

THE NOMINATION OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL
MICHAEL E. KURILLA, USA TO BE GENERAL
AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL
COMMAND

HEARING

BEFORE THE

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UNITED STATES SENATE

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requested or required to be inserted for the record.

**THE NOMINATION OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL
MICHAEL E. KURILLA, USA TO BE GENERAL
AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL
COMMAND**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2022

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Jack Reed, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Committee Members present: Senators Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Chairman REED. Good morning. The Committee meets today to consider the nomination of Lieutenant General Michael Kurilla for promotion to general and to be the next commander of U.S. Central Command.

General, your nomination is well deserved, and I thank you for your willingness to lead in this very important position.

We welcome your wife, Mary Paige, and daughter, Michelle, both of whom are here today, and we ought to welcome Sophie, who I am sure is glued to a television set someplace, watching her father. We thank them for their continued service to our Nation.

You have led most recently as the Commanding General of the 18th Airborne Corps, an experience that will serve you well in this new role. Your career spans nearly 34 years with distinguished service across multiple theaters and command at every level of our Nation's premier fighting forces. The country is fortunate to have leaders like yourself serving in uniform.

If confirmed, the range of challenges you will need to address is significant. CENTCOM's geographic area of responsibility stretches from Northeast Africa, across the Middle East, to Central and South Asia, and the security challenges are similarly expansive.

Perhaps most pressing is Iran's malign influence in the region. The United States' latest round of indirect negotiations to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, has seen progress, but Iran's ongoing nuclear development threaten to derail any agreement.

Simultaneously, Iranian-linked groups continue to mount drone and rocket attacks in the region, including against bases in Iraq and Syria with a United States military presence. These threats are growing, as are drone and missile attacks by Iranian-linked Houthis against the Gulf States. During today's hearing I would like to know your level of concern over rising tensions between the United States and Iran, and how you would advise responding to Iranian malign influence in the region.

While the death of ISIS leader al-Qurayshi in a United States strike last week dealt a blow to the organization, ISIS remains a threat. Last month, ISIS militants seized a prison facility in Syria where thousands of ISIS detainees are held, leading to a days-long standoff requiring United States and Coalition air and ground support to the Syrian Democratic Forces (STF). Press reports indicate that up to 200 fighters may have escaped, and hundreds of people were killed. If you are confirmed, you will be responsible for helping ensure the STF and the Iraqi Government have the capacity and support needed to address the threat from ISIS and properly detain these prisoners.

Of particular emphasis for this committee is a reformation of how CENTCOM and the Defense Department respond to civilian casualty incidents. It must be noted that CENTCOM's approach to this issue in recent years has not been adequate, and the DOD Inspector General and independent studies have highlighted important areas for change.

Our military goes to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties, but when tragic errors occur, we have an obligation to be transparent, take responsibility, and do everything we can to learn from those mistakes and prevent future mistakes. As such, General, I hope you will share what steps you would take to ensure CENTCOM improves its openness and transparency with this committee and the public.

Finally, turning to Afghanistan, we have transitioned to an "over the horizon" counterterrorism posture to continue to respond to threats from the region using assets based outside Afghanistan. Our 20-year mission there largely achieved the goal of significantly degrading al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, but the work is not finished.

During testimony to this committee last October, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy assessed that ISIS-K and al Qaeda have, in his words, the intent to conduct external operations, but neither has the ability to do so. To prevent terrorist groups from developing this ability, we must to continue to bolster our "over the horizon" capabilities. With that in mind, I would ask that you share the most important lessons learned from your time in Afghanistan, and how you would ensure CENTCOM can conduct optimal "over the horizon" activities.

Again, thank you, General, for your continued willingness to serve, and I look forward to your testimony.

Let me now recognize the ranking member, Senator Inhofe.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES INHOFE

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General Kurilla, for your willingness to continue your distinguished career.

General Kurilla, when confirmed, you will take command of a region where terrorist groups increasingly threaten U.S. personnel, partners, and the Homeland. Due to the Biden administration's disastrous withdrawal of the United States troops from Afghanistan last summer, Afghanistan is now back to pre-9/11 conditions. The Taliban controls the country, and it has already killed more than 100 former Afghan officials, soldiers, and Coalition partners, according to the United Nations.

The Haqqanis, which are affiliated with the al Qaeda, have government positions and ISIS-K, which killed 13 United States servicemembers on August 26, is exploiting the vacuum that the Biden administration left behind.

Elsewhere, the Iran-backed Houthis have launched deadly missiles and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, threatening United States forces and our partners.

Last month, ISIS launched a series of new attacks in Syria and in Iraq. Last week's successful operation against ISIS' leader shows that the counter-ISIS mission isn't over.

I am concerned that things will get even worse if President Biden re-enters the failed 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which many of us here have urged him not to do. Iran will have received substantial sanctions relief. Iran will spend that windfall on terrorist proxies. That means more arms for Hezbollah, Hamas to attack Israel, more training for the Houthis to threaten our Arab friends, and more support for the Iraqi militias that target our personnel. Rejoining the Iran nuclear deal won't prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons capabilities. The deal's limitations expire in 2026, which is not that far off.

So, all of these threats in the Middle East are getting worse, but we also have to prioritize threats from the Chinese Communist Party and Russia right now. Both of those adversaries are heavily invested in competition in the CENTCOM.

So here is what I hope you will address today: What resources do you think we will need to counter these regional threats? What roles should our partners play, and how can we improve their capabilities? Perhaps most important, what can we do to ensure that our longtime regional partners stick with us in the escalating competition with China and Russia?

General Kurilla, you have served with great honor in this CENTCOM region; you are very familiar with it, you are the right guy to do this, and we look forward to winning together.

Thank you again. Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

General Kurilla, your remarks, please.

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. KURILLA,
USA, TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES
CENTRAL COMMAND**

General KURILLA. Good morning.

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, it is an honor

to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the next commander of the United States Central Command.

Today, as always, I am humbled to serve the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen, and guardians, who defend our Nation at home and abroad every day; they are our Nation's best.

Young me today is my amazing wife of 27 years, Mary Paige. Throughout my career, Mary Paige has been my best friend, partner, and enthusiastic advocate for our servicemembers and their families. She is the daughter of a Vietnam veteran and has known from a very young age, firsthand, the challenges and hardships that face our military families.

I have two wonderful daughters. My oldest Michelle flew in late last night from Massachusetts, where she is a senior at Harvard University, double-majoring in Government and English. My youngest daughter Sophie is a sophomore at Tufts University, studying biology and at the lab at the New England Aquarium this afternoon, so she is watching from her dorm.

My family has long understood that family readiness is a key component to operational readiness and we are grateful for the service of all of our military families.

I am grateful to the President, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs for their confidence in me and to General Frank McKenzie's lifetime of service to the Nation.

I thank the Congress, and especially this Committee, for its unwavering support of our military.

This is a critical time for the 21 countries of Central Command. The United States faces a new era of strategic competition with China and Russia that is not confined to one geographical region and extends into the CENTCOM area of responsibility. The Middle East, Central and South Asia remain complex and dynamic environments. CENTCOM remains a dangerous theater with its own internal threats to American security.

As the United States rightfully prioritizes competition with China, we must remain engaged in the Middle East and Central and South Asia. We must be clear eyed about the fact that the United States Central Command area of responsibility remains home to America's national interests.

The region today presents a mixed picture. On one hand, there are signs of progress, such as normalization of Arab states with Israel that defeated the physical so-called Caliphate, the ending of the Gulf rift, and the continued support by longtime partners and allies; on the other hand, there are some vexing challenges: Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missile advancements, and its continued malign influence across the region.

The CENTCOM theater is also burdened by civil war and humanitarian crisis. The area is home to 9 of the top-10 most dangerous, violent extremist organizations, including al Qaeda and ISIS, which are both reconstituting. All of these ill trends are accelerated by water scarcity and food insecurity.

China has significantly increased its investment and influence in the region and Russia acts as a spoiler. If confirmed as the CENTCOM commander, I will protect American interests in the region with these challenges in mind.

While we are no longer in Afghanistan, we must acknowledge and honor the sacrifice of the more than 1 million servicemembers, civilians, partners, and allies who answered the call and did their duty during the war, and we must never forget the ultimate sacrifice of those who gave their last full measure of devotion on the battlefield.

If confirmed, I will work hand-in-hand with our diplomats to ensure that diplomacy is in the lead, while strengthening our relationship with military partners and allies. I will embrace technology, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data-centric warfare to increase CENTCOM's competitive edge across all domains.

If confirmed, by this body, I look forward to working with this committee and Congress, the senior leadership for the Department of Defense, and our partners and allies; furthermore, I will always remain transparent and candid with both, Congress and this committee.

I look forward to your questions.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, General.

As is required, there are a series of standard questions, which you may responded to appropriately.

Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflict of interest?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Have you assumed any duties or taken any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the confirmation process?

General KURILLA. No, Senator.

Chairman REED. Exercising our legislative and oversight responsibility makes it important that this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings, reports, records, and other information from the Executive Branch on a timely basis.

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify before this committee when requested?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Do you agree, when asked before this Committee to give your personal views, even if your views differ from the administration?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Do you agree to provide records, documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner, when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult with the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such records?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established by this committee for the production of reports, records, and other information, including timely responding to hearing questions for the record?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Will you cooperate and provide any witnesses and briefers, in response to congressional request?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Will those witnesses and briefers be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, General.

Again, let me commend you for your service to the Nation and the service of your family.

We spoke before about the continuing crisis in Afghanistan and looking forward, the steps we have to take. There is, as you recognized, a humanitarian crisis that is becoming more and more severe, each moment. There is the persistent threat of al Qaeda and ISIS-K and other terrorist groups.

What do you see as the challenges in Afghanistan and the surrounding region and can we cope with them "over the horizon"?

General KURILLA. Senator, as you identified, one of the challenges is the threat to the Homeland from al Qaeda and ISIS-K. They are reconstituting. The Taliban has not renounced al Qaeda. ISIS-K, with the release of the prisoners both, from the Bagram Prison and Pul-e-Charkhi, are in the process of reconstituting. While they have aspirations to attack the Homeland, they do not have the capability yet.

Additionally, we have the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. I believe there are opportunities in the future of ways that we can work with, perhaps, the World Food Programme and others in the region, to help alleviate some of that burden on the humanitarian crisis.

Chairman REED. Now, in our regional response, we have to consider the position of Pakistan. They have been a very complicated partner, and sometimes not a partner.

Do you have any comments on that relationship and what you would like to do to improve it?

General KURILLA. Senator, we have not always seen eye-to-eye with Pakistan, but I do think we have a shared interest in regional stability and countering violent extremist organizations. One of the most violent is Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistani, the TTP, which directly threatens Pakistan. Also, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, threatens the migrants to push into, and refugees, to push into Pakistan. So, I think there is potentially some shared interests that we can work with them on counter VEOs and the humanitarian crisis.

Chairman REED. Well, thank you.

Turning to Iran, as both myself and the ranking member pointed out, it presents a very, very serious challenge. There are talks underway to try to revive the JCPOA, but it is uncertain if that will happen. Their malign activities both, directly and through proxies, like the Houthis, are causing concern, especially attacks recently against the United Arab Emirates.

Can you give us an idea of how you would approach this problem as you take command?

General KURILLA. Senator, Iran is the number one destabilizing factor in the Middle East right now with their malign behavior. I think a going through our partners and allies and strengthening those with a united front from all the partners and allies is the best way to confront them.

The United States policy of Iran cannot get a nuclear weapon, I believe that any enforceable agreement should make sure that they do not get a nuclear weapon.

Chairman REED. Thank you.

You also said in the advanced policy questions, and in your testimony, that we must invest in artificial intelligence and machine-learning platforms and programs to increase our ability to detect, defend, and respond to conventional Iranian military capabilities.

Can you sketch, very quickly, what you would attempt to do?

General KURILLA. Senator, right now in the 18th Airborne Corps, when James McConville, General McConville, the Chief of Staff of the Army, charged the 18th Corps to lead and artificial intelligence become an AI-enabled corps, we have taken a four-prong approach to that with the culture, data literacy, data governance and management, and our infrastructure; i.e., cloud computing and cloud computing on the edge. Then we take that and we do a quarterly exercise that uses artificial intelligence for target detection.

Every quarter, from all six services participate. The last exercise had over 40 aircraft, and to include the Navy, participating with the Maritime Operations Center. It culminated in a Marine F-35 dropping a live, thousand-pound bomb on an artificially intelligence-derived grid that was one meter off from the surveyed grid. We do these exercises quarterly to improve the capability of the targeting ability of the Corps. I would look to take that, if confirmed, down to CENTCOM, and expound upon that.

Chairman REED. Would that also help us with our issues regarding “over the horizon” sort of suppression of terrorists in Afghanistan?

General KURILLA. Senator, it has capabilities for both, counter-terrorism, as well.

Chairman REED. Well, thank you very much, General. I am very confident that you will be confirmed and confident that you will lead with distinction.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Chairman.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the past year, Iran and its proxies have escalated their regional aggression. Hamas launched more than 4,300 rockets at Israel during the May 2021 conflict. The Houthis have increased their attacks on civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. The U.A.E. and the Iran-backed militias in Iraq, routinely target United States personnel, property, and partners.

All this happens while the Biden administration is focusing on returning to the flawed Iran deal, which could provide billions of dollars in sanctions relief for the Iranian regime.

Now, General Kurilla, based on what you have observed of Iran in the past, would you expect Iran to spend at least some of that sanctions relief on its terrorist proxies, and if so, how would this affect the security of our forces in the CENTCOM region?

General KURILLA. Senator, there is a risk with sanctions relief that Iran would use some of that money to support its proxies and terrorism in the region, and if it did, it could increase risk to our forces in the region.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah. General Kurilla, I have visited for many, many times, our friend, Masoud Barzani in Erbil many times over

the years. The Iraqi Kurds are among our most reliable partners in the region and I believe it is important to ensure continued and reliable support to our Kurdish friends, in coordination with the Iraqi Government.

Do you agree that the continued and reliable support to the Kurdish Peshmerga would enhance our partnership and advance our mutual interests in the region, and can you share some insight on the value of our partnership with the Kurds, based on your personal experience, because you had that personal experience?

General KURILLA. Senator, I have worked with our Kurdish partners and found them to be very reliable and very capable. I have worked with them since 2004, on my first tour in Iraq, and as recently as the counter-ISIS fight up in 2014. I have found them to be an incredibly capable and reliable partner.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah.

All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Senator Shaheen, please?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I didn't realize we were still going in seniority order, so I appreciate that.

[Laughter.]

Senator SHAHEEN. Congratulations, Lieutenant——

Chairman REED. You have a cheering from the upper deck.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes. Well, General Kurilla, thank you for being here. Congratulations to you and your family on your nomination. We very much appreciate your willingness to serve.

I understand that you are actually leaving directly from this hearing to be part of the task force overseeing the deployment to reinforce our NATO allies, because of Russia's buildup on the Ukrainian and Belarusian border.

I wonder what you consider to be the biggest challenge of that deployment?

General KURILLA. So, Senator, right now, we are in the process of deploying; and yes, I will be leaving right after the hearing to fly over to be a continued part of that deployment. I think the challenge is, obviously, moving transatlantic with the number of forces we have, our mission over there is to assure our NATO allies and detour Russian aggression against our NATO allies.

Senator SHAHEEN. To what extent do you think Putin is hoping for an incident along the border to give him an excuse to go into Ukraine?

General KURILLA. Senator, I could not begin to speak for Putin's thoughts, but I do know I am very concerned about a Russian incursion and invasion into Ukraine.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I want to switch to part of will be your AOR as CENTCOM commander. One of the things that I am very concerned about is what is happening in the ISIS detainee camps in Syria. The one at Al-Hol has 60,000 family members. It has become a hotbed for a potential radicalization of those family members there.

Can you talk about what the strategy ought to be to address those detainee camps? I know, because you worked with the STF, that they have stated that they are not able to assume long-term

responsibility for those detainees in those camps, so what should we be doing to address that?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe that there should be a whole-of-government approach and an international effort to both, assist the STF on the repatriation of some of these detainees. It is approximately 10,000 ISIS detainees at about two dozen different detention facilities. That is an ISIS army in waiting. We saw that in Hasaka, when they attacked the prison.

We also have, as you noted, 60,000 family members; over 80 percent are children, women and children in the Al-Hol camp. My concern there is the indoctrination that is happening there, and so there must be a whole-of-government approach and an international effort to support the STF on this.

Senator SHAHEEN. This Committee, actually, as part of the Defense Authorization bill last year, passed a requirement to establish a detainee coordinator to help address how we respond in those camps and how we repatriate some of the detainees.

Are you aware of that position and do you think that that would be helpful?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do think that would be helpful.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Hopefully, someone is listening to your testimony.

I want to go to Iraq because we have seen a series of bomb and grenade attacks taking place over the last week in Baghdad and it is assumed that Iranian-backed militias are responsible for these incidents.

So, how can we better hold Iran accountable for these kinds of attacks and ensure that our personnel and those Iraqis defending their country are protected?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe the key is that we have to make sure that we expose the Iranian malign behavior. I have found that anytime Iran's hand behind us is exposed, it is helpful.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

There was a recent report on a Special Operations-directed strike, targeting components of the Tabqa Dam in Syria, despite the dam being on the no-strike list. It is not clear to me how this happened; I haven't seen my reports investigating that.

But will you commit to investigating what happened here and to reporting the results to Congress?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will, if confirmed.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Finally, we have a law called the Women, Peace and Security Act that is designed to try and ensure that women are involved in our operations and, particularly, in conflict areas. So, can you talk a little bit about how you see that law working in your area of responsibility and what we should be doing and how it could be helpful to what is happening in the Central Command.

General KURILLA. Senator, the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, if confirmed, that is an area I would look to see how is CENTCOM employing that law. I think anytime you have women involved in conflict resolution and helping and assisting in the delivery and relief of relief, it is a good thing. So, I think, if confirmed, I would have to take a look at how that is being implemented.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. I look forward to working with you on that and being helpful in any way I can.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator WICKER, please?

Senator WICKER. General, I think there is widespread agreement that you are the right man for the job. We need to get you back to your base and get you involved in that deployment. I am almost attempted to yield back my time so you can get on about that, but I am not quite convinced that I should do that.

Let me ask you about money. We are now spending money for the Pentagon that was decided on more than a year ago, and that is because of our failure to have a Defense appropriation bill. We are about to do another continuing resolution. People in this town, from the administration, really to DOD, to the Congress seem to sort of view this as an inconvenience and a little bit of a lapse.

How big of a problem is this, and I have got several questions, but is this merely an inconvenience or is CENTCOM really going to take a hit because we can't do our job?

General KURILLA. Senator, I can't speak on behalf of CENTCOM, but I can tell you my personal experience in 18th Airborne Corps. When we have prolonged CRs, it affects readiness, it affects our ability to train, it affects our combat-training centers, our rotary wing flight hours. I have two armored brigade combat teams in the 18th Airborne Corps; they are very expensive to operate.

It affects modernization. It can disrupt modernization. I have an armored brigade combat team that is in a year-long modernization window. They will emerge as the most modernized armored brigade combat team in the Army.

The CRs can disrupt that. I don't know the impact if it was to take it all the way out through the year and then have a second armored brigade combat team that is going in the summer.

Lastly, it can affect quality of life. It stops the prevention of new starts, such as military construction for barracks, motor pools and child development centers.

Senator WICKER. I may be speaking to the choir about this in this room, but it seems when we bring this up, and any number of members of this committee bring it up, people nod and agree with you, and yet, we are just going to be quite relaxed next week about going to another continuing resolution.

Let me ask you about the Stans that were formerly Soviet Republic, and I am looking at the map here, General, and I see Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and then the massive geographic area of Kazakhstan, which covers five time zones.

Why are they important to us in the United States and what difference did it make in their leadership seeing how we left Afghanistan, in what I view as a major debacle?

General KURILLA. Senator, they are very important. That is an area, also, that I think we compete with Russia and China. I think with the departure from Afghanistan, there is some security interests that we share with them, and that is, in terms of those that border on Afghanistan, particularly, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, I think we have shared interests on the VEOs and areas that we

could potentially partnership with them on the border security to prevent the expansion of the VEOs from coming into their area.

Senator WICKER. But you haven't started this job yet, but you are anticipating that you will.

Has the leadership of these five former Soviet Republics acting differently after seeing what happened last August in Kabul?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not sure, and, if confirmed, that is an area that I would take a hard look at.

Senator WICKER. If Russia invades Ukraine, how will that, in your judgment, affect how these five former Soviet Republics view their neighbor to the north and the United States?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe they would have some concerns with Russia invading Ukraine as that would look to expand, potentially, one of their former locations.

Senator WICKER. Thank you.

Well, good luck to you, and I am going to yield you a whole 30 seconds to get back and get that deployment going.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator WICKER. I yield back.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Senator Hirono, please?

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General, for your service. You have a lot of experience in your AOR.

I start the questioning of all nominees to any positions in any of the committees I sit on, and these are the following two questions that I ask all nominees. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

General KURILLA. No, Senator.

Senator HIRONO. Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement, related to this kind of conduct?

General KURILLA. No, Senator.

Senator HIRONO. General, I am very concerned, along with other members of this committee, very concerned about the ongoing issue of the poor treatment of Afghan women and girls, especially since our withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power.

Recently, President Biden appointed Rina Amiri, as United States special envoy for Afghan women, girls, and human rights, to spearhead an interagency effort to advance the rights of Afghan women and girls.

As commander of Central Command, what do you see your role in supporting Ms. Amiri, USAID, and other agencies, in supporting the rights of Afghan women and girls?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, that is an area that I would look at to analyze how CENTCOM can be a part of a whole-of-government approach.

Senator HIRONO. I like the fact that you have used "whole-of-government" in your response to a number of questions. I think that is a very good idea, because "whole-of-government" means, I would say, the active involvement of the State Department and, also, any of our allies.

So, you know, I would be interested, if confirmed, how you will proceed in this area, since the fate of Afghan women and girls is

something that weighs very heavily on a number of us and our challenges and getting or rescuing many of them out of the country remains very difficult.

You mentioned Iran as being the number one destabilizing actor in the Middle East. Again, with the Iran whole-of-government approach and how to contain their malign activities and you said that when Iranian malign behavior is exposed, it is helpful.

Can you just describe what you consider an example of Iranians malign behavior, which would be helpful to expose, and what do you mean by, it is helpful to expose such behavior?"

General KURILLA. Senator, when we see the Iran proxies and those Iranian-aligned militia groups that are either firing rockets at our embassy in Iraq, they are firing at our troops inside of Syria. They support the Houthis and they are providing that technology to them, to fire ballistic missiles into the U.A.E. and into Saudi Arabia.

When we exposed the Iranian hand behind that, it causes them to react.

Senator HIRONO. It causes who to react?

General KURILLA. The Iranians to react.

Senator HIRONO. How would they react; would they pull back their—

General KURILLA. Ma'am, they try and hide their behavior and it can cause them to not take action for a period of time; that is my experience, when I was down at CENTCOM.

Senator HIRONO. You were asked some questions regarding the JCPOA and that President Biden joined United States allies, France, Germany, the U.K., and Ireland in a statement noting that a return to a JCPOA would result in both, in sanctions lifting a law for enhanced regional partnerships and a reduced risk of a nuclear crisis that would derail regional diplomacy.

What are your thoughts on a return to the JCPOA and would rejoining the agreement be a positive step in containing Iran's nuclear ambitions?

As far as I am concerned, there is no question that our membership in the JCPOA enabled us to really track what Iran was doing. Would a return to the JCPOA really, greatly enhance efforts to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not aware of the exact details of the ongoing negotiations, but I am supportive of any enforceable agreement that limits Tehran's ability to gain nuclear weapons.

Senator HIRONO. I think a large part of that would be to have an agreement, such as a JCPOA, and, unfortunately, that is not where we are.

If confirmed, how do you plan to work with partners and allies to confront the challenges presented by Iran?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, I will have to take a hard look at the partners and allies. Each one of them bring different capabilities. I think there is some opportunities in an integrated air-and-missile defense, particularly, with Israel, now under the CENTCOM area of responsibility, that they can do some partnerships in terms of increasing the capability.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you.

I would say that Israel would be a major partner in that effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Senator Fischer, please?

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, General, to you and your family, and thank you, sir, for your many years of service to this country.

General, we read in the Washington Post about an Army review of the Afghanistan drawdown. The report highlights the extent to which the Biden administration's poor planning forced our servicemembers into an incredibly dangerous and an incredibly chaotic situation during that evacuation.

I know that you are not responsible for this report, but, if confirmed, do I have your word that if future reports like this are completed, that this committee will learn about them from you and not from the morning paper?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you.

I wouldn't think that members of this committee would have to make a FOIA request in order to learn information that should be brought forward in a positive way to keep us informed so we can perform our oversight responsibilities.

General, based on your prior experience that you have had in the region, your knowledge of the region, what do you assess to be the most significant challenges for CENTCOM to carry out an "over the horizon" counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan?

General KURILLA. Senator, "over the horizon" capability is extremely difficult, but not impossible. I think the biggest challenge for Afghanistan is that it is a landlocked country. We rely on another nation for an air line of communication to be able to enter Afghanistan. The distances required to fly ISR is great. We spend approximately two-thirds of the time flying there and getting back, versus over the target. So, it is a resource-intensive to be able to do the finding, and then the fixing, and then the finishing of those targets that you are going after.

I think we need to reinvest in a lot of our intelligence capabilities, our human-intelligence capability that was lost during the withdrawal.

Senator FISCHER. Do you anticipate that we will have more success in the future on being able to find those partners on the ground?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, I will need to make an assessment of that.

Senator FISCHER. Do you know of any ongoing conversations about basing agreements with neighboring countries that would be helpful to us in being able to do "over the horizon" CT?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not aware of any detailed discussions going on, but I know that there are discussions happening right now, that could ease the distances that are required.

Senator FISCHER. I would hope if you do, you would contact us so that we can keep up to date on the progress, or lack thereof, in this regard, because it is so vital to our commitments that we have and in Afghanistan and the needs that we have to meet in Afghanistan.

I hope that you will do that review process. We heard from Secretary Kahl in October ISIS-K could generate the capability to attack our Homeland by April. That is not too far away from today. If there needs to be a change in strategy, if CENTCOM needs to be resourced differently, I would hope that you would bring that to our attention, as well.

General KURILLA. Senator, I will.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you.

When you were speaking about partners and allies and our need for partners and allies, especially in dealing with Iran and their proxies, are there specific ways that you feel we could help our partners defend themselves with regard to missile and drone attacks?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe that is probably the area with some of the greatest opportunity in terms of working towards and integrated air and missile defense. The addition of Israel to the AOR, I think, will help with that.

I think there are areas, also, in terms of cyber defense. We are collectively stronger together, when we work together, so there are areas there that each one brings unique capabilities in terms of that.

Senator FISCHER. From your comments, I would imagine that you would, then, be a strong advocate for providing Israel with the defensive means that they need?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Now, via Webex, let me recognize Senator Gillibrand.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

In recent years, Beijing has elevated the Middle East strategic significance by building commercial ports in Pakistan. They are beginning another port project in U.A.E., which was halted by United States pressure.

We try and rely for the Persian Gulf for nearly half its energy supply. Do you view countering the expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative in the CENTCOM area responsibility as a fundamental priority?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do.

Right now, 18 of 21 countries in the CENTCOM AOR have signed agreements, strategic agreements for Belt and Road Initiatives with China. China has increased their spending 360 percent in the Middle East. So, I believe it is of great concern.

What we have to do is expose their predatory practices, where they treat every country as a client or a customer; where we deal in relationships and we are partners and allies.

Senator GILLIBRAND. So, how does countering China in the region balance against some of our other counterterrorism commitments with regional partners?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe we can do both.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Reports last year emerged that Saudi Arabia purchased ballistic missiles from China, while also manufacturing its own ballistic weapons using Chinese technology.

Are you concerned that China is forging technological relationships with countries, such as Saudi Arabia, to further enhance the ballistic missile capabilities of regional actors; also, do you have a broader concern that our traditional allies in CENTCOM should be shifting towards China as we potentially focus on other regions across the global?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am very concerned with China's military involvement, as well as, in terms of these agreements. Three of the top purchasers of their UAVs are out of the Middle East. The technological agreements they have with Huawei; five major Middle Eastern countries have also come into agreements with them, so I am very concerned with that.

Senator GILLIBRAND. You will give us any guidance to the extent you need additional resources or authorities to address those concerns?

General KURILLA. Senator, I would not hesitate to do that.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

A recent NDAA-directed RAND study pointed out numerous shortcomings in the DOD's investigation in response to civilian casualties. It concluded a number of recommendations to improve DOD's internal and external process conducting tactical strikes. One specific issue RAND highlighted is the need for the Department of Defense to better engage with non-governmental organizations to develop a better situational assessment for civilian-casualty incidents.

If confirmed, will you continue to prioritize effective CIVCAS response within your command and do we have your commitment that CENTCOM will improve and regulate and engage with NGOs on this issue?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

My last question. As the military shifts focus to great power competition, low-intensity conflicts in the Middle East may lose significant resources.

Can you discuss how forced-planning concepts, like dynamic force employment, that is the ability to rapidly shift key U.S. military assets from one theater to the other, will allow the U.S. to divert resources from CENTCOM to meet the challenges faced by near-peer competitors, if necessary.

General KURILLA. Senator, that is going to have to be—if confirmed, I would have to make an assessment of the impact of those DFEs. The challenge with counterterrorism efforts are that they do take time to develop the targets; it is finding the targets and fixing them. Dynamic Force Employment could come in for a finish, potentially, but, really, the effort goes into the findings and the fixing.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Okay. Well, thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General KURILLA. Senator, thank you for your support for 10th Mountain up in Fort Drum; part of 18th Airborne Corps.

Senator GILLIBRAND. My pleasure and privilege.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Rounds.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Kurilla, first of all, I did enjoy our visit in my office and I can share with you that I do believe that you are the right man for the job right now, and I look forward to supporting your nomination.

I would like to explore a little bit along the lines that Senator Fischer began, with regard to the “over the horizon” capabilities. I think this is something that we have got to be able to explain in terms of the challenges here a little bit better.

One item that we talked about was literally the number of units necessary to maintain surveillance over a particular area. Would you just take a minute or so and dive in a little bit deeper with regards to the challenges of “over the horizon” capabilities that we face with regard to Afghanistan.

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

So, just using an MQ-9 Reaper as an example, you have the normal ones with an extended range can go up to 30 hours of endurance. If it is taking you 10 hours to get to a target and 10 hours to fly back, to be able to keep a single sensor over that target, you are going to have to have two and a half MQ-9s; one taking off every 10 hours, to be able to be over the target for just one sensor to be able to develop that target.

In Afghanistan, when we were doing operations, sometimes I would have up to 12 sensors on a target to be able to follow individuals, develop the target.

It is also used in civilian-casualty mitigation, because you are watching all the approaches to that target when you are taking a strike. So, it can be very resource intensive.

Senator ROUNDS. I think that is the critical part here, is when we talk about “over the horizon” capabilities, it is extremely equipment intensive and it will take a huge amount of resources in order to be successful in the Afghanistan region.

Your background is one of developing and moving ahead with regard to technologies. With regard to the 18th Airborne Corps, would you share a little bit about the challenges that you found in terms of bringing in and using the newest technology, including the threats of cybersecurity or cyberattacks, what you found you needed to do in order to keep the team up to speed, and talk just a little bit about with regard to artificial intelligence; the fact that this is not something in the future, but rather, something that we are faced with right now.

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe it is the next revolution in military affairs.

I find the biggest challenge is actually the data literacy and the education of our current force, and particularly, with kind of the older generation of us. It is really our younger generation does get a lot of this.

The challenge you have is being able to, then, take this, and how do you fight with artificial intelligence. What we have discovered is that the human must be in the loop. An individual human augmented by artificial intelligence is far more effective than just artificial intelligence on its own right now.

We do these quarterly exercises called “Scarlet Dragon.” Every quarter, we will bring in all six services and we go through the process of how can we increase the scale and scope of targeting

against a near-peer in a large-scale combat operation. We have found that we were able to exponentially increase that capability to sort through hundreds of targets, to pick the right targets, to be able to strike moving at machine to machine, and directly to an aircraft.

Senator ROUNDS. Tell us how to integrate that with regard to the AOR that you are going to be responsible for. You now have Israel as a part of this AOR. They are an ally. They have significant capabilities.

As you move forward, do you see some real opportunities here to coordinate with Israel with regard to cybersecurity, AI, and sort of, in an integrated defense program?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think there are tremendous opportunities to partner with, not just Israel, but with all the partners in the region, in terms of that.

Senator ROUNDS. Can you talk a little bit about, with regard to Iran, the threats that you see with regard to cybersecurity threats emanating from Iran.

General KURILLA. Senator, Iran has a very capable offensive cyber capability. We see that playing out in the CENTCOM region right now. So, I think the areas that we can work on is hardening our cyber defenses of our partners in the region.

Senator ROUNDS. They talk about Iran having access to ransomware and, as such, since it is normally used by criminals, it is one way in which they can, perhaps, hide some of their activities.

Would you agree that Iran is a threat, with regard to ransomware at this time?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do agree.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back my 10 seconds.

Thank you, sir.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.

Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator King.

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

First, I want to compliment our colleague Senator Gillibrand; I thought her questions on China and China's growing influence in the region were very perceptive and important, and something that we often don't think much about.

General, it is hard to ever utter the phrase "cooperation" and "Taliban" in the same sentence, but we have a common enemy in ISIS-K. The Taliban doesn't like them. We don't like them. They are a danger to us. They are a danger to them.

Is there an opportunity for developing a kind of, compartmented relationship, if you will, with the Taliban, with regard to ISIS-K?

We are able, we have been able to use the ALoC through Pakistan for ISR, but there has been no kinetic strike yet and there is some question as to what effect that would have on the relationship to the Taliban and Pakistan.

The short question is, is there room for some relationship with the Taliban that could help us, and help them, with the problem of ISIS-K?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, that is an area that I would have to do a deep study on, but I do think, in my personal

opinion, there are pragmatic instances where we could come together, going after ISIS-K, based on the threat to the Homeland.

Senator KING. Well, I would hope so, because as they say, the old saying is that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. So, there may be an opportunity there to deal with the threat of ISIS-K, which I think is very significant and growing.

How do we assist with the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, without, at the same time, assisting the Taliban? Are there avenues to provide support that we can avail ourselves of that don't shore up the Taliban regime?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe the most important thing would be to make sure that it is transparent and it does not fall into the hands of the Taliban and is used as a, that they can weaponize it. I think an opportunity potentially exists with the U.N. food program. They are a very transparent and accountable organization. To be able to provide funding of relief, I also think working with Pakistan, they have a shared interest in that because of the refugees coming out of Afghanistan right now into Pakistan.

Senator KING. Moving to Iraq, there appears in recent years, or in the recent, last year or so, a decline of Iran's influence in Iraq with Sadr and with some of the militias.

How do you assess the situation in Iraq; is there an opportunity for us to leave there or should we have to maintain a presence in order to offset Iran's influence?

General KURILLA. Senator, we are in Iraq right now for the enduring defeat of ISIS and to maintain our strategic relationship with the Government of Iraq. I think that the partnership that we have with them on the enduring defeat of ISIS is very important. The Iraqi Security Forces do have a very capable force, but it is not, it can still grow and needs to develop so that it is self-sustaining for being able to go after ISIS.

Senator KING. As you mentioned earlier, one of our key allies there are the Iraqi Kurds, which have been reliable and capable allies throughout this entire process in the Middle East.

General KURILLA. Senator, I have worked a lot with the Kurds and they are a very capable and reliable partner.

Senator KING. How do you assess the addition of Israel, the moving of Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM in terms of your job and the ability to deal with the Middle East as a coherent entity?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think there is significant opportunity with the addition of Israel. It starts with the Abraham Accords, the normalization of relationships between Israel and Arab nations. We have both, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, and that has caused them to start talking. When you are talking, you are lowering the temperature in the room. There is talk of security cooperation, as well, and I think that is only a good thing.

Senator KING. Finally, in your military judgment, we have been having discussions about the JCPOA and whether to re-enter, and everybody is committed to Iran not achieving a nuclear weapon. In the absence of diplomacy or some kind of enforceable agreement, what are the military options, realistically, for eliminating Iran's nuclear capability?

General KURILLA. Senator, my current job, I am not aware of the current military options. My only concern would be that you can

never take away the intellectual knowledge that they have on how to increase their nuclear capability and then the reaction that Iran would have of any strike on them.

[Pause.]

Chairman REED. Senator King, we cannot hear you and your time has expired. So, with your permission, let me recognize Senator Cotton. Thank you.

Senator COTTON. General, welcome to the committee and congratulations on your nomination. It is a very important post in the long and illustrious posts that you have held over your distinguished career. Thank you for your service to our Nation.

We have had a lot of talk about Iran this morning in the committee, in part, because Iran is the worst country in your region. They are the world's worst sponsor for state terrorism. They are behind almost every proxy war in the region, to say nothing of what they are doing in trying to obtain nuclear weapons.

If it becomes clear that Iran is actively pursuing a nuclear weapon, does Central Command have the resources necessary, should the Commander in Chief, President Biden, direct a military strike against Iran?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, I would have to look at the mission and the resources required and I would come back to the chairman and the secretary if additional resources were required.

Senator COTTON. Can you commit that you will do that and that you will give your best professional military judgment about what resources would be needed to carry out such a mission?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator COTTON. Senator King just spoke about Iran getting a nuclear weapon and how we all think that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon, and that is what President Obama frequently said in 2015, in defending the nuclear deal, that Iran, that he would not allow Iran to obtain the bomb. I think President Biden just said something similar.

That leaves open the possibility that we would allow Iran to get right up to the threshold of getting a nuclear weapon; the proverbial turn of the screwdriver, if you will, the way a country like Japan is today. I mean, people worry about Japan being one step away from a nuclear weapon because Japan is not run by a bunch of crazed theocrats.

It may be one thing to say the United States could live with an Iran that is one turn of the screwdriver away from getting a nuclear weapon. Can a country like Israel live under those circumstances, though, or what about Saudi Arabia or the other Arab nations in the region?

General KURILLA. Senator, my concern would be Iran being a nuclear threshold state, that it could be very destabilizing to the region and cause others to attempt to work on their defense.

Senator COTTON. But even if they don't have a nuclear weapon and don't have a demonstrated capability, if they are simply a nuclear threshold state, it would embolden them that much more; that is your point?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator COTTON. Yeah. I think you are right about that.

One incredibly emboldened action I have seen over the last couple of months is that Iran's proxies in Yemen are firing ballistic missiles and one-way drones into the Emirates and some of those are attacking bases where we have American troops.

What do you make of this incredibly provocative and escalatory action coming out of Iran's Yemeni proxies?

General KURILLA. Senator that is an example of Iranian malign behavior and aggressive behavior from their proxies in the region.

Senator COTTON. Why do you think, so, they have been doing that to Saudi Arabia, in Southwestern and Western Saudi Arabia for a few years, why do you think in the last couple of months, those proxies in Yemen are now firing those missiles or drones all the way into the Emirates?

General KURILLA. Senator, my personal opinion is part of that is because of the advances of the Giants Brigade down in Yemen took back areas like al-Shabwa Province from the Houthis, and that is their reaction back to the U.A.E.

But I would have to have, if confirmed, do a deeper study on that.

Senator COTTON. What would you do if you were sitting in Abu Dhabi and you had missiles and drones flying into your territory, just sort of hitting your bases or hitting the Burj Khalifa?

General KURILLA. Senator, if I am the CENTCOM commander with forces there, I would use the Patriots and THAAD Systems that we have in the theater to shoot them down.

Senator COTTON. Do you think we currently have enough of those systems in the region to protect, not only our allies, but in this case, again, it was our troops; our troops at bases in the Emirates?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think that one of the advances that we can look at doing is increasing the integrated air and missile defense in the region of our partners and allies to contribute to make sure that they are all integrated.

Senator COTTON. I mean, based on the threat we have seen coming out of Yemen in these last couple months, I think it is going to be one of the most urgent priorities you face; both making sure we have the resources we need, but also working with our partners to help them.

Because I don't think, as Iran is emboldened, I don't think this threat is going to increase; I think it is only going to increase. Again, we are just talking about it coming out of Yemen, not other places, where they are supplying proxies with similar missiles or drones.

One final point. I kind of get irritated when I see reports about the F-22s and F-35s bombing insurgencies or, you know, in 2017, I think we bombed a drug factory with an F-22.

Can we do a better job about not using advanced fifth-generation aircraft to bomb low-threat first-generation targets?

General KURILLA. Senator, as a military person, if that is the only asset available, I would use that asset.

Senator COTTON. I got that. I would like to see better asset-planning, though, so those aircraft are directed towards countries like China with advanced air defenses and fifth-generation fighters, themselves, and older-generation aircraft are directed against ISIS and al Qaeda.

General KURILLA. Certainly.

Senator COTTON. One final question. There has also been a lot of talk about the “over the horizon” strike capacity in Afghanistan. I think that would be better termed “over the rainbow” strike capacity.

How can we possibly be striking into Afghanistan without intelligence on the ground and when we are completely beholden to Pakistan for giving access to their airspace; it is a big problem, isn’t it?

General KURILLA. Senator, it is a challenge.

Senator COTTON. All right. Good luck trying to conquer that challenge. We need you to.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator COTTON. Thank you. Congratulations, again.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Cotton.

Now, let me recognize Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

General, welcome to the committee and thank you for your services. Thanks to talking with me the other day, as we did on the phone, and answering my questions, as insightfully and forthrightly as you are doing here at the Committee. I look forward to visiting with you during your service in CENTCOM.

As you and I discussed, I am very deeply concerned, in fact, frustrated and even angry about the slow pace of the evacuation of at-risk Afghanistan allies and, potentially, Americans from Afghanistan. We have been dwelling in this committee hearing mostly on the use of American power, our military power, but our credibility and power around the world depend on our keeping our word.

We have given our word to the translators and interpreters and guards and drivers and all the Afghans who put their lives on the line to protect our troops and diplomats during the 20 years of our engagement there in combat, and I worry about our credibility around the world and our credibility in the next struggle.

Two of my sons have served. One was an infantry officer, a Marine Corps officer in Afghanistan. It took him 2 years to bring over his interpreter. The other was a Navy SEAL. I just want to say how grateful I am to the veterans groups for their support in the continuing effort to enable those at-risk, Afghan allies to come to this country.

But I have been frustrated by, frankly, our State Department’s seeming reluctance to be as engaged as it should be in this effort. A number of us colleagues have joined, Senator Graham, Senator Ernst, myself, Senator Cardin, in a measure called “Honor Our Commitment,” which would try to enable more of those at-risk, Afghan allies to come here.

Let me ask you, what capacity do you think CENTCOM has to facilitate the continued evacuation of the Afghan allies who remain at risk in that country?

I know it is winter there, as it is here. The airport has failings, but we are America; we can fly in and out of that airport. Can CENTCOM play a role in facilitating the evacuation of those at-risk, Afghan allies, if asked to do so?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe we have a moral obligation to help those at-risk Afghans to come out of Afghanistan. If con-

firmed, I commit to you to look at what options are available to be able to assist in that Department of State.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Will you commit to come back to the committee, I think it is implied in your answer, with such a plan and a description of the options and assets that could be made available?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Do you think that there is, there are necessary assets in CENTCOM right now, if you know, to support that kind of plan?

General KURILLA. Senator, I would have to look at the current missions, if confirmed, look at the current missions assigned to CENTCOM, the resources allocated, and identify the risks associated against all of those, if that additional mission is applied, what resources, and does that place others at risk, or go back for additional resourcing for that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Well, I welcome your commitment to come to us with a plan and description of the assets that could be made available, and if necessary, additional assets that would be required. Thank you.

Let me ask you a final question. When we are talking about defending against missiles and our allies that need those defenses, the Iron Dome is one very reliable and important means of Israel defending against its adversary's missiles. Would you agree that replenishment of the Iron Dome capacities of Israel is important to the security of that country and potentially our own?

General KURILLA. Senator, you know, the U.S. Army just got two Iron Dome batteries that are going through testing and evaluation and I believe it has had about a 90 percent kill rate in terms of being able to knock down targets, but I do think the Iron Dome should be funded.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. That it should be funded and replenished for Israel, because, as you have absolutely correctly observed, it is a very reliable, defensive, emphasize defensive, mechanism.

General KURILLA. It is, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much, General. Good luck.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Ernst, please?

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Kurilla, thank you so much for being here today and for your many, many years of service, and to Mary Paige, and to your daughters, as well, thank you for the love and support that you have given to General Kurilla.

I am coming from a unique perspective here, in that, General Kurilla, I have had the opportunity to know you better than 25 years, closer to 30, and I have had the opportunity to watch your career and I am extremely impressed with the path that you have chosen and has been chosen for you. I am very excited about your opportunity to serve as our CENTCOM commander. While you can't assume confirmation, I absolutely can, because I will be supporting.

We have talked about a number of issues today, and I will associate with so many of my colleagues in the threats that we are see-

ing around the globe. China's influence in CENTCOM, Russia's influence in CENTCOM, certainly, Iran, and then you also have all of the violent extremist organizations on your plate, as well.

Senator Blumenthal's point, as far as those we have left behind in Afghanistan, that remains heavy on my heart, as well. So many of us are working to find opportunities to bring these folks out of Afghanistan and safely into, whether it is third countries or into the United States. So, I look forward to your partnership there.

So, we have talked through so many of those issues, but beyond being tactically proficient and sound at your craft, which you are, there are other things that commanders do need to be concerned about, and that is the health and welfare of their soldiers. We all know and understand in the SOF community that humans are more important than hardware and you exhibited that in the 82nd Airborne with focusing on mental health and brain health and the checkup from the neck up.

If you could talk a little bit about the importance of mental health and well-being of your soldiers and what you will do to continue those types of movements within CENTCOM.

General KURILLA. Senator, thank you.

Senator, one of the areas that we are trying to look at right now in terms of mental health, we know that anytime a soldier does a permanent change of station, that is a very high-stress environment, and so our medical professionals do a screening of, a full-evaluation screening of everyone coming into Fort Bragg right now, regardless of the unit. We identify those that are either moderate or high-risk, and they are able to talk to a mental health professional that day. Sometimes we can miss the transition from someone who is coming from one installation to another, and so, we start with there, and then we also make sure that they have the availability of the mental health professionals. Additionally, we have an ongoing effort right now, whether you are an E1 Private or an—Lieutenant General, that you must go get, talk to a behavioral health specialist annually, we do it for our teeth, annually, because you never know what someone is going to say behind closed doors. They might be able to talk about some challenges and issues they have, and if that saves one life, then it is worth it. So, we are working through that right now.

Senator ERNST. By having every soldier and every officer do that, do you feel that that takes away the stigma of having those conversations?

General KURILLA. One hundred percent, Senator. When they know that that individual has to go in behind there, you never know what someone is going to say behind closed doors. If they know that I even have to go behind there and talk to a behavioral health specialist that can only help reduce the stigma.

Senator ERNST. Absolutely. I appreciate that and look forward to working with you on those efforts, as well.

Again, there are so many challenges that exist across the spectrum. "Over the horizon," I know, as we spoke the other day, you will go into the position, you know, you know, I am assuming confirmation for you, but going into your position, you will do an assessment and I believe that you will, at some point, come back to

the committee, and if you need additional resources, you will absolutely let us know; is that correct?

General KURILLA. Yes, it is, Senator.

Senator ERNST. Okay. We look forward to that discussion.

Again, I am going to yield back the last 30 seconds, but, General Kurilla, I know that you have the intestinal fortitude to move quickly and easily into this position. I wholly support your confirmation.

God bless you. Thank you so much for your service to our great United States.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Ernst.

Senator Warren, please?

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Kurilla, welcome to you and your family, and congratulations on your nomination.

I would like to focus on one of the topics that you and I discussed when we met last week: civilian casualties. I think everyone in this room can agree that U.S. military operations kill far too many civilians. In the past 2 decades, the United States has killed tens of thousands of innocent people, including hundreds of women and children, across a half dozen countries in the Middle East in the Africa.

Now, we will likely never know the true numbers, given the difficulty of accurate reporting and the Pentagon's failure to fully investigate reports of civilian harm. This has been the unfortunate reality of U.S. military operations, despite congressional oversight, despite dozens of watchdog groups raising the alarm, and despite documenting the harm, and despite DOD's own efforts and attempts at reform, designed to improve how it protects civilians.

So, General, you have been nominated to lead the United States' military operations in an AOR that has even the lion's share of these casualties. Civilian casualties, obviously, they destroy the lives of those affected, and that alone, is reason enough for reforms.

But, would you also agree that these civilian casualties harm our credibility abroad and fuel the very insurgencies that we are fighting against?

General KURILLA. Senator, they do.

Senator WARREN. Good, I mean, that you recognize this.

Do you want to say more about that?

General KURILLA. Senator, every civilian casualty is a tragedy. I know there is a process right now down at CENTCOM, if confirmed, I would look to see how I can improve upon that process.

Senator WARREN. Well, you know, it is clear that we do need reforms and I am glad that you want to focus on this.

But instead of tackling this problem head-on, the Pentagon has repeatedly weakened accountability for civilian casualties. Most recently, there was reporting from The New York Times that detailed a secretive U.S. task force that used loopholes in the law to sidestep safeguards that were designed to protect against civilian casualties. The Times also found that DOD prematurely dismissed many civilian casualty reports at the assessment phase, without doing basic due diligence, like internet searches or searches in Arabic.

General, do you agree that any credible reports of civilian casualties deserve the Pentagon's full attention and thorough investigation?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do, and I think the Secretary of Defense's new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Plan of action that he has asked to come back in 90 days from 27 of January. If confirmed, I would look to be able to participate in that to make the process better.

Senator WARREN. Good. Well, I am glad to hear that you are committed to a full investigation. We will see what happens with the reforms.

You know, it is clear that additional reforms are needed. I have ideas on that front. I am sure there are others; I am not alone on this.

So, let me just see, I know we have a report coming out, but, General, if confirmed, will you commit to prioritizing reforms that will mitigate civilian casualties, resulting from U.S. operations and improving accountability and transparency at the Pentagon on this issue?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will.

Senator WARREN. Good. I really appreciate it, General, and I want to say thank you.

You know, I have said it before, but it deserves repeating: the system is broken. We cannot accept the deaths of innocent civilians as just an unavoidable cost of warfare. It is long past time that DOD addresses the harms that U.S. military operations have caused and implement meaningful reforms that de-emphasize lethal force and prioritize civilian lives.

I have already asked President Biden to incorporate these ideals into his upcoming counterterrorism review, but, General, if confirmed, I think you are going to have an opportunity to set the standard to protecting innocent lives and actually implement some real change here.

So, I look forward to working with you. I hope we can make some improvements in this area. Thank you.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Let me recognize Senator Tillis, please.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, thank you for being here. Congratulations on your nomination. I intend to support you, as well. I don't gamble, but I do bet from time to time, and that is when I am absolutely certain that I am going to win it. So, I have to agree with Senator Ernst; I have you will have strong support from this committee.

I have one, or a couple of questions. One is within your current area of responsibility, but do you believe the decision to employ elements out of Fort Bragg to Poland and to Germany was a wise decision from a reassurance standpoint?

General KURILLA. Senator, the mission we were given was to reassure our NATO allies and to detour Russian aggression against those NATO allies. So, we were deploying elements of the 18th Airborne Corps headquarters, the 82nd Airborne Division, and other elements of 18th Airborne Corps to Poland and Germany.

Senator TILLIS. A question, I don't know if it has been asked before, but within your future area of responsibility, do you have any concerns at all with the continued implementation of the vaccine mandate and readiness of our troops' strength?

General KURILLA. Senator, I don't have any concerns with that right now.

Senator TILLIS. I did have a question related to what Senator Warren said, so just more curiosity, I don't know the answer to this, but do you have access to a body of knowledge that would say in the past years, that the United States has been responsible for the killing of tens of thousands of innocent civilians in this area of responsibility?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not aware of the exact number.

Senator TILLIS. It would seem to me that it would be far less than that. One question that I have about it, at least in some of the after-action reports that I have seen, it appears as though ISIS, in particular, finds a way to embed itself in populations where they are putting maybe some innocent lives in harm's way, but do you agree that that tends to be a tactic of theirs and we are doing everything we can to be more surgical in our approach to taking out bad actors, but recognizing that innocent civilians are not something that our military is in the business of trying to do?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am, in my past experiences, I have seen these ISIS, al Qaeda, Taliban do hide among the population and we do our absolute best to try and not harm civilians.

Senator TILLIS. Well, we can always get better, and I do agree with some of Senator Warren's comment about how do we get better, but I also think that we have to recognize that we are talking about people, particularly in Afghanistan, where we are concerned with their reconstitution, either ISIS or al Qaeda, now in a breeding ground to, I think, potential attacks within that area of responsibility and within the Homeland.

We heard public reports of 6 months to a year before we could actually have a threat on U.S. interests, either here or abroad. We have to continue to take that fight to them or they are going to take it to us.

Would you agree with that?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

The timing, I would defer to the intelligence community on the exact time, because the conditions continue to change.

Senator TILLIS. I want to talk a little bit about Iran.

Are you familiar with the Abraham Accords implementation?

General KURILLA. Senator, I am.

Senator TILLIS. Do you think that is a footprint that we should expand, and do you have any ideas on other countries that should be in the pipeline?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think it is a very good thing, because anytime we have countries that are talking, it is lowering the temperature in the room. It also goes to an economic growth and it creates job growth in some of these countries where you have a high large unemployment in some of these Arab countries.

With Bahrain and U.A.E., right now, as members of the Abraham Accords, I think that is a very good thing. I would defer to, you know, having to understand the reasonings behind other coun-

tries, why they are not coming forward right now, but I do think there are opportunities going forward.

Senator TILLIS. You generally believe your job is going to be easier or harder if we just pass a CR, rather than appropriate authorities?

General KURILLA. Senator, we need timely, accurate, predictable funding.

Senator TILLIS. What sorts of capabilities do you think you need, in addition to what you already have, for our own forces, but also for our partners in the area of responsibility?

General KURILLA. Senator, I can really only speak on behalf of 18th Airborne Corps, but it does affect readiness. It can affect modernization and it can affect quality of life.

Senator TILLIS. One other question, just in, or not a question, just a reinforced point that was made by Senator Blumenthal. The one thing that I hope when you move into this role that I would like to get feedback on, is the extent to which CENTCOM can play a role in prioritizing those who want to get out of Afghanistan.

We succeeded in getting several out, but it is only a fraction of nearly 800 cases, that in North Carolina, alone, that we are tracking. I believe that your engagement and the interagency activities, to make sure that we are prioritizing the most at-risk and those who have had a longstanding service as partners with the United States when we were in Afghanistan, I think that that is a role that I hope you will take seriously and assert because you have insights, you have background.

I have a lot of servicemembers who are desperately calling our office and looking to get folks out and I hope I can get your commitment on making sure that you play an active role in that.

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General KURILLA. Senator, thank you for your support for Fort Bragg.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Tillis.

Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Manchin.

[Pause.]

Chairman REED. Senator, you are talking, but we cannot hear you. We have a technical complication.

[Pause.]

Chairman REED. No, we cannot hear you, Senator.

Do you want to recede for a moment and fix it and we will call on someone else?

We still cannot hear you, Senator, so let me take the prerogative of asking if we can fix that and let me call on Senator Sullivan.

Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Chairman, can I pass for Senator Cramer?

Chairman REED. Absolutely.

Senator Cramer, please?

Senator CRAMER. Anything I can do to help. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General, for your service and your willingness to step into this new role. Congratulations. I don't think you are going to have any trouble getting the job.

You know, we have seen reports that the Houthi rebels in Yemen are firing missiles at U.A.E. at Al-Dhafra and there are some North Dakota airmen there, and these missiles that they are firing, of course, were designed and they were built in Iran.

Do you think the Houthis brought those missiles from Iran or did Iran donate them to the cause?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe that Iran does fund the missiles that go into the Houthis——

Senator CRAMER. So, do we consider these attacks on our airmen to be Houthi attacks or Iranian attacks and, either way, do they demand a response, do you think?

General KURILLA. Senator, Iran funds the Houthis. The Houthis were firing at the U.A.E. I cannot say if they definitively were firing at American servicemembers going forward. I am not aware of the intelligence behind it.

Senator CRAMER. All right. I want to spend just a minute, because, and by the way, I associate myself with several of my colleagues who have been asking about Afghanistan prioritizing this. I appreciate Senator Tillis' request of a commitment to do everything we can to prioritize more appropriately going forward and thank you for all that.

So, I want to focus just for a minute or 2 on military sales and to U.A.E. The Trump administration, as you know, agreed to sell the U.A.E. some F-35s, but in May, the Biden administration, reportedly, put the sale on hold, due to concerns about the U.A.E.'s relationship with China.

I know these things are complicated, and to be up front, I am more curious than I am committed to a position on this, so I would really like your views and your expertise.

What are the benefits of selling U.A.E. some F-35s, in your view, if there are some, and then, of course, the opposite, what are the risks?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe the benefits are that you have a close partner that has a, it is a very capable equipment that serves as an offset to Iran.

Senator CRAMER. So, what is the downside and how can we mitigate any risks?

General KURILLA. The downside is technology transfer that could be leaked. Can they safeguard the technologies, as the F-35 is an exquisite piece of military hardware?

Senator CRAMER. So, can we mitigate that, somehow, that concern? I share the concern, by the way.

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, that would be an area that I would have to make an assessment on with the State Department and others as they look at this.

Senator CRAMER. So, maybe just elaborate a little bit, and, you know, your answers are very concise and good. I appreciate that, but do countries like the U.A.E., or U.A.E. and other countries like them, do they have many options for these kinds of exquisite weapons systems and, particularly, if the U.S. refuses to sell them?

General KURILLA. Of the F-35, no, but there are other capabilities that I believe they have looked at in the region and from other partners.

Senator CRAMER. Well, I appreciate, again, the efficiency of your answers. As I have said, I am curious. I am trying to gain my own perspective based on a lot of other people's perspectives, but I have to say on balance, I am concerned that we are allowing this relationship with the U.A.E. and the opportunities that it presents to slip away if we don't ask more questions of people like you.

While I don't have a commitment, I certainly lean more toward trying to be the source of their exquisite weapons systems, rather than somebody else, and hopefully, we can mitigate.

With that, I will yield my last minute, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Thank You, General.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.

We have a technical issue with our colleagues who are trying to participate on Webex, so we will recognize those who are here in person.

Senator Sullivan, are you ready?

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, congratulations. Thanks for your service. I really think it has been exceptional. I fully intend to support you.

As you and I discussed, I have my own experience out in the CENTCOM AOR. I was recalled to active-duty at the end of 2004 and was there as a staff officer to General Abizaid until the middle of 2006; so a year and a half.

Have you had the opportunity to talk to General Abizaid or other CENTCOM commanders to get their advice, prior to this hearing?

General KURILLA. Senator, pending confirmation, I plan on talking to several of them.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good. I would strongly recommend that. General Abizaid, in my view, he is one of the most strategic thinkers we have had in our military in a long, long time.

One of the things that I witnessed during that year and a half, a huge concern was the proliferation of EFPs and, you know, we were in Iraq on a regular basis; General Abizaid was. I was with him during that time and we saw this proliferation starting in Basra and into Baghdad.

Can you describe very briefly what those were and what they did?

General KURILLA. Senator, an explosively formed penetrator, or an EFP, had the capability to go through any of our military vehicles that we had at the time. I lost several friends and soldiers from them.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, you lost soldiers under your command to the EFPs?

General KURILLA. I have lost soldiers to EFPs, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, I don't think this is highlighted enough, General, but I am sorry that that happened to you. In 2007, the then-Iranian ambassador to the U.N., Ambassador Zarif, who later became foreign minister, was quoted as saying, the Iranians did not provide any EFPs to anybody, Iraqi, Shia militias, and that the United States was lying and fabricating evidence about that.

Who do we now know supplied Iraqi Shia militias, these EFPs that killed and wounded thousands of Americans?

General KURILLA. Senator, they came from Iran.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, Zarif was clearly lying?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. General, what do you think the Iranians learned during that period? What is the estimate that you have heard of how many were killed and wounded; the best and brightest, by the way, in our country, with regard to these EFPs that killed our soldiers, marines, airmen, sailors.

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not sure of the exact number, but I believe it is around the number, somewhere around 400.

Senator SULLIVAN. Four hundred and several thousand wounded, correct?

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. What do you think the Iranians learned during that time, as they were killing our troops? Zarif was lying to the world and, yet, there didn't seem to be any kind of retaliation from the United States.

General KURILLA. Senator, I am not certain what they learned from that.

Senator SULLIVAN. Do you think it was good that there was no retaliation at the time or we didn't make them pay for the deaths of Americans?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think we were fighting the insurgency at the time. I can't presume to understand what the Iranians were thinking at the time.

Senator SULLIVAN. Let me, I will just give you my sense. I think that they thought that they could kill Americans with impunity and not pay a price, and, to the contrary, the price that they were, they didn't pay, but they were actually rewarded with the JCPOA. Secretary of State John Kerry negotiated with Zarif; one of the many outrages, I think, under Kerry's tenure, to literally negotiate, almost become buddies with him. You saw this other thing that Kerry and Zarif were talking a couple of years ago where Kerry was providing what looked like classified information; literally, the guy with American blood on his hands to get the JCPOA.

I talked to President Trump about this a number of times. Do you think that we were able to regain deterrence after the United States killed the Quds Force leader, Soleimani?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do.

Senator SULLIVAN. Did you agree with that strike?

General KURILLA. Senator, I don't think anyone, any adversary should be able to kill Americans with impunity. Given the intelligence, at the time, I would have taken the strike.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, if you are confirmed, and I hope you will be confirmed, will you commit to this committee to work hard to keep that deterrence that I think we have actually—

[Audio malfunction].

Senator SULLIVAN. More specifically, if Iran tries to, or does kill Americans, the way they have a history in the past, doing that impunity, would your advice to the President be, make sure that there is retaliation, so they pay the price?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe my job is to provide options.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will have some more questions for the record. Thank you.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Sullivan, and we notice——

[Audio malfunction].

Senator Peters.

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Use a louder voice, so we can make sure we are heard.

General, good to see you in person. We were have some technical difficulties, so I made a run down here to be able to ask these questions, personally, thank you for your distinguished record of service to our country.

General, in November, the Department of Defense stood up the United States-Israel Operations Technology Working Group. It was an initiative that I certainly have been championing for the last few years and I believe that it is absolutely vital that the United States remain on the cutting edge of defense technology and development and working with the capable allies, like Israel, is really paramount to that effort.

So, my question for you, sir, is, could you discuss how working in a collaborative fashion with CENTCOM allies, like Israel, on technological development, could help the United States, itself, stay at the forefront of defense innovation.

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe Israel has some very unique capabilities. They have a culture of innovation in their country, so I do believe each country has some unique capabilities and working with all of them can help the United States.

Senator PETERS. We have heard in the last few weeks that the United States has announced plans to reroute \$67 million of security assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces to support members of the military as Lebanon grapples with a severe financial crisis.

Normally, the aid package will include livelihood support payments that will go directly to troops to help them weather the extreme economic conditions being faced in their country.

General, can you discuss what the United States can do to support Lebanon during this time of political turmoil and, more broadly, why support of the Lebanese Armed Forces is actually important to the United States nationalism?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, that is an area that I would have to make an assessment, but I do know from my past experience, our relationship with the Lebanese Armed Forces, they are a multi-sect variant organizations that supports all of Lebanon and can act as a counterbalance to Hezbollah. They are an accountable organization and any military aid that we provided during my experience in the past, they were highly accountable for that.

Senator PETERS. General, the past month, we have seen continued escalation in the conflicts in Yemen with Houthi militias directly attacking the U.A.E. and the Saudi-led Coalition, continuing to pummel the Yemeni people into submission.

What efforts have we been making to end this conflict and to bring a close to the world's worst humanitarian disaster that we have seen since World War II, so to this time, we have not succeeded. Moving forward, what can the U.S. and our allies do to bring about an end to the war, which is now entering its eighth year?

General KURILLA. Senator, I don't believe there is any military solution for Yemen. There should be a negotiated settlement. I believe in supporting the U.N. and our own special envoy for Yemen.

Senator PETERS. Thank you for your answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Peters.

Senator Scott, please?

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chairman.

General, thanks for your service and thanks for being here with us.

What lessons would you draw from policy and continued positions leading up to the deadly withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan and how would you apply them if you are confirmed to lead CENTCOM?

General KURILLA. So, Senator, I know, and I applaud the Congress on the war commission that they are doing to identify the big lessons learned, strategically, over the last 20 years. I believe the Secretary of Defense right now also has an after-action review ongoing.

If confirmed, as the CENTCOM commander, that is an area that I will go and assess those lessons learned and ensure that we apply them. Much like we have in the military since I was a second lieutenant, we, after every operation, we did an after-action review to say what can we get better, but we must learn from it.

Senator SCOTT. General, under what circumstances would you be advising to cooperate militarily with the Taliban?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think areas that would have to be a pragmatic approach. If there was a threat to the Homeland from ISIS-K, which they are a rival, there is potentially an area there. I also think on the humanitarian crisis that is ongoing, look at ways that we can get the humanitarian relief to the people of Afghanistan that need it, and maybe not necessarily through the Taliban, but they would have to facilitate it, perhaps, through the World Food Programme, perhaps through Pakistan or others.

Senator SCOTT. What is your view of the—

VOICE. Your mic, please, sir.

VOICE. It should be working.

Senator SCOTT. Is it working now?

VOICE. Yeah.

Senator SCOTT. Ah, that is better.

Okay, what is your view of Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM and where do you see new opportunities to expand the cooperation between Israel and our other regional partners?

General KURILLA. Senator, I think there is significant opportunities with Israel's inclusion into the CENTCOM AOR. It starts with the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relationships between several of the countries in the AOR. I think there are opportunities for others, but those are individual decisions based on that.

There are areas of security cooperation between Israel and other countries; particularly, in air and missile defense, and other security areas.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you.

What do you see, what do you think China's strategy in the Middle East is and so how is that completely different than ours?

General KURILLA. So, Senator, China has economic interests and influence that they are looking to gain in the Middle East and the CENTCOM region. They have a Belt and Road Initiative agreements with 18 of the 21 countries in CENTCOM. They have increased their spending in the Middle East by 360 percent over the last year.

I think what we need to do is show their predatory nature of these agreements. They treat every country as if they are a client or a customer, where we deal in relationships and we treat them as allies and partners.

Senator SCOTT. What would you, what do you think we ought to be doing to counter that?

General KURILLA. I think we strengthen those partnerships and allies to show them that we are still there for them.

Senator SCOTT. Do you think that takes money?

General KURILLA. It think it takes money. I think it takes a presence. I think it takes engagements.

Senator SCOTT. All right. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Scott.

Now, let me recognize Senator Kaine, please.

Senator KAINE. General Kurilla, thank you, and congratulations on your nomination. I look forward to supporting you.

Just to state some facts at the outset that I don't think have gotten enough attention, and this is, by the way, a thank you to the American military regarding the evacuation of Afghans. The United States military, in a very difficult environment, evacuated about 125,000 Afghans; 50,000 or so to third countries, mostly in the region, 76,000 to the United States.

Of the 76,000 Afghans who had been evacuated to the United States, most came into Virginia Dulles Airport or into the Philadelphia Airport. I visited families at the Dulles Expo Center right near the airport as they were arriving, and then they were transitioned to eight military bases around the country; all of these heavily supported by the DOD. Three of the bases were in Virginia.

As of today, 68,000 of the 76,000 Afghans have been resettled in communities across the United States with a multi-government, multi-agency effort; DOD, DHS, now the lead agency. NGO is participating in a significant way so that Afghans can begin a new chapter of life in the United States.

I visited with Afghan families at each of the three bases in Virginia: Quantico, Fort Lee, and Fort Pickett. All those bases are now returned to their normal military operations and there are no more Afghans there. Last week, the DOD indicated that the remaining 8,000 Afghans would be resettled, likely by the middle part of this month.

It has been an incredible effort to bring 76,000 Afghans here. In my visits with them, they express fear and anxiety, obviously, about the future and about the fate of loved ones in Afghanistan, but also deep, deep appreciation to the United States, to the U.S. military, to the opportunity that they are being afforded here to begin a new life, that is a safer life than the one they left.

The burden is still on our shoulders, though, to make sure that this resettlement of Afghans in the United States is successful. Most of the Afghans in the United States are under a 2-year humanitarian parole that expires at the end of 2 years from their arrival here.

Mr. Chair, it is my hope that as we get into the NDA discussion, much, as in the past, the committee has grappled with SIV issues for Afghans who have worked in tandem with the United States military. The committee might explore what we could do with respect to the humanitarian parolees in the United States. We talked about this yesterday. These matters are in the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee, but it has been common for the Armed Services Committee to grapple with SIV issues to support our Afghan partners, and I would hope we would explore ways we could be of assistance.

But the scale of the effort both, on the ground in Afghanistan, tragically leading to the death of 13 troops, the injury of another four or five dozen United States troops, and the deaths and injuries of hundreds of Afghans, you know, I don't like to say that I can improve upon scripture, but a powerful line in scripture is, greater love hath no man this, that he would lay down his life for his friends.

I can improve on that. It is greater love to lay down your life for someone you don't even know. The fact that our 13 troops tragically lost their lives, but in doing so, paved the way for 125,000 people to experience freedom and more security is a powerful thing and we will never forget their sacrifice.

I want to ask you this question, does the United States have military forces in Iraq right now purely to assist the Iraqi Government in the ongoing mission to make sure that ISIS is defeated?

General KURILLA. Senator, they do.

Senator Kaine. In your view, is the Government of Iraq, a strong security partner of the United States in this mission?

General KURILLA. Senator, the Iraqi Security Forces are a very strong partner in this. The Government of Iraq currently is forming after Muqtada al-Sadr gained the plurality of the last vote.

Senator Kaine. Is the United States at work with Iraq?

General KURILLA. No, sir.

Senator Kaine. I would renew my request to my colleagues that the war authorization against the Government of Iraq, two of them, actually, one passed in 1991 and one passed in 2002, be repealed, since they are now a security partner and we are not at war with them.

The last thing I will say, General, I would just encourage along the lines that Senator Peters asked, attention to the situation in Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces has been a reliable partner for the United States and that is great. I think most accounts of Lebanon suggests that it is close to being on the verge of a collapsing state and that poses such significant danger in the region to Israel, to the Lebanese population, to other neighbors. The Armed Forces may be the one institution in that country where we can be a strong partner with other aspects of the Government, in or near collapse. Attention from CENTCOM to that important historical partner is something I would urge.

I appreciate your service.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

Did you have a comment?

General KURILLA. No, I was just going to thank the Senator for his support for our three bases and the 18th Airborne Corps soldiers on up in Virginia: Fort Lee, Fort Eustis, and Fort Story.

Chairman REED. Thank you, sir.

Let me recognize Senator Blackburn, please.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, welcome. Welcome to you and your family and thank you for the time that you spent visiting with me last week; I really do appreciate that.

We discussed China and how they are focused on getting customers and clients and the United States is focused on allies and relationships in the region. I would like for you to expand a little bit on how you are going to push back on China, particularly, as we discussed last week, with cyber and AI, how you are going to be able to do more with less and what new capabilities are on your tick list for what you need to counter what Beijing and Moscow are doing.

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, again, I would have to make an assessment of each of the countries and the area and the relationships and the inroads that China has made into each one of those countries and each one, I think, would be individualized based on that.

Exposing the predatory nature of their lending is a big part of that. I am concerned with the inroads that Huawei has made into several of the countries as they look to do their infrastructure and we know the security concerns associated with that.

Senator BLACKBURN. I appreciate that and I appreciate your comments about the 18 of the 21 countries and CENTCOM have done a BRI agreement with China.

Talk a little bit about where you see that belt and road ending in military fusion and how that affects the task in front of you, if confirmed.

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe right now, for China is the economic in the CENTCOM region, although, they do have their largest base outside of China in Djibouti, which is just across the Gulf of Aden, south of Yemen, and it is at a strategic choke point by the Bab-el-Mandeb, so that is very concerning. It allows them to do maintenance on some of their vessels while they are overseas.

My concern would be any expansion of that into the CENTCOM AOR, if confirmed.

Senator BLACKBURN. I have had the opportunity to visit our facilities and our presence in Djibouti, and it is of tremendous concern to me, as you see how China is trying to expand into that region. We have talked a good bit this morning about Afghanistan and this committee has put a good bit of attention on that.

I want to come back and kind of finish off a couple of questions that have been presented to you. Are there any instances where you think we should be sharing intel with the Taliban, and if that

is done, would you commit to informing us, even if it is in a classified setting, that that has occurred?

General KURILLA. Senator, looking at the specific instances, I think it is a case-by-case basis, based on that with the Taliban and I will commit to sharing incidences with both, I will share it with the chairman and the oversight committees and the Secretary of Defense.

Senator BLACKBURN. For those of us on this committee, we have continued to look at what happened in Afghanistan and for people like me that represent a major military post, and so many of our Tennesseans are with Fort Campbell or they are posted at Fort Campbell or they have served, and to see how this has, how it took place, the debacle that it became, has been of tremendous concern.

One other thing on that, with the Taliban takeover there in Afghanistan, how do you assess Pakistan's role in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan and what is your assessment of how they are working to help get people that we are trying to get out of Afghanistan, how they are getting them out.

General KURILLA. Well, Senator, first off, thank you for your support for the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, one of our 18th Airborne Corps units.

Senator, I am not aware right now of what Pakistan is doing in my current role to assist in getting out. I think that is an area that we could potentially work with Pakistan on. I think they are concerned about the regional stability in the area and the violent extremist organizations inside of Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, the TPP, is a very violent organization that has done, killed tens of thousands of Pakistanis, so they have a vested interest and a security interest with us on that, as well as the humanitarian crisis inside of Afghanistan.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you for your service and thank you for being here with us today to answer the questions.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

Now, via Webex, let me recognize Senator Manchin, please.

Senator MANCHIN. Can you hear me, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman REED. I can hear you, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you very much.

General Kurilla, first of all, thank you for your service and thank you for your attempt to continue to service and we appreciate it very much.

Let me just ask you this. ISIS remains a threat in Syria, as we all know, and most of its activity is focused on re-establishing networks, assassinating and intimidating local leaders and Security Forces and extending its influences in rural areas throughout Eastern Syria and Iraq.

So, my question to you will be, do you assess that the February 3 killing of ISIS leader Quraishi gave a significant blow to ISIS and the region and how do you plan to capitalize on the lack of leadership, if it did, really, truly break up their network?

General KURILLA. Senator, anytime a leader of any terrorist organization is taken out, it causes the leadership to have to figure out who will take over. It generally, temporarily, sets them back.

It depends on the capability of that leader that was in charge. But then, what it does, is also exposes that network as they communicate and try and find the next leader to replace them, and that provides opportunities.

Senator MANCHIN. So, the intel, the opportunity of intel right now is probably a premium?

General KURILLA. It is, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Let me say this. I want to also tell you, sir, I appreciate so much the efforts that you all have made to protect all civilians and we truly do. But we also know, I think Senator Tillis on both points, and Senator Warren, who is concerned, and we are all concerned, and Senator Tillis identifying that, basically, they embed themselves in. So, we know your job is difficult. We sympathize, but, also, we cannot allow these terrorist to go unchecked or undeterred, that is for sure.

In the past, counting violent extreme groups with al Qaeda and the Islamic State was the top national security; both of which are critical challenges to the CENTCOM area of responsibility for decades.

How do you assess the shift in resources, if China and Russia right now are taking the forefront in national security challenges facing the United States, that shift in resources would affect CENTCOM?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will have to look at the missions; if confirmed, look at the missions assigned to CENTCOM, the resources allocated, and the risks associated with each of those missions, and look at ways to mitigate that risk. One of the ways is partially through partnerships and allies that can make up some of that mitigation, and also through technology going forward.

But then I would come back to both, the chairman, and the Secretary of Defense, and inform this committee of any additional resources required.

Senator MANCHIN. Let me ask if you have any knowledge of the validity that China's talking points of partnering with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and if so, how are we going to counter that?

General KURILLA. Senator, I know that the Taliban has reached out to China. That was an open source, but, if confirmed, that is an area that I will have to make a deep assessment of.

Senator MANCHIN. Sir, national operations with CENTCOM, in West Virginia, the National Guard already has a strong connection with Qatar through our State Partnership Program. I think it was one of the first in the Middle East, and it might still be the only one. I am not sure.

We also had multiple units rotate to the Middle East throughout our wars with both, Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, they were 50 percent of the total force of C-130s operated by Reserve component units and we have a large contingency of that also in West Virginia.

Can you tell me how do you think, strategically, when employed, National Guard units in your area of responsibility.

General KURILLA. Senator, I am observed, as the CENTCOM Chief of Staff, that our National Guard and our Reserve provide tremendous capability into the AOR and can also help offset the impact on the active-duty force, as well.

Senator MANCHIN. So, in your planning and operations and defense and things of that, and security, you are using National Guard and their abilities, as basically, with your own forces?

General KURILLA. Senator, we have used the National Guard in all of my experience in the Middle East.

Senator MANCHIN. Well, let me say thank you. I appreciate very much.

I yield back my time.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Manchin.

Now, let me recognize Senator Hawley, please.

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, congratulations on your nomination. Thank you for being here.

Let me ask you about disturbing reports in the Washington Post today. The headline is, Documents Reveal United States Military's Frustration With White House Diplomats Over Afghanistan Evacuation.

The Washington Post has been able to see a 2,000 page Army investigative report. This committee has not been able to see that report. It has not, I don't think, been made public. The Post has it. Their reporting today begins this way: senior White House and State Department officials failed to grasp the Taliban's steady advance on Afghanistan's capital and resisted efforts by United States military leaders to prepare the evacuation of embassy personnel and allies weeks, weeks before Kabul's fall, placing American troops ordered to carry out the withdrawal in greater danger, according to sworn testimony from multiple commanders involved in the operation.

General Farrell Sullivan goes on to say in his sworn testimony, in my opinion, the National Security Council to the White House was not seriously planning for an evacuation.

Now, this report is disturbing for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which is it seems to directly contradict testimony that this committee has heard from, among others, General Milley, who had said that there was no way to have planned for or have anticipated the fall of Kabul. There was no way to have anticipated that anything like this would happen.

In fact, what the Army report seems to say is that military commanders repeatedly and for weeks, if not months, warned the White House and other leadership that something like this was imminently foreseeable, there needed to be action taken, and the White House and the State Department did nothing.

Here is my question to you, I understand this morning that, now, CENTCOM and OSD have taken position of this 2,000 page report. If you are confirmed, will you commit to releasing that full report to this committee?

General KURILLA. Senator, I would defer to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff on that.

Senator HAWLEY. So, that is a no?

General KURILLA. Senator, if it is within my authority to do so, I would, if confirmed.

Senator HAWLEY. If confirmed, and if it is up to you, you would do it.

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe it is publicly available.

Senator HAWLEY. If confirmed, do you commit to provide to this committee in a timely manner, any other information requested about the withdrawal in Afghanistan, including intelligence reports, assessments, and other material that may be at CENTCOM?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will provide to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs and oversight committees, whatever is required.

Senator HAWLEY. The last part is the only part that I am interested in, the oversight committee.

You would provide to this committee, intelligence reports, assessments, other information that we request on the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will come before this committee and testify on those reports.

Senator HAWLEY. That is not quite what I am asking. I am not asking about your testimony. I am asking you providing information that we directly request, that may be held at CENTCOM.

Would you commit to us, if you are confirmed, to providing for us, information that may be held at CENTCOM, regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, intelligence reports, assessments, et cetera?

General KURILLA. If it is within my authority to release, I would, Senator.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. Thank you.

I just want to say for the record that this committee needs to have open, public hearings on this report. We need to have open, public hearings on what we have learned about what has happened in Afghanistan, and no more closed briefings behind closed doors that shut out the American public and the cameras that we see behind us.

Frankly, this Committee's scarce interest in finding out what has happened in Afghanistan, I think, reflects badly on this Committee and it is time for the Members of this Committee to get serious about it.

Let me ask you, General, the Secretary of Defense has designated China as the Department's pacing threat and the Indo-Pacific as its priority theater. Can I just ask you for a yes-or-no answer, do you agree with that assessment?

General KURILLA. I do, Senator.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. If the Indo-Pacific is the priority theater, then it would follow that other theaters are, by definition, lower priorities; not unimportant, but if they are not the priority theaters, then other theaters are lower priorities, and that would include the Middle East, I would think.

Do you agree with that, that the Middle East would be a lower-priority theater, as compared to the Indo-Pacific?

General KURILLA. Per the 2018 NDS, that is accurate, Senator.

Senator HAWLEY. Okay, and do you agree with that assessment?

General KURILLA. I do, Senator.

Senator HAWLEY. Okay. Good. Great.

The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs wrote for the record, this is Admiral Grady that I am referring to, wrote for the record that DOD needs to do less in lower-priority theaters, so it can focus

more of its scarce resources on deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, barring a significant increase, of course, in the Defense budget.

Do you agree with that assessment by the Vice Chairman?

General KURILLA. Senator, I do.

Senator HAWLEY. Very good.

Let me shift to squarely, the AOR. Recent reports show that Israel and the U.A.E. are moving quickly to improve security and intelligence cooperation. You have been asked a little bit about that, I think, in earlier parts of today's hearing. That is a great example of the opportunities created by the Abraham Accords. I know that you have testified today that you understand the possibilities there. It is an example, I think, of something that CENTCOM can support in years ahead, now that Israel is part of your AOR, the CENTCOM AOR.

If you are confirmed, here is my question, how would you plan to empower Israel and our Gulf partners to work together and to strengthen deterrence at the regional level against Iranian aggression?

I see my time is expired, so I will let you answer that, General, and then I will return my time to the chair.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General KURILLA. Senator, I think I would have to make an assessment of that to find the best method forward. I think it is by going to each individual country and making that assessment.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Hawley.

Senator Duckworth, please?

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I would like to begin by disagreeing with my colleague from Missouri in saying that this committee has scant commitment to looking at what happened in Afghanistan; in fact, on a bipartisan basis, this committee passed the Afghanistan War Commission Act, which was set up, an entire commission to look at the entire 20 years of the war in Afghanistan, including the evacuation. It is also a provision for equal representation, equal opportunity for the Ranking Member and the Chairman of both, the majority and minority committees on SAF, on Foreign Relations, and on Intelligence, to appoint Committee Members, as well as the minority and majority leaders.

I can't, I don't think it can be any more fair than that, and the fact that it passed on a bipartisan basis, I think makes it clear that this is going to move forward and there is a commitment, overall, on a bipartisan basis to look at everything that happened in Afghanistan.

With that said, I would like to welcome you, General. Thank you. I want to apologize to you for cutting our call short the other day. You were very generous. It was one of those crazy days.

I want to return to our discussion there, talking about the fact that after decades of focusing much of our budget and capability on CENTCOM, we are now shifting, rightly, towards the Indo-Pacific region; however, I do believe that CENTCOM remains a critical part of our overall strategy to push back against great power rivals, as senators on both sides of the aisle on this Committee have pointed out, given that Russian and Chinese attempts to grow their

influence in the Middle East, as well as Iran's ongoing push to develop its nuclear capabilities.

I was really pleased to see the emphasis that you placed on partnerships and coalitions in your written testimony, and we do agree that we must better integrate our partners into our operational planning and we must reinforce reviewing their capabilities, as the Coalition's capabilities. So, again, you know, go with your pacing item, so we have to look at what our partners can do.

Yet, as we discussed on our call last week, capabilities are more than just military equipment. This is why I truly believe that engagement in exchange programs, such as our International Military Education Training, the IMET program, is so critical to success in the region.

What opportunities, General, do you see for partner engagement and exchange programs, including IMET, to retain influence in the region and prevent potentially malign actors from gaining a foothold in the Middle East?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe IMET is one of our more powerful capabilities we have. When we bring foreign officers to the United States and we expose them to our democratic values, they understand us and they understand our society. That is very powerful in helping, because eventually they continue on up and become senior leaders in their respective countries.

I think the partnership goes well beyond just military capability. It could also include intelligence. The one commodity we have a lot of is our intelligence capability and our challenge is sharing with every country in the CENTCOM AOR. We would like to do intelligence sharing, while still protecting our sources and methods that we use to get that intelligence. So, think that is an area that we can look to advance, as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

What reforms, if any, would help you to make these partner engagements and exchange programs more effective in Central Command?

General KURILLA. Senator, my attempt would be to get an assessment going into CENTCOM. I really can't give you that right now. I would have to look at that, and I would be willing to come back and provide that to you.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Thank you.

We have already talked about the National Guard and the State Partnership for Peace program; although, that is not the only model. Central Command houses a unique program between the National Guard and the country of Israel. It is run at the National Guard Bureau level and the program allows Israel to tap into the Bureau's expertise across the National Guard's many missions and capabilities. It provides training opportunities for multiple National Guard units, including those from Illinois. This program was reaffirmed last year, after an initial 15 successful years and now falls under CENTCOM.

Could you speak to the value of this program and how it would fit into your objectives for Central Command, if you are confirmed?

General KURILLA. Senator, I would have to make an assessment of that and then come back to you.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Okay. Along with my partner across the aisle, Senator Cornyn, I fought to include a provision in last year's NDAA that pushes for a partnership between the National Guard and Taiwan. After reviewing my legislation, the National Guard Bureau believes that partnership with Israel provides the best model for a comprehensive engagement with Taiwan.

If confirmed, once you have had a chance to review, would you make resources available within Central Command, either yourself or your staff and planners, to help implement a similar program between National Guard and Taiwan that is similar to the partnership with Israel, if requested?

General KURILLA. Senator, I would have to make an assessment on that reference to Taiwan being in the INDOPACOM AOR.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Right. But if they came to you and said, hey, can you tell us how it works with Israel, would you be willing to share that information with—

General KURILLA. Absolutely.

Senator DUCKWORTH.—Admiral Aquilino and the folks dealing with the Taiwan version?

General KURILLA. Absolutely.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I look forward to you being confirmed and, again, I apologize for the abruptness of our call, the abruptness of this, but I look forward to working with you in the future.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

Senator Kelly, please?

Senator KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Kurilla, congratulations on your nomination and thank you for being here today. You certainly have extensive experience and I know you have spent a significant amount of time in the CENTCOM AOR, so I know you understand some of the challenges that await you.

I noticed that your former boss, General Votel, commended your engagement on adoption of technologies like artificial intelligence, calling you an early adopter, and emphasizing their applicability for Central Command.

As chair of this committee's panel on emerging threats and capabilities, leveraging AI and other autonomy technologies, is something that I am very focused on. We often discuss this in the context of great power competition. But I believe these capabilities will be increasingly important in regions like the Middle East, where we no longer have the sizable military presence and advantage that we have had in recent decades.

So, can you elaborate on how, if confirmed, you would leverage artificial intelligence and other emerging capabilities to address current challenges that we face in the region?

General KURILLA. Senator, thank you for that.

I believe artificial intelligence, when it enables a human, can exponentially increase the capability of several of the things that we do now. Particularly, where we are focused right now in the 18th Airborne Corps is in our targeting capability, where we can take large pieces of terrain and rapidly identify hundreds of targets,

prioritize them based on a high-priority target list, that determines which ones we should strike with the resources that we have, and then that, then, goes back into our firing solutions and doing that. That happens in seconds, versus what would take hours, normally, or sometimes even days to be able to develop these targets, and it is doing it in real time at the edge, in our command post, and not being tied, just back into a garrison computing environment.

We do this quarterly and we do it with all six services participating, and where we share that with all of them, in an attempt to make all the services better with our artificial intelligence. So, rising tides raise all boats.

Senator KELLY. It would be great if you could come to us with some ideas of what you would need next. If you could think about what does AI on the battlefield look like a decade from now and let's make sure that we develop the tools so that it will be available.

I want to move on to a couple other quick topics here. The Iraqi F-16 fighter force, they paid us \$2 billion for these airplanes. The Arizona Air National Guard 162nd Fighter Wing in Tucson plays a very critical role in training these Iraqi pilots to fly these F-16s. The 162nd is uniquely qualified to do this because of the access to ranges and unmatched flying days per year in Southern Arizona, and the squadron also has decades of experience training foreign national pilots.

General, what is your perspective on the value of the foreign-pilot training to our combatant commanders?

General KURILLA. Senator, anytime we can get a partner to do something that we would do, that is a good thing, because it reduces the requirements and resources on us.

Senator KELLY. I am also concerned about, you know, reports that the F-16 fleet faces, the Iraqi F-16 fleet faces some serious maintenance issues and readiness issues. So, could you report back to this committee on both, the status, if confirmed, the status of the Iraqi Air Force's F-16 fleet and actions needed to remedy any deficits.

General KURILLA. Yes, Senator.

Senator KELLY. Then, finally, General, as you know, Israel, which was once the purview of the European Command is now part of Central Command and you will oversee Central Command, if confirmed.

While there are a number of challenges and opportunities facing Israel, one concrete action we can take is to support our ally is ensuring replenishment of the Iron Dome system, which was incredibly successful in the May 2020–2021 conflict, but also has been depleted.

I am proud of the role that Arizona has played in developing this technology; the technology behind the Iron Dome system, and I believe it is important that we work quickly to ensure that it can remain operational, to protect Israeli civilians.

What is the threat to Israel if the Iron Dome system is not replenished in a timely manner?

General KURILLA. Senator, the Iron Dome is a very capable system. The Army currently has two batteries that is undergoing testing and evaluation.

Israel does face a significant threat with literally hundreds of thousands of missiles both, in Hezbollah and both, in Hamas. So, what it does is it is a great defensive weapons system, so I am very supportive of the Iron Dome.

Senator KELLY. Okay. Well, let's make sure that we work together to ensure that we replenish and return Iron Dome to its full, operational capability.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Senator KELLY. Thank you, General.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Kelly.

I have been informed that Senator Rosen is finishing up her questioning in another committee and will shortly be available by Webex. That will give me the opportunity, General, to ask one or two more questions.

First, Russia has a significant footprint in Syria, Russia, now, is confronting NATO in Ukraine. But coming back to Syria, how do you project their role there, together with their pretensions with respect to Ukraine?

General KURILLA. Senator, I believe that if Russia does invade Ukraine, they would not hesitate to be able to act as a spoiler in Syria, as well. Already, we see it as one of the most contested, electromagnetic spectrum environments that we are currently operating in. So, I believe there is, you know, they are a competitor of ours.

Chairman REED. So, when you assume command of the CENTCOM, you will be very sensitive to reactions within Syria by the Russians that may be a consequence of something happening in Ukraine; is that fair?

General KURILLA. Absolutely, Senator.

Again, I don't believe that Russia wants to go to war with us and I know that we don't want to go to war with Russia, so I would be very sensitive to that.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much.

I believe that Senator Rosen is available, so now via Webex, let me recognize Senator Rosen.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, thank you, Ranking Member Inhofe, for holding this hearing.

I would also really like to thank you, General Kurilla, for meeting with me last week, for your lifetime of service, and your willingness to continue serving and leading the men and women of our services.

As I have noted in previous hearings, as you and I have discussed, Iranian-backed militias are increasingly targeting United States installations and servicemembers in Iraq and Syria, via rocket and drone attacks. Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism continues to threaten the United States and allied interests in the Middle East and around the world, via not only its ballistic missile program, but also its support for Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic's multitude of terrorist proxies.

So, General, can you discuss the threat of Iranian-backed militias in the Middle East post to our United States troops and our allies and how do you believe the U.S. should respond to their prolifera-

tion of attacks, how are you going to take on this challenge, if confirmed, and what is our ability to target them.

Do you have everything you need?

General KURILLA. Senator, I will not be able to make an assessment, if we have everything I need, until, if confirmed, to actually make that assessment.

It is a big concern of the Iranian-aligned militia groups that are currently operating both, inside of Iraq and then other elements operating inside of Syria, going after our servicemembers. We should, I will always protect our people and I would take action against them if they took action against us.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I want to also build on a little bit as we think about Israel's transfer to CENTCOM, because now that Israel is within CENTCOM's area of responsibility, it is my sincere hope that this transfer will potentiate even greater military cooperation between the United States and Israel through our shared goals, as well as cooperation between our Arab and Israeli partners.

So, General, I want to follow-up on Senator King's question. If confirmed, how would you leverage the Abraham Accords to improve defense cooperation in the region, in furtherance of United States interests and do you have any plans to integrate the joint exercises with Israel and Arab states who have signed on to the normalization agreements?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, I will make an assessment of the best ways to increase the cooperation between Israel and our Arab partners in the region. I think only good comes out of that when they are talking. When you have countries talking, it lowers the temperature.

Israel brings some very unique capabilities, in terms of their military component, that they believe they can share with their Arab partners in the region to increase both, the air and missile defense is a big area, based on the threat from Iran. I am a big fan of joint exercises, because I believe, collectively, rising tides raise all boats, when you make the elements train together, they get better.

Senator ROSEN. So, you definitely see a benefit to, and opportunities to Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM?

General KURILLA. One hundred percent, ma'am.

Senator ROSEN. You spoke a little bit about Iranian incursion. What is your current assessment of CENTCOM's ability to respond to Iranian nuclear breakout and I know you are not confirmed yet, but what are the contingency plans you believe CENTCOM should be prepared to execute in order to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapons, any capability?

General KURILLA. Senator, if confirmed, I would have to make an assessment of the current military capabilities and plans for any military action along those contingencies.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you, and, of course, lots of terrorism in the region, and so we have to think about our future counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, and I have asked questions in previous hearings about our ability to conduct our counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, now that we no longer have a "boots on

the ground” presence, and I would like to ask you a little bit about this, as well.

So, General, if confirmed, how do you plan to execute an enduring counterterrorism strategy that will be able to address and counter the influence of violent, extremist organizations in Afghanistan and the region?

General KURILLA. Senator, “over the horizon” counterterrorism is difficult; it is not impossible. I think I have to make an assessment of the actual mission and then those resources to apply against it and highlight the risks and look for ways to mitigate that risk, either through basing additional resources, intelligence, assets, technology that can then increase the effectiveness of that counterterrorism.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I see my time is just up, so I will submit this for the record, but I just wanted you to think about what the collapse of the Afghan Government, how it is going to affect ISIS, al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula. I will submit these questions for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Rosen.

General, let me thank you and your family for a lifetime of distinguished and dedicated service to the Army and to the Nation, and I think you have persuaded all of us, I suspect, that you have the character, the experience, and the judgment to lead CENTCOM. I look forward to your confirmation.

With that, I will adjourn the hearing.

General KURILLA. Thank you, Chairman.

[Whereupon, at 11:49 a.m., the Committee adjourned.]

[Prepared questions submitted to Lieutenant General Michael E. Kurilla, USA by Chairman Reed prior to the hearing with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

DUTIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

Question. What is your understanding of the duties and functions of the Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM)?

Answer. The USCENTCOM commander exercises command and control over assigned forces and is directly responsible to the President and Secretary of Defense for the performance of assigned missions and the preparedness of the command. Additionally, the commander organizes and provides authoritative direction to subordinate commands and forces necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command by the Unified Command Plan signed by the President as well as those tasked from the National Command Authority through the Secretary of Defense.

Question. What background and experience do you possess that you believe qualify you to perform these duties?

Answer. I have been honored to serve our Nation and our servicemembers and their families for 34 years. During that time, I have commanded at every level, from platoon to corps, serving in positions of leadership in combat and peacekeeping, and on operational deployments. I have commanded conventional and special operations forces and worked alongside allies and partners within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR).

As the USCENTCOM Chief of Staff, Joint Special Operations Command Director of Operations and Assistant Commanding General, and the Joint Staff Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counterterrorism, I have worked extensively with

the interagency, policy, and intelligence communities and with the embassy country teams throughout the USCENTCOM AOR.

Along with formal military education, these experiences allowed me to develop a clear understanding of the manner in which the military instrument of power supports national strategic objectives, the importance of building relationships across the interagency and with regional allies and partners, and effective command and control at the combatant command level.

Question. Do you believe that there are any steps that you need to take to enhance your expertise to perform the duties of the USCENTCOM Commander?

Answer. If confirmed, I am ready to assume command and will take the necessary additional steps to refine my understanding of critical issues within the region. If confirmed, I will consult with USCENTCOM Headquarters, Joint Staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), interagency partners, and other key stakeholders to increase my knowledge of the AOR. While I am a strong proponent of continuous learning and self-improvement, I am not aware of significant gaps that would preclude me from performing the duties of the USCENTCOM commander to the standard expected by members of the command, the chain of command, and the American people.

MAJOR CHALLENGES PROBLEMS, AND PRIORITIES

Question. If confirmed as the commander of USCENTCOM, you will be responsible for all the military operations in that region. These operations include deterring Iran, ensuring that terrorist groups cannot use Afghanistan as a base to attack the United States and our allies, ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and partnering with, and building the institutional capacity of, foreign security forces that promote the development of democratic values within the militaries of the region.

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

Answer. If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment of the challenges and opportunities for USCENTCOM. This assessment will involve traveling to consult with allies, partners, and embassy country teams across the region. It will also include a thorough review of all USCENTCOM operations and capabilities and intelligence assessments for the region. In conducting this assessment, I will consult with the Joint Staff, OSD, interagency partners, and other key stakeholders.

Once this assessment is complete, I will provide my insights and observations to the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the major challenges and opportunities facing USCENTCOM. I will also share my insights with our defense oversight committees and other interested congressional members and staff.

Question. If confirmed, what plans do you have for addressing these challenges and problems?

Answer. If confirmed, the assessment I will conduct will inform any plans to address these challenges and problems.

Question. If confirmed, what broad priorities would you establish and how would you define success and failure of your core missions in tangible terms?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize the objectives outlined in the National Defense Strategy and those directed by the President and Secretary of Defense. Success will be defined by USCENTCOM's ability to meet those objectives while protecting America's national security interests in the region.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work to ensure that Department of Defense (DOD) efforts in your AOR complement the efforts of civilian agencies?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with United States ambassadors and embassy country teams across the region to ensure our efforts complement and support a whole-of-government approach to advance U.S. national security objectives with the Department of State and U.S. diplomats in the lead. Our efforts to secure the region are strengthened when closely aligned with our diplomatic, economic, informational, intelligence, and humanitarian goals.

NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY AND GLOBAL POSTURE REVIEW

Question. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance prioritized the long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers China and Russia as the primary challenge with which the United States must contend, while also recognizing the need to deter and counter rogue regimes like North Korea and Iran and move to a more resource-sustainable approach to counterterrorism. Implementing the NDS will require the Secretary of Defense and combatant commanders to carry out missions efficiently and make hard choices.

What impact, if any, do you assess this strategy has on the operations and activities of USCENTCOM?

Answer. The 2018 National Defense Strategy placed increased emphasis on operating with and developing the capabilities of allies and partners in the region to counter the increasing influence of China and Russia and deter aggression from Iran. The strategy also articulated a need to promote regional stability and freedom of access to global commons. President Biden's 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance amplifies the focus on China as the pacing challenge and Russia as a disruptor, as well as the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

If confirmed, I will evaluate the implications of the forthcoming 2022 National Defense Strategy for the USCENTCOM AOR. As Secretary Austin has said publicly, the next NDS will advance the concept of integrated deterrence to address the compounding and concurrent challenges we face in the strategic environment. If confirmed, I will place emphasis on opportunities to build integrated deterrence approaches across domains in collaboration with our interagency and regional partners. This will require more meaningful integration of allies and partners into our theater-level defense planning to draw on our collective sources of strength.

Finally, if confirmed, I will seek opportunities to fill capability gaps and create opportunities for the Joint Force through cooperation with allies and partners. Moreover, I will aim to align operations, activities, and investments within the USCENTCOM AOR in a manner which disciplines our approach to campaigning and preserves warfighting readiness for the Joint Force.

Question. In what ways do you assess the 2018 National Defense Strategy has shaped United States force posture in the Middle East?

Answer. The 2018 NDS recognized an increasingly complex global security environment and rightfully prioritized China and Russia as the most concerning challenges for the Department of Defense. And, while the NDS reprioritized the focus towards the INDOPACOM AOR, it acknowledged the continued challenges and threats emanating from the Middle East and aligned forces appropriately.

Question. Given the hierarchy of prioritization on great power competition laid out in the 2018 National Defense Strategy and in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, in what ways can USCENTCOM counter Russia's growing influence in the Middle East?

Answer. I assess that the key to countering Russia's growing influence in USCENTCOM rests in developing and sustaining enduring coalitions and partnerships and working by, with, and through allies and partners. Moving forward, the command must continue to refine its country security cooperation plans to focus operations, activities, investments, and engagements on countering Russian influence. In addition to maintaining strong relationships and security cooperation, we must continue to expose malign Russian activities and highlight the risks and hidden costs our partners encounter when they pursue false Russian promises.

Question. In what ways can USCENTCOM counter China's growing influence in the Middle East?

Answer. China's growing ambition and exploitative behavior within the Middle East are best countered through enduring coalitions and partnerships. Constraining Chinese military, diplomatic, informational, and economic influence requires a whole-of-government approach that reinforces our commitments through operations, activities, investments, and engagements. Most importantly, we should contrast predatory Chinese activities that demonstrate Beijing's treatment of nations as "clients and customers" with the United States national commitment to partnerships and alliances. In so doing, the U.S. will remain the security partner of choice in the region.

Question. What is your assessment of the GPR impacts on USCENTCOM's posture requirements? Please be specific.

Answer. As part of my initial command assessment, I will evaluate the forces and assets required to accomplish the missions assigned to USCENTCOM and protect our national security interests in the region. A realignment of assets within the USCENTCOM AOR, whether in the maritime, ground, air, space, or cyber domain, may reduce U.S. capabilities in the region. It is therefore critical that we widen our circles of partner cooperation to address shared security challenges.

This must also be analyzed against the forthcoming NDS and any subsequent reviews directed by the Secretary of Defense.

Question. The review directed DOD to conduct additional analysis on enduring posture requirements in the Middle East. If confirmed, what role would you expect to play in that review?

Answer. If confirmed, and as part of my initial assessment, I will have a direct role in this process and provide my recommendations to the Secretary of Defense

and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the USCENTCOM requirements for missions assigned and USCENTCOM enduring posture requirements, as well as the risk associated with that posture.

AFGHANISTAN

Question. As the military mission in Afghanistan has concluded, what do you view as United States strategic interests in Afghanistan?

Answer. In my view, the primary United States strategic interest in Afghanistan remains preventing Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist safe-haven that threatens the United States Homeland. Additionally, enabling the continued relocation of American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and designated personnel from Afghanistan and supporting the State Department's continued diplomatic engagements with Afghanistan remain vital to United States national interests in Afghanistan.

Question. Reflecting on the mission in Afghanistan, in your view, what are some of the major strategic missteps? How would you apply those lessons learned in future military operations?

Answer. In my view, with the military mission in Afghanistan ending five months ago, we are in an early assessment period and the strategic implications of that war are not yet fully understood.

I am aware that USCENTCOM is actively evaluating the strategic and operational impacts of the Afghanistan mission and providing its best military assessment and inputs to the Secretary of Defense-directed After Action Review. Additionally, I anticipate the recently established Afghanistan War Commission will contribute to identifying major strategic missteps, actionable recommendations, and lessons learned. If confirmed, I will ensure USCENTCOM operations and activities are fully informed by these findings.

Question. In your view, what factors do you assess as leading to the Taliban's ultimate success in returning to power in Afghanistan?

Answer. While the Afghanistan War Commission represents an opportunity to analyze, identify, and understand the factors that led to the Taliban's return to power, it is clear, in my view, that the Taliban successfully exploited ethnic, tribal, religious, and political fissures within all levels of the Afghan Government.

Any review must evaluate the underlying factors that led the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) leaders and soldiers to lose the will to fight, particularly the failures of Afghan Government leadership.

Question. In your opinion, what are the implications of the collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) for future advise, train, and assist missions?

Answer. I anticipate the Afghanistan War Commission will allow a full understanding of the factors that led to the dissolution of the ANDSF and the broader implications for our national security.

Question. In your view, can the United States conduct effective "over the horizon" counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan without a partner force on the ground? Please explain your answer.

Answer. Over-the-Horizon-Counterterrorism (OTH-CT) operations are, in my experience, difficult but not impossible. Though a partner force on the ground significantly improves the effectiveness of counterterror operations, OTH-CT has many benefits. Most critically, through employment of airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, OTH-CT allows us the ability to degrade terrorist groups that pose a direct threat to the United States and our allies in places in which we lack physical access.

PAKISTAN

Question. In your view, what do you consider to be the major challenges in the United States-Pakistan strategic relationship?

Answer. Pakistan is a difficult but necessary partner. Our relationship has seen progress and improved over the last few years. The major challenges in the United States-Pakistan strategic relationship include regional tensions between two nuclear-capable powers, India and Pakistan, a tension which complicates our work toward regional stability. Adding to this complication are the pressures of territorial and resource disputes, growing Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence, and a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan along Pakistan's western border. Lastly, Pakistan's reliance on Chinese economic and military support challenges American ties in the country.

Question. What is your assessment of the strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan? Do you assess that those strategic aims have changed

as a result of the transition of United States forces from Afghanistan? If so, please describe the changes.

Answer. The strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan is complex, but necessary. We share an important partnership given the many areas in which our interests converge. Pakistan is a nuclear power that sits at the nexus of Russian, Chinese, Indian, and American geopolitical interests.

Stability in South Asia region remains the most important mutual strategic interest for both the United States and Pakistan, and we must continue to constructively engage with Pakistani leadership to work towards achieving success on this mutual interest.

While the United States remains Pakistan's partner of choice, China's influence in Pakistan is growing, this may increasingly challenge our relationship.

The advancement of nuclear weapons in Pakistan, India, and China, has increased tension in the region and has regional security implications. Ambiguity or a miscalculation of the other side's capabilities or intentions could have catastrophic consequences.

Question. In your opinion, what would you consider to be areas of shared strategic interest between the United States and Pakistan?

Answer. In my view, the United States and Pakistan share a number of strategic interests, including regional stability and the threat posed by violent extremist organizations. Finally, both nations also share a concern of addressing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Question. If confirmed, what changes, if any, would you recommend enhancing United States relations with Pakistan, particularly in terms of military-to-military relations?

Answer. Primary among the avenues to continue enhancing the United States relationship with Pakistan is in the area of counterterrorism partnership. If confirmed, I will evaluate the United States-Pakistan military-to-military relationships during my initial assessment of risks and opportunities in the region for such partnership opportunities. I will provide recommendations regarding this relationship to the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, as requested, to our defense oversight committees and other interested congressional members and staff.

CENTRAL ASIA

Question. What is your understanding of the role Russia and China are seeking to play in the Central Asian states? Do you assess that their strategic aims have changed following the end of the United States combat mission in Afghanistan?

Answer. It is my understanding that Russia and China seek decisive roles in Central Asia. I assess the end of the United States combat mission in Afghanistan created a void in Central Asia that Russia and China will seek to fill. In particular, Russia and China are likely concerned over the potential for growth and expansion of violent extremists in Afghanistan with the US withdrawal and fall of the former government, and are therefore incentivized to increase influence in the country.

In addition, Russia considers Central Asia as firmly within its sphere of influence and views the region as a security buffer against unwanted foreign interference, particularly on the part of the United States, Europe, and China. The recent crisis in Kazakhstan marked a major milestone for the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and demonstrates Moscow's intent to ensure the region remains stable and reliant on Russia as its sole security guarantor. Russia retains an advantage in the region through extensive bilateral engagement with all five Central Asian states leveraging social and historical ties, established intelligence networks, economic dependences, and military relationships.

Meanwhile, Beijing seeks access to Central Asian natural resources to meet Chinese industrial demands, to expand the use of Central Asian transportation infrastructure and to counter perceived security threats. China invests in industry throughout the Central Asian region. Since 2016, China increased security engagement with the region bilaterally and through China-dominated security structures, exemplified by the Quadrilateral Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism that allows China to jointly patrol the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-China border region. Beijing does not want to be a regional security guarantor and is focused only on threats that directly affect China while capitalizing on Russia's approach to perceived threats across the region.

Central Asian states will likely continue to maintain their relationships with the United States and allies, both as a hedge against excessive external influence, and as leverage to elicit advantages and concessions from Russia and China.

Question. In your view, do you consider Central Asia as a place where the United States is in long-term strategic competition with Russia and China? If so, what can USCENTCOM do to tip the regional balance in favor of the United States?

Answer. Yes, given that strategic competition with Russia and China remains a global priority, it is my view that Central Asia presents significant opportunities. Based on geography and history, Russia and China possess an outsized impact politically, economically, and militarily within Central Asian States. Influence and access to Central Asia requires that USCENTCOM participate in whole-of-government commitment to strengthen our relationships in Central Asia. Increased cooperation should continue to focus on areas where U.S. and partners' interests intersect.

Question. In your opinion, what are the potential consequences for U.S. access and interests in the region if the United States does not actively engage with Central Asian partners?

Answer. Advancing United States interests in the CENTCOM region requires active engagement with Central Asian partners. Given advanced Chinese and Russian influence, durable partnerships that benefit our mutual security assume increased importance.

By contrast, curtailed engagement with Central Asian partners could cede American access and influence. Russia actively seeks to maintain influence in the region and endeavors to bolster its position as the perceived security provider of choice in Central Asia. Russia continues to foment the idea of United States abandonment of Central Asia in the aftermath of American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Similarly, China, through its calculated investments in the region, seeks economic advantage.

IRAQ AND SYRIA

Question. What is your assessment of the current threat posed by ISIS?

Answer. In my view, ISIS remains a serious threat to United States interests. In 2021, ISIS maintained 17 publicly recognized branches and claimed responsibility for attacks in dozens of countries. While a loss of key leaders and a lack of resources have severely hindered the organization, ISIS sustains a capable threat to the security of the USCENTCOM AOR, as evidenced by the recent attack on the al-Hasakah detention facility. ISIS remains a learning, adaptable and committed organization with a dedicated core. Consistent pressure by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Iraq and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria, enabled by United States and Coalition forces, prevents ISIS from expanding and conducting external attacks. Displaced persons and refugees are susceptible to exploitation and radicalization by ISIS. ISIS also seeks opportunities in Afghanistan where the group has gained considerable personnel and resources.

Question. What is your assessment of the current security situation in Syria?

Answer. The security situation in Syria is complex and tenuous. Syria's military and Pro-Regime Forces (PRF) have a decisive advantage over the remaining opposition groups and the Assad regime is positioned to end the civil war militarily. However, the underlying causes of the conflict, including political disenfranchisement, poverty, water scarcity, and economic instability, will likely persist beyond the conflict's end. Most critically, ISIS remains a threat to both the United States and partners in the region.

Question. In your view, what are the United States national security objectives in Syria? To what extent does continued United States force presence in Syria support those objectives?

Answer. The military's mission in Syria is to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. Although the so-called physical caliphate is territorially defeated, the group transitioned to an insurgency that poses a continued threat to the U.S. Homeland, our allies, and the stability of our regional partners. This continued threat is exemplified by recent attacks and attempts to free thousands of ISIS fighters from prisons in Syria.

Our presence supports a whole-of-government approach to achieve other strategic objectives in Syria, including countering Iran and Russia. Tehran's military, paramilitary, and proxy involvement in Syria should be of concern, as it directly threatens Israel and Jordan, and risks dangerously escalating regional tensions. Lastly, our security presence allows for provision of humanitarian assistance by international and non-governmental organizations that would otherwise not be possible.

Question. In your view, should United States troop levels in Syria be tied to the achievement of certain conditions on the ground? If so, what conditions do you believe should factor into decisions about United States troop levels in Syria?

Answer. Mission requirements drive troop levels in all operations and there are always a series of operational factors that must be considered. Risk to force and risk

to mission must be considered in locations such as Syria where minimal United States and partner force footprints exist. Any modification of troop levels should take into account the SDF's capability to prevent ISIS from reestablishing a base of operations.

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

Answer. While political solutions require a whole-of-government approach, from a military perspective, it is critical that USCENTCOM and Combined Task Force-Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) continue to support our partner forces as they provide local military security and time and space for the continued development of local governance and security structures.

Question. What role, if any, do you believe United States military advisors should play in transitioning Syrian Defense Forces (SDF) to conduct local security vice offensive operations to clear territory held by ISIS?

Answer. U.S. military advisors play a critical role in the development of the SDF, to include in their ability to provide local security.

Question. What is your assessment of the current security situation in Iraq?

Answer. My assessment is that Iraq's security and political situation is fragile. Government formation is the national priority following the October 2021 elections that resulted in the Sadrist bloc gaining a plurality in the new Parliament. As the process continues, Iranian-aligned political parties and militia groups may escalate violence, particularly if they perceive diminishing opportunity to influence the course of government formation. ISIS in Iraq remains a credible threat to Iraqi security; the group uses complex attacks and subverts the local and provincial governments to grow its influence and expand its insurgency. Iran and its associated militias present the most direct threat to United States personnel and interests in Iraq.

Question. What is your understanding of the current United States strategy and objectives in Iraq?

Answer. My understanding is that the primary United States objectives in Iraq include the enduring defeat of ISIS and maintenance of a strategic partnership with the Government of Iraq. The strategy relies on a whole-of-government approach, to include a military focus on the development of capable, self-reliant, and accountable security forces, supported by the Government of Iraq.

Question. All United States forces in a combat role have transitioned from Iraq. Going forward, what do you envision to be the missions and size of the United States military presence in Iraq?

Answer. Although United States and coalition forces have transitioned from combat, ISIS elements remain active with an ability to regenerate and reconstitute. If confirmed, my initial assessment will include an evaluation of force requirements based on the missions and tasks given to USCENTCOM by the President and Secretary of Defense.

Question. What steps would you recommend for normalizing security assistance to the Iraqi Security Forces in the coming years?

Answer. If confirmed, I will assess the advisability and feasibility of normalizing security assistance to the Iraqi Security Forces in the coming years. I would do so in close consultation with Embassy Baghdad and the Commander of Combined Joint Task Force Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) and will provide my advice to the Secretary and Chairman to inform the interagency discussion and legislative considerations of authorities and funding. The Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) represents a crucial component of the United States whole-of-government approach to the enduring defeat of ISIS; any changes to this important funding source must be carefully analyzed to ensure our partner-based approach remains effective.

Question. What do you see as the appropriate role for NATO in Iraq? What adjustments would you make, if any, to NATO's current mission in Iraq?

Answer. If confirmed, a key component of my initial assessment will include an evaluation of the role for the NATO Mission in Iraq. If confirmed, I will maintain a collaborative approach with NATO headquarters to ensure our forces on the ground forces maintain their close relationships.

Question. In your view, what should the United States do regarding the repatriation of ISIS prisoners currently detained by the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Government of Iraq?

Answer. Repatriation is among the primary challenges USCENTCOM faces in Syria, as demonstrated by the recent ISIS attack on the al-Hasakah detention facility and subsequent SDF operations to recapture ISIS escapees. This issue requires a whole-of-government approach focused on engagement with allies and partners. The thousands of ISIS detainees of foreign descent represent an ISIS Army-in-wait-

ing and, if confirmed, I will address this vulnerability together with interagency partners and allies.

IRAN

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

Answer. Iran remains the primary and enduring threat in the USCENTCOM area of operations due to its use of its increasingly sophisticated military capabilities, broad proxy network, and periodic willingness to use force against the United States, our allies, and partner forces. Iran's rapidly expanding military capabilities enable it to coerce its neighbors, threaten international trade, and exploit instability throughout the region.

Tehran's primary power projection tools are ballistic missiles, UAVs, and expanding maritime capabilities. Iran's missile inventory includes both medium- and short-range ballistic missiles capable of holding many regional targets at risk. Iranian surface-to-air missiles pose a significant threat to United States intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets operating in international airspace. Additionally, naval cruise missile technologies will strengthen Iran's Anti-Access Area Denial efforts and increase Tehran's ability to hold critical sea lines of communication at risk and threaten countries in the region with greater speed, precision, and lethality. Iran also leverages a network of proxy forces to advance its power base and build strategic depth. Iran repeatedly demonstrates a willingness to share advanced conventional weapons with Shia militant proxies and partners throughout the region.

Question. Are United States military forces and capabilities currently deployed to the USCENTCOM AOR adequate to deter and, if necessary, respond to threats posed by Iran?

Answer. If confirmed, I will conduct a careful assessment of forces required in the region with consideration for the significant military capabilities and threats emanating from Iran. This assessment will examine force levels necessary to deter and, if necessary, respond to Iranian threats and assess risks and mitigating strategies.

Question. What is your assessment of United States national security interests associated with the growth of Iranian influence in the Middle East?

Answer. My assessment is that Iran's negative influence in the region continues to grow and is incompatible with United States national interests, as well as those of our allies and partners. Iran views the United States as its greatest enduring threat and continues a multifaceted approach to remove United States forces from the region while avoiding escalation into major conflict. The risk of miscalculation and escalation remains high.

Question. If the United States returned to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), what concerns, if any, would you have for regional security?

Answer. Iran is, in my view, the single biggest contributor to instability in the region and any agreement must fully prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Without knowledge of the specific terms of ongoing diplomatic negotiations, it is premature to assess the outcomes on regional security. Renewed negotiation efforts must consider the significant changes that have occurred in the security and geopolitical environments since the 2018 American withdrawal from the agreement.

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

Answer. It is my view that together with the international community and our Middle East partners, the United States maintains a shared objective in countering Iran's proliferation of Advanced Conventional Weapons and its support to proxies. In addition to continued diplomatic engagement, I assess that USCENTCOM must continue its efforts to enhance interoperability with allies and partners to deter and, when required, defeat Iranian conventional military capability across multiple domains. Finally, we must continue investing in technology, to include Artificial Intelligence and machine learning platforms and programs, to increase our ability to detect, defend, and respond to conventional Iranian military capabilities.

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

Answer. If confirmed, I will assess whether a reduction of U.S. force presence impacts our ability to achieve objectives for the region and undermines the assurances we provide allies and partners. Part of this assessment will address key areas in which partners, allies, or interagency elements can fill capability gaps or further enable efforts. It is my view that the current United States military posture in the

Middle East serves as an important role in unifying a coalition of regional partners and provides a counterbalance to Iran's malign regional influence. If confirmed, I would ensure USCENTCOM continues to work hard in sustaining enduring military, security, and intelligence ties with our regional partners.

Question. What is your assessment of the purpose and threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile program? To what extent is the United States and our partners in the region postured to counter the Iranian ballistic missile threat?

Answer. If confirmed, I will assess whether United States and our partners' integrated air and missile defense capability is adequate to counter Iranian ballistic missile threats in the short term. I intend to prioritize working with regional partners on their air defense systems with the aim of fully integrating air and missile defense across the region.

Question. In your view, what role, if any, should USCENTCOM play in countering Iran's support of international terrorism and proxy forces throughout the USCENTCOM AOR?

Answer. It is my view that USCENTCOM should support a whole-of-government approach to countering Iran's support for international terrorism and proxy forces. The Iranian regime leverages the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force in managing proxies in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon through the proliferation of advanced weapons technology and destabilizing actions.

USCENTCOM will counter Iranian efforts with continued operations, activities, investments, engagements, and support to partners in the region.

YEMEN

Question. What is your assessment of the threat posed by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS-Yemen to the United States?

Answer. My understanding is that al Qaeda's capabilities have been significantly weakened and appear to be on a declining trajectory. AQAP threatens the U.S. primarily through its ability to inspire lone actors to carryout high-profile attacks.

Question. What is your assessment of the current United States strategy to counter AQAP and ISIS-Yemen?

Answer. Yemen is a complex environment that will continue to evolve. If confirmed, I will use my initial assessment to evaluate our strategy and determine the resources and tools necessary to counter violent extremist organizations in Yemen. It is my view that a sound strategy requires close coordination with partners within DOD, the intelligence community, the interagency, and our allies and partners to assess and address threats emanating from Yemen.

Question. In your view, what are the United States national security interests in Yemen?

Answer. As I understand it, United States national security interests in Yemen are to prevent an attack on the United States Homeland or United States allies and partners in the region, reduce human suffering resulting from the humanitarian disaster, promote regional stability, and protect global economic trade routes.

Question. What is your assessment of the Iran-backed Houthi ballistic missile, unmanned aerial vehicle, and other threats emanating from Yemen to United States regional partners, U.S. interests, and freedom of navigation?

Answer. It is my view that the Houthi threat to United States and partner interests in the region remains high. The risk to United States personnel, citizens, partners, and interests is substantial given the Houthis' capabilities to inflict harm and demonstrated willingness to conduct complex strikes against major urban areas, including Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Question. What do you see as the implications of the Biden Administration's decision to cease offensive support operations to the Saudi-led coalition?

Answer. I believe there is no purely military solution to the current crisis in Yemen. If confirmed, I will include in my initial assessment an evaluation of the current state of Saudi-led coalition operations in Yemen and will provide these insights and recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and keep the Congress fully informed as requested.

Question. In your view, what role, if any, should the United States play in supporting the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen?

Answer. This is a question of national significance for elected officials and U.S. policymakers. It is my understanding the United States Government is working closely with the UN Special Representative (UNSR) and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to support the ongoing diplomatic efforts to bring the Yemeni conflict to a negotiated end.

EGYPT

Question. What is your assessment of the security situation in Egypt, including the Sinai Peninsula?

Answer. Egypt's political and security situation is stable. Like most nations, Egypt faces domestic challenges, including a weak economy, poverty, and water scarcity. Sinai-based extremist threats are largely contained, and, with continued counterterrorism pressure, ISIS–Sinai should remain a manageable concern for Cairo. I assess the historically strong United States and Egyptian military-to-military relationship remains our most reliable option to assist and positively influence security with this critical regional partner.

Question. What is your assessment of the United States–Egypt security relationship?

Answer. The United States–Egypt security relationship is strong. If prioritized and resourced, this relationship will endure as a critical pillar of regional stability. Within this context, we should continue to share our values of accountability with our partners.

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

Answer. Egypt's standing as the largest Arab nation and its strategic location at the nexus of North Africa and the Middle East means Cairo must remain a positive contributor to regional stability. Egypt's military routinely contributes to regional security, participating in multinational exercises and sustaining cooperation with the United States and other important partners.

Question. What is your assessment of Egypt's counterterrorism operations?

Answer. If confirmed, my initial assessment will include an evaluation of Egypt's counterterrorism operations. Egypt's effort to counter ISIS–Sinai made meaningful progress in 2021. If confirmed, I will continue efforts to support the development of Egyptian counterterrorism forces and our commitment to building a more capable, self-reliant, and accountable partner force.

Question. How do you assess the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood, al Qaeda, and the ISIS affiliate Wilayat Sinai, respectively, to the security situation in Egypt and the stability of the Sisi Government? To what extent do you believe that countering each of these groups should be a focal point of United States engagement and strategy in Egypt?

Answer. I assess the Sisi Government remains capable of degrading violent extremists in Egypt, including the Sinai. United States military efforts should be focused on groups, including al Qaeda and ISIS's Sinai affiliate, which pose threats to United States and regional security. The United States should continue to support the development of Egyptian counterterrorism forces into capable, self-reliant, and accountable forces.

LEBANON

Question. What is your assessment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), including their ability to act as the sole guarantor of Lebanon's security and sovereignty?

Answer. I assess that a lack of government funds since September 2019, emanating from Lebanon's economic and political crises, resulted in a consistent decrease in LAF troops available for operations, thereby degrading LAF capabilities. If confirmed, I intend to seek opportunities to strengthen the partnership with the LAF and fully assess their capabilities.

Question. In your view, what is the appropriate role for the United States military in Lebanon?

Answer. In my view, the appropriate role for the United States military in Lebanon is in providing security cooperation with the LAF. The U.S. military security cooperation relationship with the LAF is critical in Lebanon and has broader impacts for the region. Based on previous assignments, I understand that the LAF has a strong record of safeguarding U.S.-provided equipment, and the organization keeps meticulous records of such equipment.

The LAF serves as a reliable United States security partner. The United States–LAF partnership is increasingly critical, given expanding influence by Lebanese Hizballah, Iran, Russia, and China, in the country. If confirmed, I will seek opportunities to strengthen our partnership with the LAF.

Question. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of United States security assistance provided to the LAF in recent years, including the ability of the LAF to appropriately utilize and maintain accountability of United States-provided equipment?

Answer. United States security assistance to the LAF is critical to the continued stability of Lebanon and the region. The LAF has demonstrated the ability to avoid

sectarianism while using and maintaining accountability of United States-provided equipment to enhance security in Lebanon. If confirmed, I will include in my initial assessment an evaluation of the effectiveness of United States security assistance provided to the LAF.

Question. What is your assessment of the LAF's relationship with Hizballah?

Answer. The LAF and Lebanese Hizballah are not in partnership with each other. The LAF remains the most trusted and only defense institution in Lebanon with diverse sects. The organization serves all the Lebanese people while Hizballah is a sectarian militia. While the organizations cooperate and deconflict operations when necessary to avoid directly antagonizing each other or infringing on each other's established territory, relations between the two are distant.

COMBATING TERRORISM

Question. In your view, within the USCENTCOM AOR, what do you consider to be the highest counterterrorism priorities?

Answer. The highest priority for counterterrorism operations is protecting the Homeland, followed by mitigating threats to U.S. interests and those of our allies and partners in the region.

Question. What is your assessment of the threat posed by ISIS, al Qaeda, and their associated forces to the United States Homeland and U.S. interests overseas?

Answer. ISIS and al Qaeda remain a serious threat to the United States Homeland and U.S. interests overseas. Neither group has forsaken its ambitions, nor their direct hostility toward the United States. ISIS continues to encourage its networks, branches, and supporters to inspire, enable, or direct attacks worldwide. ISIS uses its media capabilities to preserve its global brand appeal despite territorial losses in Iraq and Syria.

Al Qaeda remains avowedly hostile to the United States, with continued aspirations to attack the U.S. Homeland. Across the USCENTCOM AOR, al Qaeda is comprised of disparate groups with uneven centralized control, but still maintains its goals to attack U.S., allies, and partner interests across the region.

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

Answer. Within the whole-of-government approach to combatting terrorism, the Department of Defense sets policy for and implements the military component of national power to defeat our enemies and protect our interests and citizens. If confirmed, I will implement the military component of the counterterrorism strategy in the USCENTCOM AOR in close consultation with the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Commander, USSOCOM.

Question. Given your current knowledge of USCENTCOM operations and activities, do you believe the Command's resources are aligned in a manner consistent with counterterrorism priorities?

Answer. If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment which will help me determine whether the resources provided to USCENTCOM are aligned with counterterrorism priorities. Defeating terrorists and preventing threats to the Homeland from the USCENTCOM AOR is the priority counterterrorism mission. Building partner capacity to address threats emanating from the region is necessary for long-term stability.

Question. If confirmed, do you foresee any counterterrorism efforts in the USCENTCOM AOR that may be constrained due to the 2018 National Defense Strategy prioritization of long-term strategic competition with Russia and China over countering VEOs?

Answer. If confirmed, I will assess any impact of resourcing decisions on the ability of USCENTCOM to conduct counterterrorism operations. This will identify USCENTCOM's ability to achieve all its assigned missions, including counterterrorism, and will provide my insights, concerns, assessment of risk, and advice to the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and keep the Congress fully informed as requested.

Question. To what extent, if any, do you consider the Muslim Brotherhood to constitute a terrorist threat within the USCENTCOM AOR?

Answer. The Muslim Brotherhood constitutes a minimal threat to U.S. personnel and our military presence in the USCENTCOM AOR. The organization is more likely to focus on priorities internal to the countries in which it operates.

BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE

Question. In the past few years, Congress has provided DOD a number of authorities to provide security assistance to partner nations. In your view, what should be

our strategic objectives in building the capacities of partner nations in the USCENTCOM AOR?

Answer. Our strategic objectives should be designed to develop partner nation capabilities; optimize U.S. influence, access, and freedom of action; and, build a network of capable partners who will work together in stabilizing the region. All these actions are consistent with the National Defense Strategy and USCENTCOM Campaign Plan. Ultimately, we want partner nations who are capable, self-reliant, accountable, and interoperable with partner forces. Security cooperation is essential to conducting counterterrorism operations and promoting regional stability within the USCENTCOM AOR.

Question. What would be your priorities, if confirmed, for building partner capacity, including institutional capacity, and other security cooperation efforts in the USCENTCOM AOR?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts that directly aid in establishing a capable network of allies and partners consistent with U.S. strategy and objectives. In general, this means undertaking efforts that increase interoperability at all levels, prioritizing equipment commonalities and common doctrine. We will remain focused on building forces that are capable, self-reliant, and accountable. At the institutional level, priorities include developing planning, logistics and sustainment, command and control, and sustainable resourcing.

Question. In your view, what is the appropriate balance between efforts to build partnership capacity at the tactical and operational level and at the institutional and ministerial level?

Answer. Partner capacity at the tactical, operational, institutional, and ministerial levels are inextricably linked and vital to the overall capabilities we strive to build. Before investing in partner capacity, we must first evaluate several conditions. It is critical that we ensure partners are willing and able to obligate the required resources and make appropriate organizational changes to implement capability at the tactical, operational, institutional, and ministerial levels. Developing a partner's institutional capacity is our ultimate goal and often the most challenging aspect of force development.

Question. In your view, how should our security cooperation be modified, conditioned, or restricted with countries in which there is significant corruption at the institutional and ministerial level?

Answer. Ultimately, the decision to restrict, condition, or modify security cooperation is a complex question involving U.S. laws and policy makers. If confirmed, I will execute security cooperation as directed in full compliance with Department of Defense policy guidance, directives, and authorities.

If confirmed, I will provide military advice to policy makers, through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explaining the operational opportunities and risks to our national objectives presented by working with or restricting assistance to countries in a highly competitive FMS market.

Question. In your view, how should USCENTCOM approach building partner capacity with host nation militaries that have been tasked to take on the role of police and internal security forces?

I believe all forms of security assistance should be evaluated and executed consistent with law and policy. Within the region, many defense forces carry a dual role of providing both internal and external security. Understanding the nature of those roles and authorities is critical to effectively building partner capacity.

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Question. If confirmed, how would you ensure civilian casualty allegations are adequately and promptly investigated by USCENTCOM?

Answer. USCENTCOM has a standardized process to assess civilian casualty allegations. If confirmed, I will review and, if necessary, improve USCENTCOM's processes for reporting and investigating allegations of civilian casualty incidents. Furthermore, I will serve as an active participant in the development of the Department's Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Plan, as directed by the Secretary of Defense on January 27, 2022.

Question. Do you believe credible civilian casualty incidents should be independently investigated by personnel who are sufficiently removed from the unit or chain of command associated with the incident? Please be specific in your response.

Answer. In my assessment, credible CIVCAS incidents should be investigated by personnel sufficiently removed from the chain of command and independent from the unit at the heart of the incident.

Question. What is your understanding of USCENTCOM's obligation to report civilian casualty incidents to Congress?

Answer. USCENTCOM will report civilian casualties to the Department of Defense in support of the Secretary of Defense's statutory obligation to report to Congress and be open and transparent with our oversight committees. If confirmed, I will ensure compliance with all Department policies and procedures for reporting civilian casualty incidents.

Question. What is your understanding of USCENTCOM's current policies with respect to public transparency, and if confirmed, what policies would you seek to establish in this regard?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure the fullest appropriate measure of transparency across USCENTCOM operations. This includes full compliance with departmental reporting requirements across all aspects of operations, including instances of civilian harm, as well as conducting regular media engagements and updates to congressional committees.

Question. Under what circumstances do you believe it is appropriate to provide ex gratia payments when civilian casualties or other civilian harm result from U.S. military operations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will follow the applicable law and Department of Defense policies as set forth in Section 1213 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act and the Under-Secretary of Defense's Interim Regulations for Condolence or Sympathy Payments to Friendly Civilians for Injury or Loss. I will ensure USCENTCOM policies are clearly articulated and effectively implemented to comply with both the law and Department policy, including supporting the Secretary of Defense's reporting statutory requirements.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Question. Over the past decade, DOD has funded an increasing number of military information support operations and influence programs.

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

Answer. The information environment is key terrain in USCENTCOM. USCENTCOM's military information support operations and information warfare programs advance U.S. interests in the AOR by offering information advantage in countering competitors and adversaries.

Question. If confirmed, what steps would you take to ensure information operations activities conducted by USCENTCOM comply with DOD guidance and are in support of military objectives?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure information operations activities are well-coordinated, aligned with military objectives, and comply with department policy guidance. USCENTCOM provides quarterly and annual reports on all activities related to Information Operations. If confirmed, I will continue to employ these practices while complying with all regulatory requirements.

Question. Do you believe USCENTCOM and other agencies within the United States Government are appropriately organized to respond effectively to the messaging and influence efforts of ISIS, al Qaeda, and other violent extremist groups?

Answer. If confirmed, my intent is to conduct an initial assessment, which will specifically include an evaluation of USCENTCOM messaging and influence efforts to determine if they are appropriately organized to respond effectively to the messaging and influence efforts of violent extremist organizations.

Question. Given that long-term strategic competition with China and Russia is a top-tier National Defense Strategy priority, what is USCENTCOM doing to counter Chinese and Russian strategic narratives across the AOR?

Answer. If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment which will include an evaluation of USCENTCOM efforts to counter Chinese and Russian strategic narratives across the AOR.

Question. In your view, is countering a violent extremist group's messaging an important aspect of counterterrorism? Which media platforms do you view as most conducive to disseminating violent extremist group's messaging, and what steps do you believe USCENTCOM could take to counter this messaging?

Answer. Counter-messaging focused on extremist ideology is an important aspect of countering violent extremism. Social media channels are generally the most effective recruitment and coordination platform for violent extremist organizations within the USCENTCOM AOR. USCENTCOM regularly coordinates with the FBI and the Department of State Global Engagement Center to identify and report malign use of social media. Likewise, USCENTCOM works with the interagency to more effectively counter extremist recruiting, communication, and misinformation.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

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

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

Answer. The establishment of partnerships that integrated all instruments of national power at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels was essential to our campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as our broader counterterrorism efforts in the last 20 years. Through these collaborative partnerships, we learned lessons on the importance of information sharing, the value of pairing complementary authorities, and the criticality of bringing a range of organizational capabilities to bear on a problem. During service as both a general purpose force and special operation commander, I found that transparency, direct coordination, and development of a mutually agreed upon operational framework enabled success. It is imperative we carry these lessons forward and apply these constructs in future conflicts.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Question. The Department of Defense has developed comprehensive policies and procedures to improve the prevention of and response to incidents of sexual assaults, including providing appropriate resources and care for victims of sexual assault. What is your view of the steps taken to prevent and respond to sexual assaults in USCENTCOM, including assaults by and against U.S. civilian and contractor personnel?

Answer. The USCENTCOM climate and policies surrounding sexual assault prevention and response will be part of my initial command assessment. I take the prevention of and response to sexual assault against any person seriously. Sexual assault is abhorrent; it is not only against our values, but also harms military readiness. Sexual assault exists along a continuum of harm, so we must also ensure that we do not tolerate other types of behaviors, such as sexual harassment, that at times can escalate.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure prevention and response is a top priority for all commanders and members of the USCENTCOM community. I will also ensure our efforts are properly resourced, and that all programs, policies, and training are supportive of Department's five lines of effort (LOEs), which include:

- 1) prevention;
- 2) victim assistance and advocacy;
- 3) investigation;
- 4) accountability; and
- 5) assessment.

Fundamentally, sexual assault is a safety and readiness issue, and will always receive my direct attention.

Question. What is your view of the adequacy of USCENTCOM policies and procedures to protect victims of sexual assault from retaliation for reporting the assault?

Answer. As part of my initial command assessment, I will review both the adequacy of USCENTCOM policies and procedures for protecting victims of sexual assault from retaliation, but also the effectiveness of the training and implementation of such policies and procedures. Every leader and every member of the force must support a climate in which survivors can report these claims without fear of retaliation or blame for the unlawful actions of others.

We all must encourage climates in which victims feel comfortable coming forward to report their experiences so they can connect with restorative care and aid in our efforts to hold offenders appropriately accountable. I will continue a zero-tolerance policy for any type of sexual assault, harassment or retaliation.

Question. What is your view of the adequacy of the training and resources in place in CENTCOM to investigate and respond to allegations of sexual assault?

Answer. An important aspect of my initial command assessment will be the adequacy of the training, resources, and climate surrounding sexual assault prevention and response. While commanders have an absolute responsibility to address command climate issues, I also believe every member of our Armed Forces can contribute to an environment in which we make clear that sexual harassment and sexual assault are absolutely unacceptable. I will work hard to empower all members of our community with the necessary tools, skills, and abilities to ensure the safety of all. When confronted with instances of sexual assault, I will ensure that survivors receive the necessary support and treatment they require without fear of retaliation.

Critical to sexual assault prevention is training for supervisors regarding incident response and the warning signs of retaliation. Indeed, training all members of the command to recognize retaliation is critical.

I am committed to bringing to bear the resources required throughout the AOR to ensure thorough and complete investigations are conducted. I am also fully committed to survivor care and offender accountability.

Question. What is your view of the willingness and ability of military leaders to hold servicemembers accountable for sexual misconduct?

Answer. In my career, I have observed a strong willingness by military leaders to hold servicemembers appropriately accountable for sexual misconduct. Yet we are still not where we need to be and more must be done. Disciplined, fit, and cohesive teams can be built only upon a foundation of trust. Sexual misconduct destroys trust and the cohesion so necessary for a ready and lethal fighting force. I remain committed to bringing to bear the resources required in the AOR to ensure servicemembers responsible for sexual misconduct are held appropriately accountable.

Question. What is your understanding of the adequacy of the resources and programs in USCENTCOM to provide victims of sexual assault the medical, psychological, and legal help they need?

Answer. Congress has been a critical partner in helping the Department of Defense ensure we have a robust response system and the resources available for survivors. However, support to victims is an area in which we constantly must reevaluate and assess our effectiveness in helping ensure they have access restorative care. We must constantly reassess where we are; as such, I emphasize my support for Secretary Austin's initiatives surrounding sexual assault, to include survivor support. Commanders play a critical role in this capacity.

The Department of Defense provides commanders with the many resources and programs to care for our personnel and their families. We continue to pursue the most useful tools that will expand our ability to support victims with quality medical, psychological, and legal help. Part of my initial command assessment will include issues surrounding services provided to victims of sexual assault. If confirmed, I will ensure commanders and leaders at all levels within USCENTCOM are not only personally aware of all available resources but that they actively inform their subordinates of their availability.

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

Answer. Taking care of our people is critical to effective leadership. If confirmed, I will ensure USCENTCOM continues to reduce, with the ultimate goal of eliminating, the crime of sexual assault.

My strategic approach to sexual assault is "prevention first." However, if a sexual assault occurs, I have an unwavering commitment to survivor care and offender accountability.

Question. What is your view about the role of the chain of command in changing the military culture in which these sexual assaults have occurred?

Answer. While leaders at every level are responsible for culture, organizational culture starts at the top. As I have for 34 years, I embrace the obligation to ensure our military culture reflects our core values and ethos. My commitment is, as it has long been, to building disciplined, fit, cohesive teams, wherein everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Those who volunteer to serve in uniform are our Nation's sons and daughters, and I am absolutely determined to ensure they can serve in environments in which they will be treated with dignity and respect.

Question. Do you consider the current sexual assault policies and procedures, particularly those on restricted reporting, to be effective?

Answer. The current sexual assault policies and procedures on restricted reporting are effective. This reporting option allow us to wholly commit to survivor care, while also supporting any desire for privacy.

If confirmed, what actions will you take to reassess current policies, procedures, and programs and to ensure senior level direction and oversight of efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assaults in USCENTCOM?

If confirmed, I will initiate an assessment of policies, procedures, and programs to prevent and respond to sexual assaults within USCENTCOM. I am fully committed to the prevention of sexual assault throughout the organization. In the event of a sexual assault, however, I will ensure a timely, appropriate, and sensitive response and that survivors' resources commensurate with their needs. I will also fully commit to supporting Secretary Austin's initiatives regarding prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Question. What methods for monitoring overall trends and gauging the sufficiency of component commanders' efforts in preventing and responding to incidents of sex-

ual assault do you consider appropriate and intend to implement as USCENTCOM Commander?

Answer. It is my understanding that USCENTCOM has a robust program for prevention of sexual assault, inclusive of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Stand-downs, team building events, values-based training, active bystander intervention, and leadership training sessions.

USCENTCOM component commanders evaluate and report trends of sexual assault incidents. If confirmed, my goal will be the elimination of any incidents of sexual assault. I will also fully commit to supporting Secretary Austin's initiatives regarding prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

RELATIONS WITH CONGRESS

Question. If confirmed, what actions would you take to sustain a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between USCENTCOM and Congress, and in particular the congressional defense committees?

Answer. Combatant commanders must maintain strong and transparent relationships with the defense committees. As a former USCENTCOM Chief of Staff, I am acutely aware of the mutual benefits of a robust Congressional Engagement Plan (CEP) that establishes an operational framework across the legislative year. If confirmed, I plan to execute a robust CEP, inclusive of quarterly calls with the chairs and ranking members of the defense committees. If confirmed, would also welcome member and staff visits to the USCENTCOM headquarters.

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

Question. In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications) and other information from the Department.

Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to provide this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications), and other information as may be requested of you, and to do so in a timely manner? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to consult with this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to keep this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this committee? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MAZIE K. HIRONO

OVER THE HORIZON TARGETING

1. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Kurilla, after the United States-led military withdrawal from Afghanistan, President Joseph Biden described counterterrorism in the country as pivoting to “over the horizon” capabilities. These capabilities will rely heavily on drone strikes. We also recently saw the use of Special Forces to target ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] leadership. If confirmed as U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander, how do you intend to continue the counterterrorism mission without the use of conventional forces?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I will conduct a holistic initial assessment of the U.S. Central Command operational environment, inclusive of an analysis of the over the horizon counterterrorism strategy. I envision a whole-of-government counterterrorism strategy to complement over the horizon military operations. Such an approach will rely heavily on integration of the U.S. Intelligence Community and allies and partners throughout the U.S. Central Command area of operations. We must also work effectively across the interagency to counter violent extremism, address roots causes and terrorist ideology, and promote economic development and stability programs with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Department of State.

2. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Kurilla, as illustrated by the errant Kabul strike in August 2021, which killed 10 civilians, the over the horizon strategy comes with inherent challenges. If confirmed, what steps would you take to prevent civilian casualties resulting from the military’s shift to “over the horizon” counterterrorism efforts?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Preventing civilian casualties is a priority for the Department of Defense and an inherent responsibility for all operational commanders. I look forward to supporting the Secretary of Defense’s recent initiative to develop a Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Plan, and, if confirmed, I will seek opportunities to strengthen processes to prevent civilian casualties.

Over the horizon counterterrorism operations are difficult, but not impossible. Counterterrorism strikes that rely solely on over the horizon capabilities require the employment of additional airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to reduce the risk of civilian casualties. In such operations, the risk of civilian casualties can be mitigated by close cooperation with the U.S. Intelligence Community, robust human intelligence, signals intelligence, partners on the ground, and a fusion of other intelligence capabilities.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

COOPERATION WITH THE TALIBAN

3. Senator INHOFE. Lieutenant General Kurilla, based on your personal experience, what would be the impact on troops’ morale if the United States shared military intelligence or cooperated militarily with the Taliban?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. There are limited situations in which military cooperation with the Taliban should be cautiously considered and conducted only after the requirements of Section 1213 of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act are satisfied. For example, if we gain credible and specific intelligence of an imminent attack on our Homeland, Americans, or our allies that neither U.S. forces nor those of allies or partners are able to prevent, it may be advantageous to consider a limited sharing of sanitized intelligence with the Taliban if doing so may disrupt or prevent the attack. In such cases, which must be specific to threat, the possible advantages must be weighed against the risks. Based on my previous experience, I judge the vast majority of troops would understand the necessity of coordination with the Taliban in such a scenario, particularly if doing so saved the lives of Americans or those of our allies.

4. Senator INHOFE. Lieutenant General Kurilla, the United Nations has received “credible allegations” that more than 100 former Afghan Government officials, troops, and those who worked with coalition forces have been killed since the

Taliban took control in mid-August, despite assurance from the terrorist group that they would remain unharmed.¹

Is there any reason to believe that we can trust the Taliban to the extent that it would be advisable to share military intelligence or cooperate militarily with the Taliban, in your opinion?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I do not trust the Taliban. There are limited situations in which military cooperation with the Taliban should be cautiously considered and conducted only after the requirements of Section 1213 of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act are satisfied. For example, if we gain credible and specific intelligence of an imminent attack on our Homeland, Americans, or our allies that neither U.S. forces nor those of allies or partners are able to prevent, it may be advantageous to consider a limited sharing of sanitized intelligence with the Taliban if doing so may disrupt or prevent the attack. In such cases, which must be specific to threat, the possible advantages must be weighed against the risks.

5. Senator INHOFE. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in the very unlikely situation that the United States shares military intelligence or cooperates militarily with the Taliban, are you familiar with section 1213 of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which requires notification to the Armed Services Committees, including the nature of the intelligence that was shared or military cooperation?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I am familiar with section 1213 of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act. If confirmed, I will comply with all laws and regulations and support the Secretary of Defense in meeting the Department's notification requirements in accordance with the law.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR THOM TILLIS

COMMUNICATION INTEROPERABILITY

6. Senator TILLIS. Lieutenant General Kurilla, the Department of Defense continues to struggle with disparate communications systems that don't speak to one another nor allow for true interoperability. Lack of communication interoperability is exacerbated when working with partner nations. In your previous roles at U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and while commanding the 18th Airborne Corps you saw firsthand how the use of a non-proprietary software solution could overcome these interoperability challenges. Can this same solution be utilized by CENTCOM to provide and share a complete common operating picture to warfighters and international partners to shorten the time of information transfer to gain increased situational understanding of complex situations?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I will analyze technical opportunities to increase situational understanding of complex situations across U.S. Central Command. To do so, I would prioritize building interoperability through coordination with the Joint Force and Service Chiefs and partners and allies operating in the U.S. Central Command area of operations.

While it is my understanding that U.S. Central Command already leverages a mission partner network to share its common operating picture, I look forward to assessing opportunities to expand and improve these capabilities. Moreover, if confirmed, I am committed to leveraging emerging technologies, machine-to-machine communication, artificial intelligence, and data-centric operations within U.S. Central Command.

It is my view that USCENTCOM is well-positioned to employ the Joint All Domain Command and Control (JADC2) concept to address data interoperability necessary to integrate joint and combined forces, and accelerate and improve decision-making.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN

AFGHANISTAN

7. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you believe the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan was a strategic failure?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. While I believe it was a strategic failure, we are, in my view, still assessing the strategic implications of our withdrawal from Afghanistan. The conclusion to the war in Afghanistan offers many lessons and observa-

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/world/un-former-afghan-troops-officials-killed-taliban-takeover>

tions we must absorb with humility and apply across the force and toward future operations. I anticipate the ongoing review directed by the Secretary of Defense to examine the withdrawal from Afghanistan will offer critical lessons for future operations. In addition, I anticipate the independent congressional Afghanistan War Commission, chartered with an examination of the entire war, will also yield lessons learned from the withdrawal from Afghanistan applicable to the entire force.

8. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what lessons should we take away from the Afghanistan withdrawal debacle?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my view, we are still assessing the strategic implications of our withdrawal from Afghanistan for lessons we should humbly absorb and apply to future operations. I anticipate the Secretary of Defense-directed ongoing review of the withdrawal and other aspects of the final days of the war in Afghanistan by an independent panel will identify missteps and offer lessons learned for future campaigns. In addition, I anticipate the independent Afghanistan War Commission, chartered with an examination of the entire war will also yield insights from the withdrawal from Afghanistan that will apply to future operations.

9. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, current CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie said that without United States troops on the ground in Afghanistan, counterterrorism strikes would be harder, though not impossible, specifically noting that “[t]he ranges will be greater, the resources will be greater, the risks will all be greater, but it will be possible to do those things.” Do you agree with this assessment?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, I agree with General McKenzie’s assessment. Over the horizon counterterrorism operations are difficult, but not impossible. Such strikes require increased aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets and introduce additional complexity and risk than do operations with U.S. forces on the ground. If confirmed, I will conduct a holistic assessment of over the horizon counterterrorism operations and evaluate ways to improve effectiveness and mitigate risk.

10. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what are the core requirements for a successful “over-the-horizon” counterterrorism campaign in Afghanistan?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Over the horizon counterterrorism relies on several capabilities to compensate for a lack of American military forces on the ground. If confirmed, I will seek to leverage a layered approach inclusive of multiple intelligence sources, refined target development, non-kinetic effects, and persistent surveillance.

Successful over the horizon counterterrorism operations require skilled analysts and targeting experts to characterize a terrorist network, locate individual terrorists, and identify the presence and proximity of civilians. These operations require increased airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to develop, track, and strike targets while mitigating the risk of civilian casualties.

Over the horizon counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan are particularly challenging; as Afghanistan is a landlocked country, we rely on neighboring nations to enter the country through the air; we must fly intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets a great distance to the targeted area. Therefore, these operations require access, basing, and overflight agreements with partners in the region.

11. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in response to an advance policy question for your confirmation hearing, you wrote, “... through the employment of airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, OTH-CT [over the horizon-counterterrorism] allows us the ability to degrade terrorist groups that pose a direct threat to the United States and our allies in places in which we lack physical access.” Do you believe that an over-reliance on ISR assets, coupled with a lack of physical access, could lead to an increase in strikes with high collateral damage to civilians?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I will work diligently to mitigate both collateral damage and harm to civilians. Over the horizon counterterrorism strikes in areas where we lack U.S. physical presence rely heavily on aerial ISR assets. Such operations may increase the risk of harm to civilians if not properly resourced. Those risks, however, are reduced through expanded human intelligence networks on the ground, extensive rehearsals, in-depth target analysis, and substantial target development. If confirmed, I will assess U.S. Central Command’s processes and procedures for OTH-CT to seek ways to mitigate these risks. Further, I anticipate the

Department of Defense's Civilian Harm Mitigation Response and Plan will identify methods to drive down risks of civilian harm.

12. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in September 2021, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated, "[t]he Taliban has committed to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base for external operations that could threaten the United States or our allies, including al Qaeda and ISIS-K [ISIS-Khorasan Province]." Do you believe the Taliban has fulfilled this commitment?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I do not believe the Taliban is fulfilling its commitment to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base from which to threaten the United States or its allies.

The Taliban has not renounced al Qaeda and al Qaeda continues its operations in Afghanistan. However, in an attempt to gain international legitimacy and support, the Taliban will minimize any relationship with al Qaeda.

Conversely, the Taliban and ISIS-K are openly hostile with one another. ISIS-K continues efforts to terrorize the Afghan populace, but it is unclear to what extent the Taliban is able to constrain ISIS-K attack planning.

Moving forward, if confirmed, I will work closely with the United States Intelligence Community to determine whether the Taliban fulfills its September 2021 commitment to prevent violent extremist groups including ISIS-K and al Qaeda from using Afghanistan as a base for external operations that may threaten the United States or our allies.

13. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, the most powerful faction of the Taliban government, known as the Haqqani Network, maintains ties to al Qaeda and to some elements of ISIS-K. The Haqqanis have directly threatened the United States and its allies on multiple occasions, and in recent years, has held more targeted United States hostages than any other terrorist group. If confirmed, what steps would you take to address the Haqqani threat?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. The Haqqani network is a United States State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization. The United States does not recognize the Taliban Government in Kabul, nor do we acknowledge any of its Haqqani members as legitimate.

If confirmed, I will conduct an assessment of the U.S Central Command area of operations, to include an evaluation of all violent extremist groups and the risks they pose to Americans. This assessment will inform our approach, inclusive of United States interagency, allied, and partner efforts, to include the Haqqani network threat. Finally, if confirmed, I will work closely with the interagency to support the return of American hostages.

14. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if the Biden administration rejoins the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), do you anticipate any change in Iran's threat disposition or support for terrorism absent a follow-on agreement?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my view, Iran is the single biggest contributor to regional instability across the United States Central Command area of responsibility. Iran's increasingly sophisticated military capabilities, broad proxy network, and willingness to use force against the United States, our allies, and partner forces enable it to coerce its neighbors, threaten international trade, and exploit instability throughout the region.

Without knowledge of the specific terms of ongoing diplomatic negotiations, it is difficult to assess any change to Iran's threat disposition or support for terrorism should the United States rejoin the JCPOA. Given Iran's historical support to terrorist activities and proxy forces, there is risk such destabilizing behavior will continue.

15. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in recent months, Iranian proxies have escalated their aggression against United States partners. The recent Houthi attacks on United Arab Emirates (UAE) were particularly concerning. If confirmed, what steps would you take to address the Iranian-backed proxy threat in CENTCOM?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I will assess whether the United States and partner integrated air and missile defense capability is adequate to counter Houthi ballistic missile, Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), and Land Attack Cruise Missile (LACM) threats to our forces and our allies and partners, to include the UAE. In addition to continued diplomatic engagement, if confirmed, I intend to prioritize working with regional partners to build a full range of operations, activities, investments, and engagements to address the threat of Iranian-backed proxies.

CHINA IN UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

16. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in recent years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has aggressively advanced their Belt and Road Initiative all over the globe, including throughout the Middle East. These include the Jizan Industrial Park in Saudi Arabia, Duqm Port Project in Oman, and the Khalifa Port and Khalifa Industrial Zone in UAE, to name a few. What is your assessment of the growing Chinese presence in the CENTCOM area of responsibility?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. China has significantly increased its economic, political, informational, and—to a lesser extent—military footprint in the Middle East in the past decade, becoming a major trade partner and external investor for many countries in the region. Approximately fifty percent of China's petroleum imports come from the Middle East. Just last year, Chinese investments in the Middle East increased by 360 percent. A total of 18 of the 21 United States Central Command countries have economic agreements with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

I assess that Chinese influence in the region will only expand in the coming years under BRI. To protect its access to more oil and natural gas in the Gulf region, Beijing's public policy is that the BRI creates "oil roads" that ensure a constant flow of energy from the Middle East to China. China also intends to rapidly expand its telecommunication networks in the region. Strategic competition with China is a global priority for the United States and Chinese influence in the region challenges American opportunities.

17. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in March of 2021, the PRC and Iran signed a 25-year, \$400 billion deal for PRC investments in Iran in exchange for a regular supply of discounted oil. In recent years, China has strengthened its economic ties with the UAE and is now one of its largest trading partners as well as the largest consumer of Gulf oil. What steps must we take to ensure we remain the partner of choice in CENTCOM?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that constraining Chinese diplomatic, informational, military, and economic influence requires a whole-of-government approach that includes enduring coalitions and partnerships. If confirmed, I would focus on operations, activities, investments, and engagements in the U.S. Central Command region.

Exposure of the risks associated with Chinese investment serves our interests. China offers predatory economic packages to states that give Beijing ownership over critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, our enduring relationships offer long-term mutual benefits. In calling out this rapacious behavior, we should contrast Chinese activities that demonstrate Beijing's treatment of nations as "clients and customers" with the United States national commitment to partnerships and alliances.

In addition, we should continue, and where appropriate expand, intelligence sharing, Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Financing, and International Military Education and Training programs.

18. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, is the PRC taking any steps to protect its access to oil and natural gas in the Gulf region?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, given that almost half of Chinese oil comes from the United States Central Command area of responsibility, Beijing takes active measures to protect its access to oil and natural gas in the Gulf region. China views port facilities as the cornerstone of sea lane security and continued access to oil and natural gas, driving investment in shipping and port assets across the Middle East. Beijing looks to secure access to key maritime shipping routes and strategic choke points, including the Straits of Hormuz, Bab el Mandeb, and the Suez Canal through infrastructure development and other commercial agreements.

To protect its access to more oil and natural gas in the Gulf region, China has expanded its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agreements with Gulf states. Beijing's public policy is that the BRI creates "oil roads" that ensure a constant flow of energy from the Middle East to China. Chinese port development projects in UAE, Oman, and Egypt provide Beijing with a chain of facilities strategically located in the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and Mediterranean Sea critical for maritime shipping.

19. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if confirmed, how would you ensure the United States retains a competitive advantage in the region against the PRC?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that retaining a competitive advantage against the People's Republic of China in the United States Central Command

area of responsibility requires a whole-of-government approach with diplomacy in the lead. If confirmed, I would implement a strategy that reinforces our commitments through operations, activities, investments, and engagements.

Critical to this effort is increased regional integration and military interoperability through military security cooperation activities. Our continued military presence demonstrates our commitment to regional security and stability while maintaining our competitive advantage in the region against the People's Republic of China.

If confirmed, I intend to contrast predatory Chinese activities that demonstrate Beijing's treatment of nations as "clients and customers" with the United States national commitment to partnerships and alliances. In doing so, the U.S. may remain the security partner of choice in the region.

20. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, given the recent shift in Department of Defense focus and resources toward United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), if confirmed, how would you ensure evolving threats in CENTCOM are adequately addressed?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I intend to make an assessment of the full spectrum of missions, resources, opportunities, and risks within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, inclusive of force posture, partnerships, and threats. This assessment will inform me of the best strategy to address evolving threats.

EXTREMISM IN THE MILITARY

21. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in the wake of the events on January 6, 2021, there has been a growing narrative in the media, and sadly amongst several of my colleagues here in Congress, that the military has a problem with extremism. This narrative stems from the fact that 81 veterans, 4 Reservists, and 1 Active Duty servicemember were charged with crimes as a result of their actions on January 6th. That is 81 veterans out of a population of 18 million, 4 Reservists out of 810,000 currently serving in the National Guard or Reserve, and 1 Active Duty servicemember out of 1.3 million personnel on Active Duty. In your opinion, reflecting 30+ years of experience, do you believe the U.S. military has a problem with extremism?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Extremism, which is rare among the ranks, has no place in our military and violates our Constitutional oath. If confirmed, my focus will remain, as it has for 34 years, on building disciplined, fit, cohesive teams wherein everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Organizations in which all members feel valued and leaders know their servicemembers and seek indicators of destructive behavior are the greatest hedge against behavior contrary to our military values.

We must be vigilant against extremism in the force. When warning signs are observed, they must be reported, investigated, and resolved through the Uniform Code of Military Justice and other administrative actions.

22. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you believe the narrative of extremism in the ranks, not supported by data, hurts morale in the U.S. military?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Statements characterizing the force should be based on accurate data. I believe servicemembers want to serve in disciplined, fit, and cohesive organizations in which every member trusts one another and leaders care for their troops. Such organizations are the best performing, the most combat capable, and have the highest morale.

23. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you believe the U.S. military is systemically racist?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Racism has no place in our military. When observed, it must be reported, thoroughly investigated, and then adjudicated. While incidents of racism occur and individual racists do serve in the military, I do not believe the U.S. military is systematically racist.

ENERGY

24. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, oil and petroleum account for 80 percent of Iran's exports and proceeds fund around half of their annual budget. Prior to the JCPOA agreement under the Obama administration, Iran's oil exports dropped by more than half and its total trade by value fell by 50 percent according to the International Monetary Fund. In the aftermath of the JCPOA, Iran's crude exports have more than doubled, reaching a monthly peak of 2.5 million barrels per

day in 2018. Do you believe Iran earning more money from oil exports increases or decreases its capability to conduct destabilizing activity in the CENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR)?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Iran has a long history of using profits from oil exports to fund malign and destabilizing activity in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. Therefore, increased money from oil exports into Iran presents a risk of increased destabilizing activity in the region. However, Iran must never obtain a nuclear weapon. Enforceable agreements that limit Iran's nuclear capability are desirable.

25. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how would you characterize the importance of energy in the CENTCOM area of responsibility?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. A free flow of energy and commerce through the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility is critical to regional stability, the global economy, and our national interests in the region.

26. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you believe the United States maintaining energy independence through domestic oil and natural gas production helps or hurts U.S. national security?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my view, energy independence helps U.S. national security as it reduces dependency and reliance on energy supplies from other nations.

27. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do United States energy exports to allies and partners provide an effective hedge against their need to import Iranian oil?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. An increase in oil production from outside Iran decreases Iranian leverage and provides United States allies diverse options to meet global energy needs.

ISRAEL

28. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in September 2021, CENTCOM assumed combatant command responsibility for United States Forces in the State of Israel. Will this further enable security cooperation between Israel and nations in the CENTCOM AOR?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that Israel's inclusion within the United States Central Command area of responsibility offers significant opportunities to enable security cooperation. In building partnerships and increasing dialogue with Arab neighbors, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), this realignment allows for robust multilateral relationships capable of addressing shared security challenges.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARSHA BLACKBURN

CHINA AND RUSSIA

29. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how are unconventional or asymmetric approaches necessary in deterring Chinese regional disinformation in CENTCOM?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. U.S. Central Command possesses a variety of means to counter disinformation. In my view, our most effective strategy is through a whole-of-government approach, including Service Component Commanders and the network of Senior Defense Officials and Defense Attaches assigned to each embassy within the area of responsibility. These leaders provide timely and truthful information to our partners, building an enduring trust.

If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment of the U.S. Central Command operational environment. This assessment will include an evaluation of Chinese disinformation throughout the region and the most effective approaches to countering Chinese disinformation to achieve an information advantage.

30. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how does the United States mitigate Russia and China involvement in Afghanistan without a presence on the ground?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that mitigation of Russian and Chinese involvement in Afghanistan requires a whole-of-government strategy centered on the Central and South Asian states. The military component of this strategy is best accomplished by fostering strong security cooperation. Small United States in-

vestments in regional partner security cooperation with neighboring states may result in exponential strategic gains and offer a counterbalance to Russia and China.

31. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if confirmed, how would you address Chinese propaganda or disinformation surrounding Afghanistan?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that countering Chinese propaganda requires an integrated interagency approach that also leverages allies and partners to provide credible local voices regarding events and issues in Afghanistan.

If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment of the operational environment which will include a full evaluation of Chinese propaganda and disinformation throughout the area of operations, to include Beijing's messaging surrounding Afghanistan. This assessment will identify the best opportunities to counter this propaganda and disinformation.

32. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if confirmed, how would you address Russian propaganda or disinformation surrounding Afghanistan?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that countering Russian propaganda requires an integrated interagency approach that also leverages allies and partners to provide credible local voices regarding events and issues in Afghanistan while also taking into account Russia's military presence in the region as well as its historical influence in, and ties to Afghanistan and the Central Asian states.

If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment of the operational environment which will include a full evaluation of Russian propaganda and disinformation throughout the area of operations, to include Moscow's messaging surrounding Afghanistan. This assessment will identify the best opportunities to counter this propaganda and disinformation.

33. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what traditional CENTCOM partners have turned to Russia or China for equipment, training, or other military support?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Several CENTCOM partners, to include Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, and UAE are engaging in largely transactional relationships with Russia and China for specific systems and capabilities. It is my view that a steady growth in Chinese and Russian arms trade agreements with traditional Middle Eastern partners represents a concerning trendline as nations look to fill urgent capability gaps.

If confirmed, I will conduct an initial assessment of the U.S. Central Command operational environment. This assessment will include an evaluation of our Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training programs, and opportunities that exist to expand security cooperation.

34. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how do we strategically address Beijing's policy of military-civil fusion while applying uniquely American competitive advantages?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I assess that Beijing's policy of military-civil fusion is best addressed through a whole-of-government approach that reinforces our commitments through operations, activities, investments, and engagements in the U.S. Central Command region. For example, mutually beneficial enduring coalitions and agreements reveal the advantages of partnering with the United States. We cannot counter Chinese influence through military power alone. If confirmed, I will work closely with our colleagues at the Department of State, USAID, and throughout the interagency to strengthen diplomatic and economic efforts in the region.

Communicating our values to the region must serve as an important component of this approach. For example, our messaging should contrast predatory Chinese activities that demonstrate Beijing's treatment of nations as "clients and customers" with the United States national commitment to partnerships and alliances. In so doing, the U.S. may take an important step toward remaining the security partner of choice in the region.

35. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what linkages do you see between the Belt and Road Initiative and military-civil fusion in the Middle East?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. The Belt and Road Initiative is making inroads into the Middle East, and China's diplomatic, informational, military, and economic activities are intrinsically linked. Additionally, Chinese military activities in the United States Central Command area of operations, including weapons sales, exercises, and basing agreements, support Beijing's intent to secure and sustain its economic interests.

ISRAEL

36. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how would you actively work with partner nations to integrate the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) into the regional security architecture?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, I will use my initial assessment to evaluate the best mechanisms and opportunities to bring the Israeli Defense Forces into an inclusive regional security framework. It is my view that the IDF could offer world-class military and economic capabilities to its neighbors in a mutually beneficial, enduring set of partnerships that bolsters regional security and stability.

37. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, will you encourage 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 Israel to invite Arab partners to join their exercises (ex. Blue Flag)?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, if confirmed I will work closely with my diplomatic colleagues and regional partners to encourage Israeli and Arab participation in multinational exercises such as Bright Star, Iron Union, and Blue Flag. Based on recent multinational exercises, it is clear Israel's incorporation into exercises is a positive step towards advancing regional stability, sending a strong signal as a security partner to potential adversaries, and further normalizing relationships amongst all United States Central Command regional partners.

38. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what level of involvement do you believe Jerusalem should have in the area of responsibility in working groups, task forces, humanitarian missions, and multilateral exercises?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that nearly all multilateral bodies should welcome Israel. Recognizing that some Arab sensitivities may exist, if confirmed, I will work with my diplomatic colleagues to carefully address concerns of each partner and ensure existing working groups, task forces, humanitarian missions, and multilateral exercises employ a deliberate approach to inclusivity. Additionally, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the United States Security Coordinator, Israel-Palestinian Authority, a Department of State position that coordinates with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to enhance security cooperation.

39. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how can Israel be more integrated into regional maritime and air defense security?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Israel brings advanced maritime capabilities, air and missile defense capabilities, and expertise to the U.S. Central Command. I understand CENTCOM and its Service Components are making progress on including Israel into exercises with other regional partners. If confirmed, I intend to leverage this momentum with Israel and regional partners to better integrate Israeli capabilities to address regional security challenges.

40. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you think incorporating Israel into the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) makes sense?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my view, incorporation of Israel into the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) may bring considerable military capability and expertise to this critical regional partnership. With 34 partner nations, the CMF, centered on adherence 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.

41. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, of CMF's three separate task forces focused on maritime security, where do you feel Israeli participation may be most feasible?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my understanding that Combined Maritime Forces member nations conduct operations among the three Task Forces consistent with their national mandates and authorizations. Task Force 150 conducts counter illicit smuggling in the Gulf of Oman and Red Sea. Task Force 151 conducts counter-piracy operations in the region, primarily in the Gulf of Aden. Task Force 152 conducts maritime security operations in the Arabian Gulf.

Israeli participation would likely make the most sense in Combined Task Force 150, given that its mission to counter illicit smuggling in the Gulf of Oman and Red Sea. However, if confirmed, as part of my initial command assessment, I will evalu-

ate the capabilities, task forces, and multinational exercises within the Combined Maritime Forces to identify appropriate areas for the inclusion of Israeli forces.

42. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if confirmed, how do you specifically plan to overcome the problem of distrust when it comes to intelligence sharing?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view, based on my experience, that distrust in the context of intelligence sharing is overcome through emphasis on incremental relationship building between security services. Additionally, each of our partners have their own national interests, as do we, when it comes to intelligence needs. Recognizing that trust in these areas is often accelerated with operational results, if confirmed, I will use my initial assessment to evaluate areas where confidence building measures can demonstrate value.

Additionally, if confirmed, I will continue to work with the Intelligence Community and the Defense Intelligence Enterprise to ensure we have the authorities to share timely and relevant information with our partners, while at the same time asking our partners to do the same.

IRAN

43. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how prepared are American regional allies to counter Iran's proxy forces; furthermore, what resources are needed to enhance readiness for military alternatives should a diplomatic agreement with Tehran fail to materialize?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that Iran's proxy forces serve as a key destabilizer in the region. Our regional allies are involved in a constant effort to constrain these proxy forces. If confirmed, I will conduct a careful assessment of resources required to address this threat and evaluation of the unique capabilities that each partner nation can apply. This assessment will also examine force levels necessary to deter and, if necessary, respond to Iranian threats and assess risks and mitigating strategies.

44. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, what steps is CENTCOM taking, in concert with regional partners, to defend against Iranian retaliation in a scenario of preventive military action by the United States and/or others against Iran's nuclear program?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my view that defense against any Iranian retaliation requires a multilateral, fully integrated response to address a range of Iranian capabilities, including ballistic and cruise missiles with precision guided systems, Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), maritime interdiction/attacks, cyber attacks, and attacks by proxy forces.

If confirmed, as part of my initial assessment, I will review CENTCOM's defensive and contingency plans. I will evaluate whether we maintain an adequate posture and strategy to counter an Iranian retaliatory strike.

45. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, do you believe that, if it became necessary, the IDF have the capability today to defend themselves against the rising threat of a nuclear Iran?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, as part of my initial command assessment, I will evaluate the IDF's ability to defend against the rising threat of a nuclear Iran. Additionally, I will remain consistent with United States policy of commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge.

46. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if the IDF needed to act to destroy the Iranian nuclear program, could they set it back significantly?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my view, Iran gained significant technical expertise and knowledge in recent years in pursuit of nuclear capability. This expertise and knowledge cannot be completely eliminated through military action. A more complete answer to this question requires a higher level of classification than this document allows and additional consultation with our Israeli partners.

47. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, could you give us CENTCOM's best estimate of how many precision-guided weapons Hezbollah now has in its arsenal?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I am not aware of any unclassified CENTCOM estimates of the number of precision-guided weapons Hezbollah possesses. In my view, Hezbollah continues to build a large, capable arsenal of weapons that likely includes precision-guided and advanced conventional weapons.

If confirmed, I will be prepared to address Hezbollah's order of battle, to include precision guided munitions program, in a classified forum.

48. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how significant a threat do you see this Iranian precision-guided missile project being to United States interests, and what will you do to thwart it in Lebanon and elsewhere?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Iran's proliferation of guided weapon systems to surrogates, partners, and proxies across the region poses a direct, sustained, and expanding threat to United States forces, partners, and allies across the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. If confirmed, I will work with partners and allies to support a whole-of-government strategy aimed at reducing this threat. This will include efforts to expose the Iranian complicity and involvement in supplying precision-guided munitions to proxies, as well as opportunities to build and strengthen allied and partner air and missile defense capabilities.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOSH HAWLEY

OVER-THE-HORIZON COUNTERTERRORISM

49. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, General Kenneth McKenzie, the current commander of CENTCOM, testified that over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan will be "difficult," but that they can be done and will allow us to achieve our counterterrorism objectives in that country. Do you agree with General McKenzie's testimony?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, I agree with General McKenzie's testimony statement.

50. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) Michael McCord wrote for the record that the Department expects over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan to cost "considerably less than the cost of supporting and protecting thousands of troops in Afghanistan." Do you agree with Under Secretary McCord's assessment?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. In my current position I am not aware of the detailed cost estimates of over the horizon counterterrorism operations nor the cost of maintaining a United States force footprint in Afghanistan. Both of these costs would vary based on size, number of locations, and force protection requirements for each mission. However, in my view it is logical to assume that over the horizon counterterrorism operations would likely cost less than a large U.S. troop footprint.

51. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if confirmed, will you commit to providing regular updates to Congress on the costs associated with over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, if confirmed, I will ensure transparency regarding United States Central Command operations, including costs associated with over the horizon counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. This includes full compliance with departmental reporting requirements across all aspects of operations and updates to congressional committees.

BURDEN-SHARING

52. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, you testified in agreement with Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Christopher Grady that the Department of Defense needs to do less in lower-priority theaters, so it can focus more of its scarce resources on deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, barring a significant increase in the defense budget. Acknowledging there are certain missions only U.S. Forces can perform, would you agree that the United States should seek to rely on its allies and partners in the CENTCOM AOR as much as possible, so we can protect U.S. vital interests in the CENTCOM AOR, while simultaneously reducing United States force levels in that region and focusing more of the Department's scarce resources on China in the Indo-Pacific?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, I agree that the United States should seek to rely on its allies and partners in the United States Central Command area of responsibility to allow the Department of Defense to focus more intensely on China, the priority pacing challenge. If confirmed, as part of my initial command assessment, I will evaluate the missions assigned to U.S. Central Command, the resources allocated, and the associated risks to force and risk to mission given threats facing the region. While there are missions and capabilities that only U.S. forces can per-

form or provide, I will always look for ways that allies and partners can mitigate risks and fill capability needs.

53. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, in what ways can we make better use of our allies—including NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] forces—and partners in the CENTCOM AOR, so we can protect U.S. vital interests in the CENTCOM AOR, while simultaneously reducing United States force levels in that region and focusing more of the Department’s scarce resources on China in the Indo-Pacific?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. If confirmed, as part of my initial command assessment I will evaluate our operations with, and resources provided by, allies and partners in the region, including those in NATO. I intend for this assessment to identify complementary and supplementary capabilities that can be utilized in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. This could identify resources best provided by partners and allies.

DETECTING IRAN

54. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, former Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Kathryn Wheelbarger has argued, “Conventional forces are of limited use for deterring unconventional attacks” by Iran or its proxies. She went on to argue, “Countering the threat of militia attacks with aircraft carriers and other high-end assets places the U.S. on the strategic back foot and drives up costs.” Do you agree with Ms. Wheelbarger’s assessment? If not, please provide an explanation for your response.

Lieutenant General KURILLA. I agree with Ms. Wheelbarger’s assessment that aircraft carriers and other high-end assets are costly. Their use against Iranian proxies and unconventional attacks must be weighed carefully against global demands posed by China and Russia. Conversely, I disagree that conventional forces are of limited use in deterring unconventional attacks supported or directed by Iran. Proxy forces and unconventional attacks are part of Iran’s strategic approach against the United States and our interests in the region; Iran routinely operates across the spectrum of warfare with an expectation that the U.S. will deliver a proportional response.

Further, it is my view that Iran carefully monitors United States assets in the region and measures its use of conventional and unconventional forces based on its anticipation of a U.S. response. Therefore, conventional forces can serve as a credible deterrence to Iranian unconventional or proxy attacks by proxies based on its anticipation of how the United States will respond.

CENTRAL COMMAND MANNING

55. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how many forces are assigned to CENTCOM? Please provide an unclassified response.

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my understanding that approximately 5,200 uniformed personnel are assigned to U.S. Central Command, of which approximately 3,300 are stationed within the area of responsibility.

56. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if you do not currently know how many forces are assigned to CENTCOM, do you commit to providing that information in a timely manner and unclassified format, if you are confirmed?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes.

57. Senator HAWLEY. LTG Kurilla in addition to assigned forces, on the most recent date for which data is available, how many forces were allocated to CENTCOM? Please provide an unclassified response.

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my understanding that approximately 40,000 personnel are allocated to U.S. Central Command as of January 2022.

58. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if you do not know how many forces were allocated to CENTCOM, in addition to assigned forces, on the most recent date for which data is available, do you commit to providing that information in a timely manner and unclassified format, if you are confirmed?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes.

59. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, how many civilian personnel—including civilians classified as General Schedule and contractors—are assigned to CENTCOM? Please provide an unclassified response.

Lieutenant General KURILLA. It is my understanding that there are approximately 360 Department of Defense General Schedule civilians, 418 Defense Intelligence Agency civilians, and 1,431 contractors assigned to the U.S. Central Command headquarters. In addition, U.S. Central Command has approximately 1,500 civilians and approximately 9,300 contractors overseas in direct support of operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

60. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, if you do not know how many civilian personnel—including civilians classified as General Schedule and contractors—are assigned to CENTCOM, do you commit to providing that information in a timely and unclassified format, if you are confirmed?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes.

CHINA IN U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

61. Senator HAWLEY. Lieutenant General Kurilla, the CENTCOM AOR includes the Suez Canal and the Bab al-Mandeb. Are you concerned that Chinese forces in Djibouti or neighboring areas might try to prevent the United States from using these chokepoints to send reinforcements to the Indo-Pacific in a time of crisis or war?

Lieutenant General KURILLA. Yes, I assess China would use all available options to hinder United States military operations in a time of crisis or war. The Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb represent vulnerabilities to our ability to move forces through the United States Central Command region and to the Indo-Pacific area of operations.

If confirmed, I will conduct a thorough assessment of the U.S. Central command operational environment. This assessment will include an evaluation of risks to critical waterways and associated mitigation strategies.

[The nomination reference of Lieutenant General Michael E. Kurilla, USA follows:]

NOMINATION REFERENCE AND REPORT

PN1606

AS IN EXECUTIVE SESSION,
SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,
January 5, 2022.

Ordered, That the following nomination be referred to the Committee on Armed Services:

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

To Be General

Lt. Gen. Michael E. Kurilla, 1139

_____, 2022.
(Date)

Reported by Mr. Reed _____
(Signature)

with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed.

☐ The nominee has agreed to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.

[The biographical sketch of Lieutenant General Michael E. Kurilla, USA, which was transmitted to the Committee at the time the nomination was referred, follows:]



United States Army

Lieutenant General MICHAEL E. KURILLA

Commanding General
XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg
2175 Reilly Road, Stop A
Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28310
Since: October 2019



SOURCE OF COMMISSIONED SERVICE USMA

EDUCATIONAL DEGREES

United States Military Academy – BS – Aeronautical Engineering
 Regis University – MBA – Business Administration
 National Defense University – MS – National Security and Strategic Studies

MILITARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses
 United States Army Command and General Staff College
 National War College

FOREIGN LANGUAGE(S) None recorded

| <u>PROMOTIONS</u> | <u>DATE OF APPOINTMENT</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 2LT | 25 May 88 |
| 1LT | 25 May 90 |
| CPT | 1 Aug 92 |
| MAJ | 1 Oct 98 |
| LTC | 1 Sep 03 |
| COL | 1 Dec 07 |
| BG | 2 Aug 13 |
| MG | 2 May 16 |
| LTG | 7 Oct 19 |

| <u>FROM</u> | <u>TO</u> | <u>ASSIGNMENT</u> |
|-------------|-----------|--|
| Oct 19 | Present | Commanding General, XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| Aug 18 | Sep 19 | Chief of Staff, United States Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida |
| Aug 16 | Aug 18 | Commanding General, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| Jun 15 | Aug 16 | Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism, J-3, Joint Staff, Washington, DC |
| Jul 14 | May 15 | Deputy Commanding General (Maneuver), 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas and OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE, Iraq |
| Jul 12 | Jul 14 | Assistant Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan |
| Aug 11 | Jul 12 | Director of Operations, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina |
| Aug 09 | Aug 11 | Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia and OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan |
| Jul 08 | Jul 09 | Student, National War College, Washington, DC |
| Jun 06 | Jul 08 | Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Lewis, Washington and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq |

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| Mar 04 | May 06 | Commander, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment (Stryker), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq |
| Jun 03 | Mar 04 | Chief, Exercise Division, G-3, I Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington |
| Dec 01 | May 03 | Aide-de-Camp to the Commanding General, United States Army Europe and Seventh Army, Germany |
| May 01 | Dec 01 | Chief, Current Operations, G-3, United States Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne), Vicenza, Italy and OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN, Kosovo |
| Apr 00 | May 01 | Operations Officer, 173d Airborne Brigade, United States Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne), Vicenza, Italy |
| Jun 99 | Apr 00 | Operations Officer, 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, (Airborne Battalion Combat Team), United States Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne), Vicenza, Italy |
| Jul 98 | Jun 99 | Student, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas |
| Apr 98 | Jun 98 | Assistant Operations Officer, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia |
| Jun 96 | Apr 98 | Commander, C Company, 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia |
| Jun 95 | Jun 96 | Logistics Officer, 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia |
| Aug 94 | May 95 | Assistant Operations Officer, 75th Ranger Regiment, and OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, Haiti |
| Jul 93 | Aug 94 | Commander, E Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry (Mechanized), 2d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, Camp Hovey, Korea |
| Jul 91 | Jul 93 | Platoon Leader, B Company, 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia |
| May 90 | Jul 91 | Executive Officer, B Company, 3d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, Saudi Arabia |
| Mar 89 | May 90 | Platoon Leader, A Company, 3d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and OPERATION JUST CAUSE, Panama |

SUMMARY OF JOINT ASSIGNMENTS

| | <u>DATE</u> | <u>GRADE</u> |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Chief of Staff, United States Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida | Aug 18 - Sep 19 | Major General |
| Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism, J-3, Joint Staff, Washington, DC | Jun 15 - Aug 16 | Brigadier General/Major General |
| Assistant Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Jul 12 - Jul 14 | Colonel/Brigadier General |
| Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Mar 10 - Jun 10 | Colonel |
| Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Sep 09 - Jan 10 | Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Mar 08 - Jul 08 | Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Jun 07 - Oct 07 | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Sep 06 - Jan 07 | Lieutenant Colonel |

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

| | <u>DATE</u> | <u>GRADE</u> |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Deputy Commander, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Operation Inherent Resolve, OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE, Iraq | Oct 14 - Dec 14 | Brigadier General |
| Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force, Joint Special Operations Command, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Feb 14 - Jun 14 | Brigadier General |
| Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force, Joint Special Operations Command, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Jun 13 - Oct 13 | Brigadier General |
| Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force, Joint Special | Aug 12 - Dec 12 | Colonel |

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| Operations Command, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | | |
| Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Mar 10 - Jun 10 | Colonel |
| Commander, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan | Sep 09 - Jan 10 | Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Mar 08 - Jul 08 | Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Jun 07 - Oct 07 | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Commander, 2d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Sep 06 - Jan 07 | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Commander, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment (Stryker), OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq | Oct 04 - Aug 05 | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Chief, Current Operations (G-3), United States Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne), OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN, Kosovo | Jul 01 - Aug 01 | Major |
| Assistant Operations Officer, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia and OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY, Haiti | Sep 94 - Oct 94 | Captain |
| Executive Officer, B Company, 3d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, Saudi Arabia | Aug 90 - Apr 91 | First Lieutenant |
| Platoon Leader, A Company, 3d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, OPERATION JUST CAUSE, Panama | Dec 89 - Jan 90 | Second Lieutenant |

US DECORATIONS AND BADGES

Distinguished Service Medal
 Defense Superior Service Medal (with 3 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)
 Legion of Merit (with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster)
 Bronze Star Medal for Valor
 Bronze Star Medal (with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)
 Purple Heart (with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster)
 Defense Meritorious Service Medal
 Meritorious Service Medal (with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)
 Joint Service Commendation Medal
 Army Commendation Medal (with 2 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)
 Army Achievement Medal (with 2 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)
 Combat Infantryman Badge (with Star)
 Expert Infantryman Badge
 Master Parachutist Badge (with Bronze Star)
 Ranger Tab

[The Committee on Armed Services requires certain senior military officers nominated by the President to positions requiring the advice and consent of the Senate to complete a form that details the biographical, financial, and other information of the nominee. The form executed by Lieutenant General Michael E. Kurilla, USA in connection with his nomination follows:]

117th CONGRESS, 2021 -- 2022
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
ROOM SR-228
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510-6050

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE
INFORMATION REQUESTED OF NOMINEES
FOR CERTAIN SENIOR MILITARY POSITIONS

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE NOMINEE: Answer all questions and provide all requested information. If more space is needed, attach an additional sheet of paper to the Questionnaire and cite the part of the Questionnaire and the question number (e.g., A-9, B-4) to which the continuation of your answer applies. Unless otherwise required, an answer of "yes", "no", or "not applicable" is appropriate.

QUESTIONNAIRE, PART A

NOTE: Information furnished in this part of the Questionnaire will be made available in Committee offices for public inspection prior to the hearing, if any, and will be entered in the hearing record, also available to the public.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION TO BE MADE PUBLIC

1. Name (Include any former names you have used): **Michael Erik Kurilla**
2. Position to which nominated: **Commander, United States Central Command**
3. Date of nomination:
4. Government experience (List any advisory, consultative, honorary, and other part-time service or positions with Federal, State, or local governments, other than those listed in the service record extract provided to the Committee by the applicable agency/department/board): **None.**
5. Business relationships (List all positions currently held as an officer, director, trustee, partner, proprietor, agent, representative, or consultant of any corporation, firm, partnership, or other business enterprise, and of any educational or other institution): **None.**

6. Memberships (List all memberships and offices that you currently hold, as well as any memberships and offices you have previously held, in professional, fraternal, scholarly, civic, business, charitable, and other organizations): **Military Order of the Purple Heart Membership, Veterans of Foreign Wars Membership, Association of the United States Army Membership, Military Officers Association America Membership, 82nd Airborne Division Association Membership, 75th Ranger Regiment Association Membership, Joint Special Operations Association Membership.**
7. Honors and awards (List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, honorary society memberships, and any other special recognition received for outstanding service or achievements, in addition to those listed in the service record extract and biographical provided to the Committee by the agency or department): **Patriot Award for Outstanding Service – Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation (Nov 2015)**

COMMITMENTS IN FURTHERANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

NOTE: In order to exercise their legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress timely receive testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information from the executive branch. A simple “yes” or “no” response is appropriate.

8. Do you agree, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this Committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate Committees of Congress? **Yes.**
9. Do you agree, if confirmed, and when asked before this Committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate Committees of Congress to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the position of the Administration? **Yes.**
10. Do you agree, if confirmed, to provide this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information, as may be requested of you, and to do so timely? **Yes.**
11. Do you agree, if confirmed, to consult with this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? **Yes.**

12. Do you agree, if confirmed, to keep this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? **Yes.**
13. Do you agree, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this Committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? **Yes.**
14. Do you agree, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this Committee? **Yes.**
15. Do you agree, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this Committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? **Yes.**

[The nominee responded to Parts B-E of the committee questionnaire. The text of the questionnaire is set forth in the Appendix to this volume. The nominee's answers to Parts B-E are contained in the committee's executive files.]

SIGNATURE AND DATE

I hereby state that I have read and signed Parts A and B of the foregoing Senate Armed Services Committee Questionnaire, and that the information provided therein, and in any document appended thereto, is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, current, accurate, and complete.


MICHAEL E. KURILLA

Lieutenant General, United States Army

This 20th day of November, 2021

[The nomination of Lieutenant General Michael E. Kurilla, USA was reported to the Senate by Chairman Reed on February 15, 2022, with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate on February 17, 2022.]

