

[H.A.S.C. No. 117-70]

**NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND
U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN THE
GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA**

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD
MARCH 17, 2022



U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

48-987

WASHINGTON : 2023

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CONTENTS

	Page
STATEMENTS PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS	
Smith, Hon. Adam, a Representative from Washington, Chairman, Committee on Armed Services	1
Wittman, Hon. Robert J., a Representative from Virginia, Committee on Armed Services	3
WITNESSES	
Baker, Sasha, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, U.S. Department of Defense	5
McKenzie, Gen Kenneth F., Jr., USMC, Commander, U.S. Central Command .	8
Townsend, GEN Stephen J., USA, Commander, U.S. Africa Command	7
APPENDIX	
PREPARED STATEMENTS:	
Baker, Sasha	51
McKenzie, Gen Kenneth F., Jr.	77
Townsend, GEN Stephen J.	64
DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD:	
AFRICOM Maps	109
CENTCOM Maps	115
GEN McKenzie response to Mrs. McClain	117
WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE HEARING:	
Mr. Carbajal	121
Mr. Waltz	121
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING:	
Mr. Bacon	135
Ms. Jacobs	135
Mr. Lamborn	125
Mr. Moore	137
Mr. Scott	128

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Thursday, March 17, 2022.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Adam Smith (chairman of the committee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The CHAIRMAN. Call the meeting to order.

This morning the committee is gathered for the “National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa.”

A couple of programming notes before we get started.

It is a long, complicated day on the committee. We have this hearing, and then, at 1 o'clock, we have the Under Secretary for Policy, Mr. Kahl, giving us a briefing on Ukraine, a classified briefing. And then, these fine folks will be back at 2:30 for a classified version of this brief.

So, I have finally decided that I don't actually have to read the statement explaining how our virtual hearing works. I will simply say that this is a hybrid hearing. There will be some people here in person; there will be some people appearing virtually. And we will all be prepared for that.

Our witnesses this morning are Sasha Baker, who is the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Department of Defense; General Stephen Townsend, who is the commander of the U.S. Africa Command; and General Kenneth McKenzie, who is the commander for U.S. Central Command.

And both General Townsend and General McKenzie are scheduled to have this be their last appearance before our committee. Events happen. One never knows when we might have to bring you back before then. But, at any rate, you are retiring.

And both you gentleman have appeared before this committee many times, served this country incredibly well in a variety of capacities. But in the two theaters that you are currently responsible for, you have had a lot to do during your tenure there, and you have done it quite well. And we have appreciated the relationship and we wish you the best. And thank you for your service.

And these, as mentioned, are two incredibly important commands. I think on this committee there is always a challenge. We

are trying to prioritize. We have spent a lot of time the last few years talking about how China is the pacing threat; we need to focus on China. Obviously, with Vladimir Putin's brutal and violent decision to violate the fundamental laws of the world and invade Ukraine in the way that he has, a lot of attention has focused there.

But the bottom line is, while we do need to prioritize, we also need to be aware of, you know, we live in a robust threat environment. We have got to be paying attention to all of it and trying to make sure that we are meeting all of those challenges; first of all, because they are all important, and second of all, because they all tend to be interconnected.

Certainly in the two theaters that we are talking about today, both China and Russia are factors in the great power competition that we find ourselves in. So, we want to make sure that we are addressing those issues.

So, taking them one at a time, starting with the Africa Command, China is incredibly active in that region, looking to build partnerships, you know, the goal of ultimately building bases wherever they can. It is incredibly important that we keep an eye on that, maintain our relationships in Africa, and try to deal with that challenge.

At the same time, the transnational terrorism threat is still very real throughout the continent. Things have gotten more complicated on the Horn, given the conflict in Ethiopia. I have always felt that the partnerships that we built to deal with the challenges in Somalia and the challenges that are presented by AQ [al-Qaida] in the Arabian Peninsula between Yemen and Somalia, the partnerships that we have built with Kenya and Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda, and others in the region have really been a great model for how partnerships can help us meet our national security threats, so that we don't do it all alone.

We have a similar and growing challenge in West Africa, as there are a variety of different transnational terrorist elements there that we need to work with. And in the midst of all that, Russia is aggressively, through the Wagner Group, providing security in that region that is having a very destabilizing effect. It is not a coincidence that the increased presence of Wagner as a security force has matched up with an increase in the number of coups throughout West Africa.

We have got a lot of challenges in Africa, and we look forward to hearing from General Townsend about his take on those challenges and answering our questions on that.

Central Command also has a lot of challenges. Certainly, we have seen the drawdown in both Afghanistan and Iraq over the course of the last 10 years that has changed that, but the challenges are very real. And I know General McKenzie knows that one of the central questions that this committee will have is, what now in Afghanistan? There is still a threat there from al-Qaida and from ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]. What is our plan for dealing with that threat, now that we have pulled out of Afghanistan?

And in the Middle East, we still have the challenges from ISIS, the instability in Syria, the instability in Yemen. I am particularly

interested to hear the latest on what Iran is up to, and how we are working with partners in the region to contain that threat.

And also, I would be curious to hear, as Russia gets further and further bogged down in Ukraine, what does that mean for their activity in Syria, where, as we know, they have been very involved going forward?

The bottom line is—and my written statement gets into a lot more detail—we could talk about both of these areas of responsibility for a very long time. There is a lot to do. There are a lot of challenges. They are a huge part of our national security posture going forward, and I look forward to hearing more details from all three of our witnesses on how best we should meet those challenges going forward.

With that, Mr. Rogers is out ill this morning, and ably filling in is Mr. Wittman, as the ranking member. And I will yield to him for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT J. WITTMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM VIRGINIA, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. WITTMAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I deeply appreciate our witnesses coming to testify before us today. And thanks so much for your service.

General Townsend, as was discussed last week, the threats in Africa are multifaceted and they continue to grow. But spending on AFRICOM [U.S. Africa Command] comprises only about three-tenths of 1 percent of the entire defense budget—not related to the magnitude of what I believe is the building threat. And it is these meager resources that are now spread even thinner because of the challenges we face before us with Russia and China. And that is not just worldwide; that is specifically there on the African continent.

Russia has been entering into a disturbing number of arms sales and basing agreements in African nations. China is using the Belt and Road Initiative to extract African natural resources and gain permanent footholds on the continent. The Chinese have built an overseas military base in the strategically important area of the Horn of Africa, and they are actively scouting other locations, including the Atlantic coast. Make no mistake about their intentions.

The growing presence of China and Russia in Africa is a threat to our national security, and it is imperative that we increase investments there, as well as other places around the world.

I look forward to hearing from you, General Townsend, about how we can maximize diplomatic and military efforts to counter Russia and China's growing global ambitions in China.

In CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command], General McKenzie, we are also seeing increased Chinese presence. China is building ports and other infrastructure throughout the region, and it has entered into trade and telecom [telecommunication] agreements with allies in the region.

But what I find most concerning is that President Xi continues to cozy up to the Ayatollah. China signed valuable trade deals with Iran, bought Iranian oil in defiance of international sanctions, and joined Russia in conducting joint drills with the Iranian navy. These actions provide a lifeline to Iran at a very dangerous time.

The Ayatollah continues to fund and equip terrorists targeting American troops. His cronies are prolonging a civil war and a humanitarian crisis in Syria, and his regime is aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons. We absolutely cannot allow this to happen. I do not believe that reentering the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] will stop them. I look forward to hearing more about the administration's plan for ending the Ayatollah's quest for a nuclear weapon and how they intend to deal with the rest of the regime's destabilizing actions.

Finally, to both you, General McKenzie and General Townsend, you continue to face tremendous challenges snuffing out hardened terrorists in both AORs [areas of responsibility], and I am very concerned that we are backsliding on the progress we have made in combating terrorism.

In Africa, the repositioning of U.S. and French forces further from terrorist hotspots is making it much harder for us to successfully conduct counterterrorism operations.

In CENTCOM, President Biden's decision to unilaterally and unconditionally withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan has undermined our national security. As anticipated by nearly everyone except the President, the Taliban has overrun the government, and Afghanistan is reverting back to being a breeding ground for terrorists.

The President assures us that this so-called over-the-horizon strategy will prevent that from happening, but this is completely devoid of reality. In the 6 months since the withdrawal, we have not been informed of a single successful over-the-horizon strike. I guess it is possible that al-Qaida and ISIS-K [Khorasan Province] have thrown down their arms and decided to live in peaceful coexistence with the West, but I fear what is more likely is that we no longer have a good handle on where the terrorists are or what they are doing.

The truth is, without persistent ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance], reliable partners on the ground, and nearby facilities to launch assets, we lack the capability we need to conduct a successful strike. We know, previously, human intelligence, signal intelligence, in theater close to the adversary is critically important. And I look forward to this afternoon's classified discussion on what capabilities we have lost and how we can help restore them.

As to our posture shifts in the Indo-Pacific, we need to ensure other combatant commanders we have the capabilities they need to carry out their missions. We cannot allow for blindspots, especially in your two AORs.

Before I wrap up, I would like to thank both of you for your service, General Townsend and General McKenzie, incredible service to our Nation.

General McKenzie, I wish you the best in your retirement. Just make sure that you have your number available on speed dial.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WITTMAN. And again, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Baker, you are recognized for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SASHA BAKER, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY
OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Ms. BAKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Congressman Wittman, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I ask that my written statement be entered into the record.

For the past year, the Biden administration has placed a priority on revitalizing and expanding the U.S. alliance and partnership architecture. In bringing together our partners' capabilities with our own, the Department is building an integrated deterrence framework that we believe creates advantages for ourselves and dilemmas for our adversaries.

In the Middle East and Africa, the Department builds partnership through an approach that draws on all of our tools, to include security cooperation, exercises, defense diplomacy, and force posture.

The Department's priorities in the Middle East are to defend against Iranian-backed threats, to counter violent extremist organizations, and to deepen cooperation with our partners. We are committed to deterring and defending against threats posed by Iran and its proxies. The Department continuously evaluates the appropriate mix of forces to defend U.S. personnel and interests, if necessary.

In Iraq and Syria, the Department is committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS, supporting a broad, whole-of-government strategy designed to address the underlying conditions that gave rise to ISIS.

In Yemen, our policy objectives are to end the conflict, alleviate humanitarian suffering, and defeat the threat from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS-Yemen. Separately, the Department supports the UAE [United Arab Emirates] and Saudi Arabia in the defense of their territory and people from cross-border Houthi attacks.

The Department is committed to deepening cooperation and coordination between the United States, Israel, and partners in the Middle East and Africa.

Recent normalization agreements have laid the groundwork for Israel's entrance into the U.S. Central Command, which will, in turn, we believe, enhance cooperation in the security sphere.

In Afghanistan, our military service members served honorably for two decades. Although we have withdrawn U.S. forces, the Department continues to advance U.S. interests in Afghanistan. This includes monitoring indicators and warnings for counterterrorism threats against U.S. interests and the U.S. homeland. It also includes supporting the Department of State's efforts to facilitate the departure of American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and our Afghan allies, as well as efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. We continue to support interagency partners in the care and resettlement of Afghan evacuees in the United States.

In Central Asia, we are continuing to develop long-term security cooperation programs that are focused on bolstering regional capabilities to help counter a wide range of threats in the region and to the U.S. homeland.

In our relationship with Pakistan, counterterrorism remains a focus, as violent extremist organizations seek to target our shared interests and destabilize the region. Pakistan has participated robustly in counter-piracy efforts, for example, meant to ensure a free and open maritime transit.

In Africa, the Department remains focused on countering violent extremist organizations that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and interests, and addressing targeted strategic competition concerns. To those ends, the Department is building partnerships that support conflict resolution, improving defense institutions, and attempting to strengthen democratic norms.

DOD's [Department of Defense's] training and exercises promote a respect for the law of armed conflict, for civilian oversight of the military, and for human rights.

We employ a holistic approach, working with our partners across the U.S. Government, to include State and USAID [United States Agency for International Development], and we are reviewing all of our deployments to ensure that they are rightsized to balance our near-term challenges with our long-term modernization and readiness requirements.

In the Horn of Africa, we remain committed to supporting our AMISOM [African Union Mission to Somalia] partners, and in the east and in the Sahel, we are focused on interagency and multilateral efforts to stabilize the region and to improve our counter-VEO [violent extremist organization] efforts.

In North Africa, we support a common security objectives on the continent and in the southern Mediterranean.

And in the maritime domain, alongside the Department of State, we are working with regional partners to secure the Atlantic from maritime and transnational threats.

The Department's approach to the Middle East and Africa is informed by threats to a free, stable, and open international order, including those posed by Russia and the PRC [People's Republic of China].

Russia seeks to reshape security structures, exploiting governance vacuums and using private military companies and resource extraction to undermine U.S. interests.

Beijing is establishing overseas infrastructure to project and sustain military power while expanding its implements and its access.

As the Department coordinates with partners to address our shared threats and their security needs, it will also seek to limit Russian and Chinese influence through sustained engagement, demonstrating the superiority of the United States as a partner of choice.

With the support of the Congress, the Department remains, we believe, well-positioned to support our allies and partners, to compete with Russia and the PRC, and to deter and defeat our adversaries across the Middle East and North Africa.

In closing, I would just like to echo, on behalf of the Department, our thanks to both General McKenzie and General Townsend, for their long service to our Nation.

And with that, I will conclude and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Baker can be found in the Appendix on page 51.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Before turning to General Townsend, one programming note that I neglected to mention. We are going in reverse order of questioning today. We try to give the freshmen, our junior members, a chance to go first in some of our hearings. So, we will be starting with the least senior and working our way up today. Just to make sure everyone is aware of that.

General Townsend, you are recognized for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF GEN STEPHEN J. TOWNSEND, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General TOWNSEND. Chairman Smith, Congressman Wittman, distinguished members of the committee, good morning. Thank you for inviting me to appear today, even as the eyes of the world are focused on Russia's lawless attack on the Ukraine, an unjust war which impacts Africa as well.

For nearly 3 years, it has been the greatest privilege of my career to represent the dedicated members of U.S. Africa Command. Thank you for your steadfast support for them and for our mission.

I am here this morning with my battle buddy and command senior enlisted leader, Sergeant Major Richard Thresher, and colleagues, Dr. Sasha Baker and General Frank McKenzie. For General McKenzie and I, it is our final appearance before you. Our joint testimony highlights continued and pressing challenges and opportunities faced by our respective commands and our Nation.

Together with our interagency teammates, USAFRICOM protects and advances U.S. interests, prevents strategic distraction, and preserves America's options—all in concert with our allies and partners.

As AFRICOM's fifth commander, I have come to learn five truths about Africa.

First, America cannot ignore Africa. Africa's challenges, opportunities, and security interests are inseparable from our own. Weak or poor governance, conflict, and climate change stress the stability of many African nations, which in turn will impact U.S. security and prosperity.

Second, our competitors clearly see Africa's rich potential. China and Russia both seek to convert soft and hard power investments into political influence, strategic access, and military advantage. Both seek to bolster autocrats and change international norms in their favor. For China, Africa is their second continent. Across Africa, mercenaries from the Kremlin's Wagner Group offer their services for profit—regime protection, resource exploitation, and horrific violence against Africans, just as we see in Ukraine today.

Third, deadly terrorism has metastasized to Africa. Al-Qaida's Al-Shabaab in East Africa and ISIS and al-Qaida groups in West Africa and elsewhere, are among the world's fastest growing, wealthiest, and deadliest terrorist groups, and remain grave and growing threats that aspire to kill Americans, both there and in our homeland.

Fourth, a battle between democracy and authoritarianism is raging across Africa. Despite a recent surge in democratic backsliding, our values, our democracy, our willingness to work with African partners create a huge demand for U.S. engagement and U.S. partnership.

Fifth, in Africa, a few troops and a few bucks still go a long way. Modest and predictable resourcing yields outsized returns for U.S. and African security interests. As an economy of force and posture of limited theater, AFRICOM employs just .3 percent of DOD's operating budget and manpower. Modest investments today can yield a continent of partners tomorrow.

We are most effective when we synchronize diplomacy, development, and defense. So, we are grateful for your continued leadership and backing to resource our interagency partners at the State Department, USAID, and the intel community. Thanks to the authorities and resources you provide, and your continued interest and support in the capabilities that AFRICOM requires to accomplish our mission.

In summary, USAFRICOM remains cheap insurance for America's security.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Townsend can be found in the Appendix on page 64.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General McKenzie.

**STATEMENT OF GEN KENNETH F. McKENZIE, Jr., USMC,
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General McKENZIE. Chairman Smith, Representative Wittman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, it is a pleasure to be here today beside the Honorable Sasha Baker and General Steve Townsend, and in the company of my senior enlisted leader, Fleet Master Chief Jamie Herdel.

I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify for the final time regarding U.S. Central Command's posture in an area of responsibility that encompasses 21 nations, 600 million people, and lies at the strategic nexus of the world's most important corridors of trade.

Much has transpired since I last delivered my annual posture testimony; most notably, the conclusion of our military campaign in Afghanistan and, of course, Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine.

America's interests in the central region and the challenges we confront there have proven remarkably resilient. CENTCOM's mission to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional stability in support of enduring U.S. interests is essentially unchanged from the day of the command's founding.

The primary threats to that security and stability are also very familiar even today. CENTCOM was established nearly 40 years ago to counter the malign influence of a revolutionary regime that had seized power in Tehran, and to compete with a great power that had, in spite of international condemnation, invaded the sovereign state of Afghanistan and imposed a puppet regime.

Today, Iran is no less of a threat to American interests or the stability of the region than it was in 1979. To the contrary, the threat posed by Iran is graver than ever.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moreover, has violently demonstrated its willful disregard for international norms—just as we have seen through Russia's actions in Syria and elsewhere, in fact anywhere it sees an opportunity to diminish confidence in America's leadership.

In a more measured fashion, China is also vying for increased influence, at American expense, in a region it depends upon for over 40 percent of its fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, violent extremist organizations, or VEOs, in the CENTCOM area continue to pose a credible threat to the homeland. In sum, the central region remains today a vital and volatile arena for strategic competition and the decisive theater in the campaign against VEOs.

The campaign to defeat the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has entered a new phase. As of 1 January of this year, Iraq has assumed sole responsibility for counter-ISIS combat operations on its own soil.

In Syria, CENTCOM and its partners are degrading ISIS's ability to regenerate by improving the security of facilities for detained ISIS fighters, as well as for the displaced persons camps where their families and others reside. More than half of this population comes from other countries, and addressing the threat of ISIS in northeast Syria, ultimately, will require those countries to reclaim and repatriate whatever citizens of theirs remain in these prisons and camps—ending one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and depriving ISIS of what currently is fertile soil for indoctrination and spreading terror.

In Afghanistan, our campaign against al-Qaida and ISIS-Khorasan has also entered a new phase. We are now conducting this campaign from bases over the horizon. As I have said before, this is difficult, but it is not impossible. I should add today that we will be able to do so only so long as CENTCOM has the requisite resources to find, fix, and finish threats to the homeland before those threats develop the capability to conduct external operations. I am talking specifically about ISR assets and strike platforms. CENTCOM has the tools it needs to perform this mission, but the margins are thin and the risk will increase, should resources diminish.

In the Middle East, Iran continues to pose the greatest threat to U.S. interests and the security of the region as a whole. Through its proxies and clients, Iran has fomented conflict in an arc, tracing from Yemen through the Arabian Peninsula, across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon, and to the very borders of Israel.

Saudi Arabia endures regular attacks from the Houthis, who wield some of the most advanced unmanned aerial systems and cruise missiles in the region—all courtesy of the Iranians. Recently, the Houthis expanded these attacks to include urban centers and bases with U.S. forces in the United Arab Emirates. Tehran also enables its aligned militias in Iraq and Syria to carry on a persistent, low-level campaign of indirect fire and UAS [unmanned

aerial systems] attacks against U.S. and coalition forces, hoping to drive us from the region.

Iran's ballistic missile forces constitute an exigent threat to the security of every state in the region. Among them are our most important and enduring partners. They continue to look to the United States for assurance that we, the historic partner of choice in the region, will remain a reliable one.

China and Russia are also watching closely for any sign that America's commitment to the collective security of the region is wavering, and they are poised to capitalize on whatever opportunities emerge.

In closing, let me thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

I would also like to thank the soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, coastguardsmen, and guardians who have served and sacrificed in the CENTCOM AOR. It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as their commander.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of General McKenzie can be found in the Appendix on page 77.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Just two quick questions.

General Townsend, could you walk us through what you think China is doing in Africa? When I met with you, you gave a pretty good brief. And I know some of it we would have to do in the classified session later. But what are they doing in Africa, how does it threaten us, and what are we doing to address it?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks for the question, Chairman.

There should be some handouts at your places there that you can refer to.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix beginning on page 109.]

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

General TOWNSEND. There is one on China there that depicts what I will just kind of briefly talk to.

They compete with us in Africa. First of all, China has made a decision, a deliberate decision, to compete with America in Africa and win that competition. They compete primarily through economic means and diplomatic means. And you can see that there with their Belt and Road Initiative. They are investing everywhere across the continent.

We don't actually have to meet that competition in every location head-on. We have to pick and choose where we are going to do that. And there are countries where it is important that we do.

In the military sphere, you heard in the chairman's opening remarks there that have their one overseas base in Djibouti. The primary thing that concerns me with China's military competition in Africa is that they are seeking, actively seeking, a military base on the Atlantic coast of Africa. And for a variety of reasons that I will go to in closed session, that would be bad for America's security. And—as a first priority, we need to prevent—deter a Chinese base on the Atlantic coast of Africa.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

And, General McKenzie, just a quick specific question on Yemen. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen continues to be great. The fight

has gone back and forth there. I know our envoys there have tried to get to a peace agreement, but unable to do that. But, in terms of getting food, humanitarian assistance, basic supplies, into Yemen, we continually hear about the blockade of Yemen; that Saudi Arabia is like leading this effort, blocking the ability of supplies to get in. Is there more that we could do to free up the ability to get supplies, the basic supplies of food, medical supplies, humanitarian aid into Yemen? And what is really going on in terms of the effort to blockade that by Saudi Arabia, or by anybody else?

General MCKENZIE. Chairman, you are correct, it is very difficult to get humanitarian aid into Yemen. It is further compounded by the fact that there are distribution problems that the Houthis are associated with, once that aid gets in. I would agree that there is more that we could do with our friends in the region to allow more humanitarian aid to enter Yemen, and I would support that action.

However, I think the larger problem is the distribution of the aid, once it enters Yemen and actually gets out to the people that need it. The U.N. [United Nations] Special Representative is working that very hard, but that remains, I think, the most significant problem, when it comes to distribution of aid to the many hundreds of thousands of people who experience food insecurity in Yemen.

The CHAIRMAN. But, before it gets in, the Saudis, in particular, are searching ships, blocking ships from getting in because they are afraid that arms are being shipped in.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, they are, and they have also allowed aid ships to enter. It is not a perfect solution. It is not a perfect solution, and I acknowledge that.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, that is something I would like to continue to work with you on, because, as you know, the humanitarian crisis there is extreme.

And with that, I will yield to Mr. Wittman for his questions.

Mr. WITTMAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses.

I want to follow up on what the chairman talked about. It is concerning to me, not just the dynamic that is happening between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, but the support that Iran is providing to Yemen. That, to me, allows them to do the things that they are doing that are very, very disruptive in that area.

As we know, they have looted U.N. food convoys. They have laid over a million mines in civilian areas. They have recruited thousands of child soldiers and have taken over the closed U.S. embassy. They are holding at least 11 former U.S. embassy staffers hostage. And they have stepped up cross-border attacks by drones and missiles against the UAE that have actually targeted and killed civilians in the UAE.

As the chairman pointed out, they have completely rebuffed efforts by the current administration to enter into any kind of talks to resolve these particular issues.

General McKenzie, I want to go to you first and ask, what are your thoughts about what we can do in interrupting the relationship between Iran and the Houthis, which allow them, unfortunately, to continue to keep this unsettled state in Yemen? And that, in turn, antagonizes the Saudis, and this just continues to escalate. Can you give us your perspective on that?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I can. And I would like to note at the beginning that, while the supply of humanitarian aid to Yemen has been imperfect and not consistent, throughout the long history of this crisis, Iran has never imported a single bag of rice or any other foodstuff into Yemen.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes.

General MCKENZIE. In fact, the only material they have brought into Yemen is stuff designed to kill people.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes.

General MCKENZIE. So, we should just remember that when we talk about the people here.

Sir, I believe there is an opportunity for a negotiated settlement here. I believe that the parties, I believe that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and I believe UAE are open to that solution.

I believe that the Houthis have an opportunity, should they choose to negotiate, but under prompting from their Iranian masters, they have instead chosen to double down. They continue their attacks into Saudi Arabia. As you noted, they have ramped up attacks into UAE in a very disturbing new phase of operations.

But I think there is an opportunity here, under the United Nations, to get to a truce, and a truce would be the best of possible worlds. We would be able to begin to open Hudaydah, get foodstuffs into Hudaydah, and distribute it under the auspices of someone other than the Houthis and their ability to interfere with it.

Mr. WITTMAN. Can enough pressure be put on Iran and Saudi Arabia to kind of force the Houthis to the table and say, "Listen, you've got to resolve this"?

General MCKENZIE. I don't believe it is in Iran's interest to end the war in Yemen. I think it is a fairly low-cost war for them. As you noted, it embarrasses Saudi Arabia. It embarrasses UAE. And I think they are actually not motivated to do that right now.

I think it is certainly in the Houthis' best interest to cut a deal. So, the ball is sort of in their court. They have some opportunities. They need to seize those opportunities, because, frankly, sir, I don't think those opportunities are going to be there forever.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes. Thanks.

Let me ask you briefly, too, about the growing threat from ISIS-K in Afghanistan. As we had heard before, by a complete withdrawal of forces there, we knew that the risks were going to increase. Obviously, they have.

The concern is that that risk is going to extend beyond the borders of Afghanistan and they will have an opportunity or a capability to pursue attacks outside of Afghanistan. That is incredibly troubling.

Also, our ability to do significant CT [counterterrorism] operations in Afghanistan, the issues of what we used to have as far as human intelligence, signal intelligence, greatly degraded now. The over-the-horizon capability is just not something that is realistic in relation to the threat that we face.

I wanted to get your best military judgment regarding the adequacy of the current force structure in CENTCOM following our departure from Afghanistan. What do we have in place? Is it enough with this over-the-horizon capability to really keep a handle and keep ISIS-K from growing to a point where it can perpetrate at-

tacks outside the border there? And what are the risks with our current force structure? What are the risks that are there before us today, and how do you think those risks will continue to grow?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, in the closed session a little later this afternoon, I am going to exhaustively drill down into our force posture and all the disciplines of intelligence that we are applying in Afghanistan, and give you very detailed and specific granular answers to those questions. But I prefer to do that in a closed session.

I will say that we are very concerned about the potential for ISIS-K growth in Afghanistan. We assess that they do retain a desire to attack us in our homeland here in the United States. And absent effective pressure, that threat will only grow and metastasize over time.

Mr. WITTMAN. Okay. Very good. That is what I want to get to, is that you continue to see it growing, then, in the years to come, unless something significant is done in the meantime?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I will talk about that in great detail a little bit later today.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With that, I yield back.

Mr. COURTNEY [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Wittman.

In accordance with the chairman's extraordinary procedure today, the chair recognizes Mr. Panetta from California.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity. I just wish I would have had a little more insight as to the order. But thank you very much.

That being said, gentlemen, Doctor, thank you very much for being here. I appreciate your time. I appreciate your testimony.

I am going to focus down to West Africa, and more particular, in Mali especially. We know that the French came in back in 2013, Operation Barkhane. They had U.S. support. Unfortunately, now the French are leaving. Unfortunately, now there is a void.

I don't have confidence in the 15,000 Blue Hats that are there on the ground to fill that void. I am very skeptical of the Malian government to actually contract with the Wagner Group as well to do that.

I know that we provided support in Operation Barkhane, and maybe this is a conversation we can have later this afternoon.

But my question to you is, one, why are the French leaving? Two, who do you see filling that void? Three, why did they contract with the Wagner Group, and if you could go into that a little bit?

And then, my last question is, does China have a strategy? You have this nice map here that shows their involvement in Africa. Does China have a strategy to deal with the violent extremism in Africa?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman.

So, first, the French aren't leaving. They are repositioning in West Africa. They are leaving, as you pointed out, Mali.

Mr. PANETTA. They are going to Niger, correct?

General TOWNSEND. Their plan is to go to Niger and Côte d'Ivoire, and maybe a few other places. So, they are repositioning their forces.

You asked the question, why are they leaving? So, in our interactions with the French, they had come to the realization that it

was time to reset their campaign there and maybe gain new efficiencies. And so, they had already made a decision, which the French government had announced, that they were going to reposition and reposture in West Africa.

Then, we had successive coups in Mali.

Mr. PANETTA. Right.

General TOWNSEND. And Mali, as you know, has invited in Wagner. I think they have invited—and that gets to your second question, why have they invited Wagner in? They have invited Wagner in because they believe that Wagner will replace the French and do a better job.

When I learned of this, I traveled to Mali and I met with the president there, the junta president there. And I explained that I thought it was a bad idea to invite Wagner in, because we have seen them, I have seen them in Syria and I have seen them in other places in Africa. And Wagner obeys no rules. They won't follow the direction of the government. They won't partner more effectively. I think they will only bring bad—

Mr. PANETTA. Was he listening? Will he listen?

General TOWNSEND. He told me that it wasn't Wagner; that they were dealing with the French—the Russian Ministry of Defense, except I think President Putin later said there are no Russian military in Mali; there are private military companies there, Wagner.

So, I think that only bad will come from that. I think there may be some initial gains. We are seeing Wagner deploy and build their base camps. They haven't really started significant operations yet. I think they have already suffered some casualties.

Mr. PANETTA. Casualties from violent extremism?

General TOWNSEND. Yes. I think that only bad is going to come from their deployment there.

You asked about China. We don't see China having a counter-violent extremist role. They are in Mali, though. They are there as part of—they have a substantial force there as part of MINUSMA [United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali], the U.N. mission there. But we don't see them doing—we see them doing a little bit of counterterrorism training on the continent, but we do not see them conducting any counter-VEO operations.

Mr. PANETTA. And a lot of our role, then, will be from Niger, is that correct, in regards to any sort of what we do?

General TOWNSEND. We currently have forces in Niger, and I am working with the Department of Defense on a strategy for West Africa that will take into account the French reposturing; that will take into account the malign actors like Wagner in the region.

Mr. PANETTA. And it sounds like you don't necessarily believe this Malian official who you spoke to in regards to it was an organized Russian group? You believe it is the Wagner Group who is in there now?

General TOWNSEND. It is the Wagner Group, supported by the Ministry of Defense and the Kremlin. The Russian air force flew them in.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you. Once again, thank you.
I yield back.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Mr. Panetta. I was closely watching the portraits of the past chairmen. There was no disturbance of the universe. So, nice job.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Fallon.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just thought this was a gift that you were giving an Irishman on St. Patrick's Day. So, I appreciate that.

Thank you all for your service, and thanks for being here today.

General McKenzie, I was a bit dumbfounded about a week and a half ago. I read an article, a report, in The Wall Street Journal that the UAE's Sheikh and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia would not take a call from the President of the United States. I found that alarming. I wanted to just hear your thoughts on that.

General MCKENZIE. Relationships at that level would probably be better with Ms. Baker or the Department of State than me. I can tell you that, at my level, I have no trouble talking to the chiefs of defense of each of those two countries, and I talk to them frequently.

Mr. FALLON. Okay. Ms. Baker, if you would like to comment? Thank you.

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, thank you.

I can't speak to the specifics of the President's phone calls. What I can tell you is from a defense perspective, as General McKenzie said, we have long and enduring strategic partnerships with both Saudi Arabia and UAE. Those have existed for any number of years.

Mr. FALLON. I know. That is why I found it so—

Ms. BAKER. We are fully committed to them.

Mr. FALLON [continuing]. Alarming and shocking that they weren't taking—I thought they were allies of ours in the region, and not to take the President of the United States phone call, to me, it spoke volumes about the deteriorating relationship.

Ms. BAKER. Again, I can't speak to the President's phone calls. I can tell you that, as General McKenzie said, we pick up the phone and we talk with these folks every day, and we have a very close and enduring partnership from a defense perspective.

Mr. FALLON. General McKenzie, in Syria, I would love if you could just touch on the influences that Turkey, Russia, and Iran have. It seems to be an absolute mess, you know, from everything we read, and then, the maps didn't help too much, either. But I just wanted to get your thoughts on that.

General MCKENZIE. Sure. So, in Syria, Iran uses Syria principally as a land bridge to move advanced conventional weapons into Lebanon to be employed against Israel, as a possibility. They are also interested in operating against our forces that are there in Syria. As in Yemen, Iran, generally speaking, has no positive objective in Syria. Rather, their goals are almost wholly negative.

Mr. FALLON. Just disruption.

General MCKENZIE. It is disruption, but also they view it—again, we shouldn't understate the importance of that corridor that allows them to move weapons to a position against what they consider their greatest foe and the nation they are sworn to destroy, Israel.

Russia, obviously, has a client state in Syria. They came in right after the beginning of the civil war. They have been there for quite a while. It allows them to do several things by being in there.

First of all, it is opportunistic. I don't see a long-term strategy in the Russian action. They have got an air base in western Syria. They have got a naval base in the eastern Mediterranean, which they had during the Cold War, I might add. So, it is not a new thing necessarily.

It also gives them the opportunity to attempt to posture on the global stage and to throw sand in our gearbox. Again, it is an act of opportunism that we see as typical of a lot of Russian activity.

The Turks have genuine national security concerns——

Mr. FALLON. Is it the Kurds mainly? Are they concerned about the Kurds more than anything else?

General MCKENZIE. Well, the Turks are, yes.

Mr. FALLON. Yes.

General MCKENZIE. We would argue that there are different elements within the Kurds, and we disagree with Turkey on that, on all the Kurds being devoted to attacking Turkey. But they do have legitimate security concerns.

We also, as you know, partner heavily with the Syrian Democratic Forces and other Syrian Kurdish elements to actually conduct the fight against ISIS. So, there is a genuine dispute there between us and our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] partners over that. But, when all is said and done, we do recognize they have legitimate security concerns.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, General.

General Townsend, I was noticing in the foreign aid we crush the Chinese, \$11 billion to about 2.5, but, in economic trade, they almost quadruple ours in Africa. What I wanted to ask you is, who is China the chummiest with? Whose relationships are the best as far as the nation-states they have and relationships they have in Africa? And what worries you most about that theater?

General TOWNSEND. Well, Congressman, thanks.

I don't think anybody has asked me who China is chummiest with in Africa before. So, I don't think I have contemplated that. They have pretty good relations with a lot of the countries on the continent. Where the relations are strained is in their earlier economic investments, where they have lured African countries into what we call "debt trap diplomacy."

Mr. FALLON. Right.

General TOWNSEND. And there are a number of those countries where a large percentage of their foreign debt is held by China, and China has extended leases on critical infrastructure like ports and airports.

The thing I think I am most worried about is this military base on the Atlantic coast. And where they have the most traction for that today is in Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. FALLON. Yes.

General TOWNSEND. They have laid markers down up and down the coastline, but the place where they have actually made progress toward this is Equatorial Guinea. And we have had a recent interagency delegation travel there to discuss that with the government there.

Mr. FALLON. Well, it concerns me because it is like almost an end-around to the Monroe Doctrine in some ways to have a Chinese base on the Atlantic—

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes Congresswoman Luria.

Mrs. LURIA. Thank you.

And, General McKenzie, I would like to start with a quote that you made. You said, "the proximate causes for the establishment of CENTCOM nearly forty years ago" was Iran, and "Today, Iran is no less of a threat to American interests or the stability of the region than it was in 1979. To the contrary, the threat posed by Iran is graver than ever."

So, I would like to ask you, from a perspective of CENTCOM, how is the United States, and how is the United States and our allies prepared to respond to this threat from Iran?

General MCKENZIE. So, the actual operational expression of the Iranian threat is in the vast improvements in their ballistic missile, their land attack cruise missile, and their small unmanned aerial vehicle platforms, which over the last 5 to 7 years have dramatically increased, both in number and in accuracy and ability to fly in relatively undetected ways. All of that directly threatens the immediate partners.

Mrs. LURIA. So, the 5 to 7 years, what year did we enter into the JCPOA? It is about that timeframe?

General MCKENZIE. About that timeframe, but—

Mrs. LURIA. So, I just wanted to shift, and maybe we can have a more thorough conversation on the first part of the question.

So, if the United States returns to the JCPOA, what impact do you foresee that having on Iran's regional activities? What impact on the flow of additional resources to the Houthis, to Hezbollah, to Hamas, and their actions in the region against the United States, Israel, and our allies?

General MCKENZIE. So, I will note, the principal foreign policy objective we have vis-a-vis Iran is for them not to possess a nuclear weapon. So, a JCPOA would presumably give that assurance.

Mrs. LURIA. Right. The current agreement has allowed them to have additional resources to fund these proxy organizations.

General MCKENZIE. So, I believe that what they do with their ballistic missiles, their proxies, and other things, are not necessarily coupled directly to the JCPOA. But I will acknowledge that there could be second-order effects of that. I do not know what the terms of the pending JCPOA will be. I just don't have that information.

Mrs. LURIA. So, perhaps I will turn to Ms. Baker. And I really don't think it is a disputed fact, by the fact that we have eased pressure, we have lifted sanctions, Iran has more resources. And those resources are flowing to these proxy groups and terrorist organizations throughout the region.

So, if a nuclear deal is reached with Iran, I think that it is likely that Tehran will use a significant part of those associated sanctions reliefs to attack Israel and support these terrorist proxies. Are we open to supplying Israel with additional security assistance and other support, in light of this potential situation?

Ms. BAKER. Congresswoman, our commitment to Israel's security is ironclad. We consult with them on a near daily basis.

Mrs. LURIA. Are they at the table in the negotiations for the JCPOA right now?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, the Department, of course, does not have the lead on those negotiations, but my understanding is the Israelis are not at the table. We do consult with them regularly, and we are in regular conversations about how we can better bolster their security in the region.

Mrs. LURIA. So, if we consult with them regularly, have they expressed concerns over the pending reentry into the Iran deal?

Ms. BAKER. You know, I think this is a subject of active conversation, and I don't know that there is a unified opinion on that. That being said, we are committed to their security. We are committed to giving them the equipment, the capabilities that they need, the QME [qualitative military edge] that we have committed to.

Mrs. LURIA. So, I will shift back to General McKenzie. And I wanted to ask, why hasn't there been a more forceful U.S. response to Iran's aggression against our allies and our troops in the region? For example, we just saw this strike this weekend towards Erbil in the vicinity of the U.S. consulate. And Iran directly took responsibility for that strike.

General MCKENZIE. Ma'am, I would like to talk about that in the closed session, if I could, and I will be prepared to go into great detail.

I will tell you that I think our response has been measured, balanced. You know, after the strike on UAE by the Houthis, we deployed a fifth-generation fighter squadron to Al Dhafra Air Force Base. I sent a ballistic missile-capable destroyer to UAE's waters. And we have done a variety of other things to enhance their protection.

So, sometimes it doesn't require an immediate kinetic response in order to show a measured response that assures our partners and allies.

Mrs. LURIA. So, has our current policy of not having a 1.0 continuous carrier presence in the Gulf, have you seen any change in Iran's activities due to that? And do you think a carrier in the Gulf is essential for a deterrent? And lastly, balancing that versus the need for that asset within the 7th Fleet AOR for PACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command]? Can you—

General MCKENZIE. So, as I think about deterring Iran, I don't think in terms of individual platforms. I think in terms of the holistic capabilities of the joint force—land-based air, carrier-based air. And so, one is up; one is down. We have other uses for those carriers; they can't be everywhere. But we do innovative things. We bring bomber task forces in from the United States. There are a variety of things I can display to ensure the Iranians know that we have the capability to defend ourselves and to punish them if they continue their malign activities.

Mrs. LURIA. Right. So, in your assessment, these shore-based squadrons are providing, essentially, you, as the combatant commander, the same equivalent capability as a deterrent?

General MCKENZIE. Yes, and other capabilities as well beyond that.

Mrs. LURIA. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Thank you.

Mrs. McClain is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Perhaps I didn't hear that correctly. So, I will apologize in advance. Did I hear you say that Israel doesn't have an opinion or a position on the JCPOA?

Ms. BAKER. No, ma'am. I believe that they have expressed concerns.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. And they want us to go back in or not go back in? What is their opinion?

Ms. BAKER. Congresswoman, you know, I think it is a complex situation. I am not sure that there is a unified point of view.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. That is interesting, because when I was in Israel, it was clearly unified. So, I am just—

Ms. BAKER. We have heard Israel's concerns about the JCPOA loud and clear.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Okay.

Ms. BAKER. I want to acknowledge that.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. I just wanted to make sure I understood that because I didn't catch that.

Ms. BAKER. What we have committed to, in response, is the ongoing conversation we have about ensuring Israel's QME, its security. That was the case before the JCPOA. It is the case during, when we were in the JCPOA, and it will continue in—

Mrs. MCCLAIN. But, to be clear, they do have a response; they do have an opinion; they do have a position; and we are clearly aware of what that position is?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, that is my understanding, yes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you. Thank you. I just wanted to clear that up.

Thank you all for being here.

General McKenzie, the DOD Inspector General, in a recent report, stated that "Iran-aligned militias continue to have strong ties to some elements of Iraq's traditional security forces"—especially pointing out Iraq's federal police, under the Ministry of Interior. My question is this: Does the Department, or any agency of the U.S. Government, continue to provide assistance for Iraq's federal police and Ministry of the Interior? Do we provide funds to them?

General MCKENZIE. Congresswoman, I will have to answer—take that one for the record. I will come back with a precise answer to that question.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 117.]

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Okay. Thank you.

My next question is, just this weekend, Iran directly launched missiles in the vicinity of our consulate, right, in Erbil, Kurdistan. I'm just—I'm trying to understand this and come to grips with this, is how can we justify using taxpayer dollars to go to a police force that supports that, or dollars to support that?

General MCKENZIE. I will go into more detail in the closed session. But I can tell you that they were not targeting us with those strikes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. I think I want to believe you. I think the American people want to believe you. I am just not much for coincidences. It is scary when you are on the outside looking in. So, I look forward to the briefing to make us feel a little bit better about that.

General MCKENZIE. Certainly.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. And then, my second question is, are you familiar, obviously, with the Badr Corps?

General MCKENZIE. I am.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Okay. My question is, do you believe that that organization is best described as a terrorist organization?

General MCKENZIE. It has—let me come back to you on that, if you want a—let me put it better. I prefer to answer that in a closed session, if I can.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Okay.

General MCKENZIE. And I will be prepared to do that.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Slotkin is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thanks.

Thanks for you all being here. And having served, I think with all three of you in different capacities, I really appreciate your service and all the work that you have done for the country over many, many years.

I just want to continue the conversation on Iran. And, General McKenzie, you know, I was reading through your testimony, and there is a lot of discussion about Iran's nefarious activities in the Middle East and their ballistic missile program. Can you give us, as much as possible, just for the American public to understand, the stakes of their nuclear program; how close they are to turning fissile material into nuclear, you know, weapons-grade material; and your assessment of the threat, where it falls vis-a-vis the other threats coming from Iran?

General MCKENZIE. Thank you. And it is good to see you again, ma'am.

I would note, first of all, I think the Iranians are close. I don't think that they have made a decision to go forward. I think they actually, my assessment is, they want the sanctions relief that has already been discussed here. And so, I think the best solution would be to get an agreement where they are not going to pursue a nuclear weapon. So, I will say that as number one.

What really concerns me much more on a day-to-day basis are their ballistic missiles, their cruise missiles, and their land attack cruise missiles, which they have invested in heavily, at great cost to their population, over the past several years. Those capabilities directly threaten their neighbors today. And we saw an example of that in the attack on Iraq over the weekend—their ability to fire very accurate missiles into a neighboring country, something they have done before, including the attack on Al Asad Air Base in January of 2020. Those capabilities concern me, and I believe they concern our neighbors and friends in the region as well.

And that is, actually, one of the opportunities I will talk a little bit more in the closed session about. We have an opportunity to work on integrated air and missile defense. That is the great opportunity in U.S. Central Command right now, because that will address a cogent, imminent threat to all of our neighbors in the region. And it is a tremendous opportunity.

What that doesn't do is address the proxies, and their proxy forces are very active. Principally, we look at Iraq and in Syria, but they are obviously active in Yemen and in other places both in and out of the region. And that is another significant element that we work with our partners against.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Yes. I mean, certainly, as someone who used to work on Iraq and work in Iraq, Iran's terrorist activities were an everyday fact of life, frankly, if you were over there.

But I guess the question I have is, from the Chairman on down, the best military advice on a deal that would focus just on the nuclear parts of the Iranian threat. You know, we are going to be asked in some form or fashion to weigh in on this. There is, I think, a lot of briefing and a lot of work that is still going to go on to bring people up to speed. But, as I understand it, the deal, like the last deal, doesn't include the ballistic missile program and the terrorism. What was the best military advice from the Chairman on closing such a deal?

General MCKENZIE. I would defer to the Chairman on that deal—on that military advice.

I would note, the last deal did not include those ancillary elements that you talked about.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Right.

General MCKENZIE. And that is concerning.

Ms. SLOTKIN. But your best military advice at your level, since this is your AOR, you support a deal that would just be focused on the nuclear parts of the threat?

General MCKENZIE. I support Iran not having a nuclear weapon. And I would support the most effective way to get there. That will not solve all our problems.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Yes.

General MCKENZIE. But it would solve one problem. There are other areas that we need to work in. And I know that we have expressed interest in broadening the agreement. And my understanding is Iran has resisted that. But I think we do need to get to a broader agreement. But our number one priority is for them not to have a nuclear weapon.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Appreciate that.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mrs. Bice is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the witnesses being here this morning.

General McKenzie, has there been an impact to your AOR since the Russian invasion of Ukraine? And if so, can you describe the movement of the fighters, potentially from Syria or elsewhere, from the AOR into Ukraine?

General MCKENZIE. So, we watch the Russians closely across the region. They have not done much force balancing as a result of the

Ukraine operation. I can talk a little bit more about that in the closed session. Not much, really none significant.

We have not seen a flow of fighters, and I can give you some precise numbers in the closed session. We just haven't seen much of that yet out of Syria. I know there is a lot of discussion of that, but it is just not evident to us. And we look at that pretty closely. And that could change, but that is sort of what we see right now.

Mrs. BICE. I want to take a step back. We were discussing in previous lines of questioning the Taliban and what has happened in Afghanistan. During the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] markup, I offered an amendment which required the DOD to report to Congress the security impacts of the release of the prisoners from Bagram Air Base. Can you share some of the security impacts that you have seen from CENTCOM AOR as a result of the prisoners' releases?

General MCKENZIE. Sure. The release of the prisoners from Bagram, Parwan, and Pul-e-Charkhi, which the Taliban overran on or about the 13th to the 15th of August, first of all, injected about a thousand ISIS fighters back into the battlespace of Afghanistan. And that rejuvenated ISIS-K. And I believe the Taliban are going to grow to reject that—or to regret the decision to release those prisoners.

It also released thousands of Taliban fighters and others who returned to the Taliban. But I think their action, shortsighted, actually, has had a profoundly negative effect on conditions inside Afghanistan. I believe, ultimately, unless we are able to keep effective CT pressure on ISIS in particular, they will have the opportunity to grow and seek to strike us here in the homeland.

Mrs. BICE. And you mentioned that earlier.

Last question. It is widely known that large swaths of the telecom infrastructure throughout the continent of Africa are run on Chinese-produced hardware, including Huawei and ZTE [Zhongxing Telecommunications Equipment]. I have long been concerned with the network security threats from compromised Chinese-produced hardware. Can you talk about your level of concern with these types of threats from AFRICOM AOR?

General TOWNSEND. Yes. So, part of that extensive Chinese investment on the African continent is telecommunications, as you just mentioned. Huawei is endemic across the continent. They are building smart cities/safe cities, which are going to connect everything in those cities, and it will report back to Beijing. Usually, it reports back to Beijing before it reports to the host nation's capital. So, that is a fairly significant threat that I don't think we truly understand the implications of, and we won't until sometime in the future.

Mrs. BICE. Do you think our allies are aware of that?

General TOWNSEND. Yes. I believe that they are. But, at the same time, they are wanting to pull their countries into the modern world. And so, China is offering very lucrative technologies that they probably wouldn't be able to access otherwise. And so, I think they are going into it mostly with eyes open.

Mrs. BICE. Do you think there is any effective response that the U.S. could have to this type of coercion, if you will?

General TOWNSEND. I think probably—and I will defer to Ms. Baker—but I think probably having an economical alternative—right?—some competitive alternatives on the economic side in the free market is probably the best alternative.

Mrs. BICE. I love the word “free market,” General. Are we too far down the path, though, with the amount of equipment that has been installed in Africa, to really impact in a positive way the continent?

General TOWNSEND. No, I don’t believe that we are.

Mrs. BICE. Okay.

General TOWNSEND. In the countries, in the safe cities that are already being established, yes, but, elsewhere, I don’t believe that we are.

Mrs. BICE. Ms. Baker.

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, if I could just add to that, I think our strategy, as it relates to the telecommunications infrastructure and the China challenge, is twofold. The first, as General Townsend said, is we are trying to make sure that partners and allies in the region, not only in AFRICOM, but globally, have the information that we see about the threat that this poses to their infrastructure and the potential vulnerabilities that it will introduce into their systems. So, that is part one; it is sort of an educational aspect.

We are also—and this is not a Department of Defense lead, but as an administration—looking at technological solutions that would allow some of these countries to get after that telecommunications capability that they are so desperate to get, but in a way that is safer.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. The gentlewoman’s time has expired.

Mrs. Murphy is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

One of the areas that I have had some concerns about is Iran’s, both direct and through proxies, influence in Syria and Lebanon. In fact, I was able to secure a provision in the fiscal year 2020 Intelligence Authorization Act to ask the DNI [Director of National Intelligence] to report to us a bit about those efforts by Iran and how those efforts might impact U.S. interests and our allies, including Israel.

I was wondering if you all could provide me with a bit of an update on Iran’s efforts to expand its influence in Syria and Lebanon.

General MCKENZIE. Yes, ma’am, I will begin. I will begin with Lebanon.

As I spoke a little bit earlier, Iran sees Lebanon as the terminus of a land bridge to the Mediterranean that gives them a perch from which they can launch attacks on Israel. So, their interest in Lebanon is wholly transactional and is limited to that.

They exercise influence in Lebanon through Lebanese Hezbollah, LH, a shadow organization that we recognize has penetrated many aspects of Lebanese society, but then again, doesn’t actually do much for the Lebanese. And our response to that is, at my level, the mil-to-mil level, despite many other things we are doing for the government of Lebanon writ large, is we work very hard to sustain the Lebanese Armed Forces as the single military representative of the properly constituted government of Lebanon.

It is not a perfect relationship, but I believe in the long term our best solution, and the strategy that we follow, is to assist that armed force. I speak to the Chief of Defense of Lebanon frequently, and I believe that they remain our best opportunity to balance the other nefarious actors that are in Lebanon.

If we turn to Syria, again, Iran's interest in Syria, wholly transactional, wholly negative. It is the sort of middle part of a land bridge that allows them to get into Israel. It also serves as a staging place for potential attacks against Israel and allows them, also, to stage for operations inside Iraq, which is a long-term focus of Syrian foreign policy and military strategy.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. Thank you.

And then, just shifting a little bit, The Wall Street Journal reported yesterday that Saudi Arabia is considering accepting the Chinese yuan as payment for oil exports, which currently only accepts U.S. dollars. This is following up on news that Saudi Arabia had invited the Chinese President to visit the Kingdom on an official trip.

I think when I think about the prospect of a growing Saudi-Chinese relationship, it is a little concerning, especially given the historical partnership between the United States and the Kingdom. What is your assessment of current Saudi-Chinese relations and the impact that it could have on the United States relationship, as well as our influence in the region?

General MCKENZIE. Ma'am, I can only talk really in my lane at the mil-to-mil level. But I will note that I have a good relationship with the Saudi Chief of Defense. We talk frequently. It is my belief that we remain the preferred partner of choice for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They want our equipment, and they want more than our equipment, which is, demonstrably, the best available—they want the training, the education, and all the things that come with a partnership with America.

As for outreach to the Chinese and what they might do with oil sales there, probably not my lane to answer. I will defer to Ms. Baker on that.

Ms. BAKER. Yes, I mean, I agree completely with everything that General McKenzie has said. The only thing I would add perhaps, by way of context, it is clear to us, I think, that strategic competition has come to the Middle East, and perhaps has been there for quite some time. And so, we do see China and Russia, but particularly China, looking for economic and other inroads with some of our partners and allies.

As General McKenzie said, from a defense perspective, we believe that those relationships are strong; that we remain the partner of choice, and that there are things that we bring to the table, and that we are offering to partners and allies in the region, that, frankly, China and others can't match.

Mrs. MURPHY. Thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Waltz is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, thank you again for your service to this great Nation, and Semper Fi.

I just have a pretty straightforward question for you on Afghanistan. Just given how the withdrawal—not the 20 years, not the

mistakes that we made—but given how this withdrawal was conducted, which I think most would say was a bit of a debacle, any regrets?

General MCKENZIE. I think the end game for Afghanistan that played out in the summer of 2021, those events didn't begin in the spring of 2021 or the summer of 2021. You have got to look all the way back for that.

Certainly, I regret that we no longer have the ability to be as effective as we would like to be on the ground in Afghanistan and the CT mission. We are doing that over the horizon. As I have said, it is much harder to do that over the horizon. And I will talk in great detail about that in the closed session. So, I certainly regret that we no longer have that opportunity.

Mr. WALTZ. I have spoken with a number of the 13 Gold Star families who are now without their loved ones because of an ISIS fighter suicide bomber that was released from Bagram Prison just weeks before. I just received notes from Afghan women who served in the military alongside us that are being hunted down right now with the database that we left behind, with the payroll database. No regrets there? Nothing we could have done differently in terms of how we exited?

General MCKENZIE. I think you go back to the basic strategic decision that we were leaving, and everything else flows from that basic strategic decision that we are going to leave, and we are going to leave completely. And everything flows from that.

Mr. WALTZ. And was that the right decision, in your view?

General MCKENZIE. My opinion has been—and I have stated it publicly—that we should have retained a small presence in Afghanistan. I argued for 4,500 in the fall of 2020, and as we went into the spring of 2021, it was my opinion—and remains my opinion today—that about 2,500 would have given us adequate forces on the ground to retain an advising capability.

Mr. WALTZ. I appreciate that. And I appreciate your reminding this committee of that, because I think we are going to come to regret this decision. And I think it is going to be felt in the homeland, and it is going to be felt by future American soldiers that have to go fight their way back in to deal with it.

Ms. Baker, along those lines, the FY22 [fiscal year 2022] NDAA required an over-the-horizon strategy within 60 days of passage. That was about a month ago. You are a month late. Where is that strategy?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I don't know the exact progress of that strategy. I would be happy to look into it and get you an answer.

Mr. WALTZ. You don't know the progress of an over-the-horizon strategy required by law? The President of the United States has cited the over-the-horizon strategy. Secretary Austin, your boss, here, the last time he was here, said we can do over the horizon; we can keep America safe.

I am in my district saying, "The administration says we can do this," even though, as a special operator, I know better. What is the status?

General McKenzie, have you chopped on it and sent it up to OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]?

General MCKENZIE. That strategy is working right now. I have, we have had the opportunity to work on that strategy. And we actually have a practical strategy that is in effect right now. Again, it is something I would be happy to talk about in the closed session.

Ms. BAKER. And, Congressman, if I could just clarify, we do have a strategy for over the horizon. What I was referring to is the specific report. I don't know what the status of that report is, but I will get you an answer.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 121.]

Mr. WALTZ. Okay.

Let's take a step back. We just had a successful strike against the leader of ISIS, the successor, in Syria. And as I have stated in this committee before, but I think it is worth repeating, we had local allies that helped with that. Correct? The Kurds. We have bases in the region in Jordan, Turkey, Israel, northern Iraq, right?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I would still characterize that strike—and as you know, I am the officer who did it—I would still characterize—

Mr. WALTZ. Would you characterize that as over the horizon?

General MCKENZIE. That is over the horizon.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay.

General MCKENZIE. I would characterize that as an over-the-horizon strike—

Mr. WALTZ. Let's look at the map again. Do we have any bases in any neighboring country in Afghanistan?

General MCKENZIE. No. The difference is, as you note, the distances are far greater going into Afghanistan. Conceptually, it is the same thing. The distances are greater; the risks will be higher. And you are well aware of that, sir. I know you—

Mr. WALTZ. Right. Are we still reliant on Pakistan for overflight of our ISR assets?

General MCKENZIE. There is no other way to get into Afghanistan for me right now.

Mr. WALTZ. Pakistan has historically supported the Taliban, correct?

General MCKENZIE. They have also supported us. The air line of communication is a direct reflect of Pakistan's support of us.

Mr. WALTZ. But it is a bit like asking the arsonist for access for the fire department to put out the fire, should the homeland be threatened again. We are reliant, just to be clear, we are reliant on Pakistan for that overflight. Otherwise, we have got to fight our way in.

General MCKENZIE. We are reliant on Pakistan, but, as you know, we always reserve the right to defend ourselves anywhere in the world.

Mr. WALTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Crow is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to all of you for your service to the country and for coming in.

And particularly, General Townsend and General McKenzie, in your last appearance here before the committee, I applaud you for your long and honorable service to the country.

General McKenzie, I understand very deeply that decisions are made here in Washington, and strategic decisions are made, and the military has to carry it out. And I want to thank you for your service and candor before this committee and the American people on Afghanistan and related issues.

And, General Townsend, as much as I want to start with you, as a fellow Ranger, I am actually going to start and direct my comments to Ms. Baker.

Ms. Baker, what is the timeline for the National Defense Strategy? When can we expect to have that released by the administration?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I can't provide you with a specific date. I can tell you that it is in final coordination, and we are hopeful to get it over to you all and out to the public very soon.

Mr. CROW. Okay. And has that been held up because of the recent events in Ukraine?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I think it is only appropriate for us to take a look at what has happened in Ukraine and make sure that we are reflecting that in the strategy. I will say that the NDS [National Defense Strategy], as it has been developed over the course of the last year, we believe is very resilient to current events, and, in fact, continues to sort of—the bones of it are going to remain unchanged.

Mr. CROW. I can certainly appreciate that, and appreciate that you are taking into account some of the current events as well that have changed the landscape a bit.

Focusing in on Africa, we have this notion, this proclivity to kind of look at China as 10-feet tall sometimes. And certainly, they are making big investments, and it would be a mistake for us to underestimate them. But they are also making a lot of mistakes, right? And the use of Chinese labor, predatory economics, there is a lot of disenchantment that is growing within Africa in some places. So, they certainly have their weak points.

And we have our strengths. One of our strengths is the fact that we have a larger value proposition. We can bring to the table economic, humanitarian, you know, our moral authority, a lot of things.

How would you classify, very briefly, what is the elevator pitch for what is U.S.'s strategy in Africa? How would you explain our strategic posture in Africa and our goals?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman—and I would invite General Townsend to add to this—I think we have three goals in Africa right now. One is counter-VEO, and we do that by, with, and through our partners.

The second is, to that same point, we are working to strengthen those partnerships and strengthen—

Mr. CROW. Well, those are—I don't mean to interrupt—those are things to do. Those are tasks, enablers. What is our overarching goal? How do we want to be known in Africa? And how would you classify our engagement?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I mean, I certainly think that our goal in Africa is to be the continent's strategic partner of choice.

Mr. CROW. Okay. So, with that in mind, from your perch at DOD—and the U.S. Government often has silos, right? You know, the State Department has their silo and their lane, DOD, USAID. If our value proposition is to coordinate all of that and bring that all to bear in a way that our force multiplies each of those elements, how can we better do that and what are the impediments to achieving that right now?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I think we are always working to break down those silos, as you well know from your time in uniform.

I will say I think—and General Townsend, again, can jump in here—but it works better in the AFRICOM AOR. The integration of our defense, diplomacy, and development efforts; the fact that General Townsend has folks from USAID and State sitting right beside him at his headquarters.

So, I think we have made a lot of progress in AFRICOM. And frankly, there are things we can learn from AFRICOM and apply to other COCOMs [combatant commands].

General TOWNSEND. So, I think she has got our strategic goal exactly right. We want to be the strategic partner of choice. That translates into sustained U.S. access and influence on the continent. And that will come in handy in a million ways that we can't even foresee today.

Regarding the integration of, you know, the breaking down of silos, we try really hard to do that every day in AFRICOM. Dr. Baker has mentioned the fact that we have a 3D [three dimensional] command, built that way, purpose-built that way from the start.

One of my most senior leaders is a senior State Department ambassador. I have got a senior development advisor from USAID. We look at everything through that 3D lens every day to be the strategic partner of choice, and maintain U.S. access and influence.

Mr. CROW. Thank you. I appreciate everyone's hard work.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Just a programming note. As I mentioned, at 1 o'clock, we will have a classified brief upstairs on Ukraine. So, we will be concluding this at 12:45 to give the committee and everyone time to sort of move up and get settled. So, we will wrap this open hearing up at 12:45, and then, of course, we will be seeing all of these folks again at 2:30 for the classified portion of it.

Mr. Bergman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, General Townsend, thank you for your decades of leadership. It takes leadership to do what we need to do.

Ms. Baker, General McKenzie, let me lay out a scenario for you. Under the 2015 JCPOA, Russia removed all excess low-enriched uranium and nuclear materials from Iran. If a similar requirement exists in a new deal, and if Iran subsequently believes the agreement has been violated, or that it has not received the promised sanctions relief, will Russia, could Russia be in a position to return enriched uranium to Iran? In essence, would that potentially put

Vladimir Putin in the position of being the de facto judge of compliance with the new agreement?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, as you know, there is no agreement yet. And there are—

Mr. BERGMAN. Again, it was a scenario.

Ms. BAKER. Understood. We don't know whether Russia will play that role in a future agreement. Certainly, in whatever agreement is reached, if an agreement is reached, we would seek to pressure-test it against any kind of interference of that kind from the Russians. To this point, we have not seen any indication, though, that they intend to act in that way.

Mr. BERGMAN. Okay. General McKenzie, in an UNCLASS [unclassified] way, given the ongoing need to deploy U.S. air defenses to Europe, how do you assess our, the United States, ability to deploy and/or sustain similar systems in the Middle East as a stop-gap to help defend our Gulf allies, or at least until they are much better able to defend themselves?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, over the last few years, we have worked closely with our Gulf allies to expand their ability to defend themselves. And, in fact, some of those countries have very significant air defense inventories. Saudi Arabia has over 20 Patriot batteries. UAE has a number of Patriot batteries as well. And as you know, UAE actually possesses THAAD [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense], the high altitude system which was tested successfully just last month.

So, the way that we actually accommodate the basic fact of life that we don't enough U.S. Patriots to service all of our needs globally, is through enhanced cooperation with our allies. We are still there. We still have Patriots in the theater. We still work with them. But what you do is you try to think about the way nations can cooperate with each other, and I will talk a little bit more about that in the closed session. But there is a path forward.

And really, the countries in the region are the ones that are directly threatened by the Iranian threat. They are focused, I believe, in a way they have never been focused before by the imminence of that threat, the fact—the quality and number of the Iranian missiles and LACMs, land attack cruise missiles, and UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles], is very concerning to them. So, there is a real convergence of interest on the part of our partners now.

Mr. BERGMAN. Okay. And basically, I think my next question is going to be best answered in the closed, classified session about the engagement with our partners. You kind of alluded to that, and the preparation and the training and the cooperation to confront and deter a nuclear Iran, should that possibility become a potential reality.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back and save my questions for the classified session.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Carbajal is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And, General Townsend and General McKenzie, thank you for your many years of service to our country. I say that with great gratitude for the American people. We are lucky to have had you in your posts.

And thank you, Secretary Baker, for your service now.

General McKenzie, I applaud the Department's commitment to improve its policy in order to better protect civilians, especially with Secretary Austin's new memorandum entitled "Improving Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response." As we have seen several times just in this year alone, the U.S., tragically, can get it wrong sometimes. With this new memorandum from the Secretary, including standing up a Civilian Protection Center for Excellence, and issuing a forthcoming Civilian Harm Mitigation Response Action Plan, how do you believe this directive will impact the AOR's operations going forward?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, thank you for the question.

I would like to begin by saying nobody wearing this uniform ever wants to kill an innocent civilian. Nobody ever wants to do that. There is nothing that is more completely antithetical from the way we operate. We have made mistakes and we have killed innocent civilians, and we acknowledge that. And we are going to do everything we can to get better and narrow that gap between our ideals and our actions.

I will tell you, with Secretary Austin, it is much more than a memorandum. It is the energy he has brought to the problem. I have several officers that are full-time committed to a study that is going on right now that will form the basis for future actions.

But, in the meantime, you know, we are not waiting on that study. As a result of the RAND study and other studies that have come out, we have undertaken a set of things in the short term to improve our own processes within Central Command, as General Townsend has within Africa Command.

So, we don't want to minimize this problem. We recognize that it is, in fact, a significant and a critical problem that cuts right to the very heart of what we want to do, as representatives of the United States.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

General Townsend, Africa nations are increasingly influential in the United Nations and other international forums. Currently, 3 of 15 United Nations Security Council seats are held by African nations—with the Kenyan U.N. ambassador giving an extremely powerful speech at the UNSC meeting regarding Ukraine.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of public misunderstanding about the AOR. You have been commander of AFRICOM for over 2½ years. What are some of the misconceptions you hear from both American officials and the American public about the AOR? And how can we approach the AOR in a more productive and effective manner?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman.

I think some of the main misconceptions are probably that, first of all, Africa doesn't really matter to us; that we don't have to worry about Africa. And maybe America has been able to largely ignore Africa in the past, but that is not the future. And that is why I said in my opening statement: America cannot ignore Africa. So, that is probably the number one misperception.

And then, I think they don't understand that we have a lot of interest and a lot of partners there every day. We have a great re-

lationship with much of Africa. We are the partner of choice for much of Africa, and just educating the American public on that.

You mentioned the vote on Ukraine. And you are right, the Kenyan ambassador did give a powerful speech and he voted to condemn what the Russians were doing there.

But I am a little dismayed about much of the rest of the continent. About half of the continent voted to condemn Russia. The other half either abstained or did not vote, and that concerns me. Only one country, though, did vote in support of Russia, Eritrea. But the other—one-half of the continent didn't really cast a vote, and that concerns me a bit. But many of the countries that we are the strongest partners with did join us, and the world, in condemning Russia.

So, I think the future for this country's security is in Africa, and we have to lean into it.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

General Townsend and Secretary Baker, around the world, violent extremism has been a very difficult problem to address, in particular in the AFRICOM AOR. From a report on recent trends in militant Islamic group activity in Africa the past few years, it appears there has been an alarming increase in violent events by these groups, including Al-Shabaab and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghrib area.

What is the biggest impediment to being able to better address these threats? Do you think the U.S. needs to amend our strategy in the AOR?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I will start, and then, of course, turn to General Townsend.

I think the challenge that we face in the AFRICOM AOR—and part of what is driving the growth in VEOs—is challenges of underlying governance and underlying security. And so, a lot of our effort in the AOR is dedicated towards institutional capacity-building, building that security—

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 121.]

The CHAIRMAN. I apologize, the gentleman's time has expired. I should point that out upfront.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Even if you are in the middle of answering the question, we try to wrap up as close as possible, to respect other members' time.

Mr. Banks is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, the original JCPOA was finalized in July of 2015. Iran tested missiles in October 2015, before the deal was even implemented in January of 2016. All of this directly contradicted the Obama administration's objective to change Iran's behavior for better through the deal. Then, after the implementation of the JCPOA in January of 2016, Iran tested missiles again in March of 2016.

General Lloyd Austin, the then-commander of CENTCOM, said in a Senate hearing at the time that, despite the JCPOA, quote, "There are a number of things that lead me to personally believe

that, you know, their behavior is not—they haven't changed any course yet." End quote.

General McKenzie, 6 years later, do you agree with then-General Austin's assessment of Iran's behavior following the implementation of the JCPOA?

General MCKENZIE. With regard to ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, land attack—

Mr. BANKS. That it didn't change their behavior?

General MCKENZIE. Their behavior has not changed.

Mr. BANKS. Do you think that the Islamic Republic of Iran will ever give up its revisionist intentions in the region? And if not, what does a successful counter-Iran policy look like?

General MCKENZIE. Well, I think you begin by Iran not possessing nuclear weapons, and that needs to be an overarching—that is our overarching goal. I think it is better for everyone if Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon.

We should, then, try to find ways to bring their ballistic missiles, the other elements of their national power that they value very highly, under some form of control. And you are right, they have proven extremely resistant to that up until this time.

Mr. BANKS. I appreciate that candidness.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies reported, on August 10, 2021, that Iran possesses the largest and most diverse missile arsenal in the Middle East and is a major hub for weapons proliferation. If some form of the JCPOA is restored, how do you expect Iran to behave regarding missile proliferation amongst partner and proxy groups?

General MCKENZIE. Based on past behavior, I would expect not much modification in that behavior.

Mr. BANKS. And can you tell us, specifically, how CENTCOM is prepared to deal with that?

General MCKENZIE. So, we work to prevent their successful attacks by working with our partners for integrated air and missile defense across the theater; by enhancing the capabilities of all our partners' air defenses, in effect. And that is the best way to do it.

I would also argue that Iran knows that, if they strike us, we are prepared to respond very powerfully, if need be. So, we attempt to achieve deterrence. And that has largely worked over the past couple of years.

I note the attack last weekend, but let me emphasize again, that attack was actually not directed at us.

Mr. BANKS. Understood.

General, as one of his first foreign policy initiatives, President Biden delisted the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen as a foreign terrorist organization. But, instead of de-escalating tension, the Houthis doubled their attacks on Saudi Arabia in 2021 and occupied the U.S. embassy compound in Sana'a and took the local staff hostage. In late 2021 and early 2022, the Houthis also attacked UAE three times, killing three people.

In the way the Houthis have conducted themselves, General, do you think that the Houthis are terrorists?

General MCKENZIE. I would defer to Policy, Ms. Baker, for a discussion about that, the delisting decision. But I can tell you, from an operational military perspective, they continue to wage war on

their neighbors, both Saudi Arabia and UAE, and they wage irresponsible, reckless war without regard for casualties.

Mr. BANKS. I understand as well that you would probably defer as I ask: Why do you think the Iran-backed Houthis increased hostility since the Biden administration delisted them as a foreign terrorist organization?

General MCKENZIE. I am sorry, would you say that again, please?

Mr. BANKS. Well, why do you think that the Iran-backed Houthis increased their hostility after the Biden administration delisted them as a foreign terrorist organization?

General MCKENZIE. I think they still—I think the Houthis still believe there is a military means to achieve their end. I don't believe they are right in that, but it doesn't matter what I think; it is what they think.

Mr. BANKS. How does CENTCOM plan to address the Houthis' behavior moving forward?

General MCKENZIE. So, we have worked closely with both our UAE partners. In the wake of this most recent attack, we sent fifth-generation fighters to UAE. We moved a ballistic missile defense-capable destroyer to the vicinity of UAE. We have conducted refueling of UAE fighters that are flying combat air patrol. And we have shared intelligence with the UAE on that. So, we have done some very discrete, measurable things to help our partners in UAE.

Mr. BANKS. I have got 30 seconds left. Ms. Baker, why did the Biden administration delist the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, you know, I think no one in the administration—certainly no one in the Department—takes lightly the threat that the Houthis pose in the region. And as General McKenzie said, we are attempting to get after that problem, and we are providing any number of avenues of support, both to the UAE and to the Saudis.

Mr. BANKS. This is outrageous.

With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Speier is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie and Townsend, we can't begin to thank you enough for your extraordinary service, but know that we are very grateful.

Let me start with, the report that was just released a few days ago detailing the significant failures in training and physical security at the U.S. Cooperative Security Location in Kenya, where we lost a service member and two DOD contractors. It was alarming to read that there was inadequate focus on force protection, inadequate understanding of the threat, inadequate security force preparation, and problems with mission command.

What has that taught us in terms of looking at other cooperative facilities in Africa as to our responsibility to harden them in terms of security?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, ma'am.

Well, first, let me say we certainly regret the loss of the lives of our three Americans there at Manda Bay. We studied this situation

in great detail over the last 2 years and have applied the lessons learned across the African continent. All the things you mentioned that are in that report were all true, regretfully so.

I think they go back, they stem back to incorrect threat assessments. So, when commanders and leaders look at threat assessments, that is their first understanding, and that leads them down—can lead them down the wrong path unless they—

Ms. SPEIER. So, are you saying now that all of our facilities in Africa have been hardened and have greater protection? Or do we have some areas where we need to do more? And should you alert us to those?

General TOWNSEND. All of our facilities have been improved since the attack at Manda Bay. We applied those lessons across all of them. However, we do have to continue that work. We have got to improve our foxhole every day. That work continues, and we do have requirements in that area.

Ms. SPEIER. All right. Thank you.

Ms. Baker, in the NDAA last year, an amendment that I authored to request the status of African women—excuse me—Afghan women and girls since the Taliban takeover was due March 1st. We haven't received it. When will we receive that?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I don't know the status of that specific report, but I would be glad to look into it and make sure we get it to you.

Ms. SPEIER. All right. Would you report back to the committee, then, as to when we can expect that report?

Ms. BAKER. Yes, absolutely.

[The information referred to was not available at the time of printing.]

Ms. SPEIER. All right.

Ms. Baker and General McKenzie, as far back as October, DOD said it would be making payments to the families of those who were killed on the August 29th drone attack. Can you tell us the status of those payments?

General MCKENZIE. Ma'am, we are moving forward with those payments in the interagency. I can talk a little bit more about it in the closed session. CENTCOM stands ready to carry out instructions on how to execute those payments, once a decision is made.

Ms. SPEIER. Well, I thought we already made a decision to make payments to those families.

General MCKENZIE. The modality of the payment and how it is actually going to be executed.

Ms. SPEIER. So, are you saying that there hasn't been any payments made to these families yet?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I just want to be a little careful about what we discuss in the public session, because we don't want to put these families at further risk, but we would be happy to get you that information and talk about it in the closed session this afternoon. There has been progress made—

Ms. SPEIER. I just want to make clear that, when we make a commitment, we deliver on it. And we have a history—

Ms. BAKER. We will deliver.

Ms. SPEIER [continuing]. Of not doing that. So, I have your word that we are going to deliver to those families?

Ms. BAKER. This has the attention of the highest of our leadership, yes.

Ms. SPEIER. Can any of you tell us the extent of RT [Russia Today] in Africa?

General TOWNSEND. The extent of what, ma'am? I didn't catch it.

Ms. SPEIER. Russia Today.

General TOWNSEND. Right. So, I can't specifically talk about that particular media outlet. I can say this: Russia has extensive media engagement on the continent, and that is greatly facilitated by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the oligarch, and his media arm, in addition to—you know, he has the Wagner mercenaries, but he has got a media arm that does that.

Ms. SPEIER. You know, I do think our committee has to take very seriously the impact of RT around the world. I just came back from Latin America, where not only is it pervasive and ubiquitous, it is perceived to be objective. It is perceived to be just a legitimate TV network. And—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. She makes an outstanding point, however, on the need to engage more in the information warfare.

Ms. SPEIER. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Gaetz is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GAETZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I completely concur with my colleague regarding the risk that RT poses, and it seems to appear more legitimate and objective when Members of Congress go on RT. And so, I associate myself with the gentlelady's comments, and perhaps you could share them with the gentleman from California who chairs the Intelligence Committee, who I have seen on RT talking about legislation, giving them credibility.

Ms. Baker—

Ms. SPEIER. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GAETZ. I only have a few moments, but I would love to chat with you about it further.

Ms. Baker, you said, in response to Congresswoman Bice's questions, we have heard Israel's concerns about the JCPOA. What are they?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I think Israel remains concerned, as do we all, about Iran's malign activity in the region beyond its nuclear program. And that is something that we discuss with them regularly.

Mr. GAETZ. So, their concern is a better resourced Iran, whether through sanctions relief or cash payments, would be more capable in taking action against Israel? Does that [inaudible] it?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, that is my understanding, yes.

Mr. GAETZ. And can we learn anything about whether or not cash payments are on the table as part of a renewed JCPOA?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I am not able to discuss the details of the agreement, only because there is no agreement that has been reached at this point. I think there has been progress made toward an agreement, but, of course, the issues that are remaining are some of the most complex. So, you know, I—

Mr. GAETZ. I understand that in a negotiation, you know, nothing is settled until everything is settled.

Ms. BAKER. Exactly.

Mr. GAETZ. But there are contours of an agreement, as we get closer to it. And since the administration has been working on an Iran deal, I was wondering whether or not we could take off the table infusions of cash. Because when I asked General McKenzie some years ago whether or not the cash payments that the Obama administration permitted to Iran increased that very malign activity that Israel is concerned about, that we are concerned about, his answer was that there was more malign activity following the last JCPOA.

Ms. BAKER. Again, Congressman, I understand the concern. I am just not able to discuss specifics of the agreement that is being negotiated by the State Department, and—

Mr. GAETZ. So, you are not in position to be able to say that cash payments are off the table?

Ms. BAKER. I am not in a position to be able to discuss the specifics of the agreement in any form.

Mr. GAETZ. General Townsend, is Vladimir Putin bringing African mercenaries to the fight in Ukraine?

General TOWNSEND. I have heard those reports. We haven't seen that yet. We are watching for that very closely. However, I do believe they are bringing Wagner fighters from Africa to Ukraine.

Mr. GAETZ. And, General McKenzie, have you seen Vladimir Putin successfully bring Syrian mercenaries to the fight in Ukraine?

General MCKENZIE. Not yet. We watch that closely. I can't say one or two people haven't gone, but we haven't seen any systemic movement.

Mr. GAETZ. Great.

I will yield the remainder of my time to my Florida colleague, Mr. Franklin.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Thank you, Mr. Waltz.

General, in your testimony and throughout your statement—I am sorry, General McKenzie—in your written testimony here today and throughout the questioning, you made it clear that you consider Iran to be the biggest threat to stability in the CENTCOM AOR.

During my travels throughout the region, and most recently, in Israel 2 weeks ago, the recurring theme is the malign influence of Iran's proxies. You also spoke of those in your testimony. Do you consider the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] to be one of the drivers and facilitators of these proxies?

General MCKENZIE. The IRGC and its elite element, the Quds Force, absolutely at the very heart of these activities.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay. It has been reported, and as recently as yesterday in the press, that the Biden administration is considering delisting the IRGC as a terror organization. I know that decision involves a lot of factors that are beyond your lane, but strictly on your military advice, do you think that would be a good idea?

General MCKENZIE. I will defer on that one. I would not—I think they certainly are very disruptive and dangerous in the region. That remains my best military advice, and we should treat them like that.

Mr. FRANKLIN. And if they are emboldened or strengthened, do you think that would make them a more formidable—

General MCKENZIE. I think anything you do to embolden or strengthen them would have a negative effect across the region.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Sure. Okay.

Echoing some of my other colleagues here with respect to Israel, people we met with there were crystal clear that, historically, whether it has been cash payments from the Obama administration or any activities that lead to putting money in the coffers of Iran, there is a direct correlation to the pace of intensity of attacks when that money flows in there. Is it your opinion that buying Iranian oil and lessening sanction on Iran would lead to an increase in IRGC activity?

General MCKENZIE. I think any—I think the Iranian economy as a whole is penetrated thoroughly by the IRGC. So, it is hard to see where money flows inside the Iranian economy and how much of it is used for legitimate reasons and how much of it is used for illegitimate reasons.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Roger that. Thank you, General.

And I appreciate my colleague yielding his time.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could just follow up on that point, so we—I forget exactly when—but we left the JCPOA in 2017, 2018, something like that. So, we went right back in, maximum sanctions.

Would you say that Iranian malign activity since we left the JCPOA has increased?

General MCKENZIE. I would, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. And that is the point, as you have said. The point of the JCPOA is to stop them from getting a nuclear weapon. It would appear that Iran's ability to do malign things in the region doesn't seem to be tied to the JCPOA, because they are still incredibly active, even though we have been out of it for 3 years, 4 years now. So, just want to let members chew on that one.

Ms. Escobar is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I just want to piggyback a little bit on the comment that you just made about the JCPOA. When you look at the evolution of Iran's malign activity, as you mentioned, we really do have to look at the withdrawal from the JCPOA, instead of looking at just a narrow window. It is just like with our conversations on Afghanistan. We need to take a step back and look at the broader historical movement.

But, anyhow, thank you for making that point, and I just wanted to put an exclamation point on it.

Thank you so much, Chairman, for this hearing and for making sure that we have the opportunity to speak to our panelists.

And to our panelists, I just want to express my gratitude to all of you for your service to our Nation, and for being here today to share your wisdom. And I look forward to the conversations in closed session as well.

I have the honor and privilege of representing El Paso, Texas, which is home to Fort Bliss, America's second-largest military installation and largest joint mobilization force generation installation in the Army.

And obviously, the regions of the world that you all are postured in have long been plagued by violence, instability, and war. In some cases, that has been furthered by us. But as we look to the future, and especially beyond our withdrawal from Afghanistan, ahead of the challenges that we need to confront, not just today, but going forward, challenges posed by Iran, China, Russia, and the terrorist groups that they empower in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM areas of operation, we have got to be strategic with our engagement and our posture in this ongoing battle, especially that battle between democracy and authoritarianism.

General McKenzie, I was just in Israel, and I had the opportunity to see for myself the warmer relations that exist between Israel and Arab states. It really is a source of great hope, and it is clear that the relationship has created some stability in the region.

And I am pleased that CENTCOM, under your leadership, has embraced this new reality. But we know that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a source of tremendous friction, and that threat is always just over the horizon. The fighting last May is a prime example of how the conflict in that region can very quickly escalate and become violence. Everyone there, and here, we are all concerned that the cycles of violence will only continue.

But, from an American national security perspective, do you believe that such rounds of violence have adversely impacted America's defense posture? And if so, is there a national security impetus for the United States to take an active role in improving the reality on the ground, in order to help create the conditions needed to achieve a two-state solution? And if so, how?

General MCKENZIE. Ma'am, the entry of Israel into the AOR was a significant historical event. And so, what it has done is, it is sort of the operational expression of what began with the Abraham Accords and other normalization activities that go forward. And so, the relationship that Israel is developing with its Arab neighbors is going to be profoundly significant in the years ahead.

Something that is an irritant to those good relationships is, of course, the struggle with the Palestinians. And that is an irritant to the Arabs, to many of them, and I think it is a significant factor. Anything we could do to reduce that, to reduce that as an irritant to those relationships, would contribute to not only Israeli security, not only security across the region, but ultimately our own security.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much.

And I have less than a minute left. But, generally speaking, to what extent does U.S. security assistance and coordination allow our regional partners to better coordinate with each other, and remove some of the regional security burdens that would otherwise fall more directly on American shoulders?

General MCKENZIE. So, we have seen over the past year, year and a half, the opportunity for nations to share U.S. resources that one nation purchased, another nation had need of. There are processes that we go through to allow that, what we call a third-party transfer. And we have seen that work successfully. The specifics I would rather put into the closed session, but I am prepared to talk about that. But, yes, it is. It is something we have found valuable.

I would simply tell you, we also struggle sometimes with the United States bureaucracy, when we attempt to do these moves. Sometimes we are our own most significant source of friction when nations want to share things like that.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much, General McKenzie.

I am out of time. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PANETTA [presiding]. Thank you.

The chair recognizes Mr. Carl from Alabama.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

I apologize for popping in and out, but, as you well know, it is one of those days.

Thank you to all of our speakers. I know it is time-consuming for you to come here and take time away, but I appreciate you coming here.

And oorah, General. I raised a Marine myself. So, I am very proud of that.

General Townsend, you mentioned in your statement the growing Chinese influence in AFRICOM and their possible plans to establish a naval base on the western side of the continent, allowing the Chinese to do this project. How can we expand our naval capabilities to ensure that the Chinese do not have a dominant posture in this area?

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, I would defer to the Department and the Navy on how we might expand our naval capabilities there. The naval capabilities that I have today are sufficient to do what AFRICOM must do. They are not essential to precluding what China does on the Atlantic coast of Africa. They will be essential if China is successful in gaining a base there. In my view, we would have to invest more naval presence there and activity to further protect America from a Chinese naval base on the Atlantic coast.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, sir, and that is what I was after. I appreciate that.

And I give my time back. That is the only question I have. Thank you.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, Mr. Carl.

The chair recognizes Mr. Scott from Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ma'am, gentlemen, I appreciate your service.

I slipped out for a few minutes to meet with a man named David Beasley, who is the head of the World Food Program. And I want to read to you one of his statements.

"We get 50 percent of our grains out of the Ukraine-Russia area. It's going to have a dramatic impact on food cost, shipping cost, oil, and fuel. This is a catastrophe on top of a catastrophe."

He pointed out that Sri Lanka right now—and I will just read the headline from Bloomberg—"Shockwaves from War in Ukraine Threaten to Swamp Sri Lanka."

In 2021, more than half of the grain for the U.N. World Food Program came from Ukraine. It is a tremendous exporter of wheat, corn, sunflower oil. Russia and Ukraine combined account for 30 percent of the global wheat exports. As this invasion continues, it is more and more unlikely that Ukrainian farmers will be able to plant their crops, or fertilize their crops, or harvest their crops, or

export any of this food supply into the world. Developing countries in the Middle East and North Africa will feel the impact of this.

And my question is, have you considered the instability and unrest that will soon be taking place around the world in your respective AORs? How can we help alleviate the suffering and the instability that we believe will come from this? And what funding resources do you need to take on this challenge?

General TOWNSEND. Thanks, Congressman.

So, your point is exactly right about the food instability especially impacting Africa. In fact, just in the last day or so, the World Health Organization has declared a humanitarian disaster in Ethiopia as being the greatest one on the planet. So, food security, or insecurity is a critical part of that on the African continent.

I would say, as I said in my opening remarks, I think—and in my written statement—I think it is imperative that we continue to fund USAID, because they invest in a robust way on the African continent. It is probably one of the best investments America makes there. And I think there is going to be, because of the point you just made, there is going to be more of that required.

General MCKENZIE. Sir, I would note two countries, in particular, in my AOR will be threatened. One is Egypt; the other is Jordan. Both depend significantly on imports from Ukraine, and they will face a growing food insufficiency as we go forward.

I think the long-term solution is you would like to find a regional way to actually supplant exporting food into the region, but that is a long-term solution. We are looking aggressively now for short-term solutions that will bring wheat and other foodstuffs in for the short term. And obviously, you are going to have to find other sources, other global sources, rather than Ukraine and Russia. And that is going to be hard to do with a third of the market coming from those two areas. This is a very pressing concern, and I appreciate your calling it out.

Mr. SCOTT. Ms. Baker.

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I couldn't agree more with what Generals McKenzie and Townsend have said. I would add to General McKenzie's list perhaps Yemen as being a country that will face an impact here.

You know, what we are seeing now are the second- and third-order of consequences of Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. As General Townsend said, USAID has the lead on this issue. We are strongly in support of USAID's efforts and we will continue to work with them in an interagency fashion.

Mr. SCOTT. I think what is happening around the world right now is because of the shortages and the anticipated shortages is that people who were receiving some are now receiving none, and a lot of people have had the assistance they were getting through the World Food Program cut in half. I think as many as 13 million people in Yemen actually receive some type of assistance through the World Food Program.

I just—I can't emphasize to this committee and to the world enough the devastation of what Vladimir Putin has done and the disruption around the world. And I think that the pain and the suffering that that individual has caused is only now beginning to be felt. And I think the world is going to be hurting for several years

because of what he has done. And I just hope that we are paying attention to the potential civil unrest and instability that comes from the lack of a global food supply, because of what Vladimir Putin has done.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Thank you.

Ms. Jacobs is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you so much.

And thank you to our witnesses. It is great to see you all again.

And I first wanted to ask you, General Townsend: Recent reporting brought to light U.S. support to the Rapid Intervention Battalion in Cameroon under the 127e program. The Rapid Intervention Battalion has been repeatedly implicated in human rights abuses. So, why was U.S. support to the Rapid Intervention Battalion not blocked on human rights grounds? What steps is AFRICOM taking to ensure that any partner forces supported under section 127e have not committed gross violations of human rights? And wouldn't one way to prevent this in the future be to subject 127e to the same kinds of Leahy vetting standards we use for nearly every other security assistance program?

General TOWNSEND. So, there was an Amnesty International, I think, report in 2017 that brought this to light. That caused the Department and AFRICOM to look closely at our support, our engagement with the Rapid Intervention Battalion in Cameroon. In 2019, our relationship was ended with that element. In fact, we have drawn down pretty much—in 2019 and by early 2020, we ended all of our engagement with Cameroon.

We are starting to re-engage there on a very selected basis with some few programs, but not with the Rapid Intervention Battalion. And we do go through extensive vetting with all of our programs, training programs, on the continent, to include the 127e program.

Ms. JACOBS. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Baker, nice to see you.

Recent years have seen U.S.-trained officers in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, and Gambia overthrow national governments in military coups. Many of these countries had issues with gross human rights violations in the past, particularly Burkina Faso and Mali, and lacked robust security sector governance and democratic progress that made this kind of challenge, frankly, predictable.

On February 4th, I, along with Chairman Meeks, sent a letter to President Biden, [Secretary of State] Blinken, and Secretary Austin on our strategy in the Sahel and requested that the administration evaluate its security sector assistance and other efforts over the last 15 years to assess their efficacy and areas for improvement. And I look forward to this briefing and hope we can work together on this going forward.

But how have these developments impacted DOD's thinking on which Sahelian and West African militaries we provide security assistance to?

Ms. BAKER. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you for the question.

I should note just upfront that we do have security assistance restrictions as a result, as you said, of the recent coups in both

Burkina Faso, Mali, and also Guinea. So, for starters, that is in place.

As you know, we work closely with the State Department to ensure that we are vetting all security assistance partners, in compliance with U.S. law, with local screening biometrics, as it is required. There is always more that we can do in this space. And so, we will look forward to getting you a briefing on what we are working on.

Ms. JACOBS. Okay. Thank you.

Frankly, I think some of these challenges with the folks we trained was a bit predictable. So I want to make sure we are going beyond just the immediate vetting, to make sure we are contributing to the broader democratic governance of our partner countries.

Ms. BAKER. Absolutely. And I would just say, as General Townsend has said, one of our focuses in the AFRICOM AOR in particular is that institutional capacity-building that will help us, we hope, to move beyond these kinds of incidents.

Ms. JACOBS. Great.

And, General McKenzie, the DOD has significantly undercounted civilian casualties compared to numbers provided by credible independent organizations, despite the fact that these organizations undertake interviews, site visits, and other measures that DOD does not generally have. Additionally, recent New York Times reporting found that DOD prematurely dismissed many civilian casualty reports at the assessment phase without doing basic due diligence, like basic internet searches or searching in Arabic instead of only in English.

And earlier this week, I, along with my colleagues, sent a letter to DOD urging it to take steps on preventing and mitigating civilian casualties moving forward. As CENTCOM implements changes in procedures for tracking, assessing, and investigating civilian harm, will CENTCOM revisit the many past cases that appear to have been prematurely dismissed? And going forward, what changes do you believe need to be made?

General MCKENZIE. I will begin by saying nobody wearing the uniform of the United States is interested in killing an innocent person. We work very hard to minimize that. But the battlefield is a deadly and dangerous place, and we have made mistakes. And, yes, we have killed innocent people. And we have tried very hard to mitigate that.

As you know, the Secretary has undertaken a large, comprehensive, exhaustive, and high-energy project to further shape the efforts of the Department. And we are full participants in that going forward.

I would tell you, in the interim, based on various reports that have been issued, we have undertaken 10 discrete actions within U.S. Central Command that will support the larger effort, but we are not waiting on that to actually happen. And I will be happy to send those 10 things over, so that you can examine them.

But the Secretary is seized with this. His energy is palpable, visible, and we are moving forward on it.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you. We appreciate the Secretary's efforts, and we will look forward to that briefing.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mr. Franklin is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I have a couple more questions that I didn't quite get to before.

And again, back to General McKenzie. As Chairman Smith had noted, Iranian terror activity has been significant, whether there is a JCPOA in place or not. I understand that. Whether it is Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen, the Quds Forces in Iraq, the common denominator is the neighborhood bully. And I hate to use that expression because it is obviously a lot more significant than that, but they are the bad guys. They are the bad actor in the neighborhood. They are the ones that want to destabilize everything.

I hate to ask this—I wouldn't normally ask this question, because I understand your place to provide advice and counsel to the administration. But based on the way things unfolded in Afghanistan, and knowing now the questions we were asking and weren't getting answers to before, things are coming out that there was a lot of advice provided by the Pentagon that was not heeded by the administration.

And so, before we get this treaty that the administration seems really bent on getting back into into place, I think it is really essential that the details are discussed.

Has the White House engaged you for your regional security expertise in the negotiation process of this Iran deal?

General MCKENZIE. Sir, the person I engage with is the Secretary of Defense on policy.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay.

General MCKENZIE. And I have a constant dialog with the Secretary on all issues within the CENTCOM AOR.

Mr. FRANKLIN. And I understand the Secretary has got a lot on his plate. But where he is getting his primary source of the boots-on-the-ground feedback is going to be from you?

General MCKENZIE. I think he gets it from me. I think he gets it from Policy, you know, a variety of sources.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay. So, my concern is what we are seeing on the press out there, in the press, of what may be coming out—delisting IRGC, buying Iranian oil. Those, from what you have told us here, would not be in alignment with your advice on what is best from a military perspective. And I don't expect you to comment on that. But it is either that or they are not asking for your advice at all. And I find either of those to be very concerning, and we are going to watch very closely on how this treaty develops.

But I thank you all. And I am assuming that this will be the last time the two of you testify before us, but I want to thank you, as a former military member, for your decades of service. It is a lot of hard work and not very gratifying a lot of times, but your Nation appreciates your work.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

And I just want to clarify on the last answer, General McKenzie said he is speaking to Secretary Austin, and that is the chain of

command here. The White House is not ignoring the Department of Defense's opinion on this. They are speaking with Secretary Austin, who is speaking to his people, and that is where the information goes back.

And the larger point is it's we have civilian control of the military for a reason. You know, the President is ultimately the one who has to make the decisions. If we want to just do whatever the military told, we wouldn't have civilian control of the military. You take the advice, you process it, and you make the best decision you can. And that is what they are trying to do.

Ms. BAKER. And, Mr. Chairman, if I could, I do just want to clarify that both the Chairman and the Secretary have had opportunities to provide that advice to the President and to offer their recommendations.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification. Mr. Gallagher is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Baker, your testimony references the emerging concept of integrated deterrence multiple times. You say the Department "will continue to lean forward in strengthening multilateral security cooperation in order to strengthen integrated deterrence and to address threats, particularly those emanating from Iran."

Later on, you say, "The integrated deterrence means creating advantages for ourselves, our partners, and our allies while creating dilemmas for our competitors." I would like to talk a little bit about the dilemmas you envision under integrated deterrence.

I know this is a CENTCOM hearing, but I wanted to ask quickly about Russia. Your portfolio is, obviously, very vast. Would it be a fair characterization of the administration's policy that sanctions are designed to deny the Russian government resources they would otherwise have available in order to punish their behavior?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I would say that the sanctions that the U.S. led, and that are not only U.S.-owned, but multinational at this point, are designed to impose consequences on Russia for its illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So, that's a yes, to punish their behavior. And by punishing Russian behavior, we are creating dilemmas, as you put it, or at least costs for the Russians, right, cost imposition? Correct?

Ms. BAKER. Yes, Congressman.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So, under the same logic, if another actor—say China—provided the Russian government with funding to help them evade sanctions, that would, in a sense, create an advantage for Russia—in the sense that it would mitigate some of the costs we impose via sanctions, right?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, yes, and we are having a conversation with China about our concerns in that regard.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I think this is a very important point, not only because, as we evaluate whether China increases its support to Russia, but, to be clear, if our adversaries have access to more resources, that creates an advantage for them. And if our adversaries have more resources and are more capable, that creates dilemmas for ourselves and for our allies.

And I bring this all up because I think it's a self-evident point that is getting lost in the shuffle, that policies that give our enemies more resources give them an advantage, and by the administration's own admission, undermine its vision, such as it exists, of integrated deterrence.

And I bring this up because, as my colleague, Mrs. Luria, brought up before, we may be days before, according to some—days away, according to some reports, from signing a deal with Iran, which will, in any scenario, provide a massive windfall, to the tune of billions of dollars, to the world's primary state sponsor of terrorism. And everything else aside, indications are that this deal will provide unprecedented sanctions relief, well outside the scope of its nuclear program, to the Iranian government, including from terrorism-related sanctions.

And I don't think you have to be an opponent of the original JCPOA to understand that this makes no sense. Just take the administration's own words at face value. Their strategy calls for creating advantages for our allies and dilemmas for our adversaries, but this deal, by providing massive resources to our primary adversary in the Middle East, will create dilemmas for us and provide advantages to our foremost enemy.

And just a quick question on that point. To your knowledge, is the Central Bank of Iran still financing terrorism?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, that is a question I would have to defer to Treasury and others.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Okay. I have asked this question in other committees. I have asked the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] Director. It is a matter of public record, the Treasury Department has put a—it doesn't take arcane or exquisite intelligence to know the answer. But we will take it back.

I guess, since you responded to an earlier question from my colleague, Mr. Crow, I believe, that the NDS is now being delayed because of the crisis in Ukraine—is that correct?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, I wouldn't say it is being delayed because of the crisis in Ukraine. It is in final coordination, and we hope to have it to you soon.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Okay. Are you rethinking any of the assumptions underlying the NDS as a result of Ukraine? Or do you see it as a validation of integrated deterrence?

Ms. BAKER. Congressman, we believe that the strategy, in fact, took into consideration some of the behavior that we have now seen Russia exhibit, and that it is resilient to what we are seeing from the Russians at this time.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So, do you believe integrated deterrence succeeded in the case of Russia-Ukraine?

Ms. BAKER. I think what you are seeing right now is integrated deterrence in action, bringing together the sanctions, the allies and the partners, all—

Mr. GALLAGHER. I have 7 seconds. But what you are effectively saying is your entire theory of deterrence requires on a country getting invaded and pillaged in order to galvanize the West into action. And I just don't want to put our eggs in that basket.

I am out of time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I appreciate it.

I will point out we have sanctioned many nations long before they invaded another country. Certainly, we had sanctions, you know, against Russia. We have sanctions against Iran now. And I think the central dilemma that this administration is trying to wrestle with is, we also don't want Iran to get a nuclear weapon. And that is kind of the tradeoff on that that we are trying to go through.

And I have not seen any other reasonable plan, other than negotiating with Iran, for how we stop them from getting a nuclear weapon. Now the details of that negotiation, obviously, matter. What are we giving up? What are we getting? But we can't act like, for no apparent reason whatsoever, we are just giving Iran sanctions relief, so they can engage in more mischief. No, there is a very, very, very big reason why we are engaged in these negotiations, and that is we don't want them to have a nuclear weapon.

Now you can debate whether or not we are going to get there on that, but I think that is worth at least throwing in there, into that conversation and discussion.

We have no further requests for time.

I want to thank you all for your testimony. We will see you in a couple of hours on the classified side.

And with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 17, 2022

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 17, 2022

STATEMENT BY
SASHA BAKER
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR POLICY
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

BEFORE THE 117TH CONGRESS
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 17, 2022

Opening

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on our defense posture and policy in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) areas of responsibility, alongside Commanders General McKenzie and General Townsend.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy, my portfolio spans the entire globe, including a vast network of U.S. allies and partners in the Middle East and Africa. These partners are a force multiplier, and ensuring our interests are aligned and our shared goals are resourced appropriately is among my top priorities.

The Biden Administration is committed to strengthening and expanding the U.S. alliance and partnership architecture, because these relationships are a critical strategic asset. In the Middle East and Africa, the United States is better able to disrupt terrorist networks, counter proliferation, and resolve complex armed conflicts if we do so in cooperation with allies and partners. The Global Posture Review completed by the Department at the end of last year also recognized the importance of engaging with our allies and partners on our overseas posture, and working in concert to align our resources against strategic objectives.

In the Middle East, the Department of Defense (DoD) employs security cooperation, multilateral exercises, consistent and high-level defense policy engagements, supported by our overseas posture, to increase stability and secure U.S. interests. Most important, the military instrument of power supports diplomacy, this Administration's tool of first resort. By enhancing partners' capabilities and capacities to provide for their own defenses and to address regional problems, the DoD can advance U.S. interests more efficiently and effectively.

In Africa, our policy objectives are to counter violent extremist organizations that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. interests; strengthen ally and partner networks to support mutual security objectives; and address targeted strategic competition concerns that present a military risk to the United States. Additionally, we support whole of government activities to prevent and respond to crises that threaten U.S. nationals, facilities, and interests. We seek to accomplish these objectives working primarily by, with, and through our allies and partners.

Middle East

With respect to the Middle East region, the Department remains focused on counterterrorism in order to prevent attacks on the homeland; countering Iran's destabilizing activities; working together with allies and partners to support freedom of navigation; and demonstrating our commitment to regional partners and allies, including through security cooperation and supporting humanitarian crisis response, when necessary. The Department's approach to the Middle East is also informed by growing threats to a free, stable, and open international order, including those posed by Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), that seek to increase their influence in the region. Across each of these efforts, the Department prioritizes countering risks to U.S. forces.

Strategic Competition

While the Department works to advance U.S. strategic objectives in the Middle East and Africa, Russia and the PRC are also pursuing their own interests and influence in the USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM areas of responsibility. Their objectives often run counter to those of the United States, threaten U.S. force protection, and seek to limit U.S. operational flexibility. Both countries use weapons sales as a leading tool to deepen their influence and compete with the United States. Russia seeks to reshape Middle East security structures by offering a no-strings attached weapons sale process and by exploiting governance vacuums to increase leverage and influence from the eastern Mediterranean into North Africa, and south and east into the Red Sea and Gulf.

As articulated in the China Military Power Report submitted to Congress in November 2021, the PRC intends to reshape the international order to better align with its authoritarian system. Like with Russia, the PRC is aggressively seeking inroads at the expense of both our influence and our direct security interests. As part of its efforts, it is establishing overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to project and sustain military power at greater distances, including in Africa and the Middle East. As the Department coordinates with partners on shared threats and seeks to address our partners' security needs, it will also continue to limit Russian and PRC influence in the region through sustained engagement and by demonstrating the superiority of U.S. security solutions – including equipment and training – to remain the partner of choice.

Iran

The Department of Defense employs a wide range of capabilities to deter and defend against threats from Iran and its proxies, and maintains readiness to provide the President with all options necessary to keep the United States secure. The Department supports Department of State diplomatic efforts to return to mutual compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and restore verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program. The Department's core activities are to protect U.S. forces, support the defense of our partners from Iranian malign activities, synchronize our capabilities and actions with those of our allies and partners to deter Iran, and counter Iran-backed destabilizing activities.

Iran continues to play a destabilizing role in the region through its development and proliferation of short and medium range ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial systems, which have been used by Iran and its proxies to launch attacks against a wide range of commercial shipping, oil facilities, and even U.S. forces.

The Department is stepping up its efforts to interdict Iranian proliferation and expose its maritime malfeasance, so that Iran can no longer hide behind the veneer of plausible deniability. In July 2021, the Department released photos and analysis on the Iranian attack on the merchant ship *Mercer Street*, which killed two civilian crewmembers. In response, the G-7 issued a statement condemning Iran's reckless actions. This past December and January, the U.S. Navy interdicted two shipments of rifles and urea fertilizer, used for explosives, which were en route from Iran to the Houthis in Yemen. Iran's latest violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which prohibits weapons transfers to the Houthis, shows its determination to violate

international norms in order to proliferate destabilizing weapons which have been used to attack U.S. forces, our partners, and civilians throughout the region.

Iraq and Syria

In Iraq and Syria, the Department is committed to the enduring defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It pursues this objective through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which brings together 79 nations and 5 international organizations to provide an array of military capabilities, funding, and political support to the campaign against ISIS. Since 2014, the United States and its partners in the Global Coalition have made progress in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Still, the group remains a threat – demonstrating the intent to reconstitute and terrorize – as evidenced by recent attacks including on a detention facility holding ISIS detainees in northeast Syria. The United States continues to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga forces, and other vetted local partners as they lead in the fight against ISIS.

In Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) completed the transition to an advise, assist, and enable role, fulfilling commitments made during the July 2021 U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. The Department completed this transition ahead of schedule and announced on December 9, 2021 that no U.S. forces with a combat role remain in Iraq. This early transition was possible because of the tremendous progress achieved by the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga in developing the capability and capacity to lead the fight against ISIS in Iraq. As part of this process, the Department redeployed combat equipment from Iraq and transferred military vehicles to the Iraqi security forces; downgraded the OIR command from a 3-star to a 2-star; and OIR transitioned its Support Command and Special Operations Command out of Iraq. The United States welcomes this new phase and will continue to support the Iraqi security forces at the invitation of the Iraqi government. The Department will also continue to provide enabling support, within means, to NATO Mission – Iraq, which conducts ministerial-level advising.

The Department is committed to the Defeat ISIS mission and committed to maintaining a presence in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government in order to advise, assist, and enable the Iraqi security forces. At the same time, force protection remains of the highest priority. The United States is prepared to defend U.S. forces in Iraq from Iranian-backed threats and respond to threats and attacks. This Administration has made clear that it stands ready to take necessary and proportionate actions to defend U.S. forces.

In Syria, the Coalition continues to work by, with, and through the SDF and other vetted Syrian partner forces to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS. The January 20, 2022 ISIS attack against the largest detention facility in northeast Syria demonstrates the continued threat the group poses and the need to maintain counterterrorism pressure on ISIS. The attack highlights the need for members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to provide additional funding to improve the secure and humane detention of the more than 10,000 ISIS fighters held by the SDF. It also underscores the urgent need for countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and prosecute, where appropriate, their nationals who are detained or displaced in northeast Syria.

Military activities to support the enduring defeat of ISIS are just one piece of a broader whole-of-government strategy designed to address the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that gave rise to ISIS and that ISIS continues to exploit. The Department continues to work across Federal departments and agencies to best support our local partners in Iraq and Syria and encourage international action to address the challenges that remain in order to ensure ISIS's enduring defeat.

Yemen

In Yemen, U.S. policy objectives are to advance a durable resolution that ends the now seven-year civil war there, cease Iranian-supported cross border attacks against Saudi Arabia and the UAE, alleviate humanitarian suffering, and to defeat the threat from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS elements in Yemen. While the United States – with the Department of State in the lead – continues its effort to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the Iranian-backed Houthi armed group continues to threaten U.S. partners, U.S. interests, and U.S. persons. With Iranian support, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated missiles and lethal unmanned aerial systems against U.S. partners – including against infrastructure and airports where American citizens and other civilians are present. The Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea threatening a major maritime corridor. Despite Saudi willingness to support a comprehensive ceasefire, over the past year, the Houthi leadership has prioritized offensive operations in the city of Marib and repeated attacks on key infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over an agreement on a UN-brokered ceasefire proposal.

The Department of Defense is providing support to both the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the defense of its territory and people, including through long-standing support to those partners' air defenses. The Department also continues to provide limited, non-combat support to the Saudi-led Coalition for the purpose of defending Saudi Arabia and the other members of the Coalition from external threats, consistent with the policy President Biden laid out in his February 4, 2021 remarks at the Department of State. Roughly 60 DoD military advisors are deployed to help Saudi Arabia's Armed Forces defend their territory from threats emanating from Yemen. In U.S. engagements at all levels with the Saudi-led Coalition, reducing harm to civilians is a consistent priority and message.

Inside Yemen itself, the Department of Defense maintains a small presence of U.S. special operations forces to combat the al-Qa'ida and ISIS terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests, and that have capitalized on Yemen's instability. Along with our Gulf partners such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, U.S. efforts have degraded AQAP's ability to conduct external attacks and ISIS's presence.

Partnerships: The Gulf, Egypt, and the Levant

The Department's objectives for a more stable and secure region are best met by working in lock step with our partners and allies. Over the past year, the immense value of our strategic defense partnerships in the region was made evident when these partners provided unprecedented support for the evacuation of over 124,000 American citizens, Afghan citizens, and third country

nationals from Afghanistan through the Department's network of military bases throughout the region. In particular, the Department is grateful that Qatar and the UAE continue to host evacuees. Qatar plays a particularly key role in facilitating sustained evacuations of American citizens and the flow of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

The Department will continue to lean forward in strengthening multilateral security cooperation in order to strengthen integrated deterrence and to address threats, particularly those emanating from Iran. In 2021, the Department restarted annual bilateral defense meetings with partners from Egypt to Iraq and Israel to the UAE. U.S. forces joined Exercise BRIGHT STAR in Egypt in September 2021, which tested countries' ability to work together to address regional challenges across air, land, sea and cyber domains; the International Maritime Exercise 2022 in Bahrain, which brought together 60 nations and international organizations in February; and other multinational exercises.

Each of these engagements is a step toward building out an integrated deterrence framework that synchronizes U.S. efforts and capabilities with those of our partners and allies. Integrated deterrence means creating advantages for ourselves, our partners, and our allies, while creating dilemmas for our competitors. The Department will achieve this through increased interoperability and coordination and communication across land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace to meet ongoing threats and new challenges that do not respect borders and are not limited to a single terrain. With the persistent threat of air and maritime attacks from Iran and Iranian-backed groups, integrated regional operations have taken on new importance. The Secretary of Defense highlighted DoD's focus on greater multilateral cooperation with regional partners during his November 2021 address at the Manama Dialogue.

The Department is also committed to deepening cooperation and coordination between the United States, Israel, and other partners across the Middle East and Africa. The revision of the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility to encompass Israel will help facilitate the Department's efforts to build upon ongoing normalization efforts to enhance multilateral cooperation in the security sphere. Just last month, Israel's president made an historic visit to the UAE; Israel and Bahrain signed a security cooperation agreement; and the King of Bahrain welcomed Israel's prime minister in Manama. The Department is poised to facilitate additional cooperation, in accordance with our steadfast commitment to Israel's security.

Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts, and is a key stakeholder in resolving the Yemen conflict. The Saudis are an important partner for cooperation in promoting regional stability, security, and countering Iranian influence. The UAE remains a willing and capable partner in regional security efforts, including on maritime security and counterterrorism operations in Yemen. The UAE, along with our other Gulf partners, provides us with critical access, basing, and overflight for regional operations including over-the-horizon efforts in Afghanistan. Oman serves as a critical waypoint for DoD operations in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility and is a consistent voice for moderation in regional affairs. Kuwait remains a key partner for force-flow and logistic support to U.S. forces throughout the region, and continues to host the fourth largest presence of U.S. forces outside the United States. Qatar is a critical host for U.S. forces and is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain is a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and has served as a

forward-looking leader in the region through its enhanced security cooperation with Israel. Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a critical resource in protecting the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, and the International Maritime Security Construct, an eight-nation consortium that helps to maintain the free flow of trade for legitimate mariners in the region.

Egypt remains a key strategic partner to the United States and a partner for improving regional stability in Gaza, Libya, Iraq and throughout the region. Suez transit and Egypt's responses to U.S. overflight requests remain critical to U.S. commercial interests and military responsiveness. The Department supports Egypt's military modernization, and in particular Egypt's efforts to bolster its counterterrorism capabilities and border and maritime security efforts. The Department also continues to maintain U.S. contributions to the Multinational Force and Observers, or MFO, which monitors the implementation of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Department will continue its efforts to promote stability and security in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan remains a steadfast partner to the United States and a leader for stability throughout the region. The Department continues to work with Jordan to bolster its ability to secure its borders against the continued threat posed by ISIS and address new and emerging threats such as drug smuggling, unmanned aerial systems, air and missile threats, and other challenges posed primarily by Iran. In Lebanon, the Department continues to work closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces, or LAF, to help them counter violent extremist organizations, secure their border with Syria, maintain internal stability, increase professionalism, and preserve stability in Lebanon. The LAF's reputation as a capable, nonsectarian and responsible institution also undermines Lebanese Hizballah's false narrative that its weapons are necessary to defend Lebanon.

In the Middle East as in every region of the world, DoD's ability to advance cooperation and deepen partnership is most effective when U.S. interests and U.S. values are aligned. As DoD works with its partners toward security and stability in the region, it is also coordinating across the U.S. Government to address human rights concerns and reinforce the U.S. interest in a stable and rules-based international system reinforced by a network of alliances and partnerships. In practice, this translates into consistent engagement by senior DoD officials encouraging support for fundamental freedoms and expressing concern for corruption, inequality, and disinformation trends that contribute to less stable, less secure partners. The Department regularly raises the need to prioritize civilian protection and offers programs to help partners reduce civilian harm.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia

From 2001 to 2021, our military members served with courage and conviction in Afghanistan to defend the U.S. homeland, support our allies and partners, and ensure that Afghanistan did not become a terrorist safe haven. We are all grateful to our military personnel and their families for their sacrifice, including the 13 service members who were killed in a suicide bombing at Hamad Karzai International Airport on August 26, 2021, while courageously helping with the evacuation of 124,000 civilians, including 5,500 Americans, from Afghanistan. I want to thank Congress for its consistent support of our military personnel in their past and present missions. Gen. McKenzie will detail how our over-the-horizon counterterrorism mission will reinforce our enduring policy of ensuring terrorist

organizations are not able to use Afghanistan to conduct attacks against the United States, our Allies and our partners.

Although we have withdrawn U.S. forces from Afghanistan, our service members and civilian employees remain hard at work to advance our interests in Afghanistan, which includes supporting the Department of State's efforts to facilitate the departure of American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and our Afghan allies from Afghanistan. We continue our efforts to support interagency partners to care for and resettle Afghan evacuees who have come to the United States. The Department is also working hard to aid our interagency partners in efforts to mitigate the overwhelming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Our colleagues at the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Treasury can provide further information on the support the United States is providing to mitigate Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

Initially, there were predictions that the U.S. military withdrawal would signal a disengagement from the broader region, but these concerns have proven unfounded as the United States continues to engage its Central Asian partners in all spheres, including on security cooperation issues, and at all levels. We continue to work with our Central Asian partners to develop and maintain long-term security cooperation programs focused on bolstering regional capabilities. These programs help counter a wide range of threats to the region and to the U.S. homeland. The United States and its partners in Central Asia continue to cooperate on the shared interests of countering terrorism and violent extremist organizations while also enhancing border security in support of regional stability.

We also work with Pakistan across several issues that are important to our national interests. We continue to seek and build upon areas of mutual interest to improve regional security and our bilateral relationship. Counterterrorism remains an area of mutual interest as several violent extremist organizations seek to target U.S. and Pakistani interests. Pakistan has also participated robustly in counter-piracy efforts, meant to ensure a rules-based international order with free and open maritime transit. Strategic stability in South Asia remains an enduring interest of both Pakistan and the United States. There are several ways we can continue to cooperate with Pakistan to pursue these interests.

Africa

In Africa, the Department remains focused on countering violent extremist organizations that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. interests, strengthening ally and partner networks to support mutual security objectives, and addressing targeted strategic competition concerns that present a military risk to the United States. The Department's approach to Africa, as in the Middle East, also considers growing threats to a free, stable, and open international order, including those posed by Russia and the PRC, which continue to increase their influence on the continent.

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations

The destabilizing effects of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) throughout the continent, but most acutely in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, represent a major security challenge. This challenge garners the attention of many U.S. allies and partners, as well as our strategic competitors.

Progress has been exceptionally challenging in the Horn of Africa region due to persistent

regional political-military instability, exacerbated by issues such as draughts, famine, and flooding. DoD remains committed to supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the countries contributing forces to that mission, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi, and Uganda. We seek to address the threats posed by al-Shabaab and ISIS Somalia by adopting a tailored, effective, and sustainable strategy to achieve our national security interests in Somalia and East Africa. As an element of that focus, we are reviewing our posture in the region and looking closely at the safety of U.S. personnel operating in Somalia and the current terrorist threats throughout the region.

The ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia is a tragedy causing immense human suffering and threatens the unity of the Ethiopian state. We fully agree with United Nations and African Union leaders: there is no military solution to this crisis. At the same time, we value Ethiopia's contribution to AMISOM, which has remained constant despite Ethiopia's ongoing internal security conflict. Kenya also continues to be a strong DoD partner in AMISOM and we mutually benefit from our bilateral engagements. Uganda remains a critical partner to East and Central Africa security efforts, including through AMISOM contributions and CT operations against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. While we value Uganda's key role in AMISOM, we continue to have concerns over Ugandan Security Force conduct during last year's presidential elections and some reports of human rights abuses. We also support the Department of State in promoting accountability for those individuals who have violated the Ugandan people's human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Djibouti, also a key AMISOM Troop Contributing Country and as host to Camp Lemonnier with about 3,500 DoD military and civilian personnel, remains a critical U.S. partner. Djibouti's geostrategic location near the Bab al-Mandab strait is a critical node in supporting DoD operations at the seam between the AFRICOM and CENTCOM areas of operations. Djibouti also hosts a constellation of foreign militaries to include U.S. partners like France and Japan, as well as the PRC, whose first overseas naval base is six miles from Camp Lemonnier, and which has grown substantially over the past year.

In the Sahel and West Africa, DoD supports whole of U.S. government and multilateral efforts to address the drivers of insecurity, contain the spread of violence, and stabilize the region. The Department recognizes France's repositioning plans and activities, and remains committed to working with our allies and partners to ensure a smooth transition. DoD will continue to support the militaries of our African partners, and our European partners supporting them, in their fight against VEOs throughout this vast region. Additionally, we continue to work closely with international partners to coordinate security and civilian protection efforts, including the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), France's transition and reorganization of Operation BARKHANE and Task Force TAKUBA, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Multinational Joint Task Force, and bilateral security forces of Chad, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. Military assistance to Mali and Burkina Faso remains suspended due to the August 2020 coup and January 2022 coup respectively. Despite vast current and emerging challenges, to include Russia's growing malign PMC Wagner presence in Mali, DoD remains focused on improving coordination of these efforts, and preventing the spillover of instability into littoral West Africa. DoD also continues to work closely with West African partners to professionalize their armed forces, including focusing on the adherence to the law of armed conflict, and the

prevention of and accountability for human rights violations.

In West Africa, DoD is also concerned by the rising rates of piracy, illicit trafficking, and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Gulf of Guinea that impede global trade and put freedom of navigation at risk. Alongside the Department of State, DoD continues to work with global and regional partners to support maritime security in the South Atlantic, including through the provision of security cooperation activities and joint exercises that enhance the capabilities of partner nation navies and coast guards.

Strengthening Ally and Partner Networks

The Department of Defense will continue to build partnerships in Africa to support conflict resolution, combat threats posed by violent extremism, limit and/or deny malign strategic competitor advances contrary to U.S. and African interests, improve the institutions of defense ministries, and strengthen democratic norms and the rule of law. Enhancing our alliances and partnerships in Africa through diplomatic, development, and security initiatives will enable us to be more effective in protecting and securing U.S. interests in and related to Africa.

DoD supports a holistic approach to the security challenges in Africa, ensuring that U.S. security and governance approaches are mutually reinforcing and sufficiently comprehensive. This holistic approach is evidenced by the diverse set of programs DoD implements in Africa to help build resilient defense institutions. For example, in coordination with Department of State, DoD's training and exercises promote a respect for law of armed conflict, civilian oversight over the military, human rights, and gender diversity in partner nation security and defense sectors. Other aspects of this approach include key leader engagements, counter-terrorism training and operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, military training exercises, foreign military sales and other security-related assistance, intelligence sharing, institutional capacity building, crisis response, and humanitarian assistance.

DoD values the support of our European and international partners who have deep ties to Africa. The Sahel and West Africa highlight the assistance of European partners taking the international lead to counter VEOs and achieve mutual objectives. In Mozambique, the European Union and Portugal have provided training to the Mozambique military in its fight against ISIS-Mozambique. In East Africa, the UK is a key partner in countering al-Shabaab and ISIS Somalia. The Department of Defense welcomes the support of like-minded partners to help bring stability and peace in support of African solutions to African challenges.

In North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia continue to be key security partners who broadly support our common security objectives on the continent and the southern Mediterranean. As the only two major non-NATO Allies in Africa, Moroccan and Tunisian partnership remains exceptionally strong and these two countries host the largest land and naval exercises in the USAFRICOM area of responsibility as well as other training events. Morocco and Tunisia maintain professional militaries capable of interoperability with U.S. forces and they desire stronger roles as regional leaders, particularly in counterterrorism. Both countries have committed to helping export security to other African partners through training, exercise, and support to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Mali and the Central African Republic.

Nevertheless, and despite their security importance, we urge a swift return to the path of Tunisia's parliamentary democracy and support a UN-led political process to advance a durable and dignified solution to the conflict in Western Sahara

In Libya, the United States, in support of the UN-facilitated political process, continues to urge the quickest possible path forward to presidential and parliamentary elections. It is vital that Libyan parties find a peaceful and non-violent way forward with interim governance that can legitimately guide Libya forward to those elections. The Libyan people have clearly expressed their commitment to choosing their own leaders and building a more secure future for all Libyans free from foreign interference. In this regard, we fully support the October 2020 Libyan ceasefire agreement and its call for the departure of all foreign forces, fighters, and mercenaries, including Russian elements. DOD supports interagency efforts to promote Libyan elections and implementation of the Libyan decision calling for the withdrawal of all foreign elements. The Department's force posture in Africa is primarily concentrated in the Horn of Africa, with additional presence in West Africa. This is augmented with modest security cooperation investments, which are also directed to the Maghreb, Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and West Africa/Littoral state regions. Our engagements elsewhere in Africa, such as in Central and Southern Africa, are designed to keep an open dialogue and encourage positive changes toward more robust bilateral efforts, where possible.

Strategic Competition

DoD's work is important in the light of malign strategic competitors' interests in Africa. The PRC remains a serious competitor on the continent where its expansive economic, security, and political engagements, coupled with increased military expansion and power projection activities, provide it access and influence. Its activities too often undercut regional and global efforts to strengthen local defense institutions and long-term stability grounded in international rules and norms. As the PRC's overseas development and security interests expand, we are observing a steady rise in its military and logistical support system to project power and protect those interests. A global People's Liberation Army (PLA) logistics network could interfere with U.S. and Allied military operations and eventually support offensive PLA operations. We are seeing increased indicators and warning signs of this in Djibouti, the PRC's first overseas military base, where the PLA has violated international norms by lasing U.S. military equipment and sought to restrict Djiboutian sovereign airspace, all while steadily expanding and increasing its military basing facilities, posture, and influence. DoD is committed to halting the spread of these destabilizing activities in Africa through strong partnerships, multilateral engagement, and support of interagency initiatives that provide our partners with options that adhere to international norms. U.S. Defense Attaché Offices (USDAOs) and Offices of Security Cooperation (OSCs) play critical roles throughout the continent in monitoring PRC activities and are frequently the only DoD presence in most countries throughout Africa. We are returning, and have returned, officers to posts that were previously affected by a 2020 plan to shutter Defense Attaché Offices. We continue to explore all options to ensure we have sufficient attaches to achieve U.S. policy objectives.

Concurrently, Russia's security influence operations and outsourcing to private military companies directly undermine our efforts to advance U.S. interests and values in Africa.

Together with interagency partners, we are concerned about Russia's expanding military partnerships, resource extraction, and malign influence in Africa.

Conclusion

With the support of Congress, the Department of Defense remains well positioned to support our allies and partners, compete with Russia and the PRC, and deter and defeat our adversaries across the Middle East and North Africa. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

Sasha Baker**Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy, Department of Defense**

Sasha Baker was sworn in as the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on February 14, 2022. In this role, she serves as the primary assistant to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in formulating, coordinating, and integrating national security policy and plans within the Department of Defense.

Ms. Baker was most recently Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning at the National Security Council. She previously served as national security advisor for Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, and as Deputy Chief of Staff for Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, for which she received the Department of Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal.

Ms. Baker joined the civil service as a Presidential Management Fellow at the Office of Management and Budget, where she served in the Homeland Security and National Security divisions and later as Special Assistant to the OMB Director. She began her public service career with the House Armed Services Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, supporting bipartisan congressional reviews on a variety of national security topics.

Ms. Baker received her B.A. from Dartmouth College and earned a Master in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL STEPHEN J. TOWNSEND, UNITED STATES ARMY
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED FORCES COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2022

**INVESTING IN AMERICA'S SECURITY IN AFRICA:
A CONTINENT OF GROWING STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

INTRODUCTION:

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished Committee members, I am once again honored to testify before you on behalf of over 10,000 service members and civilians of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). As I enter the final months of my command, there has been no greater honor than serving alongside the men and women of AFRICOM who work so hard, even going in harm's way, to defend our nation and way of life. Since I last addressed this committee, AFRICOM underwent its third DoD-directed review in as many years—the “Global Posture Review”—ensuring our campaign plan aligned with the new National Defense Strategy (NDS) and bolstered the nation's deterrence to better safeguard vital U.S. interests. Throughout these reviews, AFRICOM has remained focused on our mission of protecting and advancing U.S. interests—including maintaining a free, open, and stable international order—on the African continent. During my three years at AFRICOM, Africa's geostrategic importance has gained increasing global recognition, driving our strategic rivals to successfully leverage both soft and hard investments into political influence, sometimes malign, and hard military advantage. As my tenure at AFRICOM winds down, I am certain of two things—first, access to a stable and prosperous African continent will be increasingly important to the United States, politically, economically, and militarily and will become even more so in the future; and second, America will increasingly rely on her modest investment in U.S. AFRICOM to protect her interests and advance her objectives in this dynamic and important region of the world.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Potential vs. Obstacles... Opportunities vs. Challenges

Africa lies at a global crossroads. This enormous continent's environment is complex—ripe with opportunity but burdened with challenges. It holds tremendous geo-strategic significance while being shaped by the competing forces of prosperity and poverty, peace and conflict, plenty and famine, good governance and corruption and democratic backsliding. These tensions are evident throughout Africa—a continent whose socio-economic importance to the future cannot be ignored.

Africa sits astride six strategic chokepoints and sea lines of communication¹, enables a third of the world's shipping², and holds vast mineral resources. When access through these strategic chokepoints is blocked, global markets suffer. Last March, the grounded container ship *Ever Given* blocked the Suez Canal and froze 12 percent of global shipping for 6 days³. This same type of dilemma could limit the flow of U.S. forces as well. Beyond its geostrategic location, Africa possesses vast untapped energy deposits, including one third of the world's mineral reserves and

rare earth metals. These resources are the key supplies that America relies on to produce 21st century technologies⁴ and transition to clean energy, including mobile phones, jet engines, electric-hybrid vehicles, and missile guidance systems. The winners and losers of the 21st century global economy may be determined by whether these resources are available in an open and transparent marketplace or are inaccessible due to predatory practices of competitors.

African Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is a global leader averaging 4.9 percent per year since 2000, outpacing global GDP growth by 2 percent over the same period⁵. This growth makes the continent a powerful part of the global economy—for both supply and demand. *The Economist* projects this impact will only increase when a quarter of world population will live in Africa by 2050—a billion of whom will be under 18 and entering the labor force⁶. How those acting on this continent—including Africans, allies, partners and competitors—mitigate or exacerbate the drivers of fragility, like climate change and violent extremism, will determine whether this human potential serves as a catalyst for growth or a contributor to global crises.

Climate Crisis: Exacerbating Fragility, Undermining Resilience

Climate change serves as a risk accelerant especially when coupled with other persistent fragility factors. Climate change compounds the challenges African nations face, raising new obstacles to overcome with respect to population, migration, and urbanization. Creeping ramifications of climate change include increased water shortages in the Sahel, storm surges in southern Africa, and lower crop yields in the Horn of Africa⁷. All of these issues will have profound negative repercussions on the security environment my successor, and those who follow, will undoubtedly face. Sub-Saharan Africa could see as many as 86 million internal climate migrants by 2050⁸. While the majority of migrants will likely remain within Africa, some 11 million are projected to cross the Mediterranean into Europe⁹.

The demands of population displacement and forced migration reaffirm the need for a whole-of-government approach bolstered by the right authorities and timely funding to tackle these challenges. The impact of climate change in Africa can best be addressed by strategic investments in adaptation and resilience, focusing on land and water resources, sustainable and clean power, empowering local leaders to advance community-based approaches to climate adaptation, and other areas where our development partners so expertly lead. Success with climate resilient development and climate mitigation reduces the need for America and our partners to engage in the defense sector.

Geo-Strategic Significance Drives Strategic Competition

Africa's global impact drives global influence. Africans are increasingly influential in the United Nations (UN) and other international fora. Currently, Africa holds 28 percent of UN General Assembly votes¹⁰ and three of 15 UN Security Council (UNSC) seats¹¹. Our African partners face choices to strengthen the U.S. and allied-led open, rules-based international order or succumb to the raw power transactional pressure campaigns of global competitors. How African governments choose partners may determine the future of U.S. values-based influence in international political fora.

Strategic rivals, China and Russia, have long recognized Africa's importance. Both nations leverage opportunities to erode U.S. influence with African nations. Both nations are gaining ground on the continent. Both nations successfully convert soft and hard power investments into new partnerships. Both nations exert political influence at U.S. expense.

China continues to focus on the long game as its dominant position in African markets has allowed it to buttress autocracies and influence global political norms, technological standards, and commercial practices while offering an entry point for their military. China's heavy investment in Africa as its "second continent", and heavy handed pursuit of its "One Belt, One Road" initiative is fueling Chinese economic growth, outpacing the U.S.,¹² and allowing it to exploit opportunities to their benefit. This year, China significantly expanded the capabilities of its Doraleh Naval Base in Djibouti—Beijing's only permanent overseas military base—by adding a large and capable pier while advancing plans to establish a second location along West Africa's Atlantic Coast. By 2030, Chinese military facilities and technical collection sites in Africa will allow Beijing to project power eastward into the Middle East and Indo-Pacific Theaters and west into the Atlantic¹³. A permanent Chinese naval presence in West Africa would almost certainly require the Department to consider shifts to U.S. naval force posture and pose increased risk to freedom of navigation and U.S. ability to act.

Russia continues to undermine rule of law by exploiting insecurity and diplomatic disputes to expand its presence in Africa, primarily through its use of Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. Wagner has malignly inserted itself in several African countries—namely Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Central African Republic (CAR), Mali—including instances where their mercenaries have been linked to horrific violence against civilians and other human rights abuses¹⁴. Where Wagner goes, instability follows. For example, Wagner forces in the Central African Republic (CAR) have reportedly massacred dozens of civilians during missions that ostensibly protect the government

while advancing Moscow's economic and political interests¹⁵. Russia's Wagner uses its designation of as a PMC for Moscow in an attempt to deny, however implausibly, these abuses. Similarly, President Putin insists Wagner is a private company employed by Mali's transitional authorities—the same Malian authorities who claim that only official Russian Ministry of Defense personnel are conducting operations in their country. Further, Moscow remains Africa's largest arms supplier having increased exports by 23 percent over the last four years¹⁶. The Kremlin's willingness to sell weapons to authoritarian leaders and combatants without end-user agreements fuels militarization and escalates conflict and instability across Africa.

Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), a Persistent and Growing Threat

According to the Global Terrorism Index, seven of the ten countries with the largest increase in terrorism in 2020 were in Sub Saharan Africa, with Burkina Faso suffering a 590 percent increase. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaida-aligned VEOs remain a potent and growing threat across much of Africa. In East Africa, al-Qaida's al-Shabaab remains the greatest threat to U.S. persons and interests in the region as well as the homeland, while undermining peace, security, and political progress in Somalia. The largest, wealthiest and most lethal Al Qaeda affiliate in the world today, al Shabbab is now working to re-establish supporting ties with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It is my judgement that due to a lack of effective governance and counter-terrorism pressure, al Shabaab has only grown stronger and bolder over the past year as seen in recent coordinated, multi-target attacks in Mogadishu.

Sustained U.S., African, and allied counter-terrorism pressure has significantly weakened VEOs in North Africa but the problem has shifted southward to Sub-Saharan areas. In the Sahel, what started in the mid-2000s as a small, largely isolated, al-Qaida offshoot in northern Mali, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslmin or JNIM, has metastasized into a powerful, sprawling terrorist network now threatening Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and littoral West Africa. In addition, ISIS's exploitation of ungoverned spaces, including recognition and creation of new branches elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, has increased these groups' ability to destabilize local governments, exploit fragility and instability factors, and drive radicalism. Increased collaboration among ISIS groups in central Africa is a concerning trend that is expanding the terrorist threat to Mozambique, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is my judgement that greater and more coordinated efforts are necessary by our African and international partners, with continued U.S. support, if we are to check the pervasive spread of violent extremism—especially in East and West Africa.

U.S. AFRICOM's APPROACH

AFRICOM actively campaigns towards four enduring objectives¹⁷. First, maintain America's strategic access and influence on the continent. Failure to achieve this objective means failure everywhere else. Second, counter threats to U.S. persons, facilities, and interests, whether they be from violent extremists or other malign actors. Third, prevent and respond to crises that can range from disaster relief to threats against our embassies. Finally, we do all this with a lean, purpose-built combatant command and a coordinated, Diplomacy-Defense-Development effort that teams with allies and partners to achieve shared security objectives, and advance shared principles. This deliberate, coordinated, low-cost campaign approach requires resources to protect previous and future gains—especially as our strategic competitors increase their investments.

Maintain America's Strategic Access and Influence

Gaining and maintaining access and influence underpins all U.S. government efforts in Africa and is the cornerstone of our campaign. Without it, we cannot ensure U.S. ability to act, assure allies and partners, deny adversary objectives, respond to crisis, deter major war, or posture to successfully transition from deterrence to conflict. AFRICOM primarily achieves access and influence in priority locations through focused activities such as senior leader engagements; security force assistance and cooperation; and multi-national exercises. We effectively leverage our resources through this range of effective, low-cost opportunities that contest malign influence, impose costs, and exert pressure with minimal escalatory risk.

Activities such as delivery of COVID aid, bilateral security cooperation, and assistance programs focus on African partner nations' priorities, such as existential VEO threats; while exercises such as AFRICAN LION, FLINTLOCK, and CUTLASS EXPRESS expand interoperability that bolsters partner capabilities. AFRICOM's Joint Exercise Program saw cuts from 2020 resulting in the cancellation of three exercises in 2022. The Joint Exercise Program is key to fostering relationships and has the added benefit of enhancing partner effectiveness, deterring malign actor access and influence, and helping prevent exploitation of African nations.

At the end of the day, our engagements, our access, and our influence in Africa matter. Even with our limited physical presence on the continent, we are still considered the "partner of choice" by most African nations. This position of advantage is ours to lose.

Countering Threats to U.S. Persons and Interests

AFRICOM is the only combatant command with basing that neighbors a Chinese military installation, and one of only two combatant commands with active counter-terrorism operations. Africa is a center for VEO confrontations. I have fought Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan, Iraq,

and Syria; and in my judgment, VEOs have shifted their weight of effort to Africa. For a variety of reasons, U.S. and partner efforts to disrupt and degrade the most dangerous VEOs have not achieved the success we need. To advance America's security, we are revising and renewing our own efforts. Al-Qaida's al-Shabaab retains the intent and capability to threaten U.S. persons and interests from its safe haven in Somalia, making it a top-tier VEO threat for the U.S. Government and the top counter-VEO priority for AFRICOM¹⁸. While the metastasis of Al-Qaida and ISIS in West Africa does not pose an immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, they are a clear danger to U.S. persons and interests in West Africa as well as our African and international partners there. Our continued support to multi-national partners in the Sahel, bilateral relationships with affected African partners, and continued support to cooperative efforts remain critical to suppressing the VEO threat. These efforts are essential to early warning to prevent future attacks.

As VEOs remain the number one concern for many African countries, U.S. counterterrorism support is also a key avenue by which we compete strategically on the continent. In Africa, helping partners tackle shared security goals to address VEO challenges is an effective way America wins influence over strategic competitors.

Preventing and Responding to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests

Always ready, regardless the threat, AFRICOM safeguards U.S. personnel, facilities, and other critical interests in Africa's uncertain and volatile operating environment. In 2021 AFRICOM maintained a ready-response posture. In one brief period, we simultaneously tracked violence in Chad, prepared for concurrent Non-combatant Evacuation Operations in Ethiopia and Sudan, shepherded diplomatic engagements in Libya, monitored multiple irregular transitions of power, and conducted periodic engagements in Somalia. With crisis frequency in Africa managed in hours and days, not weeks and months, AFRICOM selected capabilities to provide the crisis response the American people expect.

Africa contains 16 of the 31 diplomatic posts designated by the Department of State (DoS) as High Threat or High Risk worldwide¹⁹. U.S. diplomats and service members operate across the continent at the extreme fringes of our operational reach. AFRICOM shares its crisis response forces, located in four widely dispersed locations, with three other combatant commands. These shared resources maximize the savings and readiness for the Department of Defense. Personnel Recovery/MEDEVAC, ISR and vertical lift are the most important capabilities our troops need to accomplish their missions in harm's way with acceptable risk.

Teaming with Allies & Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives

AFRICOM pursues our campaign objectives in close cooperation with allies and partners. Our relationships enable us to coordinate actions, enhance interoperability and share costs and risk to achieve mutual security goals. These relationships not only lead to stronger access and influence, but also showcase democratic principles, strengthen compliance with the rule of law, and highlight nefarious intentions of our competitors.

Strong bilateral relationships with allies and partners are also fostered through AFRICOM's active participation in multi-national efforts. This participation reinforces our message that the U.S. will stand side-by-side with our partners to work toward a more stable and prosperous Africa. Furthermore, our presence, engagement, and security cooperation efforts with partners not only improve their capability to address internal security concerns, but also degrades our competitors' ability to exploit relationship gaps. The National Defense Strategy places great importance on partnering. However, DoD distribution of security cooperation funding steadily declined for AFRICOM in previous years. This is an area of concern to me, as I assess it opens the door for China or Russia to usurp the U.S. as the partner of choice. Security cooperation, multi-national exercises, and the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP) provide AFRICOM with relatively low-cost tools to strengthen relationships, sustain our long-term strategic alliances, and address future challenges.

REGIONAL ASSESSMENTS & OBJECTIVES:

East Africa

Somalia's slow but continued steps towards stability stalled over the past year. Al-Shabaab exploited political infighting and decreased security pressure from Somalia, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the U.S., to expand its territorial control, revitalize attacks in Mogadishu, and plan terrorist attacks that threaten American persons and interests. The persistent threat al-Shabaab poses to U.S. persons and interests, coupled with the pressing need to disrupt ISIS-Somalia's funds distribution, as well as stay postured for crisis operations in Ethiopia and Sudan, reinforces the importance of retaining our small force footprint in the Horn of Africa.

Both Djibouti and Kenya remain strong partners in this increasingly vital but volatile region. I believe the U.S. must continue our efforts to support these partners, lead Somali and AMISOM partners to pursue our common fight against al-Shabaab and degrade their ability to threaten the homeland. As al-Qaida's largest and wealthiest global affiliate²⁰, if left unchecked al-Shabaab will soon expand beyond Somalia's borders and become an even greater threat to regional stability and

American interests. ISIS-Somalia's ability to connect, direct and fund ISIS elements elsewhere in Africa makes them a group of unique concern.

The Sahel, Littoral West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea

The rapid expansion of Sahel-based VEOs outside of Mali and Burkina Faso calls for stronger international action. During the past year, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslmin (JNIM) made inroads into littoral West Africa, adding a new destabilizing threat to strategically important countries on the Atlantic. Compounding the escalating security situation, JNIM's regional rival, ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), has embarked on a campaign targeting civilian populations with mass casualty attacks, taxation, and recruitment thus driving regional instability.

AFRICOM's approach in West Africa aims to limit VEO destabilization of the Sahel and prevent further VEO expansion in Niger and the littoral states. Our three-pronged approach is strengthening U.S. assistance to international partners, bolstering partner effectiveness to deal with VEO advances, and increasing the effectiveness of existing multi-lateral security constructs in the region. We enable the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development to capitalize on these lines of effort, addressing drivers of instability and contributing to sustainable solutions. Otherwise, competitors will affiliate and partner where the U.S. government does not—Mali's outreach to Russia's Wagner Group is a prime example²¹.

Nigeria is the largest purchaser of U.S. military equipment in West Africa and is an important security partner on the front lines against ISIS's largest global affiliate, ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA). ISIS-WA has consolidated control over the Lake Chad Basin and increased cross-border attacks into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Abuja's domestic security concerns, and those it shares with its littoral West African neighbors, have strategic implications beyond national borders. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is a devastating economic and food-scarcity challenge for the region. Chinese fishing fleets are the primary IUU offender, even as Beijing offers West African countries maritime security cooperation as pretext to expand a security or military basing foothold it could use to threaten the United States. There is no clear delineation between military, economic, and diplomatic investments by China, therefore the line between pro-Africa and anti-U.S. activity can be difficult to discern.

U.S. maritime engagement, especially in West Africa, is critical. A single unique asset, our new expeditionary staging base vessel, USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (HWW), provides enormous return on investment. Assigned to AFRICOM in August 2020, the HWW conducted more Sub-Saharan maritime engagements in less than two years than this command was able to conduct in the

previous five years. In four locations, she was America's first port call in over a decade. Regular presence of a vessel like HWW demonstrates U.S. commitment and improves interoperability with our African partners in ways that had been absent for years²². Our Ambassadors praise the powerful impact of our maritime engagement to advance an array of U.S. security objectives in Africa.

North Africa

Countering the encroachment of Russia and China along NATO's southern flank remains a top focus for AFRICOM, followed by monitoring and disrupting signs of VEO resurgence in Libya and Tunisia, and supporting State Department efforts to consider reestablishment of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in Tripoli. Senior DoS and AFRICOM engagements this past year helped Libya defuse its long-standing civil war, advanced progress to a unified government, and disrupted longstanding Russian aspirations to establish a permanent security foothold in the country. Conversely, Tunisia's economic and democratic uncertainty made it increasingly vulnerable to Chinese influence, threatening Tunisia's strategic importance as a major non-NATO U.S. ally, as Tunis signed new financial and technical agreements with Beijing. Future Chinese overtures could further expand Beijing's leverage in Tunisia, including potential port development²³.

Maintaining strong partnerships remains critical to U.S. access, influence and interests in the region. Last summer 31 partner nations joined AFRICOM for exercise AFRICAN LION, our premier annual exercise combining air, ground, and maritime components to enhance readiness of U.S. forces and strengthen African security capabilities. AFRICOM's ability to exercise with Major Non-NATO Allies, like long-standing co-host Morocco, is key to bolstering U.S. credibility on the continent and supporting a lead security partner.

Central and Southern Africa

Thwarting the rise of ISIS in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda is a key regional objective in Central and Southern Africa, where we are witnessing accelerated trends of VEO mergers, cohesion, and expansion. This year, security forces from eight countries of the Southern African Development Community joined Rwandan troops in northern Mozambique to stabilize Cabo Delgado and push ISIS back into the bush. AFRICOM training and partnership enables this regional solution to regional instability. Despite this underappreciated success of regional cooperation, other central and southern African countries—unaffected by VEO violence three years ago—remain threatened by ISIS expansion today. AFRICOM maintains small, unmanned contingency locations in Africa to provide platforms for crisis response. We have these on-call "lily pads" across the continent with the exception of southern Africa, a region larger than the continental U.S.

CONCLUSION

A more stable and prosperous Africa will enhance America's security. AFRICOM is committed to our work to improve security and stability, to doing our part in whole of U.S. government efforts to lessen the sources of extremist recruitment, to create stable political environments, to improve governance and to promote democracy and the rule of law.

With our partners, the men and women of USAFRICOM work hard every day to maintain U.S. access and influence in Africa, to counter threats that might emanate from Africa, and to rapidly and effectively respond to crises that threaten U.S. interests or are humanitarian in nature. To be effective in these tasks, our troops require critical capabilities—PR/MEDEVAC; contracted airborne ISR platforms, both manned and unmanned; security cooperation programs like the International Security Cooperation Program; and exercise programs that help our partner nations in countering VEO activities while also enhancing their own security. These capabilities allow our troops as well as partners and allies to succeed in not only defeating our enemies, but also allowing our partners to continue to build their own capabilities and capacity.

Despite AFRICOM's forward leaning stance, we know one of our main roles it to enable diplomacy and development—our tools of *first* resort. For that reason, AFRICOM requests Congress consider measures to ensure we have confirmed Ambassadors to lead our diplomatic missions in Africa. Currently five nominees are pending confirmation, including Chad, Kenya, South Africa, South Sudan, and Sudan. At the same time, I believe the USAID would greatly benefit from increased flexibility to address emerging requirements. Due to earmark constraints in annual appropriations, the USAID Administrator has limited discretion to direct resources within Africa.

I believe it is imperative that America sustain a predictable, though modest, investment in AFRICOM to protect U.S. interests and advance U.S. objectives in this dynamic and important region of the world. A sustained and coordinated U.S. government approach, bolstered by strategic vision and appropriate resourcing, can serve to strengthen relationships with partners in Africa, preserve U.S. interests, and further our objective for increased security, stability and prosperity.

Thank you for your diligence and commitment to invest in AFRICOM—its joint force and its future. Together with your support, AFRICOM will continue to implement smart investments and partner with this region of growing strategic importance to advance America's interests.

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- ¹ (U.S. Africa Command Strategy, Engagement and Plans Directorate, 2021)
² (World Shipping Council, 2021)
³ (Russon, 2021)
⁴ (United Nations Environment Program, 2022)
⁵ (International Monetary Fund, 2022; Trade, 2021)
⁶ (The Economist, 2020)
⁷ (Serdeczny, et al., 2016)
⁸ (Voegele, 2021)
⁹ (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021)
¹⁰ (de Carvalho & Forti, 2020)
¹¹ (Charbonneau & Nantulya, 2021)
¹² (Runde, 2021)
¹³ (Nakamura, Moriyasu, & Hadano, 2021)
¹⁴ (Harding & Burke, 2021)
¹⁵ (GlobalSecurity.org, 2022)
¹⁶ (Parachini & Bauer, 2021)
¹⁷ (Townsend, 2021)
¹⁸ (Williams, 2021)
¹⁹ (U.S. Department of State, 2021)
²⁰ (USAFRICOM Intelligence Directorate and U.S. Intelligence Community, 2021)
²¹ (News Wires, 2022)
²² (U.S. Navy Europe-Africa, 2021)
²³ (The World Bank, 2022)

General Stephen Townsend, USA
Commander, U.S. Africa Command

General Stephen J. Townsend, U.S. Army, became the fifth Commander of United States Africa Command in July 2019. Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, U.S. AFRICOM is one of six joint service geographic combatant commands and is responsible for all U.S. military operations and activities to protect and advance U.S. national interests in Africa.

General Townsend's previous assignment was commanding U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command where he oversaw all recruitment, training, and education for America's Army.

From Griffin, Georgia, General Townsend commissioned as an Army infantry officer upon graduation from North Georgia College in 1982. He has led and commanded troops at every echelon from rifle platoon to infantry division and Army corps as well as two combined/joint task forces.

General Townsend's operational experience includes Operation Urgent Fury, Grenada; Operation Just Cause, Panama; Operation Uphold Democracy, Haiti; Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan; Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq. In 2016-17, he led the multinational effort to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria during Operation Inherent Resolve. His career includes service with four Army divisions, the 82d Airborne, 7th Light Infantry, 101st Air Assault and the 10th Mountain; the 75th Ranger Regiment; the separate 3d Stryker Brigade,

2d Infantry Division; as well as command of the XVIII Airborne Corps. His past joint assignments include U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command, the Joint Staff, Regional Command-East in Afghanistan, and Combined/Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria.

General Townsend holds two master's degrees and military qualifications and awards appropriate to his service as a career infantry officer.

General Townsend is married to Melissa, also from Georgia. They have two married sons, one an Army Captain, the other an Army veteran, and a university student. The Townsends happily spoil two grandchildren and two large and unruly dogs.

POSTURE STATEMENT OF
GENERAL KENNETH F. MCKENZIE, JR.
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2022

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Iran	3
Iranian Activities in Iraq	4
Iranian Activities in Syria and Lebanon	5
Iranian Activities in Yemen	6
Countering the Iranian Threat	7
Countering Violent Extremist Organizations	8
Yemen	9
Afghanistan	9
Iraq and Syria.....	11
Iraq	11
Syria	13
Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund	13
Detainees	14
Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees	15
Safeguarding Civilian Life	17
Strategic Competition	18
The People's Republic of China	20
Russia	20
Competing Strategically	22
Taking Care of Our People	23
Command Values	23
COVID-19	24
Conclusion	25

Introduction

For over twenty years, United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has demanded a greater share of the Department of Defense's resources and attention—and those of the United States as a whole—than it claimed in the first twenty years of its existence. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 brought terror to American shores on a scale unknown since 1941 and transfixed the nation. The United States subsequently reoriented its defense establishment to confront the exigent threat of violent extremism, which had metastasized from within the CENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). In 2001, a “global war on terror” began in Afghanistan and expanded to Iraq in 2003 following a campaign to liberate that country. For a generation of Americans, the very name “CENTCOM” has been virtually synonymous with the military operations in these two countries. Indeed, with the recent withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and conclusion of U.S. combat operations and the transition to an advise, assist, and enable mission in Iraq, many Americans may assume that CENTCOM’s very reasons for being have drawn to a close. That could not be further from the truth.

In fact, the proximate causes for the establishment of CENTCOM nearly forty years ago were the ascendance of a destabilizing, virulently anti-American regime in Iran and naked Soviet military aggression in Afghanistan. More fundamentally, its establishment reflected a clear-eyed recognition by the Carter and Reagan administrations of the geostrategic importance of the broader Middle East. Spanning more than 4.6 million square miles and, with last year’s addition of Israel, encompassing twenty-one countries, the CENTCOM AOR of today has for millennia been a geographic and geopolitical crossroads and site of cooperation, competition, and conflict. In the modern age, the sea lines of communication that pass through the Strait of Hormuz (SOH), Bab al Mandeb (BAM), and Suez Canal are more essential than ever for enabling global commerce, facilitating transportation of more than 20 percent of the world’s and over 40 percent of China’s energy supply.

Rich in cultural heritage but with unevenly distributed natural resources, the region is also beset by internal conflict and instability. It encompasses the geographic origins and spiritual centers for many of the world’s largest religious populations, with active fault lines bisecting political and ethnic boundaries. Fabulous wealth in some resource-rich countries contrasts starkly with abject poverty and the absence of essential services in others. Inequity within societies gave wind to the 2011 “Arab Spring,” which largely failed to address grievances that still fester. Ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen and the collapse of legitimate governance in Afghanistan have undermined stability

throughout and beyond the region and given rise to humanitarian, refugee, and potential environmental crises.

The conclusion of active combat operations in Afghanistan and transition to an advise, assist, and enable mission in Iraq provided an opportunity to reassess and adjust the United States' military posture in the region. Yet CENTCOM's core mission, to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional stability in support of enduring U.S. interests, remains virtually unchanged from the day of its establishment, and just as relevant now as then. The foundational challenges that CENTCOM was designed to confront—the destabilizing influence of Iran and strategic competition—are more salient now than ever. Meanwhile, a twenty-one-year campaign against violent extremist organizations (VEOs) has prevented further attacks on the American homeland but has not eradicated a potent threat that yet lurks in the un-governed and under-governed corners of the CENTCOM AOR. Within the Central Region, the United States faces four of the five named threats identified in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS): Iran, China, Russia, and VEOs. Among these are a potential antagonist in any interstate, Middle Eastern conflict—Iran—and the most immediate threat to the American homeland—VEOs. These remain, therefore, CENTCOM's first and second priorities, respectively. And while we might prefer otherwise, the fact remains that China and Russia have made the CENTCOM region a primary theater of strategic competition, fostering predatory economic ties while seeking regional influence and assured access. Competing in this arena constitutes CENTCOM's third strategic priority.

Despite these continuities, inevitable and appropriate adjustments to American posture in the region are prone to misinterpretation by American partners and adversaries alike. Suspecting that the United States is eager to put the last twenty-one years—and the region as a whole—behind it, partners are hedging, and competitors are exploiting the opportunity to gain influence. From its inception, CENTCOM has been responsible for the stability and security of an “economy of force” theater—one that offered valuable returns on modest, prudent investments designed to secure and stabilize a region with outsized influence on global commerce and energy supply, and in which VEOs have proliferated and expanded globally over the past generation. Even in the midst of global competition, the Interim National Security Guidance recognizes the importance of these investments, but the impulse to compensate for a perceived *overinvestment* in the region these past twenty-one years bears inherent risks. Most importantly, acting on this misperception threatens to undermine the confidence of partners in the region, compromising our ability to leverage longstanding relationships and wield influence as we have historically: with a light-yet-responsive touch and with a small

footprint that can rapidly expand as circumstances demand.

CENTCOM plays an integral role in reassuring these partners and allies of the U.S. commitment to regional stability and to advancing shared interests, including by participating in operations and exercises throughout the region. Israel's shift from the EUCOM to CENTCOM AOR opens the doors to numerous strategic opportunities—including by enabling CENTCOM to more closely align our regional partners against common threats, such as those posed by Tehran. The United States remains steadfast in its commitment to Israel's security and to supporting Israel's right to defend itself, and CENTCOM will continue to support the expansion of Israel's military ties with regional counterparts through training, joint exercises, and other defense cooperation efforts.

The normalization agreements between Israel and the Gulf are historic, and they follow in the footsteps of the peace treaties signed by Egypt in 1979 and Jordan fifteen years later. Both Egypt and Jordan remain strategic partners. Egypt maintains a strong defense relationship with the United States on counter-terrorism (CT) and maritime and border security efforts, and provides critical access, overflight, and Suez Canal transit for U.S. forces. Our decades-long partnership enables us to work with Egypt on areas of disagreement while continuing to address challenges throughout the Middle East and Africa together. Jordan is likewise one of our most committed partners in the Middle East, as well as being a key partner in the Defeat-ISIS coalition. The close partnership with Jordan is essential to U.S. operations across the region.

Maintaining our influence and safeguarding American interests requires a whole-of-government approach and the agile deployment of limited resources to blunt challenges and seize opportunities as they emerge. But it further demands a demonstrable commitment to regional partners, upon whom security in the CENTCOM AOR must ultimately depend.

Iran

The greatest single day-to-day threat to regional security and stability remains Iran, which challenges the United States and its allies by pursuing regional hegemony, breaching its Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) commitments, and posing a conventional threat to partner nations while facilitating and conducting coercive and malign activities. With the largest military in the Middle East, Iran has developed and amassed sophisticated ballistic missile forces and is at the cutting edge in the development of aerial and maritime unmanned systems. With their potent offensive capabilities, these weapon systems enable Iran to threaten its neighbors and menace the free flow of commerce throughout the region, negatively affecting global trade and the world's energy

supply. Over the past year, Iran used these weapons to attack and seize merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and northern Arabian Sea.

Iran views the United States as its greatest enduring threat and obstacle to regional hegemony; it continues a multi-faceted approach to remove U.S. forces from the region while avoiding escalation into a major conflict. Though it has not conducted direct attacks on U.S. forces since January 2020, Iran continues to threaten current and former U.S. officials and enable its proxies to conduct implausibly deniable attacks on deployed U.S. forces. The risk of miscalculation and escalation remains high because of Iran's strategic calculation that it can simultaneously and discretely engage in diplomacy *with* and a proxy campaign *against* the United States. Moreover, Iran's command and control of its proxy and affiliated militias has changed following the 2020 death of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani, which may create challenges for Tehran's ability to govern the initiation and escalation of violence directed at U.S. and Coalition Forces. Iran continues to violate sanctions and embargos, proliferate weapons to its network of proxies and affiliates, terrorize mariners, and seize shipping in international waters. While Iran is not currently pursuing nuclear weapons, it has developed ballistic missiles that could be configured to deliver them and has conducted numerous launches to test those missile systems. These actions continue to demonstrate Iran's defiance and willingness to undermine international norms with threats against U.S. interests and those of our partners and allies.

Iranian Activities in Iraq

In Iraq, Iranian-Aligned Militia Groups (IAMG) increased attacks throughout the first half of 2021, targeting U.S. forces with unmanned aerial systems (UASs) for the first time. In early July, IAMGs paused such attacks in the hope that the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue and forthcoming Iraqi elections would eject American forces through political and diplomatic means. As it became clear that Iran-aligned Shia groups had performed poorly in the October election, IAMGs directed violence against fellow Iraqis, further undermining those groups' standing and influence. When the Strategic Dialogue yielded only the end of an American combat mission rather than a withdrawal, IAMG leaders threatened a resumption of attacks on any Americans remaining in Iraq beyond 2021. In early January 2022, IAMGs briefly surged attacks against U.S. targets in Iraq and Syria but have since largely restrained operations against U.S. forces—likely due to sensitivities related to the formation of the new Iraqi government. Coalition forces remained postured to respond should the IAMGs become more aggressive.

The danger posed by IAMGs has not passed. As a coalition government forms in Iraq, IAMGs continue to evaluate their options and marshal—with covert Iranian assistance—the means of resuming complex UAS and rocket attacks against their fellow Iraqis, as well as U.S. and Coalition forces. Regardless of who forms the government, IAMGs are likely to continue sectarian, criminal, and anti-U.S. activities that destabilize Iraq.

Iranian Activities in Syria and Lebanon

In Syria, Iran and its proxies have been less restrained in attacks against Combined Joint Task Force-Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR). Here, Iran supports the Assad regime with the aim of maintaining the “Axis of Resistance” alliance against Israel, a sworn enemy of Tehran’s revolutionary government. Notwithstanding their common support for the Assad regime, Iran competes with Russia for economic opportunities and long-term influence in Syria. Ultimately, Iran desires a permanent presence in Syria, pursuing economic opportunities to recoup significant wartime investment, increased local militia influence to maintain security, and increased soft power to gain influence over the population. To this end, Iran seeks to expand its already well-established position along the Middle Euphrates River Valley by converting local Sunnis to Shi’ism, recruiting Sunni tribal members into IAMGs, and colonizing the area with Iranian irregular forces and their families.

Iran will continue to use Syrian (and likely Iraqi) territory as a critical hub and resupply route for maintaining its campaign against Israel. CENTCOM supports Israel’s right to defend itself from threats posed by Iran and Iranian proxies. Iran will also remain focused on supporting Lebanese Hizballah, whose illegal weapons stockpiles exceed those of most legitimate partner militaries in the region. Hizballah has consistently undermined the legitimate Lebanese Armed Forces, a steadfast partner of the United States that acts in the interests of the Lebanese people, works to maintain Lebanese stability, and remains the most trusted government institution in Lebanon.

Iran likely has decreasing tolerance for continued U.S. presence in Syria, especially as pro-Assad regime forces gain more control over the country. Accordingly, Iran and its proxies and affiliates are increasing their capabilities and planning to target U.S. and partner interests, as evidenced by multiple indirect fire attacks against U.S.-associated bases with increasingly capable systems that have evolved from typical, commercial off-the-shelf UAS models to more advanced platforms resembling improvised cruise missiles with increased speed, range, accuracy, electronic warfare-hardening, and explosive payload capacity. More troubling, increased proliferation of this

advanced technology has enabled mass production of components that can be easily transported, assembled, and launched from remote locations with little to no support infrastructure. Such capabilities make it easier for non-state actors and proxy forces to acquire and employ this technology on a much larger scale at great stand-off ranges.

Iranian Activities in Yemen

The least restrained and most destabilizing of all of Iran's affiliates in the region are the Houthis of Yemen. Aside from being active combatants in that country's seven-year-old civil war, they are also engaged in a near-daily long-range fires conflict with Saudi Arabia. Wielding the most advanced UASs and ballistic and cruise missiles Iran can design, build, and smuggle into Yemen, the Houthis have targeted Saudi Arabia's largest cities and its critical oil infrastructure. Recently, the Houthis have raised the stakes further by using the same high-end Iranian weapons to target the United Arab Emirates, including the air base at Al Dhafra that U.S. forces share with our Emirati partners. Additional concerning indicators of Houthi contempt for international norms include the November 2021 breaching of the former U.S. embassy compound in Sana'a, the detention of local Yemeni staff of the U.S. embassy, and the escalating frequency of abductions, armed robberies, and carjackings in the parts of Yemen controlled by the Houthis.

Over the past year, Iran has continued to provide Houthi forces with advanced conventional weapons (UASs, theater ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and unmanned surface vehicles) and related technology. The proliferation of small and medium-sized UASs and sophisticated ballistic and cruise missiles to the Houthis presents the most complex and consequential threat to U.S., partner, and allied forces. In 2021, the Houthis conducted over 325 cross-border attacks with UASs and missiles. Since the start of 2022, the Houthis have conducted at least 45 cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia and the UAE with attacks that simultaneously threaten U.S. personnel based in the region and international maritime interests in the Red Sea and Gulf of Oman. Over the past year, the Houthis made incremental advances toward the petroleum-rich city of Marib and reclaimed the areas surrounding the Port of Hudaydah following the withdrawal of Republic of Yemen Government-aligned forces. Likely emboldened by territorial gains in western and central Yemen, as well as perceived declining U.S. support to the Saudi-led Coalition, the Houthis accompanied their campaign to capture Marib with near-daily cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia using UASs, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles.

In response to recent gains by the Emirati-sponsored Giants Brigades south of Marib, the

Houthis expanded their missile and UAS attacks to targets in the United Arab Emirates—including civilian targets, as well as military targets at Al Dhafra Air Base, home to a substantial contingent of U.S. forces. Air defense fires by both Emirati and American batteries—including the first successful combat Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) engagements in history—defeated this complex Houthi attack. It nevertheless demonstrated that the Houthis are prepared to further escalate this conflict using whatever means the Iranians put at their disposal, even at the risk of inflicting mass civilian casualties and threatening American forces.

The recent attacks on the UAE fit the broader pattern of Iran-enabled Houthi missile and UAS attacks on the Arabian Peninsula, targeting both military and civilian targets, endangering civilian life, and risking global economic disruption should the Houthis successfully strike major oil infrastructure or economic hubs. Although the United States provides information and defensive assistance to Saudi and Emirati armed forces, it does not provide offensive military support. CENTCOM continues to support diplomatic efforts to end the conflict in Yemen.

Countering the Iranian Threat

Detering Iran and its threat network depends on capabilities that provide a credible threat of a robust and timely response to Iranian aggression paired with flexible deterrent and response options that impose high costs on Iran, thereby altering its decision calculus. Accordingly, current CENTCOM planning is based on clear and unambiguous signaling to Iran and its threat network. It also makes a virtue out of the necessity to disperse forces threatened by Iranian missiles and UASs. Distributing forces more broadly outside of the most significant Iranian threat ranges not only enhances survivability but also demonstrates an increased capability to rapidly mass combat effects using dynamic force employment (DFE), agile combat employment (ACE), and bomber task force (BTF) missions. A distributed approach lowers costs, improves defensive posture, and makes it more difficult for adversaries to mass effects against U.S. and coalition assets. In addition, this approach demonstrates the flexibility, global reach, and responsiveness of U.S. forces.

At the same time, the United States must demonstrate to our allies and partners that ours is a credible, dependable force in the region, and enable these allies and partners to contribute more effectively to their own defense. In this regard, the greatest threat to the region's security—Iran's missile force—is also a catalyst for increased cooperation in the form of Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD). While this requires a willingness on the part of regional partners to share intelligence more fully and quickly than they have to date, it does not require the introduction of

foreign forces onto the soil of neighboring nations. Similarly, greater cooperation in the air domain promises greater integration and deterrent effect without provoking friction that has historically worked against collective defense in the region. This is especially true in the case of Israel, which joined the CENTCOM AOR in 2021 and has already participated in a number of multilateral exercises and fora that would have been inconceivable before the normalization agreements signed between Israel and Gulf countries in 2020.

Aside from their obvious value to readiness and interoperability, regional exercises incorporating DFE, ACE, and BTF demonstrate allies' and partners' will and readiness to respond to Iranian aggression, thereby enhancing deterrence. Additionally, exercises provide platforms to inject strategic communications and highlight Iranian malign activities, engendering unity and signaling resolve among allies and partners. For the return on investment, such exercises are invaluable. Unfortunately, COVID and reduced budgets for exercises impinged upon CENTCOM and its components' ability to even maintain (let alone expand) existing exercises, despite a regional appetite to do so.

CENTCOM is also hindered in its ability to achieve effective, economical collective security by delays in foreign military sales (FMS) to allies and partners, which—combined with reductions in American capabilities across the region—contributes to the perception of a wavering United States commitment to the security and stability of the CENTCOM AOR and the individual countries therein. This has provided a false narrative and an opening for America's strategic competitors in the region and undermines deterrence of Iran. Countering this impression requires credible assurance and demonstrations of America's commitment to regional security and our partnerships. This commitment includes a recognition of the importance of our security assistance enterprise and our defense industry being capable of efficiently supporting our partners' defensive needs. Moreover, CENTCOM's posture, in terms of forces, footprints, agreements, authorities, and resources must allow us the flexibility to compete with our adversaries below the level of armed conflict, leaving no doubt that U.S. combat power can rapidly flow into the region when required and that Iran will suffer grave costs for their aggressive actions.

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations

While Iran remains the greatest threat to the security of the Central Region itself, ISIS, Al Qaeda (AQ), and other VEOs operating in the region will remain the most likely and proximate threat to the security of the United States and that of our citizens and interests at home and abroad.

ISIS and AQ are seeking to exploit a reduction of U.S. CT efforts in Afghanistan to reinvigorate their adherents and increase their ability to plot and direct external attacks. While CENTCOM and the Global Coalition to Defeat-ISIS have had extraordinary success against these VEOs, the underlying conditions that led to their growth—civil war, poor governance, a youth bulge, and scarce resources and opportunities—remain unchanged. If left unmonitored and unchecked, a resurgence of VEO capabilities could manifest with new attacks on the United States and the homelands of our allies. While VEOs have a presence in virtually every country in the AOR, CENTCOM's primary CT focus remains on those organizations with the ambition and varying capabilities to plot and conduct external operations against the United States and our allies. These VEOs principally reside in Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Yemen

U.S. unilateral and partner-supported CT operations have disrupted and degraded Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), rendering it ineffective and unable to conduct operations outside of Yemen. However, the group maintains aspirations to attack the U.S. homeland, with AQAP senior leadership threatening attacks against the United States as recently as October 2021. ISIS-Yemen remains an active threat group as well, although with fewer capabilities and adherents compared with AQAP. The United States retains a small, tailorable CT footprint in Yemen, supported by a regional CT headquarters that enables regional partner CT forces to monitor and disrupt these VEOs.

Afghanistan

ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) poses a moderate to high threat to the Taliban and civilians in Afghanistan, and this threat has the potential to grow in the coming months and years. As the economic situation and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan worsen, with food security continuing to deteriorate, vulnerable populations will potentially become increasingly susceptible to ISIS-K recruitment. ISIS-K continues targeting the Taliban, Shia populations, urban centers, and targets of opportunity and is attempting to expand from its historic eastern Afghanistan operating areas, as evidenced by its claims of high-profile attacks from Kunduz in the north to Kandahar in the south. ISIS-K likely will remain capable of conducting high-profile attacks throughout Afghanistan, seeking to increase recruitment, expand its operating area, and challenge the Taliban's control. Absent sustained CT pressure, ISIS-K may gain strength and be emboldened to expand its operations and target neighboring countries—as evidenced by recent attacks against Shia civilians in Pakistan. The Department of Defense assesses ISIS-K could establish an

external attack capability against the United States and our allies in twelve to eighteen months, but possibly sooner if the group experiences unanticipated gains in Afghanistan.

In the near-term, AQ will most likely continue to maintain a low-profile under pressure from the Taliban, which seeks international legitimacy. Given its long-standing ties with the Taliban and Haqqani Network, CENTCOM assesses some AQ elements have limited freedom of movement in Afghanistan. AQ likely still aspires to recruit and train, and if successful, restore an external attack capability against the United States and our allies in twelve to twenty-four months.

Following the August 2021 Taliban takeover of Kabul, on-the-ground CT efforts against Afghanistan-based VEOs fell largely to the Taliban. Since taking Kabul, the Taliban have prioritized internal security and begun taking steps to combat ISIS-K's ability to attack the regime in the near-term, and to reconstitute in the long-term. As 2022 unfolds, the Taliban's so-called "Ministry of Interior" (MOI) and "General Directorate of Intelligence" (GDI) likely will synchronize efforts to combat ISIS-K's urban attack cells, while focusing on developing intelligence networks to weaken ISIS-K's historic support zones in eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban's restraints and actions against other regional VEOs have been markedly less aggressive.

For the United States, conducting CT operations in Afghanistan from "over the horizon" remains difficult, but not impossible. The loss of collection following the withdrawal of U.S. forces has exacerbated gaps in our intelligence. This limits the intelligence community's ability to provide indications and warning of VEO threats from Afghanistan. Also limited is the United States' ability to fix and finish those threats we are able to find. The resultant reductions in consistent CT pressure potentially could enable VEO groups to pose increased threats to the United States and our allies, assuming the Taliban is unwilling or unable to do so itself. Presently, CENTCOM relies on the Operation ENDURING SENTINEL Over-the-Horizon Counter-Terrorism (OTH-CT) Task Force and a finite number of UAS sorties to develop and potentially strike terrorist targets in Afghanistan.

Additional opportunities for enhanced cooperation present themselves among the Central Asian States and Pakistan. Due to pressure from Russia (and, to a lesser extent, China), membership in its Collective Security Treaty Organization, and varied willingness to engage with the new Taliban government, the Central Asian States are measured in their support for counterterrorism cooperation in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, they remain concerned about the risk of extremist spillover from Afghanistan and will likely seek out a limited and measured

expansion in U.S. security cooperation engagements while continuing to strike a balance in regional dynamics with all partners. Already, partners in Central Asia value several U.S. security cooperation activities, including support for border security activities, basic peacekeeping skills development, and Foreign Military Sales/Foreign Military Financing. Moreover, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which all border Afghanistan, hold military exercises and receive training from U.S. advisors. Working across the whole-of-government with our interagency partners, as well as international partners and allies, to mitigate the growing humanitarian and economic crises will also be a critical component of effectively countering the growth of VEOs in Afghanistan.

Iraq and Syria

The threat posed by ISIS has been severely degraded in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, its enduring defeat has not been completely achieved. Through the combined efforts of Coalition forces under the command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) and our partners in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including the Kurdish Peshmerga, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), ISIS has lost territorial control and operates mostly in under-governed areas or disputed areas such as the Syrian desert or along the Kurdish Coordination Line (KCL) in Iraq. Deliberate targeting of leaders and facilitation networks has reduced ISIS's capability to conduct large-scale attacks and compelled them to rely foremost on uncoordinated, small-scale hit-and-run engagements. Meanwhile, they seek to reconstitute forces and plan for more complex mass casualty-producing attacks, the most recent example being the January 2022 attack at the detention facility in Hasakah, Syria.

Iraq

Despite significant progress in the Defeat-ISIS campaign, ISIS-Iraq remains a credible threat to the stability of the Iraqi government, as well as to U.S. and Coalition forces and interests in the country. ISIS-Iraq maintains the limited ability to target bases housing U.S. and Coalition forces both in the Kurdistan region and Baghdad. ISIS-Iraq is also capable of targeting supply lines, as well as U.S. and Coalition forces while in transit during training and enabling operations across the country. Improved Iraqi security in Baghdad has diminished ISIS-Iraq's opportunities for high-profile attacks there, but it has demonstrated the intent to conduct small suicide and improvised explosive device (IED) operations against soft targets. Moreover, ISIS-Iraq continues its efforts to destabilize the ethno-sectarian environment, potentially embroiling our Iraqi partners and Coalition forces in a rapidly deteriorating security environment with little warning.

Consistent CT pressure likely resulted in key leader losses, reduced access to resources and materiel, and an inability to infiltrate urban areas. These challenges almost certainly contributed to an overall decline in attacks from 119 per month in 2020 to 97 per month in 2021. Nevertheless, ISIS-Iraq remains a credible threat. ISIS-Iraq uses complex attacks and subverts authority to grow its influence and expand its insurgency and ISIS-Iraq remains operationally active in Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din—specifically along the KCL. ISIS-Iraq relies on rural safe havens to mitigate CT pressure, and as a staging point for operations against civilian and military targets. In late 2021, ISIS-Iraq initiated a series of seemingly coordinated attacks against Kurdish interests causing dozens of casualties in Irbil, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces as ISIS-Iraq continues efforts to stoke sectarian and ethnic conflict.

In early December 2021, CJTF-OIR, in cooperation with the Government of Iraq, completed the transition to an advise, assist, and enable mission. Preceding this transition was the restructuring of the force to an irreducible minimum of requisite personnel and equipment, all residing on consolidated joint bases with Iraqi forces. Coalition Force advisors in the Military Advisory Group-Iraq (MAG-I) and Military Advisory Group-North (MAG-N) are working closely with their ISF and Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) counterparts in operational-level planning and battle tracking of unilateral Iraqi operations against ISIS. Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant (SOJTF-L) contributes to this effort at the tactical, operational, and institutional levels by partnering with Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Services (CTS). Critical to this effort are the intelligence collection and fusion, logistics, and joint strike support that we provide to Iraqi-planned, led, and executed operations to defeat ISIS. Coalition Forces provide in-extremis assistance with ISR, and joint strike capabilities when required, at the request of the Government of Iraq. Finally, CJTF-OIR's Directorate of Military Assistance manages the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), which divests materiel and financial support to the ISF and KSF. These efforts provide support to ISF and KSF counter-ISIS operations and serve as the basis for a future military-to-military relationship between the United States and Iraq. The ISF and KSF have conducted larger joint operations, demonstrating tangible progress, as well as a fundamental understanding of intelligence collection and joint fires to support more complex operations spanning multiple provinces.

CJTF-OIR is committed to its advise, assist, and enable mission, helping Iraqi forces develop operational structures and processes of sustainment, maintenance, and command/control mechanisms at echelon that are necessary for maintaining force structure and operational tempo. Essential to CJTF-OIR's advisory mission is the relationship with NATO Mission Iraq (NMI)—an important

initiative both for the contributions it is poised to make and for the signal it sends about our global allies' commitment to the long-term stability of Iraq. NMI provides advisory support to the ISF at the ministerial level, focusing on institutional advice in areas such as doctrine development, budgeting, sustainment processes, and personnel management. NMI's efforts are key to maintaining the operational capability of the ISF in the mid- to long-term. The NMI and OIR missions are separate but complementary, and there must continue to be a symbiotic relationship between the two as they progress. Work is ongoing to understand where gaps and crossovers exist between NMI and OIR so they can be addressed as these missions both continue to evolve.

Syria

ISIS remains a significant threat in Syria, despite the drop in the group's total claimed attacks since July 2021. The group continues to target the Assad Regime, the SDF, and local populations primarily in Homs and Dayr az Zawr provinces. These attacks are typically small-scale and rudimentary, employing small arms fire, IEDs, assassinations, and hit-and-run ambushes on security forces. A notable exception is ISIS's recent concerted effort to liberate detainees from the largest detention center in Hasakah. ISIS's ability to project power further has been degraded by persistent pressure from the SDF and CJTF-OIR, and was further reduced with the February 2022 death of the so-called "amir" of ISIS, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. Nevertheless, increased conflict between the SDF and the Assad regime or Turkey—which views the SDF as inextricably linked to the YPG, a group Ankara considers a terrorist organization—would likely provide ISIS the respite it needs to recover from recent losses and expand its influence, and recent events at Hasakah demonstrate that its will is unbroken.

The SDF have continued to demonstrate the resolve and capability to maintain continuous pressure on ISIS in northern Syria. They have remained the only reliable and effective partner in Syria and continue to improve in their capability to prevent the resurgence of ISIS in the Eastern Syrian Security Area (ESSA). The nature of the operations executed in northeastern Syria are different than those conducted in Iraq. The SDF control an area of Syria in which they are opposed not only by ISIS but also by the Assad regime, the regime's Russian and Iranian backers, and Turkey or its proxies. Thus, despite the SDF's ability to conduct operations without direct oversight from Coalition Forces, they remain susceptible to external pressures and dependent upon SOJTF-Levant for ISR, fires, and intelligence support for complex missions.

Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund

Throughout 2022, our partner forces in Iraq and Syria will continue to benefit from a range of financial and materiel support provided through the CTEF, which provided \$726.9 million of critical assistance in 2021. CTEF continues to play a vital role in Counter-ISIS operations within Iraq and Syria, resulting in tremendous operational success while minimizing U.S. presence in the AOR. CTEF is a critical tool by which the Coalition enables the ISF, KSF, and SDF to meet operational requirements necessary to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS and set conditions for continued stabilization of the region. Drawing on the lessons from the last twenty-one years, CJTF-OIR has, over the last six months, tailored ISF divestments to address ISF sustainment, maintenance, and communications requirements. In Syria, CTEF expenditures for partner forces remain focused on maintaining the necessary level of capability to target ISIS cells, keep ISIS fighters securely and humanely detained until they receive due process or are repatriated to their countries of origin, and sustain vetted partners in Syria at the level required to counter the ISIS threat and help maintain security and stability in the region.

For these reasons, any rapid reduction of CTEF appropriations risks a reversal of gains made in the security sector, the reemergence of ISIS and other VEOs, and the future stability of the region. Given the unique circumstances of Iraq and Syria, where our most reliable partners depend upon us for essential support in various capacities, CTEF provides a flexible, responsive mechanism for addressing emergent requirements and capitalizing on opportunities. As such, CTEF is essential to continued progress in the D-ISIS fight.

Detainees

The limited repatriation of ISIS detainees and displaced persons in northeast Syria remains the biggest impediment to ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS. While there has been modest progress on repatriating and resettling some of these displaced persons and some detained ISIS fighters, more needs to be done. Military force cannot resolve this festering problem, which, if not addressed by the international community, will eventually form the core of the next round of violent Islamic extremism in the region and beyond.

Presently, more than ten thousand ISIS fighters are detained in repurposed detention facilities throughout northeast Syria. These facilities are guarded by a force of makeshift SDF guards, mustered from the local population with limited training. The SDF guard force remains capable of responding to external threats against the facilities, but there remains a constant threat from internal riots and coordinated action with ISIS cells at large, as evidenced by recent events at the detention

center in Hasakah. Working with the SDF and Joint Operations Center-Iraq, CJTF-OIR has facilitated the transfer of hundreds of Iraqi nationals from SDF-controlled detention facilities to Iraq—but there is still more work to be done, as several thousand Iraqi ISIS fighters remain in makeshift detention facilities in Syria. CJTF-OIR has also leveraged CTEF funding to upgrade facilities and has worked to train and pay SDF guards to mitigate the threat posed by the detained ISIS fighters. Yet these measures serve only as a temporary solution until a more viable long-term one can be found.

Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees

Another challenge in the AOR is that of large-scale displacement as a result of protracted conflicts in the region. Of Syria's pre-war population of approximately 20 million, over 6 million are IDPs and more than 13 million throughout the country need humanitarian assistance. Another 6 million sought refuge in other countries. Russia and the Syrian regime have consistently limited efforts by the UN and other organizations to provide sufficient humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations in Syria, causing unnecessary suffering. The UN has identified Syria as a hotspot for acute food insecurity, with millions depending on humanitarian organizations to deliver essential aid to areas outside of regime control.

Especially challenging is the displaced persons camp at Al Hol in northeast Syria. Al Hol, which began as an Iraqi refugee camp in the early 1990s and originally hosted about ten thousand people, swelled to a population of over seventy thousand after the fall of Baghuz when ISIS lost its last remaining territory. The camp, which currently holds approximately fifty-seven thousand people, predominantly women and children, comprises a complex mix of Iraqi Syrians, and third-country nationals; both the victims of ISIS and families of ISIS live in relatively close proximity to one another. The camp remains a challenge to security forces and humanitarian providers alike due to recurring violence against camp residents, NGO workers, camp administrators, and suspected coalition collaborators. In March 2021, the SDF conducted a security operation in response to the uptick in assassinations within the camp. Assassinations decreased following this sweep but continued throughout 2021, underscoring ISIS's resilient influence and the ongoing challenge of properly managing security.

Some women living in Al Hol camp are perpetrators of violence, while many residents, including the tens of thousands of children, remain victims and extremely vulnerable. ISIS-affiliated women often act as *Hisba*, or religious police, keeping a keen eye on activities in the camp, while preying upon vulnerable camp residents through violence and intimidation. They often focus on radicalizing other residents, primarily children, through propaganda and fear to

ensure the second generation of the organization. Some of these children are being radicalized in the camp and are later smuggled out to be trained as future fighters and suicide bombers in ISIS camps in ungoverned locations in Syria.

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance inside camps like Al Hol, USAID and State Department-sponsored humanitarian aid and stabilization programs in Syrian communities have attempted to fulfill the need for basic services, maintain stability, and facilitate the peaceful return of displaced Syrians to their areas of origin. In the interim, extremist elements will continue efforts to exploit the lack of a viable, internationally-supported solution to the Syrian conflict to build popular support and contribute to the reconstitution of ISIS and affiliates. The only viable solution to Al Hol is a political one, whereby nations repatriate and reintegrate their citizens and relieve the burden on the SDF.

Other displaced persons in the AOR pose logistical and economic challenges. Following the largest airborne non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) in history, which delivered over 124,000 Americans, third-country nationals, and at-risk Afghans to safety, many Afghans have already begun new, promising lives in the United States. Others remain at transit facilities in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, awaiting onward resettlement. To aid in this effort, CENTCOM facilitated the establishment and support of several temporary safe havens and transportation “lily pad” sites utilizing \$140 million of the emergency Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) funds provided by Congress in July 2021. Meanwhile, the United States continues to relocate Afghan allies, which will require at least two of these locations to be fully operational for the remainder of the fiscal year. Planning continues for expanded efforts at the Camp As Saliyah transit site in Qatar, and initial indications are that this effort could continue well past originally estimated end dates. Coordination with interagency partners for the hand-off of resourcing and contracting for this effort is challenged by gaps in various departments’ and agencies’ operational authorities and funding. For other countries that have hosted the region’s refugees—among them Jordan, Lebanon, and Pakistan—the economic strain imposed on the host country systems can further exacerbate fiscal challenges and undermine stability.

A final crisis of displaced persons within the AOR is, unfortunately, largely beyond CENTCOM’s ability to influence or alleviate. Over the past year, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen has remained severe, with over 16 million Yemenis subject to food insecurity and 4 million internally displaced by conflict. The World Health Organization reports only 50 percent

of Yemen's medical facilities remain functional, and those that are open lack sufficient medical staff, equipment, or basic medicines, leaving Yemenis vulnerable to COVID-19, cholera, diphtheria, malaria, and other diseases. Yemen will remain dependent on external aid to address these critical needs. The ongoing conflict raises additional difficulties for aid workers attempting to transit to and within the country, while the Houthis also tax and abscond with humanitarian aid supplies to support their war effort. The humanitarian crisis will remain a challenge in Yemen for years to come, even after any settlement of the internal conflict, and Yemen will remain reliant on external aid to address issues such as food insecurity and healthcare shortfalls. Additionally, a structural failure of the FSO *Safer*, a permanently-moored oil tanker off the coast of Ras Isa, could quickly compound many issues in Yemen, almost certainly disrupting maritime traffic transiting the Red Sea and potentially causing an environmental disaster.

Safeguarding Civilian Life

While CENTCOM strives daily to alleviate the suffering of those displaced or harmed by conflict in the region, we also recognize that combat operations can also inflict harm on civilian life and infrastructure. CENTCOM is absolutely committed to safeguarding civilian life throughout its area of operations, and across the range of military operations. Further, CENTCOM and each of its subordinate headquarters takes very seriously our legal, moral, and ethical obligations to abide by the law of armed conflict, and we recognize that respect for the sanctity and dignity of human life is inherent in our mission to ensure the security and stability of the region. Moreover, we recognize that the United States' legitimacy as the leader and guarantor of a liberal, rules-based international order depends on our demonstrated commitment to protecting innocent life.

As the Secretary of Defense has recently acknowledged, we can and must do better in minimizing and responding to harm to civilian populations resulting from our operations. We remain committed to reviewing and improving our tactics, techniques, and procedures and fully support the Secretary of Defense-directed development of an overarching Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan (CHMRAP). CENTCOM has already implemented preliminary changes to its method of tracking and reporting allegations of civilian casualties. Process improvements include the establishment of a civilian casualty working group, increased interagency coordination to improve deconfliction processes, and the resumption of publication of monthly CIVCAS reports by CJTF-OIR. This working group will provide additional oversight of the reporting and investigation chain that was previously conducted predominantly outside of the combatant command headquarters.

CENTCOM appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the CHMRAP and will swiftly implement and fully support the Secretary's direction.

Although CENTCOM is fully committed to the principles of the Law of Armed Conflict and U.S. policies that in many cases far exceed what international law requires, we cannot offer guarantees against the unintended loss of civilian life in the future. Our adversaries in the AOR do not merely lack our regard for innocent life—they deliberately abuse and jeopardize it with a goal of protecting themselves and using civilian casualties to conduct information operations against the United States. Moreover, U.S. forces, which often operate in complex, hostile environments, always retain the inherent right of self-defense. In the fog and friction of combat, individuals and their commanders must sometimes make difficult decisions—literally with life-or-death consequences—under intense pressure and with sometimes imperfect information. Hesitation can cost lives, as can well-intended action.

When an allegation of civilian casualties occurs, CENTCOM and its subordinate headquarters will report it to Defense Department leadership, acknowledge it, investigate it, and take whatever action is appropriate to ensure accountability and improve CIVCAS prevention and mitigation measures. CENTCOM did so in the wake of the MQ9 strike in Kabul on 29 August 2021. Our commitment to minimizing the risk to civilian life was further demonstrated in the recent raid that resulted in the death of ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. Rather than target him with an airstrike, we accepted increased risk to U.S. forces by launching a raid, expressly planned to separate noncombatants in the objective area from the ISIS leader and his subordinates. Notwithstanding the regrettable loss of noncombatant lives when the terrorist or one of his wives detonated an explosive on the third floor of his residence, U.S. forces took extraordinary measures to clear the objective area of civilians, and in so doing protected no fewer than ten of them from harm. This is a standard of care for civilian life that is virtually unprecedented in the history of armed conflict, and it is one that CENTCOM will continue to uphold into the future.

Strategic Competition

As the historical and enduring crossroads for overland and maritime trade between Europe, Asia, and Africa and home to half of the world's proven oil reserves, the CENTCOM AOR constitutes geo-strategic "key terrain" and a potentially decisive theater for strategic competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia. Within the AOR, an

expansionist PRC and a resurgent Russia seek to shift alliances and gain influence, seeking leverage through tools such as state-sponsored investment, to achieve assured access and key resources to support their national objectives. The PRC and Russia have tailored their regional approaches to suit their specific goals and have expanded military cooperation with many regional countries through both arms sales and exercises. The PRC has expanded its presence through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), COVID-19 diplomacy, debt-trap infrastructure investments, and the proliferation of 5G technology that will provide opportunities for political coercion and military exploitation. Similarly, Russia has reinforced its enduring military and economic presence in Syria, expanded its economic presence in and defense relationship with Egypt, and seeks to increase influence over regional energy resources and transit routes. In Central Asia, proximity to the PRC and Russia and a relatively minor U.S. presence mean every interaction between the U.S. and Central Asian states holds significance for our regional CT and strategic competition policy priorities. Ultimately, the PRC and Russia seek to expand their influence and subvert the international rules-based order at the expense of U.S. interests and those of our allies and partners.

The PRC and Russia also engage Iran to further their own interests while working against those of the United States. Both the PRC and Russia hope to position themselves as key economic partners for Iran, anticipating sanctions relief and priority access to development contracts and markets. In October 2021, Iran announced it would sign a strategic partnership with Russia similar to the agreement Tehran signed with Beijing in March 2021. For the PRC, the agreement ensured a reliable energy supply, hedging against any U.S. attempts to block other sources of oil. Moscow, meanwhile, advocated for a reinstatement of the JCPOA while helping Iran develop military capabilities that enable its destabilizing regional activities. Ultimately, neither the PRC nor Russia will align itself so closely with Iran that it jeopardizes its ability to court other economic and military partners in the region, but both will continue to use Iran as a useful foil against the West, reaping economic benefits as they do so.

Yet the geography and political contours of the region do not overwhelmingly favor the PRC or Russia. To the contrary, the bisection of the Eurasian landmass by the Central Region provides key terrain and a dominant position for the United States to strategically compete with the PRC and Russia through a range of security cooperation ventures, including border security, counter-narcotics, CT, and defense institution building. Because of these relationships, the United States remains the “partner of choice” for most countries in the region in comparison to Russia or the PRC. While we must compete to retain this favorable position, it remains ours to lose. In Central Asia, where

proximity *does* afford Russia and the PRC certain advantages, many nations are interested in closer relations with the West and share CT concerns with the United States, presenting opportunities to find and cultivate common ground.

The People's Republic of China

The PRC, which is the world's largest importer of oil, currently imports roughly 46 percent of its crude oil and 36 percent of its natural gas from the CENTCOM AOR. It continues to cultivate trade relationships, infrastructure development projects (on which it depends to absorb its excess industrial capacity), economic investment, and comprehensive partnerships among the region's states. The PRC continues to expand influence in the Arabian Gulf and Northern Arabian Sea is supported through port development and investment programs such as those in in Gwadar, Pakistan, and with the United Arab Emirates, which are central to the PRC's regional strategy.

Throughout the past year, the PRC has engaged with nearly every country in the AOR, using trade, the BRI, COVID-19 diplomacy, and other humanitarian assistance to support its strategic objectives and expand its influence. The PRC particularly enhanced its cooperation and influence with Iran by securing a twenty-five-year economic agreement, dampening the effects of international sanctions and providing the Iranian regime an economic lifeline. The PRC also initiated the accession process for Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while adding Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia as dialogue partners. Additionally, the PRC advanced its status as an arms supplier to the region, providing military equipment to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, and the UAE, at discount prices and without preconditions, attempting to supplant the U.S. as a "partner of choice."

Aside from foreign military sales that can displace our U.S. security assistance relationships, the PRC conducts multilateral military exercises in the region and is postured for further collaboration. The People's Liberation Army Navy maintains a constant presence and is active in the region, conducting a wide range of peacetime operations to protect the PRC's maritime trade, assets, and personnel. This presence includes the Naval Escort Task Force, which operates in the Gulf of Aden and uses Djibouti as a sustainment hub. From there, the PRC can quickly project naval power into the Red Sea, the Bab al Mandeb strait, and the Gulf of Aden.

Russia

Over the past year, Russia has sought to portray itself as a regional powerbroker and

reliable partner on the global stage while also attempting to undermine U.S. positions and relations in the CENTCOM AOR. Russia maintains a largely opportunistic approach to its engagement with countries in the Middle East while viewing its influence in the Central Asia region as vital to its national security interests. Moscow responded to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan by pressuring Central Asian states to refuse support from the U.S. and reinforcing its own position as the area's primary security partner through military exercises and advocating for the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Additionally, Russia has solidified its military presence in Syria, where it asserts its position in international fora to increase its influence in the region and pressure the United States to withdraw. Russia has demonstrated the ability to project forces, test weapon systems, and routinely interfere with Coalition D-ISIS operations. To date this has included the exploitation of the space environment, electronic warfare, GPS jamming, and the use of private military companies. Since 2015, Russian armed forces have conducted kinetic actions in Syria at the behest of the Assad regime.

Russia has further developed forces and footprints capable of sustaining extra-territorial military operations. One example is the Russian naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, for which Russia recently signed a forty-nine-year lease and announced plans to invest \$500 million in port development. This base allows up to eleven nuclear-powered Russian Black Sea warships to repair and replenish in the Mediterranean Sea without having to return to home port through the Turkish Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, and it has facilitated increased naval activity in the Red Sea. Russia also developed an airfield to accommodate Russian bombers and expand its operational capacity in the region. From its Syrian footprints, the Russians are ideally placed to disrupt NATO operations in the Middle East and present a potential hedge against NATO's southern flank.

To improve its economic situation, Russia leveraged its relationship with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) to gain favorable market conditions for oil and gas sales over the last year. Russia's interests in Iraq are primarily in the fuel and energy sector, including exploration and infrastructure development. Russia has several energy companies operating in Iraq, including Lukoil, Gazprom, Neft, and Bashneft, for investments worth over \$10 billion. Russia also continues marketing its advanced weapons systems for export to CENTCOM AOR countries. This marketing occurs in an environment in which many of our partners are looking for systems that support their national security

requirements, including the threat posed by Iran. As with the PRC, the speed of Russian arms sales is appealing to partners—and does not come with American accountability demands for end-use monitoring and human rights assurances, such as Leahy vetting.

While it is too early to grasp the full consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for the CENTCOM AOR, our partners there are already feeling the initial adverse effects. Challenging humanitarian conditions across the CENTCOM AOR have already led to sustained displacement, undermined trust between governance structures and communities, and created space for our adversaries to exploit the human suffering of vulnerable populations. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has the potential to exacerbate these dynamics due to disruptions in wheat exports to the Middle East, strain on financial institutions, and rising fuel prices with global implications. Russia is the world's largest exporter of wheat, and Ukraine is the world's fifth largest, together accounting for 28.9 percent of global wheat exports. Countries across the AOR depend on Russian and Ukrainian wheat to varying degrees, and reporting out of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon indicates price hikes of staple food items ranging between 30 and 50 percent since the Russian invasion began. Governments are attempting to ease the negative impacts on their citizens by increasing domestic production or pursuing imports from alternative markets, but these efforts will not fully address growing food insecurity, especially in import-dependent and cash-strapped countries such as Lebanon and Yemen.

Competing Strategically

The PRC and Russia have shown that they are willing to work together toward common regional objectives: mutually supporting Iran, vetoing United Nations Security Council resolutions against Syria, and offering limited humanitarian assistance where it furthers their interests. Due to the geostrategic importance of the Central Region, allies, partners, and competitors will attempt to increase their influence in the CENTCOM AOR, especially if they perceive a wavering U.S. commitment to the region. The global economic environment induces regional partners to seriously consider Chinese and Russian offers of capital, investment, technology, infrastructure, and equipment to realize their national long-term economic and defense goals. At the tactical level, security cooperation and building partner capacity will remain central tenets of our military instrument of national power. The PRC and Russia currently lack the capability and capacity to conduct robust security cooperation activities, despite their desire to do so—but we should not assume this will continue to be true over the longer term. When given a choice, our Middle Eastern partners have traditionally preferred

alternatives presented by the United States and our allies. These alternatives must be viable, substantive, and timely if they are to ward off our strategic competitors.

Meanwhile, the United States and our allies can capitalize on our unique ability to build and lead international coalitions of like-minded nations. Multilateral security organizations such as the Combined Maritime Forces, the International Maritime Security Construct, and the forthcoming Red Sea Maritime Security Initiative serve as bulwarks against Chinese and Russian grey-zone operations and a deterrent to aggression in the region. By demonstrating international resolve and solidarity, we at once instill confidence in the international rules-based order and reduce the burden of doing so with like-minded partners.

Yet as we seek to limit the day-to-day deployments of U.S. assets to the region, we must retain the flexibility to rapidly deploy forces and other resources throughout the depth of the AOR. Increasing port, airfield, and basing access expands our regional influence and enhances our partnerships while also building resiliency and survivability in the case of regional or global conflict. It also allows us to support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief more quickly and effectively than our competitors, demonstrating the values, commitment, and capability that have made us the partner of choice in the region and beyond.

Taking Care of Our People

Command Values

Improving diversity and inclusion in our force is an operational imperative to meet the demands of strategic competition. We must take deliberate action to build a joint force of men and women of all ethnicities, races, backgrounds, and beliefs. CENTCOM established a Diversity and Inclusion office responsible for advising the command on all matters relating to discrimination and institutional biases, as well as barriers to diversity and inclusion across the CENTCOM portfolio. This office is currently working on our Human Capital and Talent Management strategy to meet the demands of strategic competition.

While diversity enhances and strengthens the command, sexual assault and extremism within the ranks erode the very bonds of trust that make CENTCOM and the broader Joint Force the most capable military organizations in the world. CENTCOM is fully committed to the prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Over the past several years, we have improved our command climate and prevention efforts in each of these areas. The feedback we have received from several

command-wide surveys shows our efforts have increased trust, credibility, and awareness. Our command climate results show that both our military and civilian personnel feel comfortable not only coming forward and reporting any concerns, but also that they trust we will action it appropriately.

Extremist ideologies conflict directly with our obligations to our country and the American public. Every service member and DoD civilian took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. Extremism desecrates that solemn obligation and erodes the trust and confidence the American people have in the military as an institution. CENTCOM conducted virtual training modules featuring subject matter experts and presentations by our most senior leaders and facilitated small-group discussions to build awareness and help prevent actions associated with extremist behaviors that go against the fundamental principles of our profession. This dialogue with our servicemembers and DoD civilians will continue, as will CENTCOM's commitment to respecting the rights and dignity of the American citizens who embody our force and constitute our greatest strength. Operating in a command free of discrimination, hate, and harassment while accomplishing our mission is paramount to our success.

COVID-19

Across the AOR, CENTCOM rapidly responded to the COVID-19 threat, implementing both non-pharmaceutical and pharmaceutical interventions, obtaining and disseminating personal protective equipment, and adapting newly-developed treatment guidelines to an austere deployed environment. Despite the pandemic, military operations and medical support for combat and non-combat casualties remain fully mission capable. Extensive public health measures, host-nation partnerships, and robust medical support across the AOR resulted in zero COVID-19-related service member deaths.

As of 17 February 2022, over 15,773 cases of COVID-19 were identified, resulting in 297 personnel medically evacuated from theater. Over the past three months there has been a decline in active cases with an average active case count of thirty-five. While many events were cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19, partners successfully executed larger, multinational exercises such as BRIGHT STAR, IMX, and EAGER LION. Anticipatory public health measures and effective implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination program detailed below led to dramatic reductions in daily active cases and theater medical evacuation.

CENTCOM continues working closely with the Joint Staff, Defense Health Agency, and Defense Logistics Agency to identify requirements for COVID-19 vaccines and newly

developed medications. CENTCOM prioritized forward-deployed forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria for early vaccine delivery and voluntary inoculation efforts. In March 2021, CENTCOM significantly expanded vaccine distribution throughout the AOR with the intent to provide COVID-19 vaccines for all DOD personnel, dependents, and contractors willing to receive it to provide maximal force health protection. Following full licensure and OSD-directed mandatory vaccination, CENTCOM overcame ultra-cold storage and shipping challenges to provide the Pfizer vaccine more broadly across the AOR, achieving full vaccination rate of 97 percent among U.S. military personnel and civilians.

Refinement of theater deployment physical standards for all personnel helped reduce the impact to U.S., Coalition, and partner-nation civilians. Continued entry of COVID-19 infected personnel, finite quantities of on-hand testing consumables, limited quarantine and hospital capacity in theater, and irregular resupply obstacles were effectively mitigated, leading to outbreak prevention and containment. Individuals must now be fully vaccinated as a theater entry requirement, which will minimize COVID-19 mission impact moving forward. Booster shots are readily available and encouraged for all deployed personnel.

At the CENTCOM headquarters, relaxing restrictions on travel and movement in both the AOR and the United States renewed face-to-face key leader engagements and regular personnel rotations throughout much of 2021. CENTCOM was able to remove previously implemented teleworking procedures, with on-site staffing returning to 100 percent in June 2021. Effective public health measures and implementation of mandatory vaccination has provided long-term solutions to enable safe operations in the headquarters (both in Tampa and forward) and continuous support to forward-deployed formations.

Conclusion

CENTCOM will continue to play an important role in commanding and directing a multitude of operations, activities, and investments across the region that maintain freedom of navigation, bolster our allies and partners against coercion, share in the region's common defense, and strive for regional stability. Maintaining a sufficient and sustainable level of presence in the Central Region will enable us to deter Iranian aggression, while providing the capability to compete with the PRC and Russia and disrupt VEOs. It also will provide us the ability to influence and help secure three of the world's five most vital transit choke points, ensuring free flow of navigation, resources, and commerce.

Moving forward, how we establish our limited enduring presence will be closely watched by both our regional and global partners, with nations making their own decisions about our reliability in the long term. A tailored presence supported by an over-the-horizon capability will enable flexibility, responsiveness, and act as a strategic shock absorber and backstop to our allies and partners in times of crisis. It is vital to match aspirations with resources to ensure successful strategy execution in the Central Region. Ultimately, CENTCOM must operate forward, retain appropriate manning, and remain operationally ready in order to meet an uncertain, unstable future and support whatever policies our civilian leadership direct. The necessary oversight and deep support from Congress critically enable our continued success.

General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., USMC
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr. is the Commander, United States Central Command. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, upon graduation from The Citadel in 1979, General McKenzie was commissioned into the Marine Corps and trained as an infantry officer.

He has commanded at the platoon, company, battalion, Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and component levels. As a lieutenant colonel, he commanded First Battalion, Sixth Marines. As the Commanding Officer of the 22d MEU (SOC), he led the MEU on combat deployments to Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2005-06. In 2006-07 he served as the Military Secretary to the 33rd and 34th Commandants of the Marine Corps.

In July 2007, upon promotion to Brigadier General, he served on the Joint Staff as a Deputy Director of Operations within the National Military Command Center. In June 2008, he was selected by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be the Director of the Chairman's New Administration Transition Team(CNATT). In this capacity, he coordinated the efforts of the Joint Staff and the combatant commands in preparing for and executing a wartime transition of administrations.

In June 2009, he reported to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, Afghanistan, to serve as the Deputy to the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) for Stability. Upon his return from Afghanistan, in July 2010, he was assigned as the Director, Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J-5) for the U.S. Central Command. In August 2012, he reported to Headquarters Marine Corps to serve as the Marine Corps Representative to the Quadrennial Defense Review. In June 2014, he was promoted to Lieutenant General and assumed command of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Central Command.

In October 2015, he was assigned to the Joint Staff to serve as the Director, J-5, Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff.

In July 2017, he was named the Director, Joint Staff. General McKenzie was promoted to his current rank and assumed command of U.S. Central Command in March 2019.

General McKenzie is an honors graduate of the Armor Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the School of Advanced Warfighting. He was selected as a CMC Fellow in 1999 and served as a Senior Military Fellow within the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. He has a Masters degree in Teaching with a concentration in History.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 17, 2022

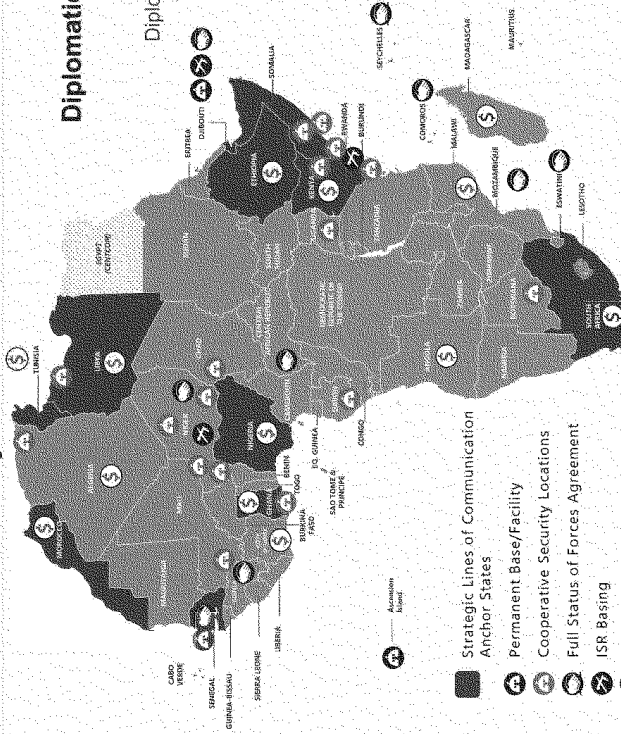
2021 U.S. Influence & Activity in Africa

Military/Defense

- 1** Permanent Military Base (Djibouti)
- 0** Potential New Permanent Basing Locations
- ~6,500** Military Troops Deployed in Africa
- 29** Troops Supporting UN Peacekeeping Operations
- \$3.9 Billion** Foreign Military Financing/Sales
- 19** Major Military Port Visits

Diplomatic/Development/Economic

- 49** Diplomatic Missions out of 53 Countries in Area of Responsibility
- ~\$11 Billion** Foreign Aid (USAID)
- \$64 Billion** Economic Trade
- 3** Cabinet-level or Above Visits
- ~170,000** Citizens Living in Africa
- ~145 Million** COVID-19 Vaccinations Delivered in CY20-21



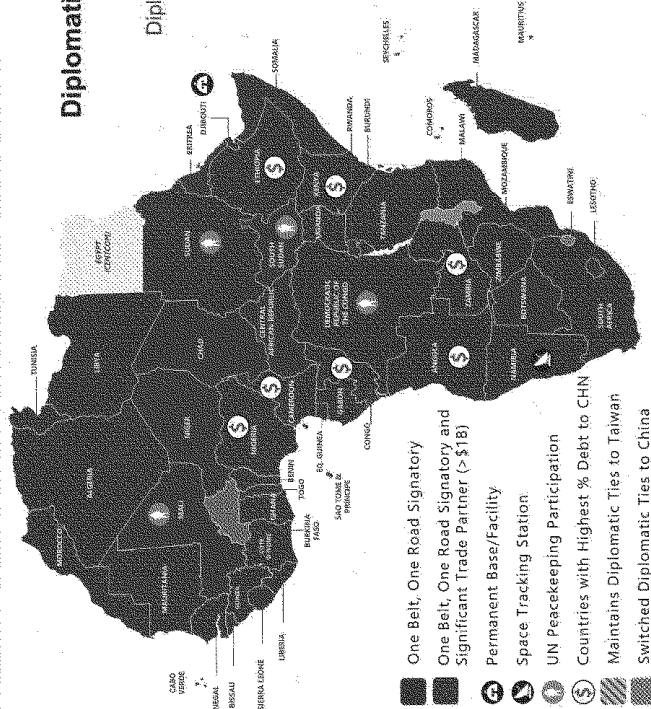
2021 China (CHN) Influence & Activity in Africa

Military/Defense

- 1** Permanent Military Base (Djibouti)
- 1 by 2025** Potential New Permanent Basing Locations
- ~4,000** Military Troops Deployed in Africa
- ~1,750** Military Troops Supporting 4 UN Peacekeeping Operations
- 0** Major Military Port Visits
3 Naval Escort Task Force Deployments to Gulf of Aden

Diplomatic/Development/Economic

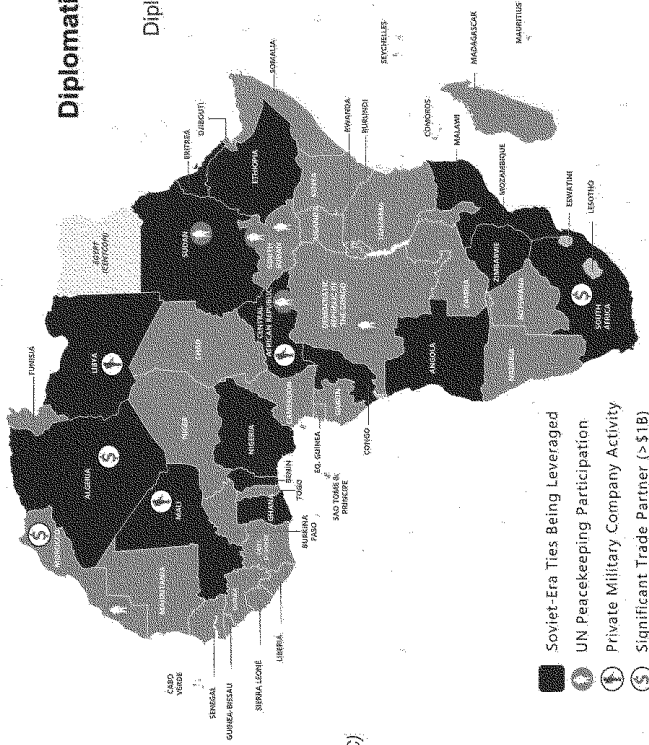
- 52** Diplomatic Missions out of 53 Countries in Area of Responsibility
- ~\$2.5 Billion** Foreign Aid CY20
- \$235 Billion** Economic Trade
\$254 Billion including Egypt
- 3** Cabinet-level or Above Visits
- ~1.3 Million** Citizens Living in Africa
- ~200 Million** COVID-19 Vaccinations Delivered in CY20-21



2021 Russia (RUS) Influence & Activity in Africa

Military/Defense

- 0 Permanent Military Bases
- 3 Potential New Permanent Basing Locations
- 4,000 – 5,000 Mercenaries Deployed in Africa
Wagner Private Military Company (PMC)
- 61 Military Troops Supporting 6 UN Peacekeeping Operations
- 12 Major Military Port Visits
Including 6 Visits to Port Sudan



Diplomatic/Development/Economic

- 38 Diplomatic Missions out of 53 Countries in Area of Responsibility
- ~\$30 Million Foreign Aid CY20
- \$13.2 Billion Economic Trade
\$18 Billion including Egypt
- 0 Cabinet-level or Above Visits
- ~37,000 Citizens Living in Africa
- ~720,000 COVID-19 Vaccinations Delivered in CY20-21

Al-Shabaab Threat Intensifying

(U) *Al-Shabaab has emerged as Al-Qaeda's largest, wealthiest, and deadliest global affiliate*

COMMITTED to KILLING AMERICANS

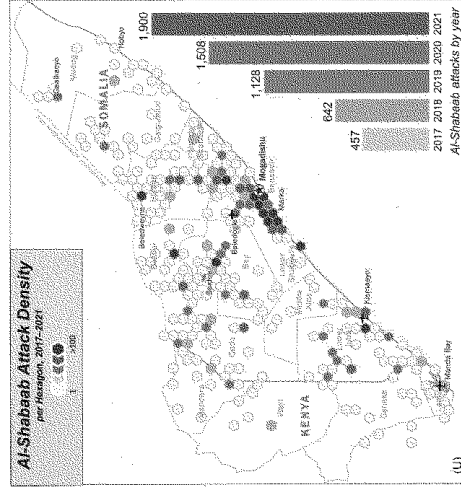
Since 2014, Al-Shabaab killed more Americans citizens (AMCIT) than all other Al-Qaeda affiliates combined. Al-Shabaab has been calling for more attacks on U.S. interests globally.

COMMITTED to EXTERNAL OPERATIONS

Operative ties in countries outside Somalia; primary threat to Kenya and Ethiopia

COMMITTED to REVENUE GENERATION AND INNOVATION

At least \$120 million in annual revenue from extortion, taxation, and legitimate businesses. Fueling efforts to obtain explosives/weaponry at an industrial scale; indications of attempts to weaponize drones



(U) Jan 2020: Manda Bay Airfield: 3 AMCITs Killed



(U) Sep 2018: Baladweyne Military Airfield



(U) Jan 2019: Nairobi's DusitD2 Hotel: 1 AMCIT Killed

(U) **Key Takeaways:** Inconsistent counterterrorism pressure has emboldened Al-Shabaab and enabled it to expand its shadow government and threaten Mogadishu. The group has plotted against the U.S. Homeland and is capitalizing on Somalia's degraded stability to augment its weapons capabilities, and intensify attacks across the country.

West African Terrorist Groups on the Move

(U) Violent Extremist Organization (VEO) attacks increasing in Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger region and are extending into littoral West Africa

(U) 2017 vs. 2021

3x VEO attacks, 4x civilian casualties

As a result of increased VEO growth and regional government response

2x increase in Internally Displaced Persons

Violent trends are exacerbating food insecurity, humanitarian access, etc.

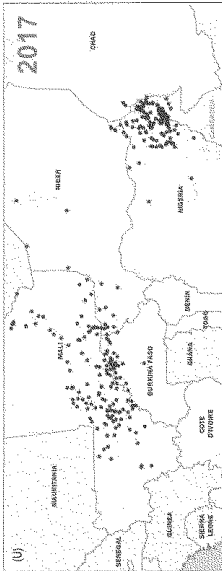
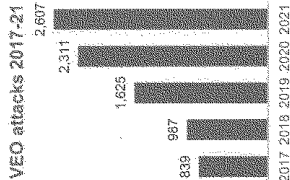
Widely Available Funding Methods

At least \$35 million earned annually from taxation, mining, and kidnapping

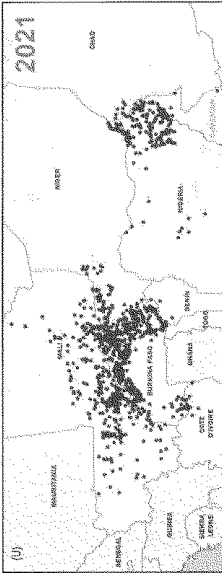
Al-Qaeda encroaching on 6 more countries

Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo

(U) Expansion of VEO Operations Across West Africa



**Source Armed Conflict Location And Event Data



**Source Armed Conflict Location And Event Data

(U) **Key Takeaways:** West African VEOs are increasingly demonstrating the ability to threaten the stability of West African nations. Regional Al-Qaeda and ISIS safe havens increase the threat to U.S. and Western personnel, and threaten regional security.

Africa: Foreign Reliance on Critical Mineral Stores

(U) Africa hosts sizeable reserves of U.S. Department of Interior--designated critical minerals with defense production applications. At least 40 percent of global production of five such minerals occurs on the continent, with the U.S., China, EU, and Russia relying on their import to varying degrees.

Table (U)

CRITICAL MINERAL	MILITARY APPLICATIONS	AFRICA'S SHARE OF GLOBAL PRODUCTION	MAJOR PRODUCING COUNTRIES	PARTIES RELIANT* ON AFRICAN IMPORTS
	Gas turbines, steel production, superalloys	43%	South Africa	U.S. China EU
	Gas turbines, batteries, radar components	76%	DRC Madagascar Morocco	China
	Jet engines, batteries, steel production	44%	Cote d'Ivoire Gabon Ghana South Africa	U.S. China Russia
	Catalytic converters, medical implants	81%	South Africa Zimbabwe	U.S. China EU
	Electronics, gas turbines, aircraft, spacecraft	67%	DRC Ethiopia Nigeria Rwanda Mozambique Uganda	China

* Importing more than 20% of a given mineral from African partners

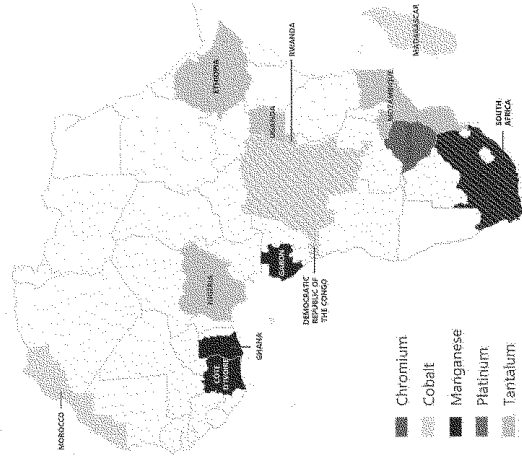
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USAFRICOM



Map (U)





Strategic Importance of the USCENTCOM AOR (U)

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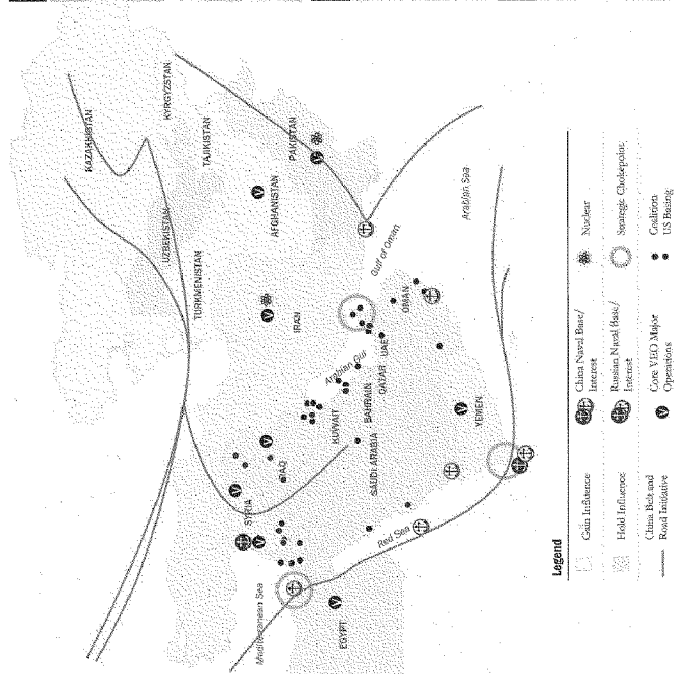
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AOR SIGNIFICANCE

Key Terrain	Suez Canal, Bab el Mandeb Strait of Hormuz
3 Strategic Chokepoints	
International Oil Imports	59% of Japanese, 64% of South Korean, 47% of Chinese, 33% of European allies
50% of World's Oil / Petroleum Liquids	
Changing Relationships	Israel included in 2021
Challenges	Iran primary threat; largest missile force; proxies; VEDs desire to acquire and employ WMD; China Belt and Road Initiative to include Suez Canal and UAE's Free Trade Zone

CDRUSCENTCOM PRIORITIES

Deter Iran	
Disrupt and degrade VEDs that can threaten the Homeland	
Competition with China and Russia	
Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems	
Displaced persons and weaponization/exploitation of refugees	
PARTNER PRIORITIES	
Counter-ISIS	
Counter-piracy	



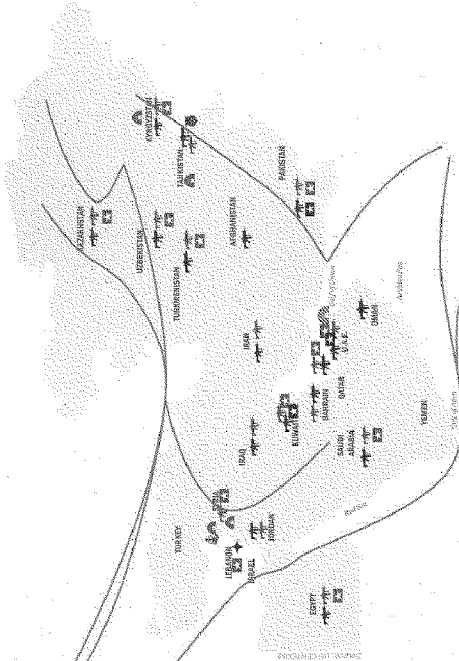
AOR AT A GLANCE	
Iran	Primary threat to ME stability; nuclear weapons concerns
VEDs	High priority groups operating throughout AOR
China	Widespread economic, infrastructure investments
Russia	Military and economic presence throughout AOR
Israel	Security challenges and commitments
WMD	Previous use by countries in AOR
Global Economy	Influenced by oil prices
DIPLOMATIC / DEVELOPMENT	
US Embassies	17 (out of 21)
Foreign Aid (USAID)	\$27.05bn (FY20)
Foreign Direct Investment	\$90.12bn (2020)
US Citizens living in USCENTCOM	~1,700,000
MILITARY / DEFENSE	
Enduring Military Bases	26
DOD Personnel deployed to USCENTCOM	~36,000 to 18 countries
2021 Foreign Military Sales	\$7.0bn to 17 countries
41% of US Global FMS	(4 of top 10 customers)
Major Port Visits	58 planned for Mar 2022

Military / Defense

- ~ 8,000 – 15,000 troops deployed at 4 permanent military bases in AOR: Syria, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan
- No new military bases currently planned
- Over \$8.3 billion in military equipment sales

Diplomatic / Information / Economic

- Embassies in 21 of 21 AOR countries
- Cabinet-level or higher visits / engagements in 18 of 21 AOR countries in 2021
- Information Operations via Russian media outlets in 21 of 21 AOR countries
 - Use state-run media to promote positive perceptions, counter U.S. and partner interests
 - Improving ability to reach foreign audiences and shape regional and local perceptions



Military / Defense

- Less than 100 military / security deployed in AOR; People's Armed Police in AFG
- 419 personnel involved in UN PKO
- No permanent military bases; 1 base planned in UAE
- Over \$4 billion in military equipment sales

Diplomatic / Information / Economic

- Belt and Road Initiative MOUs in 20 of 21 AOR countries; building overland and maritime infrastructure, network connectivity; capitalizing on development opportunities to support access to energy and trade
- Embassies in 20 of 21 AOR countries; (Yemen)
- Cabinet-level or higher visits / engagements in 18 of 21 AOR countries in 2021
- Information Operations Via Chinese media outlets in 11 of 21 AOR countries
- Use state-run media to promote positive perceptions, counter-U.S. and partner interests
- Expanding foreign media presence and improving ability to reach foreign audiences to shape regional and local perceptions

Figure 1

	Arm Sales		Base - Russia		Planned Base - China
	People's Armed Police - China		Peacekeeping Operation		Embassy Presence Flag Rank
	Key		Russia		China

Source: SIPRI, SIPRI Yearbook of Armaments and Disarmament, 1990-1991, 1992-1993, 1994-1995, 1996-1997, 1998-1999, 2000-2001, 2002-2003, 2004-2005, 2006-2007, 2008-2009, 2010-2011, 2012-2013, 2014-2015, 2016-2017, 2018-2019, 2020-2021, 2022-2023, 2024-2025, 2026-2027, 2028-2029, 2030-2031, 2032-2033, 2034-2035, 2036-2037, 2038-2039, 2040-2041, 2042-2043, 2044-2045, 2046-2047, 2048-2049, 2050-2051, 2052-2053, 2054-2055, 2056-2057, 2058-2059, 2060-2061, 2062-2063, 2064-2065, 2066-2067, 2068-2069, 2070-2071, 2072-2073, 2074-2075, 2076-2077, 2078-2079, 2080-2081, 2082-2083, 2084-2085, 2086-2087, 2088-2089, 2090-2091, 2092-2093, 2094-2095, 2096-2097, 2098-2099, 2100-2101, 2102-2103, 2104-2105, 2106-2107, 2108-2109, 2110-2111, 2112-2113, 2114-2115, 2116-2117, 2118-2119, 2120-2121, 2122-2123, 2124-2125, 2126-2127, 2128-2129, 2130-2131, 2132-2133, 2134-2135, 2136-2137, 2138-2139, 2140-2141, 2142-2143, 2144-2145, 2146-2147, 2148-2149, 2150-2151, 2152-2153, 2154-2155, 2156-2157, 2158-2159, 2160-2161, 2162-2163, 2164-2165, 2166-2167, 2168-2169, 2170-2171, 2172-2173, 2174-2175, 2176-2177, 2178-2179, 2180-2181, 2182-2183, 2184-2185, 2186-2187, 2188-2189, 2190-2191, 2192-2193, 2194-2195, 2196-2197, 2198-2199, 2200-2201, 2202-2203, 2204-2205, 2206-2207, 2208-2209, 2210-2211, 2212-2213, 2214-2215, 2216-2217, 2218-2219, 2220-2221, 2222-2223, 2224-2225, 2226-2227, 2228-2229, 2230-2231, 2232-2233, 2234-2235, 2236-2237, 2238-2239, 2240-2241, 2242-2243, 2244-2245, 2246-2247, 2248-2249, 2250-2251, 2252-2253, 2254-2255, 2256-2257, 2258-2259, 2260-2261, 2262-2263, 2264-2265, 2266-2267, 2268-2269, 2270-2271, 2272-2273, 2274-2275, 2276-2277, 2278-2279, 2280-2281, 2282-2283, 2284-2285, 2286-2287, 2288-2289, 2290-2291, 2292-2293, 2294-2295, 2296-2297, 2298-2299, 2300-2301, 2302-2303, 2304-2305, 2306-2307, 2308-2309, 2310-2311, 2312-2313, 2314-2315, 2316-2317, 2318-2319, 2320-2321, 2322-2323, 2324-2325, 2326-2327, 2328-2329, 2330-2331, 2332-2333, 2334-2335, 2336-2337, 2338-2339, 2340-2341, 2342-2343, 2344-2345, 2346-2347, 2348-2349, 2350-2351, 2352-2353, 2354-2355, 2356-2357, 2358-2359, 2360-2361, 2362-2363, 2364-2365, 2366-2367, 2368-2369, 2370-2371, 2372-2373, 2374-2375, 2376-2377, 2378-2379, 2380-2381, 2382-2383, 2384-2385, 2386-2387, 2388-2389, 2390-2391, 2392-2393, 2394-2395, 2396-2397, 2398-2399, 2400-2401, 2402-2403, 2404-2405, 2406-2407, 2408-2409, 2410-2411, 2412-2413, 2414-2415, 2416-2417, 2418-2419, 2420-2421, 2422-2423, 2424-2425, 2426-2427, 2428-2429, 2430-2431, 2432-2433, 2434-2435, 2436-2437, 2438-2439, 2440-2441, 2442-2443, 2444-2445, 2446-2447, 2448-2449, 2450-2451, 2452-2453, 2454-2455, 2456-2457, 2458-2459, 2460-2461, 2462-2463, 2464-2465, 2466-2467, 2468-2469, 2470-2471, 2472-2473, 2474-2475, 2476-2477, 2478-2479, 2480-2481, 2482-2483, 2484-2485, 2486-2487, 2488-2489, 2490-2491, 2492-2493, 2494-2495, 2496-2497, 2498-2499, 2500-2501, 2502-2503, 2504-2505, 2506-2507, 2508-2509, 2510-2511, 2512-2513, 2514-2515, 2516-2517, 2518-2519, 2520-2521, 2522-2523, 2524-2525, 2526-2527, 2528-2529, 2530-2531, 2532-2533, 2534-2535, 2536-2537, 2538-2539, 2540-2541, 2542-2543, 2544-2545, 2546-2547, 2548-2549, 2550-2551, 2552-2553, 2554-2555, 2556-2557, 2558-2559, 2560-2561, 2562-2563, 2564-2565, 2566-2567, 2568-2569, 2570-2571, 2572-2573, 2574-2575, 2576-2577, 2578-2579, 2580-2581, 2582-2583, 2584-2585, 2586-2587, 2588-2589, 2590-2591, 2592-2593, 2594-2595, 2596-2597, 2598-2599, 2600-2601, 2602-2603, 2604-2605, 2606-2607, 2608-2609, 2610-2611, 2612-2613, 2614-2615, 2616-2617, 2618-2619, 2620-2621, 2622-2623, 2624-2625, 2626-2627, 2628-2629, 2630-2631, 2632-2633, 2634-2635, 2636-2637, 2638-2639, 2640-2641, 2642-2643, 2644-2645, 2646-2647, 2648-2649, 2650-2651, 2652-2653, 2654-2655, 2656-2657, 2658-2659, 266

Key Russia: China: BRT Transport Corridor (Blond)



UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

29 March 2022

The Honorable Lisa McClain
U.S. House of Representatives
218 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman McClain,

I take this opportunity to personally respond to your two questions you expressed during the open session of 17 March 2022 House Armed Services Committee hearing.

Regarding your question as to whether the department, or any agency of the U.S. government, continues to provide assistance or funds to the Iraqi Federal Police, the United States Central Command has not provided any support to the Iraqi Federal Police since 2020. Before 2020, as part of the United States Central Command Defeat Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) campaign, we did utilize Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Funds to support the Iraqi Federal Police. The U.S. Central Command did this in the form of providing individual equipment, ammunition, small arms, and counterterrorism training. I cannot speak on behalf of other U.S. government departments and agencies regarding their activities with respect to the Iraqi Federal Police.

Regarding your question as to whether the Badr organization is a terrorist organization, the Badr organization is not currently designated a foreign terrorist organization by the Department of State, nor is it identified on the Department of the Treasury's sanctions lists. However, the Badr organization is known to engage in anti-U.S. operations; take money, equipment, and direction from Iran; and directly affiliate itself with designated terrorist organizations.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter and for your continued support to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and Guardians of United States Central Command.

Sincerely,


Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr.
General, U.S. Marines

Copy to:
The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
The Honorable Mike D. Rogers
Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

MARCH 17, 2022

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. CARBAJAL

Ms. BAKER. Challenges in governance and underlying security contribute to the growth of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), and this is an issue we face across the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) area of responsibility (AOR). Thus, much of our effort in the AOR is dedicated to institutional capacity building and enabling sustainable security in close coordination with our allies and African partners. Another focus of our efforts has been to support French CT operations in the Sahel. While successful, we recognize that focusing only on the military response has not been sufficient. In addition to the significant resources DOD commits to counterterrorism efforts focused on mitigating the immediate threat posed by VEOs in the region, we are also coordinating with interagency partners, including the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of the Treasury to implement the NSC's Sahel Strategy and the Global Fragility Act (GFA), which focus on development and prevention and mitigation of extremism and violent conflict. The GFA is an important mechanism for addressing the governance and security challenges needed to reverse the negative trend in terrorist activity. [See page 31.]

General TOWNSEND. Congressman, the biggest impediment to being able to better address the threats posed by Al-Shabaab and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, and I would add ISIS, is insufficient will on the part of African governments to provide good governance and security to confront the challenges. For the U.S., the highest impediment is a lack of an approved whole of government strategy with appropriate resources to achieve the objectives of said strategy.

Yes, I think the United States needs to amend our strategy in the AOR, because the threat is increasing rapidly and so are the risks to U.S. interests. [See page 31.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. WALTZ

Ms. BAKER. The Department submitted the Sec. 1069 report to Congress on September 30, 2022. [See page 26.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

MARCH 17, 2022

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LAMBORN

Mr. LAMBORN. Please describe the role the Army and other military services have in training and assisting our allies and partners in the region against a variety of threats to our nation's security and regional stability? How do you plan to employ your assigned Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) as well as your National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) units over the next 12 months?

Ms. BAKER. The Army and other military services have an important role in our security cooperation efforts and regular military-to-military engagements with our allies and partners, including in the Middle East and Africa. We are encouraged to see expanding roles for DOD, including the Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) and the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP). Forging long-standing relationships with SFABs and State National Guards builds ally and partner military capabilities and interoperability. Enduring relationships forged over many years both increases deterrence and opens doors to the access and presence we need to compete in these regions. With regard to the SPP, one of our strongest security cooperation tools, we continue to grow the program throughout the world. On April 1, DOD released findings from an independent strategic evaluation covering SPP's outcomes from 2014–2019. The Department is considering recommendations and lessons learned from this assessment, monitoring, and evaluation effort, to include assessing the capacity for new SPPs, how much growth the SPP can handle annually while sustaining existing partnerships, and ways to leverage the SPP as a unique and specialized security cooperation program.

Mr. LAMBORN. One of the United States' most important relationships in the Middle East is with Israel. As your command works to grow the integrated air and missile defense system for the region and our partners, how are Israeli capabilities being brought into the network? How are theater capabilities being integrated into Israeli defense?

Ms. BAKER. The Abraham Accords between Israel and many of its neighbors in the Gulf and Morocco, in conjunction with Israel's long-standing peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and Israel recently being moved into the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility expands opportunities to integrate air and missile defense capabilities among our partners in the Middle East. There are a range of efforts ongoing to enhance regionally integrated air and missile defense. For instance, at the Negev Summit in March 2022, leaders from Israel, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States came together in Israel to discuss how to build on USCENTCOM's work on integrated air and missile defense. These efforts build on the annual JUNIPER-series missile defense exercise that U.S. European Command conducted with Israel for more than 20 years, which USCENTCOM is continuing. DOD efforts are not limited to Israel; in a related effort in mid-March of this year, DOD co-chaired the U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council working group on integrated air and missile defense, which developed a common vision for deterring the most pressing threats in the region and reaffirmed a shared commitment to regional security. Additionally, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency and the Israeli Missile Defense Organization have cooperated on research, development, and production of advanced air and missile defense capabilities for more than 30 years. The Department is now working to leverage this past experience in bilateral force development and multilateral operational lessons learned to facilitate an integrated air and missile defense architecture for all our partners in the region.

Mr. LAMBORN. Please describe the role the Army and other military services have in training and assisting our allies and partners in the region against a variety of threats to our nation's security and regional stability? How do you plan to employ your assigned Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) as well as your National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) units over the next 12 months?

General TOWNSEND. USAFRICOM's Components play a significant role in training and assisting our Allies and Partners in the region against a variety of threats to our nation's security and regional stability. All Services leverage the Joint Exercise Program (JEP), security cooperation and assistance, and engagements to maintain presence and influence access. In addition, our efforts directly counter Russia and

China influence and seek to maintain the U.S. as the partner of choice. I am a big fan of both the SFAB and SPP. Both are agile, low cost, high payoff programs.

Over the next 12 months, our assigned SFAB will support operations, activities and investments in 8 African Countries. These include tier one countries of Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Tunisia, Djibouti and Kenya. Engagement in tier two countries include Chad and Niger.

Over the next 12 months, USAFRICOM SPP will continue to leverage relationships and capabilities to build partnership capacity and sustained engagements on the continent. Specifically, the Indiana NG will conduct the Niger Logistics Company Building T&E case in Niger.

Mr. LAMBORN. What roles do the Air and Army National Guard have in your theater and how are they enabling your mission?

General TOWNSEND. The Air and Army National Guard enable USAFRICOM, across the full range of operations, activities, and initiatives (OAI) by providing the operational depth of highly trained personnel and capabilities where the inventory of available Active Component forces cannot meet the operational demand. The bottom line is the National Guard is critical to almost everything AFRICOM does.

Missions include providing Crisis Response Security Task Force in East Africa, Intra-Theater Airlift (C-130s), Engineering, Signal and Communication functions, Aviation support, Theater Fixed Wing (C-12s) and Airfield Operations support and Army Security Force Assistance Trainers.

Mr. LAMBORN. Israel's acquisition of the KC-46 will be important for its military capabilities, especially as military threats posed by Iran and others will only increase. However, the anticipated delivery for Israel's KC-46 appears to be years away. Have you looked at the temporary deployment or stationing of one or two U.S. KC-46s in Israel as a means to (1) support U.S. interests, training, and dynamic force employment and (2) conduct a combined pilot, crew chief, and maintainer training with Israeli counterparts on the KC-46? Do you believe such an arrangement could reduce the time for Israel between receipt of the KC-46s and those assets achieving full operational capability?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Currently there is no planned KC-46 deployment to Israel. We have not planned any KC-46 Title 10 subject matter expert exchanges with Israel due to lack of KC-46 assets/personnel in theater. Once those assets are programmed for arrival, we will likely coordinate with Israel for potential subject matter exchanges and/or potential deployments based on mission requirements and resources.

Mr. LAMBORN. Please describe the role the Army and other military services have in training and assisting our allies and partners in the region against a variety of threats to our nation's security and regional stability? How do you plan to employ your assigned Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) as well as your National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) units over the next 12 months?

General MCKENZIE. (U) The SFAB provides USCENTCOM with a persistent network of Army Security Force Assistance (SFA) Teams conducting theater security cooperation activities across the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). The SFAB is now authorized to provide capabilities in support of CJTF-OIR in Iraq where they assist in training partner forces to counter and defeat D'aesh. The SFAB conducts advising with partners through subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE), conferences and seminars. When authorized, SFAB is conducting building partner capacity (BPC) activities focused on counter unmanned aerial systems (CUAS), counter improvised explosive device, border security, military decision-making process (MDMP), and intelligence preparation of the battlefield.

(U) The U.S. Army National Guard's (USARNG) State Partnership Program (SPP) supports the USARCENT security cooperation effort in three main ways: by providing subject matter expertise, by providing additional capabilities to accomplish tasks, and by providing continuity to complement what USARCENT accomplishes with rotational forces. These activities include bilateral and multilateral engagements resulting in the development of seminars, visits and subject matter expert exchanges which serve to strengthen partner relationships.

(U) State partnerships are an essential component of enduring partner relationships. One distinguishing characteristic of our National Guard units is many Guardsmen remain in units longer than their active-duty contemporaries. This lends an additional element of continuity to SPPs; often partner nation (PN) units will maintain enduring relationships with their State Guard counterparts. In our AOR countries, that longevity enhances trust. That trust, in turn, allows Guardsmen to play a prominent role as we develop and implement our country security cooperation plans (CSCPs).

(U) USCENTCOM is currently developing plans for FY23 and will seek to maximize the use of the SFABs to advance our individual country objectives. Our SPP

partners are fully integrated in our security cooperation planning process and often generate an outsize return.

Mr. LAMBORN. What roles do the Air and Army National Guard have in your theater and how are they enabling your mission?

General MCKENZIE. (U) For Fiscal Year 2022, USCENTCOM received allocation of Air and Army National Guard units and service members from 35 different states, with the preponderance of them supporting the missions of our Army and Air Force components. In Fiscal Year 2022 USCENTCOM will employ over 1,200 Air National Guardsmen and over 8,500 Army National Guardsmen. 17 of those troop-contributing states provide units in support of the train, advise, assist, and enable mission in Iraq. These nearly 10,000 citizen Soldiers and Airmen are an essential component of the Joint Force and are critical to our success. When USCENTCOM requests critical force elements to conduct operations within our area of responsibility, it is done without regard to the component. The services, in turn, source our operational requirements with units and personnel from across all components.

Mr. LAMBORN. Your area of responsibility has become increasingly complicated by Iran's relationships with China and Russia. By conducting foreign military sales with Iran, China and Russia are making an already challenging security threat more advanced. Should we be concerned about continued advancements of Iranian threats in the area, including future hypersonic threats? To what degree is the Integrated Air and Missile Defense system we are developing able to deter and defend against these threats?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Yes, we should be very concerned about advancements in Iran's capabilities, including the potential for Iran to acquire future hypersonic technology, and the threat Iran presents to U.S. and partner interests. Iran's expanding inventory of advanced conventional weapons and their proliferation to its proxies and partners, coupled with improved offensive air and air defense capabilities, is a growing concern due to the quantity and quality of these systems. Reports that Russia has turned to Iran for lethal unmanned aerial vehicles for operations in Ukraine highlights one example of closer military ties between Tehran and our strategic competitors.

Mr. LAMBORN. One of the United States' most important relationships in the Middle East is with Israel. As your command works to grow the integrated air and missile defense system for the region and our partners, how are Israeli capabilities being brought into the network? How are theater capabilities being integrated into Israeli defense?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Israel is currently interoperable with the United States via network connections to the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) and USEUCOM, and connections from MDA and USEUCOM to USCENTCOM. Integrating Israel's capabilities with USCENTCOM is a priority for us and will be discussed in detail with the Israelis at Command and Control Interoperability Boards (CCIB). USCENTCOM intends to collect and approve Information Exchange Requirements (IERs), which will then allow us to develop a plan for greater and more direct integration between Israeli and USCENTCOM systems.

Mr. LAMBORN. What is being done to support the integration of Israel into existing USCENTCOM networks, like the regional missile warning notifications supported by the U.S. Space Force?

General MCKENZIE. (U) We have an extensive variety of shared engagements and working groups with Israel that include secure C2 interoperability and integration, air and missile defense, joint exercises, defense cooperation, and intelligence sharing. These fora provide us with a venue to explore and develop greater integration with Israel. For example, we requested and received approval to integrate Israel into the information sharing Middle East Security Forces (MESF) construct. Second, USCENTCOM integrated the Shared Early Warning (SEW) network into the USCENTCOM Command Center in June 2022. Third, USCENTCOM J6 hosted USEUCOM and Israel for the Engineering Working Group (EWG) from September 12–15, 2022 to discuss the transition of secure IT services from USEUCOM to USCENTCOM. Moving forward, regional integration of air defense is a tremendous opportunity to pursue for this unified command plan transition. USCENTCOM and IDF aim to sign a Data Sharing Memorandum of Understanding at the upcoming Command and Control Interoperability Board (CCIB), the primary venue to discuss secure C2 interoperability and the integration of Israel into existing USCENTCOM networks.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. Congress just approved and the President signed into law an additional \$1 billion for Israel's Iron Dome system. How quickly can we get this funding spent and help Israel to be in a better position to deal with future threats from Hamas, Hezbollah and other terror groups?

Ms. BAKER. The Department of Defense strongly supports replenishing and strengthening Israel's Iron Dome Defense System capabilities. The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD (A&S)) is the organization within the Department responsible for executing the Exchange of Letters with the Israeli Ministry of Defense required to execute the support provided in the OMNIBUS. The letters outline the terms of the transfer of funds to support Israel's Iron Dome Defense System, which include a workshare for U.S. industry of not less than 25% of the appropriated \$1 billion funding. These discussions have concluded and the letters were signed on April 22. Subsequently, the Department transferred the supplemental funding for Iron Dome Defense System to the Israeli Ministry of Defense.

Mr. SCOTT. What can be done to help prioritization of countering this growing drone threat from a policy standpoint?

Ms. BAKER. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. SCOTT. What is the state of logistics and transportation infrastructure on the African continent, including warehousing, communications, customs and legal support?

General TOWNSEND. It is important here to distinguish the general state of logistics infrastructure available across the continent and that which U.S. Forces rely on to conduct operations into and within the continent.

As a posture-limited command operating in an expansive and austere environment, USAFRICOM Forces rely heavily on airlift and contracted sustainment support. Strategic and tactical airlift offer the fastest means to move forces and equipment into accessible airfields. USAFRICOM leverages sealift to move assets relying heavily on our Embassy Teams and Army Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC) to work through legal and customs exoneration processes that are unique to each sovereign partner.

Logistical delays occur frequently on the continent—challenges from washed out roads limiting ground movement, to fuel scarcity resulting from a global crises. These forms of contested logistics have driven the command to work with our Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) partners on prepositioning options. For example, as a result of shipping delays for food supplies (CLASS I), DLA's Prime Vendor in West Africa expanded its warehouse capabilities (infrastructure, communication, etc.) to expedite delivery timelines for orders from our Service components.

For airlift, when U.S. capacity is stretched, AFRICOM worked closely with European and Tunisian partners to take advantage of excess airlift capacity to expand distribution options.

Mr. SCOTT. A Chinese company just took control of Uganda's main international airport because of a failure to pay back loans. How should the U.S. government respond to China's continent-wide Belt and Road activities?

General TOWNSEND. The U.S. should continue to focus on building strong partnerships in Africa while encouraging diverse sources of investment for African nations. China continues to use transactional relationships to expand its Belt and Road activities in Africa, while the U.S. builds relationships with partner nations that prioritize a safe, secure, and prosperous Africa. Ultimately, the negative financial, social, and environmental impacts of Chinese activities in Africa will limit the ability of the Chinese government to expand its influence on the continent. At the same time, USAFRICOM will continue to support U.S. diplomacy and development activities to reinforce African partner resiliency so that they can make informed and independent decision for their future stability and prosperity.

Mr. SCOTT. Is there an emerging C-130 coalition on the continent for airlift?

General TOWNSEND. Not really, but there is interest among African partners to set one up and USAFRICOM is working to establish one in the future. There is a construct based in Papa, Hungary that works called the Heavy Airlift Wing utilizing C-17s. I would like to see a similar construct among willing and capable African partners.

What the command has today is an established framework developed in conjunction with European partners, operating on the continent, to collaborate on intra and inter-theater airlift sharing options. This is done within an Africa Distribution Network Forum that has existed for a few years. Additionally, our Air Force team has been working to certify willing and capable partners, notably Tunisia with viable C-130 fleets through an Air Transport Sharing Mechanism (ATSM). With more Af-

rican partner C-130s certified as airworthy, we can see building towards a C-130 coalition that the AU and RECs can rely on for crises response.

A good example of African solutions to African challenges occurred last year as Angolan air assets moved South African and Botswanan forces and cargo in support of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission in Mozambique.

Mr. SCOTT. Does Russia have anything to offer the people of Africa besides more arms and mercenaries to prolong its wars?

General TOWNSEND. Some 43 African countries purchase or employ Russian arms, however Russia also sells key agricultural commodities to several African countries and engages others in energy and economic cooperation. Though some cooperation initiatives provide genuine benefits to African participants, others enable malign activity such as sanctions evasion.

Fourteen African countries import more than half their wheat from Russia and Ukraine, with Somalia depending entirely on these countries for its supply. However, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is severely disrupting this supply chain and has the potential to worsen food insecurity in African countries, particularly those less reliant on local grains such as sorghum and teff.

Russia has memorandums of understanding with countries such as Nigeria, Rwanda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to assist in their development of peaceful nuclear energy programs. Russia's Rosatom state atomic energy corporation leads efforts to help African states develop and build nuclear power plants, research institutes, and provides relevant training.

Finally, Moscow can provide expertise to African states on mineral resource extraction, often through oligarch-owned businesses. This is an attractive offer for states with limited options due to local security conditions or external sanctions.

Mr. SCOTT. In a global struggle against Communist China and Russia, why must AFRICOM do more without having more resources?

General TOWNSEND. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. SCOTT. What is the role of private logistics contractors like Agility and APL in AFRICOM? How do they help AFRICOM respond to crises? Are there any plans to involve private logistics companies in wargames and exercises in order for AFRICOM to better understand their capabilities and for private companies to improve their knowledge of AFRICOM's potential logistics requirements?

General TOWNSEND. No plans for USAFRICOM to involve private logistics in wargames and exercises. In general, USAFRICOM relies heavily on a variety of logistics contractors; for example, Agility International Inc. ("Agility") has been awarded contracts for surface distribution, warehousing and cargo forwarding across USAFRICOM's Area of Responsibility. One of the key functions for logistics contractors includes supporting crisis response by maintaining Cooperative Security Locations (CSL) in a "warm base" status, enabling U.S. forces to flow in and receive support on very short notice. Although we contract support for exercises, there are no plans to involve contractors in wargames or exercises as it would involve granting an unfair advantage to compete for potential logistic requirements, which would risk violation of the 1984 Competition in Contracting Act.

Mr. SCOTT. Do the military planners in AFRICOM have the established databases regarding available logistics infrastructure with the private sector prior to conducting missions?

General TOWNSEND. Military planners at USAFRICOM are able to assess existing logistics infrastructure required to support operations via several means: Pre-Deployment Site Surveys (PDSS), U.S. Embassy Country Team information, and USTRANSCOM airfield report databases. Where the site is considered a Cooperative Security Location (CSL), a Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP)-funded private contractor provides site updates to our logistics planners.

Generally, there isn't a single database consolidating all this data; however, USAFRICOM supports ongoing DOD efforts to consolidate numerous logistics systems of record, to include operational contract support databases, into a new and single data environment. This will provide a significant advantage to our planners.

Mr. SCOTT. Does AFRICOM have any plans to work with private logistics companies to identify locations where additional infrastructure should be located?

General TOWNSEND. USAFRICOM components may choose to leverage existing USACE/NAVFAC contracts with Architectural and Engineering (AE) firms when requirements emerge to conduct master planning in the form of long range plans and studies at locations where additional infrastructure should be located at existing posture locations. Master planning provides a long-term strategy to guide future infrastructure investment, and supports visualizing the connection between the infrastructure, current and potential future missions, and the people assigned to those locations. USAFRICOM doesn't work directly with private logistics companies to

identify locations where additional infrastructure should be located, however USAFRICOM does consult with contractors on how to best utilize current and future investments on the current list of posture locations across the continent.

Mr. SCOTT. Ambassador Herman J. Cohen wrote in the March 2022 issue of Proceedings an article entitled, "The Time is Right for a Pivot to Africa." Moreover, according to Ambassador Cohen, "It will be crucial to first sell the American public on a pivot to Africa." What recommendations do you have to sell the American people on a pivot to Africa?

General TOWNSEND. I recommend Congress and USAFRICOM continue to work together to inform the American people that a more stable and prosperous Africa will enhance America's security. In addition to public statements and congressional testimony, congress can provide funding to support publically releasable studies. These studies are a good method to provide reliable information to the U.S. public on security concerns. Examples of area where studies would provide value include: Chinese military expansion in Africa, illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea, the malign effects of private military companies in Africa and threats of African instability to American security and prosperity.

This enormous continent sits on global crossroads and is ripe with opportunity while simultaneously burdened with challenges. It holds tremendous geo-strategic significance while being shaped by the competing forces of prosperity and poverty, peace and conflict, plenty and famine, good governance and corruption and democratic backsliding.

Africa possesses vast untapped energy deposits, including gone third of the world's mineral reserve and rare earth metals. These resources are key supplies that America and the world rely upon to produce 21st century technologies. Open and transparent management of Africa's resources could contribute to prosperity at local and global levels, while predatory lending practices and elite manipulation could undermine African prosperity while fueling broader global conflict. The winners and losers of the 21st century global economy may well be determined in Africa.

According to the Global Terrorism Index, seven of the ten countries with the largest increase in terrorism in 2020 were in Sub Saharan Africa. In East Africa, for example, al-Qaida's al-Shabaab remains the greatest threat to U.S. persons and interests in the region as well as the homeland, while undermining peace, security, and political progress in Somalia.

The American people should also know that our strategic competitors, China and Russia, have long recognized Africa's importance. Both nations leverage opportunities to erode U.S. influence with African nations. Both nations are gaining ground on the continent. Both nations successfully convert soft and hard power investments into new partnerships. Both nations exert political influence at U.S. expense.

USAFRICOM believes it is imperative that America sustain a predictable, though modest, investment in Africa to protect U.S. interests and advance U.S. objectives in this dynamic and important region of the world. A sustained and coordinate U.S. government approach, bolstered by strategic vision and appropriate resourcing, can serve to strengthen relationships with partners in Africa, deter malign influence, and further our objective for increased security, stability and prosperity on the continent.

Mr. SCOTT. What is the potential of security, sustainable agriculture, trade, and better governance in AFRICOM?

General TOWNSEND. The short answer is the potential is tremendous but also unlikely if we do not resource a whole-of-government approach to doing so. Africa has immense human, economic, and resource potential. While some countries have made impressive strides in all of these areas, others appear mired in cycles of conflict. USAFRICOM's focus is on security, but security force assistance, and countering VEOs, can only make a long-term impacts in conjunction with diplomacy and development efforts that collectively improve the governing institutions and the lives of people.

Security, political, and economic challenges require coordinated investments across the U.S. government and with allies and partners. These problems are interconnected, and so must be the solutions. The demands of population displacement and forced migrations, for example, reaffirm the need for a whole-of-government approach bolstered by the right authorities and timely funding to tackle these challenges. For its part, USAFRICOM works to promote partner defense capabilities, anti-corruption campaigns, and military subordination to civilian authorities in order to help create conditions for expanded stability and development.

Mr. SCOTT. How can the United States better communicate to the people of Africa that Communist Chinese and Russian projects in Africa are a very bad deal for the people of Africa?

General TOWNSEND. First, we need to communicate effectively across diplomacy, development, and defense to ensure the United States projects a unified message. USAFRICOM works across the U.S. government to achieve this goal and explain to African partners our views on Chinese and Russian projects.

Second, we need to demonstrate that the United States is the better partner of choice by providing timely and effective support to partners when and where they need it. USAFRICOM works with partners to understand their needs and meet them where they are. Speed and flexibility are two areas where we continually seek improvements to ensure we get our partners what they need.

We seek to continue to work with congress and our interagency partners to reinforce the negative aspects of Chinese and Russian investments and provide dependable alternatives.

Mr. SCOTT. Will you please describe AFRICOM's role in countering Russian influence operations?

General TOWNSEND. Our role, within the larger whole of government approach, is to secure the U.S. strategic interests by ensuring access and influence while strengthening partner of choice status in a secure and stable Africa.

Our approach to the Russian problem is three-pronged. Our operations, activities and investments are focused on undermining Russia's ability to sow distrust and cynicism, protecting democratic norms, values, and institutions that hold power to maintain accountability and promoting U.S. Ally, and Partner interests and reputation.

We leverage the Joint Exercise Program (JEP), security cooperation and assistance, Combined Military Information Support Operations (MISO), and strategic engagements to maintain presence and access to influence African partners and counter Russian operations.

Mr. SCOTT. What is AFRICOM's strategy for the use and management of information for both offensive and defensive information operations?

General TOWNSEND. USAFRICOM's information strategy is to preserve U.S., ally, and partner decision-making advantage, while denying the same to our adversaries. We have a special focus on shining a spotlight on the bad behaviors of malign actors such as China, Russia (including PMCs), Iran and VEOs.

Defensively, the Command strategy is to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Command, interagency, and partner information at all times. USAFRICOM does this by mitigating vulnerabilities to U.S. and partner networks.

Offensively, USAFRICOM disrupts, manipulates, and interrupts adversary information and decision making cycles to our advantage. We accomplish this through the application of information related capabilities (e.g. cyber, electronic warfare, military information support operations, operations security, and deception).

Mr. SCOTT. What war colleges in the AFRICOM AOR are in need of additional U.S. assistance to enhance their respective missions? What nations still need to establish a war college for their armed forces? Should African military personnel receive additional seats at U.S. War Colleges? What more can U.S. War Colleges do to enhance any partnerships with African War Colleges?

General TOWNSEND. African war colleges are generally underfunded across the board and would benefit from stronger professional military education (PME) programs. Two countries have asked for our assistance in this space, Senegal and Nigeria, which we are exploring programs of support. We have not received any other requests this past year.

The countries still lacking an accredited senior war college include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, CAR, Chad, Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville; Congo-Kinshasa, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Although some of these countries have some form of PME, they all present opportunities to partner with U.S. institution for mutual benefit.

To address demand signals that exceed our domestic capacity, additional resources would enable USAFRICOM to mirror the successful efforts of USEUCOM's "mini-war college"—a U.S. training center in southern Germany that provides senior military education to European partners and allies—that served as a critical enabler of Ukraine's military modernization following the invasion of Crimea.

U.S. War Colleges can help improve ties with African militaries by providing additional instructors to integrate with the staffs at African war colleges. It is preferable that we plan these requests a year out, but USAFRICOM often lacks sufficient personnel to fulfill these requests. Further, at moment, the U.S. government does not accredit African military institutions, although we have assessed several partner in-

stitutions on their degree of equivalency to our own, there is more that we could do to help African military institutions gain accreditation.

Mr. SCOTT. How many manned and unmanned platforms would have to be deployed to AFRICOM's AOR to be able to have 24/7 coverage of AFRICOM for 365 days a year?

General TOWNSEND. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. SCOTT. What are you seeing today from Iran in your area of operation?

General TOWNSEND. Iran is pursuing an aggressive strategy in Africa to expand its influence, elevate its international credibility, and threaten Western and Israeli interests. Since the October 2020 expiration of the UN arms embargo on Iran, Tehran has increasingly focused on expanding its diplomatic and defense outreach in Africa, specifically in the east and west. So far in 2022, Iran has pledged to provide several West African countries defense and technology assistance. In 2021, Iran established a new embassy in the Republic of the Congo, the Iranian navy circumnavigated Africa for the first time, and Iranian armed UAS were delivered to the Ethiopian military during the Tigray conflict. Many of Iran's outreach efforts are in the nascent stages and likely are vulnerable to disruption through measures such as U.S. and diplomatic and military engagement with African partners.

Additionally, the Iranian threat network (ITN), led by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), has increased its activity and remained intent on expanding its capabilities in Africa. Since late 2020, there have been at least ten disrupted probable ITN plots in Africa, including two plots against U.S. ambassadors in Africa. Iran almost certainly continues to seek retaliation for the death of former IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Soleimani, and it could leverage the ITN to attack high-level U.S. government or military officials in Africa, especially if Iran suspects them of complicity in Soleimani's death. Finally, the IRGC-QF is increasingly leveraging East African smuggling networks operating in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to resupply the Huthis in Yemen with lethal aid.

Mr. SCOTT. How will CENTCOM focus on integrating Israel into already-established multinational exercises hosted by Israel's Arab partners like Egypt (Bright Star) and the UAE (Iron Union) to include Israel, and vice versa, will you encourage Israeli to invite Arab partners to join their exercises (e.g., Blue Flag)?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Incorporating Israel into the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR) operationalizes the Abraham Accords by adding a military component to the broad normalization that is already underway between Israel and many of its Arab neighbors. Israel brings advanced maritime and air and missile defense capabilities to regional partnerships. Their expertise and increasing acceptance among regional partners enable a shared approach to address threats from regional malign actors. In addition to our traditional JUNIPER-series exercises with Israel, as the mil-to-mil relationships between Israel and our other regional partners expand, we are working with partners to include Israel in exercises they have never participated in before, such as IRON UNION. Additionally, we are working with the Israelis to include our mutual Arab partners in Israeli exercises such as BLUE FLAG. While geopolitics influence the levels and visibility of such engagements, USCENTCOM is working across all engagements to normalize Israel's mil-to-mil relationships with partners with increasing success. We are optimistic that Egypt may invite Israel to participate in BRIGHT STAR 23.

Mr. SCOTT. Opportunities now exist for CENTCOM to integrate Israel into existing U.S.-led multinational task forces. Recent examples include joint naval exercises between Israel, the United States, the UAE, and Bahrain in the Red Sea in November, and the International Maritime Exercise/Cutlass Express 2022 which included participants from Israel, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia in February. How will CENTCOM work to continue to expand such joint maritime exercises? Do you think incorporating Israel into the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a 34-nation partnership based at NAVCENT headquarters in Bahrain that focuses on freedom of navigation, counterpiracy, counter narcotics, and other illicit activity by non-state actors makes sense? Of CMF's three separate task forces focused on maritime security, where do you feel Israeli participation may be most feasible? (Operations outside the Persian Gulf (Task Force 150), counterpiracy missions (Task Force 151), or operations inside the Persian Gulf (Task Force 152) in immediate proximity to Iran?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Incorporating Israel into the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) operationalizes the Abraham Accords by adding a military component to the broad normalization that is already underway between Israel and many of its Arab neighbors. Incorporation of Israel into the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) may also bring considerable military capability and expertise to this critical regional partnership. With 34 partner nations, the CMF, centered on adher-

ence to the rules-based international order, is the world's largest maritime partnership. With shared interest in protecting maritime trade routes in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Gulf, and the Red Sea, Israel can add capabilities and capacity to the enduring CMF construct. Over time, participation by Israel in all CMF task forces focused on maritime security may be feasible.

Mr. SCOTT. Are you seeing an uptick in advanced drone threats in the CENTCOM AOR? How concerned are you about attacks on our forces and facilities by multiple drones and drone swarms?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Yes, I am deeply concerned about U.S. and partner force protection, especially as Iran demonstrates increased use of UAVs and a willingness to proliferate these systems. We have already observed the adversary's use of multiple drones in a single attack and swarms remain a possibility. I am further concerned Iran is expanding its UAV inventory while improving tactics, techniques, and procedures—and sharing equipment and knowledge with its proxies and partners.

(U) Protecting our forces and assets is my top commitment. USCENTCOM has already seen complex attacks involving multiple drones (varying in size) as well as mortars and missiles. We fully expect swarming and other tactics will continue to evolve, along with other technique and technology advancements.

Mr. SCOTT. You have expressed an urgent operational need for counter UAS capabilities. Is DOD developing and fielding counter drone systems fast enough to mitigate this growing threat so that we do not have to shoot down cheap "Costco" drones, as you say, with F-16s and Patriots?

General MCKENZIE. (U) DOD has made great progress in fielding C-UAS systems, and we have effective layered defenses in place at many of our locations, but there is more work to be done. Recently the Department reprogrammed approximately \$460 million to support the Counter-small UAS (C-sUAS) requirements, and I support the increased funding to address future C-UAS/CsUAS requirements.

Mr. SCOTT. The Office of the Under Secretary for Research and Engineering and the Administration's Council on Science and Technology have prioritized exploring directed energy and specifically high-power microwave, technology and solutions. Is CENTCOM working on directed energy and high-power microwave solutions for electronic warfare and air and missile defense?

General MCKENZIE. (U) USCENTCOM fully supports development, testing and fielding of directed energy (DE) capabilities for use in our area of responsibility. Our role in the development of warfighting capabilities is to validate Joint needs generated by our components. We also participate in the development of future warfighting concepts, which serve to drive innovation across the Department. We are not funded to pursue solutions to our generated needs. To address our needs, we must compete for funding from programs established within the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, and the Services—the research, development, testing, and engineering (RDT&E) ecosystem—which pursue material solutions to service and Combatant Command needs. In the past, USCENTCOM oversaw the first operational use of a DE weapon, and we continue to work with the Services and developers to bring follow-on systems into our AOR. Additionally, we employ a number of electromagnetic techniques; high power microwaves being one of them, against a variety of threats. As such, USCENTCOM sees great potential in the use of DE due to its potential for faster response and a magazine that is recharged through on-board, fuel-based power and thermal management systems. We stand ready to work with the RDT&E community to assist in the development, including operational testing in our AOR of DE systems tailored to address our warfighting needs.

Mr. SCOTT. Would you support the immediate deployment of proven counter-drone prototypes into the CENTCOM AOR to include kinetic and non-kinetic systems like high-power-microwaves?

General MCKENZIE. (U) USCENTCOM already employs prototypes and conducts operational assessments of counter-drone prototypes in theater, to include laser, high-powered microwave, and electromagnetic pulse systems. An "all-of-the-above" layered defense is the best way forward and we gladly accept new systems for testing, particularly systems that add capability to take down larger UAS that may or may not transmit a frequency.

Mr. SCOTT. How might CENTCOM strengthen maritime domain awareness in the CENTCOM AOR? How might the sharing of relevant information in a timely and coherent manner be accomplished?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Our Naval component (NAVCENT) established a Task Force (TF 59) to test and operate unmanned surface vessels (USVs) and artificial intelligence systems in the AOR. TF 59's USVs enhance maritime domain awareness by facilitating a persistent maritime presence throughout the AOR and by leveraging advanced technologies like artificial intelligence. TF 59 is actively working with partners to develop a regional network of USVs that will be able to gather

and share maritime domain awareness information to deter smuggling and other malign activities. Additionally, we conduct regular P-8 and unmanned air surveillance missions to develop maritime domain awareness, as do several of our partners. NAVCENT also leads a thirty-four nation coalition called the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) located at NAVCENT headquarters in Bahrain. CMF representatives at NAVCENT daily share maritime domain awareness information and coordinate operations throughout the AOR.

Mr. SCOTT. What steps are being, or can be, taken to maintain robust bilateral missile defense cooperation with Israel, even as the United States also works to develop more regional air defenses? Given the ongoing need to deploy U.S. air defenses to Europe, how do you assess the United States' ability to deploy or sustain similar systems in the Middle East as a stopgap to help defend our Gulf allies—at least until they are much better able to defend themselves?

General MCKENZIE. (U) There has been no degradation to the robust bilateral missile defense relationship with Israel. In fact, USCENTCOM is working to expand this relationship beyond ballistic missile defense to air and missile defense (AMD) to add defenses to counter cruise missile (CM) and unmanned aerial system (UAS) threats. The strong bilateral relationship is in many ways the foundation of our regional air defense efforts, which will benefit both Israel, our other partners, and U.S. interests in the region.

(U) USCENTCOM has identified two key concerns deriving from the reduction of U.S. air defense systems in the area of responsibility (AOR). The first is a reduction in coverage for U.S. forces and critical infrastructure, and the second is the perception that these reductions create among our regional partners that the U.S. is abandoning the region. To mitigate these concerns, USCENTCOM is working with partners to improve employment and integration of partner systems.

(U) Only three Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations have the capability and capacity to provide limited defense—acquired via FMS: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. All three countries field advanced air and missile defense (AMD) capabilities such as Patriot and/or THAAD. Bahrain have agreed to purchase two Patriot batteries, but they are several years from initial fielding.

Mr. SCOTT. What do you assess would be the impact of lifting the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation of the IRGC? Would Iranian malign influence increase or decrease as a result?

General MCKENZIE. (U) To date, the FTO designation has not impeded Iran's pursuit of its strategic objectives. I assess lifting the FTO designation will have no impact on Iranian malign influence. The IRGC-QF and its proxies and partners will remain Tehran's primary tool to dominate its neighbors and eliminate the U.S. military presence from the region.

Mr. SCOTT. China has made significant strides in expanding its influence in the Middle East. What is your assessment of China's growing footprint, and do you consider China's influence on the region as competition for the United States as we pursue our own defense and security interests? What are you doing to win against China and ensure that U.S. defense and security interests are maintained in the face of Chinese malign activity?

General MCKENZIE. (U) China's growing presence in the region directly competes with U.S. defense and security interests in the Middle East. Beijing's holistic diplomatic, information, military, and economic approach seeks to amplify and exploit a false "abandonment" narrative. This approach threatens to displace the U.S. over time as the strategic partner of choice in the region. We must leverage tools such as FMS to build partnered nation capacity and capability in order to strengthen our relations and maintain our position as the partner of choice. Our greatest tool to counter China is the relationships we maintain with our allies and partners in the region. Sustaining these relationships is a whole of government effort.

Mr. SCOTT. What is the status of Israel's integration into CENTCOM's AOR? What steps are still outstanding? Will you commit to accelerating Israel's move into CENTCOM?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Working with the Secretary, Joint Staff, and USEUCOM, we have identified 46 distinct groups of activities that must transfer to USCENTCOM or require modification of their function. To date, we have successfully transferred or modified 25 of these 46 activities since we started the transfers in September 2021. Throughout the process, we have successfully worked with USEUCOM to find opportunities to responsibly accelerate the transfer and will continue as this process moves forward.

Mr. SCOTT. How can the U.S. Coast Guard enhance their relationship with the Israeli Navy?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Our Naval component (NAVCENT) routinely operates and trains with the Israeli Navy. NAVCENT's U.S. Coast Guard personnel and ships

have conducted a number of engagements, including subject matter expert exchanges, port visits, visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) exchanges, seamanship and navigation, search and rescue, small boat operations, and engineering exchanges. Operations and trainings will continue on a regular basis as NAVCENT works with the Israeli Navy to enhance maritime domain awareness and maritime security in the AOR.

QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. BACON

Mr. BACON. How should the U.S. work with allies and partners, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, to improve the interdiction of Iranian weapons shipments going to Iran's proxies and affiliates throughout the CENTCOM region?

General MCKENZIE. (U) We continue to focus on targeting malign actor advanced conventional weapons (ACW) proliferation across the Arabian Peninsula (AP) and territorial waters by, with, and through our partners. Our component commands remain postured across the AP to defend against and interdict ACW threats. U.S. forces should approach the ACW problem from a joint and multi-lateral perspective, as countering this threat requires a division of labor across joint-combined operations and to identify vulnerabilities in the weapons shipment network. We should focus on continuing to promote regional stability and security operations, degrading ACW manufacturing, leveraging multi-national resources, synchronizing personnel and assets to align with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) capabilities, and sustaining existing information sharing with partners. USCENCOM is actively engaging partner nations across the AOR to increase their understanding of the growing Iranian threat and gain their commitment to addressing the shared regional security concerns posed by Iran. We must continue to leverage our regional partnerships by sharing releasable intelligence and information to develop a common understanding of the threat. Additionally, we must remain engaged with partners for timely exploitation of collected exploitable material.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. JACOBS

Ms. JACOBS. The government promised to evacuate survivors of the August 29 drone strike. Have they been evacuated yet, and if not, why not?

Ms. BAKER. The Department, in coordination with other U.S. Government departments, continues to take steps to respond to the August 29, 2021 airstrike in Kabul, which resulted in the tragic death of Mr. Zemari Ahmadi and nine other individuals. As part of this, we are working closely with Nutrition & Education International (NEI), Mr. Ahmadi's employer. This is a high priority matter for the Department and with the full support of the Secretary and Policy staff have been working directly with the President of NEI, Dr. Steven Kwon and representatives of the affected families. To protect their safety, and security, we are not able to provide more information regarding these efforts in an unclassified format at this time. [QFR #24 for cross-reference.]

Ms. JACOBS. Congress recently reauthorized three million dollars annually for ex gratia payments for civilians who have experienced harm from U.S. military operations. However, in 2020, the last year for which this information is publicly available, the Department of Defense disbursed zero dollars in ex gratia payments. Most civilian casualties in recent years have occurred in the CENTCOM AOR. As it improves civilian casualty tracking and reporting, does CENTCOM plan to return to past cases of civilian harm to offer ex gratia payments? How does CENTCOM plan to change or improve its ex gratia disbursement procedures moving forward?

Ms. BAKER. The Department made ex gratia payments of \$5,000 in calendar year 2021. A single payment was made in January and reported to Congress in the first quarterly report for that year. The payment was made by USFOR-A in accordance with DOD and USCENCOM regulations and procedures. As mention in the response to QFR 24 above, DOD in coordination with other U.S. Government departments, continues to take steps to respond to the August 29, 2021 airstrike in Kabul. With respect to the general reduction in payments beginning in 2020 and continuing to the present, two factors combined to reduce the number and amount of payments. One was the requirement to develop new regulations as required by section 1213 of the FY 2020 NDAA, followed by the requisite country assessments in consultation with our State Department colleagues. Additionally, due to the general change in the nature and number of operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility beginning in 2020, the number of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. operations decreased substantially. DOD commands continue to assess and review open incidents of civilian casualties, and can reopen cases that have been resolved if new

information is made available. Finally, the improvements to processes will be addressed for DOD-wide application by the Secretary of Defense directed Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan –Task Force (CHMRAP–TF) now underway.

Ms. JACOBS. What measures does AFRICOM take to fulfill that requirement and assess whether imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances in the context of 127e operations?

General TOWNSEND. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

Ms. JACOBS. General Townsend, you have frequently noted the logistical challenges with troops “commuting to work” and that there are more “effective and efficient ways” in Somalia to carry out AFRICOM’s mission. But let’s take a step back a bit. Can you first describe how any operations in Somalia have measurable reduced instances of terrorism and violent extremism in Somalia?

And how specifically would a permanent force presence better our mission to address violent extremism in Somalia?

General TOWNSEND. U.S. operations in Somalia have served as a key catalyst and enabler of Somali National Army (SNA) territorial gains, removed al-Shabaab leaders and attack planners, and limited the pace and scope of the group’s attacks. Since the U.S. repositioning in early 2021, al-Shabaab’s advances—including expansion in Mogadishu, central Somalia, and along the Kenya-Somalia border—have underscored the role of sustained U.S. operations in constraining the group’s operations. Operationally, a permanent presence in Somalia will improve our interaction with partner forces, increasing the pace and efficiency of operations to contain al-Shabaab.

U.S. operations and training in Somalia have enabled the SNA to clear and seize territory from al-Shabaab, including significant terrain in the Lower Shabelle region during Operation Badbaado in 2019–2020. U.S. collective self-defense airstrikes have also supported partner forces during advances against al-Shabaab positions.

U.S. airstrikes have removed senior al-Shabaab members and attack planners, driving the group’s leadership to reduce its visibility and delay operational goals. Airstrikes have also disrupted specific attack plans, including against U.S. interests.

The impact of U.S. operations is also evidenced by attack trends following the U.S. repositioning from Somalia in January 2021. The group subsequently increased attacks in Mogadishu, more than doubling the number of VBIED attacks in 2021 compared to 2020 and increasing its pace of assassinations in the capital.

A persistent force presence will (1) reduce risk to our troops, (2) increase rapport between USSOF and our partner forces, (3) increase the flow of information and (4) facilitate efficient command and control. Without the logistical burdens inherent to episodic engagements, operational tempo and tactical efficiency will increase. A persistent presence also better enables intelligence development required to illuminate VEOs network activity.

Ms. JACOBS. I am pleased to hear that CENTCOM has implemented preliminary changes to its method of tracking and reporting allegations of civilian casualties. As recommended in the recently released RAND report on DOD Civilian Casualty Policies and Procedures, will you commit to consulting with civil society organizations specialized in civilian harm as you continue making and implementing changes?

General MCKENZIE. (U) Yes, USCENTCOM will continue to engage and consult with civil society organizations focused on mitigating civilian harm during military operations. Likewise, USCENTCOM remains committed to the significant work the Department has undertaken to develop the new DOD Instruction on preventing and mitigating civilian harm. The Department’s work has been informed by our experiences and lessons learned in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen as well as the studies you reference, civil society organizations specializing in civilian harm, and DODIG reports.

Ms. JACOBS. Congress recently reauthorized three million dollars annually for ex gratia payments for civilians who have experienced harm from U.S. military operations. However, in 2020, the last year for which this information is publicly available, the Department of Defense disbursed zero dollars in ex gratia payments. Most civilian casualties in recent years have occurred in the CENTCOM AOR. As it improves civilian casualty tracking and reporting, does CENTCOM plan to return to past cases of civilian harm to offer ex gratia payments? How does CENTCOM plan to change or improve its ex gratia disbursement procedures moving forward?

General MCKENZIE. (U) The ability to offer ex gratia payments provides an important tool for our commanders on the ground to ensure the safety and security of our forces and address instances of civilian harm where and when appropriate. Commanders retain the ability to utilize ex gratia for past cases as appropriate subject to the statutory requirements, as implemented by DOD. Ex gratia remains a very

important tool for our commanders and we remain committed to training our leaders and teams on the benefits and purpose of this authority so that it is considered and utilized within the authority permitted and consistent with the spirit and intent of the authorization.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MOORE

Mr. MOORE. Recognizing that the DOD shared the responsibility to withdraw from Afghanistan with the State Department, I would like you to answer to the best of your ability, what was the thought process behind the decision to withdraw all U.S. military forces, end close air support, and remove civilian contractors from Afghanistan, particularly prior to the evacuation of U.S. citizens?

Ms. BAKER. After a rigorous policy review, President Biden decided to withdraw the remaining U.S. forces from Afghanistan and end a 20-year war. It is my understanding that the decision was informed by extensive consultations with his entire national security team, Members of Congress, allies and partners, and other experts. The United States continued to provide support to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) with civilian contractors and U.S. military close air support until just days before the evacuation began. The unexpected speed of the Taliban's ground seizure resulted in our rapid withdrawal and led to both high levels of desertion and the sudden surrender of the ANDSF. It is my understanding that extending the U.S. presence beyond the end of August would have greatly imperiled our forces and our mission.

Mr. MOORE. President Biden has stated that the U.S. will use over-the-horizon capabilities to strike terrorist threats remaining in Afghanistan, yet I lack understanding of how this is logistically possible. A quick glance of the map shows there is no good way for the U.S. to access Afghanistan from the air. Pakistan is not our friend, Iran and China are not options, and nations bordering Afghanistan are unwilling to cooperate. Even if the vast distances involved did not impede how rapidly the U.S. could respond in Afghanistan, which they do, what are some of the practical, political, and geographical limitations regarding the over-the-horizon capabilities to defeat emerging terrorist threats in Afghanistan, and what is the administration doing to work around these challenges?

Ms. BAKER. The Department remains committed to never again letting Afghanistan become a safe haven for terrorist organizations, and we will use all of the Department's capabilities in furtherance of that objective. DOD continues to invest in and deploy capabilities that can effectively counter terrorism from Afghanistan. We have the edge over terrorist groups in technological capacity, direct-action readiness and expertise, and power projection capability. We continue to deepen our relationships in the region, collaborate with allies and partners, and ensure we bring the right mix of the Department's capabilities to bear. For instance, we have been working with Pakistan to meet our counterterrorism objectives in the region. We remain confident in our ability to conduct this mission and the Department can provide additional information in a classified format.

