, a year ago Friday. There hasn't really been action in the House.

I just hope that we would follow—I hate to say this—I hope we would follow the lead of other nations whose legislative bodies have decided it was important enough to have a debate and vote on this before the public.

Second issue I want to just bring up. And this is more just kind of an observation for you. Senator McCain was the first to call for the no-fly zones. At the time that he started that, I didn't agree

with him. The reason I didn't is that there were testimony from General Martin Dempsey and others here that to do a no-fly zone would run the risk of running across the Syrian air defenses. To many of us on the committee, that argument fell away when the administration came and proposed an aerial attack on Syria after the use of chemical weapons against Bashar al-Assad. When we reminded them, "Hey, wait a minute. You said Syria has really tough air defenses," the administration testimony at that point was, "Yeah, well, we're not that worried about them."

Let me tell you why I think the absence of the humanitarian zone is going to go down as one of the big mistakes that we've made, equivalent to the decision not to engage in humanitarian activity in Rwanda in the 1990s. With respect to Syria, there's been testimony from the military to us that the Syrian Air Defense System is really not all that great, and that we could take care of it. And with respect to Russia, Russia voted for Security Council Resolution 2139 in February of 2014 calling for cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria without the permission of Bashar al-Assad.

There are few guarantees in life, but I can pretty much give you this one. Russia would not intervene and try to mess around with us if we were engaged in a humanitarian effort that was premised upon a U.N. Security Council Resolution that they actually voted for. And since February of 2014, we've had the ability and the legal rationale to enforce that resolution. And we haven't. And millions of refugees have left the country. If we had done that then, I think we'd be in much better place now. And I think we can still do it, and we'd be in much better place.

So, just in terms of the argument about, "Here's why we don't think it's a good idea," previous testimony to the committee by folks from the Pentagon have undercut your argument with respect to Syria and Russia.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any other questions.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary and General, thank you for your service.

The President addressed the Nation Sunday night. Did you hear his address, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary CARTER. I did not. I read it.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Do you believe that we're at war with ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I do.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe they're at war with us? The answer is——

Secretary CARTER. Yeah.

Senator GRAHAM.—yes, yeah. They would hit our homeland if they could.

Secretary CARTER. For sure. They say that——

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Secretary CARTER. They say that they—and they indicate that——

Senator GRAHAM. Is there any place on the planet that you would take off limits when it comes to fighting ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. No, I don't think we can do that, for the reasons I just—I said earlier. They are metastasizing everywhere, and everywhere there is—there are information media, there are going to be people who go online who, maybe, have never been to Syria or Iraq, or even know where they are——

Senator GRAHAM. The answer is——

Secretary CARTER.—they only know——

Senator GRAHAM.—no.

Secretary CARTER.—where their screen is.

Senator GRAHAM. Right, I agree with you. I think that's a very good answer. There is noplace on the planet we should give them safe haven.

Number two, when it comes to time, in terms of this war, when will it end?

Secretary CARTER. As soon as we can possibly bring it to——

Senator GRAHAM. Five years? Ten years? Does anybody know?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I think that——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you want to put a time limit on how long we should fight it?

Secretary CARTER. I think, in war, it's good to have plans. I think it was Eisenhower, who——

Senator GRAHAM. Here's my question. Are you willing to put a time limit on how long we can fight ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. I think we have to fight ISIL until ISIL is defeated everywhere.

Senator GRAHAM. I couldn't agree with you more.

When it comes to means, do you believe this country should use all lawful means when it comes to fighting ISIL, depending on what the circumstances dictate?

Secretary CARTER. Sure.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think Raqqa, Syria, will be—still will be in the hands of ISIL by January 2017, more or less likely?

Secretary CARTER. I'm sorry, you said—which ones?

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think Raqqa, Syria, will be in the hands of ISIL——

Secretary CARTER. Oh, I very much hope that it won't—that it would be—that——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think it's more likely——

Secretary CARTER.—it will either be—it not be in the hands of ISIL or that there—control will be substantially eroded——

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. So——

Secretary CARTER. I hope that. I can't guarantee——

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—that. You can't guarantee anything——

Senator GRAHAM. Right. But——

Secretary CARTER.—in war, but it's——

Senator GRAHAM.—we hope——

Secretary CARTER.—certainly an objective.

Senator GRAHAM. We all——

Secretary CARTER. As soon as possible.

Senator GRAHAM. We all hope, but we're not going to get there on hope. So, you're a good man. I'm not trying to fight you, here.

Here's what I've done. I'm making an offer to our President that I believe this war is going to go on for a long time, after his presi-

dency. I believe that they're going to go wherever they can on the planet, and that we should stop them wherever necessary. And when it comes to means, we should not limit this Commander in Chief or any other Commander in Chief when it comes to means. Do you agree with that?

Secretary CARTER. Yeah, I do.

Senator GRAHAM. So, I have an Authorization to Use Military Force, Senator Kaine. It's not limited by geography. It's not—could you put it up, please—it's not limited by geography, time, or location. It represents a theory that this President and future Presidents need to have the same capabilities against ISIL as we gave—that existed after 9/11 regarding al-Qaeda.

So, I agree with Senator Kaine that the Congress should be involved. I am answering the request of the President to get involved. And here is the question. As Secretary of Defense, could you support an authorization using military force that has no limit on geography, time, or lawful means when it comes to destroying ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I'm not going to invent a new AUMF here. This is the first time I've studied yours. I'm sorry to——

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Secretary CARTER.—to say. I did support the President's AUMF, for two principal reasons. The first——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you——

Secretary CARTER.—first——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you——

Secretary CARTER.—the first was because I thought it could, exactly as you say, permit us to conduct the campaign that we need to do to defeat ISIL. That's critical. It did have a time dimension in it, which I——

Senator GRAHAM. From a military point of view, General, do you think saying you're going to have a time dimension is probably a wrong signal to send to the enemy?

General SELVA. The context of the time signal makes a difference. I would prefer not to have one.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

General SELVA. So I could say to them, "I'm going to prosecute you anywhere I find you."

Senator GRAHAM. That's what I want to say.

General SELVA. As long as I——

Senator GRAHAM. I want to say to this President that, "I want to give you the tools, that time is no factor when it comes to destroying ISIL, and location doesn't mean a damn thing, where, after you—wherever you go, as long as it takes, whatever is required to defeat you." That's the statement I think America needs to make. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. Secretary? "Whatever it takes, as long as it takes, wherever we need to go to destroy you," when it comes to ISIL.

Secretary CARTER. Well, I mean, that's okay, from the point of view of conducting the military campaign, but you have to——

Senator GRAHAM. That's——

Secretary CARTER.—but you have to get the votes.

Senator GRAHAM. That's—no, I know.

Secretary CARTER. And I—that, I can't——

Senator GRAHAM. Yeah, but, you know——

Secretary CARTER.—predict. So——

Senator GRAHAM.—I'm not asking you to vote.

Secretary CARTER.—I'm not going to try to craft what it—what can be passed here, Senator. I've testified in favor of the AUMF the President——

Senator GRAHAM. Would you vote for this?

Secretary CARTER.—submitted.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you vote for this?

Secretary CARTER. I don't know. I'm seeing it for the first time. I'm——

Senator GRAHAM. Well, as Secretary——

Secretary CARTER.—not a——

Senator GRAHAM.—Secretary of Defense, do you support the concept that the President——

Secretary CARTER. I support an AUMF that the President submitted——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you support——

Secretary CARTER.—that gives us the authority——

Senator GRAHAM. With——

Secretary CARTER.—to wage the war that——

Senator GRAHAM. Just——

Secretary CARTER.—we need to wage. That's——

Senator GRAHAM. Mr. Secretary——

Secretary CARTER.—the important thing.

Senator GRAHAM.—do you support the concept, the authority that this President should have no time limits placed on his ability to fight the war? Do you support that concept?

Secretary CARTER. I think the AUMF, as submitted, only recognizes that his term of office——

Senator GRAHAM. I'm not asking you——

Secretary CARTER.—comes to an end——

Senator GRAHAM.—about his AUMF.

Secretary CARTER.—in a year.

Senator GRAHAM. Right. I agree with that. Do you agree the next President, whoever he or she may be, should have a AUMF not limited by time? That's just a smart decision, from the military point of view. Do you agree with that?

Secretary CARTER. Well, it's not——

Senator GRAHAM. When you—are you going to—are you, as Secretary of Defense, telling me that you want to put limits, in terms of time, regarding——

Secretary CARTER. No, I'm trying to explain to you why—as I explained to this committee before, why I understood that there was the three-year time thing——

Senator GRAHAM. I'm not asking you about——

Secretary CARTER.—provision. And it was not——

Senator GRAHAM. Listen.

Secretary CARTER.—for a military reason.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay, right. But——

Secretary CARTER. It was in deference to a future President.

Senator GRAHAM. Yeah. Okay.

Secretary CARTER. And you can agree or disagree——

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—with that, but that was the reason why it was included——

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Secretary CARTER.—in there. And I—that was a political reason——

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

Secretary CARTER.—having to do with——

Senator GRAHAM. From a military point of view——

Secretary CARTER.—the constitutional system, not a military——

Senator GRAHAM. From a military—listen to me, please. From a military point of view, you don't want time limits.

Secretary CARTER. I don't think we can—I don't think——

Senator GRAHAM. From a military point of view, you don't want geographical limits.

Secretary CARTER. Yeah, I don't—we don't—we can't have geographic——

Senator GRAHAM. From a military point of view, you don't want to take means off the table that are lawful, when it comes to——

Secretary CARTER. And that we——

Senator GRAHAM.—destroying ISIL.

Secretary CARTER.—that are useful to this——

Senator GRAHAM. Yeah.

Secretary CARTER.—campaign.

Senator GRAHAM. So, to the Congress, if you don't like what this President or future president does, in terms of fighting ISIL, defund it. That's your job. I am making a simple proposition to this President that, "I will give you whatever you need, in terms of my authorization to go wherever you need to go, as long as it takes, to use whatever available tools you have, within legal limits, to destroy this threat. Mr. President, are you all in, or not?" The Secretary of Defense seems to be indicating this is good military policy.

To my colleagues on the other side, if we produce an Authorization to Use Military Force restricted by time, means, or geography, you're sending a message to the enemy I will not send, you're restricting our ability to defend this homeland, which is a—an imminent attack is coming. So, I want to have this debate, like Senator Kaine has suggested. And it is imperative that the Congress get off the sidelines.

Tim Kaine and I may have a different outcome, but you're absolutely right, let's have a discussion, let the enemy know, without hesitation, there is no limitations on time, means, or location when it comes to destroying ISIL.

"Mr. President, embrace this authorization for you and future presidents, because the country needs it."

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary and General, for your fine service.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your service, Mr. Secretary, General. And thank you for being here.

I've just come from a vote on the floor, but, before that, a hearing of the Judiciary Committee, where FBI Director Comey was testifying about many subjects related closely to the subject matter of

your testimony. Even though the geography may be different, the threat is the same. And clearly, the strategy for confronting that threat of terror has to be coordinated and targeted to what poses the danger to our Nation. And my feeling is—I agree with you—the reality is, we are at war. That's the stark, irrefutable reality. And more needs to be done, more aggressively, more intensely, and more effectively, in using our Special Operators, advising local forces, supplying and equipping them, providing them with intelligence, intercepting communications of our adversaries, and cutting off the flow of money, which is their lifeblood. And the pace of our present activities seems inadequate.

Now, we may differ on that point. And you have more on-the-ground knowledge than I do. But, the American people are growing impatient and apprehensive. I think that statement, in fact, is an understatement.

So, I would like to see our strategy become more aggressive and intensified in combating this threat abroad, in the theater, where we confront ISIL, and at home, where we confront terror in our neighborhoods and streets, and where the adversary is just as real and potentially growing just as alarmingly.

Are you satisfied that the intersection and coordination between those two efforts, in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world and internally at home, is sufficiently aligned and coordinated that we have the most effective strategic approach?

Secretary CARTER. I met, just yesterday, with Director Comey, also along with the Director of Homeland Security, Jay Johnson, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper—John Brennan's out of the country, but his—somebody from CIA [the Central Intelligence Agency] was there, and other agencies, working to do exactly what you rightly know is necessary—say is necessary, namely to align our efforts overseas, which involve exactly the ingredients that you name, and you're right, we are looking for opportunities to do more by using precisely the tools you describe. We're finding them, and we're strengthening and gaining momentum in the military, which we need to do, because we need to defeat ISIL over there as soon as possible. Back here, we haven't—it's a different kind of challenge, but it's related. Director Comey's working extremely hard and skillfully on that. And the purpose of my calling this meeting yesterday was precisely to make sure that we're all aligned. And we'll continue to do that periodically. And there are things, by the way, that we can do, as DOD, even though we obviously don't operate here in the United States the way the FBI does, in terms of striking their information infrastructure the same way we strike their energy infrastructure, their command and control, and so forth, in Iraq and Syria.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I thank you for that answer. I agree totally that the efforts need to be aligned. And, in fact, better aligned, more seamless than they are now, in terms of intelligence-sharing and intelligence-gathering, but also working with our partners in the region, because the troops on the ground need to be local. We cannot send American troops back to that part of the world in massive numbers with a combat mission. There's always the danger of mission creep, even in a small number. But, I remain dissatisfied that the number of Special Operators on the ground

may be insufficient, and the pace of sending them there may be too lengthy, and that local forces, like the Peshmerga, have shown that a robust effort involving all of those ingredients that are planned to be sent can make a difference if they're timely and sufficient.

I agree, finally, that an Authorization for the Use of Military Force is absolutely essential. The reality is, we are at war. The President deserves a declaration of war. That declaration may define the kind of conflict that we see, and provide a forum for debate about the limits we may want to put on them. But, at least it will provide a framework for public support that the President needs for this continuing war.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Lee.

Senator LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks, to both of you, for all you do for us to keep us safe.

I want to start by echoing some of the concerns that have been stated by my colleagues, Senator Kaine and Senator Blumenthal. Like them, I feel like, for constitutional reasons, we ought to be following the process in the Constitution. For some of the reasons mentioned by Senator Graham, I think it's important to have the debate and the discussion about the extent of our involvement there. And that's another nice process associated with following the constitutional structure.

After the failure of the initial train-and-equip program in Syria, the Department of Defense seems to have shifted its focus to equipping forces that are already on the ground in Syria, such as the Syrian Kurds and Arab groups that we have somehow, in one way or another, using methods that I'm not familiar with, deemed to be moderate, or deemed to somehow have interests that overlap with ours.

Mr. Secretary, can you explain to us how, specifically, we're vetting this—these groups, how we decide who ought to be the beneficiary of this program?

Secretary CARTER. Well, you're basically right. We—that is the shift we made, although, you know, we're still willing to do—we're open to lots of different possibilities with our train-and-equip program, but the—it is essentially——

Senator LEE. It's not, basically, an equip program rather than a train-and-equip program, right?

Secretary CARTER. No. We take some of the people out for training. We're willing to do that. And we have those training sites, so we'll take selected individuals—not the whole unit—out and give them specialized training in how to connect with us and how to connect with our enablers. So, there is a training aspect to it. But, you're right, fundamentally, it's enabling groups that exist rather than trying to create brand-new groups. That's the essential correction, I'd say—course correction that we made.

You asked how they're vetted. They are—they're—it is their leaders that are vetted, rather than down to the individual level. And I can get you a description of that.

[The information referred to follows:]

Vetted Syrian Opposition (VSO) groups become eligible to receive United States assistance under the Syria Train and Equip program if the leaders of the recipient groups have been appropriately vetted. In other words, at a minimum, they are as-

sessed for associations with terrorist groups or with Syrian or Iranian Government-aligned militias, in accordance with Department of Defense (DOD) procedures, and provide a credible commitment to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law. DOD vets these VSO unit leaders using procedures that include biographic records review, biometrics, and an interview.

Secretary CARTER. And, General Selva, maybe you'd like to say something about the vetting process in general.

General SELVA. We have, in the case of the Syrian Arab coalition, convinced leaders to come to the Iraqi side of the border. We have vetted them through public and classified databases for their relationships and prior conduct, and we have spent time with them on the items that the Secretary talked about, how they link to our forces, how they communicate back their progress. And our relationship with them is relatively transactional, where we supply them with ammunition and the advice required to hit strike-specific targets, and then we watch that progress.

Senator LEE. Once we decide to equip a particular group—I mean, it sounds like it is—it's made on a group basis, based, in part, on our assessment of their leaders—what degree of command and control do we retain over the group in question, over its leaders, and specifically, perhaps most importantly, over the supplies that we give them?

General SELVA. I could go into much more detail in a classified environment, but, at the surface level, we don't exercise command and control. We exercise influence. And the influence we have is their connection to the enablers, that we provide fire support through airpower, advice, and training.

Senator LEE. Do the groups that we're supporting in this capacity, specifically the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian Arabs—do they—or to what extent do they share the same political goals and the same vision for Syria in the future?

General SELVA. Today, they share the goal of wanting to take their homes back and defeat ISIL in doing so. And that is necessary and sufficient to get at the fight in eastern Syria and working our way back towards Raqqa.

Senator LEE. Are you concerned about the possibility of their goals shifting? I mean, is it common in the region for some groups to have one focus one day and then have a priority shift, perhaps one day having interests that align roughly with our own goals and with preserving interests that are important to American national security that might change later?

General SELVA. If you'd allow me to discuss that one in a classified setting on the how we measure and manage that relationship, it will be much more useful than doing it in open session.

Senator LEE. Okay.

Can you tell me roughly how many people are involved in this right now, how many units or how many members they have? Is that something we can discuss in a nonclassified environment?

General SELVA. Yes, sir. The Syrian Arab coalition, we brought out roughly 40 of their leaders—I'm sorry—20 of their leaders, did a full vetting of their allegiances and their prior conduct. They brought to the battlefield roughly 1600. The number varies up and down slightly from that number, based on who's engaged in the fight. But, roughly 1600 fighters that have worked their way through roughly three villages or three towns right now in eastern

Syria. They started in a place called al-Hasakah. They have taken al-Hawl, and they are beginning the preparatory actions to prosecute a third target that I'd like to keep private at this point.

Senator LEE. Okay.

I see my time is expired. Thank you very much.

Chairman MCCAIN. Senator Gillibrand.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you so much for your testimony today. This has been extremely helpful to our committee. And thank you, obviously, for your extraordinary service.

In yesterday's hearing, Commander Jeffrey Eggers said that, while our military victories against ISIL will affect their ability to recruit new fighters, how we conduct the war will also affect that ability. Specifically, he said that having ground troops go into Syria is what ISIL wants.

On Monday, a New York Times article pointed out that in 2003, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had called the Iraq war, quote, "the blessed invasion," because his and ISIL's apocalyptic vision is that non-Muslims will come to Syria to fight Muslims and bring about the end of the world.

So, do you believe that a ground war with Western troops would help or hurt ISIL's recruiting? And which countries are best positioned to fight ISIL on the ground, in your opinion?

Secretary CARTER. The forces that are best positioned to fight ISIL on the ground in both Iraq and Syria would be local indigenous forces, particularly Sunni forces, because the ISIL representation and the territory they occupy is mostly Sunni territory. Therefore, outside of—well, so in both Iraq and Syria, Iraqis and Syrian local forces—that's why we're trying to work with them, that's why we're trying to put a political end to the civil war in Syria, so that the Syrians stop—Syrians who are not ISIL—are not ISIL sympathizers, not under the thumb of ISIL right now, can unite to defeat ISIL.

Next in line—and this is something that I have urged, and the U.S. has urged now for some months, would be for more of Sunni Arabs from the Gulf states to become involved, not necessarily occupying territory, but participating in enabling local forces there and——

Senator GILLIBRAND. Have you had any luck there? I mean, any?

Secretary CARTER. Well, they have participated, in the early days, in the air war. Now, I'm generalizing a little bit——

Senator GILLIBRAND. Yeah.

Secretary CARTER.—here—and not—generally disinclined to participate on the ground and, of course, now with the Yemen conflict, got preoccupied with that. But——

Senator GILLIBRAND. General?

General SELVA. Ma'am, I think your quote of Mr. Zawahiri—or Zarqawi, I'm sorry—that said, "Bringing Americans to this fight is a blessing to the radical Islamic view that ISIL portrays" is exactly right. What we don't do enough of is talking about who ISIL is and what they do. They're barbaric, they are—they subjugate women, they subjugate children, they engage in extortion. They are not creating a caliphate that's consistent with Islamic teaching; they're creating caliphate that's consistent with their narrative of Western

subjugation and extremist Islam. And it's about their power and enriching themselves. And so, we need to tell that truth. If we fall into the trap of radical Islamic violent extremists baiting us into a ground fight, we're actually doing exactly what they want us to do.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Yeah.

General SELVA. So, as we work through and with partners that we can find that are willing to fight, they'll have the effect we need them to have.

Senator GILLIBRAND. And can't we be more aggressive with our allies in the region, particularly Sunni Arab allies, to do more? I mean, I don't—I haven't seen our success there yet. So, I'm wondering if you feel there's leverage there to get that result.

General SELVA. We have had support from Turks, from the Jordanians, as well as from a small number of our Sunni partners. That is a place where we might be able to exert some additional effort.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Just quickly on Turkey, since you raise it. Obviously, Turkey is critical to the fight against ISIL. What do you think were Turkish calculations in shooting down the Russian plane? And has it affected our ability to work with Russia and Turkey?

General SELVA. I can only tell you what I learned from consultation with my Turkish counterpart the day of the shootdown. I actually was in Turkey that afternoon after the shootdown. They believe, and executed against, a incursion into their airspace. What I pressed him on, though, was securing their—the Turkish border from end to end. And there is a roughly 90-kilometer span of the Turkish border through which ISIL still has a fair number of smuggling lanes that are relatively open because ISIL controls the Syrian side of that border. The Turkish have redoubled their efforts. They have opened up their Terrorist No-Fly List, their Terrorist Identification Database, and a variety of other techniques to help seal that border. Much beyond that, if we could do that in a closed session or a private conversation, that would be——

Senator GILLIBRAND. That would be fine.

Secretary Carter, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Secretary CARTER. No, I think General Selva said it very well. We—the—Turkey is—shares a border with both Syria and Iraq. That border has been used as the principal border through which fighters flowed in both directions. And we've asked the Turks to do more. They have done some more. We're helping them do yet more. But, it's critical that they control their border.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAIN. Well, of course, ISIS wants, more than anything else, to preserve their caliphate. No one is arguing to—that there should be 100,000 troops, although the President, and obviously you, like to set up the strawmen. It is clear that, without American participation and leadership, there is no strategy to take Raqqa, which is their base of operations where they are planning and orchestrating attacks. We just saw the manifestation of it, including working on chemical weapons.

Mr. Secretary, I would beg you to call up General Keane, General David Petraeus, Secretary Gates, Secretary Leon Panetta, even former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Ask all of them, and they will tell you that a safe zone could have prevented the millions of refugees and the horrible consequences of at least a quarter of a million people barrel-bombed.

For you to sit there, General, and say that we'd have to take out Syrian air defenses is either a stunning display of ignorance or, again, this whole aspect of avoiding—or making the problem seem so huge that we can't handle it. All we have to do is protect a no-fly zone. We don't have to take out a single airplane—air defense capability of theirs. All we have to do is tell them, "If you fly into this area, you're going to get shot down," which we can do with Patriot batteries. And everybody knows that. And that's why General Keane and General Petraeus and Secretary Gates, Secretary Panetta, and even Secretary Clinton have said that these things are doable. It's really saddening to see that, basically, business as usual while thousands and thousands of Syrians are slaughtered by this horrible barrel-bombing, which also was accompanied by acts of chemical weapons.

So, I leave this hearing somewhat depressed, because clearly there is no strategy to take Raqqa, there is no motivation to set up a no-fly zone, which, even as I say Hillary Clinton has supported and every military leader that I know that was architect of the surge, says you can do it without much difficulty. But, we are seeing again what we have seen from this administration for the last four years, since some of us advocated it, saying that it would be too hard to do, ignoring the fact that, as long as Bashar Assad continues to do this horrible barrel-bombing, they're slaughtering thousands of innocent civilians—men, women, and children. Where is our moral—where is our—the tradition of the United States of America? We went to Bosnia after the—after they ethnically cleansed 8,000 people. This guy has killed 240,000. And yet, it's too hard for the most powerful nation on Earth to set up a no-fly zone.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:26 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES INHOFE

STRATEGY/END STATES—ISIL, IRAQ, SYRIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Senator INHOFE. What policy objectives were given to Department of Defense in order to develop a military strategy?

Secretary CARTER. The policy objective given to the Department of Defense was to degrade and ultimately destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which guided the development and implementation of the military campaign plan.

2. Senator INHOFE. Was the Department of Defense given any constraints in developing a military strategy?

Secretary CARTER. The Department of Defense recognizes that a successful strategy to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), at its core, is not purely reliant on the military; it is a strategy that requires a whole of government effort. The military campaign plan was informed by policy and nested within the broader national strategy. As the campaign has progressed, I have gained a clearer assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Coalition's efforts, and have received approval from the President to accelerate the military campaign, degrading ISIL's control of territory.

3. Senator INHOFE. Does operational and tactical decision making and control of operations reside with our commanders in the field or is it back in the Pentagon or White House?

Secretary CARTER. Lieutenant General Sean McFarland, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, is the commander and the senior leader in charge of the military campaign in Iraq and Syria. He and United States Central Command Commander General Austin have broad authorities within Iraq and Syria to prosecute this campaign.

4. Senator INHOFE. Is current United States strategy just against ISIL in Iraq and Syria or globally?

Secretary CARTER. The strategy against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a global one. It is also absolutely necessary to focus on defeating the ISIL parent tumor in Syria and Iraq. The recent strike against ISIL's leader in Libya highlights the recognition that ISIL is a diverse and global adversary. The Department is looking for opportunities to degrade and defeat ISIL trans-regionally and transnationally; every combatant command is engaged in this worldwide campaign. I would add that it is not merely a kinetic fight. Other actions like messaging, counter-finance, and foreign fighter flow are targeting ISIL globally.

5. Senator INHOFE. What are our end states in Iraq and Syria?

- No Iranian presence?
- No Russian presence?
- Stable and unified Iraq with representative Sunni-Shia-Kurd government?
- Stable and unified Syria absent Assad?
- Are these end states interlinked with our ISIL end state/strategy?

Secretary CARTER. The desired end-states in Iraq and Syria are for each to achieve a state of political stability free from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: in Iraq through a unified and inclusive central government; and in Syria through a political transition. Iran and Russia could play constructive roles in achieving each of these end-states if they so choose; to date, they have chosen otherwise.

6. Senator INHOFE. What are the required resources and estimated timeline required to achieve this end state?

Secretary CARTER. With the help of Coalition partners, the Department has intensified offensive operations to degrade and destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) control of territory, disrupt its command structure by removing its leadership, and reduce its ability to sustain its war-making enterprise through effective air strikes and enabling local partners on the ground to seize territory from ISIL. The timeline required will be based on conditions on the ground.

7. Senator INHOFE. Do you need ground forces occupying territory to achieve these end states?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, local ground forces responsive to a sovereign government are needed to achieve lasting stability in Iraq and Syria and to prevent the rise of additional terrorist groups in the future. This is why our military strategy combines coalition air power with enabling capable and motivated local forces on the ground to achieve a lasting defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. This is coupled with a diplomatic strategy for political settlement to end the civil war in Syria.

8. Senator INHOFE. You are increasing operations in Syria and Iraq, deploying additional personnel, expending additional weapons and placing additional wear and tear on equipment. You are also meeting all your other global contingency operations requirements that are also increasing. Will OCO funds cover all of these operations or will you have to take money out of the base budget??

Secretary CARTER. The Department is very concerned that Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) requirements may exceed the enacted FY 2016 OCO funding levels. Increased counter-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant activities in Iraq, Syria, and the Middle East, coupled with a slowed drawdown in Afghanistan, are the primary reasons for concern. The Department identified an unfinanced requirement of $3.3 billion for these efforts to the FY2016 OCO request. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 (Public Law 114–113) recognized this shortfall, but only provided $1.277 billion along with $1.0 billion more in special transfer authority for potential reprogramming.

The Department will review execution rates and spend plans during its mid-year review in the spring. At that time, the Department will be in a better position to

ascertain the magnitude of any shortfall and make recommendations to meet the remaining requirements, if necessary.

9. Senator INHOFE. Does the United States need to maintain a long term presence in Iraq and/or Syria or can we withdrawal when we reach our end state?

Secretary CARTER. The United States is committed to the lasting defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. I cannot predict or prescribe hypothetical future force posture in Iraq or Syria.

10. Senator INHOFE. Is the refugee crisis being caused by Assad, ISIL, a lack of strategy, a power vacuum, or all of the above? Can the flow of refugees be stopped without addressing the Assad regime and ISIL operations in Syria?

Secretary CARTER. There is no single cause for the refugee crisis. Some refugees fled the civil war that began when the Assad regime attacked its own people. Others fled the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) brutality. Still others fled for the promise of a life in the West. Resolving the refugee crisis requires both an end to the civil war and the defeat of ISIL.

To that end, the Department is intensifying the offensive operations to degrade and collapse ISIL's control of territory, disrupt its command structure by removing its leadership, and reduce its ability to sustain its war making enterprises. Where coalition-supported forces have liberated territory from ISIL, such as in Kobane and Tal Abyad, some refugees and internally displaced persons have returned to their homes. They will require security, reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and civil services provided by a government that meets their needs. Extending these conditions to the whole of Syria is a challenge. There is no purely military solution to the civil war. To that end, Secretary Kerry has led intense diplomatic efforts through the International Syria Support Group to seek a political resolution to the conflict. Until there is both security and opportunity in Syria for those who fled, it will not be possible to resolve the refugee crisis.

To address the immediate needs of displaced Syrians, the Department of Defense, with Congressional support, is providing approximately $115 million in humanitarian assistance. This assistance addresses life-saving needs in the categories of shelter, health and sanitation, and water for Syrian refugees and other displaced persons in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

11. Senator INHOFE. Is Russia still attacking United States-trained Syrian opposition forces?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

12. Senator INHOFE. What does the presence of a S400 surface to air missiles mean to United States and coalition air operations in Syria and in Turkey?

Secretary CARTER. [Deleted.]

MEASURING SUCCESS

13. Senator INHOFE. How are you measuring success in your strategy against ISIL—territory controlled, number of combat effective units, end of hostile engagements, integration, and/or surrender?

Secretary CARTER. We are measuring success across nine lines of effort in order to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Given ISIL's hybrid terrorist-state nature, measuring traditional elements of state power are minimally applicable. The approach requires a whole-of-government strategy; efforts to remove ISIL from the battlefield alone will not be sufficient to eliminate the threat ISIL poses to United States persons and interests in the region and around the world. In the lines of effort for which the Department of Defense has the lead—namely, denying ISIL safe haven and building partner capacity—United States Central Command is measuring success across five objectives: establishing a Coalition and employing forces; increasing regional partner capacity and security; degrading ISIL's military effectiveness; decreasing ISIL's freedom of maneuver in Iraq and Syria; and degrading ISIL's organizational capabilities.

14. Senator INHOFE. What benchmarks are you using to measure this success?

Secretary CARTER. The Department of Defense uses five benchmarks for success in the two lines of effort for which the Department has the lead—denying safe haven and building partner capacity. These five objectives include: establishing a Coalition and employing forces; increasing regional partner capacity and security; degrading the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) military effectiveness;

decreasing ISIL's freedom of maneuver in Iraq and Syria; and degrading ISIL's organizational capabilities. Given ISIL's hybrid terrorist-state nature, measuring traditional elements of state power are minimally applicable.

15. Senator INHOFE. Of our 65 coalition partners, what coalition partners are conducting ground combat operations and what partners are conducting air combat operations?

Secretary CARTER. Currently, there are 17 coalition partner nations in Iraq conducting advise and assist and building partner capacity missions. In addition to the U.S, they are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, The Netherlands, New Zealand, and Sweden.

Currently, the United States and 12 coalition partners are conducting air combat operations in Iraq and/or Syria. They are: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark France, Great Britain, Jordan, The Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and UAE.

16. Senator INHOFE. Secretary Carter, you stated that the new special operations forces are being sent into Iraq would conduct raids, free hostages, gather intelligence, and capture ISIL leaders. Where are you going to hold these detainees and for how long?

Secretary CARTER. The appropriate disposition for a detainee is determined, consistent with United States domestic law and international law, on the basis of all the facts and circumstances, including the national security interests of the United States and its allies and partners, and the conduct the detainee has engaged in. Depending on the circumstances, detainees may be prosecuted in the United States, detained in their home countries, or detained in a third country. The Department makes assessments regarding the appropriate disposition of detainees on a case-by-case basis.

17. Senator INHOFE. Are you sending the right number and type of forces in Syria and Iraq to achieve your strategy? Have you accurately defined their mission and objectives?

Secretary CARTER. Yes, we are sending the correct number and type of United States and coalition personnel to Iraq and Syria given current opportunities and the number of local ground partners assisting our efforts in those countries. In addition to trainers and advisors in Iraq, United States Special Operations Forces (USSOF) are being deployed to enable local partners in Iraq and Syria to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant more effectively. Given current circumstances, their mission and objectives have been accurately defined. If we identify additional opportunities in Iraq (in partnership with the Government of Iraq) and in Syria to enable capable, local partners, I am prepared to recommend to the President to deploy additional USSOF capabilities.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR KELLY AYOTTE

INF VIOLATIONS

18. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter, according to public reports, "Russia flight-tested a new ground-launched cruise missile ... that United States intelligence agencies say further violates the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty." On September 29, before this committee, I asked Deputy Secretary of Defense Work if he believes that Russia has violated the INF Treaty. Reiterating previous statements by this administration, he said "We believe very strongly that they did." Do you still believe that Russia has violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty?

Secretary CARTER. Yes. Under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, Russia is obligated not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles. Russia has built and tested a ground-launched cruise missile system that violates the Treaty. For additional information, please see the Annual Report to Congress on Adherence to and Compliance With Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments.

19. Senator AYOTTE. Secretary Carter, despite acknowledging Moscow's violation of this landmark treaty, Deputy Secretary of Defense Work said more than two months ago that "we have not decided on any particular action at this point." When

I asked what this administration was going to do about it, he said, "we are still in the midst of negotiating this position." What specific steps is the Department of Defense taking to respond to Russia's violation of the INF Treaty, and why has it taken so long for the administration to study this?

Secretary CARTER. The Department of Defense (DOD) has reviewed a broad range of military response options and, with the interagency, considered the effect each option could have on either convincing Russian leadership to return to compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty or on countering the capability of the prohibited ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) system. This assessment was conducted at the same time as new strategic realities developed in Europe—a Russia that is destabilizing the European security order by purporting to annex Crimea and conducting illegal activities in eastern Ukraine, a Russia that is actively seeking to undermine the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and a Russia that is modernizing its military capabilities across a range of systems.

In 2015, the Administration determined that the United States needed to consider Russian actions with regard to the INF Treaty in the context of its overall aggressive and bellicose behavior that flouts international legal norms and destabilizes the European security order. Russia is not violating the INF Treaty in isolation from its overall aggressive behavior; therefore, the Administration concluded that responses cannot focus solely on the INF Treaty.

Consequently, DOD is committing to many investments irrespective of Russia's decision to return to compliance with the INF Treaty.

United States responses to Russia's increased aggressive actions, including its violation of the INF Treaty, involve a broad range of efforts—within the Department, bilaterally with allies and partners, and within the NATO Alliance. These responses cover a variety of initiatives including increasing posture and presence, refocusing planning and shaping of future military activities in Europe, and improving defensive measures to deny Russia offensive capabilities by modifying and expanding air defense systems.

For example, DOD plans to continue the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), with $789.3 million requested in fiscal year (FY) 2016. Under the ERI, the United States has maintained a persistent, rotational air, land, and sea presence in the Baltics and in Central Europe to reassure Allies and to build up their capacity. ERI also enables the United States to expand bilateral and multilateral exercises in Europe in order to improve interoperability and to strengthen United States warfighting capability in the face of newer threats from Russia. DOD will continue to seek funding for ERI in FY 2017.

DOD is also transforming its posture in Europe to be more responsive and sustainable for the 21st century. In order to allow United States rotational forces to move more quickly and easily to participate in training and exercises in Europe, DOD is prepositioning equipment, termed "European Activity Sets", which include: tanks, artillery, infantry fighting vehicles, and other equipment to respond rapidly to crises and provocation. Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland have offered to host company- to battalion-sized elements outfitted with this equipment, which will be moved around the region for training and exercises.

NATO

20. Senator AYOTTE. General Selva, I asked General James Jones, USMC (Ret.), in a recent hearing what may happen if the United States fails to alter its course with respect to Russia's aggression. He responded, "I think it's possibly the beginning of the end of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I think it is that serious. We just can't sit back and let this happen." He continued, "[NATO] should become more proactive ... sitting back and being reactive and then debating it for six months hoping for on-hundred percent consensus among 28 countries is not a formula for success with Vladimir Putin." There is serious concern that a failure to stand up in Moscow in Ukraine and elsewhere will invite Putin's adventurism in the Baltics—creating an Article 5 crisis for NATO. Is the Department of Defense re-evaluating United States defense posture in Europe, and can you provide an update?

General SELVA. The United States' commitment to NATO Article 5 remains Ironclad. In order to demonstrate our willingness and capability, DOD is re-evaluating our defense posture in Europe to ensure the United States military can deter and defend against Russian aggression. We will ensure the U.S. military remains postured to support ongoing and future contingency operations, counter transnational threats, deter and defeat Russian aggression, and build Allied and partner capability. The European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) has enabled us to increase responsiveness and readiness by pre-positioning ammunition, fuel and equipment for

use in regional training and exercises, as well as improving infrastructure that enhances NATO operations and enables Eastern Allies to rapidly receive reinforcements. ERI also enables us to maintain our increased rotational force presence along NATO's eastern flank under Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE (OAR) to demonstrate the ability and commitment to act together with NATO to deter and counter Russian malign influence, coercion, and aggression. In 2015, we prepositioned additional European Activity Sets—complete equipment set for one armor brigade combat team—to bolster NATO's eastern flank. We will continually assess required presence and equipment prepositioning in order to meet the demands of an evolving security environment in Europe.

21. Senator AYOTTE. General Selva, what specific steps is the United States taking to make clear to Moscow that we will defend NATO and honor our Article 5 commitments, including in Eastern Europe?

General SELVA. The United States has made clear to Russia through political, diplomatic, economic, and defense measures that we do not accept Russia's aggressive foreign policy, and we will defend NATO and honor our Article 5 commitments. Focusing on defense and military measures, European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) funding has enabled the United States to increase its military activities in Eastern and Central Europe to reassure Allies and partners of our solemn commitment to their security and territorial integrity in the face of aggressive Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere. Through ERI we increased responsiveness and readiness by pre-positioning ammunition, fuel and equipment for use in regional training and exercises, as well as improved infrastructure that enhances NATO operations and enables Eastern Allies to rapidly receive reinforcements. ERI also enables us to maintain increased rotational presence along NATO's eastern flank under Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE (OAR) to demonstrate the ability and commitment to act together with NATO in the face of the challenges from Russia. Examples of action taken to demonstrate resolve in Eastern Europe in 2015 include the persistent rotational presence of approximately 500 Soldiers; organized in company teams of approximately 150 Soldiers training alongside allied forces in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, the approximate three month deployment of 12 A–10s to Estonia and 12 F–15Cs to Romania, shorter duration deployments of A–10s, F–15s, F–16s, F–22s and C–130s to eastern Europe, and multiple exercises involving thousands of United States forces throughout 2015. In addition to unilateral U.S. efforts, we are working with our NATO Allies to implement the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) agreed to at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales. RAP includes a series of assurance and adaptation activities to enhance NATO's defense posture and increase NATO's readiness for and responsiveness to security challenges in and around Europe.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

Volume of Airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, Release Authorities, and the National Security Council's Role in the Counter ISIS Campaign

Secretary Carter, during Desert Storm we dropped 88,500 tons of bombs while conducting over 48,000 strike sorties and averaged over 1,100 sorties per day.[1] During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 31 day air campaign against Saddam Hussein averaged over 800 sorties per day. By contrast, since Obama announced his intention to defeat ISIS, the United States has conducted a paltry 6,846 air strikes in Iraq and Syria.[2] Averaged over the 465 days of operations, that amounts to less than 15 strikes per day.

Meanwhile, ISIS continues to control territory across Iraq and Syria. They rape women from minority communities. They murder Christians, Muslims, Yazidis, and others in horrific and brutal ways. According to reports from Pentagon officials, ISIS remains as strong today as it was before the bombing began, with estimates ranging from a fighting force of 20,000 to 30,000 persons.[3]

The order of magnitude between a serious air campaign that is focused on destruction of our enemy and the photo-op campaign being conducted by this Administration is striking. Just as startling are the reports that this campaign is being so

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[1] *http://www.wsj.com/articles/mark-gunzinger-and-john-stillion-the-unserious-air-war-against-isis-1413327871*

[2] *http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve*

[3] *http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/10/12/islamic-state-pentagon/73840116/*

micro-managed by the White House, that the warfighting expertise of our military leaders is being overridden by "little twerp[s] from the NSC."[4]

22. Senator CRUZ. What role is the National Security Council taking in managing the day to day operations in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Secretary CARTER. The National Security Council does not have a role in managing the day-to-day operations in Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan. For Iraq and Syria, I appointed a commander, Lieutenant General McFarland, to be in charge of counter-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) operations. He manages day-to-day operations in Iraq and Syria and has appropriate authorities delegated to him to undertake such operations successfully.

In Afghanistan, General Campbell has the authority to manage the missions he has been given, including the United States counterterrorism mission focused on defeating al-Qaeda and its associates and a mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. He also has the authority to deal with force protection threats from any individual or group that poses a threat to United States and coalition personnel.

23. Senator CRUZ. Who maintains final approval for the deliberate target selection process? What authorities have been completely delegated to the COCOM? Please describe the authorities and permissions in the targeting process, as written, and as actually practiced.

Secretary CARTER. The Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-Operation Inherent Resolve Commander is the approval authority for deliberate strikes in Iraq and Syria. The written process for deliberate targeting is to pursue Intelligence Community (IC) vetting if necessary; however, the CJTF has adopted a practice of seeking IC concurrence for all deliberate targets.

24. Senator CRUZ. Who approves strikes against a target of opportunity observed by an airborne pilot over Iraq or Syria?

Secretary CARTER. The Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve Commander is the Target Engagement Authority for striking dynamic targets, including targets of opportunity. He may further delegate this to a general or flag officer (O–7 or higher).

25. Senator CRUZ. Can our Special Operations Forces conduct operations without approvals from the White House or the National Security Council?

Secretary CARTER. Yes. Lieutenant General McFarland is in charge of operations, and he has appropriate authorities to conduct operations without approvals from the White House or the National Security Council.

26. Senator CRUZ. How many times per week do our military leaders and staff officers at the Combatant Command and lower levels of operations interact with the National Security Council for permissions or approvals?

Secretary CARTER. Lieutenant General McFarland, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve, has appropriate authorities to carry out operations. He does not interact with the National Security Council for permissions or approvals on a daily or weekly basis.

27. Senator CRUZ. Senator McCaskill is offended that the conduct of an air campaign might result in unintentional instances of collateral damage. For all of her sanctimonious lecturing, ISIS is doing tremendous damage to the civilian populations, with the assistance of a slow and lumbering Administration that is unwilling to focus its efforts, nor even correctly identify the threat. Reports indicate that 4,406 documented innocent civilians have been killed by ISIS,[5] with estimates going well into the 10s of thousands. How many civilian casualties has ISIS inflicted on the local populations? How many refugees have been displaced from their homes?

Secretary CARTER. The Department does not keep those statistics. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there were 7,632,500 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in Syria as of June 2015. There is no exact numbers of how many IDPs have been directly displaced by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Syrian Government forces, or the other various countries and factions fighting in Syria.

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[4] *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-obama-white-house-runs-foreign-policy/2015/08/04/2befb960-2fd7-11e5-8353-1215475949f4_story.html*

[5] *http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/12/isis-syria-death-casualty-count*

28. Senator CRUZ. Does the target approval process deny strikes on locations where there might be a chance of accidental collateral damage?

Secretary CARTER. The target approval process will deny any strike that exceeds the stated level of acceptable risk for collateral damage.

PREVENTING IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN BAGHDAD FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ISIS

29. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, how do you propose that we break the influence of the despotic, theocratic Iranian Ayatollah Khameni over Baghdad now that the central government is almost completely dependent on the security that Iranian backed militias and Quds forces provide?

Secretary CARTER. The United States is a strong partner to the Government of Iraq. We are able to provide Iraq with support and combat capabilities that no other partner, including Iran, can provide. I am confident in the strength of the United States' partnership with Iraq. I share your concerns about the sectarian nature of Iran's approach in Iraq. I believe that sectarianism could pose serious challenges to Iraq's stability as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is pushed out of the territory it currently occupies.

Iran does have deep and historic religious, cultural, and economic ties with Iraq that cannot be ignored. Although Tehran wields influence in Baghdad, the central Iraqi Government does not depend completely on Iran or Iranian-backed militias for its security. Iraqi Security Forces along with Kurdish forces and Sunni fighters—not just the Shia militias—are all central to the defeat of ISIL and to Iraq's long-term stability and prosperity. I believe that Prime Minister Abadi is committed to this vision for Iraq, but more time is needed for him to implement his reform agenda and to establish an effective and inclusive government. The Department of Defense encourages all nations to engage constructively with Iraq to help ensure a stable and inclusive Iraq.

30. Senator CRUZ. Secretary Carter, what are you doing to develop a strategy that counters Iran's anti-American designs to isolate and harm our allies using terrorism and violence across the Middle East and the rest of the world?

Secretary CARTER. The Department of Defense (DOD) addresses the totality of threats posed by Iran through its Iran policy architecture, which includes military plans, preparations, posture, and regional partnerships, recognizing that these DoD policy tools are just one part of a robust interagency effort to address Iran's support to terrorism and other destabilizing activities. More specifically, DOD retains and updates plans that address Iran's conventional and unconventional threats. Our military preparations and posture serve to deter and, if necessary, respond to Iranian aggression, including its support to terrorism. More than 35,000 U.S. military personnel and our most advanced missile, air, and ground forces are currently deployed to the region to protect U.S. partners and interests. The Department also continues to intensify our efforts working with regional and international partners to counter the threats posed by Iran.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

SYRIA

31. Senator SHAHEEN. What effect do you expect renewed efforts by France, the UK, and Germany to have on the fight in Syria?

Secretary CARTER. France, the United Kingdom (UK), and Germany's decision to expand their counter-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) operations in Syria will significantly enhance the Coalition's efforts to defeat ISIL's parent tumor. On November 15th, French aircraft began striking key ISIL nodes, such as command and recruitment centers, ammunition storage facilities, and training camps in Raqqah, the group's de-facto capital in Syria. The UK also made its impact felt immediately, launching airstrikes against ISIL oil infrastructure in eastern Syria on December 3rd mere hours after Parliament approved these strikes. On December 4th, the German Parliament approved the deployment of reconnaissance and refueling aircraft to support Coalition efforts in Syria, adding needed niche capabilities to the Coalition's fight against ISIL.

Our partners' contributions will continue to accelerate the campaign in Syria by striking ISIL's military capabilities, severing its lines of communication, targeting its leadership and economic infrastructure, and supporting partners on the ground.

General SELVA. Renewed efforts of our European allies, particularly France, the UK, and Germany, have enhanced both military capability and diplomatic efforts of

the Coalition to bring pressure against ISIL on multiple fronts. Their support in operational planning, intelligence, logistics, training, and air operations nests effectively within the military lines of effort and overall campaign plan. More importantly, the impact is political—solidifying our resolve with concrete actions to drive ISIL out of Syria, pave the way for a political solution, and bring stability to the region, which ultimately serves to protect the homelands in Europe as well as the United States.

REGIONAL AND COALITION EFFORTS

32. Senator SHAHEEN. As we increase the tempo of air operations are we at risk of running short of munitions? Do you need additional funding to replenish our stocks?

Secretary CARTER. and General SELVA. Increased air operations tempo is creating shortfalls in some precision guided munitions, specifically, recent expenditures of Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) and Small Diameter Bombs (SDBs) in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). The Department is developing options to reprogram fiscal year 2016 funding and adjust future munitions program funding to recover to pre-OIR levels by fiscal year 2021.

RUSSIA

33. Senator SHAHEEN. What threat does Russia's deployment of S–400 anti-aircraft defenses in Syria pose to our operations and those of our allies? What steps are we taking to mitigate?

Secretary CARTER. and General SELVA. [Deleted.]

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