

**UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND,
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND AND
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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MARCH 8, 2016
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CONTENTS

MARCH 8, 2016

	Page
UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND AND UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND	1
Austin, General Lloyd J., III, USA, Commander, U.S. Central Command	5
Rodriguez, General David M., USA, Commander, U.S. Africa Command	26
Votel, General Joseph L., USA, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Com- mand	35
Questions for the Record	75

**UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND,
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND AND
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
COMMAND**

TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2016

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31 a.m., in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator John McCain (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Lee, Graham, Reed, Nelson, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, and King.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, CHAIRMAN

Senator MCCAIN. Good morning. The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on the posture of U.S. Central Command [CENTCOM], Africa Command [AFRICOM], and Special Operations Command [SOCOM] in the context of our review and oversight of the fiscal year 2017 defense budget.

We are pleased to welcome our witnesses, General Austin, General Rodriguez, and General Votel. We thank each of you for decades of distinguished service and for your leadership of our men and women in uniform. I would like to extend special thanks to General Austin and General Rodriguez, as this may be their last appearance before this committee.

Our Nation's most distinguished national security leaders have testified before this committee repeatedly that we are witnessing the unraveling of the rules-based international order. Nowhere is this unraveling more visible or more dangerous than the Middle East. From North Africa to South Asia, state authority and the balance of power are breaking down.

This emerging vacuum has been filled by the most extreme and anti-American of forces: Sunni terrorist groups, such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL] and al Qaeda; Shiite extremists, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies; and the imperial ambitions of Putin. As a result, almost every Middle Eastern country is now a battleground or combatant in one or more wars, to wit, this morning's New York Times entitled, "Pentagon plan to fight ISI[L] in Libya includes barrage of airstrikes."

These are diverse, complex, and transregional threats that our military confronts every day across CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and SOCOM lines of responsibilities.

As this committee continues its review of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, we are interested to hear our witnesses' views as to whether the current structure best enables us to succeed in the strategic environment of global and transregional threats in the 21st century and what reforms we might consider. This is critical because there are already too many obstacles to success as it is.

Time and again, politically driven strategy, micromanagement, and misguided reductions in defense spending have made our military's job more difficult. This has been especially true for our Special Operations Forces [SOF]. More than 15 years of continuous deployments, due in part to an overreliance on their unique capabilities, has led to unprecedented stress on the force.

As the threats we face impose greater demands on our special operators and their families, we must be vigilant and provide the necessary support to maintain their vital capabilities, not just in direct action, but in building partnership capacity across CENTCOM and AFRICOM.

While we marvel at our Special Operations Forces, we must remember they are just one part of our force and our strategy. They are not a magic solution to every problem or a substitute for a coherent strategy, as the administration's "light footprint" approach in the Middle East has demonstrated repeatedly.

Despite temporary relief from the arbitrary spending caps imposed by the Budget Control Act, we are still facing an unnecessary and dangerous burden on the backs of our servicemembers in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM theaters. President Obama's fiscal year 2017 defense budget request does little to relieve that burden.

Secretary Carter has said the military is at a major inflection point, requiring urgent and simultaneous investments in next-generation technologies and in current operations, such as a 50 percent increase in funding for the fight against ISIL. In view of these needs, President Obama should have requested a defense budget that reflects the scale and scope of the national security threats we face.

Instead, he chose to request lowest level of defense spending authorized by last year's budget agreement and submitted a defense budget that is actually less in real dollars than last year, despite the fact that operational requirements have grown.

This comes as little surprise from an administration that for the past seven years has sought to scale back America's involvement in and commitment to the Middle East. In moments of consequence—Iran's Green Revolution, Libya after the fall of Muammar Qadhafi, the withdrawal from Iraq, and the crossing of the chemical redline in Syria—this President walked away and ignored the lessons of history that power abhors a vacuum, that wars do not end because politicians say so, that the perils of indecision and inaction often outweigh the risks of action, and that while America cannot solve the problems of the Middle East, American leadership is indispensable to managing them.

With major policy decisions hanging in the balance right now, our Nation cannot afford to ignore these lessons again. In Afghani-

stan, the President has told our enemies that we will proceed with a calendar-based decision to cut United States troop presence in half by the end of this year, and he has yet to explain the consequences of reducing U.S. troop levels from 9,800 to 5,500; significant reductions to information, surveillance, and reconnaissance [ISR] and close-air support capacity; diminished operational flexibility of U.S. counterterrorism forces; and perhaps most damaging of all, the end of the U.S. train, advise, and assist mission at all but the highest level of the Afghan military precisely when their support is needed most.

What all this translates to is risk: risk that problems and contingencies once addressed in days will be addressed in months, that is if they are addressed at all; risk that sudden tactical or operational setbacks that would have been in our power to reverse will put Afghanistan on a path to strategic failure we will be powerless to stop; and risk that the gains won by the sacrifices of American and Afghan troops will be squandered.

In Iraq and Syria, the artificial limitation on troop levels ties the hands of our military commanders and makes our troops more vulnerable to attack and much less likely to succeed. The President has inched forward with incremental increases in needed capabilities, but this misguided gradualism serves only to allow the enemy to adjust before these capabilities ever make a difference.

It is clear to me from my conversations with our military commanders both on the ground and in the Pentagon that they have been reduced from considering what it will take to win to, "What will I be allowed to do?" It is our troops and our national security that are paying the price.

Africa has emerged as the next front of the global war on terror with ISIL, al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and al Shabaab commanding territory and launching successful attacks throughout the continent.

Most alarming, ISIL now commands an army of 5,000 fighters in Libya. While the threat in Africa continues to metastasize, our military commanders are being forced to do more with less, starved for resources and denied timely and flexible authorities to take advantage of battlefield opportunities and halt the advance of extremism.

In the Gulf, the President is failing to live up to the promises made at the Camp David summit in May 2015. For example, the President committed to fast-tracking arms transfers to our Gulf partners with fighter aircraft sales for Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain that could help thwart Iranian hegemonic ambitions. They are languishing on the shelf gathering dust. Once again, American credibility is disintegrating as the malign influence of Iran and Russia continues to grow.

This administration's great failure to date has not been that it makes mistakes. It is rather that it has failed or perhaps refused to learn from them. Unless we chart a new course, it may well be this administration's lasting legacy.

Senator Reed?

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

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

I too want to join you in commending and thanking General Austin and General Rodriguez for their extraordinary service, since this is likely to be their last appearance before the committee.

It has been a privilege to work with you for many years. Your professionalism, skill, and commitment to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that you lead is without parallel. Thank you, gentlemen, both.

General Votel, we appreciate your appearance here today as a Special Operations Commander, and we will see you again tomorrow, I suspect, as you have been nominated to be the successor to General Austin in Central Command. Again, your service is also deeply appreciated.

Earlier this year, I traveled to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Djibouti to see firsthand some of the pressing challenges that we have been talking about.

In Iraq, the diplomatic and military officials I met universally agreed that the Iraqi security forces' successful retaking of Ramadi in June was critical for providing momentum for upcoming operations. While ISIL has now lost considerable territory that it once held in Iraq, the more difficult military task is still ahead.

In the coming months, the combination of a newly trained Iraqi security force, enabled by coalition intelligence and airstrikes, should be able to continue to make progress in evicting ISIL from population centers. We look forward to our witnesses' assessment of what we can expect realistically in the coming months as Iraqi special forces and security forces turn their attention particularly to Mosul.

In addition, Iraq's political leadership must confront the longstanding questions related to political reconciliation in Iraq.

General Austin, I look forward to your assessment of the political atmosphere in Baghdad and whether you believe the conditions are set for a political dialogue, which will stabilize the political situation to complement military actions taking place.

In Syria, the cessation of hostilities agreement appears to be tenuously holding, and tenuously at best. It remains unclear, however, this incremental step will be sufficient to set the stage for meaningful political negotiations, which every side said is the ultimate solution to their issue.

ISIL remains in control of much of eastern Syria. Syrian Kurdish armed fighters with the assistance of coalition airstrikes and Special Operations Forces have made gains in northern Syria, but the battlefield dynamic continues to present many challenges.

As General Philip Breedlove discussed last week, the weaponization of refugees by Russian and regime activity in Syria presents military, political, and humanitarian issues that we have not seen in the modern era. I hope our witnesses will provide their assessment of the situation in this respect.

Iran continues to be a cause of significant concern to the committee, particularly its recent missile test and ongoing support to nonstate actors across the Middle East.

General Austin, I hope you will provide your updated assessment of Iran's activities in the wake of the [JCPOA] Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action's implementation day.

In Afghanistan, the past year has been one of significant security and political transition. We must continue to evaluate how we can best enable efforts by the Government of Afghanistan to protect and govern its population.

I know that General John Nicholson, the new commander of Resolute Support, is now conducting an assessment of what capabilities and associated troop levels he believes will be required to achieve our objectives in Afghanistan throughout the rest of 2016 and into 2017. As I said before, his recommendations must be given most serious consideration, since he is on the battlefield and the closest to the issue.

General Austin, General Votel, your thoughts, again, on this issue would be deeply appreciated.

General Rodriguez, one of the results of CENTCOM's operations against ISIL in Iraq and Syria has been ISIL metastasizing into Libya and other places, as we have talked about. Your command has undertaken a number of operations against ISIL in Libya. The lack of a functioning government in Tripoli or a unified Libyan military makes it difficult to sustain progress. I hope, again, you will give us your insights on this issue.

While in Djibouti, I was made more familiar with the operations in Somalia. As you know, General Rodriguez, the AMISOM, African Union Mission in Somalia, has been functioning, but it is coming under increasing pressure. We, in turn, have been helping them. Just recently, there was a significant airstrike by U.S. Forces to help support their efforts. I would like your assessment of the situation there, and, as we go forward, what we can do.

There is one issue that cut across all the areas I visited, and that was that we seem to be losing the information war of messaging, of getting our message to the people of all these countries about our support for the legitimate government, for reasonable, decent government. That is ironic, to say the least. Your comments about how we can reverse this tide and, in fact, win the information war and win the population to our side would be appreciated.

Again, General Votel, finally, as the chairman has noted, your Special Operations Forces have sustained extraordinary operational tempo over the last years. We know what they have done. They have done extraordinary work, and we appreciate your leadership. We all would like you to commend them personally, and their families, for what they have done.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the senior enlisted personnel that are here. Thank you, gentlemen, for your leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator McCAIN. Welcome, General Austin.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General AUSTIN. Good morning, Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss the current posture of your United States Central Command.

I am pleased to appear here this morning alongside General David Rodriguez and General Joe Votel.

Today's global security environment is incredibly complex. Most of the challenges that we face transcend borders. I cannot ask for two better teammates than the gentleman beside me to work through these challenges on a daily basis.

Ladies and gentlemen, this past year has been an especially challenging one for the governments and for the people of the central region. We have seen an almost unprecedented level of turmoil and conflict among regional, state, and nonstate actors, along with increasing involvement by external state actors such as Russia and China.

At the same time, many of the countries that make up the central region are under growing economic pressure. Of course, the combination of these and other factors makes this strategically important region vulnerable to conflict and to increased instability.

Presently, the United States Central Command is involved in supporting multiple military operations, and they include the campaign to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and our Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. We are providing limited support for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. We continue to prosecute the fight against terrorism and extremism throughout our area of responsibility. We are also dealing with the mischief that we see throughout the region that is caused by Iran.

I will talk briefly about a few the situations, in particular as they continue to demand a large portion of our attention and our resources. I will start with the fight against ISIL.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are defeating this enemy in Iraq and Syria, and we are pressuring ISIL on more fronts than at any other point in time since they marched into Mosul some 18 months ago. We are doing so by degrading the enemy's military capability, by taking back territory, by diminishing his economic resources, and by removing his senior leadership from the battlefield. We are also slowing the flow of foreign fighters joining his ranks.

All of these actions in combination are contributing to a force that is less capable and increasingly demoralized and paranoid and prone to defections.

While we are defeating ISIL in Iraq and Syria, we see increased efforts by this enemy to expand into other areas of the globe, mainly North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia. He is expanding into these and other areas in part because he knows that he is losing in Iraq and Syria, and he needs to find other ways to maintain his legitimacy.

Halting this expansion will require a concerted effort by the international community going forward.

In the meantime, Iraq's security forces are performing better with time through our capacity-building efforts. Of note, the Kurdish Peshmerga remain critical to our efforts on the ground in the northern part of the country. They are irreplaceable, and we must do all that we can to support them.

In Syria, we continue to work with indigenous forces, including Syrian Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and others as they take the fight to the enemy. Together, they are achieving tremendous results, including securing more than 18,000 square kilometers of territory previously held by the enemy.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria remains incredibly complex. While the defeat of ISIL will take time and it will not be easy, you can rest assured that we will get it done.

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, the security forces continue to hold their own. They have come a long way over the past 14-plus years, and we want to ensure that they maintain momentum going forward. This past year, the Afghans underwent multiple transitions that together have shifted the operational environment. I still assess that the Afghan security forces are capable of holding their gains against the Taliban, however, like with any plan, changing conditions on the ground may require a reevaluation of our planning assumptions.

We have invested a great deal in that country. It is an important country for a number of reasons, and we want to do what is necessary to help the Afghans be successful in the long term.

Finally, with respect to Iran, while we are hopeful that the implementation of the JPOA agreement and the results of the recent elections will lead to more responsible behavior by the Iranians, we have not yet seen any indication that they intend to pursue a different path. The fact remains that Iran today is a significant destabilizing force in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, some of the behavior that we have seen from Iran of late is certainly not the behavior that you would expect to see from a nation that wants to be taken seriously as a respected member of the international community. We will continue to keep a close eye on Iran going forward.

Today, despite the many challenges that exist in CENTCOM, we do see progress being made in a number of areas. Of note, our decades of investment are paying off, and we are seeing our regional partners assume a greater share of security responsibilities in the region. They are effectively dealing with extremist threats in their own countries while conducting military operations as a part of a counter-ISIL coalition in Iraq and Syria.

We are encouraged by what we are seeing, and we remain committed to working with our partners in support of our shared goals and objectives.

Ultimately, we want to see a strategically important central region move in the direction of increased stability and security. We must be properly resourced to do what is required to effectively protect and promote our interests.

We do appreciate this committee's strong, continued support. In closing, Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee, I want to thank you most importantly for the strong support that you continue to show to our servicemembers, our civilians, and their families. I am incredibly proud of them, and I know that you are as well. Thank you again for the opportunity. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III

INTRODUCTION

This is an extraordinarily challenging time throughout the Central Region. We see an almost unprecedented level of activity, turmoil, and conflict among regional state

and non-state actors, along with increasing involvement by external state actors including Russia and China. Many of the challenges facing the region, most notably the threat posed by the violent extremist organization (VEO), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), transcend borders. They are symptoms of a wider set of challenges plaguing that strategically-important part of the world. The most fundamental challenge remains the heightened instability that is fueled, in large part, by certain root causes or “underlying currents.” The prevailing current is the ethno-sectarian competition that exists between groups and chiefly among Shiite and Sunni and Arab and Persian populations.

The regional security environment is incredibly complex. The sharp decline in global oil prices is greatly impacting those countries that are highly-dependent upon oil revenues. The economic uncertainty is adding to the instability, while limiting partner nations’ purchasing power. The region continues to struggle with a large-scale humanitarian crisis caused primarily by the wars in Syria and Yemen. The situation is further challenged by malign actors and poisonous ideas that serve to radicalize individuals and generate movements that threaten our core national interests and the interests of partner nations. Adding to this challenge, the world today is more interconnected than ever before. The information space is borderless and physical borders are less clearly defined, if not absent altogether. As a result, events that occur in one location can and often do affect other parts of the globe. Thus, we have a vested interest in helping our regional partners to address existing challenges and, to the extent possible, prevent potential problems from developing further.

We have an important role to play in providing for the security of the Central Region. That said, we also recognize that we cannot solve every challenge through direct U.S. military action alone. While supporting and enabling the efforts of partner nations, we must help them build additional needed military capacity. The goal is to empower them to provide for the security of their sovereign spaces and confront regional security challenges such as those posed by Iran. We must also encourage our partners to actively counter radical ideologies and address the “underlying currents” that contribute in large part to the instability in the region. American efforts, including the U.S. military, can buy time and we may encourage others to do what is necessary. However, we cannot do it for them. Only the people of the region can bring about the needed changes.

Today, despite the many challenges that exist in U.S. Central Command’s (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), we do see progress being made in a number of areas. We are hurting our adversaries, while helping our partners assume a larger role in providing for the security of the region. Their conventional military capabilities far outreach those of any possible hostile adversary, and our core partnerships remain strong. At the same time, while weaker and under threat, political institutions throughout the region, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, are withstanding pressure from extremist groups and outside actors. Moreover, we have 84,000 U.S. troops in the AOR with an unmatched ability to provide rapid reinforcement in response to unforeseen contingencies. They are the best and most capable military forces in the world. Their presence and many contributions are making a significant difference in what is a very important part of the world. The Central Region is an area of great consequence and one that merits our continued, strong investment. We will need to remain present, properly postured, and actively engaged there for the foreseeable future.

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK

This past year, we worked through a number of tough challenges throughout the Central Region. Five specific areas required a larger share of our energy and attention. Foremost among them is Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria. American military action, coupled with our leadership of the 66-member international coalition, has achieved substantial progress in combatting ISIL. We have degraded the organization, which was Phase I of the military campaign, and we are well along in Phase II operations which focus on dismantling ISIL. The forging of a whole-of-government effort has maximized the effectiveness of military and diplomatic actions. At the same time, we are providing support to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-led Coalition in Yemen. Additionally, we maintain pressure on extremist networks and actively pursue terrorists in the region on a daily basis. Next, we continue to support operations in Afghanistan where we have transitioned to a mission focused on helping the Afghans to build needed capability and fortify their security forces, while we continue to take direct action against al Qaeda (AQ), ISIL-Khorasan Group (ISIL-KP), and others that present a threat to U.S. and coalition forces. Finally, we keep a close eye on Iran. We are hopeful that the controls put

in place as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement will discourage Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapon. Regardless, Iran maintains hegemonic ambitions and will continue to pose a threat to the region through the employment of various anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, theater ballistic missile and cyber capabilities, aggressive maritime activities, and the destabilizing activities of the Iranian Threat Network (ITN) and its Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Forces (IRGC-QF), and other proxies operating in the region.

The command's primary focus this past year has been the ongoing fight against transnational VEOs, and namely ISIL or what is referred to by many in the region as "Daesh." While the group's military capabilities have been degraded in Iraq and Syria, which represents the center of ISIL's self-proclaimed Caliphate, the group remains a legitimate terrorist threat in both countries and has expanded its reach to other parts of the globe, including Egypt, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, West Africa, and parts of the Pacific. ISIL's presence undermines nation-states while driving competition for leadership among global jihadists. This competition has led to increased activity by ISIL and AQ which, although its capability is degraded, remains relevant and active throughout the region. ISIL's insidious activities perpetuate sectarian conflict and, if not effectively addressed, could serve to spark a broader regional sectarian war. For these and a host of other reasons, ISIL poses the most immediate security threat to our interests and the interests of our partners and allies. It must be—and it will be—defeated.

Over the past year we have seen a trend emerge as countries have begun to take more seriously the threat from transnational and trans-regional VEOs. Many of our regional partners historically did not prioritize the threat from VEOs. They were less concerned that these organizations would attack them at home. However, ISIL has changed that paradigm. Countries, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, now are dealing with a very real threat from Sunni extremists that they did not encounter in the past. They recognize that they can no longer afford to dismiss these threats. In the same way, countries outside of the Central Region, particularly throughout Europe and Turkey, have experienced a relatively high number of terrorist attacks conducted by or inspired by VEOs in the region, including ISIL and AQ. As partner nations' perceptions begin to change, we should seize the opportunity and work with them to build additional needed capability.

The most prevalent challenge facing the Central Region continues to be the "underlying currents" that fuel many of the destructive behaviors that plague that strategically-important part of the world. These currents include a growing ethno-sectarian divide; the ongoing religious struggle between violent extremists and moderates; and, the rejection of corruption and oppressive governance. They also include the "youth bulge," which consists of young and unemployed or under-employed and disenfranchised individuals who feel marginalized and thus are ripe for recruitment by extremist elements. While there appears to be a greater recognition of the negative effects of these currents, we have yet to see sufficient improvements made to address them. Indeed, they are becoming even more pronounced. In many parts of the region, ethnic and sectarian affiliation has taken on greater importance, moving to the forefront of individuals' and nation-states' identities. For example, it is more important for some to be Sunni or Shiite, Kurdish or Arab, than to be an Iraqi or a Syrian. Stakeholders recognize this changing dynamic, and they have not only sought to benefit from the growing instability, many actively exploit the sectarian tensions to promote their own goals and objectives. All of this has the effect of seriously weakening the nation states in the region.

Progress with respect to the root causes of the instability can only be achieved by the governments and the people of the region with our continued support. They must actively work to address the growing ethno-sectarian divide, elevate the voice of moderates, root out corruption, guard against freedom of movement and expanding influence by terrorist groups in ungoverned and under-governed spaces, and ensure the young people of the region have access to better opportunities and are able to contribute to society in meaningful ways. We need to see responsive governments in place and taking an active role in addressing these and other challenges facing the region.

The international community must also do its part to address the radical ideologies that serve to inspire extremist behaviors. It should be noted that the fight against ISIL is not simply a fight against a VEO. ISIL is an ideologically-motivated movement and must be addressed as such if we hope to achieve lasting, positive effects. We are beginning to see some positive trends with an increasing number of state leaders, senior clerics, and religious leaders from Arab countries speaking out against radical extremism. We are hopeful that such ventures will bear fruit, and we will do all that we can to support them going forward.

What should concern us all, beyond the sectarian nature of today's conflicts, is the growing risk that the increased malign activity by proxy and surrogate actors could lead to perpetual armed conflict and resulting widespread instability in the region. The "underlying currents" are common to many of the problems that exist, and activities in one area often fuel challenges in other parts of the region. We will have to keep a close eye on these and other challenges present throughout our area of responsibility.

USCENTCOM'S MISSION.

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

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT.

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

USCENTCOM PRIORITIES.

At U.S. Central Command, our aim is to see a positive transformation of the region over time, achieved "by, with, and through" our regional partners. Looking ahead, USCENTCOM will remain ready, engaged and vigilant. Our priority efforts include:

- Dismantle and eventually defeat ISIL in order to prevent further trans-regional spread of sectarian-fueled radical extremism, and to mitigate the continuing Iraq-Syria crisis.
- Continue support to Afghanistan, in partnership with NATO, to assist Afghanistan as it establishes itself as a regionally integrated, secure, stable, and developing country; continue planning and coordination for the enduring United States and NATO partnerships in Afghanistan beyond the end of 2016.
- Defeat al Qaeda, deny violent extremists safe havens and freedom of movement, and limit the reach of terrorists, to enhance protection of the United States Homeland and allies and partner nation homelands.
- Counter the Iranian Threat Network's malign activities in the region, to include the impacts of surrogates and proxies.
- Support a whole of government approach to developments in Yemen, preventing Yemen from growing as an ungoverned space for AQ/VEOs; and supporting regional stability efforts that retain U.S. CT capacity in the region.
- Maintain a credible deterrent posture against Iran's evolving conventional and strategic military capabilities.
- Prevent, and if required, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; disrupt their development and prevent their use.
- Protect lines of communication, ensure free use of the global commons and cyberspace, and secure unimpeded global access for legal commerce.
- Shape, support, incentivize, and maintain ready, flexible regional Coalitions and partners, as well as cross-CCMD and interagency U.S. whole-of-government teams, to support crisis response; optimize military resources.
- Develop and execute security cooperation programs, improving bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships, building partnered "capabilities," and improving information sharing, security, and stability.

CRITICAL FOCUS AREAS.

While we remain focused on the broad range of challenges present today in the Central Region, there are several areas that merit a larger share of our attention

and resources. These areas are strategically important because of their potential impact on our core national interests and the interests of partner nations.

Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq-Syria). We remain intensively focused on the crisis in Iraq and Syria and the ongoing fight against the terrorist organization, ISIL. Our military campaign to defeat ISIL requires that we rely on indigenous forces and that we support and enable their efforts using our precision air operations and by advising and assisting their leadership and training and equipping their ground forces. Eighteen-plus months into the campaign, we are putting increased pressure on ISIL throughout the depth and breadth of the battlespace. We are achieving good effects against the enemy; we completed Phase I of the military campaign (Degrade) and are well into Phase II (Dismantle).

In Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces, which include Iraqi Army and Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS) forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, and various Sunni and Shiite volunteer elements, with the support of United States and Coalition air operations and advisors and materiel donations, have effectively halted ISIL's advance. The enemy is now almost exclusively focused on defending his strongholds rather than projecting combat power. Additionally, ISIL's counter-attack capability has been reduced as a result of battlefield losses, although we see the group conducting deadly terrorist attacks against Iraqi forces in Anbar and west of Baghdad, and, worryingly, civilian targets—including in areas far from its control, in Baghdad and parts of the Shiite-populated south.

In Syria, we are supporting and enabling the efforts of the indigenous forces, including Syrian Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Turkmen, and others. These forces are putting increased pressure on the enemy as they push south towards the capital of ISIL's self-proclaimed Caliphate in Raqqa. They have retaken more than 18,000 square kilometers of territory and cut a number of ISIL's key lines of communication (LOC). They also secured key border crossings between Syria and Turkey, impacting ISIL's ability to send in reinforcements and much-needed re-supply. It is quite possible that the military efforts underway in Syria could progress more rapidly given that we now have a growing number of willing and capable partners on the ground.

Since commencing air operations in early August 2014, Coalition air crews from 19 partner nations have conducted more than 10,700 strikes. They are taking the fight to the enemy, and have greatly enabled the reach and effectiveness of the indigenous ground forces. Coalition airstrikes have removed several thousand enemy fighters from the battlefield, to include more than 160 of ISIL's leaders. We have destroyed thousands of the enemy's vehicles, tanks, and heavy weapon systems, along with training sites and storages facilities, command and control structures, and oil production facilities. We have helped to retake more than 40 percent of the territory in Iraq that ISIL held when we began airstrikes in August 2014, and we have restricted the enemy's freedom of movement along key routes in both Iraq and Syria. We have expanded our targeting of ISIL's oil enterprise, one of his primary sources of revenue and destroyed several bulk cash storage sites. This is further restricting ISIL's access to critical funds and other resources. This enemy hides among the civilian population; and so, we must be as precise as possible to avoid causing unnecessary civilian casualties and destruction of critical infrastructure, thereby generating resentment among the local populace. The high level of precision achieved by our air crews has ensured minimal collateral damage.

The situation in Iraq and Syria is made even more complex by the involvement of external actors, specifically Russia and Iran. It is apparent through Russia's actions that their primary objective in Syria is to bolster the Assad Regime, principally by targeting those Syrian moderate opposition forces that pose a threat to the Regime. Through its actions, Russia is effectively prolonging the civil war in Syria, which over the past five years has caused the deaths of well over 250,000 innocent men, women, and children. Assad would almost certainly not be in power today were it not for the robust support provided to the Regime by Iran and Russia. Russia's involvement in Syria exacerbates sectarian tensions as it appears they are supporting the Shiite states against the Sunnis. By putting the full range of their military capability on display in Syria, the Russians hope to impress regional actors and assert global power. Ultimately, they want to enhance their regional influence to counter the U.S. as the indispensable power player in the Middle East. None of Russia's military actions have helped stabilize Syria or end the suffering of the Syrian people. The recent Cessation of Hostilities process is an opportunity for Russia to demonstrate a renewed commitment to play a constructive role in Syria. We will continue to judge Russia by its actions, not by its words.

Of note, Russia's cooperation with Iran appears to be expanding beyond near-term coordination for operations in Syria and is moving towards an emerging strategic partnership. The potential for a more traditional security cooperation arrangement

between Russia, a state actor and member of the UN Security Council, and Iran is cause for significant concern given Iran's existing relationship with the Syrian Regime and Lebanese Hezbollah. We already see indications of high-end weapon sales and economic cooperation between the two countries.

We are making progress militarily in our efforts to defeat ISIL, as demonstrated by the recent victories in Ramadi and Shaddadi. However, military success will be lasting only if corresponding political progress is achieved in both Iraq and Syria. The Government of Iraq must take the necessary steps towards greater inclusiveness. Iraq will not remain a unified state long-term without the support of the major ethno-sectarian groups. In Syria, President Bashar al Assad's actions and his deplorable treatment of the Syrian people created enormous instability in the country that allowed ISIL to flourish. ISIL will remain difficult to defeat as long as Assad remains in power. He needs to be replaced and a stable, responsive government must be established to prevent safe haven for VEOs like ISIL.

To defeat ISIL we must do as President Obama said and "squeeze its heart [in order to] make it harder for ISIL to pump its terror and propaganda through the rest of the world." This remains the foundation of our Military Campaign Plan—to degrade, dismantle, and eventually defeat this enemy in Iraq and Syria. This is essential; however, it is not sufficient. Beyond its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, ISIL has expanded to other parts of the globe, including to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan-Pakistan. Expansion is a necessary element of ISIL's declared end-state of a global Caliphate. It also demonstrates that we are degrading the enemy's capability in Iraq and Syria; as a result, ISIL is attempting to gain a foothold in alternate locations. Moreover, the increased activity helps to distract the international community from the setbacks that ISIL is experiencing in Iraq and Syria. To maintain its legitimacy, ISIL must achieve real or perceived military victories and it must expand territorially. While the priority must be the defeat of ISIL's core in Iraq and Syria, we also will need to address the ISIL affiliates and franchises that exist in other parts of the region and globe. Additionally, we will need to continue in our efforts to curb the flow of foreign fighters, and take away the enemy's ability to resource himself.

The U.S. military is not doing any of this alone. The military campaign is just one component of the broader U.S. Government (USG) strategy which consists of nine lines of effort (LOE), to be executed by all elements of the USG with the support of our coalition partners. The military is responsible for two of the nine LOEs, LOE #2 and #3. LOE #2—"Denying ISIL Safe Haven" 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. LOE#3—"Building Partner Capacity" includes our train and equip program and advise and assist efforts in Iraq. Critically important are the many contributions being made by the 66 partners that make up the Counter-ISIL Coalition; the Coalition represents the strength of the military campaign.

We made it clear at the outset of the campaign that the defeat of ISIL would take time. There is tough work still ahead. We must remain vigilant and keep pressure on this enemy, recognizing the high stakes involved.

Afghanistan (Operation Freedom's Sentinel/Resolute Support Mission). The Afghan's National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have been challenged over the past several months in what was an especially tough fighting season. During the first full year in which the ANDSF were fully responsible for the security of their country, the ANDSF managed to deny the Taliban lasting gains. The Taliban saw the opportunity to exploit weaknesses in the Afghans' still-maturing capabilities. Although the Taliban achieved some initial success, the ANDSF have retaken and reestablished security in key areas, such as Kunduz. Most important, the ANDSF continue to learn from their experiences and look to grow stronger and more capable. The ANDSF also benefit from a supportive government that values the strong partnership between the United States and Afghanistan. The National Unity Government (NUG), led by President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah, continues to mature as both leaders work together on behalf of the country.

Meanwhile, we see positive developments across the populace. Of note, adult life expectancy has risen by 22 years from 42 years in 2002 to 64 years in 2012¹. We have seen the various state institutions develop and mature; and, the Afghans continue to make progress in the areas of governance, the judiciary, and respect for human rights, women's rights, and education. In 2001, less than 900,000 Afghans were enrolled in primary and secondary schools and almost none of them were girls.

¹U.S. Agency International Development (USAID).

Today, there are more than 8 million students enrolled in school; 36 percent of them are girls². Progress in Afghanistan has been significant over the past 14+ years, and the United States-led Coalition and the ANDSF have provided the necessary security to enable these advancements. There is a strong desire to continue to make lasting improvements in all areas, including education, the economy, healthcare, infrastructure, and communications.

While the ANDSF have made significant progress, critical capability gaps do exist in some areas, including leadership, aviation, aerial fires, ISR, logistics, and sustainment. Many of the systems that support Afghan warfighters have not fully matured, and our continued support remains critical to their development and long-term success.

The ANDSF still face a significant insurgency complicated by the presence of a number of extremist elements in the region including the Taliban, Haqqani Network, AQ, and the newly-formed ISIL—Khorasan Province (ISIL—KP). ISIL—KP poses a concern for the United States and our Afghan partners given the evolving security dynamic. The group's efforts to date have produced mixed results; however, they instability, violence, and potential for regional growth require effective pressure to deny the establishment of a safe haven. Persistent action must be taken by the Afghan Government with the support of the United States, NATO, and regional partners to disrupt the expansion of ISIL—KP and other VEOs in the region.

The Afghanistan and Pakistan (AFG—PAK) relationship remains a delicate one. Some progress was made this year, and both sides indicate a continued willingness to participate in multi-lateral and bilateral discussions. Despite long-standing distrust between elements in each country, the United States is encouraged by both nations' continued cooperation and collaboration towards trans-regional security and stability.

On 15 October 2015, President Obama announced that the United States would maintain up to 9,800 United States forces in Afghanistan through most of 2016, before drawing down to 5,500 United States forces by January 2017. This decision allows for the continued training, advising, and assisting of the ANDSF through the 2016 fighting season. By maintaining the current level of forces through much of 2016, the United States will be able to: (1) reassure Afghanistan, our partners, and allies of our enduring strategic commitment; (2) continue to conduct the train, advise, and assist (TAA) mission at the Afghan National Army (ANA) corps level and Afghan National Police (ANP) equivalent levels; and, (3) support our counter-terrorism (CT) efforts against AQ and ISIL—KP. TAA at the operational-level for select ANDSF special forces units has paid significant dividends, as evidenced by the expeditionary advising performed during operations in Northern Helmand and Kunduz at the end of the 2015 fighting season, and will remain a critical component of building capacity and institutionalizing long-term ANDSF sustainment systems.

By sustaining our current troop levels through 2016, we also demonstrate a strong commitment to our NATO allies and other partner nations, many of whom have since reaffirmed their troop commitments in support of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. NATO's continued participation is integral to the development of the ANDSF and will also help ensure donor nations provide much-needed financial support to the ANDSF. Finally, our presence sends a clear message to the Taliban that the United States supports the Afghan government and the ANDSF and encourages broader reconciliation efforts and lasting peace achieved through dialogue, rather than through violence and a continued insurgency.

Afghanistan remains a worthwhile and strategically-necessary investment. The Afghans continue to demonstrate that they are willing partners. Together, we have invested many lives and precious resources with the goal of improving stability in that country. We want to preserve those hard-earned gains and to enable the Afghans continued success going forward.

Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremist Organizations. A variety of factors that include poor governance, economic disparity, disenfranchised populaces, and deficient security forces contribute to creating conditions that promote the activities of VEOs, including ISIL and AQ. The VEOs are able to plan and launch attacks, undermine local governments, and exercise malign influence from ungoverned or under-governed spaces. In doing so, they threaten regional security and U.S. core national interests, including the defense of our Homeland.

Perhaps the most significant development in recent years is the proliferation of transnational and trans-regional VEOs that desire and, in some cases, demonstrate the ability to shape and even dominate the security environment in ways that we have not seen before. These transnational extremist groups are ideologically opposed to and often target the nation states in the region. They conduct attacks and ter-

²Afghan Central Statistics Organization (2014).

rorize local populaces in an effort to undermine and eventually topple existing governments. This further contributes to increased instability in the region.

One related dynamic that we see developing is a growing competition between transnational extremist groups. For a long period of time, AQ was the unchallenged leader of global jihad. Then, in late spring of 2014, ISIL seized large swaths of territory in Iraq, in addition to the territory it seized in Syria. It declared a Caliphate and suddenly AQ was facing a rival. Going forward, there is significant potential for increased expansion among VEOs as ISIL and AQ compete for resources and recruits. This will compel both groups to conduct more spectacular operations and to employ more aggressive messaging campaigns. As ISIL and AQ look to expand their influence, we can expect other VEOs to attempt to align with these groups. The resulting struggle and heightened activity will contribute to increasing instability across the region.

We must take direct military action where appropriate to counter this growing threat. We cannot allow VEOs to operate uncontested in the region, permitting them to grow stronger and expand their global reach. The long-term defeat of VEOs will require that our regional partners provide for the security of their sovereign spaces, with the U.S. and its allies providing support where possible. Until they have sufficient capability to do so, we must be prepared to take active direct measures to counter these VEOs.

Yemen. Yemen remains embroiled in a complex civil war that is exacerbated by sectarian tensions. In January 2015, the Huthis, a group of Zaydi Shiite fighters led by Abdul Malik al Huthi and aligned with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, displaced the legitimate government of Yemen led by President Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi. On each side, there are a number of competing factions, including the Huthis, Saleh loyalists, southern secessionists, and tribal alliances with competing agendas that further complicate the situation on the ground. These groups are attempting to assert control over Yemen as a whole or at least gain greater autonomy within their respective areas of influence.

Iran has provided support to the Huthis, likely to gain leverage against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This could potentially enable the Iranians to complicate maritime LOCs, including the Bab al Mandeb Strait, from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and beyond. Iran has a long history of seeking to protect the Shiite populace in the Gulf and using this rationale to justify a broad array of actions. Conversely, KSA desires a stable Yemen with a pro-Saudi government that effectively protects its border, prevents an Iranian proxy from gaining undue influence over strategic terrain that includes the Bab al Mandeb, and protects against safe havens for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and other VEOs. The KSA-led Coalition has sought to counter the Huthis and associated forces with the goal to return the legitimate displaced Hadi government to power. While the coalition has experienced some significant challenges and we have expressed concerns about Coalition strikes on targets that lead to civilian casualties and damage Yemen's already poor infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Coalition's efforts have proven problematic for the Huthis.

Yemen is the poorest country in the Central Region and the ongoing conflict continues to exacerbate the very serious humanitarian crisis plaguing the country. Much of Yemen's infrastructure has been destroyed, food production is at a standstill, international trade is severely degraded, medical supplies are critically short, and little humanitarian aid is reaching those in need. The ousting of the Republic of Yemen Government (RoYG) created a large security vacuum which has greatly benefited AQAP, as well as the newly-formed ISIL affiliate, ISIL—Yemen (ISIL—Y). AQAP is strengthening and expanding its reach in the absence of a significant CT effort. Prior to the unseating of the Hadi Government, the United States maintained a physical presence in Yemen and an effective CT partnership with the Yemeni security forces. We conducted operations against AQAP and had significantly degraded its capacity. We were also in the process of building the Yemeni forces' capacity through our advise and assist and train and equip efforts. The reduced capability coupled with the lack of a U.S. presence presents a vulnerability that must be addressed.

Since these groups pose a national security risk to the U.S. and partner nations, it is imperative that we seek a way to resume a partnered approach to CT operations against Yemen-based VEOs and their support networks. It is in our national interest and the interest of our partners to resolve the civil war and reinstate the legitimate government that can work to address the many challenges facing Yemen today. We are looking at how to best move this forward. The additional capability would enable them to better secure their borders and guard against internal threats from violent extremists.

Iran. Iran continues to pose a significant threat to the region despite the restrictions placed on its nuclear program as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement. In this post-JCPOA period, the Iranian Threat Network's (ITN) Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Forces (IRGC-QF), proxies (e.g., Lebanese Hezbollah), and Iranian-backed Shiite militant groups remain very active. Iran also maintains a large and diverse theater ballistic missile arsenal, along with significant cyber and maritime capabilities. Despite the fact that President Rouhani's administration has indicated an interest in normalizing relations with the international community, there are hardline elements in the country intent on undermining the efforts of the moderates. They maintain substantial influence over Iran's foreign policy and military activities.

Iran continues to pursue policies that enflame sectarian tensions and threaten U.S. strategic interests in the Central Region. Their primary focus is countering the ISIL threat in Iraq and preserving the Assad Regime in Syria. They also continue to support some Shiite surrogate groups in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Huthis in Yemen, and Lebanese Hezbollah, with a combination of money, arms, and training. Iran's emerging relationship with Russia further complicates the security environment as they look to expand their cooperation in areas that include the sale of high-end weapons. We must consider that when ISIL is defeated and Syria stabilizes, we and our partners will face an enhanced ITN bolstered by warfighting experience, a multi-ethnic supply of radicalized Shiite fighters, expanded partnerships, and an intense sectarian climate. There are additional developments within the ITN that we will have to closely monitor to fully appreciate the nature of this evolving threat. For example, Iranian-backed Shiite militia groups are becoming entrenched within Iraq's formal security institutions through the Popular Mobilization Forces, a development that could provide these groups with increased resources and legitimacy and greatly complicate our relationship with Iraq's security forces going forward. Additionally, it is possible that Iran will have challenges commanding and controlling an expanded ITN, something we are already seeing play out in several places across the region. Iran exerts a considerable degree of influence over the multiple external proxies and surrogates that comprise the ITN. However, the larger the ITN becomes through the proliferation of Shiite militant groups, the more difficult it may be for Iran to control their activities, especially when their interests diverge.

Our relationship with Iran remains a challenging one. We will continue to pay close attention to their actions, while supporting our regional partners and helping them to improve their capacity to counter Iran and mitigate the effects of Iran's malign activity in the region.

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE.

In many ways our military-to-military relationships continue to represent the cornerstone of America's partnerships with the nation states in the USCENTCOM AOR. Below are synopses of the status of those relationships, along with the current state of affairs in each of the 20 countries, save Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Iran which were addressed in the previous section, "Critical Focus Areas" (see pages 9–21):

The Gulf States

The Gulf States remain steadfast partners and continue to support the Counter ISIL Coalition's operations in Iraq and Syria, primarily through the provision of robust access, basing, and overflight permissions critical to the conduct of regional operations. This support played out against the backdrop of some key developments over the past year, GCC support for the JCPOA agreement, and the GCC-led campaign in Yemen, which remains the Gulf State's primary focus.

Last year, we witnessed an increased willingness by our Gulf partners to attempt to actively shape and influence the regional security environment, most recently in the campaign in Yemen. Several of the Gulf States have demonstrated an unprecedented level of unity and military cooperation in operations against the Huthis in Yemen, and we continue to emphasize the importance of pursuing a political solution that will lead to the reinstatement of the internationally-recognized government. We are working with the Saudi-led coalition to help mitigate civilian casualties and to ensure that humanitarian assistance flows into Yemen. Nevertheless, we are deeply concerned by the devastating toll of the crisis in Yemen, both in terms of civilian casualties and the dire humanitarian situation that Yemen faces. We continue to urge all sides to undertake proactive steps to minimize harm to civilians, including by exercising restraint, distinguishing between military objectives and civilian objects, and not positioning armaments or military equipment in areas where civilians are known to be present, as the Huthis have done.

Our GCC partners have also indicated a desire to collaborate more closely with the U.S. on the threat posed by AQAP and the newly ascendant ISIL–Y. However, the pace and scope of activity has challenged the Gulf States’ ability to sustain operations, and to conduct the same level of military-to-military engagements, training, and exercises as in previous years. Now, more than ever, there is a need for strong U.S. engagement, vision, and leadership aimed at increasing participation and cooperation amongst and between our GCC partners.

We have worked hard to strengthen our strategic partnership with the *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (KSA) in support of shared security objectives. Going forward, we can expect KSA to continue to exercise influence among Sunni States throughout the Central Region.

The Kingdom continues to balance a wide range of external security challenges, including the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, operations in Yemen against the Huthi-Saleh alliance, and the growing threat posed by AQAP, ISIL–Y, and other VEOs. While KSA is a member of the Counter-ISIL Coalition, over the past several months their primary focus has been leading the coalition in Yemen. The ongoing campaign in Yemen has provided KSA with valuable experience in building and sustaining coalitions and conducting coalition-supported operations. It also has provided some opportunities for us to identify reforms that KSA could undertake to increase their capabilities.

The Saudis continue to support the fight against ISIL. After postponing air operations for a period while they focused on Yemen, KSA recently staged F–15s at Incirlik, Turkey and will commence operations inside of Syria beginning in early March. While operational demands continue to limit the amount of support that the Saudis are presently able to devote to the Counter-ISIL Campaign, we anticipate that as the conflict in Yemen approaches a negotiated settlement, Saudi support for ongoing efforts against ISIL and other VEOs will expand.

Kuwait remains a model for stability in the Gulf Region. It provides one of the most supportive environments for access, basing, overflight, and burden-sharing. As a Gulf leader, Kuwait has been able to mitigate rifts between and among partner nations, while at the same time helping to promote a regional response to crises emanating from the region (e.g., Iraq, Syria, and Yemen). We want to continue to encourage and enable the Kuwaitis in their efforts to achieve increased cooperation among the GCC partner nations.

The bilateral relationship between the United States and Kuwait remains strong. With robust air and sea ports, as well as modern military bases and infrastructure, Kuwait provides a critical platform for USCENTCOM to project power in response to regional contingencies. Most notably, Kuwait is home to the forward operating headquarters of USCENTCOM’s United States Army component, United States Army Central (USARCENT). The support provided by the Kuwaitis has been integral to the planning and execution of Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq and Syria) and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel/Resolute Support Mission (Afghanistan).

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq. The occasion provides an opportunity to acknowledge the significant contributions made by the U.S.-led coalition in 1991, while showcasing the gains made over the past quarter of a century as a result of the security cooperation agreement that exists between both countries. It is also an opportunity for pursuing additional steps to deepen and broaden our partnership with Kuwait. We remain committed to working together to address emerging threats. Although Kuwait has been largely unaffected by the fight in Iraq and Syria, it did suffer a significant bombing of a mosque in Kuwait City in June 2015 for which ISIL claimed responsibility. We remain committed to assisting the Kuwaitis in their efforts to prevent ISIL from achieving further inroads within Kuwait’s borders.

Our military-to-military relationship with the *United Arab Emirates* (UAE) continues along its historically positive trajectory. The UAE shares our concerns with respect to the regional spread of violent extremist ideologies, and the Emirates recognize the threat posed to their internal security—and overall regional stability—by ISIL and its adherents and affiliates. In response to this shared threat, the UAE has undertaken several complementary lines of effort designed to counter the rise of groups like ISIL–Y and AQAP. Our continued support is critical to enabling the Emirates’ “lead by example” approach to regional security, both on the ground and in the information domain. Given our shared enduring security interests, the U.S.-UAE relationship will almost certainly grow in importance in the coming days.

The UAE’s military capability is arguably the most mature among the Gulf States. The Emirates have demonstrated the ability and political willingness to plan and conduct expeditionary military operations, as evidenced by their recent deployment of forces in support of the Saudi-led operation in Yemen. They also provide critical support for coalition operations in Afghanistan. Going forward, we will look

to strengthen our security cooperation partnership with the UAE through continued engagement and a robust Foreign Military Sales program. We also will pursue opportunities for increased collaboration in support of CT initiatives across our AOR.

Qatar continues to play an influential diplomatic and military role throughout the Central Region and has demonstrated a commitment to strengthening relations with the United States. This year, the Qataris played a central role in the Counter-ISIL Coalition operations in Syria, in addition to providing forces to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. It is the first time Qatar has supported two simultaneous operations outside its borders. These dual track efforts place significant demand on the Qatari military's 11,000-member force. The Qataris, with our support, will need to find ways to manage the demand while they take steps to enhance the capability of their military forces. In 2014, Qatar was the largest FMS customer in the world with \$11 billion in new cases (Patriots, Apaches, and Javelin). Qatar is also looking to further expand its Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) system by acquiring Terminal High Altitude Area Defense and Early Warning Radar capabilities. Qatar's efforts to modernize its military and increase its self-defense capabilities, present an opportunity for the U.S. to enhance its interoperability with an important regional partner. We will coordinate those missile defense efforts as part of our broader engagement with the GCC on ballistic missile defense.

We value our strong military-to-military relationship with the Qataris. Over the past 20 years, Qatar has provided the U.S. with unmatched regional access through basing of American forces at Camp Al Sayliyah and Al Udeid Air Base (AUAB). Of note, AUAB is the single-largest U.S. logistical hub in theater and the Combined Air Operations Center at AUAB provides critical oversight and direction to all U.S. air operations in the region. Qatar's long-demonstrated history of open partnership makes it one of our strongest partners in the Central Region.

The United States enjoys a historically strong and productive partnership with the *Kingdom of Bahrain*. Bahrain hosts the headquarters of United States Fifth Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces in Manama (Naval Support Activity Bahrain and Isa Air Base), and it enjoys status as a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally. Bahrain is also a member of the Counter-ISIL Coalition; its air crews participated in the initial airstrikes in Syria in September 2014. Additionally, the Bahrainis remain active supporters of the Saudi-led operations in Yemen. The Kingdom faces a persistent threat from Iran via malign proxy activity within its borders. USCENTCOM actively supports the Bahrainis in their efforts to counter this threat.

Our military-to-military relationship improved in recent months since full resumption of U.S. FMS after a three-year delay. Bahrain also seeks to make improvements to its aviation capabilities, specifically by purchasing new F-16s and upgrading its ageing fleet. We continue to urge the Bahrainis to further their commitment to political reconciliation and dialogue, which is fundamental to mitigating the risks posed by sectarian radicalization. The Bahraini government has implemented a number of reforms since 2011. We are encouraging them to pursue and mature these reforms and other similar institutions, as it is imperative that internal security gains against tangible threats do not lead to harsh restrictions on legitimate and non-violent expressions of political disagreement.

The U.S. and *Oman* maintain close relations based upon a shared desire for a peaceful and prosperous Gulf Region, and we greatly appreciate Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said's leadership. Oman is strategically positioned on the Arabian Sea and provides critical support to the United States in the form of access, basing, and overflight permissions that greatly enable coalition efforts in the region. While Oman's strategic approach does occasionally cause tension between Oman and its GCC neighbors, it also presents USCENTCOM with opportunities to work with the Sultanate as an intermediary between adversarial states. In general, our bilateral military-to-military relationship with Oman remains strong, underpinned by the U.S. and Oman's shared interest in maintaining open sea lines of communication in the Gulf and strengthening land borders in order to prevent the infiltration of AQ and other VEOs into the Sultanate.

The Levant

The Greater Levant sub-region is the epicenter of ethno-sectarian tensions and conflict in the USCENTCOM AOR. The volatility reflects the makeup of the sub-region's populace with Sunnis, Shiite, Kurds, Christians, Druze and others living together in mixed neighborhoods. Also adding to the unrest is the growing competition between AQ and ISIL. AQ shifted some of its command and control to Syria to support its most prominent affiliate, al Nusrah Front. At the same time, the core of ISIL's self-proclaimed Caliphate resides in the Levant. Thus, the Levant is where you have two organizations' senior leadership in competition for global jihad. At the same time, the sub-region is struggling to manage the effects of the civil war in

Syria. If not contained, the conflict, now in its fifth year, risks sparking a broader regional war. It also has caused a burgeoning humanitarian crisis affecting Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. Stability in the Levant is impacted by the competition for influence by outside actors, principally Iran, China, and Russia. The instability in the Levant also threatens Israel, an important United States ally. The close coordination between USCENTCOM and United States European Command is essential given Turkey and Israel's role in the Levant's security environment.

Lebanon is an important and valued partner in the region. Lebanon faces an array of interlocking challenges that include sustained threats from ISIL and other VEOs; a steady influx of refugees that only exacerbates long-standing sectarian tensions and ongoing humanitarian and economic crises; and a political deadlock in Beirut that has left Lebanon without a president for over 19 months with none of the major political institutions of the state—the presidency, parliament, and the cabinet—functioning adequately today. ISIL and AQ affiliate Al Nusrah Front pose potential threats to Lebanon's security and stability along Lebanon's border with Syria, but also in urban areas deep within the country's border. In November 2015, ISIL conducted coordinated suicide attacks against Shiite targets in Southern Beirut killing 41 civilians. The attacks threatened to ignite increased Sunni-Shiite tensions, but tensions were diffused by an immediate and coordinated response by Lebanese security forces. These attacks were at least partly in response to Lebanese Hezbollah's (LH) active involvement in the Syria conflict. Although Lebanon's official contributions in support of the Counter-ISIL Campaign have been limited to CT efforts inside of Lebanon's borders, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have been heavily engaged in the fight against extremists with near daily engagements along Lebanon's border with Syria.

Lebanon faces a refugee crisis of historic proportion with more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees and 1.5 million Syrian refugees, which is equal to a quarter of Lebanon's population. The latter presents an economic and humanitarian burden for Lebanon, while also posing a security threat as some Syrian refugees may be vulnerable to Sunni extremist influences. In order to effectively cope with the refugee crisis resulting from the Syria conflict, Lebanon will require significant international assistance long-term. Meanwhile, top Lebanese officials have suggested that there may be a need for an international intervention to address the presidential vacancy and political impasse which has resulted in poor government services and large-scale public demonstrations.

In the context of these challenges, the LAF is one of Lebanon's only functioning national institutions. We enjoy a strong military-to-military relationship with the LAF, and our support has been critical to its success. Our special operations forces have conducted extensive joint training exercises and have well-established relationships. The LAF has been a staunch USCENTCOM partner for nearly a decade, receiving almost \$1 billion in combined assistance from the U.S. during this period. During fiscal year 2015, we provided \$84 million in foreign military financing (FMF), \$80 million in CT assistance, and also trained over 2,000 LAF soldiers in the U.S. Our special operations forces have conducted extensive joint training exercises and have well-established relationships. Because of its success against ISIL and other VEOs, the LAF enjoys strong support across Lebanese sects. Our continued support of the LAF is critical and will focus on developing much-needed ISR, strike, and aerial fires capabilities to ensure sustained success against ISIL and Al Nusrah Front along the border and to counter-balance LH.

The *Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* remains one of the United States' most reliable partners. Like many in the region, Jordan faces economic challenges that are exacerbated by the Syrian civil war, the associated refugee flow, and a generally unstable regional security environment. The instability caused by the "underlying currents," namely the "youth bulge," makes Jordan's populace highly susceptible to radicalization. The country's leadership is particularly concerned about the growing threat from ISIL and Al Nusrah Front emanating from Syria. The Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) remain active participants in the Counter-ISIL Campaign.

Jordan's partnership and leadership are critical to advancing U.S. regional objectives. Jordan is widely considered the Arab voice of moderation in the region and Jordanian leadership continues to play a critical role in countering the extremist ideologies that contribute to instability. In return, Jordan requires economic assistance for military cooperation and to stabilize its economy. In fiscal year 2015, Jordan received \$385 million in FMF. Congress appropriated \$450 million in FMF for Jordan in fiscal year 2016. Additionally, Jordan receives \$3.8 million annually for International Military Education and Training (IMET), and more funding than any other partner to date from the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund. The JAF's ability to procure U.S. weapons and equipment and increase interoperability with U.S. Forces depends on this funding, which also provides Jordan with a strong message

of assurance that we will help to defend them from extremist threats. Finally, Jordan requires continued international assistance to deal with its sizeable refugee population that consists of approximately 600,000 UN-registered Syrian refugees, the majority of whom compete with locals for employment and housing, creating the potential for increased tensions. In the past 24 months, USCENTCOM invested \$5.4 million for humanitarian affairs projects inside of Jordan.

Egypt remains an anchor state in the Central Region. It is a key strategic partner of the United States in both the counter-ISIL fight and with respect to our many shared security interests, including securing peace with Israel, achieving regional stability, and enhancing security of the Suez Canal. While daily life is returning to normal after four years of political upheaval, including recently conducted parliamentary elections, Egypt still faces a number of internal and external challenges, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, which is now home to the ISIL affiliate, ISIL-Sinai (ISIL-S) that threatens not only Egyptian stability, but also the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) mission, and is strongly suspected of downing a Russian civilian airliner. Egypt is also increasingly concerned about ISIL-Libya's ability to impact its western border.

The cornerstone of the United States-Egypt relationship is the military-to-military partnership with the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF), forged through decades of close coordination, exercises, and interdependence. After a downturn in relations in 2013, we have seen the relationship enter a gradual recovery period. The Egyptians support our overflight requests and provide our naval forces with Suez Canal transit courtesies that provide expedited access to critical waterways. Egypt routinely deploys peacekeeping troops in support of operations around the globe. USG aid and support to Egypt, including FMF, remain crucial to Egypt's fight against ISIL-S as we work closely with the EAF to provide both the equipment and the training required to make the transition from a force focused on conventional warfare to one that can defeat a terrorist enemy using asymmetrical tactics. We are focused on helping Egypt improve the security of their borders in an effort to stop the flow of foreign fighters and equipment transiting from Libya and the Sudan through Egypt and into the Central Region.

A sizeable portion of Egypt's current military leadership is United States-trained and has indicated a keen interest in securing additional U.S. support to address evolving security threats. It will be imperative to leverage these ties as we look to assist the Egyptian military in their ongoing efforts to bring improved stability to North Africa, including the Sinai Peninsula. Also, we want to help them to further modernize and reform their security forces to better enable them to address relevant threats and play a larger role in providing for regional stability. Specifically, we will need to focus on updating Egypt's counter-insurgency/CT doctrine and training programs to better address the unique nature of the terrorist threats facing the region. We continue to provide much-needed support to the MFO mission, whose presence has been a linchpin for Egyptian-Israeli peace and cooperation since its inception over 30 years ago. With the support of the Egyptians, we have taken significant measures in recent months to increase the protection of our forces assigned to Task Force Sinai and the MFO mission writ large.

Egypt has not contributed forces in support of the Counter-ISIL Campaign in Iraq and Syria. They are supporting the Saudi-led fight in Yemen, and they continue to place pressure on ISIL affiliates in both the Sinai and Libya. Additionally, Egypt's regional leadership carries much influence among our Arab partners and can help to promote USCENTCOM's broader regional objectives. We continue to look for ways to integrate Egypt into the Counter-ISIL Coalition and in support of our CT efforts across the region.

Central and South Asia

We view the CASA sub-region, not as a single entity, but as seven individual countries, each with its own political and economic trajectory and each sharing a unique bilateral relationship with the U.S. While we have many shared interests, we are paying especially close attention to the Central Asian States' (CAS) reaction to the planned United States/NATO downsizing in Afghanistan set to begin in late 2016. Of note, transit access by way of the Northern Distribution Network, used to supply our troops in Afghanistan, is provided by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Our primary goal remains unchanged and that is to prevent the establishment of terrorist safe havens in the CASA sub-region, while acknowledging the challenges posed by trans-national extremism, narco-trafficking, and the return of foreign fighters. These countries face additional pressures from an increasingly assertive Russia. China is seeking to expand its economic influences in the sub-region as well. In light of these challenges, leaders in the region actively seek U.S. engagement, while we

continue to encourage greater multi-lateral cooperation with the goal to promote improved security and stability in the region and to preserve the CAS' sovereignty.

We conducted our first CASA Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) Conference in late September. The event was well-attended and highly-productive. Despite their geographic proximity, many of the CHODs had not met nor communicated with one another prior to attending the conference. The conference focused on identifying opportunities for collaboration on issues such as CT, counter-narcotics (CN), border security operations, and the professionalization of their officer and non-commissioned officer corps. It was encouraging to see that, despite their previous reluctance to interact in multi-lateral forums, the CHODs actively participated in the discussions. They also expressed interest in convening a follow-on conference, and several of them expressed a desire to participate in multi-lateral military exercises going forward. The CASA CHODs also expressed a keen interest in finding ways to share intelligence that could further support regional CT operations. On 14–15 March, the CASA DMI (Director of Military Intelligence) Conference will be held at USCENTCOM Headquarters in Tampa, Florida. Six of the seven CASA States will be represented. The United States-Pakistan military-to-military relationship remains stable. Key contributing factors are our security assistance, and the Coalition Support Fund. In December 2015, we participated in the Defense Consultative Group, a component of the United States-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, which focused on future initiatives that will help to sustain United States-Pakistan bilateral defense cooperation on shared security interests.

We are encouraged by some signs from Kabul and Islamabad that point towards a renewed effort at improving Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, and Pakistani support for the reconciliation process in Afghanistan. The Pakistan military continues to play a visible role in efforts to reduce safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, while at the same time actively countering VEOs, including AQ, Tehrik e Taliban—Pakistan, and the newly-emerged ISIL—KP. During the most recent fighting season we saw increased collaboration among Afghan and Pakistani military leadership. Commanders at the corps level have met multiple times and continue their efforts to increase interoperability between the forces. Both countries' military leaders also are working to secure a bilateral border standard operating procedure. In the meantime, we need Pakistan to take decisive actions against the Haqqani Network (HQN). The Pakistanis are uniquely positioned to counter the HQN, which remains the greatest threat to our forces and to stability in Afghanistan long-term.

Progress on the India-Pakistan relationship is hindered by cross-border violence and territorial disputes. However, there have been some encouraging signs and lines of communication remain open as demonstrated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's meeting in Pakistan in late December 2015 and the subsequent commitment both parties to reinstate the Comprehensive Dialogue. Dialogue between the two countries is critical, especially given that they are both nuclear powers. USCENTCOM will continue to do our part to help encourage and strengthen the critical relationship between Pakistan and its neighbors.

Kazakhstan remains the best positioned country in the CASA sub-region with respect to security given its geographic location and strong economic foundation. However, the recent downturn in oil prices and pervasive Russian influence do present growing challenges. Despite these obstacles, the United States' relationship with Kazakhstan remains the most well-developed among the Central Asian States. The Kazakhs seek United States assistance in modernizing their military forces, and we are taking advantage of the opportunity to further strengthen our bilateral relationship. Specifically, we are helping the Kazakhs to professionalize their non-commissioned officer corps, modernize their military education program, and improve training and personnel management. Additionally, we continue to help the Kazakhs to build a deployable peace-keeping capability. Kazakhstan remains the largest contributor to Afghanistan's stability among the CAS, providing technical and financial support to the Afghan security forces and educational opportunities for Afghan students to study in Kazakhstan.

The *Kyrgyz Republic* faces many of the same security challenges as its neighbors in the region, particularly with respect to the threat posed by VEOs and the flow of narcotics. While our military-to-military relationship with the Kyrgyz has been historically positive, it remains challenged by the absence of a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which guarantees United States servicemembers legal protections while in country. The DCA with then-Kyrgyzstan ended on 11 July 2014 with the closure of the Transit Center at Manas International Airport. While this has strained our military-to-military relationship, we intend to pursue bilateral cooperation on a case-by-case basis.

Tajikistan has been heavily impacted by Russia's economic downturn and by increased instability in northern Afghanistan. Moreover, intense pressure from the Kremlin, including the presence of Russian military bases inside of Tajikistan, limits our military-to-military cooperation. Nevertheless, Tajikistan still desires a strong partnership with the United States to help address external security concerns, maintain internal stability, and safeguard Tajikistan's sovereignty. Our mutual security interests provide several opportunities for cooperation in the areas of CT, CN, border security along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, as well as the development of a deployable peacekeeping force. Our military-to-military relationship is growing comparatively faster than our other relationships in the CASA sub-region.

Like other hydrocarbon-exporting countries, *Turkmenistan* has had to confront falling gas prices and remains concerned about perceived instability in northern Afghanistan. Turkmenistan is selective in accepting military cooperation programs, declining to participate in most military events, conferences, and exercises. United States cooperation with the Turkmen is primarily focused on counter-narcotics, disaster preparedness, and medical service readiness. These three areas provide us with engagement opportunities to build those partner capabilities that are acceptable to the Turkmen and also help to sustain and even strengthen our relationship going forward.

A shared border with Afghanistan and a heavy domestic security presence have helped to shield *Uzbekistan* from significant threats. Despite their stated aversion to foreign blocs and multi-lateral engagements, our relationship with the Uzbeks continues to grow stronger. Bilateral military-to-military opportunities are focused on improving border security, CT, CN, and stemming the flow of foreign fighters. The Uzbeks, like other CASA nations, remain concerned about the potential return of radicalized fighters from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. Our military-to-military relationship with the Uzbeks remains positive. By expanding our collaboration, we expect to improve the professionalism and capacity of Uzbekistan's armed forces, which is the largest military force in Central Asia.

OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH.

The effective employment of our "Manage-Prevent-Shape" strategic approach largely depends upon the capacity and readiness of our forward-deployed military forces and Service prepositioned materiel capabilities. Equally important are our efforts aimed at building our regional partners' capacity and strengthening our bilateral and multilateral relationships. This is achieved principally through key leader engagements and our training and joint exercise programs.

Building Partner Capacity (BPC). A key component of USCENTCOM's Theater Strategy focuses on building the capacity of partner nations to enable them to assume a greater role in providing for the security of their sovereign territories and counter common threats. Joint training exercises, key leader engagements, and FMS and FMF programs continue to represent the key pillars of our BPC strategy. Also critical are relevant authorities and programs noted in the fiscal year 2016 President's Budget, namely the Global Train and Equip authority and Counter Terrorism Partnerships Fund. BPC is a low-cost and high-return investment. Tangible by-products of our BPC efforts include increased access and influence, enhanced interoperability, and improved security for our forward deployed forces, diplomatic sites, and other U.S. interests. The practice of working "by, with, and through" our regional partners serves to enhance the legitimacy and durability of our actions and presence in the region. Most importantly, having strong partners enhances our collective capability and interoperability, allows for increased burden sharing, and improves the likelihood of success, particularly in the event of unforeseen contingencies. Over the past year, it has been encouraging to see a number of our regional partners take a more active role in addressing threats and protecting their sovereign territories. In particular, the GCC's role in addressing regional security challenges has grown exponentially. Our Gulf partners are to be commended for their leadership and their efforts in a number of areas. The convergence of interests, namely the need to counter the threat posed by ISIL and other VEOs, has afforded a unique opportunity to strengthen ties among nations while contributing to improving stability and security throughout the region. We should do all that we can to support and enable their continued collaboration as we work to enhance our collective capabilities.

The fact is that contingency operations provide an opportunity to take a hard look at ourselves and identify areas where we may need to make improvements. They also provide opportunities to strengthen our commitment to our regional partners. They will prove increasingly important going forward as we confront the growing

threat posed by ISIL, AQ and other VEOs, and as we manage the challenges posed by Iran and other malign actors in the region.

The President reiterated our strong commitment to bolstering the defense capabilities of our GCC partners during the U.S.-GCC Summit held at Camp David in May 2015. Building on that Summit, GCC members have welcomed enhanced U.S. security engagement, but implementation of commitments to follow-up on the Camp David Summit has been uneven. In some areas—including arms transfers, ballistic missile defense, and CT cooperation—we have had productive initial engagements and follow-up efforts are underway. In other areas, most notably special operations training and maritime cooperation, the GCC has been slow to act on U.S. offers of additional cooperation and assistance. Over the next year, we will continue to build on the Camp David Summit, prioritizing implementation of GCC commitments that would reaffirm our commitment to Gulf security and also support our two top priorities: defeating ISIL and other extremists, and addressing conflicts that are undermining regional stability. Our security assurance and assistance, and the steps we are taking with our GCC partners to strengthen their capacity to deal with asymmetric threats, are designed to put them in a far stronger position so that they can engage Iran politically—clear-eyed, without illusions, and from a position of strength. We look forward to seeing the initiatives translate into credible, enduring capabilities that contribute to improved regional security and stability.

USCENTCOM Exercise and Training Program. The USCENTCOM Exercise and Training Program continues to grow in complexity and relevance with extended participation throughout the AOR during fiscal year 2015 and into the 1st quarter of fiscal year 2016. The program affords meaningful opportunities that assist with BPC efforts, improve interoperability among partner nations, maintain U.S. readiness, and provide for key leader engagements.

During fiscal year 2015, the command executed 51 USCENTCOM and/or component command-sponsored bilateral and multi-lateral exercises. These included EAGER LION 15, which was hosted by Jordan and included naval, air, and land assets from 14 partner nations operating at 14 different locations and totaling over 8,500 personnel, including some 4,500 U.S. military and civilian support personnel. The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise is planned for the spring of 2016, taking place in over 8,000 square miles of navigable waterway and uniting more than 40 nations, including over 7,000 global military servicemembers and over 40 naval vessels and numerous other warfighting assets in defense of the region's maritime commons. Each of the 51 exercises contributes to the readiness of U.S. and partner nation forces and the advancement of our national interests. Our exercise and training program also serves to demonstrate mutual commitment to regional security and combined command, control, and communications interoperability (C3I). Other program impacts include military-to-military engagement, integrated staff planning, the execution of joint and combined operations, the development of coalition warfare, and the refinement of complementary warfare capabilities.

REQUIRED CAPABILITIES AND RESOURCES.

The security environment in the Central Region is likely to remain highly volatile for the foreseeable future. We must ensure that we are ready and able to conduct steady state operations, deter our adversaries, reassure our regional partners, and respond to unforeseen contingencies from a wide range of actors and VEOs.

In order to effectively protect and promote U.S. and partner nation interests in the region, USCENTCOM must maintain a strong forward presence and be adequately resourced with the necessary capabilities and force posture, including forces, equipment, and enablers. USCENTCOM's posture and presence remain the primary means for providing the National Command Authority with military options in the region. Our required capabilities include:

Forces and Equipment. Forward-deployed rotational joint forces that are trained, equipped, mission-capable, and ready to respond quickly and effectively, including fighter and airlift assets, surveillance platforms, BMD assets, naval vessels, ground forces, and cyber teams, are essential to the protection of our core interests, and supporting and reassuring our regional partners. A capable and well-supported forward presence can help to prevent conflict through deterrence, manage crisis escalation through early intervention, and provides our national-level leadership with a broad set of response options. We continue to develop a sustainable, flexible, long-term posture that provides the necessary presence, access, and partnerships to support enduring missions and activities across the USCENTCOM AOR.

We remain increasingly concerned that our demand for replenishment of critical precision munitions continues to put a strain on Service budgets. At the same time, industry's capacity to produce key precision munitions cannot keep pace with the

demand from USCENTCOM, other geographic combatant commands, as well as our Coalition partners looking to purchase munitions through existing security assistance programs in support of USCENTCOM theater-wide operations. We work with the Service headquarters to prioritize precision munitions and continue to seek increases in the procurement and AOR allocation of our most sophisticated and precise weapon systems (e.g., TLAMs, JASSM, PAC-3, ATACMs), as well as authorization for construction of munitions storage facilities within the AOR.

USCENTCOM requires continued regeneration, reset, and modernization of designated Service pre-positioned equipment capability sets. These capability sets and associated materiel represent critical enablers essential for effective force employment in support of ongoing operations and unforeseen contingencies. They allow our national-level leadership to respond to a diverse set of crisis scenarios, to include preventing disruptions to trade and security that could have disastrous impacts on the global economy. Pre-positioned equipment reconstitution and regeneration must remain a Service priority, recognizing that equipment shortfalls continue to impact indirect fire, sustainment, and troop support capabilities.

Information Operations. Information Operations (IO) remains a top priority for USCENTCOM and an important element of the broader 'whole of government' effort to counter our adversaries and protect our core national interests. Our adversaries, including ISIL, use the information battlespace to great effect. We must actively counter this asymmetric threat, recognizing that IO will endure well beyond today's major combat and counter-insurgency operations. Of note, Iran and proxy actors actively threaten our interests and the interests of our regional partners and they are enabled by robust IO efforts. Our IO capabilities, both offensive and defensive, are designed to disrupt and counter these and other threats. They also may be used to promote the messages of moderates in order to counter the radical ideologies that fuel much of the conflict and instability that plague the Central Region. To date, investments in IO have produced a cost-effective, non-lethal tool for disrupting VEO activity across the region. We will need to build upon the existing capability and improve our effectiveness and that of our partners operating in the information battlespace.

Cyber Operations. USCENTCOM communication networks are the most critical enabler for our deployed servicemembers and regional military partners. Our complex joint and coalition command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C5ISR) systems infrastructure is essential for enabling mission command, precision targeting, intelligence processing and dissemination, CT actions, IAMD, disaster relief missions, cyber, sustainment, and combat operations throughout the AOR. These missions require assured availability, integrity, and confidentiality to provide accurate data for precision weapons and navigation systems, as well as a robust communications backbone infrastructure that provides the required bandwidth for crucial aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) processing, exploitation, and dissemination and distributed mission command. We must also continue to develop and synchronize cyber capabilities with kinetic operations to achieve key security objectives. Congressional support is crucial to the continued improvement of cyber security and offensive capabilities necessary to provide mission assurance, deterrence and dominance in this critical and highly contested domain. A successful cyber defense requires vigilance and continuous investment in order to sustain an advantage over adversaries that are constantly improving their cyber threat capabilities.

Integrated Air and Missile Defense. A robust IAMD capability remains increasingly important to us and our regional partners as threat technology improves and systems become more flexible, mobile, survivable, reliable, and accurate. Today, the global demand for BMD capabilities far exceeds supply. In particular, there is a need for additional upper- and lower-tier interceptors, surface and space-based surveillance and warning, and ISR platforms to seek and destroy ballistic missiles and rockets and unmanned aerial assets. USCENTCOM mitigates some of this risk through increased IAMD integration, interoperability, and burden-sharing with our partners. However, a gap does still exist that must be addressed. Providing IAMD protection to deployed U.S. Forces and in support of critical infrastructure is crucial to mission success and provides a visible deterrence to regional aggression. Moreover, it signals U.S. commitment to regional partners, while providing flexibility to respond to regional contingencies. Our bases in the USCENTCOM AOR will increasingly be vulnerable to the threat posed by ballistic missiles if we continue along the current trajectory. Congress' support for the Department's investment in this area is essential.

Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance Assets. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities remain challenged by supply-versus-demand limitations. The demand for ISR has increased substantially as a result of the Counter-

ISIL Campaign, coupled with the enduring need to maintain a persistent eye on strategic risks and possible threats to critical U.S. national security interests. Meanwhile, collection in A2/AD environments continues to present a tough challenge. Our demand for multi-discipline, low-observable ISR with strike capability that can operate in adverse weather conditions and non-permissive environments is increasing. If we do not meet the requirements, we can expect that our information dominance, situational awareness, and security posture will diminish accordingly. Although overhead systems constitute a crucial component of the intelligence collection enterprise, they lack the ubiquity, persistence, and fidelity to fulfill our ISR gaps by themselves. Low observable platforms with improved sensors and endurance are critical to a number of USCENTCOM plans, while permissive ISR systems play a key role in COIN and CT missions. With respect to Iraq and Syria, there is need for a robust ISR capability to develop and maintain situational awareness of the security environment, particularly in denied and ungoverned spaces and in the absence of a larger U.S. ground presence. While we are looking to our coalition partners to help fill some of the ISR demand, shortages do remain that must be addressed.

REQUIRED AUTHORITIES AND RESOURCES.

The realities of the current fiscal environment continue to impact USCENTCOM HQs, our five component commands, established combined/joint task forces, and 18 country teams. Provided the right authorities and resources, our world-class Civ-Mil team can and will successfully accomplish any mission. With that in mind, we sincerely appreciate Congress' continued support for key authorities and appropriations needed to sustain current and future operations and to respond to unforeseen contingencies. The required authorities and resources listed below will enable USCENTCOM to shape positive outcomes for the future.

Iraq Train & Equip Fund. The Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) includes a multi-layered approach to assist the Iraqi military and other associated security forces by contributing to the Coalition effort to fill urgent equipment shortfalls and training deficiencies. As of mid-December 2015, we trained and/or equipped more than 19,000 Iraqi Security Forces, including Counter-terrorism Service (CTS), Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF), Peshmerga, and Sunnis through ITEF-related activities. Most graduates of the ISOF Commando Course in Area IV and BPC-trained Peshmerga battalions have been involved in combat operations since completing Coalition-led training. These trained forces appear to be performing better than their contemporaries who have not undergone Coalition-led training. United States support in fiscal year 2017 is essential to the success of the military campaign in Iraq.

Syria Train & Equip Fund. The forces we train and equip continue to show resolve and effectiveness in the fight against ISIL inside of Syria. A stand-alone fund that provides the flexibility to adapt to the changing battlefield environment while permitting the execution of our strategy to train, equip, resupply, and enable forces fighting ISIL in Syria is critical to future success. Such a fund would enable streamlined funds flow, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness that positions us to reinforce success as it occurs on the battlefield.

The Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). We continue to see tremendous achievements made possible by the ASFF as the ANDSF and the Afghanistan Security Institutions (ASI) steadily improve. While our ASFF budget request has decreased by 70 percent since 2011, the capabilities and activities enabled by this appropriation remain critical to continued success in Afghanistan. Furthermore, our support reflects U.S. confidence in the ANDSF's ability to develop and mature into a capable, credible, sustainable, and independent force. The fiscal year 2017 ASFF budget request for just under \$3.5 billion continues to posture the ANDSF for long-term sustainability. The Afghans greatly appreciate United States support, they are responsive to our advice, and they understand that funding is neither unconditional nor indefinite.

Foreign Military Financing and Foreign Military Sales. Our need for continued Congressional funding of FMF programs that support USCENTCOM security cooperation objectives cannot be overstated. The Central Region accounts for nearly half of all global FMS. Our partners in the region want U.S. equipment because they recognize that it is the best in the world. It also represents a very effective means for establishing long-term relationships between the U.S. and our partner nations and ensures greater interoperability between our militaries. We appreciate Congressional support for interagency initiatives designed to streamline the FMS and FMF process. We also need our regional partners to do their part to ensure the timely execution of all FMS requests.

Excess Defense Articles (EDA)/ Foreign Excess Personal Property (FEPP). The EDA program represents an integral component of our BPC efforts and has proven beneficial in our engagements with our regional partners. We have reaped the benefits of this authority several times in the last year, enabling us to support requirements in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and other countries located within the USCENTCOM AOR or participating in operations with U.S. Forces. Several other EDA transfers to the UAE and Egypt are pending. In the same light, the FEPP authorization has allowed us to transfer non-military equipment acquired as part of our base closures and reductions to Iraqi and Afghan security forces, and government ministries in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Coalition Support. The Coalition is central to the power of our operations and has never been stronger or more responsive than it has been over the last 18 months. The flexible authorities and funding that Congress continues to provide directly enables the size and diversity of the Coalition, which is key to its effectiveness. Together, the Coalition Support Fund, Coalition Readiness Support Program, and Lift and Sustain facilitate broad participation in combined military operations, thereby reducing the burden on U.S. Forces and enabling activities that would otherwise not be possible.

Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). Regardless of the size, shape, or mission of U.S. Forces, your continued support for CERP is essential as it provides an invaluable tool to commanders. CERP funds are routinely the only time-sensitive means to respond to unanticipated events and requirements, implement small-scale efforts that provide immediate and direct benefit to local populations to enhance protection of U.S. Forces, and enable U.S. Forces to make condolence payments for the loss of life or property damage.

Military Construction (MILCON). We continue to leverage existing infrastructure and host nation funding, as well as maritime posture and reach-back capabilities to meet steady state and surge requirements. In some cases, MILCON is still required to expand infrastructure capabilities to facilitate sustainment support for U.S. Forces and operations. Given our adversaries' continued development of A2/AD capabilities, it is imperative that we facilitate the dispersion and hardening of key infrastructure at our major operating hubs and spokes.

Long-term C4 Sustainment Plan. USCENTCOM, our Service Components, Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF), and our deployed warfighters rely heavily on communications systems to provide critical Joint and Coalition command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C5ISR) and logistics services across the USCENTCOM AOR. Without a diverse and survivable communications infrastructure and bandwidth delivery, via both satellite communications and terrestrial fiber leases to the current U.S. Force posture locations, all current and future Mission Command Operations are at great risk. Continued resource support is essential to maintaining the current U.S. Force presence in the USCENTCOM AOR, and to enable rapid support for any future contingency operations.

THE U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND TEAM.

The outstanding men and women who make up the USCENTCOM team continue to do tremendous work in support of the command's broad mission encompassing a vast and highly volatile geographic area. They shoulder great responsibility and their day-to-day actions are of enormous consequence. We have an obligation to ensure that they are resourced appropriately and have the necessary tools and equipment, a responsive support structure, and safe, secure, and respectful environments to live and work in. We also take very seriously our obligation to our families; we could not do what we do without their support. They are important and valued members of our USCENTCOM team.

The team also benefits from the unique capability provided by our Coalition Coordination Center, which consists of more than 200 foreign military officers from nearly 60 partner nations. USCENTCOM is the only geographic combatant command with this unique capability, and it continues to pay enormous dividends in terms of information sharing, collaboration, and outreach.

CONCLUSION.

Our overarching goal at USCENTCOM is to move the Central Region in the direction of increased stability and security. It is an ambitious task and success will require that all elements of the USG and the international community work together in pursuit of this shared objective. We are seeing the power of such collaboration in the ongoing fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. The enemy's capability has been

greatly degraded over the past 18+ months and that reflects the efforts of the indigenous forces supported and enabled by the 66-nation Counter-ISIL

Coalition. Much work remains, but we do see progress being made across the breadth and depth of the battlespace and throughout the USCENTCOM AOR. Going forward, we will take direct military action where necessary to counter malign actors and activities that pose a threat to our core national interests and the interests of our partner nations. At the same time, we will continue to support the governments and people of the region in their efforts to build needed capacity, enabling them to take a more active and pronounced role in providing for the security of their sovereign spaces. This will serve to increase burden-sharing among nations, strengthen partnerships, and expand cooperation. Ultimately, these various efforts will enable us to improve stability and security across the strategically-important Central Region.

Today, more than 84,000 of the very best soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast-guardsmen and civilians assigned to or associated with U.S. Central Command are selflessly serving in difficult and dangerous places around the globe. They continue to do an exceptional job in support of the USCENTCOM mission and our Nation. Our people are our most important assets. We are enormously proud of them and their families. They are and will remain our foremost priority.

USCENTCOM: Ready, Engaged, Vigilant!

Senator McCAIN. Thank you.
General Rodriguez?

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General RODRIGUEZ. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the efforts of the United States Africa Command. For the past three years, I have been honored to command the men and women of Africa Command.

Africa is an enduring interest for the United States, and its importance continues to grow as African economies, population, and influence grow.

Small but wise investments in African security institutions today offer disproportionate benefits to Africa, Europe, and the United States. African solutions to African problems are, in the long run, in the best interest of Africans, Americans, and, indeed, the world.

Now, in the most troubled spots on the continent, Africans have an understandable fear and distrust of the governments and security forces, which are charged with promoting and guarding the welfare of the people. Predatory practices, patronage networks, corruption, and political and economic exclusion of portions of the population, as well as inconsistent adherence to the rule of law, combine to crush the hope of a better future.

These conditions create an environment ripe for the expansion of violent extremism and represent a threat not only to Africa but to our European allies and the United States. Effectively addressing the threat before, during, or after a military crisis requires a comprehensive approach employing diplomacy, development, and defense to address the root causes of extremism and replace fear and uncertainty with trust and confidence in African institutions.

This approach must seek improvements in governance consistent with adherence to the rule in a society that offers equal political and economic opportunity for all.

Africa Command's contributions to this broad solution lie primarily in encouraging and enabling the professionalism of the African security institutions, which will secure national populations,

cooperate in addressing regional security concerns, and increasingly play a role in sustaining global security.

Our military strategy articulates a long-term, regionally focused approach to enabling our African partners. Our operational approach seeks to disrupt and neutralize transnational threats by building African partner defense capability and capacity.

While we have achieved progress in several areas through close cooperation and coordination with our partners, allies, and inter-agency partners, threats and challenges remain.

In East Africa, we are helping to set the conditions for the eventual transfer from the African Union Mission in Somalia, or AMISOM, to use the Somalia National Army and federal Government of Somalia.

However, al Shabaab remains a continuing threat and is conducting almost daily lethal asymmetric attacks in Somalia against AMISOM troops.

In North Africa, Libya's insecurity has negative consequences for its people, its neighbors, Europe's southern flank, and our peace and security objectives in Africa and the Middle East. An international coalition to support the Libyans to counter the Islamic State of Libya would support a functional Government of National Accord [GNA] and reduce the risks of the expansion of ISIL, further instability in North Africa, and the emergence of a direct threat to U.S. interests.

Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition that will require an appropriate long-term strategy. Across West Africa, our partners and allies are countering terrorist organizations like Boko Haram through the Multinational Joint Task Force. With troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, the Multinational Joint Task Force is a collaborative regional effort to address Boko Haram's conflicts and lethal attacks aimed at destabilizing governments and terrorizing civilians.

In Central Africa, through the combined efforts of civilian agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and military forces, the Lord's Resistance Army [LRA] no longer threatens regional stability, and its capacity to harm civilian populations has diminished greatly. Today, we estimate less than 200 LRA fighters remain, and local communities are better prepared to protect themselves.

Now, elections and transition of power remain a source for political instability in many African nations. Despite a decline in violent coup terms, challenges to the electoral process and the peaceful democratic transfer of power threaten both new and established governments.

Currently, our requirements are increasing faster than our resources. Within the command, we seek innovative ways to mitigate capability gaps by refining our priorities and deliberately improving the alignment of our resources to our strategy. Success, however, requires teamwork extended well beyond the command itself. Close cooperation with our African partners, allies, the interagency, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations will, over time, strengthen democratic institutions, spur economic growth, and advance African peace and security to a degree that U.S. military efforts alone cannot achieve.

Together, we can help the people of Africa achieve their potential on the global stage.

I want to thank you all for your continued support of our mission and to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, Coast Guard, civilians, contractors, and their families, as we continue to advance our Nation's defense interests in Africa. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of General Rodriguez follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY GENERAL DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ

UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND 2016 POSTURE STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the efforts of United States Africa Command. For the past three years, I have been honored to command the men and women of Africa Command. Since its inception in 2007, the command continues to pursue the objectives of strengthening democratic institutions, spurring economic growth, trade, and investment, advancing peace and security, and promoting opportunity and development throughout Africa.

Africa is an enduring interest for the United States, and its importance will continue to increase as African economies, population, and influence grow. Relatively small but wise investments in African security institutions today offer disproportionate benefits to Africa, Europe, and the United States in the future, creating mutual opportunities and reducing the risks of destabilization, radicalization, and persistent conflict. Our engagement now can assist our African partners in realizing their potential and gaining the capability to solve African problems. African solutions to African problems are, in the long run, in the best interest of Africans, Americans, and indeed the world.

In an effort to produce the greatest impact with the available resources, this year we updated the command's Theater Strategy and Theater Campaign Plan. Our approach employs security force assistance and exercises as decisive efforts to build partner capacity. We use military operations to create the conditions for our partners to develop the capacity they need, and we use engagements across the continent as well as our posture, presence, and agreements to sustain our efforts in Africa. These efforts expose our African partners to our values and capabilities, model military professionalism and proficiency, and inspire them to pursue excellence in their own institutions.

Our command approach is synchronized and focused, relying upon regional cooperation and close coordination with a host of partners. United States Africa Command, along with our diplomatic, defense, and development partners is helping to build African institutions capable of deterring the spread of extremism, protecting their populations, enabling economic prosperity, and expanding the rule of law and human rights.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Africa is complex and dynamic. In 2010, the United Nations estimated Africa's population at 1 billion, predicting a growth to 1.6 billion by 2030 and more than 2 billion by 2050. This population increase is coupled with urbanization and a youth bulge. Africa's increase in its youth demographic, combined with other historic challenges, has led in some cases to unemployment and wide-spread disenfranchisement from already over-taxed governments. With national systems for basic public services, security, and infrastructure under increasing stress, criminal and terrorist networks can exploit fissures between the marginalized masses and the ruling elites, taking advantage of ungoverned or under-governed areas.

Many African populations have an understandable fear and distrust of predatory governments or security forces and limited access to democratic participation and employment. This creates an environment ripe for the expansion of violent extremism, and require a comprehensive approach employing diplomacy, defense, and development to address the root causes of extremism. Our effectiveness is strengthened by close coordination with interagency partners, including the Department of State and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), who possess a strong understanding of African political dynamics, cultural contexts, and long-standing strategic partnerships.

Across Africa, the protection of United States personnel and facilities and the operational requirements of the command and the component commands have increased over the past year. In fiscal year 2015, we conducted 75 joint operations, 12 major joint exercises, and 400 security cooperation activities. In comparison, we conducted 68 operations, 11 major joint exercises, and 363 security cooperation activities in fiscal year 2014. With requirements increasing faster than resources, we use innovative ways to mitigate capability gaps, including sharing forces with other combatant commands and complementing the capabilities of multinational and interagency partners.

EAST AFRICA

The Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa leads the command's efforts in East Africa. They work to complement and build the capability and capacity of our East African partners. The International Peace Support Training Center in Kenya conducts applied research, training and education for Africans in peace operations. The United Nations Signal School in Uganda conducts standardized training for signal units deploying in support of United Nations peacekeeping missions. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in Djibouti serves as a model for regional efforts on counter-illicit finance, improve border security, and development of counter-terrorism strategy.

Security in Somalia has generally improved. Although, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces in southern and central Somalia seized significant territories from al Shabaab last year, weakening the group and reducing its ability to generate resources, al Shabaab continues to pose a threat to United States and allied interests. Recent AMISOM operations, however, have been limited due to overstretched AMISOM forces and endemic deficiencies within the Somali National Army. The Somali National Army remains dependent on foreign forces to conduct operations and is challenged by leadership, logistical support, and clan factionalism.

Al Shabaab remains a continuing threat to U.S. persons and Western interests, and is conducting almost daily lethal asymmetric attacks in Somalia against AMISOM troops. Under-governed areas outside the reach of the Federal Government of Somalia will continue providing al Shabaab with territory in which it can evade security forces and continue targeting East African regional governments and security interests as well as European and American interests. Al Shabaab's efforts will be aimed at removing external influence from Somalia and compelling troop contributing countries to re-evaluate their involvement in AMISOM. In the future, al Shabaab may seek to adapt to financial and territorial losses by broadening its terrorist agenda throughout East Africa.

Political tensions within the Federal Government of Somalia will probably increase leading up to federal elections which have been delayed and are now scheduled for August, 2016. Tensions may be exacerbated if the government falls further behind on the key transitional benchmarks of constitutional reform, federal state creation, and the establishment of technical commissions to oversee the electoral process, or if it tries to exert its authority outside of a federally-styled government.

Wide-spread deterioration of security situations due to contested elections and constitutional referendums in East Africa will continue to challenge the region. As seen in Burundi, election protests can lead to politically motivated violence between the opposition, security forces, and civilian militias.

NORTH AFRICA

In North Africa, our priority is to contain Libyan instability and to counter violent extremist organizations. The post-Arab Spring transitions have fundamentally altered the regional security landscape. Terrorist groups like the Islamic State-Libya (IS-Libya) have exploited this instability and have expanded their training and operations. Furthermore, our European allies are deeply concerned about the migrant crisis and view it as their preeminent security issue within the Mediterranean Sea and along Europe's southern flank.

Libya's insecurity, combined with porous land and maritime borders, has negative consequences for its people, its neighbors, Europe's southern flank, and our peace and security objectives in Africa and the Middle East. Foreign fighters, arms, and illegal migrants are flowing through Libya, supplying fighters to the Syrian and Iraq conflicts, and threatening our North African partners and Southern European allies. The December 2015 agreement to form a Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) is an important step toward stabilizing the country. Even with the support of the international community, the GNA will likely struggle for the foreseeable future to establish its authority and secure Libya's territory, borders, resources, and people. The continued absence of central government control will continue to perpet-

uate violence, instability, and allow the conditions for violent extremist organizations to flourish until the GNA and appropriate security forces are operational within Libya. In the interim, the political situation will complicate national and international efforts within Libya.

IS–Libya represents a serious and growing threat to U.S. persons and interests throughout the region. Since mid-2014, IS–Libya has subsumed existing violent extremist organizations and continues to attract new fighters. Foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq reinforce IS–Libya’s ranks with battle-experienced fighters. This situation allows for IS–Libya to expand its presence, co-opt existing organizations and militias, and incorporate more tribal and sub-national groups.

The absence of a functional government in Libya creates a favorable environment that threatens to export instability across Africa and threatens our European allies. Currently, we are engaged with our European partners in planning and intelligence sharing for the Libyan International Assistance Mission (LIAM), an international security effort to assist the newly established Government of National Accord. Improving regional security requires a coordinated multinational approach to support improvements in governance, security, and development.

In Mali, security has become more tenuous as terrorist organizations carry out deadly attacks in the north against Malian, French, and United Nations forces and take advantage of a smaller military presence, the flow of arms from Libya, and the inability of the Mali Government to find a political solution to its domestic security situation. Increasingly, we are seeing terrorist elements launch attacks in central and southern Mali against civilian targets, which will add increased stress to security forces that lack the training and experience with counterterrorism to combat the threat effectively. While the situation remains challenging, the international community’s coordination in addressing regional security challenges has improved. United States Africa Command supports the Department of State in preparing partners with non-lethal training and equipment for deployment to multilateral peacekeeping operations in Mali where eleven African countries are contributing to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stability Mission in Mali mission. We continue to provide support to partners and allies operating in Mali and neighboring countries, including enabling assistance to French forces in the Sahel, a relationship viewed as extremely effective and mutually beneficial.

United States Africa Command is assisting in broader regional security and stability in numerous ways. We continue to collaborate with the Sahel Multilateral Planning Group—United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Italy—to synchronize allied activities in the Sahel Maghreb region to strengthen multilateral relationships in the fight against violent extremist organizations. In Tunisia, we are supporting counterterrorism training and increasing Tunisia’s aerial support capability and focusing on improving Tunisia’s counterterrorism, intelligence, and border security capabilities. We are also assisting Tunisia in installing an electronic surveillance system along key portions of the border with Libya to help stem the illegal flow of people, arms, and contraband. In Algeria, U.S. Army Africa is providing counter-Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and forensic training. This training provides Algerian troops expertise in analyzing post-blast sites to determine types of IEDs used and adjust plans and tactics to better counter threats.

WEST AFRICA

In West Africa, containing and degrading Boko Haram (Islamic State-West Africa Province (ISWAP)) remains the top priority as Boko Haram conducts increasingly complex and lethal attacks aimed at terrorizing civilians and destabilizing governments. We are watching carefully for signs that the threat posed by Boko Haram to U.S. persons is growing as a result of the group’s alignment with ISIL. In 2015, the African Union authorized a request from Benin and the Lake Chad Basin Commission nations (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria) to form the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter-Boko Haram. Countering adaptive threat networks, like Boko Haram, across a transnational battle-space, requires this type of regional approach. The African Union, France, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States have all pledged financial support to the MNJTF partner nations to support their counter-Boko Haram efforts. With the assistance of the Department of State, United States peacekeeping operation funds are providing support to the MNJTF Headquarters partners, including a project to link the MNJTF headquarters to the African Union’s and regional economic communities’ command and control systems, while additional funds will be used to train and equip forces and to enable airlift support.

Last year, Nigerians brought about a largely peaceful transition of executive power. Since the election, President Buhari and his administration have focused on

anti-corruption programs, counter-Boko Haram efforts, and rebuilding Nigeria's socio-political and economic systems. However, after decades corruption at the highest levels of civil and military leadership and a history of human rights abuses by security forces, Nigeria will require a comprehensive effort and support from partners such as the United States to reform and fully capitalize on its role as a leader on the continent. Nigeria must continue to improve the security services' behavior toward the civilians they are obligated to protect. To assist Nigeria, we are expanding security cooperation engagements and providing counter-IED support; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assessment teams; and advisors to support Nigeria's military at both the tactical and operational levels. We are also working with the Department of State to respond to the Nigerian Air Force's request for equipment and aircraft. Information sharing agreements are in place between the United States and Nigeria as well. We also facilitated the provision of excess defense article Mine Resistant Armored Personnel carriers to Nigerian forces.

Also, in support of the counter-Boko Haram effort, the United States provided assistance to the adjoining countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In October 2015, the United States began providing security assistance training in Agadez, Niger, with 21 United States soldiers and airmen providing training to 250 Nigerien troops in support of the counter-violent extremists organization fight. In Chad, we have trained approximately 2000 members of the Special Anti-Terrorism Group, and in Cameroon we have provided small unit tactics training and assistance to six Battalions from the Rapid Intervention Brigade that are engaged in counter-Boko Haram efforts.

The Gulf of Guinea is rich with resources and significant development potential for energy, shipping, transportation, food, and tourism; however, it is also an area of insecurity. Piracy, armed robbery, illegal fishing, and kidnaps-for-ransom are pervasive off of Africa's west coast, and these problems have global implications. Lack of a regional coast guard presence to patrol waters allows criminal groups to operate and prey on tankers and commercial shipping. Through U.S. Naval Forces Africa, we support regional maritime security activities and complement civilian initiatives that address the root causes of maritime crime by strengthening governance and promoting economic development. Ongoing cooperation efforts between regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, are yielding results in implementing maritime codes of conduct, like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, an information sharing and maritime security agreement to counter illicit trafficking and piracy. For instance, as pirates took the motor tanker *Mariam* west across the maritime boundaries of Nigeria, Benin, Togo and finally into Ghanaian waters, it was tracked and monitored through the increased capabilities of the Maritime Operation Centers we helped build. Ultimately, it was interdicted and boarded by Ghanaian naval forces resulting in the arrest and prosecution of the pirates.

This year, Operation UNITED ASSISTANCE, the operation to combat Ebola in West Africa, concluded. The USAID-led effort, with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Army Africa supporting, focused on building partner capacity of Liberia and the region. Our efforts are guiding partners to lead their own responses to the next outbreak by updating regional and national disaster preparedness and management plans based on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis. Recognizing the need to achieve sustainable capacity to preempt and respond to future crises, we initiated the African Partner Outbreak Response Alliance. This African-led, USAFRICOM-supported program develops military capabilities to support responses to an infectious disease outbreak. Complementary to this is the Disaster Preparedness Program, which provides funding to build national response plans which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) used as a template for regional response plans.

CENTRAL AFRICA

In Central Africa, in addition to those states engaged in Gulf of Guinea cooperation, the command's efforts have focused on working with the African Union Regional Task Force to counter the Lord's Resistance Army. Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan have contributed forces to the African Union Regional Task Force, which has led military efforts to reduce the group's safe havens, capture key leaders, and promote defections.

While Joseph Kony remains at large, the African Union Regional Task Force, with advice and assistance from U.S. forces, has had considerable success reducing the threat posed by the LRA. Through the combined efforts of military forces, civilian agencies, and non-governmental organizations, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) no longer threatens regional stability, and its capacity to harm civilian populations has

diminished. Today, we estimate less than 200 Lord's Resistance Army fighters remain, and communities are better prepared to protect themselves. While continuing to work to eliminate the threat posed by the LRA, United States Africa Command can also now begin to focus on countering illicit activities that support the LRA and other destabilization influencers in the region.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Southern Africa remains relatively stable. The region fields some of the most professional and capable military forces on the continent. South Africa continues to contribute to regional and continental security, including participation in United Nations peace operations in Darfur, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite its relative stability, the region faces economic and social challenges that include poverty, crime, social inequality, and corruption. Future leadership challenges in countries such as Zimbabwe may increase the risk of regional instability.

STRATEGIC RISKS

Other nations continue to invest in African nations to further their own objectives. China is focused on obtaining natural resources and necessary infrastructure to support manufacturing while both China and Russia sell weapon systems and seek to establish trade and defense agreements in Africa. As China and Russia expand their influence in Africa, both countries are striving to gain "soft power" in Africa to strengthen their power in international organizations.

Non-allied and non-state actors are demonstrating increasing agility and sophistication in the information environment. They exploit vulnerabilities in partner, allied, and U.S. Government networks and invest heavily in internet and social media expertise to spread ideology and reach perspective recruits.

Elections and transitions of power remain both a source of and catalyst for political instability in many African nations. Challenges to the electoral process and to peaceful, democratic transfers of power threaten both new and established governments. Protests in response to irregular or unfair voting too easily devolve into violence or violent responses from security forces.

OPPORTUNITIES

United States Africa Command and our component commands collaborate with the African Union, European allies, the European Union, the United Nations, and other organizations to further the common objective of a safe, stable, and prosperous Africa. We also work in concert with international and interagency partners to build defense capabilities, respond to crisis, and deter transnational threats. The ability of our African partners to sustain the capacity they gain through security force assistance is dependent upon our collective efforts with allies, international organizations, and the African partners themselves. African nations are working together to develop solutions to the threats and challenges confronting them, and our allies and partners will continue to support their efforts.

COMMAND APPROACH

THEATER STRATEGY (5 – 20 YEARS)

Our strategy articulates a long-term, regionally focused approach that seeks to establish, with partners, a strategic environment in which African nations are willing and capable of addressing security threats, not solely from a military perspective, but from the foundations of governance, security, and development. The 2015 National Security Strategy mandates that we train and equip local partners and provide operational support to confront terrorist groups. It includes developing the ability to direct, manage, sustain, and operate a ready and able organization over time. These sustainable defense institutions promote governmental stability, respect for the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, and help to sustain broad-based development, all of which address the root causes of violent extremism and mitigate the need for costly international intervention.

THEATER CAMPAIGN PLAN (1 – 5 YEARS)

The United States Africa Command operational approach seeks to disrupt and neutralize transnational threats by building African partner defense capability and capacity, as directed in the 2015 National Security Strategy, in order to promote regional security, stability, and prosperity, while always protecting U.S. personnel and facilities and United States' access on the continent.

This approach includes five lines of effort:

- Neutralize al Shabaab and transition the African Union Mission in Somalia to the Federal Government of Somalia
- Degrade violent extremist organizations in the Sahel Maghreb and contain instability in Libya
- Contain and degrade Boko Haram
- Interdict illicit activity in the Gulf of Guinea and through central Africa with willing and capable African partners
- Build African peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response capacity.

Sustainable security requires effective and enduring institutions, both civilian and military, that are guided by the rule of law and a merit-based promotion system. We provide direct support to strengthening defense institutions and indirect support for governance reform and economic development, primarily led by the Department of State and USAID. Diplomatic, defense and development efforts continue to reinforce each other to promote stability in both conflict-affected and steady-state environments to build resilient democratic societies.

The Theater Campaign Plan, along with the efforts from our component commands, develops a balanced approach that strengthens institutions and conducts counterterrorism operations with African regional partners, international allies, such as France and the United Kingdom, to disrupt, degrade, and eventually defeat terrorists. Recent operations in East Africa removed Abdirahman Sandhere, a senior leader of al Qaeda-affiliated al Shabaab, responsible for terrorist activities in Somalia. His removal from the battlefield represents a significant blow to al Shabaab and demonstrates that the United States will continue to use all tools at our disposal—diplomacy, information, military, and economic—to dismantle al Shabaab and other terrorist groups who threaten our partners, our allies, and the United States. In North Africa, recent airstrike operations removed Abu Nabil, an Iraqi national who was a longtime al Qaeda operative and the senior IS–Libya leader. In West Africa, we provide enabling support to the African-led Multinational Joint Task Force in their operations against Boko Haram. In the Gulf of Guinea, our cooperation with Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo led to enforcement of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and increased their capacity to counter illicit trafficking and piracy. These efforts have achieved an unprecedented level of collaboration, and their operations are shaping the campaign plan, which provide time and space to increase partner capacity within defense and government institutions.

SYNCHRONIZATION WITH PARTNERS

The Africa Strategic Dialogue, an annual meeting of United States Africa Command and our interagency partners facilitated by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, is intended to foster a shared strategic situational understanding and a common strategic approach. This collaborative forum fosters a comprehensive approach by including Assistant Secretary-level leaders in the Department of Defense, Department of State, and USAID and provides the guidance to improve the alignment of resources to the U.S. strategy and informs our annual budget planning cycles.

We recognize that defense is only one component of the African security sector, and it is equally important to address the law enforcement and judicial systems. United States Africa Command and the Department of State are supporting partnerships with Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia to strengthen governance across the security sector with the Security Governance Initiative (SGI). SGI is a collective approach to strengthen African partners' security institutions' capacity to protect civilians and confront challenges, with integrity and accountability. Key to the success of this initiative is the demonstrated willingness and ownership of our partners to tackle security sector governance issues.

The Counter-Terrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) is a mechanism to develop the counterterrorism capacity of African partners, as well as nations within the USCENCOM area of responsibility. CTPF proposals, totaling \$465 million in fiscal year 2015 and \$420 million in fiscal year 2016, are designed to strengthen those nations' defense institutions. For fiscal year 2017, the President's budget requested \$1 billion for CTPF for AFRICOM and CENTCOM. AFRICOM anticipates using its fiscal year 2017 CTPF allocation for crucial airlift, ISR, command and control systems, sustainment training, and force structure development of African partners.

Programs such as the Security Governance Initiative and the Counter-Terrorism Partnership Fund provide an opportunity to further our relationships with African partners while improving the security environment and fostering governmental progression toward inclusive democracy. Strong institutions that are fashioned and perform their duties in accordance with the rule of law protect the people and provide

inclusive opportunities which will sustain our efforts and ultimately determine if building partner capacity succeeds.

Our security cooperation activities are aligned with our Theater Campaign Plan objectives and account for what our partner nations can absorb, with the complementary objective of aligning resources to our strategy. For example, Tunisia, our newest major non-NATO ally, has developed a three-tiered approach to building military intelligence capacity, affirming that Tunisian and U.S. strategic goals for counterterrorism and the promotion of democracy are aligned. Through this approach we developed a plan that will provide capabilities such as the Scan Eagle unmanned air system, for integration into the Africa Data Sharing Network, and build a military intelligence training program at the generating force level which complements Tunisian executive direction reforms to create a fusion center between the Tunisian Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. These efforts help to foster security, governance, and economic development and are a model for sustainable security force assistance.

United States Africa Command is working with international partners to synchronize security efforts. The United Kingdom has recently increased its presence and commitment in Africa, and we are synchronizing efforts to increase efficiencies and provide greater collective effects. In North Africa, the Libyan International Assistance Mission (LIAM), an international security effort to assist the newly established Government of National Accord, is our main planning focus with European partners. In West Africa, through an international cooperation and coordination liaison cell, U.S. assistance is synchronized with international partners from France and the United Kingdom to build interoperable and sustainable partner defense institutions. With the support of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the African Union hosted the African Logistics Forum that brought together thirty-eight nations to discuss African logistical challenges and opportunities.

THEATER POSTURE

Having an appropriate posture on the continent facilitates building partnership capacity, executing joint operations, and protecting U.S. personnel and facilities. We maintain 15 enduring locations on the African continent which give the United States options in the event of crisis and enable partner capacity building. Additionally, the command designated nine new contingency locations as part of the Theater Posture Plan for 2016 focused on access to support partners, counter threats, and protect U.S. interests in East, North, and West Africa. These contingency locations strive to increase access in crucial areas aligned with the Theater Campaign Plan. Flexible and diverse posture facilitates operational needs and the protection of U.S. personnel and facilities.

RESIDUAL RISK

We are helping to set the conditions for the eventual transition from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the Somali National Army and the Federal Government of Somalia. If the Somali National Army fails to form the defense institutions required to generate and sustain new forces and equipment, then AMISOM troop contributing countries—Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda—may reach donor fatigue levels, threatening current troop contributions levels. Recent United Kingdom commitments are encouraging, and we are complementing their efforts to neutralize the threat that al Shabaab poses to regional security. Strengthening the Somali National Army requires a coordinated international effort.

We strongly support the formation of an international coalition to counter-IS-Libya and to support a functional Government of National Accord; otherwise, we risk the expansion of IS-Libya that further degrades stability in North Africa and threatens U.S. interests. Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition that will require strategic patience as the GNA forms and develops. Our approach allows time for the Libyan Government to develop by providing support to regional partners Chad, Niger, and Tunisia, as well as Egypt (in cooperation with United States Central Command); offers support to international partners such as the Italian-led Libyan International Assistance Mission; and directs counter-IS-Libya operations.

We are mitigating risk to U.S. military and civilian personnel with regard to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) requirements and personnel recovery (PR) assets through cooperation with our allies and partners. Most operations in our Area of Responsibility occur as advise and assist missions. This requires a serious evaluation of vulnerabilities, which can be mitigated by ISR and PR. Integrating personnel recovery and surgical stabilization capabilities are a moral obligation and essential for the proper care of U.S. servicemembers who risk their lives to protect our nation.

Flexible posture through cooperative security locations and contingency locations, complemented by the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force-Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR) at Moron Air Base, Spain and the East Africa Stand-by Force in Djibouti provide the appropriate level of responsiveness during crisis and are strategically positioned to enable U.S. and partner operations against terrorist threats. Completion of our Cooperative Security Locations, coupled with accurate indications and warnings, will ensure swift crisis response to all fifteen high threat/high risk embassy locations in Africa.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

The President has stated that Africa—its growing economies, its emerging middle class, its rising geo-political influence—is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community and to the United States. Modest investments, in the right places, go a long way in Africa. Maximizing our energies today with African partners, allies, the interagency, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations will strengthen democratic institutions, spur economic growth, boost trade, enhance investment, and advance peace and security. These efforts will assist in making African nations strong, stable, and reliable strategic partners in the future, a future in which Africa will play an increasingly prominent global role. While the continent offers a challenging and complex strategic environment, the command approach is synchronized and focused, and capitalizes on regional cooperation and close coordination with our African and international partners.

As the Department of Defense makes difficult decisions about strategic risks and associated tradeoffs, United States Africa Command will continue to provide the foundation on which to build, shape, and pursue our shared interests across Africa. Thank you for your continued support to our mission and to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen, civilians, contractors, and their families as we continue to advance our Nation's defense interests in Africa.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.
General Votel?

STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

General VOTEL. Good morning, Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning alongside my teammates, General Lloyd Austin and General Dave Rodriguez, to discuss the current posture of the United States Special Operations Command.

On any given day, nearly 10,000 SOF men and women are deployed or forward-stationed to over 80 countries around the globe. They fill combatant command requirements that span the range of our congressionally delineated core activities, from behind-the-scenes information-gathering and partner-building to high-end dynamic strike operations. Every success they achieve reinforces what we already know: Our people are our greatest asset. They are adaptive, bold, and innovative. Through persistent presence in harm's way, they allow us to see opportunities early, and they routinely deliver strategic impacts with the smallest of footprints.

Perhaps nothing makes this point more clearly than the stories of two operators you have likely heard about in the past days and weeks.

Navy Seal Senior Chief Petty Officer Ed Byers was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor last week for his courage and heroism above and beyond the call of duty in rescuing an American citizen held hostage in Afghanistan in 2012.

More recently, Army Green Beret Sergeant First Class Matthew McClintock provided immediate medical care to a wounded Amer-

ican teammate before leaving an Afghan element under intense fire to secure a landing zone for medical evacuation aircraft. His courageous actions cost him his life but saved the lives of his teammates and ultimately turned the tide of the engagement.

While the stories of these two American heroes are publicly known, it is the stories of thousands of SOF operators from all of our services, aircrews, acquisition specialists, intelligence analysts, communicators, logisticians, and many others that underwrite our enduring SOF value to the Nation—quiet professionalism and absolute excellence in accomplishing our most challenging military missions.

Allow me to emphasize my strongest point this morning: Thank you for your devotion to the well-being and resilience for the men and women of SOCOM and their families. Their emotional, social, psychological, and physical health is in good hands thanks to you, and we are very grateful for your enthusiastic support.

While the command priorities remain unchanged from my testimony last year, USSOCOM continues to learn, evolve, and adapt to meet the current operational environment, an environment characterized by rapidly shifting power with competition and conflict between both state and nonstate actors, actors who are increasingly ambiguous, transregional, and multidimensional.

As a result, this past year, we focused on gaining a deeper understanding of today's gray zone challenges, and we have restructured our operational rhythm to focus on the transregional nature of violent extremist organizations.

Given this complex security environment, the demand for SOF skill sets remains understandably high. Therefore, your support for SOCOM is more important than ever.

It is a truth that SOF cannot be mass-produced in times of need. Consistent investment in our people and capabilities is very important.

As good as our men and women in SOCOM are, we remain extraordinarily dependent on service-provided capabilities and capacity to perform our mission. I ask for your strong support for them as well. We simply could not perform our mission without service-provided capabilities, infrastructure, and institutional programs.

Alongside our colleagues in the services, we are grateful for the budget stability forged out of last year's agreement and remain hopeful for similar stability beyond 2017.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the committee and Congress as a whole for your outstanding support in funding, authorities, and encouragement. Your oversight of our efforts to man, train, equip, and employ SOF remains critical as we confront an increasingly complex security environment.

We look forward to continuing this great relationship, and I pledge to you that we will remain transparent, engaged, and responsive. I remain honored and humbled to command the best special operations force in the world. I am extremely proud of each and every one of our team members and their families as they continue to serve our great Nation. I look forward to your questions today.

[The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL

OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today as the 10th Commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This is my second address on the posture of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). Since my statement last year, the challenges we face in the security environment have continued to evolve and create new conditions to which the military must adjust. USSOCOM is also evolving and tailoring our expertise to these challenges, though we remain consistent in our priorities, our commitment to excellence, and our dedication to serving the needs of our nation. During my remarks, I would like to discuss how we see the security environment changing, and how we believe SOF can best contribute to safeguarding the security of the American people, both now and in the future.

TODAY'S U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCE

USSOCOM is unique among the Unified Combatant Commands in that it was legislated into existence, and has Service-like responsibilities to organize, train, and equip Special Operations Forces. Our mission, as I pointed out last year, is to synchronize the planning of special operations and provide SOF to support persistent, networked, and distributed Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) operations to protect and advance our nation's interests.

USSOCOM has approximately 56,000 Active Duty, 7,400 Reserve, and 6,600 civilian men and women serving in a wide variety of roles and functions. Our organizations include Army Special Forces, SEALs (Sea, Air, Land Teams), Air Commandos, Rangers, Army Special Operations Aviation, Marine Raiders, civil affairs personnel, and psychological operations personnel. Our military personnel include both Active Duty as well as Guard and Reserve SOF, which provide us with an essential operational capacity that allows us to surge in support of emerging requirements. We also have a variety of enablers that are critical to our success in diverse mission sets which include acquisition experts, logisticians, administrators, analysts, planners, communicators, and other specialists who are instrumental in fulfilling our mission.

On any given day, nearly 10,000 SOF are deployed or forward-stationed in more than 80 countries worldwide. They are filling GCC requirements that span the range of our Congressionally-delineated core activities. Our actions in support of the GCCs include such mission sets as: enhancing partner capabilities; coordinating counter-terrorism (CT) planning and operations; supporting the capabilities of our interagency partners; and developing critical relationships with key influencers. In all of these examples, which cover just a segment of our activities, SOF plays a key role by working with a range of partners on complex and demanding problem sets. Even in those situations where SOF are in the lead for small-footprint, high-risk missions, we are fully integrated with, and fully dependent upon, our conventional force, international, and interagency partners.

Given the security environment we now face, the demand for the skill sets that our SOF operators possess is understandably very high. Although we will always answer these calls, expanding USSOCOM's role in multiple locations is not without risk. The skills, maturity, and agility that we develop in our operators requires significant time, effort, and investment. This is one of our SOF truths: SOF cannot be mass-produced. Therefore, the employment of SOF should be based upon where we can create the greatest strategic effect to advance our nation's interests. I believe we need a continuing dialogue on how this can be accomplished, as well as how we can best prepare to meet the challenges we see developing in the future.

ENDURING PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS

My priorities remain unchanged from those I discussed with you last year. Focusing on these priorities have helped us continue to develop appropriate capabilities and capacities to meet the needs of our nation, as well as the needs of our force. I would like to take a moment to review these priorities as well as mention some of our ongoing efforts in each.

First, we are ensuring SOF readiness by developing the right people, skills, and capabilities to meet current requirements as well as those that will emerge in the future. Although we share responsibility with the Services for developing our special operations forces, USSOCOM has the responsibility for ensuring the current combat readiness of SOF. To maximize our effectiveness here, our readiness assessment process focuses on identifying GCC demands, and assessing our ability to support those requirements as well as our ability to surge in support of new demands. This

approach is helping us identify and rectify any gaps we may have in supporting the GCCs. In another important dimension of readiness, we are implementing the Defense Secretary's decision to fully open all military positions, career fields, and specialties, including special operations specialties and units, to women. We did not request a waiver to this decision because our range of missions require a wide variety of skills and perspectives. As I conveyed to the USSOCOM Enterprise through a recorded video, we will not lower, raise or create multiple sets of standards for SOF; our priority is to identify and train the very best people for these demanding roles.

Second, we must help our nation win in today's challenges and contribute to keeping the nation safe. Our most important effort under this priority has been to organize our processes for dealing with trans-regional threats—those challenges that are dispersed not only across the borders of nation-states, but also across our GCC boundaries. As a headquarters with global responsibilities, USSOCOM is well-positioned to help the GCCs prioritize and synchronize SOF operations to maximize our effectiveness. This trans-regional approach also allows us to better inform DOD decision-making processes on force management and determine where we can act to seize opportunities. Our role in Operation Gallant Phoenix, aimed at countering the flow of foreign fighters, is prime example of our integrated and innovative approach to the challenges we face. This effort has enabled a very limited number of people to have a significant impact on these networks.

Third, we are continuing to build relationships with international and domestic partners through sustained security cooperation, expanded communication architectures, and liaison activities. USSOCOM has strengthened the relationships and connections that provide the foundation for this network to enable more regular communication and collaboration. Over the last two years, we have invested heavily in integrating our international partners into our headquarters. We now have representation from 17 nations working with us in Tampa, and we are placing our own liaisons into 15 partner nations across the globe. Our facility provides our international partners access to their own national classified communication systems while placing them in a single collaborative space, side-by-side with their U.S. counterparts.

We are also continuing to find opportunities to work across the interagency on our most pressing national security challenges, and have hosted a number of collaborative sessions to improve our perspectives on these issues. For example, last year we hosted a counter-ISIL forum with representatives from the Departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury, and Defense, as well as the FBI, CIA, Office of the Attorney General, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, USAID, and other departments and agencies. We have also held other such forums this past year with the Department of State on messaging, and with 18 of our international partners on coordinating hostage rescue operations. There is still more to be done, and I look forward to working with Congress in determining how we can best work across the interagency and serve the national security interests of the United States.

Fourth, we are preparing for the future by investing in SOF that are able to win in an increasingly complex world. Ultimately, preparing for the future is about ensuring that we match the right people and capabilities with the very best ideas to address our most pressing challenges. Improving our ability to perform in the future requires us to find innovative ways to invest today in programs that enhance existing capabilities as well as create new advantages for our SOF operators. Programs such as the Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS) are providing us with the ability to collaborate and rapidly prototype with industry, academia and other government organizations to match the latest technologies with the needs of our force. Another critical effort is our SOF Information Environment, which supports our need for better situational awareness, collaboration, decision-making, and synchronization under complex conditions. While these technologies are important, we believe humans are more important than hardware, and are expanding our investments in the human part of the equation. Our Future Special Operator concept describes appropriate attributes and competencies of the future force and is helping us identify and build the right mix of cultural and language expertise. We are also investing in education and training that will further enhance our forces' ability to adapt and innovate in rapidly changing conditions.

Critical to all of our efforts is ensuring we preserve our force and families, providing for their short- and long-term well-being. People—military, civilian, and families—are our most important asset. To the maximum extent possible, we are working with the Services to fulfill the needs of our force in terms of care. Where there are gaps in their ability to meet the unique needs of our operators, which is driven by a high, sustained operational tempo, the relative maturity of our force, and the range of stressors our force and families are placed under, we are building programs

to fill these gaps. In our efforts to address these needs, we are partnering with academia and governmental agencies, as well as non-governmental agencies. We have also begun to integrate discussion of these subjects into our professional military educational venues, so that the notion of seeking help and continuously building resilience becomes a habit, rather than an aspiration.

I believe these are the right priorities—and I also believe we are seeing progress toward generating the right capabilities and capacities to deal with the emerging security environment.

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT AND USSOCOM

Last year, I provided an overview of how we see the strategic environment changing in ways that enhance the ability of connected and empowered populations to reshape security conditions—which are taking place against a backdrop of power shifts among both state and non-state actors. Today, I will explain how I see this environment influencing the challenges we face—specifically, those that we consider “trans-regional.” Improving our understanding of the context of these challenges will improve our ability to identify appropriate solutions.

This is clearly an era of rapidly shifting power, which has stimulated increased competition and conflicts between states, within states, and across their borders. As power shifts, we frequently see competition emerge as empowered actors attempt to expand their spheres of influence, while others attempt to preserve the status quo. Empowered actors naturally seek to seize new privilege commensurate with their elevated power status—this is not new. What is new is that increasingly, populations are becoming connected through modern communications technology and are demanding change on a range of governance issues. Grievances can now quickly mobilize a connected population and create opportunities for exploitation by outside state or non-state actors.

Trans-regional challenges are situations in which an actor, such as a violent extremist organization (VEO), operates across the borders of states—and more problematic for us, across our GCC boundaries. When these organizations are able to leverage local grievances in multiple locations simultaneously, they create an “archipelago” of local insurgencies. These situations are a combination of internal instability and external exploitation. Importantly, these insurgents are motivated by local conditions, though are willing to associate with the trans-regional actors when it suits their purposes. What may appear as a vast, trans-regional threat is in many cases, a series of local issues that an external actor has taken advantage of by leveraging modern communications and culturally-attuned messaging. These associations are opportunistic and based on shared, but often transient, interests.

When these political conditions exist, aggrieved populations are vulnerable to any narrative that is acceptable within the culture and directed at the perceived source of grievance. Organizations such as ISIL are using communication tools to recruit both regionally and globally—exploiting potential recruits’ receptivity to a jihadist message. We must recognize that while the gaps between increased power and lagging privilege are opportunities for our adversaries to exploit, they are also opportunities for us to build stability in strategically important areas, and undermine the ability of these VEOs to build inroads. Over time, we can act to sever the linkages these groups depend upon for survival. What will remain is denying future opportunities to these groups to exploit local grievances for their own purposes.

USSOCOM’S VALUE TO THE NATION

Despite this complex security environment, USSOCOM is well-postured to support the GCCs in countering these trans-regional challenges by virtue of its global perspective. Our responsibility to synchronize planning against VEOs will help the GCCs identify opportunities to influence dynamics in one region by applying pressure in another. Further, we can provide a range of local options, which includes building critical influence with key actors, to magnify our strategic effects.

The range of challenges we deal with in this environment, and the span of their reach, prevent a one-dimensional approach from achieving our desired ends. Partners, both international and domestic, are critical to providing us with the range of capabilities, resources, and access we require. USSOCOM’s extensive investment in building a global network of partners has proven indispensable in developing comprehensive approaches against these threats. Although we work with a large network of partners, USSOCOM can also provide the capability to act discreetly in politically-sensitive situations, where a low-visibility approach is more effective than a larger footprint.

While the challenges we face will not be solved by military capabilities alone, there are simple cases in which force will be our only recourse. For these situations,

USSOCOM has invested a great deal of effort in ensuring we are fully integrated with the Services. SOF plays an important enabling role for conventional forces in conflict. Simultaneously, we tirelessly work to improve those capabilities that we are uniquely structured to provide. Yet even in these cases, most SOF missions require non-SOF support; we remain fully dependent upon our Joint Force partners.

By understanding the complex security environment, building meaningful relationships with our domestic and international partners, and ensuring we are integrated with the Joint Force, SOF can help influence strategic outcomes prior to crisis. Properly posturing SOF will help us identify emerging issues and rapidly adjust our approaches to best seize opportunities. All of these characteristics allow us to develop long-term and cost-effective options to prevent or mitigate conflict, and create decision-space for policymakers. We also can deter and disrupt the most immediate and important threats to US, partner, and allied interests.

Therefore, SOF's value to the nation lies in: our *global perspective* that spans regional boundaries, coupled with our ability to act and *influence locally* with a range of options; our *networked approach* that integrates the capabilities of our domestic and international partners, paired with our ability to *act discreetly* against our most important threats; and our *seamless integration with the Services* to support and enhance their effectiveness, while we provide *capabilities that SOF is uniquely structured to deliver*. All of these are only possible due to our people—adaptive, agile, flexible, bold, and innovative—who allow us to seize opportunities early, and have strategic impact with a small footprint.

With the range of capabilities that we can deliver, there are a variety of functions we are called upon to fill. These functions can be categorized into three broad bins: things we must do, things we are expected to do, and things we should do. Each of these bins are important for the security of the United States; our task is to determine the appropriate balance across each of them. To be clear, we are laser-focused on today's fight, but we remain vigilant in preparing SOF to best meet the challenges of the future.

WHAT WE MUST DO

SOF remains a multi-spectrum, multi-phased force—we provide a full array of capabilities across the range of conflict, and are prepared to support the GCCs when conflicts escalate. Yet, USSOCOM provides two no-fail mission sets to safeguard our interests.

First, we must provide the ability to rescue and recover U.S. citizens from hostage situations. This is one of the central missions USSOCOM was created to execute. Recovery of Americans in crisis situations denies the incentives to attempt to coerce U.S. policymakers with the lives of U.S. citizens in the future, while safeguarding the lives of those currently in danger to the best of our ability.

Second, SOF plays a critical role in reducing incentives to obtain and employ weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as well as deny the effects of current and emerging WMD-capable threats. USSOCOM is forging enduring, purposeful relationships with intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fully capitalize on opportunities to achieve national counter-WMD goals. Ideally, we will be able to more formally codify these relationships to ensure proper and enduring synchronization of efforts. While forums currently exist to bring various government agencies together on these problems, they tend to be more focused in the near-term and in response to crises. The most effective options require a longer-term focus with enduring partnerships.

These capabilities are unique to SOF and constitute what I perceive as our two enduring no-fail responsibilities. However, the utility of SOF in other mission sets has led to us taking a lead role in many other challenges we face, some of which share connections to these two missions.

WHAT WE ARE EXPECTED TO DO

Over the past fifteen years, USSOCOM has invested heavily in developing counter-terrorism capabilities. The increasing influence of various VEOs has understandably resulted in a call for more capacity to counter them. Our operators undertake demanding, time-sensitive, high-risk mission sets to prevent these groups from using terrorist tactics to achieve their ends at the expense of our interests, our partners' interests, and the lives of innocent civilians. While SOF is not primarily a CT force, we recognize that we provide the core CT capabilities for the Department of Defense (DOD).

I believe the use of more kinetically-centric CT operations are best undertaken as a narrow set of actions in support of broader activities intended to separate VEOs from the populations they are attempting to influence. Certainly, this kinetic aspect

of CT will play a role in safeguarding our security going forward, though not necessarily the central role.

Although SOF excel in high-risk, politically sensitive situations, the employment of SOF against any problem set is not risk-free. If we restrict our approaches to direct action-centric responses, we can quickly consume our readiness and capacity, which can undermine our ability to seize early opportunities to prevent escalation in other crises. This is particularly so when we apply a great deal of our force structure and activities against tactical conditions that emerged from unchanging—or worsening—strategic trends. A focus on these tactical conditions comes with a hefty strategic opportunity cost. We believe the most effective approach to CT is to think of it more expansively, and find options to prevent VEOs from building inroads with the populations they depend upon for their own strategic success.

Similar to the complex pathway actors seeking WMD must take, VEOs also have pathways they must travel to recruit and train, fund operations, build their networks, develop relationships with relevant populations, organize, and equip. By looking at this problem set more broadly, I believe we can begin to undermine these groups' ability to achieve success. This approach would prioritize shaping dynamics in the human domain—influencing the “will to fight” of potential recruits as well as the decision-making of VEOs.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

Earlier, I discussed the necessity of seizing opportunities. Many of the trans-regional actors we encounter are taking an experimental approach to find opportunities they can build upon. We should realize that *the tactical actions of our competitors are lagging indicators of where they expect to find—or have found—strategic success*. SOF's role as “global scouts” fits well with our need to also locate and seize opportunities, while denying them to our adversaries. USSOCOM is, and must continue to be, a learning organization intensely focused on finding areas of high-leverage opportunities to safeguard and advance our nation's interests.

I believe this aspect of our value is where we are currently under-invested, and will experience the highest returns on our efforts if we rebalance our activities. This rebalance will consist of deepening our understanding of complex regional issues, developing important relationships, providing early warning of emerging problems, and ultimately cultivating the influence that we can use to undermine the efforts of violent organizations. All of this preserves decision-space and expands our windows of opportunity—therefore minimizing our risk.

We are putting time and effort into developing a family of strategic documents intended to guide the development of our ability to do this. Maximizing the strategic effectiveness of deployed SOF requires a long time frame, efforts to understand underlying dynamics on the ground, and cultivation of key relationships to maximize our influence. The realities of today's strategic environment simply defy short-term, small-force, risk-free solutions that create the desired strategic results. Improving our strategic performance will take time, but earlier commitments can help control costs overall.

Throughout the troubled regions of the world in which we operate, actors are increasingly using approaches and methods that avoid conventional military responses to territorial encroachments. Sophisticated fusions of information operations and targeted tactical actions are helping these actors find areas in which they can achieve more enduring strategic success. Russia, for example, is advancing its interests by employing a variety of approaches across their periphery that combine traditional military operations with sophisticated information campaigns aimed at a variety of audiences. The proliferation of, and increasing reliance on, unconventional tools in the security environment requires us to invest time and effort in ensuring we prepare ourselves with the proper capabilities, capacities, and authorities to safeguard our interests.

Accordingly, we are working hard to determine how we can best leverage the capabilities of our international SOF partners to mutual benefit. Their access to and influence in key strategic locations are essential to maximizing the effectiveness of our own force, while we possess capabilities that they can benefit from. However, we must remember that these arrangements are two-way streets, and built upon mutually beneficial relationships. There are a range of areas we are exploring to improve here, such as in communications infrastructure and policies that support information sharing, as well as planning integration.

Domestically, our interagency partners provide an array of essential capabilities to address many of the challenges we face—most of which defy a military-centric solution. We continue to look for ways in which we can enhance our ability to work with interagency partners. SOF capabilities alone are insufficient to achieve policy

objectives, but we can create time and space for policymakers, while identifying opportunities to integrate the capabilities of the interagency to advance our interests. Although we have made significant progress in working with our domestic partners, I believe there is much more to do.

In short, simply improving upon what we are doing today will not be sufficient to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Shifting from a reactive approach to a more proactive one will require some time and a sustained effort. I believe this approach will be the most effective in controlling the risks we face to our national security interests.

Accordingly, we are working to organize around problem sets and better integrate the capabilities of our domestic and international partners. Further, we are working to match our operators' agility with our institutional agility—improving our support to those from whom we ask so much. As an organization that routinely deals with unique and shifting challenges, we prize our adaptability. This is a characteristic we are also leveraging in our programmatic processes to best enable our force.

ENABLING OUR FORCE

The United States and our allies face an unpredictable and dynamic security environment, while DOD simultaneously faces significant fiscal constraints. To effectively confront challenges we must make timely decisions on tradeoffs between capability, capacity, and in limited cases, readiness. These decisions require analysis and oversight.

USSOCOM's overall readiness remains stable. However, we expect to see impacts on our readiness should significant constraints be put on Service budgets that result in cuts to programs and activities that we depend upon. SOF would begin to lose its technological superiority or be forced to jeopardize various essential recapitalization and modernization programs, leaving the force with reduced capability and/or capacity in critical areas. Further, a significant increase in the demand for SOF would prevent us from adequately resetting and retraining for the large variety of missions we are expected to execute.

Programmatically, our priorities have remained consistent. We focus on enhancing Service-provided platforms to meet the needs of our force—we are therefore highly dependent on investment decisions made by the Services, and greatly impacted by budget changes that affect them. Much of our funding is currently dedicated to procurement, modernization and/or modification of aviation and mobility platforms, weapons, ordnance, and communications equipment. Our budgetary realignments are aimed at better balancing capability, capacity, and readiness as we continue to face a great deal of fiscal uncertainty. Critical procurement programs supporting the development of our force include: a precision strike package, rotary wing upgrades, and the AC/MC-130J in support of SOF aviation; improved wet and dry submersibles in support of our shipbuilding programs; and upgraded communications, weapons, protection, and visual augmentation in support of our SOF operators on the ground.

Our own investments in technology are focused on those areas that require relatively small amounts of funding in order to mature them into useful tools that uniquely meet the needs of SOF. Often they are centered on the enhancements to the platforms that form the backbone of our lethality, mobility, survivability, and communicability. We currently have a list of 32 technologies that meet this criteria and are investing in them over the next two years.

USSOCOM continues to build a culture that embraces and supports innovation in our research, development, and acquisition programs. Our acquisition team is developing and testing new operating models to help build a marketplace for SOF innovation. For example, we are piloting a venue we call SOFWERX; an unclassified, open collaboration facility designed to bring non-traditional partners from industry, academia, and the government together to work on our most challenging problems. SOFWERX is the central node in USSOCOM's efforts to push advanced manufacturing, rapid prototyping, and 3D printing technology to our operational units. This year we have provided orientation training on these technologies to operators in two of our Service components, and are already seeing the benefits of enabling their ability to think through a problem and rapidly iterate on potential solutions at all levels of our organization.

We are also breaking down barriers to innovation through industry engagement—we are using more non-traditional contractual agreements that provide greater flexibility, including signing more than 120 Cooperative Research and Development Agreements, and awarding five non-Federal Acquisition Regulation-base contracts called Other Transaction Authorities or OTAs. The TALOS effort, which I mentioned earlier, is one of our key vehicles we are using to improve our innovation ca-

pabilities across a variety of disciplines by better collaboration with industry, which we will be applying in other efforts going forward. In the second full year of that effort, the TALOS team has grown from long, less frequent prototyping events to nearly continuous rapid prototyping in a number of key technologies.

In another important area of innovation for us, we appreciate the support you have provided through the 2016 NDAA to allow our forces to develop creative and agile military information support operations concepts, technologies, and strategies. USSOCOM is currently carrying out a series of technology demonstrations to assess innovative tools designed to detect previously unseen patterns in complex social media data, integrate and visualize vast information, and allow warfighters to sense, understand, and respond to changes in the information environment in real time. The ability to conduct effective messaging, as well as counter-messaging, will only grow in importance, given the evolving nature of conflicts.

USSOCOM'S INTERDEPENDENCE

As I have indicated, a great deal of USSOCOM's procurement is focused on Special Operations-Peculiar enhancements to Service-managed programs. Being ready to support the range of contingencies we prepare for depends upon maintaining a robust fleet of air, ground, and maritime platforms that we tailor to our unique needs through our MFP-11 funding. Our buying power is highly dependent upon the Services' continued investment in these platforms. Major cuts or reprioritization in these programs will require us to reassess our readiness investments. Not only do we focus on SOF-specific enhancements to Service-managed programs, but we also focus a great deal of our training and equipping efforts on ensuring interoperability with conventional forces and partner nation forces. Major reprioritization on the part of the Services will create a significant "sunk cost" for us.

Therefore, one of USSOCOM's greatest concerns is the potential impacts of fiscal reductions to the Services' readiness, which directly affect SOF. We have already seen reductions which negatively affect us in a variety of ways. Naval Special Warfare Command is seeing training challenges associated with lower fleet asset availability which impacts readiness and interoperability. Marine Forces Special Operations Command is experiencing reductions in access to some important school seats. U.S. Army Special Operations Command is experiencing a reduction in the Military Training Specific Allotment as well as staffing at heavily-used ranges. Air Force Special Operations Command is facing risk in the AC/MC-130J recapitalization program. If further reductions become necessary, we are certain to see more examples of adverse impacts on USSOCOM like these.

We are also dependent upon the capabilities that reside within some of the defense agencies, such as the Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Agency (JIDA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). DTRA is uniquely positioned to look at WMD threats from a global perspective and provide USSOCOM with planning support, expertise and tools to counter this threat from both state and non-state actors. DTRA provides research and development support to USSOCOM by providing warfighter-unique counter-proliferation technologies. These organizations help reduce our analytical load on complex problems, while providing us with valuable insight on the threats our operators face today and will continue to face in the future. Relatedly, we appreciate the fiscal year 2016 NDAA (Sec 1533) authorization for training foreign security forces to defeat improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which enables a wider effort against this shared threat. We request your continued support in sustaining budgetary allotments and authorities for these essential enablers.

Another enduring budgetary concern for us is the future of the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding, which we remain heavily reliant upon. Maintaining contingency funds is essential for responding to today's threats while preserving the ability to prepare for the future. The current fiscal environment is forcing us to continue to leverage this funding to maintain capabilities that should be programmed into our baseline budget; much of our globally-distributed, enduring operations are currently funded with OCO. We also rely upon programs and activities provided by the Services that are funded through OCO—steep reductions will impact SOF operations. In other cases, funding enduring requirements through OCO is creating challenges for the Services to adequately match manpower specializations to requirements. For example, our operational tempo has created an increased need for Tactical Systems Operators (TSOs), which are airborne intelligence specialists provided by the Services. TSOs operate on aircraft that are not programs of record, but are vital to our ability to target enemies on the ground. This creates a situation where the Air Force, as well as the other Services, have an increased manpower bill they have not programmed for, while they provide us with essential intel-

ligence support. For critical and unique enduring capabilities like TSOs, it is essential that we provide sustainable funding that allows the Services to provide sustainable sourcing—migrating funding from OCO to Base preserves our ability to best prepare for the future.

PRESERVING OUR FORCE AND FAMILIES

The demand for SOF across the GCCs as they deal with the complexities of the strategic environment will result in an unchanging, or potentially higher, operations tempo for our SOF operators. In order to respond to these strategic challenges, maintaining a high state of readiness among the entire USSOCOM team—servicemembers, families, and our civilian workforce—is paramount. To this end, I continue to place the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) initiatives at the forefront of my priorities.

I am deeply appreciative of the support Congress and the Department have given the Command in this area and for the collaboration and support we receive every day from the Services. With that assistance, we have built an infrastructure of holistic support services at each of our tactical units. These services include behavioral healthcare, family counseling and support services, physical training and rehabilitation, and a cadre of chaplains with skills to guide our community members anytime and anywhere. For each SOF member and/or family member requiring care, there is an entire team of professionals ready to guide and care for them during their too-short downtime before the next major training event or deployment.

USSOCOM's POTFF is an enduring element of our efforts to design, build, and implement a holistic approach to address the pressure on our total force. This program identifies and implements innovative, valuable solutions across the USSOCOM Enterprise aimed at improving the short and long-term well-being of our SOF members and their families. POTFF addresses significant stressors on SOF families to include a lack of predictability, compressed and irregular training cycles, and limited post-deployment family reintegration time by leveraging both Service and SOF sponsored programs.

Since implementing the POTFF initiative, USSOCOM has conducted annual surveys to monitor usage and satisfaction and several psychological / health related factors. The program has increased resilience, decreased reported symptoms of depression, increased utilization of behavioral health services, and expanded access to timely rehabilitative care. As a result, we are beginning to see the benefits of these initiatives. The members of our SOF community are proactively and increasingly seeking behavioral healthcare. We are also seeing steady improvement in quickly returning our injured personnel to a full-mission capable status. We deeply appreciate Congressional support for these efforts. Resources to support the personnel, facilities, equipment and research necessary to sustain this initiative is a priority for USSOCOM.

Despite this progress, we continue to struggle with the challenge of suicides within our ranks and our community. Any loss of life has a profound impact on the Command. Accordingly, we are working with the American Association of Suicidology to review all of our suicides over the past four years to help us understand where we may better intervene to prevent these tragic events. We have also redoubled our efforts to ensure that our professional staff and leaders recognize the dynamics that lead to suicides and better understand how to intervene. We also continue to work with the Defense Suicide Prevention Office to develop a peer-to-peer mentoring program, so that our Service members and their Spouses have access to critical support networks during trying times. We are seeing indicators of progress in this area, and will continue to stress the value of behavioral health care across the continuum, from individual and unit performance enhancement to crisis intervention.

WORKING WITH CONGRESS

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the posture, perspective, and health of our Special Operations Forces. I would also like to extend my thanks for your support on a range of issues that are critical to ensuring USSOCOM is able to provide the Secretary of Defense and the GCCs the capabilities that are in such high demand in our current security environment. Given that we expect demand for SOF to remain high, it is incumbent upon all of us to do our utmost to ensure those in the SOF community and their families are properly cared for.

Congressional support is critical to ensure we can improve our ability to act early and seize opportunities in this complex environment. This improved ability to influence outcomes will come through a combination of tailored authorities and effective programs that enhance our capabilities, while ensuring that we adequately care for our people. The potential fallout of possible budget reductions in the future remains

a significant concern for us—the indirect impacts on USSOCOM of cuts to the Services could potentially undermine our ability to field the best possible Special Operations Forces.

We will continue to earn the high level of trust that our leaders have placed in us by maintaining an open dialogue on the challenges we face, providing our best military advice, and remaining responsible stewards of U.S. tax dollars.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, General.

General Austin, General Nicholson, the new commander in Afghanistan, testified before this committee in no uncertain terms that the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. Do you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, as you heard me say in my opening statement, I do think the environment in the country has changed because of a number of—

Senator MCCAIN. Actually, he said the situation was deteriorating, General. We really would like just straightforward answers. I only have a few minutes here.

He said that the situation is deteriorating. Do you agree with that assessment?

General AUSTIN. In part, I agree. I think the Taliban has become more active and the Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF] have been challenged over the last year.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you. Would that argue for not having further reductions in troop strength there in Afghanistan, would you think?

General AUSTIN. Sir, as I mentioned earlier, you start with a plan. The plan is based on facts that you know at that time and assumptions that you make in order to continue planning. When the situation changes so that those facts are no longer valid, or the assumptions that you made are no longer appropriate, then I think you have to go back and revisit your plan. I would agree that a review of the plan is in order.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you agree with General Breedlove that President Vladimir Putin is “deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve.”

General AUSTIN. I think what we have seen with the use of barrel bombs and the massive number of refugees and displaced personnel I think is absolutely awful. Again, there is no logical reason that he would choose to employ this kind of weapon over and over again.

Again, I think the fact that we have a cessation of hostilities on the ground right now has enabled us to get some humanitarian assistance to some of the disadvantaged people. That is a good thing. What he has done with this barrel-bombing is awful.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, actually, he is not barrel-bombing. Bashar Assad is. He is indiscriminately bombing targets without regard to precision weapons or precision targets. Is that true?

General AUSTIN. I misunderstood you. I thought you said Assad.

Senator MCCAIN. I said General Breedlove said that Putin is deliberately weaponizing migration in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve. I am sorry if I did make that clear.

General AUSTIN. I misunderstood you, Chairman.

Clearly, the approach that the Russians have taken is irresponsible. They are using dumb bombs. They have inflicted extraordinary numbers of civilian casualties, and, again, it is indiscriminate. A really poor approach to warfighting.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, again, General Breedlove said it is an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve, including breaking up the European Union [EU]. Do you support the sale of fighter aircraft to Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain?

General AUSTIN. I do, Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you think Putin's \$8 billion in advanced arms sales to Iran increased risk to U.S. forces and operations in the region?

General AUSTIN. Certainly, that will enable our adversaries to have greater capabilities. I will say at the same time that Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] countries have spent some \$10 billion on military hardware during the same time period.

Senator MCCAIN. General Rodriguez, there is a New York Times story that says the Pentagon plan to fight ISIS in Libya includes a barrage of airstrikes. "Thirty to 40 targets in four areas of the country would aim to deal a crippling blow to the Islamic State's most dangerous affiliate outside of Iraq and Syria." That is a quote from story.

Would you recommend a barrage of airstrikes, such as described in the New York Times?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, that answer would be better given in a classified setting. I will get that to you and your leadership, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you believe vigorous action should be taken in response to the metastasizing of ISIL?

General RODRIGUEZ. I think the international community has to take action to halt the expansion, degrade it, and eventually defeat it. Yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you think we are doing enough now to stop this spread, particularly expansion in Libya?

General RODRIGUEZ. The spread in Libya continues to be a challenge because of the lack of governance as well as the breakup of the military and the multiple militias on the ground. We continue to develop our situational understanding—

Senator MCCAIN. My question was, do you think we need to do more?

General RODRIGUEZ. I think the international community and Libyans all—

Senator MCCAIN. I am not asking about the international community. I am asking about the United States of America.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, I think we as part of that international community have to do more. Yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Reed?

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

General Austin, one of the issues in Iraq is the potential consequences of failure of the Mosul dam. It is not often in headlines, but it has potentially serious consequences. Can you give us a status of the situation, and also the planning that has gone into the consequences of the failure of the dam?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. We have remained concerned about the status of the dam since the conflict started here. As you know,

when Daesh (another name for ISIL) captured the dam, the employees initially left and the grouting ceased. We have encouraged the Iraqi Government, since the dam has been back in the hands of the Iraqis, to make sure that they are doing the right things to go about repairing the dam to ensure that it does not fail.

They have most recently hired an Italian company to perform maintenance on the dam. It may be several weeks or months before that company is up and running, so there is a time period that we are concerned about that there will be limited to no maintenance being pulled on the dam.

If the dam fails, it will be catastrophic. There will be thousands of people downstream that will either be injured or killed, certainly displaced. The damage could extend all the way down to close to Baghdad or into Baghdad.

We have worked with Iraqis to ensure that they are doing the right things to warn people about this, and, in the event that it does fail, what actions they should take to get to safety.

We certainly have placed measures in place to ensure that U.S. personnel are accounted for and able to be evacuated in case of the dam failure.

Senator REED. Thank you, General.

General Rodriguez, when I was in Djibouti, we focused a great deal of the resurgence of al Shabaab, the ability to concentrate forces, and to pick off some of the African allies we have in place. I presume you are taking this very seriously and you are beginning to try to disrupt their ability to attack, and also to support the Ugandan, Kenyan, Djibouti, and Ethiopian forces, and I think the Burundi forces are on the ground. Is that fair?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, it is, Senator.

Senator REED. Is there any indication that our African colleagues, the Ugandans, Kenyans, Djiboutis, Ethiopians, and Burundis, are wavering, or are they committed to the mission?

General RODRIGUEZ. They are committed to the mission. They continue their activities that they have been doing for the last several years.

Right now, because of the adjusting tactics that al Shabaab have taken, they need to start making adjustments, too, and that is what we are working with them on.

Senator REED. Very good.

I had a question for both the General Votel and General Austin. Given the years we have been suggesting, encouraging the Pakistani military forces to take action in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA] along the border, they recently have. One of the consequences is they have driven a significant number of terrorist elements into Afghanistan, which actually seems to have increased the counterterrorism demands on forces there.

Is that a fair assumption, in terms the situation on the ground?

I will start with General Votel, and then General Austin.

General VOTEL. Senator, I think it is. Certainly, their pushing into Afghanistan has not been without some level of coordination with our forces. While it has increased the turbulence, it has also provided us an opportunity to address that threat as well.

Senator REED. General Austin, your comments?

General AUSTIN. It has increased opportunities and demands on the Special Operations Forces, Senator.

Senator REED. A final question, General Austin. This is flipping back to Syria. There was, indeed, a train and equip program, and it was terminated because it was deemed not to be accomplishing objectives. The reality though, and you may dispute this, is that in order to hold ground there once we capture it, we need indigenous forces, not just Kurds but Arabs, Syrians.

Are we revising in some way train and equip on a smaller scale and prepared to provide that kind of support?

General AUSTIN. We are, Senator. I have asked for permission to restart the effort using a different approach. As you mentioned, we were being effective, but we were slow in getting started and generating the numbers that we needed to generate.

Part of that was because we were trying to take large numbers of people out of the fight and keep them out for training for long periods of time. We have adjusted our approach.

As we look to restart our efforts and really focus on smaller numbers of people that we can train on specific skills, and as we reintroduce those people back into the fight, they will be able to enable the larger groups that they are a part of. The training would be shorter, but again, I think they would be able to greatly enable the forces once they are reintroduced.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Ayotte?

Senator AYOTTE. I want to thank all of you for your distinguished service and leadership to our country.

General Austin, in your opening testimony, you talked about Iran and you said they are having a destabilizing effect on the region. In fact, there is no indication that they are following a different path than they have previously.

We know in press reports just this week, in fact, Tuesday, that Iran, the Revolutionary Guard Corps test-fired several ballistic missiles from silos across the country, defying both recent U.S. sanctions, and, of course, this follows on after the JCPOA was signed, the ballistic missile test that they did in October and November of this year.

Director of National Intelligence [DNI] James Clapper has testified before this committee that that would be their preferred method for delivering a nuclear weapon.

Are you concerned about their continuing pursuit of testing ballistic missiles?

General AUSTIN. I am, Senator.

Senator AYOTTE. What are the implications of that?

General AUSTIN. Well, certainly, we hope that the JCPOA will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in near- to mid-term, and forever, hopefully. This is something we will continue to watch.

Senator AYOTTE. Clearly, the JCPOA is not continuing deterring them on the ballistic missile program. Would you agree with me on that?

General AUSTIN. I would agree with that, Senator. What I would say is that what we and the people in the region are concerned

about is that they already have overmatch with numbers of ballistic missiles. The people in the region remain concerned about their cyber capability, their ability to mine the straits, and certainly the activity of their Quds Force, which we see malign activity not only throughout the region but around the globe as well.

There are a number of things that lead me to personally believe that their behavior, that they have not changed any course yet. This is something we will continue to watch.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I would argue that, clearly, the sanctions the administration did put in place, which I have said from the beginning are pathetic and weak, are having absolutely no impact, given that they are now continuing to test ballistic missiles. I would hope that we would up our game and impose real, tough sanctions on Iran, on their ballistic missile program.

I wanted to follow up on an important question, both General Rodriguez and General Votel. This is something I have actually asked both of your predecessors about.

My concern is if we capture Ayman al Zawahiri or Abu Bakr al Baghdadi tomorrow, where will we detain these individuals under long-term law of war detention, most importantly to interrogate them, so we can find out all that we need to know about Al Qaeda and ISIL?

I asked your predecessor, going back to 2011, I asked General Carter Ham, your predecessor in AFRICOM, what would happen if we tomorrow captured a member of Al Qaeda in Africa? You know what he told me? He said, "I am going to need some lawyerly help on answering that one."

I also asked the same of Admiral William McRaven, your predecessor, General Votel. He said to me that it would be very helpful if there was actually a facility that was designated for long-term law of war detention and interrogation.

I guess my question to both of you is, tomorrow, if we capture these individuals, given the phenomenal work that the men and women who serve underneath you do every day, where are we going to interrogate them? Do you know that? Do you know what you would do with them, especially if we want to have a long-term interrogation of them?

General VOTEL: Senator, in my experience, as we look at operations where we are actually going to change someone somebody, we have had a plan in place before we actually conducted the operation for how we were going to potentially detain them and what their legal disposition would be, whether that was back—

Senator AYOTTE. General, we just recently captured someone in ISIL. As I understand it, they are being held short term and then they are going to be turned back to the Kurds.

What about long-term detention? You would agree that long-term interrogation was quite helpful, for example, in gathering the information we needed to get Osama bin Laden. That is what worries me. What do we do in a long-term setting? Do we know?

General VOTEL. I would agree that there is a requirement for long-term detention, Senator.

Senator AYOTTE. Do we know where that would be now?

General VOTEL. I do not know. That is a policy decision that I think is being debated.

Senator AYOTTE. I think it is a policy decision that has basically never been made under this administration. It is one that has been left up in the air, which means it is left up in the air in a way that I think undermines our national security interests.

I think that you all need to know what would happen tomorrow, given the great work of the men and women who serve underneath you. We hope they capture these individuals, we interrogate them, and we find out what they know, so that we can prevent attacks on this country and obviously continue to dismantle these terrorism networks.

Thank you all.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you all for being here this morning and for your service to the country.

General Austin, I want to follow up on some of the questions about Afghanistan because I saw reports over the weekend that President Ashraf Ghani claimed that ISIL had been defeated in the eastern part of the country following a 21-day operation by Afghan forces. Do we agree with President Ghani's analysis of what has happened there?

General AUSTIN. I think we have had some good initial effects, Senator, but I think there is more work to be done in that area.

Senator SHAHEEN. Do we expect the Afghan national forces to follow up with ISIL in that area? Are we working with them directly on what is happening there? Can you elaborate a little bit on what is going on?

General AUSTIN. As you know, Senator, we are advising and assisting the Afghan special operation forces on a daily basis. Yes, we are helping them to identify these threats and also advising them on the best means to go after these threats.

Senator SHAHEEN. If, in fact, they are performing well with respect to ISIS, what does that mean for the continued fighting against the Taliban? I saw recently reports about Helmand Province and what is happening there.

Having had the opportunity to visit there back in 2010, 2011, we visited Lashkar Gah, which is the provincial capital, and saw some really amazing work that had been done by International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] forces to engage the local population to get kids in school, to do very positive things. It is very distressing to see what is happening now in Helmand and the fact that provincial capital may fall to the Taliban. It is under threat from that.

Can you talk about whether there are benefits from the effort against ISIL that carry over to the fight against the Taliban? I do not want to use the word "propaganda," but is there messaging there that is helpful in terms of the Taliban's recurring activity in Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. As was mentioned, earlier, Senator, the environment in Afghanistan this last year has been a very challenging environment to work in because of a number of transitions—transition of power for the first time in that young government's history. You had a new government standing up. We reduced our footprint. The death of Mullah Omar was announced. That caused the

Taliban to begin to fracture a bit, but also gave rise to a new leader who set out to prove himself with increased activity.

All of this worked together to prove to be very challenging for the Afghan security forces, and there were some setbacks. Those setbacks were due to a number of things—leadership, inappropriate techniques.

General John Campbell and now General Nicholson are working with the Afghan security forces to address those setbacks. They put measures in place that should improve the performance there.

The President, Mr. Ghani, has embraced these suggestions, and they are making corrections. We expect to see some improved performance. There is more advising and assisting that needs to be done going forward.

One of the key things that has transpired here recently is that, because the Afghans in some cases were overextended, they have adjusted their footprint to give more flexibility. The smaller footprint allows them to project combat power at will in places that they need to project combat power to.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

General Votel, Senator Reed raised the issue of countermeasuring in his opening statement. I know that in 2016, the National Defense Authorization Act [NDAA] provided resources for technologies to support our information operations and communication activities. Can you elaborate on what you are doing in this area to improve our countermeasuring efforts, which I think are really critical, both to what is going on with ISIL and to Putin in Russia?

General VOTEL. Thank you, Senator. I agree with your assessment. I think it is absolutely critical, and it must be an integrated aspect of all of our operations, from start to finish. It cannot be something we think about afterwards.

I am very grateful for the support we have gotten in the NDAA. Specifically, what we have done at USSOCOM is we have looked at publicly available information and how we develop the tools and the techniques and the procedures to use that information to help us understand the threats that we are dealing with. We are looking at how we can experiment in the area, the different things that we can do and bring to bear for our forces.

Publicly available information and being able to work in that environment is an area in which we hope to improve our capabilities in the future.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. My time is up, but I would be interested in hearing what we are doing to work with other agencies within the Federal Government so that we are coordinating our messages across all of our activities. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Rounds?

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your service.

General Austin, with regard to the challenges surrounding the retaking of Mosul and Raqqa by December of this year coming up, you currently have I think about 4,000 ground forces available, if I am correct.

Is that enough? Do you have enough right now to assist in your plans to be able to retake Mosul and Raqqa?

General AUSTIN. The approach that we have used and will continue to use, Senator, as you know, is to use the indigenous forces to conduct the operations on the ground and enable those forces with our aerial fire and other enablers.

As we look toward Raqqa and Mosul, clearly, there will be things that we will want to do to increase the capability of it, to be able to increase the pace of operations. That will require some additional capability. We have gone through and done some analysis to see what types of things we need to provide, and we have made those recommendations.

Senator ROUNDS. Could you share those recommendations with this committee?

General AUSTIN. No, sir. I would not care to do so because I have just provided those to my leadership.

Senator ROUNDS. You have made the recommendations and you are awaiting a response to your recommendations at this time?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. It will work its way up the chain.

Senator ROUNDS. If you were allowed to have more ground troops, what would be the capabilities that you could accomplish, or what could you accomplish if you had more individuals on the ground there at this time?

General AUSTIN. We could develop better human intelligence. We could perhaps provide more advise and assist teams at various levels. We could increase our assistance in terms of providing help with some logistical issues. We could increase some elements of the special operations footprint.

Senator ROUNDS. Assuming we would be successful in retaking both of those two towns, what then? It is broken. Clearly, you come back in, you need to reestablish civil order and so forth. When we take them back, do we have a plan in place? Do we have a plan that we want to execute to bring back in a sense of order to those communities? What does it look like right now? What part would we play?

General AUSTIN. The short answer is, yes, Senator, first of all, the Iraqis will take back Mosul, and we will work with the Syrian indigenous forces to take back Raqqa as well.

As you have seen us do, as they have taken back towns in Iraq that include Ramadi, Baiji, Tikrit, Sinjar, and other places, that effort has been to reestablish security in those places and then immediately try to do what is necessary to repair damage and make sure that we are taking care of the people, the people are able to move back in and resume their lives.

We build incrementally as we kind of move forward. There is a lot of work to be done, Senator. You know from just looking at Ramadi, there is a mountain of work to be accomplished to get that back to some reasonable state.

In Mosul, then looking forward to Raqqa, the same types of things apply. Establish the security and when that is done, bring in the humanitarian assistance, do the reconstruction activities to get things back to normal.

Senator ROUNDS. Do you believe that the current structure in Iraq with the government that is there now, do they have the capabilities and competencies to provide that to those communities in Iraq?

General AUSTIN. I think they do, sir. I think that it will require a lot of work, and it will require the government to work together much more and much better than what we have seen them do up to this point.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. [Presiding.] Senator Manchin, on behalf of the chairman.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you all for being here, and thank you for your service.

I would ask the first question I think to General Votel. Given that we will be considering your nomination to succeed General Austin as CENTCOM commander, it would be insightful to get your opinion on the current situation in Iraq and Syria. I guess the question would simply be, who poses the greater threat to the region and to the United States, ISIL or Iran?

General VOTEL. Well, I think right now, Senator, my answer would be ISIL does because they are inspiring and they are orchestrating external attacks that could impact our people. I think we have to take that extraordinarily seriously.

That said, as we have kind of discussed here already, despite the JCPOA and the agreement has been made, we should understand that Iran is not ambiguous in their activities and their focus on the United States, and certainly on our allies in the region. I think they do pose a long-term threat as well.

Senator MANCHIN. General Austin, do you agree?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I would say, clearly, the most dangerous near-term threat is ISIL or Daesh. We will deal with that threat as a part of an international coalition. I would say the greatest mid- to long-term threat to stability in the region is clearly Iran. We will need to work with our partners in the region to really counter the malign activity that we have seen Iran conduct over time.

Senator MANCHIN. The additional revenue that Iran has coming now, because their oil is starting to flow and the revenue from that, do you see that exacerbating the problem?

General AUSTIN. It certainly adds a little fuel to the problem, sir. They were going to spend money on their military and buy weapons anyway. This gives them some capability to do more.

Having said that, the GCC is working together, probably in ways that they have not done in the past, and they continue to buy a healthy dose of our equipment and our weapons as well. They are increasing their capability as well.

Senator MANCHIN. Also, with the change of regime there, I guess the last election they just had showed an awful lot of the moderates got elected and some of the extremes got pushed out of office. It is too soon to tell, but do you see that as a promising factor?

General AUSTIN. I think it is too soon to tell, sir. I think what we saw leading up to the elections, we saw a lot of moderates get disqualified from the elections. The folks who are now classifying themselves as moderates, are they really moderates or just another flavor of hardliners? We will see as time passes here.

Senator MANCHIN. General Rodriguez, regarding the U.S. strike in Somalia that occurred Saturday, I read that the fighters that

were targeted had just completed training for a large-scale attack against American forces. The question would be, could you give me a sense of the number of camps like that that are still in Somalia that you have identified? How big a concern is it that there are other camps in this region that we do not even know about?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, the camps are transitory, so they pop up and move, and they are at different places throughout Somalia at different times. It is a concern because the last three times they did something similar to this, they had the ability to conduct a devastating attack on the AMISOM forces.

Senator MANCHIN. General Votel, I would follow up with you. The National Guard State Partnership Program has been successful in building extremely strong relationships between the Guard and 70 other countries for over 20 years. In some cases, it has been going on longer.

In your testimony, you indicate one of your major priorities is to continue to build relationships with international and domestic partners through sustained security cooperation, expand the communication architects, and liaison activities.

It seems to be something National Guard has been successful with in the State Partnership Program. Do you see a role for the State Partnership Program in helping advance this priority?

General VOTEL. Senator, I absolutely do. Of course, as you may be aware, West Virginia has played a very key role in sponsoring exercises for our Polish SOF partners that was very successful. We have already engaged on doing the next version of that.

I think the State Partnership Program is absolutely essential to us. Of course, a number of embassies we have National Guard bilateral officers at the same place where we have some of our special operation liaison officers. I think that provides a great opportunity to increase our interaction and integration on activities.

I think it is a wonderful program, and we are going to try to leverage it in every way we can.

Senator MANCHIN. General, I appreciate that, because we think it has been very successful, also, and very cost-effective for us, too. Thank you for that.

My time is up.

Senator REED. On behalf of the chairman, Senator Ernst, please.

Senator ERNST. Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here today. I certainly appreciate your many, many years of service.

I would like to start, General Austin and General Votel, just in your professional military opinion, you have served a while in our armed services. I was going to say over 40 years of service, but we will just say many, many years. Again, thank you for that. What are the implications of Russia's actions in Syria and the world's response or lack of response with Russia in Syria and their international behavior?

I guess what I am trying to get at is, what lessons do you think Putin is taking out of Syria? What concerns should we have about what Putin is doing in Syria? We have heard discussion about weaponization of migrants. Can you give me a little input on that, please?

General AUSTIN. Thank you, Senator.

Russia's entry into this problem set has made a very complicated problem even more complicated. You know, when you consider the actors that are part of this, the regime, the Russians, the Turks, the People's Protection Units [YPG], the Iranians, Lebanese Hezbollah, Daesh, all of these elements interacting with each other in a fairly confined battle space, the introduction of Russia has made this more complicated, especially because of the fact that, although they said they came to counter terrorism, to counter Daesh, what we have seen them do principally is bolster the Assad regime. That potentially extends the conflict.

My personal opinion is that, as Russia entered this, they had no designs on being there for a long time. I do not think they can be there for a long time, because of the impact that it will have on their economy. Clearly, they tried to use this to demonstrate muscle and impress the region. I think they will have an opposite effect. When they came in and aligned themselves with the Syrian regime, they also aligned themselves with the Iranians and with Lebanese Hezbollah. That will eventually begin to alienate them from many of the Sunni Arab states in the region.

Senator ERNST. Do you think that is his overall goal, the alienation of those groups, and alignment with himself? Has he achieved that?

General AUSTIN. I think what they wanted to do was gain greater—certainly, they wanted access to a port in the Mediterranean. They want influence in the region. They want to increase their influence in the region by doing some of the things that they have done. I think at the end of the day, it will probably have the opposite effect of what they wanted to do.

Senator ERNST. Okay. Thank you, sir.

General Votel?

General VOTEL. Senator, I agree with everything that General Austin just said. I would add one additional point.

I think the big lesson that we are learning out of this is this ability to operate in the gray area, this area between normal state competition that we normally expect and open warfare. I think, in my view, this is an area in which Russia is engaging. Syria is another example. Certainly, Eastern Europe is another example. The Ukraine is another example.

Short of open warfare, but they are certainly challenging our interests, challenging our influence, and challenging the interests of many of our allies. For those of us in SOCOM, we are paying very close attention to this and trying to understand the gray zone and how that is going to impact our future operations, and how we contribute in a particular area.

Senator ERNST. Okay, I appreciate that.

My time is short, but very quickly, if you could, General Austin, talk about the Sunni fighting force in Iraq. Why is it taking so long to develop a force, which would keep the region stable?

General AUSTIN. One of the things I think that must be done, Senator, and I think you probably feel the same way, is that the Sunnis have to be a part of the solution going forward. We have worked with the leadership, with the Prime Minister, to enlist and hire and train and pay Sunni tribal elements that can help us.

They have across-the-board enlisted about 15,000 or so of Sunni tribal elements. They have proven that they are very reliable troops.

The reason it has taken a long time is because there are hardliners in the environment that do not want to see a large Sunni force armed and equipped because of the bad experience with Daesh.

Nonetheless, the Sunnis have to be a part of the solution going forward. We see the Prime Minister doing some things to enlist their help. We just need some more activity here.

Senator ERNST. Gentlemen, again, I appreciate it very much. Thank you for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator MCCAIN. [Presiding.] Senator Hirono?

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Rodriguez, regarding Libya, you mentioned in your written testimony that the lack of stability and security in Libya threatens our peace and security objectives in the Middle East. Of course, whatever we do in the Middle East is fraught with all kinds of peril and unintended consequences.

While the Libyan Government of National Accord established by agreement in December 2015, as you noted in your testimony, is an important step, it will take time to establish its authority.

Can you talk more about what is supposed to happen under this agreement, and what is to be expected to happen in Libya? What kind of time frame are we talking about, to establish civility and security in Libya?

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator.

The agreement that the United Nations [U.N.] brokered to build of the Government of National Accord was supposed to bring together both the House of Representatives in the east and the General National Congress in the west, and build a central government that could then begin to govern Libya.

This will be a long time coming as they work through this. We will continue to press on all the diplomatic fronts that the U.S. and international community can to get this thing moving. It has continued to move along slowly.

As far as the second part of your question, to build stability in Libya is going to take a long time because of the lack of institutions that are there, the fractured society, and the multiple competing militias and spoilers from all sides of Libyan society.

Senator HIRONO. What would you say are maybe the one or two most important steps or conditions that must occur for this process to proceed in a way that will result in civility in Libya?

General RODRIGUEZ. I think the Government of National Accord has to come together and have enough legitimacy in the eyes of the Libyan people that it can function well enough to move forward and help to begin building stability.

Senator HIRONO. Is that happening?

General RODRIGUEZ. It has not happened yet.

Senator HIRONO. Beginning to happen?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes.

Senator HIRONO. When you say it is going to be a long time, do you have any kind of a sense? Are we talking about 10 years, 15 years?

General RODRIGUEZ. For long-term stability, yes, it is going to take 10 years or so to build that society up. Yes, ma'am.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you.

General Votel, North Korea's nuclear threats are increasing and becoming more of a concern by the day. What efforts are SOCOM engaging in that we hope will dispel or lower this imminent threat? Do you think that a peaceful solution is possible at this point?

General VOTEL. Thank you, Senator. I do not know if a peaceful solution is possible at this particular point.

What we are doing, of course, is we are retaining our capability to deal with those types of weapons in the venues in which we are asked to deal with them, which are fairly peculiar. We do maintain that capability as one of our kind of no-fail missions.

That said, the other thing that we have done over the last 18 months is increase our presence and partnership with our South Korean partners. I am pretty proud to say right now, today, there are more SOF men and women on the peninsula than we have had any time in the past. We are continuing to maintain a robust presence there with all of our capability—air, maritime, and ground SOF forces.

Senator HIRONO. Even as we speak, are we engaging in some exercises with South Korea and our Marines?

General VOTEL. We are. There are major exercises that occur at various times of the year. There is one going on right now. We are extraordinarily well-integrated into that, and through our Special Operations Command Korea, we are supporting General Curtis Scaparrotti in his objectives.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you.

Again, to you, General Votel, regarding our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, which is a key strategic goal, particularly as we see what is going on with North Korea and China, with what you can say in this unclassified setting, can you comment on the capabilities of SOCOM in the Asia-Pacific region? Do you have a Special Operations Forces structure to meet the growing demands of this region? Does this year's budget request provide the resources necessary to meet the demand?

General VOTEL. Senator, to the last part of your question, we absolutely do have a structure. It is formed around Special Operations Command Pacific that is under the operational control of Admiral Harry Harris under my combatant command. We are sourcing them. They are a fairly robust headquarters. They have the ability to exercise command and control and coordination, integration with Admiral Harris' staff.

With regards to the other things that we are doing, I guess I would like to say that SOCOM never left the Pacific. We have always been engaged out there. Most of our activities are bilateral. We certainly had some success in the Philippines in the past and in support of many of Admiral Harris' objectives out there.

We are working very closely with a large variety of partners to reassure them, to develop their capabilities, and to show that we remain very committed to the area.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you very much. I thank all of our testifiers today. Mahalo.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Graham?

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you all for many years of great service. Syria, General Votel, are you responsible for training the Syrian Democratic Forces?

General VOTEL. We are providing forces to General Austin who has that mission.

Senator GRAHAM. What percentage of the Syrian Democratic Forces are Kurds?

General VOTEL. Probably about 80 percent.

Senator GRAHAM. Is it possible for the current construct for these forces to take Raqqa away from ISIL?

General VOTEL. I do not know. I think that they are capable. As we have seen in some of the things that they have done, without—

Senator GRAHAM. Is there a plan to take Raqqa back from ISIL using these forces?

General VOTEL. We have a strategy to get to Raqqa—

Senator GRAHAM. No. I said, is there a plan?

General VOTEL. There is currently not a plan.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Is there a plan to hold Raqqa once we take it?

General VOTEL. I would say, no. There is not a plan to hold Raqqa.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

General Austin, is it fair to say that when Russia and Iran came in to assist Assad, that changed the balance of power on the ground militarily in his favor?

General AUSTIN. It is, Senator.

If I could make a comment on the question that General Votel just answered?

Senator GRAHAM. Sure.

General AUSTIN. As you know, Senator, as we continue to work with the forces in theater, the indigenous forces. Our goal is to recruit more Arabs and Turkmen and others to—

Senator GRAHAM. Will the recruitment require them to fight ISIL alone and not go after Assad?

General AUSTIN. We will recruit, train, and equip forces to focus on Daesh, on ISIL.

Senator GRAHAM. Part of the conditions will be we are not going to support you when it comes to Assad.

General AUSTIN. That is correct, sir. We will only support those elements that are—

Senator GRAHAM. What happens when Assad bombs the people we train? What do we do?

General AUSTIN. We will defend the folks that we are supporting.

Senator GRAHAM. Have we defended them against the Russians and Assad, the people we have previously trained?

General AUSTIN. In terms of forces that I have trained, we have not had that issue.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, the forces that the Agency has trained have been bombed by the Russians and Assad. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I would not want to address that in this forum.

Senator GRAHAM. I think it is pretty common knowledge that the people we trained have been hit by the Russians and Assad.

Is it fair to say that, going into any negotiations, Assad is in pretty good shape because Russia and Iran are behind him militarily and we are not behind the opposition militarily?

General AUSTIN. I certainly would say, Senator, that Russia's support and Iran's support of Assad has really emboldened him and empowered him to a degree.

Senator GRAHAM. You have been in Iraq a long time.

Thank you for your years of service, to all of you. I certainly mean that.

On June 24, 2010, I had an exchange with General Ray Odierno. You were there, too. We were changing over from General David Petraeus.

Here is what I said: I think you indicated we are probably on the 10-yard line when it comes to Iraq.

This is General Odierno: I did, sir. I think we are on the 10-yard line. I think that the next 18 months will determine whether we get to the goal line or really give the Iraqis an opportunity to get to the goal line by 2011.

Did you recommend a residual force?

General AUSTIN. I did, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. If we were on the 10-yard line in June 24, 2010, using football analogies, where are we at today in Iraq?

General AUSTIN. Clearly, we are in a completely different game with respect to where we were then, sir. Nobody knows this better than you because you have spent so much time over there.

Senator GRAHAM. It is a different game. I think that is a good way to say it.

General AUSTIN. Absolutely, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. What is the strongest ground component in Iraq? Is it the Iraqi security forces or the Shiite militia? Who has the most capability right now?

General AUSTIN. The Shiite militia have a lot of numbers, but in my opinion, they are not really good fighters. They do not have good tradecraft. They do not—

Senator GRAHAM. Is it fair to say they cannot be used to liberate Mosul?

General AUSTIN. I would say, if we go down that path, Senator Graham, we will make a significant mistake.

Senator GRAHAM. I could not agree with you more. I am glad you said that. We are really relying on the Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga. I think that is a long way away.

Libya, General Rodriguez, thank you for your service.

What percentage of Libya would you say is under the control, actual or de facto control, of extremist groups like ISIL?

General RODRIGUEZ. ISIL and Daesh control the area in and around Sirte. I could not give you the exact percentage. The other places are either contested or have transitory factors.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you consider Libya at this point a failed state?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you all very much for your service.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses. Also, I echo all the comments about the appreciation for your service and the many times you have been before this committee.

General Rodriguez, I want to ask a couple questions, touching on each of your expertise about the training we do with foreign militaries.

In Africa, I know the U.S. military is a preferred training partner, and many African nations seek our assistance. I kind of would like to have you talk about the success of those training efforts over the course of your three years in the position and what other nations do significant—not African nations—do significant training of African militaries?

I think this is one of the most cost-effective investments that we make, and I would like to hear your thoughts on it.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, Senator. Thank you.

We are by far the largest contributor to training African peacekeepers in Africa. We have a tremendous amount of successes.

Just to give you one benchmark now, the U.N. missions in Africa are 47 percent provided by African soldiers. That is a significant increase over the last several years and almost a 180 degree-turn from a decade ago.

Then we have a great program that is really led by the State Department for training soldiers. All the soldiers that are trained to go to Somalia, as an example, all five nations have been trained by the State Department, supported by AFRICOM, as well as 11 nations in Mali.

We do a tremendous job of training all the U.N. missions who are heading out there. They have done extremely well overall.

There continue to be challenges in certain areas. They have had some problems with discipline in some of those units. Overall, it has been a huge success story.

As an example, in Burundi, almost every one of their units has been trained and headed to AMISOM and then come back. It has increased the professionalism of the forces.

The U.N. also does some training, as do the United Kingdom [UK] and the French. They are the biggest contributors.

Senator KAINE. The training that we do is not only training around dealing with security challenges, but in some of these nations the military has sometimes been the force for civilian repression. There are rule of law and human rights issues.

I assume that one of the sets of expertise we provide is how to do the security job, and at the same time do it in a way that respects rule of law and human rights?

General RODRIGUEZ. It is, sir. It is all about professionalizing the forces in every aspect, not just the tactical operations but also the rule of law, the law of armed conflict, and how to support the government in a democratic nation.

Senator KAINE. General Votel, would you talk about the same thing with respect to special operations and special forces, the training work we do with other nations?

Senator King and I traveled to the region, actually to Lebanon a few years ago, and we witnessed some training that Lebanese Armed Forces [LAF] was incredibly thankful for.

Just talk a little about the training component of what you do.

General VOTEL. Thank you, Senator. The example you cited in Lebanon is a good example of many of the ways in which we are working with some of our international partners, particularly through their SOF elements.

I think one of the very best authorities that Congress has provided to us is the authority that allows us to work very closely with some of our partners here to develop capabilities, to assist in our counterterrorism efforts. I think that has been a very, very successful program.

What we try to do is we try to leverage the long-term relationships, the long historical relationships that many of our countries and particularly their SOF forces have in the region.

For example, the French SOF, of course, are great partners in North Africa. The British, of course, have inroads in a lot of different places. We try to leverage that as well.

We are also looking to work with partners to develop capacity to export their skills. We look at a country like Poland, for example. That is a good example. We worked long term with that country, and they have actually been somebody who can deploy, support our activities, and, in fact, bring others with them.

I think the investment that not only we are making in SOF but a lot of our partner nations that are making in SOF, I think we are leveraging them very well through our relationships and partnerships.

Senator KAINE. This is budgets, appropriations, and NDAA season, so we are looking at line items, and we are looking at expenditures. My opinion is that one of the best things we do, if you look at the Pentagon budget, the amount we spend to train foreign militaries, either in their real estate or bringing leaders over here for programs at the National Defense University. It is just a fraction of a fraction of a DOD budget, but it might be one of the best investments we make in terms of both building capacity, but also building relationships that can be important. I just encourage you each in that.

Again, thank you for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Fischer?

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your service, your many years of service to this country and our people.

General Rodriguez, last year, you testified that Libya-based threats to United States interests are growing and if left unchecked, I believe they have the highest potential among security challenges on the continent to increase risk to U.S. and European strategic interests in the next two years and beyond.

What is your assessment of the current situation? Do you see these threats continuing to impact not just the United States but our allies?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, Senator. It has continued to grow in the last year, as I mentioned. Because of the ungoverned space in

Libya, that is also what contributes to the migration challenges that our European partners are facing. I think I agree with all those statements I made last year.

Senator FISCHER. As we look at Libya and really how unstable this area of the world has become, and the impact, the negative impact, it is having not just on that area but, as you said, with migration in Europe as well, are we going to see a unity government form? Is there any hope that that is going to happen? Or are we going to continue to see the threats grow faster than the possibility of the formation of a unity government?

General RODRIGUEZ. I think unity government, as encouraged by everybody, has a chance of moving forward. It will be dependent upon how they handle the spoilers who are really not in it for the future of Libya. That will be the real determining factor.

The concern right now for the building of the government and the ability for Libyans to contribute towards stabilization are the resources that have continued to go, their ability to generate the resources that continue to dwindle over time, so the instability has increased. That is the real risk, ma'am.

Senator FISCHER. In your best military advice, what are the additional steps that could possibly be taken in order to combat that threat that is in Libya against the formation of the unity government? What are the steps that you see that we could take?

General RODRIGUEZ. The first, of course, is to continue to press on all the diplomatic fronts to get some kind of government that can function enough, that is legitimate enough in the eyes of the people that it can function properly.

Then on the military side, it is all about working with our partners, first of all, all around Libya, whether it is the European Union in the north that has a mission going on to help with the migrant situation, or North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], both have missions in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as shoring up all the partners around us. An example is Tunisia, which we have done a good job at helping build their capacity to withstand the challenges there.

Then somehow at some point in time the international community is going to have to figure out how to halt the expansion of Daesh and then degrade it so that this government has a chance to move forward.

Senator FISCHER. You do believe that the formation of this government, it is going to take outside help in order to stabilize this area?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, I do.

Senator FISCHER. Do you have any idea on who our partners would be in that? Besides the European Union, do we have partners outside of them?

General RODRIGUEZ. NATO, as I mentioned, also has a mission in the Mediterranean Sea, and the European Union, as you mentioned. The real critical partners who have continued to work in this effort are the U.K., France, Italy, as well as Spain and Germany.

Senator FISCHER. Do we have a plan moving forward on that?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, we do, ma'am.

Senator FISCHER. General Votel, are you concerned that the threat may outpace that political reconciliation in Libya?

General VOTEL. I am. I think as General Rodriguez pointed out, that is a long-term proposition, so I do think we have to be concerned about that.

Senator FISCHER. General Austin, have you seen cooperation between Syrian Kurdish groups and Russia?

General AUSTIN. We have seen some cooperation between the YPG element that is in the northwestern part of the country with the Russians.

Senator FISCHER. Is it frequent cooperation?

General AUSTIN. I would characterize it as infrequent. Again, they are going to turn to the folks that they think can provide them capability when they need it most.

Senator FISCHER. Have the Kurdish groups attacked Syrian rebels that are supported by us?

General AUSTIN. There is evidence of that.

Senator FISCHER. Do you see that growing?

General AUSTIN. I do not see it growing. I think right now, during the cessation of hostilities, we do not see much activity at all.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Blumenthal?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your distinguished service to our Nation.

General Votel, I noticed in your testimony reference to enhancing our relationships with special operators from other countries, the interoperability of our activities with theirs. Is that an area that you see as a priority? If so, what can we do to support it?

General VOTEL. Thank you, Senator. It is an area that I see as a priority.

In fact, over the last several years, we have incorporated into our headquarters liaison officers from about 17 or 18 different foreign SOF forces, who are integrated with us right in our headquarters as kind of a demonstration of how important we think that it is.

I think what you can do is continue to support our efforts in that regard. Frankly, I think the biggest challenges that we have working with our international partners really fall into information-sharing arrangements we have with them. I find that that is kind of a friction point that we continue to work through. I think anything we can do in those regards would be very, very positive.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Is information-sharing also an issue when it comes to other United States agencies, such as the Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA], the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI]? I noticed the reference in your testimony to those agencies as well.

General VOTEL. In general, Senator, I think that has improved a lot. I do not see those as significant obstacles. Most of those agencies you mentioned have representatives in my headquarters, and they help smooth any potential conflicts we have. I think our interchange of information-sharing with them is quite good.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Over the years, we have heard testimony, both in secure settings and in public settings such as this one, about the opportunities and the failings to interdict illicit substances, heroin, opium, which not only undermines our activities in

some countries abroad—Afghanistan being an example—but also threatens our national security at home.

In fact, we are debating now on the floor of the Senate a measure called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, which aims to prevent as well as treat addiction to illicit substances in our country.

I wonder if you could comment on both the opportunities and the potential failings of our Nation in addressing those problems of interdicting and stopping the flow of heroin and other substances to this country, and the growing of it in other countries.

General VOTEL. I think, as you know, we have had a long-term plan in countries like Colombia that the U.S. Special Operations Force and others have supported for a while that has had some success to it. We do conduct a number of activities in our southern regions here to support some of our partners in those particular efforts. In most cases, we have begun to see some success when we do that.

I think they look for our leadership. They look for our partnership. They look for our expertise in helping them with that. I think what we generally see with those countries that we partner with, we do see some success. We see better efforts.

Certainly, the problem is extensive. I think our focus on interdiction routes is extraordinarily important.

In my view, in my experience, the same routes over which drugs travel, humans travel, foreign terrorist fighters could travel. I think these are multipurpose threats to us that have to be addressed very, very seriously.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. In some sense, the flow of heroin is along the same routes terrorists travel, as other kinds of threats to our Nation may come to this country.

General VOTEL. In my experience, Senator, I think that is true.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much. Thank you for your excellent testimony today.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Lee?

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

Thanks to all of you for being here and for all you do for the security of our country.

General Rodriguez, a New York Times report from February 27 recounted that at the time when intervention in Libya was being discussed, then-Secretary Bob Gates stated that Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi “was not a threat to us anywhere.” Then-director of the Defense Intelligence Agency General Michael Flynn commented that Qaddafi was “a thug in a dangerous neighborhood, but he was keeping order.”

General Rodriguez, how has the chaos in Libya, specifically the proliferation of weapons from Qadhafi’s stockpile and the infiltration of ISIL and Al Qaeda affiliates, led to the further destabilization of North Africa and the Middle East, and threatened our security interests?

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you, Senator.

The first effect of that destabilization was probably in Mali when many of the fighters as well as arms, ammunition, explosives,

headed that way, which created some of the challenges down there. It has destabilized North Africa all the way across to Mali.

The other challenge are the militias who have grown up in and around there, and used many of the ammunition stocks for their power and influence not only internal to Libya, but external to its neighbors.

Then the challenges have continued to grow, because of ISIL and its brand of terrorism, to threaten places like Tunisia. Then, of course, the destabilized and total chaos in the area there has contributed to the migrant problem.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

In a long report last week from the New York Times, it was made clear that then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the White House were persuaded to support Western intervention in Libya in 2011 largely due to pressure from European and Arab allies, who seemed to indicate that they would lead the operations, allowing the United States to lead from behind, as it was put at the time.

What is your assessment of the involvement of European and Arab nations in Libya now, after that intervention has now led to chaos and sort of Islamist insurrection?

General RODRIGUEZ. I think, as the Secretary said many times, I think we would all hope that many of the European nations would do more in this arena.

Senator LEE. The United States has been supporting Saudi Arabia's military initiative in Yemen now for over a year—this one is for General Austin—sharing intelligence in providing logistical support. In this time, the Houthis have not been driven out and the humanitarian crisis that is there seems to have been exacerbated. It certainly has not been alleviated.

Further, terrorist groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP] and ISIL affiliates are able to have safe haven and gain strength, finances, and weaponry in the conflict.

General Austin, what is your overall goal in supporting the Saudis in Yemen? Would you assess the Saudis' intervention in Yemen thus far as being successful?

General AUSTIN. First of all, I assess that the current state of play in Yemen is that they are at an operational stalemate, Senator. I think both sides have pushed hard against each other. Because neither one has an overwhelming advantage, neither one feels the need to come to the table to negotiate in earnest.

Having said that, I think even though I would characterize it as an operational stalemate right now, I think it is trending toward a coalition, a Saudi-led coalition, because of some incremental gains that have been made here recently.

Our goal is to support the coalition in their efforts to reestablish the legitimate government in Yemen, and we are hopeful that the coalition will be able to bring the Houthis to the table and negotiate a settlement that allows for this government to come back in and reestablish itself. If it does that, that will enable us to work with that government to do more to counter terrorist networks like AQAP.

We will be able to do more, but that does not mean that we are doing nothing right now, Senator. As you know, with all the means that we have available, we are pressurizing AQAP on a daily basis.

Senator LEE. Thank you, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. [Presiding.] On behalf of the chairman, Senator King.

Senator KING. Thank you.

General Austin, could you give us a quick update on the status of the investigation into the allegations of corruption of the intelligence analysis function in CENTCOM?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. The investigation is ongoing. The DOD Inspector General [IG] continues his work. As I said from the very beginning, the leadership at CENTCOM will do everything within its power to support the efforts of the DOD IG.

Senator KING. Do we have a date? Do we have a projected date? It has been sometime since that investigation.

General AUSTIN. It has been, sir. I would defer to the IG to provide that date.

Senator KING. Did you stand up any kind of investigation of your own of these allegations, being the principal victim of them?

General AUSTIN. Sir, as you know, it would be inappropriate for me to do that while the DOD IG investigation is ongoing.

Senator KING. You do not have any idea when the IG will be completing their work?

General AUSTIN. I do not, sir. I hope it is soon. I would also tell you, as I said before, if the IG or the investigation finds out or determines that there have been inappropriate actions, I will take the appropriate measures to address whatever the infractions were.

It is important to me that my intelligence analysts and all of my subordinates provide me unvarnished input on a routine basis.

Senator KING. I understand that. That is why I characterized you as the principal victim. If you are not getting good intelligence, it compromises your ability to perform your function.

Let me change the subject for a moment. Afghanistan, the current schedule is 9,800 to 5,500 on January 1, 2017. The problem as I see is to get to 5,500, you cannot just turn a switch on December 31. There is going to be a drawdown of some kind starting probably in late summer.

Are you concerned, given the heightened level of Taliban activity, that we would be making a mistake by embarking upon a drawdown of that nature, to get back to the football analogy, if we are on the 10-yard line or the 5-yard line? It concerns me that we, again, are backed into being calendar-driven rather than conditions-driven.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. The way I view this is, you have to have a plan. You build that plan on the facts, and you make assumptions at the time that you build that plan.

Senator KING. You have testified to a heightened level of Taliban activity and greater stress on the Afghan forces. Is it not time to reassess that plan now? If we wait until August or September, we are already in the midst of a drawdown.

General AUSTIN. Sir, that is exactly where I was going. As the facts change, and as the assumptions are no longer valid, then it

is appropriate to go back and review that plan and make adjustments, as required.

Senator KING. Is that happening right now? Is there a reassessment underway?

General AUSTIN. The new commander is on the ground and he is assessing things now, at all levels. We will take a look at this and make the appropriate recommendations to the leadership.

Senator KING. I certainly hope that we do not find ourselves in a situation where we are drawing down at a time when, both in terms of personnel and authorities, we need more authority to maintain the really significant gains that have been achieved.

General Rodriguez, are al Shabaab and Boko Haram growing? Are they adding members? I know they do not hold territory, but are they adding areas of influence?

General RODRIGUEZ. Boko Haram does own some significant territory in northern Nigeria, as does al Shabaab in limited areas of Somalia, Senator.

Right now, in Somalia, there has been a tactical upswing in al Shabaab activities. I think that is a tactical change right now. We are doing everything we can to support the troop-contributing countries, to ensure that that is just a temporary change.

Senator KING. Final question. General Austin, the cessation of hostilities, would you characterize that as a predecessor to peace talks or a locking in of the regime's position? A cessation of hostilities in an insurgency, it seems to me, always favors the regime.

How would you characterize where we are now? Is this simply a pause? Or is this a predecessor to peace talks? Or is this, as I say, locking in the regime?

General AUSTIN. It is left to be seen what the outcome is going to be, Senator. Clearly, the goals of the cessation of hostilities would be to allow humanitarian assistance to get to the disadvantaged people. That is happening. That is a really good thing.

The other thing that we want to happen is for this to lead to talks and, eventually, a better outcome. We are hopeful that will happen, but that is left to be seen.

We can expect that there could be some incremental tactical gains made by the regime and supported by the Russians. I think, long term, the Russians do not own the clock. If we reach a point where this drags out for an extremely long period of time, then I think it is going to play to their disadvantage.

Senator KING. The cessation of hostilities is certainly better than the all-out war we were seeing before.

General AUSTIN. Absolutely, sir.

Senator KING. Thank you.

Thank you, General.

Senator REED. On behalf of the chairman, Senator Cotton?

Senator COTTON. Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony here today, and also for your long service to our country, particularly to the two who may no longer have the pleasure of appearing before our committee anymore.

General Austin, I want to take stock of Russia's intervention in Syria. Last fall when Russia first intervened, President Obama and several senior administration officials used words like "quagmire" or "strategic blunder."

How would you take stock of Russia's intervention to this point, given their stated objectives? Are they achieving their objectives at an acceptable cost to the Putin regime?

General AUSTIN. Again, I cannot speak exactly to what their specific objectives were, but I would tell you, Senator, that my assumption would be that they wanted to make a substantial difference as fast as they could and transition to something else very, very quickly. They have not been able to do that.

I think what they are finding out is that this could go on for some time.

Senator COTTON. You say, on page 12 of your testimony, "It is apparent through Russia's actions that their primary objective in Syria is to bolster the Assad regime." Skipping down a few lines, you say, "Assad would almost certainly not be in power today were it not for the robust support provided to the regime by Iran and Russia."

If that is one of their key objectives, is it fair to say that they are meeting that objective of stabilizing the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. They have certainly bolstered and empowered the Assad regime, yes, sir.

Senator COTTON. You say further on page 13, "None of Russia's military actions have helped stabilize Syria or end the suffering of the Syrian people." Could you elaborate on that statement?

General AUSTIN. We still see thousands and thousands of civilians being disadvantaged. Barrel bombs continue. Their intervention has not made things better for the people of Syria.

Senator COTTON. Can you give a rough estimate, I know it will not be exact, but a rough estimate of how much of Russia's airstrikes are targeting Islamic State positions and personnel versus non-Islamic State positions?

General AUSTIN. I would say a small percentage, sir. I think, as you know, what they have said is that they wanted to come in and counter terrorism or counter Daesh. What we have witnessed is, in almost all cases, they have gone after counter-regime forces.

Senator COTTON. You further note on page 13 that Russia's cooperation with Iran appears to be expanding beyond near-term coordination or operations in Syria and is moving toward an emerging strategic partnership. Could you say more about that emerging strategic partnership?

General AUSTIN. It is left to be seen where this will wind up, but we have seen a sort of strengthening of that relationship as time has passed.

Russia came in, aligned itself with the regime, obviously, and also Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah. What I worry about is if that relationship between Syria, Russia, and Iran develops further, then it will present a problem for the region.

Senator COTTON. On page 21, you state something similar there. They, Iran, "also continue to support some Shiite surrogate groups in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Houthis in Yemen, and Lebanese Hezbollah, with a combination of money, arms, and training. Iran's emerging relationship with Russia further complicates the security environment as they look to expand their cooperation in areas that include the sale of high-end weapons." Can you say a little bit more about those high-end weapons that worry you?

General AUSTIN. We have seen recently the sale of high-end air defense capability from Russia to Iran, and that is a problem for everyone in the region. Also, coastal defense cruise missiles, as that type of technology migrates from Russia to Iran, it will eventually wind up in the hands of Lebanese Hezbollah.

Senator COTTON. I am glad you raised coastal defense cruise missiles, because I would like to ask both you and General Rodriguez a question. The Levant in the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, all kind of sits at the seam of your Areas of Operation [AOs] as well as European Command.

What are the implications for a long-term, permanent presence with the kind of robust modernized weapons that Russia has in Syria? What are the implications for our sea control of the Mediterranean, for access to the Suez Canal, for some of our allies in the region?

General AUSTIN. There are potential threats there, Senator. I think Russia has had a presence in this region, as you know, for some time. I think we would have to do everything we can as part of an international community to put pressure on Russia to make sure that these weapons, that they do not move around the region freely.

Senator COTTON. General Rodriguez?

General RODRIGUEZ. I agree, sir. I know General Breedlove does, too. We talk about this and it is important for it not to get anywhere. Thank you.

Senator COTTON. General Rodriguez, if I could shift topics very briefly, my final question.

What can you tell us about the ongoing violence in Burundi, specifically the extent to which old, ethnic rivalries between the Hutu and the Tutsi people are driving that conflict, and the impact it could have on the Great Lakes region more broadly?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, Senator. Thank you.

The violence thus far is mainly political violence and has not degenerated to the direct ethnic issues that you talk about that have occurred, as you know, in the past. We are watching that every single day to make sure that that does not grow. Most of it has been politically motivated, ethnically motivated.

Senator COTTON. Thank you very much.

Senator REED. On behalf of the chairman, Senator Nelson.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your public service. Thank you, General Austin, for your long, enduring public service.

We have been proud to have you as a citizen of Tampa, and as with General Votel. He will continue to be a citizen of Tampa for a while.

Let me ask you about Libya. Do we have the capability, General Rodriguez, to prosecute a war in Libya against ISIL while at the same time going after them in other parts of the world, including Iraq and Syria?

General RODRIGUEZ. Senator, I think the answer to that is yes. It is a question of how much risk the Nation has to take with the readiness of the forces and how much you are going to commit versus how much you are going to maintain the readiness, sir.

Senator NELSON. As I understand it, you all have a recommendation to the White House. Obviously, you cannot share that. That is internal conversation. In your status of forces, you feel that you have the capability that if the President's decision is to go after ISIL and other extremist elements in Libya, that we have the ability to thwart those elements?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. I do, Senator.

Senator NELSON. Thank you.

Would any of you want to comment on the efforts around here to cut back on your headquarters staff?

General RODRIGUEZ. We have worked that hard throughout the headquarters to figure out the best place to cut back. That continues to move forward. We will support the efforts we are required to take.

General AUSTIN. We clearly want to leverage all of the capabilities that exist in the entire system, Senator. We want to avoid duplication of effort, wherever possible. As you look at U.S. Central Command, as you know, sir, as I mentioned earlier, we are involved in four major military operations simultaneously, if you include Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and then this current, ongoing battle against terrorists in the region.

It takes a fair amount of effort to maintain all of that and also do things to promote stability and security throughout the region as well.

The effort to cut back on staff applies to everyone. I fully appreciate I have to do my part. Again, we also need the capability to maintain the efforts that we are involved in.

General VOTEL. Senator Nelson, I would agree with the comments that have already been made on that. Certainly, there are opportunities here for us to simplify and streamline and reduce duplication. We should always be looking at that.

The concern that I would have at SOCOM is we did make some decisions in the past year to move people from our headquarters out to our theater Special Operations Command, so we have recognized this in the past. We certainly should continue to look at how we create more efficiencies and certainly more effectiveness in how we are doing our headquarters responsibilities.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. [Presiding.] Senator Sullivan?

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the three of you for your outstanding service to our country.

General Austin, in particular I want to thank you for all you have done for the Army and America. I had the opportunity to serve with you a decade ago. It was one of the highlights of my military career, although I must say I am a little concerned about the lack of marines sitting behind you. That was a joke.

In all seriousness, to the staff, too, I know how much they put into these kinds of testimonies. I want to thank all of you, the men and women sitting behind you.

I wanted to follow up on Senator McCain's and Senator Cotton's comments on the Iranian weapons sales from Russia to Iran, particularly the S-300 missile defense system. There was a recent ar-

ticle that talked about that system, which would be capable of rendering the Iranian skies inaccessible for most U.S. and Israeli jets.

One thing that has not come up in the testimony: Is that not just a blatant violation of the U.N. Security Council conventional weapons ban against sales to the Iranians that is still in existence and a violation of the current Iranian nuclear deal that the United States and other countries signed?

General AUSTIN. Senator, I do not know if it is a violation of the nuclear deal. I will have to research that a bit. Clearly, it is concerning to everyone. These are things that will increase the amount of effort required to do whatever work we need to do. We will certainly find the ways and means to get the job done if required to do that. This makes it a little bit more difficult, but not impossible, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. The three of you have decades—decades—of experience with regard to service in the U.S. Army. Earlier, we were talking about a lot of focus on our special operations troops. There seems to be less focus in my view on our conventional Army.

As you know, the Quadrennial Defense Review [QDR] in 2014 required the Army to get down to a number of 450,000 Active Duty soldiers. I think General Mark Milley and others in the Army are looking at that as bringing very high levels of risk, given the new security challenges that our Nation faces, not only in CENTCOM and AFRICOM Areas of Responsibility [AORs] but really all over the world.

I would like your professional military opinion on that number, given the increased threats that you personally see in your different AORs, the transnational terrorists that you are focused on.

General Votel, do you agree with the statements by General Milley and Mr. Eric Fanning that our Army is getting dangerously small, given the current threat environment and that the number of 450,000 troops in terms of Active Duty Army is too high a risk, given our current threats, in your professional military judgment?

General VOTEL. In my judgment, I do agree with General Milley in the comments that he has made in regards to that.

I would just add, as I mentioned in my comments here, that as the Special Operations Commander, we are extraordinarily dependent on the services and the Army, in particular, because of what they bring in institutional and infrastructure capability that we are absolutely and 100 percent dependent on.

I am concerned, as these reductions take place, the impact that it has on us directly and indirectly.

Senator SULLIVAN. General, that is a great point. I think there is a lot of focus in this committee that, well, we do not need a big conventional force, we do not need airborne troops anymore, because we have these great special operators. They are great special operators, but they certainly cannot do it all in today's threat environment. Is that not correct?

General VOTEL. Senator, I could not agree with you more. I would not want to give anyone the impression that Special Operations Command had all the capabilities it needed to do the operations that we do. Literally, everything we do is supported by some conventional force, whether it is ISR from the Air Force, close-air support from them, basing from the Army, logistics support, at-sea

capabilities by the Navy. We are extraordinarily dependent on all of the services to support our activities.

Senator SULLIVAN. General Rodriguez, General Austin, can you comment, in your professional military judgment, on what you think of the number right now, in terms of what a 450,000 Active Duty Army does to our Nation's security?

General RODRIGUEZ. I absolutely agree with the Chief of Staff of the Army that that is high-risk. That is how he characterized that because of both the current operations that are going on with counterterrorism, as well as the threats from the four major challenges out there between Korea, Iran, China, and Russia. Thank you.

General AUSTIN. As you know, Senator, in a former life, I was Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. I was concerned about the direction that we were headed then and certainly even more concerned now. I do agree with General Milley's comments.

Senator SULLIVAN. That 450,000 is too small?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. We are getting dangerously small here.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is hard for me to believe, General Rodriguez, that it has been nine years since AFRICOM. Before that time, of course we all remember, it was part of three different coms, including PACOM.

I also remember back during the Clinton administration, I was opposed to sending troops into Bosnia. The excuse that was being used at that time was because of ethnic cleansing, and I recall saying on the Senate floor that for every person who has been ethnically cleansed in Bosnia, there have been 100 in any of the West African countries. It was something that was needed.

It was brought out by Senator—I cannot remember which one it was; Senator Cotton, I think it was—about Burundi, that there is a problem over there. There are a lot of problems in Africa. They do not rise to the top where they can see it, but the President there, Pierre Nkurunziza, is one that our State Department opposed.

It is my understanding, because I know him personally, and I have been with him several times—I have been to Burundi. He was legitimately put into office, but it was not an election. The reason that our State Department was opposed to him running again was because the term limits would have set in if that first term had been considered a whole term. You follow me there so far.

Then when the courts came along, the Supreme Court in Burundi, and agreed that he was entitled to run again, then I think I will always believe that one of the big political problems that you pointed to in answering Senator Cotton's question was the fact that our State Department was very active in that race. Our State Department objected to the fact that he was running again, in spite of the fact that their Supreme Court had made that decision.

Did you have any thoughts on that at the time? Were you involved in that discussion?

General RODRIGUEZ. I was not involved in that discussion, Senator. My thoughts continue to be focused on the military.

Senator INHOFE. I appreciate that. I wish the State Department sometimes would follow that advice, too.

There are other problems that have been brought out here. We have been talking about Libya, about Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, al Shabaab in Somalia. Other than those, and the discussion on Libya, what other areas do you see taking place, really hot issues right now, in Africa, other than the three I just mentioned?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, obviously, Al Qaeda and what is happening across northern Mali, and then you already mentioned Burundi, but we have challenges like that in both South Sudan and the Central African Republic, sir.

Senator INHOFE. Maybe in Zimbabwe, too, with some of the problems we have down there.

South Sudan, that is an interesting situation there, because I remember for years, South Sudan was wanting to get independence from Sudan and they finally did it, and then they end up in a civil war. What is the status of that civil war right now?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, that civil war continues. Both the leaders are being obstructionist people to limit the ability of that government to get back together again.

Senator INHOFE. They are supposedly right now in Ethiopia, I think it is, trying to have peace talks. Do you see anything really productive going on there?

General RODRIGUEZ. The fact that the regional partners are pressing them diplomatically to come to a solution is a very, very good sign. I think that, unfortunately, that has happened before and we have not seen any progress. We are hoping there will be a breakthrough this time.

Senator INHOFE. One last area that I have been interested in for a long time. In 2005, I went up to Gulu, Uganda, and I had two Senators with me, Senators John Boozman and Mike Enzi.

That was the first time that the LRA had really surfaced in the minds of people as to how serious that thing was. Joseph Kony, while he started there, he ended up going as far south as Congo and maybe even western Rwanda and then up to the Central African Republic.

Just last week, one of his top people—you can probably pronounce it better than I can—was done away with. Over the years, we have found others of his top people, Joseph Kony's, but it seems like he continues to go on, even though the level of abduction and tragedies has subsided quite a bit. Do you agree with that?

General RODRIGUEZ. General, we continue to pursue him with all means possible with our African Union Regional Task Force, sir.

Senator INHOFE. Okay. That is all I care about.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thanks.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. Senator Sullivan had a couple more.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to follow up on the chairman's opening statement when he talked about the micromanagement of operations.

As you gentlemen are more than well-aware, looking at the levels of warfare—strategic, operational, tactical—and how when you go down that level, there is obviously some civilian involvement, but

the further down, the conventional wisdom is, the less there should be civilian involvement.

In fact, one of the classic criticisms of the Vietnam War and the conduct of that war was how it was micromanaged. Pictures of President Johnson at the White House, in the Oval Office, picking targets in Vietnam is often seen as a symbol of the mismanagement of that war.

Yet let me just give you a couple quotes from some articles in the paper that talk about what seems to be extreme levels of micromanagement. I know these are not easy questions, but I would like to get your view on it.

There was a Wall Street Journal headline article last year where it said the U.S. military campaign against Islamist militants in Syria is being designed to allow President Barack Obama to exert a high degree of personal control going so far as to require that the military obtain presidential sign-offs for strikes in Syrian territory.

Similarly, former Secretary Bob Gates recently said, when he was talking about the operational micromanagement, he said, "It drove me nuts to have National Security Council [NSC] staffers calling senior commanders out in the field, second-guessing these commanders. When I was a deputy national security adviser, if I would have tried to call a field commander going around the Secretary of Defense or the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, I would have had my head handed to me, probably personally by the President."

Does the White House approve targets in terms of our operations in Syria? If so, is it helpful to have 20-somethings with no military experience on the NSC staff guessing what our commanders or second-guessing what our commanders are doing in the field?

Does that happen? In the Wall Street Journal, it says the President was going to approve military targets in Syria.

Does that help our operational tempo? It seems like it is micromanaging not even in the operational level of warfare but down to the tactical, which I think most of us think is a huge mistake.

Do you care to comment on that? I know it is not an easy question, but to the extent you can be frank about that and how you can see the micromanagement, it would be helpful for us, in terms of our oversight capabilities.

General AUSTIN. Actually, Senator, the question as to whether or not the White House approves our strikes, picks our targets in Syria, that is an easy answer. The answer is no, that does not happen.

Senator SULLIVAN. They do not approve of strike packages or targets that were focused on in Syria, in terms of what we are bombing or anything like that?

General AUSTIN. No, Senator. That does not happen. We have a process where we generate the intelligence. It goes into our target analysis, our target-generation process. Then it is approved by military commanders.

Senator SULLIVAN. Related to that, when the Iranians took our sailors prisoner for that time, was there any involvement?

How did that happen, General Austin, in terms of our Rules of Engagement [ROEs]? We had our sailors out there with 50 caliber machine guns that are pretty forceful weapons. Was there any involvement out there from higher political forces that talked about

ROEs, that, hey, we cannot return fire? How did our sailors get captured by Iranian forces? Why did they not return fire when they had the Iranians come upon them?

General AUSTIN. To answer your question as to whether or not there was intervention from a higher level of the White House in this particular incident, the answer is absolutely not. Things unfolded fairly rapidly with these young sailors. The investigation on that has just been completed. It has been forwarded up through channels to be reviewed by the Chief of Naval Operations [CNO]. It will take a bit more time for it to be finalized.

What you know has been reported, in that the sailors veered off course, had a mechanical issue that they stopped to address, and when they did it, they were detained by Iranians.

In terms of specifics on what happened between the Iranians and sailors, that will come out as a result of the investigation.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. It is interesting in these hearings, General, how it matters how the question is asked. I think facts are stubborn things.

For example, for 16 months, we did not bomb the fuel trucks that ISIL was using, generating millions and millions of dollars in oil revenues. Now it is a fact that it was a recommendation that we hit those oil trucks. It was not turned down; it was never approved. This is what is so infuriating to so many of us. For 16 months, these fuel trucks went unmolested. God knows how many millions of dollars of fuel revenue was generated.

Sixteen months later, we finally drop some leaflets and told the drivers to get out of the trucks.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

AFRICOM

1. Senator INHOFE. How do you assess the effectiveness of AFRICOM and the importance of AFRICOM to the United States and her interests?

General RODRIGUEZ. USAFRICOM's effectiveness and importance are measured by its ability to fulfill its mission: United States Africa Command, in concert with interagency and international partners, builds defense capabilities, responds to crisis, and deters and defeats transnational threats in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity. Fulfilling this mission also meets the requirements directed by the Secretary of Defense in the 2015 Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) which outlines objectives to achieve in the next five years: 1) disrupt al Qaeda Associated Affiliates and other terrorist organizations; 2) protect U.S. Personnel and Facilities and secure access to protect U.S. interests; and 3) build the capacity of African Partners to counter illicit trafficking, provide defense and security, support peace operations, and provide humanitarian assistance I disaster response.

USAFRICOM assesses mission effectiveness against our objectives each year in the Comprehensive Joint Assessment (CJA). Our Theater Campaign Plan (TCP) has five lines of effort that implement our plan to accomplish our GEF objectives. We assess each of our lines of effort and the corresponding intermediate military objectives quarterly, summarizing these assessments annually in the CJA.

Africa is an enduring interest for the United States, and its importance continues to increase as African economies, population, and influence grow. Small but wise investments in African security institutions today offer disproportionate benefits to Af-

rica, Europe and the United States. African solutions to African problems are, in the long run, in the best interest of Africans, Americans and, indeed, the world.

In the most troubled spots on the continent, Africans have an understandable fear and distrust of the governments and security forces which are charged with promoting and guarding the welfare of the people. Predatory practices, patronage networks, corruption, political and economic exclusion of portions of the population, and inconsistent adherence to the rule of law combine to crush the hope of a future. These conditions create an environment ripe for the expansion of violent extremism and represent a threat not only to Africa, but to our European allies and the United States.

Effectively addressing the threat -before, during, or after a military crisis—requires a comprehensive approach employing diplomacy, development, and defense to address the root causes of extremism and replace fear and uncertainty with trust and confidence in African institutions. This approach must seek improvements in governance, consistent adherence to the rule of law, and a society which offers equal political and economic opportunity to all people. Africa Command's contribution to this broad solution lies primarily in encouraging and enabling the professionalism of the African security institutions which will secure national populations, cooperate in addressing regional security concerns, and increasingly play a role in sustaining global stability.

Our military strategy articulates a long-term, regionally focused approach to enabling our African partners. Our operational approach seeks to disrupt and neutralize transnational threats by building African partner defense capability and capacity. While we have achieved progress in several areas through close coordination with our partners, allies, and interagency partners, threats and challenges remain.

In East Africa, we are helping to set the conditions for the eventual transition from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the Somali National Army and the Federal Government of Somalia. However, al Shabaab remains a continuing threat and is conducting almost daily lethal asymmetric attacks in Somalia against AMISOM troops.

In North Africa, Libya's insecurity has negative consequences for its people, its neighbors, Europe's southern flank, and our peace and security objectives in Africa and the Middle East. An international coalition to counter the Islamic State-Libya (IS-Libya) would support a functional Government of National Accord and reduce the risks of the expansion of IS Libya, further instability in North Africa, and the emergence of a direct threat to U.S. interests.

Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition that will require an appropriate long-term strategy.

Across West Africa, our partners and allies are countering terrorist organizations like Boko Haram through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). With troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, the MNJTF is a collaborative, regional effort to address Boko Haram's complex and lethal attacks aimed at terrorizing civilians and destabilizing governments.

In Central Africa, through the combined efforts of civilian agencies, non-governmental organizations and military forces, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) no longer threatens regional stability, and its capacity to harm civilian populations has diminished greatly. Today, we estimate less than 200 LRA fighters remain and local communities are better prepared to protect themselves.

USAFRICOM, through our ability to build relationships with African partners, is able to protect United States interests and prevent local threats from growing into trans-regional threats, but this requires both continuous assessment and measured long-term resourcing. The return on wise investments, however, is substantial. With this, USAFRICOM can keep strategic risk to the United States from Africa as moderate to low and prevent risk from rising to significant levels that threaten African, allied, and U.S. interests.

2. Senator INHOFE. In 2006, General Chuck Wald published an article called "The Phase Zero Campaign"—why is Phase Zero important and how does it apply to AFRICOM?

General RODRIGUEZ. The goal of Phase Zero activities is to achieve campaign objectives defined for each combatant command in the Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF). Additionally, Phase Zero activities prevent crisis and mitigate the need for the execution of contingency plans. For USAFRICOM, Phase Zero activities promote stability and peace by building capacity in partner nations that enables them to be cooperative, trained, and prepared to help prevent or limit conflicts. Phase Zero activities include shaping operations against violent extremists organizations (VEOs) that allow space and time for capacity building efforts to be effective.

Phase Zero activities place emphasis on interagency support and coordination. In many instances, Phase Zero involves execution of a broad national strategy where the Department of Defense and its programs play a supporting role in the larger U.S. Government effort. Over the long-term, Phase Zero results in an investment of fewer resources in a pre-crisis situation while avoiding an exponentially larger expenditure later. The central mechanisms for achieving success in Phase Zero operations lie in Security Force Assistance, exercises, engagements, operations, and posture. All are needed to achieve the combined effects that mitigate potential crisis.

At USAFRICOM, Phase Zero is central to the Theater Campaign Plan (TCP). The USAFRICOM TCP defines three types of Phase Zero efforts required to mitigate conflict and achieve TCP objectives and end states: Decisive Efforts, Shaping Efforts, and Sustaining Efforts. For USAFRICOM, Decisive Efforts are focused on building African partner capacity and strengthening partnerships. Success in the Command's Decisive Efforts ultimately improve the willingness and capacity of our African partners. Shaping Efforts provide the necessary time and space for USAFRICOM to be successful in its Decisive Efforts over time. Shaping Efforts provide near-term disruption, degradation, and neutralization of VEOs in Africa in order to protect U.S. interests and create the conditions that allow for the development of African partner capabilities and capacity. Sustaining Efforts primarily consist of Setting the Force and Setting the Theater for the campaign. Sustaining Efforts are executed through our efforts to acquire posture, presence, agreements, and engagements.

3. Senator INHOFE. Do you see operations in Africa increasing or decreasing over the next decade? Does AFRICOM have any resource shortfalls? If yes, what are they?

General RODRIGUEZ. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) assesses that non-state actors will continue to exploit global connections to spread violent ideologies. Based on this and current trends, we expect the number of U.S. operations in Africa to increase over the next decade. Additionally, we expect to participate in or assist our European partners in their operations in north, west, and east Africa.

We expect African social and democratic challenges will continue to generate crises requiring peacekeeping missions where the United States will be asked to provide enabling military assistance. We also expect Security Force Assistance activities to increase as USAFRICOM steadily builds the capacity of African partners.

Given current missions, USAFRICOM does not have resource shortfalls. As operations in Africa increase, USAFRICOM will continue to assess the adequacy of resourcing efforts. The President's fiscal year 2017 budget addressed many of the African Theater priority programs and requirements. USAFRICOM worked closely with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Services to ensure the final President's budget addressed the complex African security environment, most notably, violent extremist organizations' ability to exploit and exacerbate instability and undermine African states' development. These critical investments included personnel recovery; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; strategic posture; African institution building; intelligence operations; and enabling support.

4. Senator INHOFE. How do you foresee the African Union Regional Task Force and their American Advise and Assist teams eliminating the remainder of the Lord's Resistance Army in the coming year(s)?

General RODRIGUEZ. The mission against the Lord's Resistance Army is at a point now where intelligence and information sharing are the main drivers of success. USAFRICOM has an effective program to spread messages encouraging defection. From these defections, USAFRICOM is gaining intelligence on the Lord's Resistance Army. Continuing these defection messages and facilitating information sharing between the affected communities will yield the most promise in weakening what remains of the Lord's Resistance Army.

SOCOM

5. Senator INHOFE. How is SOCOM leading DOD's transregional approach to synchronize actions against terrorist organizations?

General RODRIGUEZ. USSOCOM is the designated Coordinating Authority responsible for facilitating Trans-Regional Synchronization Forums and producing quarterly assessments that will inform Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) prioritization and global resource allocation for countering trans-regional threats. This is a collaborative effort including DOD, Interagency, Intelligence Community, and coalition partners. USSOCOM has estab-

lished a Trans-Regional Synchronization Cell within its Operations Directorate that is responsible for aggregating data, developing assessments, and producing feasible, acceptable, and suitable strategic recommendations for CJCS and SECDEF consideration. The DOD Campaign Plan to Counter Trans-Regional Terrorist Organizations (CP-CTTO) is in draft form and is expected to be signed by the SECDEF in the near future.

6. Senator INHOFE. Is the Theater Special Operations Command that supports Africa fully manned as the others are? Are the rise in operations across CENTCOM and AFRICOM sustainable from a SOCOM perspective?

General VOTEL. Yes, Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF) is manned at a similar rate to other Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs). Headquarters USSOCOM realigned a significant number of authorizations to the TSOCs, including SOCAF, beginning in fiscal year 2016. For the fiscal year 2016 growth, the vast majority of anticipated inbound personnel will begin arriving in the summer of 2016.

Yes, current deployment rates remain sustainable while maintaining USSOCOM's readiness levels and its ability to surge forces in response to emergent contingencies and major plan execution. Likewise, USSOCOM can continue to meet priority emergent requirements through SECDEF approved reallocation of forces from lower priority missions.

7. Senator INHOFE. What is the primary fiscal year 2017 cost driver for SOCOM?

General VOTEL. Maintaining operational readiness continues to be the primary 2017 cost driver, followed closely by requirements associated with counter-terrorism (CT) and other operations including Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Readiness requirements to organize, train, and equip Special Operations Forces are contained throughout the entire fiscal year 2017 request in all appropriations, both baseline and Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO). CT and other operations are largely addressed in the OCO requests, but baseline funded capabilities also support current operations.

8. Senator INHOFE. Has support from each of the services to SOCOM been reduced because of budgetary constraints or conventional OPTEMPO requirements? If yes, what have been the impacts?

General VOTEL. With respect to budgetary constraints and the impact of service support to SOF, the Services have not yet fully identified where they would absorb future budget reductions; therefore, impacts on support to SOF cannot be itemized or assessed. Historical Service reductions continue to impact USSOCOM's components as follows:

a. Army: Reductions to Military Training Specific Allotment (MTSA) curtailed mandatory education, which impacts morale, professional development, and career advancement of Army Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel.

b. Navy: Reductions impacted Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (FSRM) support; fleet asset availability; and rotary wing training support associated with the fiscal year 2016 decommissioning of HSC-84/85.

c. Air Force: Air Force-funded AC/MC-130 recapitalization restricted Air Force Special Operations Command's planned recapitalization to 79 of 94 aircraft as part of a fiscally constrained 30-year Resource Allocation Plan. Budget prioritization within the Air Force has also resulted in service reduction in ISR capacity upon which SOCOM depends and heavily leverages for operational support.

d. Marine Corps: Reductions included Marine Corps funded school seats, access to USMC ranges, availability of principal end items, and budget support for certain contracts.

Given the historical impacts and lack of the Services' ability to absorb reductions, it is likely that their ability to optimally support SOF will be diminished, further straining an already challenged support structure and eventually affecting SOF operations and training in an adverse manner. Services' OPTEMPO has not been a major cause of support issues, although given the extensive Service-provided capabilities SOF relies on, it is possible OPTEMPO has been the reason a particular capability has not been available. It is not a major trend USSOCOM is tracking, and we deeply appreciate the Services' efforts to support SOF when needed.

9. Senator INHOFE. Given current and planned funding, can SOCOM meet all combatant commanders SOF requirements?

General VOTEL. USSOCOM cannot meet all combatant commanders' SOF requirements, but through application of the Department's strategic priorities, we are able to allocate SOF to the priority requirements in each theater. Current and planned

funding remains sufficient to support the sustained deployment of SOF capabilities. However, any decrease in either base or Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding could have a negative impact on our ability to sustain current readiness and deployment levels.

CENTCOM

10. Senator INHOFE. In your professional opinion, what are the implications of Russia's actions in Syria and the world's response, or lack of response, on Russia's international behavior?

General AUSTIN. Russia's deployment of combat aircraft and advisors to Syria last September probably prevented the collapse of the Asad regime and has enabled pro-regime forces to make modest battlefield gains against opposition groups. Russia's bombing campaign was initially focused against opposition forces in northwest Syria, further exacerbating the refugee crisis. Following the Cessation of Hostilities in late February, Russia has prioritized its counter-ISIL campaign, especially in the vicinity of Palmyra. Russia's recent actions against ISIL and Russia's March 14th partial force withdrawal announcement, which coincided with the restart of the Geneva III talks, was meant to demonstrate Russia's commitment to a diplomatic solution and garner goodwill from the international community, Syrian opposition, and the US-led coalition, with the ultimate goal of securing Russian interests with the future government of Syria. While the Russians are still supporting Asad, the withdrawal announcement was likely intended to place pressure on the Asad regime to participate more fully in the intra-Syrian talks. Russia has announced they will maintain their presence in Syria with naval forces, advanced fighters and air defense equipment. This equipment will hinder the ability of NATO and coalition forces to maneuver in the Levant and eastern Mediterranean Sea. Many countries, particularly those most affected by the migration crisis, are likely to view the Russian draw down in Syria as a positive step toward ending the conflict and will look positively on Russia as a main player in the peace negotiations. However, European countries are still striving to treat Russia's actions in Syria separately from its activities in Ukraine and are unlikely to support easing sanctions without movement to begin implementing the Minsk agreement.

11. Senator INHOFE. What is the impact on CENTCOM's AOR of Russia's actions as well as proliferation of Russian weapons into your AOR?

General AUSTIN. Russia wants to be the chief competitor to the U.S. in the Middle East, and seeks to diminish and supplant U.S. influence via diplomatic, information, military, and economic means. Russia exploited perceived U.S. contraction in the region to gain influence, aggressively seeking energy and security agreements with Coalition allies and adversaries under the pretext of promoting regional security and stability. Russia shares with Iran the strategic goal of limiting U.S. regional influence and is fortifying its military and economic ties to the CENTCOM AOR. In September 2015, Moscow initiated military operations in Syria to protect its geopolitical and commercial interests—its greatest commitment of force outside its near borders in decades. Russia spearheaded the Russia-Syria-Iraq-Iran Coalition, ostensibly formed for the purpose of defeating ISIL. In reality, such a security agreement provides Russia with an open door into the Middle East economic and security environment, and likely increases the prospect of advanced weapons proliferation.

12. Senator INHOFE. What are you doing to accelerate the timeline to retake Mosul and Raqqa?

General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

13. Senator INHOFE. With the typical spring offensive upon us, how prepared are the Afghan National Security Forces to stop the flow of fighters moving back and forth from Pakistan?

General AUSTIN. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border region is approximately 1400 miles long with topography ranging from barren desert to rugged mountain ranges, making it virtually impossible to control all cross-border movement. At the official crossing points, the Afghan Border Police are postured to monitor both vehicular and foot traffic, and with routine inspections, they are able to deter the movement of some "bad-actors" into the country. Patrols, border posts, and static checkpoints in the rural areas have a similar disruptive effect; however, it would be unrealistic to expect the Afghan forces to either prevent or substantially limit the movement of insurgent fighters across the porous border. Even at the height of the International Security Assistance Force mission, the coalition struggled with this issue.

14. Senator INHOFE. Is there a shortage of smart munitions? If yes, what is the operational impact and when will the shortage be eliminated?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CLAIRE MCCASKILL

KUWAIT EQUIPMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

15. Senator MCCASKILL. The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General recently put out a report addressing the 401st Army Field Support Brigade and Army Field Support Battalion-Kuwait deficiencies in processing wholesale equipment. The audit found the standard operating procedures for processing Army Pre-Positioned Stock and retrograde equipment were not updated which risked misreporting of equipment numbers and the potential for stolen equipment. Additionally, a lack of physical security controls for equipment in one location at Camp Arifjan resulted in the theft of two generators, valued at \$52,000. The standard operating procedures were due to be updated by March 1st. Has this been completed?
General AUSTIN. Yes, the standard operating procedures were updated and sent to the DODIG lead inspector on 29 February 2016.

16. Senator MCCASKILL. What actions have been taken to improve security controls at Camp Arifjan?
General AUSTIN. A security fencing project was initiated; the Statement of Work has been finalized and went out for solicitation on 19 March 2016. Following the closure of the solicitation on 4 April 2016, a vendor will be identified and construction will begin.

17. Senator MCCASKILL. What actions are being taken to prevent these deficiencies from happening at other staging locations in the Area of Responsibility?
General AUSTIN. Other staging areas are secured with guards, fencing or both, and standard operating procedures have been reviewed and updated as required.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOE DONNELLY

U.S. COMBAT AIR OPERATIONS IN SYRIA

18. Senator MCCASKILL. How do Syrian and Russian air defense systems currently impact our air operations in Syria?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
19. Senator MCCASKILL. How would operations be affected if the threat posture of those air defense systems were to increase?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
20. Senator MCCASKILL. With regard to air operations in Operational Inherent Resolve (OIR) and Operation Resolute Support (ORS), are there currently any operational demands that are not being met due to the limited availability of a particular aircraft?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]
21. Senator MCCASKILL. If the U.S. Air Force had only B-1s, B-52s, F-16s, F-15Es, and MQ-1/9s to support the operations you are currently conducting in OIR, and did not have A-10s in theater, would your mission be less effective because of the lack of A-10 support?
General AUSTIN. If the overall number of CAS aircraft remained the same, the lack of A-10s in OIR would not make the Coalition less effective in our mission because CAS has fundamentally changed due to employment of GPS-guided weapons from medium altitude, making all of our fixed wing CAS aircraft equally effective in CAS. In fact, there were no A-10s supporting OIR for the first 3.5 months of the campaign, and our CAS missions were already very effective before the A-10s arrived. As of October 2017, we will require 10-12 fighter/attack aircraft to meet OIR requirements.
22. Senator MCCASKILL. There are no A-10s performing close air support (CAS) in Afghanistan, where the preponderance of CENTCOM ground forces are engaging the enemy. How well have the Joint Forces been able to meet the CAS demand there?
General AUSTIN. [Deleted.]

PRESERVATION OF FORCE AND THE FAMILY

23. Senator MCCASKILL. What are your greatest challenges in supporting the mental resilience of our special operations forces and their families?

General AUSTIN. Our most pressing challenge is suicides among our forces and their family members. Although we have seen a steady decline in suicides since implementing the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF), we will maintain our focus on this problem. While difficult to quantify, we believe that our efforts under the POTFF program are making a difference. One indicator of this is that the number of Service Members expressing suicidal ideations has dramatically increased. We view this as a positive indication that our leadership's support for seeking help, and the resources we have in place to provide that help, are benefiting our forces and their families.

Countering the stigma associated with seeking behavioral health care will continue to be a challenge for the USSOCOM. While the increase in Service Members expressing suicidal ideations is a potential indicator that we are reducing stigma, there is still much to be done if we are to move our emphasis to prevention. Some of the efforts we have undertaken to reduce stigma include adding behavioral health content into our professional military education courses and initiating peer mentoring programs. We have also embedded multidisciplinary teams of behavioral healthcare providers, human performance specialists, and chaplains who work together to address the needs of our Service Members and their families. Through these efforts, we are working with leadership to encourage the use of behavioral health resources before there is a problem and establishing a culture in which maintaining psychological health is normal and expected.

We have developed strong working relationships with the Department of Defense and the Services in the areas of behavioral healthcare, family programs, and suicide prevention. We have enjoyed phenomenal support across the board and are profoundly grateful for the support of the DOD and Congress. We will be paying particularly close attention to the support we receive from the DOD and Services as budgets are trimmed across the DOD and forces are reduced. USSOCOM continues to have a high operations tempo and will endeavor to maintain the infrastructure of support services that we have built under the POTFF program.

Another challenge the Command has in terms of supporting the mental resilience of our forces and families is in taking care of our families and civilian work force. We appreciate the support Congress has given us in this regard with the authority to conduct pilot family programs, and while that authority allows us to address some of the needs of our families, we are unable to use Major Force Program-11 funds to hire personnel to coordinate and run family programs. The wellbeing of our civilian teammates is also a concern for the command. Many of our civilian employees are themselves veterans, and struggle with the same challenges that our Active Duty personnel do, yet we are unable to provide these employees with the counseling support and behavioral healthcare that our Service Members enjoy. USSOCOM has engaged with DOD to look for opportunities to provide non-medical counseling to our government employees that are DOD beneficiaries, and we will continue to explore opportunities to better support these team members.

24. Senator MCCASKILL. What are your top priorities in the psychological component of the Preservation of the Force and Family program?

General VOTEL. USSOCOM's top priority for the Preservation of the Force (POTFF) Psychological Performance Program (PPP) is to reduce suicides. To support this priority, there are several tasks that the Command has undertaken. The Command has implemented comprehensive reporting and tracking processes, so that we may examine the factors and trends associated with suicides. We have also undertaken a comprehensive review of all of our suicides over the past four years, which will be used to inform our future suicide prevention efforts.

A key component of our suicide prevention efforts is our embedded behavioral health providers situated at our tactical units. This is a cornerstone of the PPP and maintaining this capability is a priority for the command. The proximity of these providers to the military members helps to demystify behavioral healthcare and provides unparalleled access to care, which would not be possible otherwise.

Another priority for our PPP is to collaborate within the DOD, academia, and industry to identify and implement novel approaches to treating some of the most difficult issues faced by our Service Members, such as post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, and chronic pain. For example, this year we will be conducting a study in collaboration with the Uniform Service University to test the use of transcranial magnetic stimulation to treat post-concussive syndrome. We have also engaged in a multi-year study to examine the holistic effects of the POTFF program

with Colorado State University. One of the primary goals of these research efforts is to ensure that we are developing and using the best evidence-based practices available to support our Service Members and their families.

It is also a priority to ensure that we are addressing the needs of both our families and the community. POTFF cannot be considered holistic if we do not consider the social and environmental factors influencing the resiliency of our Service Members. The DOD and Services have been exceptionally supportive of USSOCOM in providing resources and programs to our forces and families. The DOD support, coupled with the authority Congress granted USSOCOM to conduct family programs, permits us to be responsive to the needs of our families in an exceedingly unpredictable, rapidly changing environment. Maintaining that level of support is also a priority for the command.

25. Senator MCCASKILL. What are your top lessons learned on supporting the mental health of our special operations forces and their families and will you impart that knowledge to your potential successor, LTG Thomas?

General VOTEL. Among the many lessons we have learned in supporting the mental health of our forces is that collaborative relationships with the Defense Health Agency (DHA), the Service medical departments, and others within the Department of Defense are essential to providing top notch behavioral healthcare. USSOCOM enjoys a strong, collaborative relationship with DHA and the Services, which has been hugely beneficial to the Command.

The command has also learned that recruiting and retaining qualified behavioral healthcare providers can be difficult. Potential providers are carefully evaluated for their qualifications, experience using evidence-based treatments, and how they fit with the culture of the unit. A competitive market place, coupled with the high expectations of USSOCOM, has created some challenges to filling contracted and civil service positions for behavioral healthcare providers. Therefore, retaining those providers is important.

We have also learned that dispelling stigma requires a shift in the cultural mores of the SOF community and an emphasis from leaders at all levels. To enable this, we have begun to introduce our leaders to POTFF capabilities as a part of their professional military education. Currently, we provide content on suicide prevention, sleep hygiene, crisis management, and other topics to our senior non-commissioned officers and pre-command course attendees. We are on track to expand this content to every level of our Service Member's education over the next two years.

I will impart all these lessons to my successor to ensure continuity. LTG Thomas, now confirmed as the next USSOCOM Commander, is very familiar with challenges inherent in preserving our force and families, and the USSOCOM POTFF team is prepared to provide the information he will need to be as proactive as possible.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TIM KAINE

AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

26. Senator KAINE. I am keenly interested in our Commander's ability to encourage inter-governmental response to meet our security challenges, especially countering the rise of violence extremism and radicalization through community-level prevention programs. I was told that AFRICOM recently requested approval to transfer funding to USAID for community-led violence prevention programs in Agadez, Niger but were denied by the DOD Joint Staff legal experts due to a lack of authority for such transfer.

Congress is always attempting to look for ways to help the DOD better incorporate inter-agency approaches to issues, would you support a new transfer authority that allows combatant commanders via the Department of Defense, to transfer funds to the Department of State or U.S. Agency for International Development for CVE efforts, like community level extremism prevention programs?

General RODRIGUEZ. USAFRICOM strongly supports the establishment of a mechanism that provides for transferring resources between agencies to support activities against threats to security and stability managed by the combatant commanders. Development programs that complement Security Force Assistance are essential to promote long-term stability in fragile or conflict affected states, to effectively and sufficiently counter violent extremism and radicalization.

For example, USAFRICOM, SOCAFRICA, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) identified several sources of instability in the Agadez region of Niger: youth unemployment, youth disaffection, lack of confidence in the government, elections related violence, and population displacement due to military con-

struction projects. We collectively identified existing USAID programs which could be rapidly expanded to reinforce stability in Agadez, however, USAFRICOM lacked the authority to transfer the funds.

Another example is the transfer of DOD funds to the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies to assist with building capacity in willing African partners to improve point of entry security efforts (e.g., airports, seaports, border entry etc.) to interdict foreign fighter flow linked to terrorist threats. Additionally, instability across the Sahel coupled with illicit mining and trafficking calls for flexible multi-sectoral approaches which can be mobilized quickly.

USG goals, which include diplomacy, development, and defense objectives, are best met when comprehensive solutions are implemented to stabilize regions and build resilient communities. Therefore, if efforts are to be successful, the DOD must have the flexibility to transfer funds between agencies and collaborate on holistic responses to counter current and emerging threats.

