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

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Tuesday, June 10, 2025.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Mike Rogers [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE ROGERS, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair reserves the right to declare the committee in recess at any point.

Before we begin, I would like to remind those in the audience that this hearing is open to the public, but actions that disrupt or distract from the proceedings will not be tolerated. The chair reserves the right to remove disruptive persons from the hearing. U.S. Capitol Police are on hand to assist with that task and I thank them for their service and attendance.

Today, we continue our posture hearings with CENTCOM [United States Central Command] and AFRICOM [United States Africa Command]. As this will be both General Kurilla's and General Langley's final appearance for this committee, I want to thank you for your service to our nation. Both of you have been exemplary in your roles and I want you to know you are appreciated.

American deterrence in the Middle East and Africa eroded under the last administration. The disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan emboldened our adversaries. The Biden administration's appeasement of Iran only made matters worse. After Hamas' barbaric onslaught, Iran opened a second front, activating the Houthis to strike Israel and disrupt global trade.

Since 2023, the Houthis have launched hundreds of attacks on U.S. warships and commercial vessels. Yet, instead of holding the Houthis accountable, the Biden administration pulled them off the terror list.

Immediately upon taking office, President Trump set out to restore peace through strength. He reinstated the maximum pressure campaign on Iran and strengthened America's hand in nuclear talks.

I strongly support his demand for Iran to permanently give up its capacity to enrich uranium. Iran's nuclear program must be dismantled for good but so must its proxy network.

Israel has taken decisive action against Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, and other rogue actors that had been operating in Assad's Syria. Thanks to Israel, what once seemed impossible is becoming a reality. Iran's proxies are being destroyed.

The Trump administration is building on this momentum. Nowhere is this clearer than in its response to the Houthis. Under President Trump, the United States has hit back decisively, but that threat is not gone. Recent reports indicate Iran is buying materials from China for hundreds of ballistic missiles. It is clear that Iran is determined to rearm and resupply its proxies. So we must be equally determined to stop them. This administration is right to prioritize homeland security, but that mission begins well beyond our borders.

We must stop terrorists abroad before they reach us. That means denying terrorists a safe haven and for this U.S. forces must be forward deployed. That is why I support the Department's condition-based approach to rebalancing U.S. forces in Syria. We cannot allow Syria to become a sanctuary again for terrorists, Iran, or Russia.

The same applies for Africa. Al-Shabaab, ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], and Al Qaeda are all gaining ground on that continent. Recent U.S. strikes in Somalia and across Africa have disrupted their operations but that pressure must continue.

Yet, AFRICOM is consistently under resourced. Even modest increases in ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] and security cooperation funding would go a long way and empower our African partners to take on more of the burden in the fight against terrorism.

We also must confront China's growing footprint on Africa. The reality is that the threat China poses to the United States extends well beyond the Indo-Pacific.

In Africa, Beijing is securing critical minerals and building military infrastructure from Djibouti to West Africa. If China secures a permanent naval base on Africa's Atlantic coast it will threaten vital sea lanes and have serious consequences for our ability to defend our homeland.

Russia is also deepening its presence across Africa. It is trading arms and mercenaries for access to Africa's gold, oil, and other resources. The resulting revenue is helping fund Putin's malign activities worldwide.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can continue to defend forward in CENTCOM and AFRICOM and ensure the region's threats never reach the U.S. homeland.

And with that, I yield to my friend the ranking member for any opening statement he may have.

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that, and I want to join you in our thank you's to our two military witnesses today. They have served incredibly well for a long time and sorry will not be seen before this committee. I don't know if you share—if you will miss us as we miss you.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SMITH. But we do appreciate your service. It is good to have you back one more time. The degree of expertise that you bring to these two very difficult regions is enormously helpful to our committee but also to our country.

And I will agree with the chair—I think the region is unbelievably unstable, both in CENTCOM and in Africa. The chairman has a slightly more optimistic take on how things have gone the last 6 months than I do. I think the instability is still raging and it is still something we need to deal with. Certainly, the war in Gaza goes on. The suffering there is enormous. We need to get to a ceasefire as soon as possible.

There continues to be conflicts in the West Bank. We see in Africa, and West Africa in particular, is a deeply concerning situation, where terrorist offshoots are beginning to take over more and more territory and threaten more and more countries. Sudan's civil war continues to be a major destabilizing factor. A war no one really pays much attention to continues to go on between the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo] and Rwanda, with catastrophic consequences.

We have a lot of work to do in the region, even in Yemen. Yes, it is good that the Houthis, for the moment, have said that they are going to stop shooting at U.S. ships. But we still don't have commercial shipping traffic feeling free to go through the Red Sea.

So we still have a lot of work to do to get after all of the instability in the region. I will agree with the chairman that Iran is the primary driving force in that, without question. You see their hand everywhere: Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Israel, Iraq. Getting an ability to contain that is crucially important, and I actually think it is good that President Trump is negotiating directly with Iran.

Now, my Republican colleagues would pretty much lose their damn minds every time Biden even suggested that he might talk to Iran. Sorry. So that particular hypocrisy grates a little bit. But it is a good idea to try to have a conversation. I think it is also crucially important in the negotiations that we focus on their support for proxies. It is their support for proxies that is the most destabilizing force in the region.

But we also need to work more closely with our Israeli partners. I have an enormous amount of sympathy for the threats that they face from Hamas, from Hezbollah, from Iran, and others, but we need to find an alternative to Hamas. We need to work with Palestinians to give us some sort of future beyond Hamas.

Partners in the region—as you well know, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE [United Arab Emirates] and others are working with those Palestinian partners trying to generate that and being rebuffed constantly by the Israeli government.

This war won't stop until Hamas is gone. I agree with that. But Hamas won't be gone until there is some alternative for the Palestinian people. I think it is really important that we step up pressure to try to push those negotiations and show the Palestinian people that they do have a future. If they don't think they have a future it is going to be very difficult to stop this conflict.

In Africa, I am very concerned about where that is going. The terrorist groups, as I said, seem to be taking hold in a number of

countries. Russia has become more and more prominent in the region.

They don't seem to be doing a particularly good job of keeping the peace, but they are still very present and have relationships with a number of countries. The path forward to that is not clear to me. I will close with a note of agreement with the chairman.

These regions matter. They lead to greater instability, and when we talk about our primary concern being China, we must understand that the challenge with China is global. Any notion that we are going to pivot to Asia and, therefore, deal with China and just ignore the rest of the world I think fundamentally misunderstands what is happening.

As you gentlemen know, China is very active in Africa. They are very active in the Middle East. Russia is as well. This is a global challenge. These two regions are crucially important. We need to be present, but we also need to work with partners in the region to try to create greater stability in what is a very challenging part of the world.

With that, I look forward to the testimony and the questions and answers, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I would now like to introduce our witnesses.

First, we have Ms. Katherine Thompson. She is performing the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs.

General Eric Kurilla is the commander of the United States CENTCOM and General Michael Langley is the commander of United States Africa.

Welcome to all of our witnesses.

Ms. Thompson, we will start with you. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE THOMPSON, PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for inviting me today to testify on our defense posture and policy in U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command, respectively. It is my honor to appear alongside General Kurilla and General Langley.

The Department of Defense is reviewing our posture, activities, and resources across all combatant commands, including CENTCOM and AFRICOM, in line with President Trump's America first priorities to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

In line with President Trump's peace through strength framework, and under Secretary Hegseth's leadership, DOD [Department of Defense] is putting core American interests first in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs [area of responsibility] to make America and our citizens more secure. America's core national security interests in the CENTCOM AOR are to, one, prevent and disrupt credible terrorist threats to the U.S. homeland; two, deny Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; and three, support Israel's ability to defend itself.

State and non-state actors across the Middle East such as ISIS, Iran, and its proxies continue to threaten the U.S. homeland as well as our forces and posture across the region.

At the direction of the President the Department of Defense maintains the forces and capabilities to defend against these threats to our national security.

President Trump has already demonstrated his unrelenting commitment to keep Americans safe by conducting operations targeting Houthi terrorists in Yemen that successfully restored freedom of navigation and American deterrence.

We will continue to work with our regional partners to enable U.S. operations, coordinate on approaches to regional challenges, and expand interoperability to address our shared threats.

For example, our Iraqi security force partners now shoulder the majority of operations against ISIS remnants, requiring only a modest U.S. advisory role.

In addition, the historic package of \$142 billion in defense sales to Saudi Arabia, which Secretary Hegseth signed last month in Riyadh, will help lock in another generation of interoperability and burden sharing with critical regional partners.

We will also continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel, a model ally for the region, as they defend against threats from every direction. Secretary Hegseth has backed up this commitment with action and has authorized the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, missile battery and its associated U.S. military crew to Israel.

In Africa, the most pressing security challenges include potential threats to the U.S. homeland emanating from terrorist activity as well as China's ambitions to expand its military power projection capabilities via overseas basing naval access as well as an ambition to establish dominance over critical mineral resources on the continent that fund their defense supply chains.

To address those security issues DOD has two priorities in the AFRICOM AOR. One is to disrupt, degrade, and deny the activities of Africa-based terrorist groups that have both the capability and intent to strike the U.S. homeland or U.S. personnel and facilities.

To this end, U.S. forces stand ready to engage and neutralize terrorists through direct action. At the same time, the department is working with African nations to grow their operational independence and empower them to counter shared threats.

At the same time, DOD will work to prevent and counter efforts by China to position its own forces in the AFRICOM AOR in ways that threaten our ability to defend the U.S. homeland and deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

We will also work closely with interagency partners to counter Chinese efforts to exclude the United States from critical markets on the continent. DOD's largest force posture location in Africa is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, which hosts 3,300 DOD military personnel and civilians that support AFRICOM, CENTCOM, U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Transportation Command operations.

This base, along with smaller, enduring locations, provides support to contingency operations, episodic military-to-military engagements, and crisis response.

To conclude, I want to emphasize the important role of Congress in enabling the Department of Defense to achieve our objectives in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM areas of responsibility.

Your support and funding have been and will continue to be critical to advancing peace through strength.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of Defense, and we appreciate your continued support to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Guardians, and civilians who work every day to make the American people safer and more secure.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Thompson can be found in the Appendix on page 59.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Thompson.

General Kurilla, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL MICHAEL ERIK KURILLA, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General KURILLA. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am joined today by Command Master Chief Fleet Derrick Walters, the command senior enlisted leader of U.S. Central Command.

Our partners have described the events of the last 20 months as a tectonic shift, an earthquake, one that began on 7 October 2023 and continued to produce aftershocks across the region.

We have been at the brink of regional war several times. Conflict was triggered in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Red Sea, and Yemen. The region held its breath as Iran and Israel traded blows in the first overt state on state attacks between these two countries in their history.

At the same time, Tehran continued to increase their stockpiles of uranium enriched to 60 percent for which there is no civilian purpose, threatening catastrophic ramifications across the region and beyond.

Global violent extremists exploited the turmoil wherever possible to sustain their networks and regenerate capability. This included in post-Assad Syria and the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We saw this threat actualized multiple times throughout 2024 in high-profile attacks overseas and attempted here at home.

However, from this disorder emerges opportunity. Iran is in a weaker strategic position now than at any point in the past 40 years, though it maintains significant operational capability.

Qasem Soleimani's vision of a Shi'a Crescent from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon was shattered as the Syrian regime collapsed and Assad fled to Russia.

Lebanese Hezbollah was decimated by Israel including the death of many of their leaders who were implicated in the 1983 Beirut bombing that killed 241 American servicemembers.

This dealt a massive blow to Iran's terror network that has targeted and killed U.S. personnel across the region for decades.

The Houthis, Iran's new premier proxy, threatened the free flow of commerce to a vital waterway and were met with a sustained,

deliberate, and focused campaign to re-establish American freedom of navigation.

Terrorists are under pressure as CENTCOM's relentless campaign against ISIS removed hundreds of fighters and leaders from the battlefields in Iraq and Syria to include just 6 hours ago.

Our network of partners dealt significant blows to the ISIS Khorasan networks exploiting the tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan to include our Pakistani partners bringing the terrorists behind the Abbey Gate bombing to justice.

Finally, the reality of aligning with Russia and China was laid bare as our partners across the region as they watched Russia supporting Assad's atrocities against the Syrian people and the Chinese Communist Party cynically exploit Iran-backed violence in the Red Sea.

The United States now stands in a strategic window of opportunity to secure its national interests in the central region to protect the homeland, secure our economic prosperity, establish freedom of navigation, and prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

CENTCOM's deep military-to-military partnerships have proven a catalyst to these wide-ranging opportunities that now lay before us.

Our relationships provide the foundation of the Middle East Air Defense Initiative that defeated hundreds of Iranian munitions and continues to set conditions for the rest of the region's defense.

These relationships unleash our shared creative potential in what has become a sandbox of experimentation, enabling us to innovate together, develop rapid solutions to the entire joint force.

Our partners are also on the front line in Iraq and Syria. They remain crucial to the enduring defeat of ISIS, battling the group across their respective countries as well as enabling the repatriation of ISIS detainees and displaced persons.

The warfighters of U.S. Central Command, representing less than 2 percent of the entire joint force, have been at the forefront of these seismic events over the last year and often on the front lines of conflict.

It was those warfighters who sprinted out of their bunkers to fuel, arm, and fly their F-15s through a barrage of missiles and UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicle].

It was those warfighters who led the vanguard against maritime terror in the Red Sea protecting the connective tissue of the global economy and it was those warfighters who continue to pursue and eliminate the remnants of ISIS wherever they are to stop future attacks as far away from this homeland as possible.

It is on their behalf—the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Guardians who serve this nation on the front lines of freedom that I speak before you today. It is the honor of my professional life to serve as their commander.

As I close over 37 years of uniformed service to this nation I would offer one final thought. I have spent most of my adult life living, fighting, leading, and building partnerships in the central region.

We have traditionally viewed the region as a risk to our national interests, but as I depart, I would offer that there has rarely been a time with greater opportunity to protect those national interests

than we have right now but only if we have the courage to step through that window.

Thank you, and I do look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Kurilla can be found in the Appendix on page 68.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, General Kurilla.

General Langley, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL MICHAEL LANGLEY, USMC,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General LANGLEY. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished committee members, it is an honor to appear here today representing the outstanding servicemembers, civilians, and families of the United States Africa Command.

As I get closer to the end of my tenure of command, I remain in awe of the character and the capabilities of the men and women willing to serve our nation. Our team of soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, Guardian, and civilians perform valiantly, and I am honored and proud to serve with them.

America remains in good hands. I am proud to testify with my friend General Erik Kurilla, the commander of United States Central Command, and my colleague Ms. Katherine Thompson from OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] policy. I would like to extend my gratitude for their steadfast cooperation.

Now, ordinarily I would be joined by my command senior enlisted leader Sergeant Major Michael Woods. However, as all of our outstanding NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer] do, Sergeant Major Woods has chosen to put himself in the best position to influence operations.

Today he is in Morocco for the Africa senior enlisted leaders conference. Now, Morocco is a shining example of a great return on our investment and their efforts in developing the enlisted core across the continent is a crucial step in African military professionalism.

I recently travelled to Morocco. I attended the African Lion 2025. This exercise is the largest exercise with participation of over 52 nations, 10 NATO allies, and 2 non-NATO allies and over 10,000 soldiers participating.

I also just returned from Kenya where we jointly hosted the African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Nairobi. This gathering showcased the Kenyan Defense Force's commitment to fostering military dialogue and demonstrated their leadership.

The insights drawn from that forum will help inform AFRICOM's approach to hearing how our African partners are solving challenges in their own neighborhoods and understanding where they can shoulder more of the load.

Now, everything we do at the United States AFRICOM, especially these types of partnerships, has an overarching goal in mind, achieving peace through strength.

Now, this requires three things: a clear understanding of national security threats, a robust and dependable network of like-minded allies and partners, and appropriate resourcing to match military requirements.

Now, as I have said in previous testimony, Africa remains a nexus theater from which the United States cannot afford to shift its gaze. It is home to terrorists who take advantage of conditions in Africa to grow and export their ideology.

ISIS controls their global network from Somalia. It is where the Chinese Communist Party actively works to change the international rules-based order and establish regional hegemony and it is where the Russian Federation seizes opportunities created by chaos and instability.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must deter these nations and other malign actors from their goals on the continent. Many of our security and economic interests overlap with those of our African and European partners.

Successful outcomes, enabled by burden-sharing, are beneficial for all. As a posture-limited theater, we establish strength and work towards peace by enhancing security capabilities of our African partners.

Through our robust system of alliances, exercises, training events, security cooperation, and foreign military sales programs are the backbone of our military activities on the continent.

Through these activities our forces lead by example with a warrior ethos and stand by our partners and enhance trust in the United States military. United States AFRICOM seeks to match capabilities with current and emerging threats to ensure the security of our forces while advancing American interests.

Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, crisis response forces, counter unmanned aerial systems technology, and integrated air missile defense platforms are critical resources to accomplish our mission.

I welcome your advocacy and ensuring that these necessary tools are in AFRICOM's hands.

Ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I would like to close by thanking the committee for your stalwart support during my tenure of command.

Our ability to accomplish the mission is always linked to your advocacy and encouragement, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Langley can be found in the Appendix on page 104.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, General Langley.

The chair now recognizes himself for questions.

General Kurilla, Operation Rough Rider degraded Houthi capabilities and took a target off U.S. commercial ships, but they still keep hitting at Israel.

What more can the U.S. do to support Israel against the Houthis and Iran's other terrorist proxies?

General KURILLA. So I would tell you right now that the Iranian proxies are at one of the weakest levels they have been with the decimation of—the disintegration of the Hezbollah Hamas.

However, the Houthis—the biggest challenge with the Houthis is they are being provided with Iranian weapons. They provide the weapons and they assemble them inside of Yemen.

There are experts from the IRGC [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps] that are inside of Yemen helping them to be able to manu-

facture these systems as well. So this is going to be a challenge, going forward.

We have got to stop the flow of the weapons into Yemen.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

President Trump has made it clear that if Iran does not permanently give up its nuclear enrichment military force by the U.S. may be necessary. If the President directed, is CENTCOM prepared to respond with overwhelming force to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran?

General KURILLA. I have provided the Secretary of Defense and the President a wide range of options.

The CHAIRMAN. I take that as a yes?

General KURILLA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. General Langley, your command was created in 2007 to address the shortcomings of the division of Africa between CENTCOM, INDOPACOM [United States Indo-Pacific Command], and EUCOM [United States European Command]. Since then, Africa's strategic importance has only grown with transnational terrorism on the rise as well as China and Russia working to undermine our interest on the continent.

Can you tell me, in your best military just judgment should AFRICOM remain its own combatant command separate and apart from EUCOM?

General LANGLEY. Chairman, those statistics that you just stated is more of a reason why AFRICOM needs to remain as a overall command to be able to address these challenges.

Africa is a nexus theater for the great power competition and then also with a number of violent extremist organizations that are encroaching upon the continent. It is a threat. It is a threat to our homeland and is a threat for our overall national security and protection of our national interests.

The CHAIRMAN. I take that as a yes.

General LANGLEY. Yes, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, and I fully agree with you. I made it very clear publicly that I will vigorously oppose any effort to consolidate AFRICOM into EUCOM.

As you heard in my opening statement, we need to be putting more resources in AFRICOM to combat what China and Russia and Iran are doing rather than looking at taking away attention and resources.

General Kurilla, yesterday the ranking member and I introduced the SPEED Act. It is our effort by this committee to try to speed up acquisition of critical warfighting capabilities to strengthen our defense industrial base.

What impact, if any, do you think this could have on our ability to help our partners in CENTCOM?

General KURILLA. Thanks, Chairman.

I have not read the full Act but I do know that it is trying to speed acquisition—change acquisition to get into the hands of the warfighter. Anything we can do to fix what I think is a very bureaucratic and slow process will help the warfighter.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there something else that you would suggest that we do to try—

General KURILLA. I think we need to start from scratch with a blank piece of paper on the FMS [Foreign Military Sales] process. We have had dozens of task forces to look at FMS and I have not seen much change. It is one of the number-one complaints that we get from our foreign partners, and we are 40 percent of the entire FMS projects in the region.

The CHAIRMAN. And if you had that blank sheet of paper and you were writing it out tell me what you would do with it.

General KURILLA. Well, I think there are four levers that control FMS. There is DOD. I think we have to fix some of our own processes internal on these requests.

The CHAIRMAN. Such as?

General KURILLA. Well, I think we take—sometimes we take months and up to a year. When someone says, I would like to sell you Patriots and we go back and forth for a year that should be days or weeks.

It then goes to the State Department. Candidly, that is not where a lot of hold up is. I think this body of Congress there can be holds up for whatever reason that we hold, we don't want to sell a weapon system to a country and, candidly, the biggest problem we have right now is with industry that they are not putting the investments and capital into their production lines.

The biggest thing I think Congress can help with is multi-year funding that would be able—if you are a business and you say, I am only going to get funded 1 year, they are not going to want to put the capital into those production lines.

I thank you for what you have done with some of the 2-year funding but I think it needs to be multi-year funding so that we can get these production lines up.

And I think we ought to look at our partners that are offering to also produce inside the region. Sorry for the long response.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I think that last point especially would be very helpful and I think I speak for this committee when I say we are open to that idea. I hope that when you testify before the appropriators you tell them the same thing.

With that, I yield to the ranking member for any questions he may have.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to Iran and their nuclear program, without getting into the more classified discussion about what Israel might do on their own, if Israel were to act on their own and attack Iran what implications would that have for our force protection in your region and what should we be doing to try to put ourselves in a position to protect against that?

General KURILLA. I think it would increase risk to our forces in the region. But every day we are making assessments of our posture and our risk to forces and we make adjustments based on those.

We are fielding new systems and new equipment and making adjustments every single day. We have a rule in CENTCOM—you improve your foxhole every single day, whether that is through rehearsals or any other actions that you are taking to better protect our forces.

Mr. SMITH. And what are the systems that you think are working best? If we were to, you know, throw money at you and say, here is what you need right now that could best put you in a better position to protect your forces what systems would you ask for?

General KURILLA. So counter-UAS [Unmanned Aircraft Systems] is the number-one thing. We have a revolution in warfare. The character of warfare is changing with the drone revolution and unmanned systems.

We see that in Ukraine. We saw that with the Houthis and we see that even in Iraq and Syria. The number-one challenge out there is detect. It is the ability to detect the counter-UAS systems and to defeat the swarms and I think anything we can do in the air defense world.

You know, we went back to the FMS. You know, we ought to ask ourselves the question why does a THAAD [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense] missile cost three times as much as an Arrow that is jointly developed between the U.S. and Israel and the Missile Defense Agency. Why is an SM-3 [Standard Missile-3] Block IIB six times more expensive than an Arrow missile with, roughly, the same capabilities.

Mr. SMITH. In Syria what is your—and I realize there is a huge diplomatic piece of this but you are a diplomat as well as well as a warrior—can you give us an update on where you see the Syrian government?

Obviously, it is crucial that that government stabilize and block Iran and Russia from getting back in. What can we most do to help that and where do you see it at right now?

General KURILLA. I think what the President did with talking about lifting some of the sanctions that is going to allow other countries to come in and bring some of the investments. That is one of the things that is desperately needed is the investments back into the country.

We are working directly right now with the Syrian Democratic Forces, our Kurdish partners and Arab partners on the ground going after the ISIS to get them to integrate in with the new Syrian government.

Türkiye has played a very positive role in that. That is a big piece for the stability in terms of that. I think they got to figure out how to run all of the administration of their country. They have a few people that are running the country right now.

I am very concerned with the stability but I think the fact that we are at the table now having those discussions the upside is great. The downside is very low to being at the table.

Mr. SMITH. How important is our troop presence in Syria to helping facilitate that process and continue to keep ISIS at bay?

General KURILLA. So our purpose for being in Syria is for the de-ISIS fight. We literally took a strike this morning on an external operations leader from Central Asia up in northwest Syria.

We are still waiting for the full results of that. That is what our forces do inside of Syria. We have made some adjustments, some consolidation of bases based on the fall of Assad. Right now we are making an assessment, going forward, of what other bases. It is all conditions based.

But I will make my recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and the President. But right now, the guidance to me has been given to right now make an assessment on any other adjustments that we need to make in our posture.

Mr. SMITH. General Langley, there is a lot of concerning aspects to Africa but West Africa right now seems to be the most concerning. I mean, the most capable terrorist organization is, you know, gaining influence in multiple countries and threatening others.

We don't have much of a presence there. What would be your recommendation in terms of how we contain that threat that is growing out of West Africa?

General LANGLEY. Ranking Member, I would say, you know, since we moved out of Niger, we had to reset our CT [counterterrorism] strategy and that is further engagement, especially with the coastal West Africa countries who are building capabilities and capacities to deter and a number of countries it is working.

But JNIM [Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin], which is AQIM [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb], and also ISIS-Sahel are really starting to get their footing and effective cells across the AES [Alliance of Sahel States] countries of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. I think that just collaboration with our partners and increasing institutional capacity for an enduring solution against those aforementioned VEOs [Violent Extremist Organizations].

To do that it takes a whole-of-government approach. Not so much our whole-of-government, but their whole-of-government, and we need to invest in that.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Hamadeh, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HAMADEH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Generals, for your leadership and your service for our country.

And as a former Army Reserve intelligence officer who served in the Middle East, it is incredible to see President Trump's bold vision and a Middle East defined by, quote, commerce, not chaos.

Now, those words are now backed by decisive actions that nobody dreamed possible. President Trump changed Syria's path overnight from endless bloodshed towards hope. There is a lot of optimism right there, and I know Ambassador Tom Barrack and Presidential Envoy Barrack is doing an incredible job in Syria hitting the ground running. I don't know—he has a lot of flights back and forth from Ankara to Damascus.

General Kurilla, I know there are so many questions about Syria's transition and after coming off of a 50-year Assad rule and ISIS mostly defeated, and I know you helped with the—you just talked about it briefly, with the agreement between integrating the Syrian Kurdish forces with the government forces of Syria, how is that integration actually going?

General KURILLA. I would tell you it is actually going well right now. There are some sticking points, but what is happening is you have—the Syrian Kurds are talking directly to Al-Sharaa and the Syrian government right now. Türkiye has played a positive role in that as well but I think we are on a good path right now.

Mr. HAMADEH. And do you envision that integration could also include other minority militia like the Druze or the Christians or Alawites in Syria?

General KURILLA. It could. Right now, though, I mean, we are focused on our partner that we have right now up in the northeast and that is the Kurds.

Mr. HAMADEH. Very good. And our counter ISIS train and equip fund which helped the Syrian Kurds destroy ISIS could be wrapping up. Now, can or should the train and equip shift to include Syria's forces?

General KURILLA. I think that would have to be a wait and see. I think the fact that we are at the table right now having this discussion and that will allow U.S. to make an assessment of that if that would be a wise choice.

Mr. HAMADEH. And how concerned are you about the foreign fighters possibly being integrated within the Syrian Armed Forces?

General KURILLA. That is the reason we have to take a wait and see on this.

Mr. HAMADEH. And are they integrating them right now?

General KURILLA. So right now—I mean, if you remember, these are some of the people that brought Sharaa into power. They are integrated into some portions of the government, and this is something that we have to make an assessment on.

Mr. HAMADEH. Very good.

Now, shifting toward Iraq where the same train-and-equip fund is also used in Iraq, but why are we subsidizing Iraq currently when it is withholding public salaries and military equipment from our Kurdish allies up north?

General KURILLA. They have challenges. Every now and then we end up working through them. They end up getting the salaries. They end up getting the equipment. There is always small frictions that we have to work through, but they are getting what they need.

Mr. HAMADEH. Sure. And Iran's stronghold within Iraq is that presence increasing even despite all of the setbacks that Iran has been facing the last few months?

General KURILLA. I think Iran is trying to double down on getting a grip inside of Iraq, but I think Iraq is a sovereign nation and they don't want to be a vassal state of Iran.

Mr. HAMADEH. Of course, although there is a lot of Iranian militias currently still operating Iraq. I know they are holding a hostage, Elizabeth Tsurkov, that we want released as well.

But how do you envision us pulling Iraq from Iran's stronghold?

General KURILLA. It is a challenge because it is their next-door neighbor. We partner at the military level with the Iraqi Security Forces to go after ISIS. They are doing actually a very good job in terms of going after ISIS.

We killed the number-two ISIS—global number-two ISIS Abu Khadijah out in the Anbar with the assistance of the Iraqis.

So I think from a military-to-military standpoint they understand the need and why they want to have a relationship with the West. There are a lot of other reasons at the State Department level on why we want to have a relationship with Iraq. A stable Iraq helps with a stable Middle East.

Mr. HAMADEH. Thank you, General.

And shifting to AFRICOM, General Langley, I know you have a lot of positive things to say about Morocco, and I do as well, as they were the first country to recognize the United States' independence and it seems like their alliance is increasing with us.

Do you ever envision moving the headquarters of AFRICOM from Germany to an African partner country like Morocco?

General LANGLEY. Congressman, thanks for that question.

And as I look at it from the operational perspective, cost benefit analysis, the benefit of moving to Morocco would not exceed the cost.

The benefit operationally of us being able to operate from Stuttgart headquarters onto it does not benefit an amount. The cost of moving the headquarters would be a big dent to our budget.

So I would say from a cost analysis perspective I think we are advantageous of where we are right now. When we look at the overall costs, we would not be benefiting from moving our headquarters onto the African continent writ large.

But let me just say Morocco is a great partner and what they do in exporting security is tremendous, especially in the sub-Saharan countries.

Mr. HAMADEH. Very good.

Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Bell.

Mr. BELL. Matthew 20:16, so the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Representative Wilson and Courtney, if you need any tips on how to maximize your time, Rep. Hamadeh and myself are experts in this particular committee.

I want to thank you to the chair, to our ranking member, to our witnesses as well as the servicemembers I see behind you for your service as well.

My district in the greater St. Louis region is home to the production of some of the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world, including many that CENTCOM has used in recent operations such as intercepting incoming Iranian drones and missiles that targeted Israel and our regional allies.

While I am proud to represent a region that contributes so significantly to our national defense, I must also acknowledge that many of my constituents are still struggling to recover from the most disaster—the most devastating natural disaster to impact our state since the late 1950s.

But as a region we will recover, and we are committed to build and support our domestic industrial base that is crucial to our national security. But what is not crucial to our national security is turning our backs on our allies like we have seen from the administration and cutting essential foreign assistance programs that go hand in hand with our efforts to promote strong U.S. global leadership.

China and Russia have made significant military and economic inroads across the African continent, posing serious implications for U.S. strategic interests.

At the same time, the Trump administration, under the guise of pursuing efficiency, has slashed funding for global development and humanitarian programs.

These cuts have in practice created greater inefficiencies and undermined U.S. influence abroad.

General Langley, how does U.S. economic aid—how does U.S. economic and humanitarian engagement on the continent contribute to advancing AFRICOM military objectives, particularly when it comes to countering the destabilizing influence of Russia and China?

General LANGLEY. Congressman, thanks for that question, and I will just go back on the operations, especially the operations that we do in Somalia.

So when we support the Somali National Army, as they have gone through numerous phases to the liberation phase of significant regions across Somalia they are getting into phase four and some of the capabilities that—outside of the kinetics and military operations where they were able to stabilize the region.

So we are at a point now looking forward to what worked as far as aid in the past, but this is where the Secretary has charged me with engaging other countries of a shared burden, a shared burden on looking at contributing countries, not only troop contributing but also in a phase four operation which is stabilization.

So those discussions are taking place at a higher level—at the policy level and engagement with other countries so that we can focus—laser focus on countering terrorism and shared burden with other countries to able to take up that void.

Over.

Mr. BELL. And since Hamas' October 7th terrorist attack against Israel, one notable development has been the strengthening of military and security partnerships between Israel and its Arab neighbors, especially evident during the two Iranian missile and drone attacks last year.

This growing security cooperation has shown potential in laying the groundwork for peace, and to the ranking member's point we endeavor to see a future for Palestine beyond Hamas.

So, General Kurilla, from a security perspective how can enhanced cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces or broader regional security coordination help establish a foundation for long-term peace and stability?

General KURILLA. Great question, Congressman.

There has to be—Hamas cannot be in charge. There has to be an alternative to Hamas. I think that is some form of a Palestinian governance. I think the regional partners can work with Israel to figure out what that is and with the Palestinian people.

Mr. BELL. For almost 20 months, the Iranian-backed Houthis have wreaked havoc across the region, causing significant instability. The administration recently announced an agreement to cease all operations against the Houthis in exchange for a halt in their attacks on U.S. ships.

I will submit my question, but I want to talk about how this agreement excludes our regional allies and the implications of that.

I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Messmer.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you, Chairman Rogers, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

General Kurilla, I couldn't agree with you more that FMS reform is needed and we just have to do better in that regard. In addition to reforming the FMS and DCS [Direct Commercial Sales] process, would you also agree with the need to reform or eliminate other non-treaty agreements that inhibit our ability to work with our allies and partners such as missile-to-missile technology control regime?

General KURILLA. Can you say the question again, please, Congressman?

Mr. MESSMER. Yes. How could—other than FMS and the DCS process, would you agree that we need to reform or eliminate other non-treaty agreements that inhibit our ability to work with our allies and partners such as missile technology control regimes?

General KURILLA. I think we should find those partners in the region that can—that we know can safeguard the technologies and we should work with them.

We have several in the region that have offered up to say they would like to help produce. That is where we need help is the production line right now and I think that is something we should strongly look at.

Mr. MESSMER. Okay, thank you.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the professionalism of our forces who have conducted operations in the Red Sea. But I am wondering what work needs to be done on the policy end with our regional allies and within our own interagency to devise a successful strategy against Yemen both that deters their destabilizing military actions of the Houthis and coerce them into making their closure of the Red Sea politically untenable in the region.

General KURILLA. Is that to me or—

Mr. MESSMER. To you.

General KURILLA. So I think from a—well, I will defer to policy first for any policy question. Then I will take it.

Mr. MESSMER. Okay.

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

I would just highlight two things. First, with the conclusion of Operation Rough Rider we are not, certainly, in a position where we are ending our entire engagement regarding the Houthi problem set.

The Houthis are still under a foreign terrorist organization designation and we are still pursuing a whole of government approach, which obviously includes other interagency elements to tackle this problem set.

And then I would just highlight some of the comments that you made just a moment ago, which is this will—the longer-term problem set for Yemen and the Houthis writ large really is something that in our relationships with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and our other Gulf partners this is something where we will look to burden-share this effort and really develop a regional solution that empowers our Gulf partners that we have continued to develop a deeper

defense partnership with to tackle the long-term elements of the problem set.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you.

General Kurilla, I also have concerns about the long-term stability and strategic implications of using high-end platforms and munitions like the B-2 bomber, JASSM [Joint Air-to-Surface Stand-off Missile], and Tomahawk cruise missiles against supposedly unsophisticated adversaries like the Houthis.

Has the use of these platforms and the rapid proliferation of adversarial drones led to more consideration toward the effectiveness of directed energy technologies encountering these platforms?

General KURILLA. Yeah, we absolutely need to be putting more work into directed energy high-powered microwave.

I think some of the innovations that have come out of this since Operation Rough Rider about 40 percent of the drones shot down were shot down by something called Advanced Precision Weapon Kill System, a laser-guided 2.75-inch rocket fired off our F-16s or F-15s.

That is a \$25,000 munition going against a, roughly, \$50,000 or \$100,000 drone that is an Iranian provided drone to the Houthis.

Mr. MESSMER. Excellent. So what role can our defense industrial base play in advancing directed energy solutions to ensure CENTCOM can maintain their technological advantage?

General KURILLA. Well, I would compliment someone like General Randy George and his Army Transformation Initiative. He is sending things over once they reach a technology readiness level to a certain level. He has sent over directed energy, mobile, short-range air defense.

We brought it into the theater. We tested it in the harshest conditions you can find, against an active enemy and a thinking enemy, and we provided feedback on its effectiveness to make it better so they can make a better-informed decision on that.

We have the same with high-powered microwave. We are doing things with software. Software is a weapon as well and rapidly changing this. The warfare—the character of warfare has changed with the drone revolution and that is what we need to be paying attention to.

Mr. MESSMER. Okay, thank you.

Also, how would you assess the performance of Israel's missile defense architecture during recent fighting, particularly systems like David's Sling and Arrow that we co-produced?

General KURILLA. So I would tell you that the missile defense—out of the 300-plus missiles that were fired into Israel, one person was killed, a Palestinian from Gaza who was living in Jericho.

Mr. MESSMER. Okay, thank you.

Has the attack highlighted any gaps in our budget requiring additional resources from Congress?

General KURILLA. I think we need to figure out how we also produce—I go back to my comment why does a THAAD cost three times as much as an Arrow, why does an SM-2 Block—SM-3 Block IIB cost six times as much? We have got to figure that out because we are on the wrong side of the cost curve.

Mr. MESSMER. Very good. Congress has appropriated those—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Vindman.

Mr. VINDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to all the witnesses. And General Kurilla and General Langley, thank you for your decades of uniformed service.

I want to thank you, General Langley, for these great placemats. I mean, it is a fantastic graphic depiction of why Africa is so important to our national security now and into the future, and in particular the things that I have sort of honed in on is the fact that it is the—11 of the 20 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa.

25 percent of the 193 countries in the General Assembly of the UN [United Nations] hold seats in Africa, and the rare earths is probably maybe even more interesting in how much China controls here.

So in this context—in this sort of geopolitical context, when we look at all the elements of power we have diplomatic information, military, economic, and I know there are various iterations of this.

Ms. Thompson, you emphasize the importance of countering China's influence in Africa. However, this week the House is voting on a rescission package that cuts \$3.7 billion in soft power—for example, hundreds of millions in cuts to PEPFAR [the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief], a program started by George W. Bush.

Forgetting the more than 25 million lives saved by PEPFAR since the program started in 2003, there is no question that there has been—that this has been an effective program in extending America's power and influence.

This has made us safer and boosted our national security, and in the testimony that DOD sent over for today's briefing it said, unfortunately, the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] information manipulation is significantly outpacing our efforts to counter their campaigns.

Unchecked, China's efforts could reshape the information landscape in Africa creating biases and gaps that could lead African nations to make decisions to subordinate economic and security interests to China's own.

So my question is given sort of the withdrawal that we have seen this administration take in the information environment and communicating through, you know, Voice of America and other entities that are specifically focused on Africa and in withdrawal of these critical soft power programs, are we more or less in a position to make sure that our military objectives are achieved?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

I can't speak explicitly to the State Department equities in this, particularly the humanitarian aid that you speak about.

However, I will say, from a Title 10 DOD perspective, obviously, the department has—

Mr. VINDMAN. I am sorry. Let me stop you for a second. I am talking about, like, sort of these elements of power, all right, and there is a balance to these, right?

So by withdrawing from the informational—from the economic elements does that make achieving the military objectives more or less difficult?

Ms. THOMPSON. I appreciate the question, sir.

What I would say from a DOD perspective, thinking exclusively about the Title 10 assistance that we provide particularly on the continent, that is part of our review process is understanding how our military—

Mr. VINDMAN. Let me—let me pause you right there.

General Langley, same question to you. Does this make achieving the military objectives more or less difficult?

General LANGLEY. Especially in the MISO [Military Information Support Operations]: As far as our information operations, countering some of the propaganda that the CCP is putting out there, yes, that is where we need to be able to confront them because we had a lot of success in the past, and even going forward Secretary Hegseth has given us the tools to press back on the CCP. We were—

Mr. VINDMAN. So thank you, General Langley. I heard yes, which I think is the short answer to the question and I just wanted a—

General LANGLEY. Yes. There are things that we need to counter them, going forward.

Mr. VINDMAN. Thank you.

Switching gears to the Houthis, General Kurilla, over the last few months we spent over a billion dollars attacking the Houthis in our campaign. Can you evaluate whether we have disrupted, neutralized, destroyed their capabilities?

General KURILLA. So the President gave us a very specific mission, which was to get the Houthis to quit shooting at American ships. 6 months ago on 12 November 2024 was the last time a destroyer went through the Bab Al-Mandab.

It was attacked 17 times with anti-ship ballistic missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles and UAVs. In the last week we have put four destroyers back through the Bab Al-Mandab and we were not shot at.

Mr. VINDMAN. Okay. I got that. They are not attacking U.S. shipping. Are they still attacking Israel, yes or no?

General KURILLA. They are still attacking Israel and we are still defending Israel with our THAAD system.

Mr. VINDMAN. Thank you. So—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. McGuire, you are now recognized for 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. MCGUIRE. All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses and to all of our military folks here. We wouldn't have a country without you. Thank you.

Ms. Thompson, we really appreciate what you are doing in this administration with peace through strength. I think we all agree you have to have strong American leadership in the world or you have a lot of problems.

How has the President's outreach to the new government in Syria encouraged a good outcome for our Kurdish partners and the Syrian Democratic Forces?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman, and I would highlight the President's speech in Riyadh in particular, this idea that the Middle East region is transitioning from chaos to a region focused on commerce and empowerment.

I think that this is an incredible good news story. When it comes to the conversation around Syria we are giving the Syrian government a chance at stability, if it holds in Syria, will be monumental for the region and it is something that the administration is really leaning forward on as a whole of government effort.

Obviously, it is conditions-based and we will be very careful as we watch the development, but it is a really positive good-news story that further underscores that the region is really transitioning from this region of chaos into a region focused on prosperity.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Thank you.

Ms. Thompson, since President Trump took office have counter-terrorism operations remained static or has there been an increase in operations in Somalia that have removed a number of terrorists from the battlefield?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question.

I will defer to General Langley on any additional operational comments, but I would say yes, the Somalia elements that you highlight, the increase in precision targeting in Somalia to take out terrorists who specifically pose a threat to the U.S. homeland, demonstrating the capability and intent to carry out operations against the U.S. homeland, our forces and our people is an incredible success as part of this administration's effort.

Obviously, countering terrorism and protecting the homeland is one of our number-one national security objectives and I think that the activities in Somalia since day one really do highlight the capabilities that we have.

And so I would offer General Langley the opportunity for any operational comments.

General LANGLEY. Thanks, Congressman, for the question.

And I would say that, you know, when the President gave me expanded authorities through the Secretary of Defense we have been pressurizing ISIS in the Golis Mountains considerably.

That is re-instituting deterrence in a kinetic way and they are yielding to us to the point that they are considering moving to seek refuge elsewhere.

So this is what—the warrior ethos and the lethality that we have imposed in the Golis Mountains against a foe that has the capability of attacking our homeland. I think this movement to increase our lethal effects on them is causing them to establish pause.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Thank you.

General Kurilla, Iran and its proxies across CENTCOM continue to use drones to target critical infrastructure, military installations, and commercial shipping in the region.

The conflict in Ukraine and Iran's attacks on Israel have highlighted the challenges posed by saturation attacks comprised of UAS and missile threats, and I am concerned about the survivability of high-value air defense systems like Patriot, THAAD against drones and drone swarms in the Middle East as tensions remain high.

As the threat from proliferated small UAS technology grows in CENTCOM, to the extent you can share in an open setting, how is the Army thinking about requirements to defend deployed assets

in theater against coordinated attacks from advanced aerial threats like drones and drone swarms?

General KURILLA. So that is why you want to have a layered defense, Congressman, and we start everything that can reach as far out, you know, a ballistic missile all the way down to the group one quadcopters.

We have capabilities that we layer against all of that whether it is electronic or kinetic, non-kinetic means as well. What the Army is doing to help us with that is General George is doing his Army Transformation Initiative, sending forward capability not to replace but to augment, to put it in those harshest conditions in CENTCOM against an active thinking enemy, and we give him feedback on the effectiveness of those to make it better before they do large purchases of those equipment.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Perfect. All right. From your perspective, General Kurilla, and for integration would it be better to baseline these requirements into existing weapon systems like Patriot or THAAD or separate?

General KURILLA. What we want to be able to do is have a layered defense, but we need all of those systems to talk to each other. We can't have one-off proprietary software systems that don't work with one overarching software system that controls all of them.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Awesome. Well, thank you for our witnesses for answering the questions, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Tran, you are recognized for 5 minutes, sir.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Langley, General Kurilla, thank you so much for your service. Ms. Thompson, welcome.

General Langley, you rightfully stated that Africa is a nexus theater where global interests converge and the United States continues to face fierce competition from China and Russia across the continent.

Chinese state-owned firms now hold stakes in 78 African ports and China is currently negotiating a second PLA [People's Liberation Army] Navy base in Gabon.

In your testimony you mentioned that the U.S. approach to Africa is African partner led, U.S. and ally enabled.

General Langley, in your view which African partners are the most important to furthering U.S. interests on the continent and why?

General LANGLEY. Congressman, thanks for that question.

It is a broad question, but as far as China is concerned and their aspirations to become a global hegemon, I will just give a statistic that is pretty compelling. They are outspending AFRICOM militarily 100 to 1.

So as they have basing aspirations across the globe but especially in Africa, in those places, whether it is on the east side or the west side, they are trying to close the gap from a geostrategic positioning to be able to stop our joint forces from employing across the globe or A2AD, which is aerial denial, anti-access.

So, and then also their critical minerals, trying to control those supply chains. So those geostrategic regions are ways of perfecting their geopolitical means to engage with a number of countries. It is too many to say.

Mr. TRAN. Sure, I appreciate that.

And then, you know, with U.S. engagement with certain African countries being either cooled or stalled entirely, General Langley, why is continued engagement with those African countries that are still engaged with the U.S. so essential for our national security?

General LANGLEY. Absolutely, because some of these countries we have shared interests in and we see it as essential for the purposes of the shared commitment of stability and security across the region, not only for counterterrorism but just for the international rules-based order.

A number of these countries see the importance of that and that is why we have shared national security objectives so they can get to the future of being able to stand on their own and be able to create prosperity and across the future, and a number of countries side with the United States and our ways to do it.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you.

General Langley, you mentioned in your opening that Morocco is an example of success from our investment. Was hard power the sole tool we deployed for that success and generally do you believe that hard power is the only tool we have to further U.S. interest in Africa?

General LANGLEY. So it is a portfolio, a number of powers. You know, whole of government, building institutional capacity, having the African countries take a lead and share with one another as a whole has proven to be the success against a number of layered threats that are stalling progress across the African continent.

Mr. TRAN. That is right, and we need to be thinking about all levers of power including the soft power tools at our disposal when looking to counter Chinese influence, deter further adversarial military expansion, and to protect access to critical minerals on the continent.

In fact, that is why I plan on voting against a rescission package on the House floor this week that rescinds bilateral and multilateral investment in places like Africa.

General Kurilla, how is the U.S. military supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza and what obstacles have you observed that are preventing the seamless delivery of such aid?

General KURILLA. So we have—in the past we have delivered humanitarian aid through both air, sea, and land. We were working with the Jordanians. We helped screen the convoys that would then bring in the food for that.

But right now we are not actively working humanitarian aid.

Mr. TRAN. Is there a reason why we are not?

General KURILLA. I mean, that—right now Israel has contracted an American company that is doing the distribution inside of Gaza. Hamas hates that because Hamas no longer has control over that distribution.

So this is an American private company that Israel did. There was no—CENTCOM was not part of that that contracted this that is doing a million-ish meals, I think, they are doing a day, a little more than that, through this private company.

Mr. TRAN. And are we prepared to help if Israel was to ask for our assistance?

General KURILLA. We are prepared if the President directs us to do that.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you, gentlemen, for your service and your testimony here today.

General KURILLA. Thank you.

Mr. TRAN. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Van Orden.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Kurilla, I want to congratulate you on a fantastic career.

General KURILLA. Thank you, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you for your service to the country. It is wonderful. I would also like to acknowledge your Master back there. Derrick and I worked together for—well, you could probably tell for how long by the color of my beard and the amount of hair we both have on our heads. So you did well by yourself there, General.

General Langley, you are a Marine, right? And then the Marine hymn "From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli," right? Tripoli, that is Libya, and we went to war with them because the Barbary pirates were kidnapping our citizens. Thomas Jefferson did not want to do that but he did, and other nations were paying tribute to these pirates and we said, enough, right?

So I would like to gently remind some of my colleagues that sit over there if they actually did their homework and read the rescissions packages that are proposed by the Trump administration, we are removing what can really reasonably be titled 21st century tribute.

So we are going to be assisting our African partners and our Middle East partners but we are not paying tribute anymore. Those days are over, and you are in that uniform because we stopped paying tribute back then.

So I can forward the package to anybody over there if you want—actually want to read it instead of just complaining.

So former Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said he would take the Taliban at their word when they are talking about anti-terrorist operations, counter-terrorist operations, and human rights in particular, to rights of women in Afghanistan.

General Kurilla, how is that working out for women in Afghanistan?

General KURILLA. Not very well right now, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Not very well. Okay. So the Houthis now have said that, okay, my bad, we are going to stop shooting missiles at ships, and I would encourage everybody to give as much validity to the Taliban statement as we did, or excuse me, to the Houthis' statement as we did or should have to the Taliban.

General Langley and General Kurilla, I spoke to the Special Operations component commanders about this, so I understand the issue with the Houthis is not a seam, you know, between your two COCOMs [combatant commands]. But can you—in this setting can you tell me, like, do we know how the Houthis are being resupplied by Iran?

General KURILLA. A vast majority of it is by sea. They put them on—they come out of the ports in Iran. They put them on dhows,

stateless dhows. Some of them go on maritime vessels into Djibouti on the UN vessel inspection mechanism.

They put stuff inside a container. If you have a ship with 500 containers and it is in the bottom of it you can put all those sensitive components in the bottom of that.

Now, a positive thing that just happened in the last month is that the UN vessel inspection mechanism decided to go to 100 percent inspection of containers. I think it needs to be 100 percent unloading of all the containers to see what is inside of them.

That is a positive step. But probably about 80 to 85 percent goes by sea.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. Why are we not sinking these vessels? So we have a—we have a terrorist nation, Iran, with these—their minions.

They are sending lethal munitions to the minions, which have shut off the Red Sea for commercial traffic. Why aren't we,—I guess maybe that is a question for Ms. Thompson.

General KURILLA. We have to find the ships. The hardest part is to find that ship. At any given time, there is between 3,000 and 5,000 dhows between the—Iran and Bab Al-Mandab. That is the same distance from the tip of Florida to Boston that you are trying to find these dhows.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I lived in Djibouti for a long time, and I sent some of my guys to Yemen. That was a big secret, and it is not anymore, obviously.

Ms. Thompson, have you guys looked at this from a policy perspective? I mean, the last two SEALs that were killed in combat, unfortunately, were in the Red Sea—Derrick and I's teammates—and they were boarding these vessels to try to prevent these munitions from getting to the Houthis. So this is very personal to me.

Ms. Thompson?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman, and rightly understood. I can say more on some of the particular policy elements in closed session on this but what I would say is one of the elements that we have looked at and continue to engage on is our European partners.

They are actually very well equipped to continue to help us with this effort, particularly from their positioning in the region.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Ms. Thompson, I don't mean to interrupt you, but I am going to because I have 20 seconds left.

Right now, from a policy perspective from the DOD, if the United States of America understands our European allies find a ship and we know for sure that there are munitions on there that are going to the Houthis can we just sink it?

General KURILLA. We can board it. We have the authority to board it and if we find the munitions we will take the crew. We will transfer that crew and we can end up sinking the ship.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Very well.

General KURILLA. We did one on a dhow 2 weeks ago.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Whitesides.

Mr. WHITESIDES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Kurilla, General Langley, thank you both for being here today, and thank you, ma'am, for being here today, and I want to echo my colleagues in thanking you for your distinguished service.

I want to begin by talking about a trip that we took last month. We went to the CENTCOM area of responsibility including Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE with Ranking Member Smith and a bipartisan delegation from this committee.

I have to say, General Kurilla, how impressed I was by the dedication and professionalism of the men and women serving in your AOR, especially given the rapidly shifting landscape in that part of the world.

That dedication is incredibly important. The Middle East is a place that deserves American attention and investment, as I am sure you would agree.

General Kurilla, in your time as CENTCOM commander you have seen the culmination of the civil war in Syria, the explosion of conflict in Gaza, a changing paradigm in Yemen and much more.

In my visit I heard a sense of concern from our allies in the region amid the serious change. Some of our partners in the Middle East worry that we are taking our eyes off the ball.

General Kurilla, what are the tangible concrete steps you think are necessary to reassure our allies that we are still focused on your AOR and that we still stand with them?

General KURILLA. So I think words matter and actions matter. I think what we are doing is we are transitioning from a security guarantor to a security integrator.

I think the thing—we have to have a sufficient and a sustainable posture. So we can't take everything. We have to have enough that we can still be able to partner with our partners in the region.

We need to be able to give them the military equipment—the foreign military sales—so that that can be integrated into the region. We saw that on the defense of Israel, systems that can talk to each other, and this is one of the challenges with foreign military sales. They have real security needs.

If we don't fill them, they are going to fill them. China shows up with an Amazon catalog. They say, pick anything in here—I will give you financing, free shipping, prime shipping, and no end user agreement. But I tell them it will never touch our networks.

So we have got to be able to provide them the tools that they need to integrate in the region that we become the security integrator.

Mr. WHITESIDES. Yeah, I would agree with that. We actually heard that several times over there. We also need to be more responsive in being able to fulfill the deals that we do do—

General KURILLA. That is the problem.

Mr. WHITESIDES. —so that people are not waiting, you know, 10 years or whatever for the systems. Maybe we can work together with that.

Anyway, next question. What we are seeing around the world is that allies are regarding the United States as an increasingly uncertain partner as we impose and then remove unilateral tariffs, consider cutting active duty and foreign assistance programs, and discuss using military force to take the territory of other nations like Greenland.

I believe that we are made safer through our alliances and that making our alliances doubt our resolve makes us less strong. That is particularly true in Africa where China has made long-term efforts through various initiatives.

Meanwhile, the new administration muses publicly about terminating AFRICOM. General Langley, can you describe in general terms the concerns you have heard from our African allies and security partners about this potential administration policy change and the impact it would have on our nation's security and economic resource requirements?

General LANGLEY. Congressman, I was in Nairobi last week and I would say the message from the Secretary of Defense by the chiefs of defense across Africa was well received.

They get that they need to be able to provide their own security. They get that they do not need to be dependent on us anymore. There are things that they think that they can share in a burden and they are ready to shift such as countries like Morocco and Tunisia and Kenya.

But there are others also in that as well. So they articulate what they need to push to that level. But at this point here I think everything is positive that they need to be able to take on their own security for Africa to prosper writ large.

Mr. WHITESIDES. Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate your service. I yield back. Thanks.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ma'am, gentlemen, thank you for being here. I look at the flags behind you. Means a lot to us. I look at the streamers on those flags, what they stand for, what they represent.

I think about the service that you two gentlemen have provided to your country and the blood that you have shared and friends that you have lost, brothers and sisters that are represented in some of those streamers on those flags.

The significance of a hearing like this cannot be overstated, really. We are in a era of adjustment in our nation whereby we can move into the 21st century as the dominant military force worldwide in order to maintain and preserve or establish peace, and Congress has an incredibly significant job to do, to listen to the experts that is provided to us so that we can improve the means by which we provide our warfighters with modern technology.

So I thank you for being here and for your service.

General Kurilla, you had mentioned multi-year funding versus one-or two-year funding. Would you please clarify for this committee the difference between multi-year funding for the DOD versus multi-year contracting for our defense contractors, because we don't want to lock into a technology that could be replaced by a better, less expensive technology. Would you touch on that?

General KURILLA. Sure. I agree. I mean, one of the challenges I think you have if you are a business and you make X you have this production line, but if you know you are only going to get money from these companies you are spreading that out.

You only have so much production lines. So when we have partners come to us and say, we would like to purchase X and we tell

them they can get it in 2029 because we don't have the production capability that is a concern.

I am also just as concerned that the industrial base cannot keep up with the weapon expenditure. Every conflict that we have had recently has underestimated the weapons—Russia, Ukraine, Israel.

And so I think what we want to do—

Mr. HIGGINS. Right. Yes, sir. So not to interrupt you but you are at the heart of the problem. What I want to get to here is that if we—we have to find the sweet spot and I am going to ask you what that is.

You have a problem of historically, like, constant design changes with a program. We have to move away from that. If we have multi-year funding for the Department of Defense that gives greater executive authority to accomplish the mission and build and procure and take delivery of the right vessels and craft.

But we don't want to be locked in a multi-year contract with a particular defense contractor because that would insulate us against the emergence of significantly better tech that is more effective and more lethal and less expensive. We have to be able to make that shift.

So what is that sweet spot?

General KURILLA. I can't tell you exactly what the sweet spot is but I do know we have to be agile. We have been making Patriot missiles for a very, very long time.

So the multi-year funding on that I don't know if it is 3 to 5 years, but if I am a businessman I am not going to build new production lines if I don't know if I am going to get money next year.

Mr. HIGGINS. Understood. That is for, like, existing tech. Okay. Shifting to some tech that is out there that I want to know if it is being shared, some of our allies in the Middle East have been incredibly wealthy.

They have unlimited funding for research and development, and my research indicates that they are fielding some autonomous tech that is far beyond what we have. Are they sharing that with us?

General KURILLA. So we are partnered with several of these partners in the Middle East. We do share quite a bit. There are some things that we know that they are using as well but we have quite a bit of visibility on that.

Mr. HIGGINS. And finally, what would it take to wipe out the Houthi operational capabilities?

General KURILLA. I think the number-one thing that has to happen is to have Iran quit resupplying them. They would die on the vine without Iranian support.

Mr. HIGGINS. Die on the vine. We would like that.

General Langley, General Kurilla, Ms. Thompson, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Maryland, Ms. Elfreth.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here and, Generals, thank you for your decades of service to this nation. It is greatly appreciated.

I am going to start where my colleague left off with the Houthis. Even though we have negotiated the ceasefire with the designated

terrorist organization, they continue to launch attacks, as we have said, both at our allies and continue to place global commerce at risk.

What can you tell us in this open session about the specific drone attacks on Israel and what are we learning from that?

General KURILLA. The specific what, ma'am?

Ms. ELFRETH. Drone attacks on Israel.

General KURILLA. From Iran or from the Houthis?

Ms. ELFRETH. From the Houthis.

General KURILLA. So for the Houthis, I mean, we are still shooting down Houthi UAVs that are going towards Israel. They have taken an Iranian UAV—it is called a KAS-04—with some modifications, additional gas.

They call it a Yafa. It has the—I mean, there are some Houthi firsts here but it is Iranian equipment that can go 2,600 kilometers.

And so when we have that we have shot down dozens of them and so they are taking a very simple UAV, extending the range of it, and then Israel has effective defenses as well.

Ms. ELFRETH. It has been said but I want to reiterate we are in between Ukraine and this region hypersonic technology development with—particularly with drones. What evidence do you have that the Houthis are sharing their drone warfare knowledge with our adversaries?

General KURILLA. So with other adversaries—so I will take you back to July of 2024. We killed seven individuals in Iraq that were setting up two UAVs. Of the seven individuals killed there was a Houthi UAV expert, a brigadier general.

There was an Iranian IRGC UAV expert there. There was three Kata'ib Hezbollah individuals there as well and there was a Lebanese Hezbollah individual there as well. So we are seeing that.

There is Houthis that have outreached to Russia. They have gone to China. They have cells in Iran. They are in Syria. They are in Lebanon as well.

Ms. ELFRETH. Okay, thank you.

Switching gears to General Langley, we have touched on in this hearing the very real nexus between our long standing humanitarian efforts and investments in Africa to build allies and the same time the very real threat China poses, particularly to naval progress but also the extraction of those rare earth minerals that are critical to national defense, all of that related to national security and your role.

Over the last six years the terrorist organization JNIM has seen dramatic growth in activities. You recently gave remarks emphasizing that the U.S. was focused on helping African nations build the self-reliance to fight such terrorists.

But it was reported that the vast majority of programs run through the Global Fragility Act, a multi-year initiative intended to bolster stability in vulnerable west African countries, has been shut down by this administration.

Can you please speak to the threat of JNIM to the region and its stability?

General LANGLEY. Congresswoman, thanks for the question.

Yes, the epicenter of JNIM right now lies within the countries of Mali and Burkina Faso and, to some degree, Niger. But it is threatening the former GFA recipient states. I have met in Cote D'Ivoire with Ambassador Davis Ba, and the thing in the past they have been able to benefit of being able to share ways ahead for counter-terrorism.

So in their northern regions of—excuse me, the southern regions of Burkina Faso but the northern regions of Cote D'Ivoire they have been very effective with the construct they have established.

So, yeah, they benefited from their whole of government and I think the GFA had been an enabler for that in the past. But going forward, they know that with the straight talk that we have already said that we need to share this burden and Burkina Faso is—we have offered them other opportunities to be able to benefit with what Cote D'Ivoire has been successful at.

So it's the sharing of ideas and sharing of the enduring solution to counterterrorism which all of those countries can benefit from.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, General.

And in my remaining moments I am just going to make a statement about the President's recent desire or statements and desire to develop the Gaza strip into the Riviera of the Middle East and how deeply troubling those statements are.

Many of us share the desire for a lasting two-state solution driven by self-governance and long-term stability in the region. Yet, building such a resort and displacing 2 million Palestinians will only exacerbate tensions and create a target for further hostilities in the region.

I understand this isn't directly related to your responsibilities in the military but I fail to see the national security reasoning.

Instead, I want to echo with my last moments my colleague Congressman Tran's excellent proposal that CENTCOM use its incredible logistics capabilities to support distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Gooden.

Mr. GOODEN. Thank you.

General Langley, I will start with you and then move east. Regarding the DRC and Rwanda, could you give me kind of an update, not necessarily history but where you see things as they stand today with that conflict?

General LANGLEY. Yes. At the cusp of—at the central piece of it is the encroachment of M-23 forces into the DRC—eastern DRC. They have been very successful in their offensive operations going all the way down to South Kivu.

This encapsulates some of the regions that are rich in critical minerals. So just at the diplomatic realm—and I won't speak to that two piece but I know that Rwanda is allegedly supporting M-23, and then President Tshisekedi in the DRC is trying to get his forces right set so they can counter this.

So that is all in the diplomatic realm. SADC, a number of regional constructs in southern Africa who are trying to solve this problem and trying to come to a truce where we can effect peace.

Over.

Mr. GOODEN. Well, we would consider both countries to be friends of ours, I believe. So it's tricky in that sense, but in your mind what needs to happen to wrap this conflict up and bring peace to the region?

General LANGLEY. From an operational perspective, like I said, this is mainly in the diplomatic realm so I have to defer to the State Department.

Mr. GOODEN. Fair enough. Thank you.

General, could you—the last time you were here I asked you about Qatar and our relationship with them. Some of my colleagues have questioned Qatar's reliability as a U.S. partner and their status as a major non-NATO ally, and in light of the President's recent visit could you clarify the strategic benefits of continuing advanced military exports to Doha and our relationship with them? How's that going?

General KURILLA. We have a phenomenal relationship military to military with Qatar. They house the largest base in the Middle East in Doha. They provide burden sharing in the form of \$300 million a year to run those bases.

They have been incredibly supportive of everything we do. Generally, the answer is yes—what is the question when I talk to them.

Mr. GOODEN. Is the—I find that to be the case as well and I share your belief toward that.

How does the—what opportunities could you see for us to expand that relationship that would benefit our nation?

General KURILLA. Sure. Just last week we inducted for the first time Patriot component into their depot level maintenance and they repaired that component for us. One of the things Qatar has offered to do is to help in either manufacturing or depot level maintenance for some of the unique systems that we both share.

So I think there's tremendous opportunity that can help also our industrial base as well as our maintenance base.

Mr. GOODEN. I appreciate that. Thank you for the work you are all doing, and good luck. Thanks so much. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes gentlelady from New Hampshire, Ms. Goodlander.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today, particularly to you, General Kurilla and General Langley.

I want to thank you for your incredible service to our country and I will miss you very much as a new member on this committee. So thank you for everything you have done.

General Kurilla, I want to take you back to 2022, your confirmation hearing, when you testified that Iran—the Iranian regime is the number-one destabilizing force in the Middle East. Is that still—

General KURILLA. Still remains the number-one malign influence in the Middle East.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you for that. You know, you—in your written testimony you testified that Iran's nuclear threat—its best chance at restoring deterrence and imposing its will on the region is its nuclear threat and you also testified that Iran has virtually

doubled its enrichment capacity in the past 6 months, which is extremely alarming, I think, to everybody on this committee.

And I just want to say at the outset that Congress is—we are committed on a bipartisan basis to taking action on this issue. I am proud to be supporting the Enhanced Iran Sanctions Act of 2025 and we welcome the Pentagon's help in advising Congress as we think through every tool that can be used to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

I want to ask you, General, about, as many of my colleagues have, the other pillar of the threat Iran poses its funding for terrorist groups and particularly the Houthis.

So last month the President reached a ceasefire agreement with the Houthis—the terrorist organization the Houthis. I wanted to ask you the goal of that ceasefire agreement and the terms of the agreement.

General KURILLA. So when the President gave the mission to CENTCOM it was a very specific mission on March 10. He said, I want the Houthis to quit shooting at our ships. That was the mission that was given to us.

For 51 days we pounded the Houthis. They were screaming to all of our partners in the region to include the Omanis to get the Americans to stop pounding them. And so they came and said, we will quit shooting at you if you quit—we will stop shooting at you if you quit shooting at us. That met the President's goal.

Ms. GOODLANDER. So stop shooting at American ships?

General KURILLA. That was the specific goal that was given to me.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Understood. And the goal is to restore freedom of navigation in this important part of the world where so much of global commercial shipping depends upon the freedom of navigation.

General KURILLA. 30 percent of all container traffic.

Ms. GOODLANDER. So has commercial shipping resumed?

General KURILLA. So that will be more of a lagging indicator when the insurance rates come down. We just did a freedom of navigation with four warships over the last week. Nothing was shot at them.

We also had multiple other countries' frigates and a U.K. destroyer went through there. I think you will see over time, as long as the conditions exist, deterrence is always temporal.

As long as those conditions exist and the insurance rates come back down it's a two-week faster transit to go through the Red Sea and the Suez than to go around the Cape of Good Hope.

But right now the shipping industry is looking at as long as the insurance rates stay high they will choose to go a different route, and so that is going to be a lagging indicator.

Ms. GOODLANDER. So how long do you expect it will take for commercial shipping to resume?

General KURILLA. I think you will see us start to escort some other U.S. flagships and I think others will start to go through there as well over time as long as the conditions exist.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you, General.

As you know well the cost of this lagging indicator is very real for the American people and, Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter

into the record an article dated June 5th “Red Sea passage remains a no-go for shipping despite U.S. action.”

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

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you.

General, you know, I want to ask you about—well, first of all, so our goal was to protect American ships. Our goal was not to protect our ally Israel and we are seeing an escalation in the conflict between the Houthis and our ally Israel.

You have testified to some of the things we can do to help mitigate that threat to our ally but I just want to say for the record that this—you have said well that this is a threat that is metastasizing. It is a regional scourge and the United States cannot give up on this.

General KURILLA. We are still protecting Israel. We have THAAD battery there that is shooting down Houthi missiles and we shoot down Houthi UAVs that are going towards Israel.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you, General.

I was very interested—and I will be submitting more questions for the record—in what you said about what CENTCOM could do to help deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Can you tell us what resources CENTCOM has to bear towards what I think we can all agree is a really important mission?

General KURILLA. So I think that the biggest resources that CENTCOM can assist with is—the ground lock is where you—how you move large quantities of that.

We assisted the Jordanians in scanning all of their trucks before they went in and that met the Israeli security concerns of any trucks going in and we deliver—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady’s time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Guam, Mr. Moylan.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for your participation today, especially what you have in front of you, and over the last 18 months from the administration and CENTCOM and AFRICOM you have engaged and you sustained some high tempo operations involving missile defense and rapid force protection.

You contested logistics and your counter proxy engagement so many of which reflect the type of challenges we are anticipating in the potential Indo-Pacific conflict. So lessons learned.

I would like to hear from each of you from this kinetic operations that you have been doing, whether it be from CENTCOM’s counter-Houthi maritime strikes or AFRICOM’s experience in the disperse operations and low access environments.

What lessons are being actively incorporated into strategic planning for a high-end fight in the Indo-Pacific? Ms. Thompson, if we can start first with you, please.

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you, Congressman. I think it’s an incredibly important question.

I will leave the operational details to General Langley and General Kurilla, but I would say one of the most important things that

we are watching is, certainly, strategic waterways and the ability to flow forces into the Indo-Pacific.

Obviously, freedom of navigation for U.S. military vessels through the BAM and the Red Sea is critical to that effort. So I would just highlight that as one of the big takeaways and one of the strategic choke points that is very important to make sure we have control over.

Mr. MOYLAN. General, please.

General KURILLA. So I think between both the Iranian attacks on Israel as well as our—the Houthi attacks on our naval forces we have learned a lot that are applicable and we pass these back to the big Navy, big Air Force, the Army as well.

Software is a weapon. Our ability to do combined joint all-domain command and control, the things that we are doing with software, is amazing. We have advanced that.

We have engineers every day making improvements on our ability to do that. It's at warfighting headquarters. The things that we are doing with ballistic missile defense—the software is changing based on what we are seeing on the battlefield.

The same thing I would tell you as it comes to counter-UAS as well we are making changes to the Navy software on the spy radars based on what we are seeing. It's the first time in the history of warfare that anti-ship ballistic missiles have been used against ships.

I would remind you that the Truman spent 51 days in the longest sustained period of combat for an aircraft carrier since World War II and they performed marvelously.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you.

General?

General LANGLEY. Thank you, Congressman, for that question. And from my perspective and operational sense I look at it as supporting three different combatant commanders to include CENTCOM in their globally integrated plan against their foes, especially Iran, and then—and even EUCOM in their global plan as well as INDOPACOM.

And on this map here that you see the strategic choke points. As far as AFRICOM and what we are charged to do and supporting those respective combatant commanders in support of their global plans is be able to keep us at phase zero, phase zero of deter, being able to deter and keep our free flow of commerce and freedom of action around this.

So we work through our partners, a number of countries across the Maghreb for the end. Every exercise has that teed up as far as a objective to how we do that with shared objectives, shared intel and common objectives, I should say, with other countries, and that is an enabler for us in my support plans to those respective combatant commanders.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, General.

General Kurilla, in most of my hearings I am always an advocate for the Army, right, in the INDOPACOM area, especially. But today I want to advocate for the Navy's role in CENTCOM.

So how has the United States participated in this multinational maritime task force to counter both state and nonstate actors within your area of operation?

General KURILLA. So I am incredibly proud of the sailors in our Navy and what they have been able to accomplish. So when I look at CENTCOM it has three of the eight strategic choke points in the world and what our Navy has been able to do to be able to secure those has been fantastic.

I mean, they have really—when you look at what they have done both against the Houthis and in their interdiction of other things coming into the region they have done a fantastic job.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you so much. Thank you for your service to the nation. I appreciate you all.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Sorensen.

Mr. SORENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning and welcome to General Kurilla, General Langley, and Ms. Thompson.

I especially want to thank the two generals here today for your many years of service, your dedication to our nation since this will be the last time that you appear before our committee. You have worn your uniforms so proudly and your country will always be grateful of that.

Both sides of the aisle agree today that we must continue to improve support to servicemembers as well as our standing around the world.

But I must say that my constituents and I are still very angry that our men and women in the CENTCOM theater were put at risk by the Signal mess with Secretary Hegseth, Vice President Vance, and other senior members of this administration. Our brave servicemembers should never have to worry that our own leaders are giving enemies our mission secrets.

As we have seen with the Houthis we need to be able to properly protect ourselves from drones and we should be outfitting our own warfighter with drones.

The Rock Island arsenals, a joint manufacturing and technology center, 3D prints drones that then get outfitted with the sensors and the systems needed for our important missions. I think this is crucially needed.

But to both generals today can you talk about where we need to be going in terms of both our unmanned air systems and counter-UAS capabilities in our regions?

General KURILLA. If I could just jump on the additive manufacturing and 3D printing.

So we have an innovation task force out there. One of them is Task Force 39 which has an additive manufacturing in Kuwait. We use that for both polymers and metallic additive manufacturing.

We'll print parts, get that back to—get a system back up until that OEM part can come in. We do that on a routine basis. We are 3D printing drones down in Task Force 99 down in Qatar and they do these small, attritable drones. We slap some cameras on them and we use those very effectively as well.

So I think this is—you know, when you talk counter-UAS, though, a big part of it is the detect and I think we have to do a

better job to be able to detect and that is something that we have made some recommendations on as well.

Mr. SORENSEN. General Langley?

General LANGLEY. Now I am just going to state that my buddy here Kurilla in the CENTCOM region has been the lead as far as evolving technology to counter drones because what happens in CENTCOM will eventually happen in AFRICOM.

So we have been following his lead in the technology and experimentation and we have been leveraging that within the AFRICOM region.

Mr. SORENSEN. Thank you, sir.

The new regime in Syria certainly changes the landscape of the Middle East. You know, I am hopeful that this will really diminish Iran's influence in the region and lessen Russia's foothold in the Middle East.

To General Kurilla, with our approach to Syria changing where do you see things headed today and what opportunities and challenges do you see, going forward?

General KURILLA. So the opportunities are significant. I think I see a lot of upside. I see little downside for engaging right now.

Ambassador Tom Barrack, he's the U.S. ambassador to Türkiye but also the special envoy to Syria. I talk to him often. He is at the table.

I think we waited a little too long to come to the table with the fall of Assad back in December. We are now there and we are able to engage and be able to shape the way forward. I think that is a very, very positive thing.

Mr. SORENSEN. One of the things that I worry about with the current administration is how we are handling the relationships that we have with our allies around the world—our ability to forge new partnerships and friendships.

You know, building and maintaining these partnerships is so crucial to our own safety and our interests, and as General Kurilla mentioned and your written statement, we can't take our partners for granted.

Can you speak to the importance of our allies in the region and what we in Congress need to do to support them?

General KURILLA. Well, I think a big part of it is being there for them. I have been to the region 45 times. You have to be there.

You have to sit down, you have a meal together, and that is how you build a friendship and a relationship. I talk to the CHODs. Almost every single day I am talking to a different CHOD, multiple—chiefs of defense. I am sorry.

Every single day I am talking to several of them. When they are sending you pictures of their grandkids, you know you are part of the family, and to be able to do that, though, what they are asking of us is, hey, one, are you going to be there for us and the answer is yes.

But it's the foreign military sales is their single biggest frustration that they have on the time to deliver. They have the means to purchase.

It's the time to deliver that equipment that they are asking for and that is where I think we can—and I am 40 percent of all for-

eign military sales in the world in the CENTCOM region and I think we can do a better job.

Mr. SORENSEN. Thank you, gentlemen, both for your service and we appreciate your dedication to our country.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chairman now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Luttrell.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for coming today and I would like to thank everyone in uniform today as well as our veterans that are in the room.

General Kurilla, you talked about ISIS-K in Afghanistan in your opening statement. I would like a little deep dive, if you don't mind.

General KURILLA. Sure.

All right. So ISIS-Khorasan, perhaps one of the most active in trying to do external plots globally to include against the homeland, right now what we saw is the Taliban in going after ISIS-K—they hate each other—pushed a lot of them into the tribal areas on the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Through a phenomenal partnership with Pakistan they have gone after ISIS-Khorasan, killing dozens of them. Through a relationship we have with them providing intelligence they have captured at least five ISIS-Khorasan high value individuals.

They extradited back Jafar, who was one of the key individuals behind the Abbey Gate bombing, and the first person he called, Chief of Staff Munir, was me and said, I have caught him, I am willing to extradite him back to the United States, please tell the Secretary of Defense and the President.

So we are seeing Pakistan with limited intelligence that we are providing them go after them using their means to do that and we are seeing an effect on ISIS-Khorasan.

At the same point they are continuing to move around. Sometimes they'll try and go back into Afghanistan. We have the means to be able to collect, but for the most part right now they are hanging out right in that border area of Pakistan.

And I would also tell you that, I mean, since 2024, the beginning, Pakistan held over a thousand terrorist attacks in the western area, killing about 700 security and civilians and 2,500 wounded.

They are in an active counterterrorism fight right now and they have been a phenomenal partner in the counterterrorism world.

Mr. LUTTRELL. It seems like—does it seem like they are scaling down or scaling up?

General KURILLA. So I think from ISIS-Khorasan they got hit very, very hard over the last several months and so they are—I would tell you right now they are at a low point right now.

What we are getting out of interrogation and exploitation has been significant. But remember, these are the same individuals that did the Crocus Music City Hall attack in Moscow.

They did the attack in Kerman, Iran, and they have attempted other attacks and there was actually ties in a classified setting that I could talk in terms of the homeland.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Whatever we have to do not to go back to that place would be amazing.

General KURILLA. That is why we need to—if I could.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Yes, please.

General KURILLA. We have to have a relationship with Pakistan and with India. I do not believe it is a binary switch that we can't have one with Pakistan if we have a relationship with India. We should look at the merits of the relationship for the positives that it has.

Mr. LUTTRELL. General Langley, with—in regards to AFRICOM it seems as if Russia more or less has Africa landlocked. Well, I am looking at the map here.

Can you give me kind of a high level briefing when it comes to Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, the northern part of Africa? If you roll the clock back maybe a decade that seems to be the best place you could hide in plain sight, especially in the northern point of Tunisia, with the vastness of the desert.

Are we seeing anything happening developing in the northern part of Africa? Because it seems as if we are essentially kind of focused on where all the rare earth minerals are being mined.

General LANGLEY. Congressman, that is a great question.

Now, I have always been through my tenure of command the last three years engaging with all these countries. To the degree, as we look at this is NATO's southern flank and I see those strategic choke points on there.

We need freedom of navigation or freedom of action for our ships in support of those war plans for NATO and for EUCOM.

So I have been working overtime and engaging with these countries. Morocco is doing their part, and even Algeria which—some realms that we disagree on some things but Algeria we were able to sign a nonbinding agreement in cooperation.

But I will tell you that Russia is still there. They are still trying to affect an agreement on their own so they can get basing access or port access, and as you even go down into Libya, you know, I met with Field Marshal Haftar almost—two times—actually, two times engaging them to ensure that we can work with them because they have—we have shared threats, especially along the southern borders, of terrorism.

Just engaging with both sides, trying to get collective agreement in Libya between the GNU and the LNA. That is essential that we keep U.S. diplomatic agreements and cooperation with these countries because we see what Russia is trying to do establish some ports across the Mediterranean—warm water ports, so that it'll affect their operations trying to get a decisive advantage.

But we are not going to let that happen in phase zero coherency operations that we do in AFRICOM.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Thank you.

Ms. Thompson, I have nothing for you today. Keep up the great work.

I yield back, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. You got it easy today from him.

All right. We now have—Mr. Cisneros is recognized.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And General Kurilla and General Langley, thank you both for your years of service and dedication to our country as you both—you are ready to retire here in a while.

But, General Langley, you know, when I was in the Navy my ship, the USS Ogden, stopped in Eritrea, which was at that time a new independent nation. You know, we went there to show the flag but to show a support for this new country and, really, to the region as well.

But that is not the impression I am getting from the current administration. They are pulling away foreign aid. Ships aren't visiting the continent like they used to. We are leaving a void for Russia and for the PRC to fill.

And you have been quoted as saying that the PRC is replicating what we have done in Africa, targeting the international military education and training program that they also said they are going to increase security and training in a number of countries.

In April it was reported that Cairo and the PRC were planning to participate in a joint exercise between their air forces. As the administration continues to pull back and the PRC continues to build relations what, in your opinion, is the national security risk and impact to Africa as well as to here at home?

General LANGLEY. I would say the CCP is trying to replicate what we do, what we have done in the past, and have a strategic advantage, and especially engaging with our African partners because they want to be able to establish an enabler to close the decisive gap that we have had over them for years.

I will just go on a maritime sense, especially with their NETF, the NETF, which is their Naval Expeditionary Task Force. They go around the periphery of the African continent engaging with a number of countries. We need to be able to get that.

You brought up, you know, your naval background. You know, when we had the ARG [Amphibious Ready Group] MEUs [Marine Expeditionary Unit] we are not heel to toe anymore. We are not 3.0. We do need the Amphibious Readiness Group and the Marine Expeditionary Units out there on ships. That is a force multiplier for crisis response or any other show of deterrence.

I would say, you know, that is not—that doesn't go across political lines. That goes in operational lines. You know, Navy—as I met with the vice admiral in their operation sense but also met with Admiral Kilby and also Stuart Munsch, and they are bringing up the capability to try to provide Africa with that capability so that we can compete with China, especially in the maritime sense.

So I would say that one step in the right direction is getting those ARG MEUs back out there and in the AFRICOM theater.

Mr. CISNEROS. All right. Gator Navy, all the way.

Ms. Thompson, you said in your opening remarks that the department is working with its African—with African nations to grow—working with them to increase operational independence for these African nations.

But I think really what we are seeing, right, is they are not doing that. They are moving towards the PRC. As—you know, as I referenced here Egypt and the PRC are kind of talking about doing joint operations.

How does the Department not see this as a red flag? Why aren't we doing something about this? Why are we pulling away and we are just pushing them in the direction of our—you know, of our pacing threat here?

Ms. THOMPSON. Sir, thank you for the question. I really appreciate it.

And I would point you first to our interim national defense strategic guidance. Our top two priorities are defense of the homeland, countering terrorist threats that have the capability and intent to strike the homeland, and then deterrence of the PRC, particularly in the Western Pacific.

But, obviously, as you outlined absolutely correctly that bleeds over to the African continent as well. And so I would say from our Title 10 security assistance approach to the continent but then also, as we are in the development process for our National Defense Strategy this is something that is top of mind and this is certainly not an area where we are pulling back.

We want to be very targeted and strategic in our approach to make sure that we are deterring the PRC's—particularly their ability to have a military advantage on the continent. So I would share your assessment on that front.

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, please take that back to the heads over there, right. As we continue to pull away they are continuing to build relationships with China and the PRC and, you know, they are—the PRC is more than happy to fill that void as we pull away and this should be a red flag that they are working with these things and that is something that needs to be brought up and considered.

And with that, I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Dr. McCormick.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Kurilla, General Langley, it has been a pleasure working with you. I wish you fair winds and following seas in your next endeavors.

I am sure you will be highly successful. We'll miss you. I consider you friends, and if any time you ever want to share a beverage or a box of crayons just let me know. We'll always be available.

General Langley, I will start with you. The Djibouti air base cluster is within striking distance of some of the Houthi weapons and I was wondering, especially with the development of drones that have been developed in Iran and put together in Yemen, what are we doing for countermeasures and do you think we could do better?

How can we assist you in equipping our bases with countermeasures for those advanced drones and what they are trying to develop?

General KURILLA. Congressman, it is an evolving threat, especially with the Houthis on the other side of the Red Sea, and I will get into specifics of what we actually need to improve upon, enhance upon.

We are protected now but I will get into specifics in closed session of things that I think that we can continue to enhance and

evolve in that because it's not just Djibouti. It is all the way down to Manda Bay in Kenya.

So I will say that this is evolving. The Houthis are gaining in capability and then there's other illicit actors in the region that is—that can be a threat within East Africa writ large.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Would you say that—is it safe to assume that we have a ways to go to be secure in our endeavors?

General LANGLEY. We will always do position improvement. You know, our fighting holes always need to be improved for force protection. That is my number-one mission is protecting the troops on the ground.

Dr. MCCORMICK. And in regards to CENTCOM we have seen everything from Tower 22 to the ship lanes really kind of being a proving ground for drone attacks and missile attacks, and I am sure we are going to eventually encounter supersonic missiles and other things that are very, very alarming.

What have you learned from those sort of contacts as we advance our technologies and we have these new technologies to deal with?

General KURILLA. You have—Congressman, you have to have a layered defense is the first thing and you have to continue to improve upon your capabilities and evolve faster and move faster than the enemy can on theirs.

Look at what happened in Russia with the Ukraine when you watched also them go to fiber optic drones because of the EW and the jamming that was up there.

So they are moving very, very quickly in terms of advancements. We have to move faster.

Dr. MCCORMICK. And, look, I just talked to an AI community about that very same thing: closing the kill chain, making sure that our next technologies—I mean, fly-by-wire is awesome, but it's kind of like a look-back at the TOW technology. I want to look forward and look at new training models, how we are going to do that.

What is your feeling—and this is an associated question that I just came up on, just as we are talking—if we are going to have different navigation systems that aren't going to be controlled by semi-autonomous controllers. Autonomous weapon systems that literally identify targets without any input once they are launched and it is—

General KURILLA. They exist right now.

Dr. MCCORMICK. The question is would that be a good—I get a little bit squeamish when we talk about autonomous weapon systems that direct themselves and they don't have that final—

General KURILLA. I think those exist right—they don't—I know they exist right now. It's when you get into that final mile, that final kilometer, that then locks on a target that is an autonomous target—

Dr. MCCORMICK. That is true.

General KURILLA. —recognition system that has then taken it in. You can't jam it, et cetera.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Good point. Good point.

One of the other things that I thought was really interesting is there's USAID and other things we do in the foreign investments we do that now come into question.

Now, some of it has been wasteful but, obviously, I am not against foreign aid because it gives us real influence and really creates stability in different regions.

Where do you think we could redirect those funds that have maybe been not spent on the most efficient systems? This is for both of you, and I know we only have only have 45 seconds left.

But where can we best spend the money we do to influence and create stability in those regions that we are talking about right now?

General KURILLA. Well, I think from the USAID the State Department is now taking on that responsibility. For us there are certain countries that absolutely don't have the natural resources and those are things that we need to look at and I can get specific with you if you have a written question.

I will turn it over to Mike.

General LANGLEY. Phase four operations. Stability. I have seen it work in Somalia, you know, as they were going through Lower and Middle Shabelle from 2022 heretofore. But without that recreation or recreating that or getting it from other countries there's going to be a lapse in completing a credible force to do the hold.

Dr. MCCORMICK. My best to you both, gentlemen. Loved working with you. Semper fi.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair recognizes the gentlelady from California, Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I will echo all of my colleagues' thanks to both of you for your many decades of service. I have very much enjoyed working with all of you and, General Kurilla, as predicted I outlasted you.

General Langley, I first want to discuss our strategy in Somalia. Under your leadership the United States has rapidly increased the pace of air strikes against both al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.

In the past 5 months alone the U.S. has conducted 37 strikes compared to just four during the entire first year of the Biden administration. That is actually nearly as many as President Trump authorized in his first year, which totalled 39.

So could you first tell me what is the objective of these air strikes?

General LANGLEY. Congresswoman, this is one of the number-one objectives that Secretary Hegseth came in—when he became the Secretary of Defense. He said AFRICOM needs to do counterterrorism operations to protect the homeland.

Up there in the Golis Mountains you have ISIS-Somalia. They have the propensity to affect the homeland whether it be global financing. We had to stop that. You know, we did have an operation back in 2023 but ISIS-Somalia has grown. Matter of fact, the emir is there now.

They have only increased their capability and capacity. That is why we had to turn up the heat on putting pressure through lethal means to be able to attrite that.

Ms. JACOBS. I understand the threat. I guess what I am concerned about is that we have been using this same logic for decades.

It doesn't seem like it's attached to any ability for us to eventually leave and we saw that, for instance, in 2019 when there was

expanded air strikes that it didn't actually translate to fewer al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia.

So are these air strikes part of a coherent, articulated strategy aimed at enabling long-term stability and ultimately drawing down the U.S. military footprint?

General LANGLEY. Yes, that is our operational intent right now, to be able to cease or deter their ability for ex ops to protect the homeland.

Ms. JACOBS. Okay. That is different than there being an actual strategy.

Ms. Thompson, you said Somalia is an incredible success. I think I would disagree with your assessment of that. Is there a whole of government coherent, articulated strategy aimed at enabling long-term stability and ultimately drawing down the U.S. military footprint in Somalia?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

I would highlight my commentary was meant to associate with the INDSG [Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance] guidance. Our number-one objective is, obviously, to deter and deny and degrade credible ex ops threats to the homeland, and as I have highlighted and as you highlighted in your opening comments, the significant uptick in strikes is demonstrative of basically attaching those activities to our number-one INDSG objective.

So I would articulate that that is where the connection to the strategy is. In terms of force posture in Somalia on a long-term basis this is something that, obviously, we would contemplate as part of the broader global force posture review and no decisions for AFRICOM or for anywhere else have been made at this time. But it's certainly something that would factor into this—

Ms. JACOBS. None of this sounds like an actual strategy to create stability in Somalia so I will look forward to following up with you both on that.

General Kurilla, I would like to turn to you now on Yemen. Civil society and media organizations have reported numerous civilian casualties caused by recent U.S. operations in Yemen, many as a result of the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas.

For example, the U.S. strikes on Ras Isa Port in Hodeidah on April 17th reportedly killed at least 84 civilians.

So, one, did CENTCOM foresee the level of civilian harm reported and what steps did CENTCOM take to mitigate the risks of civilian harm during the conduct of recent strikes in Yemen?

General KURILLA. So, any civilian death is a tragedy. What we have is a civilian harm mitigation team that investigates every single one of these to determine if they are credible. There are still several that are under investigation.

You mentioned Ras Isa. There were several things that we did to mitigate that prior to include heavy ISR soaking of that prior to that. We did messaging to the individuals there. We did messaging to the ships. We ensured the weaponry and the mitigation of those systems.

Now, the problem is you have a fuel port that is being hit. We did not target the trucks that were in the port at that same time. But, again, that is under investigation to determine the actual

numbers and, again, I would argue that this is the Houthi casualty numbers as well.

Ms. JACOBS. And can you commit today on behalf of CENTCOM to publish your findings on civilian casualties in Yemen?

General KURILLA. We push all of that up to the OSD and they end up pushing those out.

Ms. JACOBS. Okay. So you will publish that?

General KURILLA. Absolutely.

Ms. JACOBS. Excellent. Thank you so much.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Crank.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Thompson, thank you for being here. Generals Kurilla and Langley, thank you for being here and for your service.

I want to start by asking you the same question I have asked every combatant commander that has come before HASC [House Armed Services Committee] this year. In your opinion, has the space-based threat from China and Russia in your theater improved or worsened in the last 5 years?

General KURILLA. From a CENTCOM perspective, Russia has actually gone down because they are no longer really in the region where they were basing some of their space-based threats. China has probably increased but I would tell you Iran has significantly increased.

Mr. CRANK. So overall increased you would say?

General KURILLA. An increase.

Mr. CRANK. Yeah.

General Langley?

General LANGLEY. On the continent of Africa it has increased, especially down in Namibia, dual-use state-sponsored type space-enabling capabilities by the CCP.

Mr. CRANK. Yeah. Obviously, we are in an open setting here but can you provide maybe a brief description of how this threat affects your operations, General Kurilla?

General KURILLA. I would be happy to do that in a closed session.

Mr. CRANK. Okay. That sounds good.

General, the same? Okay.

General LANGLEY. Yes, in a closed session.

Mr. CRANK. Okay, thank you.

On another topic, I am concerned about the nuclear threat from Iran and reports that they rejected the latest proposal for a new nuclear deal from the U.S., and it seems like Iran is hell bent on having nuclear weapons, which would be a direct threat to the existence of Israel.

General Kurilla, in your written testimony you say, quote, a nuclear-armed Iran would change the Middle East overnight and forever, potentially setting off a regional arms race with catastrophic consequences, unquote.

Can you expand on this? What would a Middle East with a nuclear Iran look like?

General KURILLA. I think you would see other countries in the region doing everything they could to obtain a nuclear weapon, ei-

ther development or through purchase, to be able to gain one to be able to retain deterrence back with Iran.

Mr. CRANK. And how can CENTCOM deter Iran from proceeding with their nuclear development program? How can they strengthen the President's hand at the negotiating table?

General KURILLA. I provide a range of options to the President but I am in all favor of having a negotiated settlement that prevents Iran from getting a nuclear weapon because of the consequences of conflict.

Mr. CRANK. Okay. And then, General Kurilla, what lessons can the U.S. learn from Iron Dome that could be applied to the development of Golden Dome? Do you believe deterrence by denial to be an effective strategy?

General KURILLA. It can be, but I would tell you some of the biggest lessons learned is how Israel's defense industrial base works. You cannot even sell a system to the Israeli military, the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces], that is not open architecture that will not work with the rest of their systems so you don't end up with a proprietary system that stand alone. We need systems that can integrate and all talk to each other.

Mr. CRANK. And so Golden Dome should take note of that?

General KURILLA. That would be my recommendation.

Mr. CRANK. Okay. Thank you, General.

Ms. Thompson, how does our partnership with Jordan advance peace and stability in the Middle East?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, sir.

I think Jordan in particular and our partnership with the Jordanian Armed Forces not only goes to promote greater burden sharing throughout the region to include countering shared threats that we have, particularly on the terrorism front, but then also weapons and narcotics smuggling and interdiction. They are a really great partner on that, and then UAS and ballistic missile interdiction as well.

And I am sure General Kurilla can provide some more operational specifics but those are the main pillars of the security relationship that we have with the Jordanians.

Mr. CRANK. General?

General KURILLA. They are one of our strongest partners. They are the country I have visited the most when I go to the Middle East.

Mr. CRANK. Okay, is there any more that the Department could do to support Jordanian Armed Forces?

General KURILLA. I think there are things that we can do to strong point Jordan in the counter-UAS. Counter-UAS in Jordan defends both Jordan, U.S. forces, and Israel.

Mr. CRANK. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Thompson, after years of neglect by President Biden, President Trump is right to prioritize our Gulf partners. How did his recent visit to the region advance U.S. national security interests?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, sir, and I would just highlight particularly the deepening of defense partnerships that we have.

Not only—I mean, as General Kurilla has highlighted, obviously, we have a long way to go on working through the kinks in our FMS

process and defense industrial base but deepening those partnerships to enable greater allied burden sharing but then also interoperability and empowerment of our Gulf partners to take on more of the responsibility in the region, particularly given normalized relations with Israel. For a few of them it is a massive step in the right direction for the posture we want to have in the region.

And then I would also just highlight the commercial success as well that is coupled with the defense success and I think both per President Trump's comments in Riyadh really echo that sentiment.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

I do want to make the announcement that we will be concluding the open session at 12:30 and going into a classified session a few minutes thereafter because votes are going to be called on the House floor at 1:30.

So with that, the chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Ryan, for 5 minutes.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am sorry to my colleague from Pennsylvania. I think I got here after you.

Thank you all for being here, especially given that it's both of your last hearings, Generals Kurilla and Langley. I just want to—that is an appropriate fist bump—I just want to commend and thank you both as I know many of my colleagues have but it cannot be said enough. I appreciate it.

And, General Kurilla, in particular I want to commend you. I don't think you've—I know you are a humble, quiet professional but I think in particular what you did in defense of Israel, in defense of the region, in defense of the U.S., most importantly, in your leadership on two unprecedented direct attacks as you said in your opening testimony that have never occurred in the history of either Iran or Israel, your leadership in preparing and executing that defense was exceptional and I think we all have a lot to learn on a bunch of levels from that. But I just wanted to say that publicly here today.

Ms. Thompson, I appreciate you being here again. I know the last time you were here I was a little frustrated that we weren't getting really many answers from you. Hopefully, we can get some more answers.

My line of questioning is similar to what I asked you last time. I know it's been hit on by colleagues but I want to come back on it again.

I want to bring in what General Kurilla said in his opening very powerfully in speaking about both the risks and the tectonic shift but also the opportunity vis-a-vis Iran on its heels or, arguably, knees and our ability and opportunity to press, press, press in that moment, and I am trying to just wrestle with the dissonance between that and some of the both appointees of this administration and some of the rhetoric of this administration, not so much you today in your testimony specifically.

But I have pointed this out before. The DASD [Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense] for the Middle East, Mr. Dimino, has said deeply concerning things including that the Middle East does, quote, not really matter for U.S. interests; that, quote, vital or exis-

tential threats in the Middle East are, quote, best characterized as minimal to non-existent. He's also specifically characterized Iran's missile attacks on Israel as, quote, fairly moderate.

I think, General Kurilla, I am not going to put you on the spot. I might disagree with that. He's vocally opposed attacking Iran's nuclear program, described U.S. strikes against the Houthis as, quote, futile.

Can you just explain to us—I mean, I agree what I have heard from General Kurilla and other experienced military leaders. We need to press the advantage we have vis-a-vis Iran and their proxies. How are we supposed to do that when senior appointees in the Pentagon are saying things like that?

Ms. THOMPSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

First and foremost, I will just note that I was not involved in the hiring of any officials in the administration or the political—

Mr. RYAN. But you are here to speak on its behalf, right?

Ms. THOMPSON. So what I would say from the—yeah, from the ISA [International Security Affairs] perspective within the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, I will make very clear we support the President's objective to not only, first and foremost, defend the state of Israel but second, of course, deny Iran the ability to obtain a nuclear weapon.

That is something we are 100 percent committed to, and I will also note that we support the President's objective and stand ready to provide military options should his strategy of pursuing peace with Iran through a negotiated solution and denying Iran a nuclear weapon through a negotiated solution—we stand ready as a department and with an OSD policy to provide the Secretary and the President—

Mr. RYAN. But—I am sorry, but how are you ready if you are not in agreement? I mean—

Ms. THOMPSON. I can only speak—

Mr. RYAN. Should Mr. Dimino be in the position then if he's not aligned with the President's intent?

Ms. THOMPSON. That is not something that I can specifically speak to but I can speak to—for the international security—the international security role that I play in the Department of Defense.

This is what we are committed to. Working under Under Secretary Colby we are very much in line with Secretary Hegseth and President Trump's guidance on this and none of that has changed.

Mr. RYAN. Might this dissonance explain, for example, why in the recent back and forth about the negotiations which we all agree we want to happen there's lack of clarity on level of enrichment that might be allowed within the administration, signaling division and weakness to our adversaries.

Ms. THOMPSON. So that is not something I can speak to. That is something—that would be a question for Ambassador Witkoff's team at the State Department because they are the lead for negotiation.

Mr. RYAN. And, Ms. Thompson, I will interrupt you again. I respect you. I know you have a hard job and I know you are per-

forming the duties of, if I am saying that—right, yes, performing the duties of.

But can the administration send us someone that can speak to—these are pretty important questions. Can we get somebody that can speak to these?

Ms. THOMPSON. I would very much like to come and do a broad Iran briefing for you all if that would be something that is helpful, but I would respectfully ask that the State Department be present for that as well, because Ambassador Witkoff's team, as the lead for negotiations, really would have the most—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from South Carolina, Ms. Mace.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Iran's reckless behavior continues to threaten U.S. forces, our allies, and regional stability. Its support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis and other dangerous proxy groups continue to sow chaos throughout the Middle East, as I know you all are very familiar.

Its support for proxy militias and terrorists threatens our interests and those of our allies while it advances in ballistic missile technology and pursuit of nuclear weapons threatened to plunge the region into greater turmoil.

CENTCOM's presence in the region deters aggression against our personnel and Middle Eastern allies. We must impose real costs on the ayatollahs and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to ensure that deterrence is fully restored and Iran ceases its destructive activities.

We must also send a clear message any advance toward Iran acquiring nuclear weapons is unacceptable to the United States.

I commend President Trump's efforts to ensure Iran's nuclear program is fully dismantled. Nothing short of full dismantlement of their nuclear capabilities will ensure peace and stability in the region.

So the Iranian regime has mastered the art of wielding proxy groups against its adversaries in the region repeatedly. From Hamas barbarianism to Hezbollah's arsenals in Lebanon and the Houthi strikes in the Red Sea, Iran leverages its surrogates to strike our allies and harm our interests.

So my first question today for General Kurilla, can you briefly discuss the threat landscape you see from Iran including the use of proxies?

General KURILLA. So Iran, basically, has three pillars that they use. The first one is long-range weapons and they access aerial denial. So think long-range missiles, UAVs.

The second is their proxy networks. The number-one proxy they had was Lebanese Hezbollah which acted as a bit of a sword of Damocles over the top of Israel. Israel's—the doctrinal term disintegration of Lebanese Hezbollah should be studied by every military—

Ms. MACE. I was recently there and saw that destruction and they did a very successful work.

General KURILLA. It was brilliant what they have done to Hamas. The Houthis were one that not a lot of people thought

about before because at one point it was the lowest priority for intelligence.

I think it is something that we have to pay a lot of attention to. I think what you are seeing with the Iranian-aligned militia groups inside of Iraq—they used to be inside of Syria.

With the fall of Assad that basically severed the Shi'a Crescent. Qasem Soleimani, who we killed back in 2020, he wanted to have this Shi'a Crescent that ran from Iran to Iraq, Syria to Lebanon.

The fall of Assad severed that. That is probably the single biggest event that has happened in the Middle East.

Ms. MACE. And what has changed since October 7th?

General KURILLA. I think what has changed since October 7th is Israel feels they are an existential threat to their very existence with a lot of these Iranian proxies that are attacking them and we had the first state-on-state attacks—blows between the two countries.

Iran is in a weaker strategic position. They have lost a lot of their proxies. Their air defense network is not what it used to be. However, they still have a lot of operational capability in terms of their long-range weapons. At the classified session I can talk in great detail their capabilities.

Ms. MACE. Do you have any concern about the Houthis and their relationship with Saudi Arabia?

General KURILLA. The relationship with Saudi Arabia? No, I don't have—I mean, Saudi Arabia has been a strong supporter of what we were doing in operations.

Ms. MACE. Yes, they have.

You know, my understanding is we designate the Houthis, for example, as not the top tier terrorist organization. They are on the lower rung of designation. Is that correct?

General KURILLA. They were, ma'am. They were first a specially designated terrorist group and then we made them a foreign terrorist organization under President Trump. So they are at the top level.

Ms. MACE. They are at the top level now, which is something I advocated for when Biden was president and it didn't happen, which means there are consequences to that in the Middle East, which is good for the United States and our allies overseas.

Has the degradation of Iran's proxy network affected its ability to destabilize the region?

General KURILLA. So one challenge we have with Iran they get petro dollars.

Ms. MACE. Okay.

General KURILLA. 90 percent—85 to 90 percent of their oil is purchased by China. So China is effectively supporting and financing Iran's malign behavior. We still see the amount of funds that are going to the IRGC Quds force. That is who runs the proxy networks outside of Iran.

So as we look at the sanctioned oil I think for the first time the State Department sanctioned what are called the Teapot Refineries. These are refineries along the Chinese coast that these ships take this sanctioned oil. Iran—this is 10 percent of all Chinese oil they get.

They import 70 percent. 50 percent goes to the Strait of Hormuz but it is 85 to 90 percent from Iran. It goes into these Teapot Refineries and I think the first time we have ever done it is we have sanctioned one of those Teapot Refineries.

Ms. MACE. Last question, thoughts on Qatar?

General KURILLA. We have a very strong relationship military-to-military. Largest base there. They fund the base. They do burden-sharing. When I ask them a question they say the answer is yes, what is the question.

Ms. MACE. Okay. Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Pennsylvania, Ms. Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and that is what you get for being late to the gavel.

I really appreciate your service General and General. Thank you so much for your amazing careers and for the opportunity to speak with you.

Most questions have been asked so I am going to ask the one that I have that hasn't yet been asked.

General Langley, you spoke a lot about what is going on in Africa and the fact that you have had a conversation with our partners and allies and that they understand and are embracing, in your, I think, words their new roles and responsibilities.

I would like to believe that and so let's say that that is true because I hear that a lot from all of Europe as well about Europe and Ukraine.

Assuming that is true, can you describe how AFRICOM is operationalizing that process of transitioning the responsibilities and roles over to our allies and to our partners and can you also explain—and this is for both of you all—how you would measure or what sort of metrics or benchmarks you would have to know whether or not our partners are, indeed, transitioning and are really, truly prepared to be able to take on this sort of operational responsibility.

That is my only question so I would love it if you would give it some real thought because it is really, really important that if we assume that these folks can or are interested in doing this that we have performance metrics or standards that we are looking for and that we also have an operational plan that we have to transition those responsibilities over.

General LANGLEY. Congresswoman, I am grateful for the question. I know we last spoke when we were at the Munich Security Conference and we were in the throes of the Title 22 pause and then at the forefront of the Title 10 review.

So at AFRICOM what we had to do is reassess where we were and try to do some predictive analytics of what the effects would be.

This is all in parallel with structuring our narrative—of structuring our narrative of going to our partners, going to our allies, and come up with straight talk of what it really means of a shared burden for the sake of stability and security on the continent of Africa.

So I did—further, I did meet with the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] rep for the southern neighborhood, as they call it—they call it SNAP [Southern Neighborhood Action Plan]—and shared that with him. I said, you know, our government we are all in for stability and security across Africa but we need a shared commitment from you because this is your southern neighborhood.

What happens as far as mass migration or migration of terrorists that can threaten your neighborhood, your borders, is our same concern with our southwest border.

So that soaked in well with our African partners' shared commitment. They say, well, it is going to take a little time, and also we are going to diversify our partner so we get that as long as we have those shared objectives, as long as we have those shared values to reach that end state.

So in Nairobi last week, I collectively got with the chiefs of defense and said, "hey, you know," their biggest message to me, "hey, we are not looking to be saved." We can hit stability in—

Ms. HOULAHAN. What does that look like? And when you are talking about, you know, a narrative, narratives don't get it done. You know, what is the plan?

What is the operational plan that we all have collectively on our responsibility to hand that over and on our ability to measure whether it has actually been handed over with any sort of security or safety or assurance that we—that it will be consistent to the standards that we have always put to the region?

General LANGLEY. And, Congresswoman, I will just tell you the plan is theirs. You know, every country is different. We don't push ourselves to invade on their sovereignty.

Every country is coming up with their own plan. That was their takeaway. But they also know that the militaries—all these military leads know that they are giving their best military advice for the enduring solution from their layered threats, one of them being that is a shared threat of ours is terrorism.

So there lies their ability and their responsibility to come up with their own plans. I am seeing it different from coastal West Africa all the way to Somalia. They all have a different approach. I have to respect that, and how we—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Sure.

General LANGLEY. Then we decide—you know, then we go through our Title 10 review and we double down based on empirical data what has worked in the past and what didn't work. What did work to—

Ms. HOULAHAN. But how do you weave those strategies together or do you just walk away and say everybody has got their own plan and it looks like to be—

General LANGLEY. No.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Excuse me, a bunch of Democrats. You know, we are all going to have a different plan. You don't want that.

You want people to figure out how to work together and us walking away from this is irresponsible unless we feel as though we are walking away with a plan that is unified and not just individual sovereignty.

Am I making sense?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. I appreciate it.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Wittman.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank our witnesses for joining us.

Ms. Thompson, General Kurilla, General Langley, thank you so much for your service. Thanks for all you have done for our nation.

I want to try to maybe draw a line amongst a number of different issues that you all are dealing with. I really think that the combatant commands being there on the front lines probably have the best assessment and understanding of the threat and the timeliness of the threat and then how that needs to be expressed in the assets that we need in order to counter that threat.

I mean, we see our exquisite assets, the ones you have in theater, General Kurilla, General Langley. You see where we—you know, we pulled the Carl Vinson from the East China Sea. We extended the deployment of the Harry Truman.

General Langley, you know that when we had needs there in Africa, whether it is places like Sudan, Morocco, even some of the other events there in the Red Sea.

We see the demand signal go up and then when we'd like to have a crisis response team and an ARG MEU we don't have it or we have to move other assets around.

General Kurilla, you spoke at length about the building threat from one-way attack drones and all you have to do is to look at the aerial photographs of the runways there in Russia and ask the Russians about the impact of one-way attack drones and give the Ukrainians credit.

But the thing that concerns me is that is a scenario that can play in the opposite direction today and tomorrow, and I just don't believe we have the counter-UAS capability that we need.

I want your perspective because I think the COCOMs are closest to the threat, and if you were tomorrow to say these are the things that I need that I can operationalize quickly—I love our exquisite platforms and we need them but they are not coming quickly and they are not coming inexpensively. But there are lots of opportunities with expendables and attritables.

Give me your perspective. If you could give us on your UFR list—if you could say today—today—my top priorities on the UFR list, the way you see the threat as it is today, both of you, what would be your top five priorities to make sure this nation gives you at least a part of the tool set that you need, part of the kit that you would need to counter what you see and how it changes on a daily basis?

General KURILLA. So the greatest risk, Congressman, in the CENTCOM AOR is the unmanned aerial systems and ballistic missiles. So it would be in the detect and kill of counter-UAS to include swarms, large numbers.

You need magazine depth. And then in terms of our air defense assets that are forward deployed you have to be able to protect those from counter-UAS as well. We need to be very mobile.

We need to be able to integrate them into the systems. When I took over three years ago if I walked into a base defense operations

center—that is where they do all the command and control for the base to be able to defend against drones—you would see five systems, five screens, five operators.

Now when you walk in we have been able to integrate that into maybe two screens and two operators but you have now seven systems integrated into there. So we need to really do better at the detect.

We are only going to see the systems get smaller, more lethal, electronic magnetic information—the electromagnetic spectrum when we try and jam them. That is why the Ukraine and Russia went to fiber optics going out to 40 kilometers of fiber optic drones. You can't jam that.

So those are the things I would ask right now is the counter-UAS detect. I think we need to put aerial AESA radars for a low radar cross section to be able to pick up, elevate it, and then ballistic missile defense. Keep ballistic missile defense.

Mr. WITTMAN. General Langley? Yeah, thank you.

General LANGLEY. I think my top three is about the same as Erik Kurilla's. Counter-UAS, integrated air missile defense, and—but I was going to add sense to make sense—ISR. I am at a deficit for ISR across the continent emanating threats. Match capabilities to the threats. That is what Secretary Hegseth told me to do and that is what I am requesting.

But just going further down the list, maritime capability. Like I said, I have said it already but I am just going to bang the drum. We miss the ARG MEU. We miss the Amphibious Readiness Group.

The Marine Expeditionary Units they are ready, but they are sitting on the shore. But we need to fix the ship problem, you know. The three-ship ARG is what is needed.

We can't do heel to toe anymore. Sometimes we are not even 1.0. We need to get back there. I talked to the vice CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] the other day, and he gets it, as well as I talked to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. We missed that in the AFRICOM AOR, you know, from crisis response. We need that sea base forward.

You are right, Congressman, we really did need that, and when Hemedti was going at it with Burhan in Sudan we really needed that offshore to utilize that.

So and then also for a force deterrent it is a show of power to contend with the NETF that the Chinese is running around the purview of the continent.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

This will conclude the open portion of our hearing. We will reconvene in 10 minutes at 12:40 in room 2212 for the classified portion.

[Whereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JUNE 10, 2025

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JUNE 10, 2025

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**KATHERINE THOMPSON PERFORMING THE TEMPORARY DUTIES OF
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
AFFAIRS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST SESSION, 119TH CONGRESS

ON AFRICOM AND CENTCOM POSTURE

JUNE 10, 2025

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

1

Opening

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on our defense posture and policy in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) areas of responsibility (AORs). It is my honor to appear alongside CENTCOM Commander General Michael "Erik" Kurilla and AFRICOM Commander General Michael E. Langley.

Under President Trump's leadership and at the direction of Secretary Hegseth, the Department of Defense (DoD) is putting American interests first in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs. Our purpose in doing so is to protect and advance Americans' security, freedom, and prosperity.

Consistent with this approach, DoD's priorities in the CENTCOM AOR are:

- 1) Defending the U.S. homeland against credible terrorist threats;
- 2) Denying Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; and
- 3) Supporting Israel's ability to defend itself.

And in the AFRICOM AOR, our priorities are:

- 1) Defending the U.S. homeland against credible terrorist threats; and
- 2) Preventing China from expanding access and influence in the African continent in ways that undermine U.S. security and economic interests.

As President Trump has said, the United States will no longer engage in open-ended conflicts, nation-building, or similar efforts. Instead, we will posture and employ America's military forces to deter or defeat threats to our nation in a decisive manner, as the Joint Force did against the Houthis. This is consistent with the President's determination to restore and sustain Peace Through Strength.

At the same time, President Trump has emphasized how important it is for the United States to increase burden-sharing with America's allies and partners. This is especially important in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AOR given the array of threats facing the United States and our allies and partners in these parts of the world. Our European allies also have interests at stake in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs and can be expected to do more to help deter and defend against shared threats.

Middle East

State and non-state actors across the Middle East continue to threaten the U.S. homeland and our forces across the region. Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and its sponsorship of Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), Iraqi militias, and the Houthis underscore its center of gravity in the region. Yet, much of the Iranian proxy network suffered significant setbacks over the last year and a half, presenting an opportunity to enable greater leadership from our willing and capable partners in the region to capitalize on such gains. Iran also continues to methodically advance its nuclear program. The Intelligence Community assesses that Iran is undertaking activities that better position it to produce a nuclear weapon, should the regime decide to do so. As President Trump said, Iran must not acquire a nuclear weapon. While the President has

clearly stated his preference for a diplomatic deal, the Department stands ready to provide credible military options to the President, should negotiations fail.

Since Hamas's brutal assault on Israel on October 7th, Israel continues to demonstrate strength and resolve as it defends its people against threats from Hamas in Gaza, Hizballah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Iran-aligned militias in Iraq, and the Islamic Republic of Iran itself. Israel has stood resolutely against these threats.

After more than a decade of U.S.-led counter-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operations, the physical ISIS caliphate in Syria is destroyed, though ISIS remnants remain active. The United States continues to monitor, and when needed, take action against both ISIS and al-Qaida affiliates in Syria. After the fall of the Assad regime, the former regime's chemical weapon stocks are greatly reduced. The drug trade that flourished under Assad has also collapsed, and we will work with our partners and allies in the region to be vigilant against its return. Iran's network of proxy forces that operated inside of Syria has largely collapsed. Russia has withdrawn substantial military capability from Syria, although it is seeking to retain access to its air and naval base on the coast. As President Trump said when he announced lifting sanctions on Syria, we are giving Damascus an opportunity for a "fresh start." The Syrian government officials have also affirmed their willingness to counter Iran and ISIS.

The security situation in Lebanon has also fundamentally changed in the past year. On November 26, 2024, Israel and Lebanon signed the ceasefire understanding, reducing the threat along Israel's northern border. While the Lebanese government is making progress securing the south from LH, the government must sustain this progress and increase pressure against LH.

Israel

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has stood bravely in the face of Hamas' barbaric terrorist attack, Hizballah's rocket and missile attacks against civilians, Houthi ballistic missile and UAV attacks against civilian targets, and two unprecedented Iranian ballistic missile barrages from Iranian soil. The United States will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel in defense of its security. President Trump has made clear that America is fully committed to Israel's security and has backed up this commitment with clear and decisive action. Just days after inauguration, DoD—under President Trump's leadership—released the shipment of 2,000-lb MK-84 bombs to Israel that were languishing in North Carolina since April 2024 due to the Biden Administration's hold. DoD has also delivered six new F-35s to Israel to reinforce Israel's self-reliance and pursue President Trump's goal of achieving peace through strength. In collaboration with the State Department, who is lead on Foreign Military Sales, DoD is also working to progress cases to support Israel's most pressing munitions replenishment requirements. Furthermore, we are working with Israel to make progress on long-term force modernization initiatives—F-35s, advanced F-15s, and KC-46 refuelers—that will preserve Israel's qualitative military edge.

The President has made it clear that his priority is to bring all hostages home. Hamas can no longer be allowed to threaten Israel, and Hamas must not remain in power in Gaza. Secretary Hegseth and DoD are committed to implementing the President's vision.

Iran

On Iran, the President's policy is clear: he prefers diplomacy to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, but he is prepared to use all levers of national power should Iran choose the wrong path. This policy is articulated in the President's National Security Memorandum reimposing "maximum pressure" on Iran. The memorandum sets the following priorities: 1) denying Iran a nuclear weapon and intercontinental ballistic missiles; 2) neutralizing Iran's terrorist network; and 3) degrading Iran's ability to develop missile technologies, as well as other asymmetric and conventional weapons capabilities. The Department stands ready to provide the President with the best possible military options to prevent Tehran from pursuing a nuclear weapon, should he need them. If directed by the President, DoD maintains the capabilities—alongside our partners—to deter and, if necessary, respond to an Iranian sprint to a nuclear weapon.

Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan

In Lebanon, DoD chairs the "Mechanism," which oversees the implementation of the ceasefire understanding between Israel and Lebanon and is building the capability and capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to be the sole, legitimate guarantor of Lebanese security. Through these efforts, DoD is strongly supporting Israel's right and ability to defend itself, as well as contributing to President Trump's maximum pressure campaign against Iran by degrading Lebanese Hizballah's influence in Lebanon.

Egypt plays an integral role in advancing U.S. movement in the theater, expediting U.S. forces through the Suez Canal. As part of our efforts to increase burden-sharing with our regional partners, the Department of Defense is encouraging Egypt to be more active in addressing instability in its near abroad, particularly Gaza and the Red Sea. Jordan also remains a vital partner in promoting security in the Middle East. The Department of Defense works with Jordan to counter threats that violate Jordanian sovereignty and endanger U.S. and partner forces, to include threats posed by terrorist organizations, including ISIS, and the smuggling of weapons and narcotics across Jordan's borders.

Syria and Iraq

Iraq is a longstanding U.S. partner and played a key role in defeating the ISIS caliphate alongside the broader Defeat ISIS coalition. The Department will continue to evaluate its military presence in Iraq given the reduced ISIS threat after years of successful counterterrorism operations. As announced last September, the United States and Iraq agreed to transition the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS's military operation in Iraq to an enduring bilateral security cooperation partnership by this September. President Trump has also made it clear that he will eliminate terrorists in Syria who threaten the homeland, but that America is not interested in nation-building there. The Secretary of Defense directed the consolidation of U.S. forces in Syria in support of the President's objectives.

Yemen

On March 15, the President launched a large-scale counter-Houthi campaign to restore American freedom of navigation, a stark contrast with previous incremental approaches to Yemen. The operation was designed to be swift and decisive to ensure U.S. forces did not get bogged down in another forever war. Relentless U.S. strikes over the subsequent weeks degraded the Houthis' capabilities and leadership ranks. On May 6, the President announced the end of U.S. strikes against the Houthis after reaching a ceasefire agreement with the group after their commitment to no longer attack U.S. ships.

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and the Arabian Gulf

The relative stability, influence, and capabilities of key Gulf partners provides a strategic opportunity to empower greater Gulf leadership in regional security, a dynamic squarely in U.S. strategic interests.

The United States' 80-year partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a force multiplier for accomplishing our strategic objectives in the Middle East. Built on a longstanding foundation of interoperability and shared threats, our defense partnership offers tremendous opportunities to advance a more stable and secure region, combat terrorism, and advance mutual prosperity. As a regional leader, the Kingdom works closely with us on a range of bilateral, regional, and global priorities. Secretary Hegseth has had numerous conversations with the Saudi Minister of Defense in which he has underscored President Trump's commitment to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon, working with partners on eliminating threats to regional security, and upholding freedom of navigation. As Secretary Hegseth commented, this partnership is a critical center of gravity that helps to integrate and steady an otherwise turbulent region.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a strategic and capable partner that has fought alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen; hosts U.S. forces at Al Dhafra Air Base; and plays a critical role in enhancing regional security. The UAE is an original Abraham Accords partner and maintains strong political, defense, and economic engagement with Israel. DoD is committed to our bilateral defense partnership with the UAE, which focuses on building capacity, capability, and interoperability of our militaries through sales of U.S. defense articles, joint exercises and trainings, and regular exchanges.

More broadly, our Gulf partners serve as key enablers for U.S. operations across the USCENTCOM AOR, including in Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. We actively work with our Gulf partners to enable U.S. regional operations through access, basing, and overflight permissions, coordinate diplomatic and security approaches to regional challenges, share intelligence and early warning, and expand interoperability to address shared threats.

Along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Trump Administration will work with our Gulf partners to advance and provide for the common security and prosperity of the region. We will continue to work with these partners to advance collective approaches to shared threats, particularly in the air and maritime domains. Just last month, Secretary Hegseth signed a Letter

of Intent with the UAE to work to advance our defense relationship in a mutually beneficial fashion under the Major Defense Partner designation. Our work relies on a backbone of interoperability enabled by U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS), which currently exceeds \$220 billion in total case value. The Department of Defense remains committed to working with our Gulf partners to enhance their capabilities to successfully defend their territory, people, and the tens of thousands of U.S. citizens living in the Gulf through intelligence, early warning, and training.

At the same time, we will support diplomatic efforts to advance future Saudi-Israeli normalization of relations, which President Trump has publicly noted holds significant potential to finally bring peace in the Middle East. Such an outcome would bring enormous economic opportunities to the United States and the Middle East, building on the success of the first Trump Administration's historic Abraham Accords.

Africa

In Africa, the most pressing security challenges include potential threats to the U.S. homeland emanating from terrorist activity as well as China's ambitions to expand its military power projection capabilities via overseas basing and naval access as well as ambition to establish dominance over critical mineral resources on the continent.

To address those security issues, DoD has two priorities in the AFRICOM AOR. One is to disrupt, degrade, and deny the activities of Africa-based terrorist groups that have both the capability and intent to strike the U.S. homeland or U.S. personnel and facilities. To this end, U.S. forces stand ready to engage and neutralize terrorists through direct action. At the same time, the Department is working with African nations to grow their operational independence to counter shared threats.

At the same time, DoD will work to prevent and counter efforts by China to position its own forces in the AFRICOM AOR in ways that threaten our ability to defend the U.S. homeland and deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. We will also work closely with interagency partners to counter Chinese efforts to exclude the United States from critical markets on the continent.

DoD's largest force posture location in Africa is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, which hosts 3,300 DoD military personnel and civilians that support AFRICOM, CENTCOM, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) operations. This base, along with smaller enduring locations provide support to contingency operations, episodic military-to-military engagements, and crisis response.

Horn of Africa

In the Horn of Africa, ISIS-Somalia presents a near-term threat to American national security. DoD carries out direct action against terrorist targets in coordination with the Somali government and supports local forces conducting counter-ISIS operations. Meanwhile, Al Shabaab remains al Qaeda's wealthiest affiliate and poses a persistent threat to U.S. partners in the region. Since

February 2025, DoD has conducted over 30 strikes in Somalia, denying sanctuary for credible terrorist threats, degrading their ability to attack the U.S. homeland, and helping local partners take and hold terrain in their fight to defeat these groups.

DoD's counterterrorism efforts in East Africa are complemented by regional security partners such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, and Egypt through bilateral troop deployments, and other allies and partners from Europe and the Middle East. To counter Al Shabaab expansion, DoD is working to support a resource-sustainable approach by increasing burden sharing in Somalia by capable and engaged international partners to address shared threats.

Sahel and West Africa

In the Sahel, where Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates are destabilizing Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and attempting to expand their operations to coastal states along the Gulf of Guinea. Al-Qaeda and ISIS also exploit under-governed spaces and markets in the Sahel and West Africa for illicit trafficking and resource extraction, which fund terrorist activities both within and outside the region. For our European allies, the effects of Sahel and West Africa exploitation for terrorism often hit closest to home for them. To prevent the expansion of these terrorist threats, DoD is focused on strengthening the operational independence of partners in West Africa that are committed to degrading and containing terrorist threats. Additionally, DoD is seeking opportunities to increase burden-sharing with European allies who also have a vested interest in countering terrorists operating in these sub-regions.

North Africa

In North Africa, DoD's strong defense relationships with Tunisia and Morocco are crucial for countering terrorism in the region. These countries independently disrupt terrorist networks and share the burden of strengthening the counterterrorism capabilities of their neighbors across Africa.

Deterring China and Other Adversaries

China continues to seek the support of African countries for establishing maritime points of presence, building upon its naval support base in Djibouti, to advance its goal of developing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into a force that can project and sustain military power well beyond the Indo-Pacific, including in ways that could threaten the Joint Force's ability to defend the U.S. homeland or deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. DoD is also concerned by Beijing's efforts to gain dominance over contested critical minerals necessary for defense production, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Enhancing our partnerships in Africa and limiting China's influence and ability to project power will be critical to hedge against these threats and protect and secure U.S. interests in Africa. DoD counters the military activities of China by offering African partners an alternative model of empowerment to Beijing's predatory practices. DoD works with African partners on shared objectives to help keep Americans safe, creating space for U.S. companies and investment.

Closing

To conclude, I want to emphasize the important role of Congress in enabling the Department of Defense to achieve our objectives in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs. Your support and engagement have been – and will continue to be – critical to advancing peace through strength.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of DoD and Secretary Hegseth. I appreciate your continued support to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and civilians who work every day in service of the American people.

KATHERINE THOMPSON

Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense International Security Affairs, Office of the Secretary of Defense



Katherine Thompson has spent over six years working on Capitol Hill in the national security space, most recently serving as the National Security Advisor to Senator Mike Lee (R-UT). In her capacity as National Security Advisor, Katherine led the Senator's national security team and advised on all matters relating to foreign policy, national defense, and intelligence. Katherine started her career on Capitol Hill with Senator Lee as a Legislative Correspondent in 2018 and became the Senator's Military Legislative Assistant in 2020.

Katherine has also served as Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) prior to returning to Senator Lee's office in 2023.

Katherine's writings on national security policy have appeared in National Review and the Federalist. Katherine received a BA in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from the King's College NYC and is currently a candidate for a Master's Degree in War, History, and Diplomacy from King's College London's Department of War Studies.

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June 10, 2025

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
GENERAL MICHAEL “ERIK” KURILLA
COMMANDER, US CENTRAL COMMAND**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED
SERVICES ON THE POSTURE OF US CENTRAL
COMMAND**

**A STRATEGIC WINDOW
IN THE CENTRAL REGION**



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I. INTRODUCTION

Our Partners have described the events over the last twenty months as an earthquake; one that began on 7 October 2023 and continued to produce aftershocks across the region. After HAMAS's attack on Israel, Iran operationalized its entire proxy network and arsenal of standoff capabilities – two pillars of their strategic approach – in pursuit of one goal: to seize a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the region to its advantage. The USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) has experienced its most highly kinetic period than at any other time in the past decade. American servicemembers have come under direct fire by nearly 400 unmanned aerial systems, 350 rockets, 50 ballistic missiles, and 30 cruise missiles launched by Iran-backed groups. We have been at the brink of regional war several times with the first state-on-state attacks between Iran and Israel in their history. In the Red Sea, Houthi attempts to kill Americans operating in the Red Sea necessitated an aggressive response to protect our sailors and mariners and restore freedom of navigation. This is while Tehran is continuing to progress towards a nuclear weapons program – threatening catastrophic ramifications across the region and beyond.

The fall of the Assad Regime may be the most significant event in the region in several years. What was a puppet state of Iran, a superhighway of weapons for Lebanese Hezbollah, and a strategic foothold for Russia is now very much in flux as a new government attempts to assert control and develop a governing structure to stabilize a country that has been locked in civil war for almost 14 years. Global violent extremists are attempting to exploit this turmoil along with the porous border areas

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between Afghanistan and Pakistan to sustain their networks and regenerate capability. ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) and ISIS in Syria continue to demonstrate their capability, will, and intent to strike beyond Middle Eastern and Central Asian borders and against Western interests – including the U.S. Homeland. On 22 March 2024, ISIS-K operatives committed the worst terror attack on Russian soil since 2004 when they killed 144 civilians at the Crocus City Hall music venue in Moscow. Authorities continue to disrupt plots against the United States, including planned mass shootings at a Jewish Center in Brooklyn and polling locations in Oklahoma City on Election Day. The tragic New Years Day attack in New Orleans that killed 14 people was committed by an individual inspired by ISIS ideology and the group's relentless propaganda machine.

However, from this cacophony of disorder emerges opportunity. Iran is in a weaker position than at any point in the past forty years. In the past year, Lebanese Hezbollah was decimated, Iran's vaunted missile program and air defense were defeated, and Soleimani's vision of a Shia Crescent from Iran, through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, was shattered as the Syrian regime collapsed. Violent extremists are under relentless pressure as USCENTCOM's sustained campaign against ISIS removed hundreds of ISIS fighters and leaders from battlefields in Iraq and Syria. Assad's downfall also provides us with a historic opportunity to close the dark chapter of the Assad regime's chemical weapons program and ensure it does not pose a future threat. Finally, the pitfalls of Russian and Chinese influence were laid bare to our partners across the region as Russia is reaping a bitter harvest after supporting Assad's atrocities against the Syrian people for over a decade, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cynically exploits the Iranian-backed violence in the Red Sea.

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In contrast, our deep military-to-military have proven a catalyst to the wide-ranging opportunities that now lay before us. Our relationships provide the access, basing, and overflight (ABO) behind the Middle East Air Defense (MEAD) initiative that helped defeat Iranian aggression and continues to set conditions for the rest of the Region's defense. Our Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Partners are deployed to former Hezbollah strongholds to prevent the group's resurgence and bring hope to their country for the first time in a generation. Our Partners in Iraq and Syria remain crucial to Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS) efforts, battling the terrorist group across their countries and enabling the repatriation of ISIS prisoners and displaced persons. These successes are the result of years of continuous engagement with the Region and its commitment to integrate for a more stable and prosperous future – for the region and for the United States.

The United States now stands in a strategic window of opportunity to secure its interests in the Central Region: protect the Homeland, secure our economic prosperity, ensure freedom of navigation, and prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. U.S. Central Command's approach of People, Partners, and Innovation puts our strategic advantages at the forefront. It was our People who left the safety of their bunkers on 13 April 2024 to fuel, arm, and fly their F-15s into a fusillade of missiles and UAVs. It was our Partners who have maintained the pressure on ISIS, helped repatriate thousands of at-risk internally displaced persons (IDPs), and enabled sensitive dialogue and diplomacy to achieve a ceasefire in Lebanon and hold the door open to peace in Gaza. And it was our approach to Innovation, in concert with our Partners, that gave us our leading edge on the battlefield, protecting our forces and enabling us to optimize our limited force posture to have an outsized return on investment. Slightly more than one

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percent of the Joint Force lives and fights in the USCENTCOM AOR, and their actions across the Region over the past year have prevented broader conflict – even regional war – multiple times. We now have the opportunity to relook our approach, reset our posture, and reinvigorate our whole of government policy efforts to capitalize on the unprecedented opportunity before us.

II. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Central Region is home to significant U.S. national interests. No other Region witnesses a fraction of the scale of potential external operations (EXOPS) by violent extremists who remain intent on attacking their enemies abroad. This includes ISIS, which is actively seeking opportunities to reconstitute. If our sustained counterterrorism (CT) pressure is reduced, the intelligence community continues to assess ISIS in Syria – exploiting the turmoil caused first by the Syrian Civil War and now the post-Assad environment – retains the ability to regenerate their fighting force and seize territorial control within two years. ISIS could also capitalize on the instability to get its hands on any remnants of the Assad regime's chemical weapons program.

An estimated 2,000 of its fighters remain at large across Iraq and Syria while 8,000 are detained in facilities run by our Syrian Kurdish partners, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and another 20,000 are incarcerated by our partners in Iraq. The potential next generation of ISIS – a portion of approximately 34,000 internally displaced persons – awaits in IDP camps, ideal conditions for recruitment. ISIS is planning and executing insidious campaigns of radicalization among this vulnerable population and is working to break free its army in detention. Far to the East, ISIS-K remains an active branch in Central and South Asia (CASA), presenting a formidable

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global EXOPS threat that requires a network of partners – such as Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan – to combat. The bad actors who call the Region home are committed to harming Americans, but their methods are not limited to direct attacks on our streets.

Freedom of maritime navigation, which has underpinned American economic prosperity for more than 80 years came under assault by an Iranian backed terror organization that controls territory astride the strategic Bab al-Mandeb (BaM) chokepoint. It threatened the American mariners and sailors who've long secured our country's claim in the global economy and kept our adversaries at bay. The Ansar Allah movement, known widely as the Houthis, believed it could hold the world economy hostage and kill the innocent mariners who are exerting their right to traverse these waters and the American sailors who are defending them.

Meanwhile, Russia's shadow fleet of sanctions violators and Chinese ships sailing this critical Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sea lane took full advantage of the Houthis' maritime terrorism. While most of the world's commercial shipping companies rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, our competitors continued to enjoy safe passage, shorter shipping routes, and lesser cost of business. While a ceasefire has been achieved at this moment, a dangerous precedent has been set. The Houthis' tactics offer a template for challenging American strength elsewhere – freedom of navigation has long been key to deterring Chinese belligerent and revanchist aims in the Pacific. A fraying of this principle in the Red Sea could endanger other strategic chokepoints around the globe and threaten American access to markets.

In the Central Region, the U.S. economy benefits from direct linkages to our Partners that bolster American industries at home. Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United

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Arab Emirates account for hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign direct investment (FDI). Together, they support over seventy-five thousand American jobs across the transportation, aerospace, and software and information technology industries, and they have pledged to invest hundreds of billions more, including in critical artificial intelligence research and development (R&D). This complements their current combined \$5.8B contributions to American R&D initiatives and \$9.4B contributions to American exports. Egypt is America's largest export market for goods and services in Africa – our trade surplus is driven by over \$5B in exports of oil seeds, mineral fuels, plastics, cereals, and other goods. Texas and Louisiana are the United States' two biggest exporters, each exporting nearly \$1B in goods annually to Egyptian ports.

The Region holds nearly half of the world's proven oil and natural gas reserves. Middle Eastern crude still accounts for 10% of U.S. oil imports. While the global economy continues to cope with Red Sea terrorism, the potential for major disruptions and consumer impact remains high. The Region includes three of the world's eight strategic waterways – the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal, and BaM, which in total see nearly a third of the world's container shipping and seaborne oil trade and are increasingly vulnerable to disruption by state and non-state actors. Chronic instability and the newly established precedent of state conflict can quickly send the Region careening toward an all-consuming war, which threatens catastrophic disruptions to global oil markets and financial costs for consumers around the world.

Finally, Iran already has an active chemical weapons program developing pharmaceutical-based agents for offensive purposes, and there is the looming threat of nuclear armament. Stockpiles of enriched uranium continue to accumulate in facilities across the country under the guise of a civilian nuclear program. As evidenced by the

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most recent International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report that shows Tehran virtually doubling its enrichment capabilities over the past six months, Iran continues to gain knowledge and skills directly linked to nuclear weapon production. As one of our Partners commented, a nuclear-armed Iran would change the Middle East overnight and forever, potentially setting off a regional arms race with catastrophic consequences. It is within this context that USCENTCOM's Lines of Effort (LOEs): Deter Iran, Counter Violent Extremist Organizations, and Compete Strategically advance our national interests for a stronger, more secure, and more prosperous America.

Deterring Iran

Since the 1979 revolution, Iran's strategic objectives have remained consistent: preserve the Regime, drive an ideological alternative to the West, and destroy the State of Israel. In direct support of these objectives, Iran's strategic approach to the region has long been defined by three key pillars: (1) the use of proxy forces to project power throughout the region, (2) the development and deployment of standoff capabilities to threaten the region, and (3) the threat of developing a nuclear weapon.

The last twenty months have seen the foundations of this approach systematically undone. HAMAS and Lebanese Hezbollah, two of the most prolific agents of Tehran's program of state-sponsored terror, have suffered devastating losses. Nearly all their senior leaders have been killed – including Yahya Sinwar, chief architect of HAMAS's barbarism on 7 October, and his brother and successor Mohammed Sinwar; Hassan Nasrallah and his henchmen Fuad Shukr and Ibrahim Aqil, Hezbollah lifers implicated in the 1983 U.S. Embassy and barracks bombings that killed 258

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Americans; and Ismail Haniyeh, HAMAS's political leader who was killed while under Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) protection in Tehran.

HAMAS and Hezbollah battlefield losses have mounted while the collapse of the Assad Regime denied them a crucial lifeline of weapons, advisors, and logistical support. This dealt a massive blow to a terror network who, for decades, has targeted and killed hundreds of U.S. personnel across the Region. But while battered in the Levant, the ITN still draws breath. Its Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq threaten to undermine the government, showing their fealty to Tehran while undercutting the Iraqi Security Forces and legitimate Popular Mobilization Forces working toward a better Iraqi future. Most significantly, Iran firmly established its new front line against the West squarely in Yemen, where the ITN fully embraced the Houthis as its newest stalwart.

The Houthis are an opportunist terrorist organization with an extremist ideology and though they hold territory, they are unable and unwilling to govern in a way that benefits the Yemeni people who suffer economic hardship, acute food insecurity, and health crises. In the months following October 7, 2023, the Houthis conducted over 300 attacks on U.S. Navy and international merchant ships, employing hundreds of Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBMs) and UAVs, and dozens of Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs). In addition to targeting shipping, the Houthis directly targeted Israel, launching over 90 attacks using dozens of Land-Attack Cruise Missiles (LACMs) and Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and over a hundred UAVs against civilian targets.

The BaM became the only maritime chokepoint in the world requiring a deliberate military operation to ensure safe passage, and now the Houthi threat has metastasized beyond the BaM itself by making inroads with like-minded groups on the coast of Africa.

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It is now a regional scourge, having embedded itself as a key player in illicit networks up and down Africa's Red Sea coast and a useful vector for Iranian efforts to project influence beyond the Arabian Gulf. This nexus of state and non-state expansionist terror threatens the permanent presence of Iran-aligned groups on both sides of a key shipping lane that can shut off trade at the behest of its extremist agenda, complementing Iran's current presence on the Strait of Hormuz. Houthi exceptions for Chinese and Russian sailors as well as the strategic partnership between Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran mean this would disproportionately affect American and Western interests. Russia's share of Suez transits increased significantly relative to countries targeted by the Houthis. Through this designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), Iran retains the ability to close two strategic chokepoints and significantly impact nearly half of global commerce while benefiting U.S. competitors.

This left the United States on the horns of a dilemma: cede this space to a terrorist group supported by Iran or continue to accept the risk to force every time we sail this narrow strait. On 15 March, in response to the hundreds of missiles and UAVs fired at our forces, we began a large-scale operation against the Houthis. Our actions against these Iranian-backed terrorists were focused on reopening these sea lines of communication to our shipping and reestablishing deterrence in the region. The sustained, aggressive series of operations supporting a whole of government effort – not episodic and intermittent strikes – was designed to degrade Houthi leadership and capabilities, deny them the ability to impede merchant shipping, and ultimately compel them to cease their attacks. Following significant losses to their ranks and infrastructure, which had been repurposed away from the Yemeni people to support Iran's hegemonic ambitions, the Houthis agreed to cease maritime attacks.

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USCENTCOM is closely monitoring their adherence, and we stand ready to defend America's sailors and mariners as freedom of navigation returns to the Region.

As its traditional proxy strategy fell into disarray, Tehran twice decided to directly enter the conflict and expose the region to the second pillar of their strategic approach – their vast stockpiles of standoff capabilities. On 13 April 2024, the Iranians launched a massive barrage of more than 100 ballistic missiles, over 150 one-way attack suicide drones, and over 30 cruise missiles – the largest combined barrage of these weapons in history at that time – and again on 1 October they fired more than 200 ballistic missiles at Israeli bases and cities, each time with the intent to cause mass casualties. Both times they were defeated. In a sad bit of irony, for all the purported support to the Palestinians, the only casualty of almost 500 projectiles fired by Iran was a Palestinian from Gaza living in Jericho.

Our Partnerships in the Region proved crucial in supporting USCENTCOM's MEAD initiative, which blunted the attack and saved countless lives. Iran then suffered a devastating counterattack by the Israeli Air Force, which easily penetrated Iranian airspace and destroyed their strategic air defense, exposing the Regime and laying bare their weakness. While Iran retains thousands of ballistic missiles and attack drones that threaten every American base and every partner in the Region, these experiences have forced Iran to reassess its approach to projecting power.

Iranian leadership understands their acute vulnerability, and the precision of Israel's response demonstrates that Iran will remain critically exposed to future Israeli operations, even if their former defenses are reconstituted. Significantly weakened, Iran finds itself with fewer options. In addition to an active chemical weapons program, there

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is one remaining pillar the Regime may consider its best chance at restoring deterrence and imposing its will on the Region – the threat of developing a nuclear weapon.

The IAEA uses 90% enrichment as the benchmark for weapons-grade uranium, and it considers 25 kg of 90% enriched uranium enough to construct a simple nuclear weapon. The IAEA estimates current Iranian stockpiles to include over 400 kg of 60% enriched uranium – almost double of what it was just six months ago. This is mere steps from reaching the 90% threshold for weaponization. Should the Regime decide to sprint to a nuclear weapon, it is estimated that current stockpiles and the available centrifuges across several enrichment plants are sufficient to produce its first 25 kg of weapons-grade material in roughly one week and enough for up to ten nuclear weapons in three weeks.

The Regime funds its nuclear enrichment program and other destabilizing activities through a lucrative oil trade. Last year, Iran is estimated to have generated over \$34 billion in crude exports despite the imposition of Western sanctions. The Regime has established a multifaceted sanction evasion network in an industry already rife with intentionally deceptive practices including fraudulent certificates of origin, flags of convenience, and shell companies. More than 85% of all illicit Iranian oil exports in 2024 went to the CCP with an average of 1.5 million barrels per day, accounting for 10% of total Chinese oil imports. Because sanctioned Iranian oil is often sold below prevailing market prices, Beijing can purchase Iranian crude at a discounted price. This has incentivized Beijing and Tehran to develop a shadow oil trade system that generates an economic lifeline for Iran and competitive prices for China to satiate its high domestic demand. After the G7 allies capped the price of Russian oil at 60 dollars

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per barrel, Russia adopted Iran's illicit export methods and joined its co-conspirators' network.

Opportunities for Deterring Iran

Iran is seeking to recover its losses and reset its strategic calculus in the region. Sustainable deterrence with Iran requires complementary military and interagency efforts that demonstrate the will to hold Iran accountable. Applying pressure across all elements of national power – Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic – and implementing a holistic approach with our Partners targeted at the expanse of the entire Iranian threat will maximize our effects.

Kinetic action and the designation of the Houthi organization as an FTO are necessary steps to eliminate the expansion of their weapons, extreme ideology, and campaign of maritime terror and remain so in the event of a breakdown in the ceasefire. However, there remain many options beyond the military domain to alter the Houthis' calculus. This includes efforts in the information domain, in counter-smuggling operations, using economic leverages, and supporting the legitimate Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) and our Partners to effectively share the burden of protecting Red Sea trade. Only through a whole of government approach, of which military operations are a key component, will a sustained return of freedom of navigation be guaranteed.

In the Levant, there is significant and timely opportunity to curtail the ITN's ability to threaten our hard-fought progress toward regional integration, improve burden sharing, and right size our force posture. A coordinated international effort to reinforce the LAF, who are working to secure the Southern Litani Sector from destabilizing non-state actors, is crucial to achieving an acceptable and sustainable cessation of

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hostilities. Support for key security cooperation efforts will enable the LAF to shoulder the burden. There is no alternative in Lebanon to the LAF, and if we seek a Lebanon that is not under the thumb of Hezbollah, we must support President Aoun in his efforts to reassert control by legitimate Lebanese authorities.

While still nascent, confidence building measures undertaken by the Syrian Government continue to signal an intention to root-out malicious actors from within its borders. These include serious efforts to remove Iranian aligned threat groups from Syria that threaten its fragile stability. Supporting Levantine Partners, such as Jordan, provides mutually reinforcing lines of defense against Iran's future designs on the Region, further disrupting the Regime's goal of reestablishing a pipeline of weapons and IRGC advisors to the Mediterranean.

For their part, Iran's state-backers seek to avoid escalation and prefer to balance their relationships with other partners across the region and exploit the chaos that Iran and its proxy network promote. Recent events have put pressure on this careful balancing act and exposed fissures in Iran's relationships. Israel's systematic destruction of strategic air defenses and targeting of Iranian proxies has not only damaged Iranian legitimacy but also that of Russia. It exposed the ineffectiveness of Russian-provided defensive systems while preoccupation with the war on Ukraine curtailed Moscow's ability to resupply Iran and save the Assad Regime.

We now have an unprecedented opportunity to advance the vision of a prosperous and integrated Middle East in which U.S. national interests are advanced and Iran's violent attempts to upend this peaceful order are defeated. Key to this is integrating and harnessing Partner capabilities and increasing collaboration and cooperation that connects the Gulf Partners to the Levant in a substantive way that

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shares the burden of regional defense. There has never been a greater opportunity to drive home these relationships and holistically counter Iran's behavior.

Countering VEOs

Nearly half of United States-Designated FTOs are based in the Central Region. Further, over 90% of the organizations with capability and intent to attack the Homeland operate in the USCENTCOM AOR – a powerful reminder of why USCENTCOM defends the Homeland forward. These groups represent a kaleidoscope of extremist ideologies. A significant portion espouse or draw inspiration from radical Khomeinist thought emanating from Tehran. This includes the Houthis, the Iranian Aligned Militia Groups (IAMGs) in Iraq, and Lebanese Hezbollah – all of whom have varying degrees of religious linkages to Tehran but nonetheless have embraced the Regime's extremist ideology. Together, these groups form the backbone of the ITN. Others, like the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Haqqani Network, draw on fundamentalist Deobandism, a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam originating in Deoband, India. It was the Haqqani Network who partnered with fledgling al-Qaeda jihadists to repel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, a watershed in the proliferation of Salafi Jihadism across the Region.

In 1964, Muslim Brotherhood leading member Sayyid Qutb published his seminal work *Milestones*, written during a ten-year prison sentence in Egypt. It was a landmark in violent extremism and firmly established Qutb as the architect of modern Salafi Jihadism. The views espoused by Qutb provided a philosophical framework that would underpin the actions of jihadist groups from Gaza to Afghanistan well into the twenty-first century. In the upheaval following the Arab-Israeli wars, the Muslim Brotherhood

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established itself in branches and offshoots across a number of Arab states appealing to populations disillusioned by consistent Israeli victories. Though it is far from its apex of power, its ideology persists and continues to shape both political and violent Islamist movements in the Central Region and beyond. HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, both Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood offshoots, are the group's most well-known direct progeny. But transnational jihadist figures such as Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, all former Brotherhood members, were also inspired by Qutb's writings. To this day, Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and their affiliates continue to draw on the ideas incubated in the early history of the Muslim Brotherhood to justify attacking their fellow Muslims, people of other Religions, foreigners, and governments.

As it was during the tumult of the mid-twentieth century, the Middle East continues to be the geopolitical epicenter of transnational jihadism. The intractability of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its turbocharged violence over the last year act as a unifying *raison d'être* for VEOs to use in connection with their own local causes. Al-Shabaab, for example, consistently co-opts HAMAS messaging to connect its own struggle to that of the Palestinians. Not only does this further propagate and amplify HAMAS messaging, but it also provides a useful recruitment tool among Somalis touched by events in the Central Region. The conflict continues to be a powerful motivator for violent acts against the American Homeland. The foiled 2024 terror plot against a Jewish center in Brooklyn was planned by a Pakistani national to coincide with the one-year anniversary of HAMAS's 7 October attack. New York was chosen because of its large Jewish population with the would-be gunman himself stating, *"even if we don't attack an event, we could rack up easily a lot of Jews."*

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These terrorists continue to plot, train, recruit, and operate abroad, exploiting vulnerable populations, porous borders, disparate economic conditions, and longstanding sources of enmity and violence. USCENTCOM plays a key role in the forward defense of the Homeland against these threats. In calendar year 2024, CJTF-OIR conducted 432 ground operations and 52 kinetic strikes in Iraq and Syria against ISIS and its affiliates. These efforts have resulted in 154 ISIS killed in action, and the detention of 521 ISIS fighters. Our sustained CT pressure has driven ISIS leaders in Iraq and Syria to seek refuge in rural areas, even cave complexes, as they try to reorganize and regenerate combat power.

ISIS and ISIS-K continue to operate in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and demonstrate the ability to direct, inspire, and enable terrorists worldwide. Turmoil in post-Assad Syria could provide ISIS the opportunity to regenerate command and control capability and refill their ranks as a distracted SDF, under pressure from multiple fronts, could result in reduced security for ISIS detention facilities and an increased risk of prison breaks. It could enable a deterioration of conditions within IDP camps and a halt in repatriations, leaving residents nowhere else to turn. Just as ISIS exploited the chaos in the early days of Assad's war on his own people, the Regime's fall also provides a window to rebuild – first in the desert, then small towns and cities, and eventually threatening our Iraqi partners.

ISIS-K has been disrupted through pressure by both the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, though they continue to retain a significant network and freedom of maneuver in the tribal areas. These sanctuaries will give ISIS fighters the space to plan attacks against its 'near enemy' – our Partners in the Region – and its ultimate 'far

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enemy' – the U.S. Homeland. I assess that despite its setbacks, ISIS retains the capability and intent to attack western interests abroad with little to no warning.

Opportunities for Countering VEOs

Our Partners in the Region are the cornerstone for counter-VEO operations. Their willingness to host U.S. and Partner forces and devote CT resources has been instrumental in extending our operational reach to find, fix, and finish VEO violent extremist leadership and personnel and interdict materiel destined for use in attacking civilians. This posture disrupts terror plots against our forces and the Homeland in their earliest stages before finding their way to American shores. Sustaining and even adding operational depth by strengthening our Partnerships and exploring new opportunities is key to maintaining our position of advantage amid the changing strategic landscape. Furthermore, the United States' support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as it works with the new Syrian authorities to identify, secure, and destroy any remnants of the Assad regime's chemical weapons program is crucial to prevent these weapons from falling into terrorist hands and promote regional security.

Our small presence in Iraq and Syria has been an effective mechanism to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. Our Partnership with the SDF has liberated over 7.7 million people of all ethnic backgrounds in Northeast Syria and over 110,000 square kilometers from the barbarity of living under the ISIS Caliphate. By denying safe haven to freely plan, train, and move resources, this sustained pressure has disrupted an untold number of plots against the United States and its allies.

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USCENTCOM is in the process of optimizing its footprint in Syria, and continued direct engagement with leadership in the Region is necessary to preserve our counter-VEO mission, protect our SDF partners, and sustain the reach of the global D-ISIS coalition. This includes with the Syrian Interim Authorities who continue to take positive steps against ISIS, including targeted raids against ISIS-affiliated cells. Our Kurdish Partners have been on the front lines of the D-ISIS fight for over a decade, losing over 11,000 of their own, and they remain actively engaged against ISIS remnants. They also maintain security of over 8,000 ISIS detainees, essentially a division's worth of ISIS fighters waiting to be broken free – as a comparison, it took 5,000 ISIS fighters to seize Mosul. Developing an interagency plan to ensure a path for the continued security of ISIS detention facilities and expeditious repatriation for the roughly 36,600 Iraqi, Syrian, and foreign nationals within IDP camps, reduces risk to a manageable level.

In Iraq, USCENTCOM and our Iraqi Security Forces Partners continue to disrupt ISIS's ability to plan, organize, and conduct attacks against Iraqi civilians, as well as U.S. citizens, allies, and partners throughout the Region and beyond. Last year in August, a partnered raid in Western Iraq resulted in the death of 14 ISIS operatives, including four leaders. In October, Iraqi forces conducted precision airstrikes and follow-on raids that killed 11 ISIS operatives and senior leaders while uncovering suicide belts, weapons, explosives, and ammunition. In March of this year, the relentless pursuit of terrorist leaders paid off in the killing of the Global ISIS number two leader, Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rifai – alias "Abu Khadijah" – after a precision strike in Iraq's Anbar Province in cooperation with Iraqi Intelligence and Security Forces. USCENTCOM will continue to work through the members of the global D-ISIS Coalition and with our Iraqi Partners and honor our commitments to the transition of Operation

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INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) to a bilateral security partnership in a way that allows the continued success of the D-ISIS Partnership and prevents the group's resurgence. The collapse of the Assad Regime and potential for volatility on Iraq's Western border underscores the importance of a responsible transition with special attention paid to appropriate levels of security cooperation.

Opportunity also exists in CASA where we can expand counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan and other Central Asian partners. ISIS-K and other VEOs violent extremists with EXOPs aspirations continue to find sanctuary in the Region and threaten the Homeland. The actions of our Pakistani partners that led to the arrest and extradition of Mohammad Sharifullah, the ISIS-K planner behind the 26 August 2021 suicide attack at Abbey Gate that killed 13 U.S. service members and approximately 160 civilians, highlights Pakistan's value as a Partner in countering CASA terror EXOPs threats worldwide, and it will only increase as the Taliban continues to face security challenges within its borders. Other partners, such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, all are managing the risk of threats emanating from Afghanistan's borders and are seeking to expand their cooperation with the United States. Expanding on this opportunity could create additional opportunity against ISIS-K networks in the Region.

Competing Strategically

The CCP continues its methodical campaign of making inroads, expanding ties, and making relative gains at the expense of American influence. It's "1+2+3" cooperation framework, announced by Chairman Xi Jinping in 2014, first outlined its engagement strategy with Arab states. Its focus on energy cooperation, infrastructure and trade, and technology highlight the preeminence of economic interests in China's

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early approach to the Central Region. This framework was actualized by the CCP's flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which now has investments in 20 of the Region's 21 countries.

The mutual economic interests between the Central Region and China are undeniable. 2023 saw over \$444.2B in trade with the Region including 46% and 39% of total Chinese oil and gas imports, respectively. Since 2005, China has contributed over \$400B in commercial investments, helping fuel the Region's ambitious infrastructure projects and development goals. Though economic interests remain the primary driver of engagement, increased Chinese influence and leverage have served as a mechanism for attempts to directly challenge American security interests.

Compared to 2016, the year the CCP published its "Arab Policy Paper," which devoted only a small section to security cooperation, recent years have seen aggressive attempts to expand security influence and access across the Region. This includes the Chinese-brokered 2023 diplomatic agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a test case for China's Global Security Initiative (GSI), its security-based complement to the BRI. It also includes an expanded military footprint: a base in Djibouti, larger numbers of senior People's Liberation Army (SLA) general officers serving as Senior Defense Officials (SDO) or Defense Attachés, and unprecedented Naval port calls by the PLA Navy. Most significantly, China has achieved an 80% increase in military sales over the last decade, owed in large part to the relative ease by which our Partners are able to purchase from China's inexpensive – no strings attached – catalogue of hardware.

Still, the scant dividends of these efforts lay bare the CCP's unwillingness and inability to contribute to regional security beyond empty platitudes. While signing "comprehensive security partnerships" with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, it

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fuels the aggressive behavior that threatens these very countries. The CCP remains close with the Iranian Regime, purchasing its sanctioned oil through a vast network of illicit maritime trade. This undercuts the U.S.-led sanctions designed to alter Iranian behavior and sap the strength of its destructive proxy network that subverts governments around the Region. China's economic lifeline bankrolls this activity, which undermines the security of its own partners including Iraq, a target of Beijing's financial manipulation. Despite its ability to project power from its base in Djibouti, the CCP preferred to ignore Houthi maritime terrorism and allow it to continue in the Red Sea because it directly benefited from the disruption to rival maritime trade. This is despite the grave harm it inflicted on Egypt's economy, another one of its "comprehensive strategic partners."

The Russian Federation is mostly repositioning from the upheaval in Syria and sudden downfall of longtime ally Bashar al-Assad. Russia's willingness to save the Assad Regime in 2015 contributed to the untold suffering of millions of innocent Syrians. This continued until President Putin, so weakened by his battlefield losses in Ukraine, was capable of only offering an escape route to Russia. Bashar al-Assad fled the wrath of his own people – the very Syrians his family had brutalized since 1971, and the value of Russian partnership was on full display for the world to see.

For more than ten years, supporting Assad's atrocities was a price Russia was willing to pay to maintain a foothold in the Region, to include one of its largest bases outside its own territory in Tartus and a warm water port on NATO's eastern maritime flank. Assad's fall not only cut off Iran's strategic lines of communication, but it also severed the bulwark of Russia's position in the Middle East. Moscow is now trying desperately to retain a foothold in Syria, and the new government is in the process of

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negotiating terms with them. To mitigate this impact, Russia continues to expand its bilateral ties with Iran, another long-term partner of the Assad family, and this growing military partnership offers a mutually beneficial counterbalance. In 2024, Iran delivered several hundred ballistic missiles to Russia and built manufacturing capability which provides thousands of one-way-attack UAVs. This bolstered Iran's efforts to reduce diplomatic isolation, sustain economic activity amid sanctions constraints, and boosting development of its defense industrial base and military capabilities. In early April 2025, Russia's lower house of parliament ratified a new, two-decade strategic partnership with Iran which Presidents Putin and Pezeshkian agreed to in January. The agreement purports to expand cooperation in security, energy, trade, and nuclear energy.

Opportunities for Competing Strategically

In Syria, leading a peaceful reconciliation with the various warring factions and demonstrating a willingness for broader regional integration will be key in shaping a productive path forward for the new government and the Syrian people. An engagement strategy that does not jeopardize these nascent efforts and throw the country back into chaos can encourage progress. A stable Syria that does not allow opportunistic actors to once again brutalize the population or foment a hotbed of extremism is in the best interest of the United States.

Likewise, strengthening our Partnerships throughout Central and South Asia can present the United States as a reliable security partner, and we have critical overlapping security interests with our Partners there, especially in the D-ISIS fight. By further enabling our CT partnerships, specifically against ISIS-K, we can continue to leverage their physical and cultural proximity to the network, which has proven our most

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productive vector against ISIS-K in Afghanistan. Further, ISIS-K and other threats emanating from Afghanistan have animated every one of our Central Asian partners to reach out to us in hopes of strengthening their border security forces. This provides us a mechanism to enhance cooperation with the Central Asian states to levels not previously thought possible. Deepening our partnership in Central Asia provides alternatives to a Region traditionally dominated by our competitors and bolsters their domestic security while simultaneously enabling our objective of protecting the Homeland.

A region in transition presents new realities the United States must manage if we are to successfully contend with our opponents who have grown in relative strength and influence. A consequence of the end of the unipolar moment is that our Partners have options they didn't have twenty years ago. They want to be involved in a collaborative process that allows them to drive input and an ability to rapidly acquire capability to address their needs. The Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process is one of the most effective mechanisms to strengthen relationships, build partner capacity, reduce the demand for U.S. forces, and improve interoperability, yet it needs significant reform if we are to realize these vast untapped benefits.

Unfortunately, the FMS process has been dysfunctional and too often ran counter to our objectives, creating friction with our Partners in an area that should be a source of strength. Unacceptable delays and significant price increases have been so prevalent they affected our Partners' decision calculus on nearly every potential purchase because they were unsure if they would ever take delivery or it would work as advertised.

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The irony is that despite the number of benefits it could yield to nearly every U.S. strategic objective, FMS has been the number one frustration of our partners. USCENTCOM has 3,797 active FMS cases worth \$363.1B. FMS cases in the Region topped \$15.98B in sales in FY24 alone, accounting for 37% of global sales, and a 49% increase from the year prior. The increased demand signal over the past decade is evidence that our partners are actively seeking to integrate with us. However, the FMS system cannot handle emerging requirements at the pace and scale required by our partners. For the past decade, unmanned aerial systems have been the most likely threat and to date we have not been able to deliver a single Counter-UAS (C-UAS) system to any of our partners. Besides the issues with our own bureaucracy, industry has also struggled to keep pace with the requirements of our partners.

Egregiously delayed FMS cases were not rare occurrences isolated to a few Partners or weapon systems; they were a frustratingly common experience. It has become something of a shared experience for our Partners, a de facto cost of doing business with the United States. Unfortunately, the cost is not only temporal. Delays often result in ballooning dollar amounts in price – in one case over a 300% increase after a 3-year delay – and, worse yet, in cost to the foundation of trust and Partnership capital built over years of engagement that has served our interests for decades. Some military wares are still not delivered after a decade from the original request, and the price the Partner is expected to pay is more than double what they originally agreed to. In one case, delays have so far resulted in over \$1B *added* to the final bill. Sometimes when the Partner does take delivery – often years beyond the scheduled delivery date – quality control issues and technical malfunctions render the item useless and generate another agonizing bureaucratic process to address the problems. These issues are

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consistently raised in key leader engagements at the highest levels as a source of significant frustration.

Our Partners have real security needs. If we fail to reform this process, our regional partners will be forced to look elsewhere to fulfill them – and they will have real options. The Region's engagement with the CCP is fueled, in part, by attractive Chinese alternatives to U.S. modes of Partnership – including our FMS system. Chinese military sales to the Region are consistently on the rise year after year. The comparative ease of the proverbial wish list China provides its customers is a tempting alternative to the opaque and lumbering bureaucratic process they encounter with their American interlocutors.

In light of this, I fully support the collaborative efforts between the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce in implementing the President's April 9, 2025 Executive Order on "Reforming Foreign Defense Sales." Supporting the success of these efforts will simultaneously strengthen the capabilities of our allies and Partners and invigorate our own defense industrial base. By improving our FMS system, we will not only increase American influence, but we will reduce the requirements on our own forces as the U.S. transitions to a role of security integrator versus security guarantor.

III. STRATEGIC APPROACH

People

The men and women of USCENTCOM are on the front lines against those who wish to do our Nation harm. These warriors bear our flag in combat and in a Region that sees more kinetic activity involving Americans in the air, land, and sea than any other Region in the world.

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On 13 April and throughout the next morning, Airmen, Soldiers, and Sailors deployed to the USCENTCOM AOR repelled Iran's unprecedented large-scale attack against Israel, and our People continue to bring the full force of America's arsenal to our Nation's enemies. Working with our Partners, they aggressively find, fix, and finish violent extremist leadership wherever they hide – whether in the Region's deserts, cave complexes, or remote ungoverned spaces, they are on the tip of the spear of our nation's CT efforts. Over the previous three years, their efforts have resulted in more than 360 ISIS killed in action and the detention of more than 1,350 ISIS fighters. In the Red Sea, USCENTCOM air and naval forces have displayed incredible warfighting skill as they defended against Houthi terrorism. They have defeated hundreds of UAV, cruise missile, and ballistic missile attacks aimed at killing Americans, Israelis, and innocent civilian mariners asserting their right to freedom of navigation.

Within the Headquarters, USCENTCOM is spearheading initiatives to attract talent and improve force management decision making. These efforts focus squarely on our warrior teammates deployed to the AOR – crucial to ensure continued support to their wellbeing and ability to execute the mission, despite the loss of 1,050 authorized billets across the Command over the last ten years, a 30% decrease in manpower. Our "Winning the Fight for Talent" initiatives solicit interest in visiting Service Schools and Military Academies to inspire and attract the next generation of leaders to serve in USCENTCOM, as well as to educate and tell the USCENTCOM story. The Fight for Talent attracts and retains top-quality personnel to identify, assess, and address any existing gaps. We are also the pilot for Workforce 360. This OSD-funded effort enables decision dominance by validating information across disparate datasets and streamlining data analytics to provide timely, accurate, and impactful workforce

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transparency for the Combatant Commands. This transparency will inform force management, support decision making, and reinforce the DoD's ability to place the right people, in the right place, at the right time.

Partners

Our Partners are essential. The access granted to our forces is the key enabler to nearly everything we do and is an outgrowth of the confidence and credibility built over the course of decades. The result is our close Partnerships consistently pay off when it matters most, but we cannot take them for granted. As our Partners continue to navigate the emerging multipolar world, they will consider all options; and the consequences of American action, or inaction, will reverberate across their decision-making process. We simply cannot operate across the Region without their support to our objectives and for key basing and overflight permissions. Securing critically important access requires sustained diplomatic engagement and demonstrated commitment to achieving military objectives that not only reduce our risk, but that of our Partners.

Over the last year, our Partners have increased their burden sharing efforts to drive solutions to the Region's most pressing issues. Our Gulf Partners, for example, have consistently put their financial resources to work in support of our People deployed to the Region. Qatar has committed \$300M annually towards sustainment costs at Al Udeid Air Base, home to our largest U.S. military footprint in the Region. Our 2040 Strategic Master Plan with Qatar includes a multi-billion-dollar modernization plan for the facilities that house and sustain our forces, and Qatar intends to invest an additional \$7B over the next 20 years. Likewise, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait continue to be generous hosts and commit to our Partnerships through

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significant investments in strategic infrastructure and by offsetting costs. Our deepening defense cooperation with our Gulf Partners has consistently enabled the generous use of facilities, logistical support, and prepositioning of defense materials in support of USCENTCOM objectives and our LOEs.

Our Partners are on the front lines, directly engaging threats that seek to undermine their stability and threaten Americans at home and abroad. The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service and Syrian Democratic Forces are two of the most effective mechanisms to defeat the remnants of ISIS who are seeking to regenerate their capacity to attack the West. Together, in Partnership with our forces, they are responsible for more than 500 ISIS fighters being taken off the battlefield over the last year alone. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is one of our most dedicated and dependable Partners. They are fully integrated into USCENTCOM's counterterrorism efforts against ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates and central to our operations throughout the theater. Pakistan continues to hunt ISIS-K in their border areas, executing dozens of operations to kill and capture multiple leaders, including the mastermind of the Abbey Gate attack that claimed 13 American lives. Qatar is the Region's newest major non-NATO ally, and they have been aggressively pursuing certification to enable operational contributions to the NATO mission.

Perhaps most crucially, our Partners have been the driving force behind critical diplomatic initiatives. Their unique skillset of brokering peace talks has encouraged breakthroughs in some of the Region's thorniest issues resulting in unprecedented progress toward peace, stability, and the saving of American lives. Qatar and Egypt are bulwarks in this regard. They were essential to the diplomatic efforts that freed American hostages in Gaza, and they will be crucial players in future negotiations.

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Qatar continues to leverage its contacts with the Taliban to secure the release of wrongfully detained Americans with four released this year. The hard-earned trust and confidence we have developed through deep partnerships have set the conditions for these diplomatic breakthroughs, and our continued commitment is vital to maintaining these relationships.

Innovation

Given the breadth and depth of evolving challenges facing our forces in the Central Region, USCENTCOM relentlessly pursues novel solutions that we can rapidly deploy. Innovation is first and foremost about creative problem-solving: a mindset permeating all aspects of operations and therefore not something done on occasion. It requires a steady drumbeat to drive iteration until synthesized within our culture, and we harness the pressure of time to drive speed of progress. USCENTCOM is investing in the tools, processes, and training to continuously drive this synthesis across the Command.

At USCENTCOM, innovation is in the air we breathe. Over the course of 2024, our Headquarters continued to internalize and iterate through recurring experimentations and initiatives that tap into the creative potential of our men and women. We continue our recurring C-UAS series of exercises to test myriad threat vectors and UAS defeat solutions in theater – an effort with exceptional relevance following the sharp uptick of One Way Attack UAS threats our forces have faced over the previous year. But singular solutions are insufficient given the rapidly evolving threats produced by innovative, resourceful, and committed adversaries. This is why USCENTCOM also drives towards C-UAS systems integration to develop holistic

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solutions that prevent operators from having to 'swivel' between disparate capabilities and a multitude of screens while responding to time-sensitive inbound threats.

Our experimentation extends to the very software we use. We continue to build and iterate on the Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control (CJADC2) software suite, and we are spearheading testing on low-code computer vision tools to help operators hunt for threats across the region. The former enables seamless command and control functions from the tactical to the strategic level in real time while the latter puts users in the driver's seat for AI development, giving them more control of model training and outputs. This quantum leap in data management allows our Commanders to better serve the warfighter by harnessing real-time data from over 170 sources to make the best decision at right time and at the speed of conflict. Years ago, any one of these initiatives would have been considered an achievement for the Command. Now, this is "business as usual" – even as the Region continues to bristle with activity and the operational tempo remains higher than ever, the Command has built a "muscle memory" for innovation that has worked its way into everyday life.

Some of our most valuable inputs into this culture come directly from those in the field. USCENTCOM empowers its component-level innovation task forces to undertake highly focused efforts to create or enhance a particular capability or solve a specific problem set. Over the last year ARCENT's TF-39, NAVCENT's TF-59, AFCENT's TF-99, and SOCCENT's TF-179 have tested and fielded capabilities to address emerging needs of our warfighters. This includes improving the resiliency of maritime Inertial Navigation Systems (INS) in theater by testing solutions against INS spoofing and jamming that deny the system access to GPS. Efforts also led to the establishment of the Advanced Manufacturing Lab in the Region that facilitates rapid parts replacement

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at the tactical edge, cutting down on wait times from months and weeks to days and even hours.

The next phase is to more closely partner with the Department to achieve scale where it aligns with our mission. We are learning how USCENTCOM can help reduce risk for the true engines of scale – our military departments – providing valuable insight to inform larger acquisition programs and investments. The threat landscape and the pace of technological change are moving faster than our current systems can respond, pushing USCENTCOM to become more creative. As a result, we are now generating more technology and innovation at the tactical edge than ever before.

With the right resources to nurture this value chain, and while reducing risk and informing larger program investments, USCENTCOM can scale our warfighting achievements to greater capacity, ultimately cutting costs while amplifying our high-tech impact directly on the battlefield. Our recent collaboration with OSD, and our more effective use of the program to Accelerate the Procurement and Fielding of Innovative Technologies (APFIT), have enabled us to produce attritable autonomous systems at scale. This keeps our warfighters safer while providing critical operational data to larger programs and ultimately shapes the future character of warfare – not just technologically, but also in our tools, tactics, procedures and training requirements. To achieve more success like this, fit-for-purpose to USCENTCOM's mission, a resourcing strategy similar to APFIT for the command could propel us to even greater warfighting impact, in line with the timelines demanded by emerging threats.

Each of these efforts actualize USCENTCOM's commitment to instill innovation within our workforce. We *open the door to it* – team members of all ranks and positions

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must feel empowered and equipped to pursue innovative solutions. We empower our team members through explicit leadership guidance and targeted opportunities, and we heavily invest in software development environments, 3D printers, and more to facilitate that creative exploration. We *train and organize for it* – USCENTCOM has implemented required digital literacy trainings on a range of topics, from data analytics, to cloud computing, to tactical data links, and more: it has also pushed to make more in-depth training programs widely available, from multi-day digital literacy offsites, to training surges for specific software tools that are widely used across the Command, to real-world training through exercises and experiments. Lastly, we *test and field it* – after empowering, encouraging, and training for innovation, the Command must give opportunities to see whether their ideas and solutions work. In close collaboration with industry, we execute dozens of events where team members can test their hardware, software, and process innovations against realistic scenarios. Additionally, to incentivize partnership with the private sector, we periodically hold a 60–90-day Tech Residency Program to fully immerse top tech talent to test and validate operational integration and application of innovative technologies.

Innovation does not “belong” to a single individual or team – every team member is not only empowered but expected to think creatively and bring new ideas to the table. It is important to note the environment and factors that allow innovation to be particularly impactful at an organization like ours. The constant drumbeat of operations and the ever-active region creates the perfect “sandbox” for experimentation and realistic testing. In short, innovation is much more than a buzzword in our Command, it is a way of life and a critical element of the Command’s success.

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IV. CONCLUSION

The Central Region of today is not the Central Region of two years ago. The events of 7 October continue to reverberate and drive to collective consciousness of many of our partners. Similarly, events over the previous year have changed the region in ways that no one could have predicted, and we stand at a precipice overlooking uncharted waters. For decades, policy makers have grappled with the presence of a heavily armed Lebanese Hezbollah on Israel's Northern border led by Hassan Nasrallah, a seemingly permanent fixture in regional politics. The faces of Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyah frequented the information space, spewing their hatred for Israel and pledging to destroy the Jewish state. The Assad family, in power since the 1970s, showed there was no limit to the depravity and brutality it would employ in its lust for power. The oft-chanted mantra, "*Assad or we burn the country*," appeared to be a literal course of action.

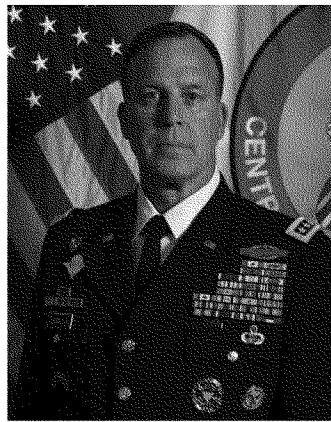
All these things were truths about the Middle East until they suddenly were not. This has created a strategic opportunity for the United States. But it is only a window. We can seize the initiative to optimize our posture to defend the Homeland, strengthen our economic outlook, take back our right to freedom of navigation, and sustain the upper hand against an increasingly desperate Iran – all in a way that leaves America in a sustainable position of strength vis-à-vis our adversaries that comes at a lower cost over time. Our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and Coast Guardsmen are ready to drive this change and our Partners are engaged. But to capitalize on this opportunity requires a deliberate and holistic effort across every instrument of power before the window closes on a new chapter in the American story in the Middle East, one that makes us stronger, more prosperous, and more secure.

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Commander, General Michael E. Kurilla

General Michael "Erik" Kurilla is from Elk River, Minnesota and commissioned into the Infantry from the United States Military Academy, West Point in 1988. Throughout his career, he has led Airborne, Mechanized, Stryker, Ranger and Joint Special Operations units during combat and operational deployments including Operation Just Cause (Panama), Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm (Saudi Arabia/Iraq), Operation Uphold Democracy (Haiti), Operation Joint Guardian (Kosovo-Macedonia), Operation Joint Resolve (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), and Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq). General Kurilla spent every year from 2004 - 2014 leading conventional and special operations forces in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility.



General Kurilla previously commanded 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry (Stryker), 2nd Ranger Battalion, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 82nd Airborne Division, and the XVIII Airborne Corps.

In addition to command assignments as a General Officer, General Kurilla served as the Director of Operations and Assistant Commanding General for Joint Special Operations Command, Deputy Commanding General for the 1st Infantry Division, Joint Staff Deputy Director for Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism, and Chief of Staff for U.S. Central Command.

General Kurilla's awards and decorations include the Combat Infantryman Badge with Star, Master Parachutist Badge with Combat Jump Device, Ranger Tab, and the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster. He holds a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from the United States Military Academy, West Point; an M.B.A from Regis University; and a M.S. in National Security Studies from the National War College.

General Kurilla and his wife Mary Paige have two daughters.

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL MICHAEL E. LANGLEY, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

10 June 2025

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished Committee Members, United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is committed to and focused on safeguarding the homeland from threats emanating from Africa, protecting vital U.S. interests by countering adversary efforts, and responding to crises across the African continent. We are steadfast in our commitment to the American people, and our method is sound: we work together with likeminded Allies and partners to enable security solutions that protect our interests.

Africa is a “nexus theater” – a continent where global interests converge. The population will grow to 25% of the world’s population by 2050, and currently boasts the largest youth demographic, along with rapidly urbanizing societies. Africa accounted for 11 of the world’s 20 fastest growing economies in 2024, and the 54 sovereign countries make up more than 25% of the seats in the United Nations General Assembly. For these reasons, Africa is a continent from which the United States cannot afford to shift its gaze. It is imperative that we create conditions where terrorist organizations and malign actors are unable to threaten our homeland, while simultaneously creating conditions for American economic interests to flourish.

USAFRICOM will achieve peace through strength by countering terrorist organizations that are increasing their ability to threaten the homeland while countering activities of China and other adversaries. Capabilities like Airborne-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (A-ISR) and Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS) are critical to addressing the increasing threat. We are acutely aware that if ISIS and al-Qaeda groups continue their expansion, they will pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Given this environment, USAFRICOM will work collaboratively with the intelligence community and interagency partners to keep the risk to U.S. national security interests low.

Our approach is *African Partner-led, U.S.- and Ally-enabled* to build partner capacity for African partner operational independence. At any time, leadership in these sovereign nations may change and our working relationship with them may subsequently evolve. Our legal and policy frameworks should remain flexible to maintain an enduring military to military relationship.

Strengthening the capacity of African partners to address security challenges and enhance regional stability reduces the long-term need for U.S. security assistance. Security cooperation is our primary tool through which USAFRICOM strengthens African security institutions toward operational independence. We achieve this through a wide array of training programs, joint exercises, and information sharing initiatives conducted across the continent. Our programs are unmatched by competitors. Flagship exercises such as FLINTLOCK and AFRICAN LION play pivotal roles in building the operational readiness of African militaries and enhancing interoperability among U.S. forces and African partners. FLINTLOCK, focused on counterterrorism and irregular warfare, brings together special operations forces from more than 30 nations to conduct realistic training, share best practices, and build trust. Similarly, AFRICAN LION provides a critical platform for joint, multinational training in a variety of domains, including land, air, and maritime operations. These exercises not only improve tactical capabilities but also foster stronger relationships between African military forces and their international partners.

EAST AFRICA

Due to its strategic importance and our robust counter terrorism operations, the preponderance of USAFRICOM's deployed forces are in East Africa. The region's proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, and its importance to global trade and commerce, cannot be overlooked;

20% of the world's oil moves through the Red Sea annually. Terrorist organizations also recognize the significance of the region and work to attack us and our allies. Our partnership with the newest Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States, Kenya, given that designation in June 2024, continues to grow stronger. Both USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM have a role to play in the security of East Africa and we work together daily to make sure the seam between our two Geographic Combatant Commands is as inconsequential as possible.

Our main effort in East Africa is collaborating with Partners and Allies to support Somalia's fight against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. Our strong relationship with Somali and African Union forces is key to this effort. Al-Shabaab is one of the deadliest terror organizations on the planet and continues to attack U.S. personnel and facilities in Somalia. Just last November, an al-Shabaab operative was convicted of plotting a 9/11 style terror attack on the U.S. For now, ISIS and al-Qaeda groups are focused on local interests, but they continue to expand and recruit fighters from around the world to position themselves to attack the Homeland. The dangerous capabilities of these groups, if not addressed, will continue to threaten U.S. interests.

The terror organizations in the East are well-resourced and enjoy freedom of maneuver. The Houthis, in Yemen, have moved beyond harassing attacks on commercial vessels, to complex, coordinated missile volleys against both commercial and military vessels. I am greatly concerned about indications of Houthi (part of the Iranian threat network) and al-Shabaab collaboration. The Houthis have the capability to attack the Djibouti Base Cluster, should they decide to escalate against the United States. If they establish a foothold in East Africa, the threat to global trade and shipping would increase significantly, bringing a highly capable, belligerent actor into a region already struggling against ISIS and al-Shabaab.

NORTH AFRICA

Through a variety of operations, activities, and investments in North Africa, USAFRICOM continues to advance U.S. interests by nurturing strong partnerships in a region that sits at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Exercise AFRICAN LION, led by the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), stands out as USAFRICOM's premier annual exercise. The 2024 edition of AFRICAN LION took place from April 19 to May 31 across Morocco, Ghana, Senegal, and Tunisia, involving over 8,100 participants from 27 nations, including NATO contingents. The exercise showcases realistic, dynamic, and collaborative readiness training in challenging environments. AFRICAN LION takes place along multiple seams between geographic combatant commands—USAFRICOM, USEUCOM, and USCENTCOM—in close proximity to key maritime chokepoints and global shipping lanes, all of which magnifies the exercise's significance. AFRICAN LION not only strengthens multinational cooperation but also enhances readiness across all domains, highlighting USAFRICOM's commitment to training African partners for operational independence. Our training brings a level of lethality and professionalism that is unmatched from our competitors, which is why our U.S. training is valued so highly.

USAFRICOM aims to push Libyans to better stand on their own to build a unified military, subordinate to civilian control, which safeguards Libyan sovereignty, increases border security, and combats illegal migration and trans-regional terrorism. The competition between East and West Libyan security actors impacts both the country's development and stability, a situation which occasionally jolts global energy markets. While national re-unification must ultimately come from the Libyan people, through modest, calculated steps, USAFRICOM can

support multilateral security integration efforts to reinforce favorable conditions for U.S. interests and U.S. businesses.

North Africa is home to two highly capable Major-Non NATO Allies - Morocco and Tunisia, both of whom support our regional objectives. This past year, Tunisia hosted the 19th iteration of PHOENIX EXPRESS, a 12-day exercise that brought together North African, European, and U.S. naval forces as part of a global network to enhance cooperation and expertise in maritime security operations in the Southern Mediterranean Sea. Tunisia also hosted SILENT WARRIOR 2024, an event dedicated to enhancing operational effectiveness and mission success of African Special Operations Forces.

Morocco serves as a regional leader by exporting security and economic development throughout Africa, providing training to more than 1200 African partners annually, often at zero cost to the trainees. The training provided includes every level of military education from basic training to War College, spans all services, and includes professional medical, intelligence, airborne, and special operations training. Further, Moroccan trainers travel to neighboring countries using U.S.-produced C-130 aircraft to transport and train partner personnel in a myriad of tasks and skills.

This strong security exporter role is rooted in Morocco's position as a significant contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Over 1700 Moroccan troops per year participate in UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. September 2025 will witness the inauguration of a state-of-the-art Peacekeeping Center of Excellence in Morocco, with the capacity to train thousands of personnel in critical skills, while also having the ability to host strategic-level defense engagements,

diplomatic summits, and senior leader peacekeeping training and discussions. This center is co-funded by the United States and will train thousands of Moroccan and other African partners.

Tunisia is another security exporter in North Africa; it remains a strategic partner on military cooperation, counter-terrorism, and broader regional security. As a growing regional military training hub, Tunisia is emerging as a key partner espousing and projecting Western military standards. Tunisia supports peacekeeping operations across Africa, primarily through strategic airlift capability with its growing C-130 fleet. Expertise within the Tunisian Counter-IED School, hard won in Tunisia's own counterterrorism fight during the prior decade, is sought after by African forces deploying to UN peacekeeping missions and now hosts African students regularly. In all, Tunisia has a significant capability to influence militaries throughout the Sahel and West Africa.

North Africa is also home to Algeria, traditionally a non-aligned nation but where the defense industry continues to make significant headway with direct commercial sales of defense articles, such as C-130 aircraft. In January 2025, the United States and Algeria signed a Military Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding – illustrating our two countries' shared vision to strengthen regional and international peace through strategic dialogue.

WEST AFRICA

West Africa is a dynamic region that includes both multi-party democracies and Sahel nations that experienced coups over the last few years. West African partners broadly welcome U.S. security cooperation despite our withdrawal of forces from the Sahel. The Global Fragility Act, being implemented in Coastal West Africa (as well as Libya and Mozambique) serves as a model for countering terrorist organizations and leveraging investments from allies towards this initiative.

A crucial moment in our partnerships and presence in West Africa in 2024 was the multinational collaborative effort in the OBANGAME EXPRESS exercise, one of three annual regional exercises conducted by U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF) and sponsored by USAFRICOM. Hosted by Gabon, the event brought together military delegations from 13 nations across West Africa, Europe, and North America over the course of five days. Participants were from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Liberia, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, and the United States. They engaged in lectures, practiced maritime security tactics, and conducted joint drills to enhance regional collaboration, maritime security capabilities, as well as counterpiracy cooperation between the African states in the naval and maritime domains. This exercise showcased the United States' unmatched convening power to bring together diverse nations for cooperative security initiatives.

West Africa has a complex mix of challenges. The region has recently experienced a wave of military coups, with countries like Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger facing upheaval as military officers ousted elected governments. These disruptions stem from entrenched corruption, slow economic development, weak democratic institutions, and limited strategic patience. Terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS have exploited these vulnerabilities, thriving in poorly governed regions and preying on underserved populations. Public discontent has intensified, fueled by lingering frustrations with former colonial powers. Central governments, often overstretched, have struggled to counter insurgencies, address corruption, deliver essential services, and resolve inter-ethnic disputes over limited resources.

In 2024, amid this challenging environment, USAFRICOM successfully conducted a safe, orderly, and responsible withdrawal of U.S. forces from Niger. This complex, multi-month

operation required seamless coordination across the Department of Defense, its service components, numerous partners, allies, and our Department of State colleagues, particularly at the U.S. Embassy in Niger. Through meticulous planning and execution, over 1000 personnel along with equipment worth over \$213M were safely redeployed in 133 flights. Without a persistent presence in the Sahel, we are limited in the ability to monitor the expanding influence of terrorist organizations in the region. Our assessment indicates that, if left unchecked, these organizations will continue to grow and their threat to regional stability, as well as to U.S. national security interests, will only intensify. We are increasing our efforts in intelligence sharing and information operations to monitor the growth of these groups and expanding relationships with willing partners elsewhere in West Africa like Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria.

Along the southwest coast of the Gulf of Guinea, recent developments in Gabon underscore the importance of U.S. leadership to counter China's efforts in West Africa. Our military support to Gabon includes plans to improve port security measures, enhance the country's coastal radar infrastructure, and improve Gabon's ability to monitor and protect its territorial waters. Additionally, collaboration with the U.S. Congress will enable the provision of maritime patrol vessels to Gabon, accompanied by comprehensive maintenance and operational training. Gabon's new collaboration with the West Virginia National Guard through the State Partnership Program will foster collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs and encourage meaningful people-to-people ties at the state level, including valuable training, exchanges, professional development, and economic projects. These efforts will not only further U.S. national security interests, but also help Gabon safeguard its natural resources and strengthen its overall maritime security capabilities, aligning with broader regional stability

goals. Our security cooperation approach in Gabon is a good example of our approach in all of West Africa – one geared towards encouraging independent operations and nations leading the way for their own security.

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Since the war in Sudan broke out in 2023, Sudan is host to the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. There is no U.S. military solution to the conflict in Sudan and Defense Department opportunities to contribute are limited following the military-assisted departure from Embassy Khartoum in April 2023. The Sudanese people bear the brunt of this crisis. Outside influences are pouring fuel on the fire in Sudan and all efforts need to focus on building conditions for a negotiated resolution to the conflict.

USAFRICOM has strong and growing partnerships in Southern African states like Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, and Angola, and closely monitors regional developments in Central Africa. Security cooperation programs focus on leadership and education so that partners can actively and independently contribute to regional crisis response. This year, Malawi hosted the first Africa Senior Enlisted Leader Conference on the continent of Africa, marking a major step forward in enlisted development. Malawi was an ideal host as they have the only Sergeant Major Academy (mirroring the U.S. Army) on the entire continent of Africa. Botswana co-hosted the 2024 African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Gaborone in June, attended by 33 African Chiefs of Defense from 32 countries, including representatives from East and West Libya. Bringing African military leaders together demonstrates our commitment to driving African solutions to shared security challenges.

Central and Southern Africa are well known for their wealth of critical minerals that serve as foundational materials for emerging technology products used in military and defense systems. The FY24 NDAA enabled the Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) to market financing solutions for critical projects that meet African partner and U.S. national security interests. USAFRICOM is establishing a Defense Economics Branch to collaborate with OSC and proactively target investment opportunities in priority countries and towards strategic objectives. What was known as a “blood diamond” in the past has turned into “blood tantalum” this century. Tantalum concentrated in the DRC is contributing to competition and conflict among state and non-state actors. The DRC has struggled for decades to effectively manage its natural resources for the benefit of its population. Rwanda’s activity in the east, China’s opaque business practices, and entrenched corruption and mismanagement have frustrated DRC’s efforts at reform in this key sector. To counter China’s harmful practices, the United States interagency is investing to improve the business enabling environment and to facilitate new investments in mining and infrastructure. USAFRICOM is supporting U.S. efforts to increase investments for responsible and mutually beneficial mineral supply chains in Africa.

CHINA’S INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

China increased their military and security activities in Africa, presenting new challenges to U.S. interests and partnerships. China seeks to expand security partnerships to protect its extensive infrastructure investments, loans, and economic partnerships under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While these investments contribute to Africa’s development, they also bring concerns regarding the debt servicing burden, public contract transparency, infrastructure quality and sustainability, and the potential to exert political leverage over African nations. Chinese financial institutions do not adhere to standard international law and financial regulations and

often rely on non-disclosure agreements to prevent African governments from applying a rigorous review to financial contracts.

In a continent where 70% of the protein comes from the sea, access to affordable fish is essential for Africans. China is the world's worst offender of illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing (IUU-F), much of it done in African waters. This activity decreases host nation revenues, increases the price of fish, and creates opportunities to exploit our African partners. China often employs soft and hard power strategies that run counter to U.S. efforts across the continent.

Foreign information manipulation and interference is prevalent as China exploits their relationships in Africa for economic gain and to secure critical minerals and resources. Unfortunately, CCP information manipulation is significantly outpacing our effort to counter their campaigns. CCP investments in digital TV services in Africa and satellite networks allows them to secure restrictive content sharing agreements with local media outlets. Unchecked, China's efforts could reshape the information landscape in Africa, creating biases and gaps that could lead African nations to make decisions to subordinate their economic and security interests to China's own interests.

We work to expose CCP information manipulation and interference, build African resiliency to false information, shape the environment to better support our interests. This growing presence by China complicates the already volatile security landscape and highlights the critical need for sustained U.S. engagement and robust support for regional partners to adequately compete.

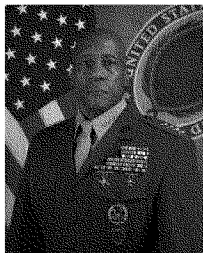
The increasing presence of China highlights the growing strategic importance of Africa, emphasizing the need for proactive U.S. engagement on the continent. USAFRICOM plays a

critical role in countering foreign malign influence through military cooperation, capacity-building, and diplomatic initiatives. Our largest facility in Africa, located in Djibouti, is only a few minutes' drive from China's only overseas military base, underscoring its deepening military investments in the Horn of Africa and across the continent. USAFRICOM seeks to counter China in the security cooperation space, where African nations consistently recognize the advantages of partnering with the United States. In comparing the quality of training, equipment, and security assistance, USAFRICOM's offerings outperform China's. While U.S. assistance is often preferred by African militaries, the time-sensitive nature of security challenges means that some partners choose to turn to China when U.S. timelines cannot meet their immediate needs. As we continue to improve the efficiency of U.S. government programs, USAFRICOM remains committed to strengthening these relationships and supporting regional stability.

CONCLUSION

The African continent is a wide and vast space that presents the United States – and our competitors – with challenges and opportunities. We remain fully committed to making effects-based and resource-informed decisions across the continent by matching capabilities to threats, and continue to believe that solutions for lasting security, stability, and prosperity in Africa involve investment across the instruments of national power: *diplomatic, information, military,* and *economic*. The men and women of USAFRICOM work diligently to make informed decisions to address challenges and capitalize on identified opportunities. We seek to maintain access and foster productive relationships with our African Partners and our Allies. In this way, USAFRICOM contributes to stability and helps create conditions that are less conducive to malign actors, while better enabling security and prosperity for the United States.

GENERAL
MICHAEL E. LANGLEY
Combatant Commander, United States Africa Command



General Michael E. Langley, U.S. Marine Corps, became the sixth Commander of United States Africa Command in August 2022. Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, U.S. AFRICOM is one of seven joint service geographic combatant commands and is responsible for all U.S. military operations and activities to protect and advance U.S. national interests in Africa.

A native of Shreveport, Louisiana, General Langley graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington and commissioned in 1985. He commanded at every level from platoon to regiment – including Battery K, 5th Battalion, 11th Marines in support of Operations WILDFIRE in Western United States; battalion and regimental commands in 12th Marines forward deployed in Okinawa, Japan; and both the 201st Regional Corps Advisory Command-Central and Regional Support Command – Southwest in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan.

As a General Officer, his command assignments include Deputy Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Force and Commanding General, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade; Commander, Marine Forces Europe and Africa; and Deputy Commanding General, culminating as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic; and Deputy Commander, culminating as Commanding General, Marine Forces Command and Marine Forces Northern Command.

General Langley's staff and joint assignments include serving as a division officer for Marine Corps Institute, Marine Barracks 8th and I; Deputy G-1, 1st Marine Division deployed in support of Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia; Naval Surface Fire Support Requirements Officer in the Expeditionary Warfare Division (N75) and Joint Integration Officer in the Surface Warfare Division (N76), Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; Policy Action Officer in the Strategic Plans

and Policy Directorate, Joint Staff J-5; Iraq Desk Officer in the Operations Directorate, Joint Staff J-3; Deputy Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Assessments Branch Head, Programs and Resources, Headquarters, Marine Corps; Assistant Division Commander of 3d Marine Division; Deputy Director for Operations, Joint Staff J-3; Assistant Deputy Commandant for Programs and Resources, Headquarters, Marine Corps; and Director for Strategy, Plans, and Policy, J-5, U.S. Central Command.

General Langley's formal military education includes U.S. Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School and College of Naval Command and Staff. He holds multiple advanced degrees including Masters in National Security Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

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Red Sea Passage Remains a No-Go for Shipping Despite U.S. Action

June 5, 2025 in [News](#)



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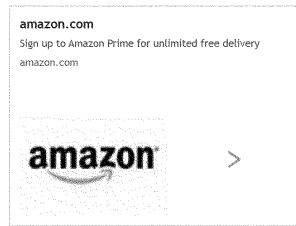
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The largest commercial shipping companies continue to avoid the Red Sea and Suez Canal, despite a recent cease-fire agreement between the United States and Houthis intended to make the trade lanes safer.

The cease-fire, which began May 6, ended a U.S. campaign that involved over 1,100 strikes against the Houthis in Yemen and became a source of embarrassment for the Trump

administration after group chats about the strikes inadvertently became public. The Pentagon had planned on a monthslong bombardment, but President Trump ended it after about 50 days.



"If the intention was to restore freedom of navigation, which is what they stated it was, then the results speak for themselves: The shipping industry has not gone back," said Richard Meade, editor in chief of Lloyd's List, a shipping publication.

Ship traffic through the Red Sea is down by around three-fifths since 2023 when the Houthis started targeting ships there in solidarity with Hamas in its war with Israel in Gaza, Mr. Meade said. Fearing that their vessels would be struck, big shipping companies avoided the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, taking a much longer route around the southern tip of Africa to travel between Asia and Europe.

The Houthis have said they are still at war with Israel and will attack vessels bound for the country. And though the Houthis have not attacked a commercial vessel since December, shipping companies say they worry that their vessels may be hit, deliberately or mistakenly, and have no plans to sail the southern part of the Red Sea anytime soon.

"We're pretty far from the threshold," said Vincent Clerc, the chief executive of A.P. Moller-Maersk, a large shipping line based in Copenhagen. Speaking soon after the cease-fire in May, he said the Red Sea would have to remain safe for the foreseeable future before the company's vessels returned.

Shipping executives said they also feared a severe disruption to their networks if they returned to the Red Sea but suddenly had to pull out of the region because attacks resumed.

When Mr. Trump started the military engagement with the Houthis in March, he said their attacks on shipping had cost the global economy “BILLIONS of dollars.” Commenting on the cease-fire, he said, “They say they will not be blowing up ships anymore.”

Oman brokered the cease-fire between the Houthis and the United States. Describing the truce, Oman’s foreign minister said that “neither side will target the other, including American vessels, in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait, ensuring freedom of navigation and the smooth flow of international commercial shipping.”

But maritime analysts said it was unclear whether the cease-fire applied just to American ships.

“Was this only an agreement between the Americans and the Houthis not to fire at each other’s military capabilities, or was this something that did indeed also cover the merchant ships going through the area?” asked Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at BIMCO, a shipping trade group.

Nor did the cease-fire appear to involve the Houthis’ conflict with Israel.

The Houthis expanded their attacks on Israel last month to include vessels at or on their way to Haifa, an Israeli port, noted Jack Kennedy, head of country risk for the Middle East and North Africa at S&P Global Market Intelligence. And while the Houthis are unlikely to attack American vessels during their cease-fire, “the unclear designations around a vessel or company’s relationship to Israel and Israeli ports, and uncertainties around Houthi targeting accuracy, mean there is a severe risk to ships transiting the Red Sea,” Mr. Kennedy said.

In an email to The New York Times, the Houthi-linked group that communicates with the shipping industry said that “no guarantees can be provided to shipping companies.”

The group added: “Sanctions and prohibitions are limited exclusively to companies and vessels affiliated with or linked to” Israel. The group also said the Yemeni Armed Forces’ actions “are carried out through a precise mechanism designed to prevent mistakes.”

The White House and the Pentagon did not comment.

Even though the route around Africa uses more fuel and crews are at sea for longer, shipping operations have adapted to the detour.

"If it were really a pain, if this new route was really imposing costs, I think you might see more countries willing to take the risk," said Jennifer Kavanagh, director of military analysis at Defense Priorities, a research institute that favors restraint in foreign policy.

In fact, traveling longer distances has allowed the shipping lines to deploy the glut of new ships that they ordered during the pandemic trade boom. Before the Red Sea attacks, the supply of new vessels threatened to depress shipping rates and the earnings of shipping companies.

"Frankly, this disruption, this long way round, has allowed the industry to a certain extent to defy economic gravity," Mr. Meade, the editor, said.

Still, one large shipping company, CMA CGM, based in Marseilles in France, has been sending a small number of vessels through the Red Sea. Ship tracking sites showed that, in recent weeks, at least five had been in the southern part of the Red Sea, near Yemen.

But CMA CGM said in a statement that it did "not plan to resume transits through the Suez Canal on a large scale in the short term, unless security conditions allow it."

The rerouting of vessels away from the Red Sea has deprived Egypt of billions of much-needed dollars in toll revenue from the Suez Canal. To coax shipping companies back, the canal is offering large vessels a 15 percent discount to go through the canal.

Peter Eavis reports on the business of moving stuff around the world.

The post Red Sea Passage Remains a No-Go for Shipping Despite U.S. Action appeared first on New York Times.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

JUNE 10, 2025

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WILSON

Mr. WILSON. With the United States decision to reduce our footprint in Syria possibly below 1,000 personnel, will we still have the sufficient resources to face the resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist groups? How can we ensure our regional partners are working in tandem to address these threats?

General KURILLA. (U) Our consolidation in Syria is being carefully metered against the threat and the prevailing security circumstances. This includes an assessment of the degree to which ISIS is successful in trying to exploit any security vacuums left after the fall of the Assad regime, the capacity of the Syrian government to afford security, and the success of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) agreed integration into the new Syrian security architecture. The U.S. military's tasks in Syria have been focused on Advise, Assist and Enable tasks in support to the SDF, underwriting their considerable success in the D-ISIS fight. This includes offensive action against ISIS cells left at large in Syria, management of the Partner Managed Detention Facilities which hold captured ISIS fighters, and management of the Displaced Persons camps of Al Hol and Roj as potential recruiting pools for the next generation of ISIS fighters. As the SDF integrates into the new Syrian security architecture, U.S. forces in Syria may be able change emphasis towards support to the U.S. burgeoning diplomatic mission to Syria, thereby supporting the D-ISIS fight indirectly through the Syrian government, and potentially, conditions dependent, a normalization of the U.S.'s security relationship in Syria. The security conditions, and specifically the success of the D-ISIS fight in Iraq and Syria are interlinked. At the invitation of the Iraqi government, we have been working closely with the Iraqi Security Forces to ensure they continually increase their competence in the D-ISIS fight. Success here will sustain the pressure against ISIS and narrow the opportunities for ISIS to find safe havens within which they can reconstitute and from which they can launch attacks, locally, regionally or potentially against the U.S. homeland. Beyond U.S. and coalition efforts in Syria and Iraq, other regional and international partners are providing significant support to the D-ISIS fight which include contributions - across Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic levers - from the 89 members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. While an important contribution, the total numbers of U.S. personnel deployed in Syria are only a portion of the totality of the effort to eradicate the scourge of ISIS.

Mr. WILSON. In your testimony, you mentioned that the International Atomic Energy Agency estimates that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium has almost doubled what it was six months ago. You also highlighted that the regime has the resources and centrifuges needed to produce enough weapons-grade uranium in a week for a simple nuclear weapon, should it choose to.

What actions are we taking to ensure the Iranian regime does not achieve its goal of gaining nuclear weapons to use on Israel and the United States?

What further resources do you need to deter Iran from achieving this capability?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. WILSON. In your testimony you mentioned that having an absence in the Sahel region limits our ability to monitor terrorist organizations in the area which would allow them to grow. We have seen how quickly terrorist organizations, like ISIS, can grow if left unchecked.

Can you talk about the potential impacts that would occur in AFRICOM with an increased absence in the Sahel and how this affects other combatant commands?

What additional resources do you need to ensure that this threat is minimized?

General LANGLEY. Since the withdrawal of US and French forces from Mali in 2022 and, more recently, the withdrawal of US and French forces from Niger in 2024, terrorist organizations have made significant advancements in the Sahel and are now threatening the littoral countries of the Gulf of Guinea. The only capabilities in place to counter the terrorist threat are special operations and conventional forces from our Allies that receive limited US support. If left unchecked, these terrorist organizations will continue to gain strength and develop the ability to conduct attacks in the USEUCOM area of responsibility, as well as other regions. Further, destabilization in the Sahel region causes illicit criminal activity and migration

flows that affects not only USAFRICOM but USSOUTHCOM, USEUCOM, and most importantly the Homeland. ISR is a key resource required to monitor the threat in the Sahel but access, basing, and overflight restrictions complicate its employment. Ideally, diplomatic engagement would secure ISR basing to ensure these resources, when allocated by the Joint Staff, are employed to their maximum effect to minimize the terrorist threat.

Mr. WILSON. We are seeing the United States and allies constantly losing presence in Africa while our adversaries continue to increase theirs. The Chinese Communist Party is expanding its footprint and is working to build up their military-to-military relationships in the region. I'm grateful that both you and Secretary Hegseth understand the need to prevent the Chinese Communist Party from taking a foothold in Africa.

Can you provide an update on the Chinese Communist Party's activities in the region, and what further resources you need to combat this threat?

General LANGLEY. China views Africa as integral to expanding its global power projection strategy, and works across the political, economic, and defense domains to achieve its goals on the continent. Beijing uses its African diplomatic and economic engagements to obtain support for its geopolitical priorities. Beijing also seeks to maintain access to Africa's markets, natural resources, and critical minerals that support its defense and commercial industries. China's defense engagements in the region protect its economic and diplomatic investments, and Beijing increasingly seeks to position itself as a key security partner to African countries. USAFRICOM would benefit from additional funding for security cooperation, information operations, and naval assets to promote American political and economic core interests. Regarding Foreign Military Sales, we would benefit from laws and policy to support an expedited system. Although we are the preferred partner in most cases, we are getting "out cycled" by our adversaries.

Mr. WILSON. Last August the United States was forced to withdraw 1,000 service members from Niger, and we simultaneously lost access to key locations, like our ISR base in Agadez. This asset was key to counterterrorism operations in the Sahel, a region which accounted for 19% of all terrorist attacks worldwide, and 51% of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024. What's more, the withdrawal of US and French forces has resulted in the presence of Russian mercenaries in more than six African countries, filling the gap by offering unconditional security assistance in exchange for resource extraction rights and political influence.

What are we doing to ensure we find new partners in the region to address the gaps that have resulted from our lost presence in AFRICOM and the Sahel?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM continues to maintain strategic partnerships in West Africa by working alongside our allies and partners to address shared security concerns. USAFRICOM is prioritizing limited and tailored security cooperation activities and investments that enable our African Partners to defend against regional terrorist threats. These efforts predominantly include counter terrorism training, defense equipment, and intelligence sharing. Moreover, USAFRICOM is actively seeking ways to increase this counter-terrorism burden with NATO and Non-NATO allies who have similar security concerns for the region. USAFRICOM is also encouraging capable African security partners to share their military expertise and assist other countries to counter regional terrorist threats so that U.S. forces can focus on global networks that threaten the U.S. Homeland.

Mr. WILSON. In your testimony, you mentioned that without a persistent presence in the Sahel, we are limited in the ability to monitor the expanding influence of terrorist organizations in the region. You also mentioned that these organizations will, "continue to grow and their threat to regional stability will only intensify."

How will this growth in the threat affect the Sahel and AFRICOM's neighbors in CENTCOM?

How are we making up for the capability gaps that are growing as we are forced out of our footprints in the Sahel?

General LANGLEY. The Sahel has become the epicenter of global terrorism, a situation which is greatly exacerbated by the withdrawal of US and French forces. Terrorist groups now threaten instability to the littoral regions of West Africa, including Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Expanded terrorist operating areas enable them to plan and potentially launch attacks from West Africa. While this threat is linked more to USEUCOM, it could eventually threaten security in USCENTCOM and eventually pose risks to the homeland in the form of terrorism, illicit criminal activity, and migration flows.

Since the withdrawal of US and French forces from Mali in 2022 and more recently the withdrawal of US and French forces from Niger in 2024, terrorist organizations have made significant advancements in the Sahel and are now threatening the littoral countries of the Gulf of Guinea. The only capabilities in place to counter

the terrorist threat are special operations and conventional forces from our Allies that receive limited US support.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. Has the intelligence and data provided by Ukraine on Russian technology, captured equipment, battlefield operational guides, weapon performance, and countermeasures against U.S. and Allied systems been useful to your command? Will it have saved the lives of U.S. service personnel in a war against an enemy peer nation?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. SCOTT. Has the intelligence and data provided by Ukraine on Russian technology, captured equipment, battlefield operational guides, weapon performance, and countermeasures against U.S. and Allied systems been useful to your command? Will it have saved the lives of U.S. service personnel in a war against an enemy peer nation?

General LANGLEY. Congressman, I can answer that question at a higher classification level.

Mr. SCOTT. Sec. 8006 of H.R. 2882, the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-47) made \$100,000,000 available for transfer to "expand cooperation, share operational information, advance interoperability, or improve the capabilities of our allies and partners" for both AFRICOM and SOUTHCOM. How has USAFRICOM made use of this transfer authority?

General LANGLEY. The \$100,000,000 available for transfer authority was allocated evenly between USAFRICOM and USSOUTHCOM, with each receiving \$50,000,000. USAFRICOM applied the funding to a number of efforts that aligned with its scope, to include African Partner Rescue and Casualty Evacuation, Aviation Landing Zone Improvements, Small Arms Range improvements, Improved Maritime Domain Awareness Capabilities, Training to African Partner Capacity across various issue areas (disease control, intelligence sharing, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, disinformation remediation), and Vehicle Recovery Kits for African partners countering Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs). These efforts specifically supported partners in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, with positive cascading effects across other African Partner nations.

Mr. SCOTT. Earlier this year, due to budget uncertainty, USAFRICOM abruptly ordered the withdrawal of two commercially-provided manned-ISR aircraft from Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire which had been supporting SOCAF CT and AFRICOM GPC missions. What impacts has this reduction in manned-ISR assets had on the ability of USAFRICOM to understand and react to growing terrorist threats, and actions of our adversaries like China and Russia in West Africa? What resources would USAFRICOM require in order to resume the use of these commercially-provided manned ISR operations in West Africa?

General LANGLEY. The reduction in manned-ISR in Cote D'Ivoire negatively impacted our ability to monitor, characterize, and counter potential threats to partners in the West African littorals. Notably, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM) and ISIS branches in West Africa desire a presence in littoral West Africa and JNIM has conducted several attacks in Benin since early January. Airborne-ISR provided unique counterterrorism collection capabilities in terms of purpose-built sensors, flexibility to conduct missions at the time and place most effective for operational action, and ability to readily share information real-time with our partners. In the case of GPC missions, the loss of manned ISR has impacted planned partner support against nefarious activities such as monitoring and reporting countries complicit in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU-F) activities within their Exclusive Economic Zones.

To resume Airborne ISR in West Africa, we need dedicated air assets, basing, overflight accesses, and liaison officers. To reconstitute these necessary African partnerships, we need to consider expanding the scope of discussion beyond manned-ISR to unmanned-ISR, including Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems (TUAS).

Mr. SCOTT. What is AFRICOM's current assessment of the scale and impact of IUUF in African waters, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea, and how does it prioritize this issue relative to other maritime security threats?

General LANGLEY. IUUF, particularly activities by China and other foreign nation distance water fleets, are leading to the rapid reduction of West African and Gulf of Guinea fish stocks. This complicates maritime security efforts in the region by exacerbating food scarcity issues and depleting revenues for local governments. USAFRICOM has limited resources to provide tailored training to local coast

guards, and only a small amount of equipment to provide to select partner forces. We support regional security constructs, and when able, highlight IUUF violations to our partners. Currently, USAFRICOM has no assigned or allocated Coast Guard or Navy ships, and our ability to counter this malign activity is minimal.

Mr. SCOTT. How does AFRICOM integrate IUUF into its broader maritime security strategy, and what role does it play in shaping U.S. national security objectives in Africa, as outlined in the 2022 National Security Memorandum on Combating IUUF?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM's priorities are to defend the U.S. Homeland from terrorist threats and to deter PRC global military ambitions on the African continent in alignment with the 2025 Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance. We are currently conducting assessments of our campaign activities to identify areas where our African partners can assume a more active role in countering illicit activities so that our limited resources can be focused on stated DoD priorities. Key Partners in this strategy to prioritize burden sharing include Senegal, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Seychelles and Mauritius. Through tailored, limited investments in training and equipment, USAFRICOM can better enable willing partners to independently address their regional maritime security challenges.

Mr. SCOTT. How does AFRICOM support African navies and coast guards in building capacity for IUUF enforcement, particularly in areas like evidence collection, legal prosecution, and cross-border interdiction?

General LANGLEY. Historically, USAFRICOM has conducted small boat operations/interdictions, as well as mentoring, through both OBANGAME and CUTLASS EXPRESS exercises. Maritime partners participate in NAVAf and USAFRICOM-sponsored exercises and operations, working alongside the US and other African partners to operationalize the capabilities to monitor their territorial waters and conduct counter-IUUF missions. The EXPRESS series of exercises, including OBANGAME, CUTLASS, and PHOENIX, all include IUUF enforcement scenarios focused on training national and regional response to IUUF and associated crimes. Additionally, NAVAf's Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercises train partners to the identify illegal fishing and dark vessel activity in the host nation's waters, supported by the U.S. Maritime Operations Center (MOC) Support Team through the U.S. Maritime SAFE interagency working group. CARAT was conducted for the first time in FY25 with Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Ghana. Our embedded liaison officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) coordinate evidence collection, legal prosecution and cross-border interdiction training and awareness. We are currently assessing our campaign activities and exercises to identify areas where our African partners can assume a more active role in countering illicit activities so that our limited resources can be focused on countering terrorist threats to the Homeland and countering malign PRC activities on the continent.

Mr. SCOTT. What specific capabilities and resources does AFRICOM leverage to enhance maritime domain awareness (MDA) and counter IUUF in African waters, and how are these coordinated with regional partners like the Yaounde Code of Conduct signatories?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM provides select African Partners with joint maritime domain awareness capabilities to counter IUUF and other illicit activity. One capability, SeaVision, has been used by our African partners to counter IUUF and other illicit activity. Additionally, a combination of data sets, models, and visualization techniques has been used to inform African partners and NATO allies during engagements and planning efforts to better enable their respective independent operations. NAVAf has Security Cooperation programs with 15 African maritime partners that provide coastal radar systems and other sensors, maritime operation center equipment, and training by US Navy and US Coast Guard operations center experts. The programs also provide coastal patrol watercraft and spare parts packages, along with training to build maintenance and sustainment programs for those new equipment packages. These are multi-year Title 10 funded programs, usually spanning 5+ years from concept to equipment and training delivery. As a result, NAVAf has been able to foster strong relationships that lead to African support of other beneficial activities such as regional maritime initiatives, joint operations, and significant key leader engagements.

Mr. SCOTT. What challenges does AFRICOM face in addressing the nexus between IUUF and transnational crimes, such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal transshipment, and how are these addressed in operations?

General LANGLEY. Our greatest challenge is maintaining focus on global terrorist threats to the U.S. Homeland emanating from Africa while simultaneously preventing PRC military encroachment on the African continent. These challenges re-

quire a resource-informed prioritization of operations, activities, and investments that help enable African Partners and allies to more actively shoulder the burden of monitoring regional illegal activities, including IUU fishing. Without maritime assets and the authorities to fund bilateral operations between the U.S. Navy/Coast Guard and our African partners, USAFRICOM is limited in its ability to support the partners for effective interdiction beyond information sharing and training within the EXPRESS and CARAT exercises. Due to the law enforcement nature of interdicting transnational crimes, U.S. Coast Guard support is vital, and with the bilateral Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Program (AMLEP), USAFRICOM and NAVAF are able to directly assist signed partners in law enforcement. Fishing vessels are often used in other crimes, such as drug smuggling and illegal immigration. For example, the multinational boarding team on the USS Mount Whitney interdicted a Brazilian fishing vessel ferrying cocaine off Cabo Verde in 2023 based on information received through the Maritime Operations center (MAOC) in Portugal. This diversity of crimes associated with IUUF requires a whole of government approach, which the U.S. government has recognized through the establishment of the Maritime SAFE working group. A majority of the U.S.'s initiatives to counter IUUF are unfunded, apart from specific Department of State initiatives. While the persistence of the counter-IUUF support operations stands as a success story of effective coordination between dedicated interagency point of contacts, the process is by no means streamlined and efficient for the pursuit of supporting the African partners.

Mr. SCOTT. How does AFRICOM utilize partnerships with the U.S. Coast Guard and other interagency entities to enhance IUUF countermeasures, and what gaps remain in these collaborations?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM partners with the U.S. Coast Guard through the African Maritime Law Enforcement Program, which uses law enforcement authorities to support African countries in their fight against IUUF. USAFRICOM values all interagency coordination, which helps enable our priorities to defend the Homeland and deter China's military ambitions on the African continent. We will continue to coordinate with the Coast Guard as they enable African Partners to shoulder the burden of illegal fishing activities off the coast of Africa.

Mr. SCOTT. What emerging technologies or innovative approaches is AFRICOM exploring to improve detection and deterrence of IUUF in African waters?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM supports the use of technology to improve the detection of IUUF in African waters. We collaborate with the interagency, allies, and partners to implement such capabilities. However, USAFRICOM's primary focus regarding emerging technologies is on the ability to conduct persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities that monitor terrorist organizations with the capability and intent to attack the US Homeland. Additionally, we seek innovative solutions to address information gaps regarding PRC intentions in Africa, as well as advanced technology to counter information operations propaganda campaigns designed to diminish U.S. credibility among African Partners. In the FY25 CUTLASS and OBANGAME exercises, the Navy's Disruptive Capabilities Office used advanced data streams, including radio frequency (RF) and Electro-Optic data to track a dark vessel in the scenario. NAVAF provided Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) subject matter experts from the Department of Transportation, Naval Air Warfare Center (NAVAIR) and Naval Warfare Center (NAVWAR) to coach the US and partner forces. The Coordinated Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise was a new approach in Africa this year. Although the Navy does not have a vessel assigned to USAFRICOM, we provided partners with logistics, planning, MDA and intelligence support so that they could conduct their own interdiction operations. FY25 CARATs were completed in Kenya, Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal, with more scheduled for Ghana and Cabo Verde. There were great results in all locations. For example, in Kenya, the Kenyan Navy boarded two fishing vessels and hailed 12 more. USAFRICOM could accomplish much more with assigned naval assets. NAVAF also deploys unmanned systems to the region to collect information. For example, during OBANGAME EXPRESS and the Senegal CARAT, SIXTH Fleet CTF-66 deployed unmanned surface vessels that provided imagery of vessels of interest into SeaVision. NAVAF also provided Starlink capabilities for the ships for the CARATs to pass video to land in real time.

Mr. SCOTT. How does AFRICOM assess the potential for IUUF to destabilize coastal African states, and what preventive measures are in place to mitigate risks of conflict or economic collapse?

General LANGLEY. While the broader interagency should continue to address IUUF, the greatest destabilizing threat to Coastal West Africa involves terror networks that actively target civilians and partner militaries. We are assessing our campaign activities to identify areas where our African partners can assume a more active role in countering illicit activities so USAFRICOM can focus our limited re-

sources on countering terrorist threats to the Homeland and countering PRC military encroachment on the continent. USAFRICOM uses our limited resources to provide tailored training and a small amount of equipment to select partner forces, enabling them to better independently counter this malign activity, along with other regional maritime security challenges.

Mr. SCOTT. What is AFRICOM's long-term vision for reducing IUUF in Africa, and how does it plan to measure success in terms of ecological, economic, and security outcomes?

General LANGLEY. We will continue to support the work of U.S. Government agencies focused on fisheries enforcement through information sharing. With key allies in the lead, and with the support of the interagency, our African Partners will be better positioned to act independently to address regional illegal activity. USAFRICOM will continue to assess our campaign objectives and refine our targeted burden sharing investments to better enable our Partners and allies for success in the future.

Mr. SCOTT. What lessons from Obangame Express 2025 can AFRICOM apply to future exercises to enhance African partners' ability to independently secure their waters against IUUF?

General LANGLEY. One lesson learned is including our African partners' interagency counterparts in the exercises. We cannot make progress in IUUF without improving the transparency between agencies like navies, fisheries, ports and harbors and maritime authorities. Further, NAVAIR is only allowed to spend funds to work with maritime security agencies and, thus, cannot provide SeaVision licenses or support the participation of any other agencies in the exercises. This is a serious constraint. Expanding funding and authorities for other U.S. agencies to support OBANGAME EXPRESS would allow for more robust training in support of the whole-of-government approach.

Mr. SCOTT. What role do you envision for space capabilities in shaping AFRICOM's long-term theater security cooperation strategy, and how will these efforts strengthen trust and collaboration with African partners?

General LANGLEY. Space capabilities are increasingly vital for USAFRICOM's security cooperation strategy, mirroring their global importance. African nations are actively developing their space sectors, evidenced by the 67 satellite launches since 1998 and the upcoming establishment of the African Space Agency. While initially focused on socio-economic and environmental needs, these advancements are now extending to security and defense objectives, emulating the U.S. Joint Force's reliance on space.

The U.S. has a unique opportunity to partner with African nations, aiding them in developing space capabilities to support shared goals. However, with growing commercial options and partnerships with other nations, we must proactively engage with allies, through Department of Commerce, Department of State, the Department of Defense, and NASA, to remain the preferred partner in this rapidly expanding sector.

Mr. SCOTT. How is AFRICOM incorporating space-based capabilities, such as satellite communications or imagery, into theater security cooperation programs to strengthen the capacity of African partner nations in areas like border security or counterterrorism?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM incorporates commercial imagery, satellite communications, and space capabilities training into theater security cooperation programs to strengthen the capacity of African partner nations. Commercially available satellite imagery gives African partners critical information for border security, such as monitoring illicit activity, unregulated border crossings, and detecting potential threats. The increasing capability and capacity of commercial collection, particularly imagery, has significantly increased the amount and quality of products that can be shared. The implementation of a National Geospatial Agency tool allows for dissemination of products over the internet, eliminating the need for classified networks or in-person transfer of hard copy products. USAFRICOM builds partner capacity through training and skills development on the use of space-based capabilities. Training includes imagery analysis tradecraft, communication systems infrastructure management, and counterterrorism network and pattern development.

A prime example of training is with Angola. Our planned FY27 Significant Security Cooperation Initiative (SSCI) will add a crucial strategic military intelligence component to the existing USSPACECOM space domain awareness initiative. This integrated approach will leverage Angola's planned Airbus electro-optical satellite, making it a cornerstone of their ISR architecture. USAFRICOM will empower Angola to receive data and independently collect, process, analyze, and share it using the software and training we provide. This initiative will include instruction on imagery analysis techniques, data fusion, and ground station operations ensuring long-

term sustainability and true partner ownership. This training also directly strengthens our ability to burden share with our African partners.

Mr. SCOTT. What initiatives is AFRICOM pursuing to share space-derived data with African partners to foster collaborative security efforts and enhance regional stability?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM employs a National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency tool called the Protected Internet Exchange (PIX) Portal. This tool serves as a secure platform for accessing and disseminating critical imagery and geospatial data. Similarly, the "GXP Xplorer" application allows partner analysts to visualize and interact with this data effectively. One example of PiX's efficacy is through Angola. USAFRICOM provided Angola's Military Intelligence and Security Service (SISM) with the PIX portal. Currently, we are introducing SISM personnel to these tools and commercial satellite imagery to enhance their independent analytic capabilities. These tools allow SISM analysts to generate intelligence products relevant to Angolan regional security priorities.

USAFRICOM also uses Global Positioning Systems to advise African partners' operational planning and execution. This data is critical in operational border security and counterterrorism. It prevents fratricide or unintended engagement with neighboring nations and mitigates unnecessary risk against terrorist actors. Additionally, USAFRICOM is exploring the use of commercial Radio Frequency-sensing to detect and track anomalies in electronic emissions. Detecting these emissions alerts partners to investigate potential security threats within their areas of influence. Deciphering emissions lends to further burden sharing to our African partners to combat illicit maritime and border activity.

Mr. SCOTT. How does AFRICOM leverage space-based tools in exercises to train African partners for disaster response and humanitarian assistance, particularly in using satellite imagery for rapid crisis assessment?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM is limited to UNCLASSIFIED space-based tools when exercising with African partners. Primarily, USAFRICOM exercises leverage commercial satellite imagery for use in planning. These capabilities allow the US joint force to evaluate terrain, population centers, and infrastructure while planning operations within exercises. Most importantly, since these images are UNCLASSIFIED, the US joint force participants can share their work with African partners to conduct combined planning and de-confliction of operational spaces.

Mr. SCOTT. What steps is AFRICOM taking to educate and train African partner forces on the importance of space domain awareness and its role in modern military operations?

General LANGLEY. Commercial satellite imagery is used in exercises because it is fully releasable to partners. These tools allow the US joint force to plan operations which are synchronized and de-conflicted with local security forces, all using the same up-to-date maps and imagery. This demonstrates the benefits of space-informed battlespace awareness and leads to more interoperable communications with partners, especially those participating in small-unit CT missions in East Africa.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. STEFANIK

Ms. STEFANIK. General Kurilla, as the Islamic Republic of Iran deepens ties with countries like China, Russia, North Korea and others that seek to destroy our way of life, in ways ranging from drone exports to arms tech-how do you assess the long-term risk to U.S. military deterrence and our interests in the CENTCOM AOR?

General KURILLA. (U) Iran's deepening ties with these countries presents a risk of increased regional instability. China and Russia have proven their tendency to take advantage of partnerships to the detriment of their counterparts, and there is reason to believe that this would be the case in the CENTCOM AOR. Our ability to deter aggression diminishes as these nations increase their involvement in the region. For this reason, our regional partnerships are of paramount importance. The Middle East nations must continue to see us as the more reliable partner, in comparison to China and Russia, and this takes engagement and presence.

Ms. STEFANIK. What is your assessment of Iran's military and technological cooperation with China? Specifically, how is China supporting Iran's missile programs, drone technology, or nuclear ambitions, and what risks does this pose to U.S. forces and allies in the CENTCOM region?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. As we know, Russia also continues to supply Iran with advanced weaponry and intelligence support. How is this relationship enhancing Tehran's

ability to challenge U.S. interests and regional stability, especially through proxy groups in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. What else do we need to do in order to continue to deter the growing axis of evil?

General KURILLA. (U) Deterrence is a function of capability, capacity, messaging and most importantly will. Iranian proxies and Iran directly respond to strength and action and they must know we will hold them accountable for attacks on our forces. We must always signal, through our actions and messages, to our allies and partners that we stand with them and that we are a reliable partner. Strengthening those relationships and bolstering our partners' capacities is key to limiting the growth and influence of the axis of evil.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you all for being here today and thank you General Kurilla and General Langley for your service to this country. With reports that Iran is only weeks away from producing weapons-grade uranium and its nuclear infrastructure more vulnerable than ever, can you speak to your concerns regarding a potential Iranian nuclear breakout?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. During his first administration, President Trump moved Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM marking a historic shift and furthering his reputation as the most Pro-Israel President in American history. General Kurilla, can you speak about how the mil to mil relationship has strengthened between the two countries since this change in 2021?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. Since October 2023, there have been at least 210 Iran-backed attacks targeting U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria, or Jordan. Can you discuss how CENTCOM's credible deterrence posture under President Trump has changed the Ayatollah's calculus?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. Can you discuss some of the work that Fort Drum's 10th Mountain Division has done with developing key counter-UAS technology under your leadership?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. General Kurilla, Israel's decisive military success against Hezbollah, the toppling of the Assad regime in Syria, along with the recent political advancements in both countries are welcomed developments. However, it is clear that Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies are actively working to rebuild and restore their networks of terror. Can you explain why it's strategically important for the United States to push back decisively against Iranian-backed proxies?

General KURILLA. (U) Iran and its proxies thrive in chaotic and unstable conditions and therefore will do all in their power to create such conditions. Pushing back against these proxies through a whole-of-government approach will help prevent them from meeting their goal of generating instability that they can later capitalize on. Our goal of a peaceful and stable Middle East cannot be achieved if these Iranian-backed proxies are able to operate with impunity.

Ms. STEFANIK. How does our posture toward these proxies affect the confidence of regional partners like Israel, Jordan, and the Gulf states in our commitment to collective security?

General KURILLA. (U) The posture of the United States towards Iranian proxies has a significant impact on regional partners' (Israel, Jordan, and Gulf states) confidence in American commitment to collective security in the region. Regional partners are concerned with Iranian aspirations for regional dominance, which they see as a threat to their own security and stability. If the US is perceived as not taking adequate and acceptable measures to counter Iranian proxy threats, it can create a sense of uncertainty and insecurity in the region, eroding partners' confidence in US commitment to their own security and decrease their willingness to cooperate with the US on regional security issues. Regional partners generally acknowledge the need for a collective approach to address the challenges posed by Iran and its proxies. Although each partner has its own view on what that means, they all consistently look to the US to play a leading role in developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to counter these threats. US CENTCOM must have a sufficient sustainable, and predictable posture to be able to deter these Iranian proxies

as well as to integrate with our partners in the region. If you do not have sufficient posture, you cannot deter or partner.

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Ms. STEFANIK. With Hezbollah's recent military losses and Iran's intent to rebuild, how do you assess the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) current capability to interdict weapons flows and prevent Hezbollah's resurgence?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Ms. STEFANIK. General Kurilla, when Israel officially shifted into the CENTCOM AOR in 2021 from EUROM, it was hailed a major success. Given Azerbaijan's increasing military and intelligence cooperation with Israel, its strengthening ties with the U.S., and its active role in countering Iranian aggression in the region, can you explain why Azerbaijan is not currently included within CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility or AOR?

General KURILLA. (U) The UCP is written with Combatant Command and Service input but ultimately authored by the Joint Staff and OSD and signed by the President. USCENTCOM is not a decision authority. We refer you to OSD for more information.

Ms. STEFANIK. What are the implications of this exclusion for U.S. strategic interests, coordination in the broader Middle East, and the current dispute with the neighboring Armenia?

General KURILLA. (U) Despite the exclusion of Azerbaijan from our AOR, we are able to work effectively with EUROM to implement policy and achieve U.S. interests regarding Azerbaijan and relations with CENTCOM nations. Azerbaijan and Israel maintain a positive relationship with strong diplomatic, economic, and security ties, driven by a shared interest in regional stability and a desire to counter Iranian influence. CENTCOM coordinates daily across COCOM boundaries to achieve objectives in parallel with adjacent COCOMs.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you all for being here today and thank you General Kurilla and General Langley for your service to this country. With reports that Iran is only weeks away from producing weapons-grade uranium and its nuclear infrastructure more vulnerable than ever, can you speak to your concerns regarding a potential Iranian nuclear breakout?

General LANGLEY. There is most definitely a worldwide concern surrounding the increased threats posed by a nuclear weaponized Iran; however for specifics, I would defer to General Kurilla.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. KELLY

Mr. KELLY. General Kurilla, Uzbekistan remains one of our most capable and reliable security partners in Central Asia and through the National Guard's State Partnership Program, we've built a relationship rooted in trust, not just transactions. But we know Russia and China are working overtime to erode that influence. From your vantage point, what's the strategic risk if we don't adequately support this partnership with tools like FMS, targeted capability investments, or military-to-military cooperation programs like SPP?

General KURILLA. (U) Uzbekistan is one of our closest partners in Central Asia, and the Mississippi National Guard does an outstanding job of building the mili-

tary-to-military relationship with Uzbekistan through continuous and reliable engagements. I strongly support the State Partnership Program (SPP), especially as we continue to build the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft program in Uzbekistan using Title 10 333 authorities and funding. The aircraft program is designed to allow for increased intelligence sharing, improved security along Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan, and improving Uzbekistan's capabilities to counter violent extremist organizations. If we fail to prioritize our relationship with Uzbekistan, the real strategic risk is ceding space and influence to Russia and China.

Mr. KELLY. AFRICOM and CENTCOM relies heavily on host-nation support and discreet basing access across the continent. What's the risk to U.S. posture and responsiveness if we don't invest in those relationships-whether through infrastructure support, partner training, or co-development efforts?

General KURILLA. (U) USCENTCOM's military-to-military relationships with Central Region partners is a strategic advantage, built over years of developing an integrated network of regional security constructs that enhance warfighting capabilities not only for the U.S. but also for our partners. The significance of these relationships was evident in recent operations, such as the defense of Israel against Iranian ballistic missile and UAS attacks, defending freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, and executing Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER, which may not have been achievable without the established framework. Neglecting these relationships could limit access to critical infrastructure, intelligence, and logistics, as well as discourage partners from sharing the burden.

Mr. KELLY. Our subcommittee has consistently advocated for giving combatant commanders the ability to pull capabilities when they need them-not wait years for procurement cycles. One example is in ISR and other capabilities-as-a-service tools that can deliver persistent coverage or effects without long acquisition tails. This includes space-based, unmanned, and aerial refueling capabilities. Please tell the Committee about the extent of your use of capabilities as a service and how it fits into your toolkit as commanders. Please prioritize the list of CaaS that you use most often/with the highest dollar amount. If the accounts were zero-sum, how would you re-balance the list of CaaS you currently use?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. KELLY. One of the reasons I've championed the SHIPS for America Act-alongside my colleagues from California the Honorable John Garamendi and 60 others, and our Senate colleagues Todd Young, Mark Kelly and many others-is because we can't surge to the fight if we can't move the fight. And right now, we're staring down a sealift shortfall with an aging, shrinking fleet that's frankly on borrowed time. From your positions as combatant commanders: what are the operational consequences if we don't recapitalize our strategic sealift fleet? How does the current state of our sealift capacity impact your ability to move force packages at speed in a major contingency?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

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General LANGLEY. Maintaining strong relationships through posture and agreements ensures reliable access and improves our operational capabilities relative to competitors. Crisis response, counterterrorism efforts, and adversary deterrence activities are all made possible through relationships with strong African Partners. USAFRICOM's locations, while limited, are crucial for swift responses, including non-combatant evacuations and potential support for major combat operations. Because host nations often do not have infrastructure to the requisite standard or scale to support requirements, they rely on small U.S. investments as a force multiplier to meet shared security objectives.

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General LANGLEY. In USAFRICOM, "ISR-as-a-service" is our top-priority "Capability-as-a-service." It provides persistent surveillance across a vast area of responsibility where we have limited assigned or allocated assets, allowing us to respond quickly to emerging threats without waiting on procurement cycles.

We also leverage the USAFRICOM Warfighter Recovery Network as a personnel recovery and CASEVAC service. It ensures we can rapidly recover and care for U.S. personnel in austere and contested environments.

If resources were constrained, ISR-as-a-service would remain our top priority given its broad operational impact.

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General LANGLEY. A failure to recapitalize the strategic sealift fleet significantly degrades the U.S.'s ability to project power, respond to crises, and deter aggression. It introduces unacceptable risks to national security and undermines the effectiveness of the U.S. military. The speed at which the U.S. can respond is diminished, and the overall cost of deployment likely increases as airlift is used as a stopgap. An additional issue to consider is having adequately trained and equipped sailors to man them. In 2025, for example, USAFRICOM lost the USS Herschel Woody Williams due to a shortfall of available Merchant Mariners.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. CROW

Mr. CROW. GEN Kurilla, in FY23 this committee created the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (CPCOE) on a bipartisan basis. We understand that we can't effectively conduct our mission, win the support of the local population, reduce civilian casualties, and ensure the effectiveness of our precision and targeting unless we make protecting civilians mission essential. Based on your leadership of a battalion in Iraq in 2005 and extensive experience at CENTCOM, do you agree that engaging with civilian populations and reducing civilian casualties as part of our operations is mission essential? Is it accurate to say that precision makes us more combat effective because it reduces civilian casualties which earns the support of civilian populations?

General KURILLA. (U) Yes, reducing civilian casualties is always a priority when planning and executing our military operations and is something we take very seriously. Precision does make us more effective. While we will never be able to eliminate all civilian harm during military operations, it is important that we make every effort to minimize it, admit when it happens, and learn from past operations how to meet our military objectives.

Mr. CROW. GEN Kurilla, the US military has spent many years working to improve its ability to prevent and mitigate civilian harm from its operations, consistent with both US values and strategic goals - including through the development of the DoD Instruction on Civilian Harm under the first Trump administration and the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan (CHMR-AP). The Department of Defense has provided notice to Congress that they are going to defund and shut down the CPCOE. How could cuts to the CPCOE affect your command's ability to prevent and respond to civilian harm? How do civilian harm mitigation and response efforts further CENTCOM's operational effectiveness?

General KURILLA. (U) CPCoE and CENTCOM CHMR billets contribute to our strategic goals as they enable us to be more precise and mitigate risk to civilian populations, differentiating us from our enemies. The CPCoE enhances the DoD's ability to retain and share our lessons learned. Additionally, the reduction of combatant command CHMR positions will force other warfighting / staff billets to execute the civilian harm mitigation and response efforts, which is particularly burdensome in our very kinetic AOR. CHMR positions increase our precision and capability to mitigate civilian harm, ultimately enhancing our operational effectiveness.

Mr. CROW. GEN Kurilla, civil society and media organizations have reported civilian casualties caused by recent US operations in Yemen. Were the civilian harm mitigation and response experts at CENTCOM and/or at the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence consulted in planning for these strikes? How is CENTCOM as-

sessing reports of civilian harm? When will CENTCOM publish the findings of these assessments?

General KURILLA. (U) Yes. Every planned target undergoes thorough vetting and validation, including detailed analysis of its proximity to civilian infrastructure, population centers, and potential collateral damage risks. Civilian Harm Mitigation Response (CHMR) experts conduct in-depth assessments, leveraging all available tools and sources of information, to predict the potential for civilian harm. CENTCOM has CHMR experts fully integrated within the Joint Targeting Process as part of the Joint Fires Element. CHMR experts analyze post-strike data and provide feedback from the information environment to identify areas for improvement and refine our processes for future strikes.

(U) Our Civilian Harm Assessments Cell is processing all received reports and will publish the findings in the Annual CIVCAS Section 1057 Report to Congress which is submitted annually by May 1.

Mr. Crow. GEN Kurilla, the administration issued a travel ban for Afghan citizens, with President Trump saying that it applies to countries that "don't have things under control." What is your assessment of the current threat environment in Afghanistan? Have civilians that assisted American coalition forces been targeted by the Taliban and are they at risk of reprisals?

General KURILLA. (U) Afghans who are former members of the Afghan military or who assisted U.S./Coalition Forces are most at risk. They would likely be subjected to reprisals from the Taliban for these connections. The Taliban Regime has a policy against such reprisals, but it is likely poorly enforced. Rogue Taliban members or other aggrieved parties could retaliate against the above-mentioned individuals with relative impunity.

Mr. Crow. GEN Kurilla, the Department of Homeland Security plans to terminate the Temporary Protected Status of around 10,000 Afghans on July 14th, leaving them open to deportation back to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. DHS claims that the security and economic situation in Afghanistan has improved enough to remove their Temporary Protected Status. Is Afghanistan now safe enough for civilians that fled the Taliban to return?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. Crow. GEN Kurilla, Secretary of State Rubio recently testified that without increased foreign aid and investment, Syria is on the verge of a full-scale civil war. Do you share the State Department's assessment that Syria is on the brink of another civil war and is the transitional government at risk of imminent collapse? How does lifting sanctions and allowing foreign aid impact security dynamics in Syria?

General KURILLA. (U) Syria's stability remains fragile after a mere seven months following the collapse of the Assad regime. Absent progress on foreign aid, investment, and sanctions relief, Syria's economic and security situation will remain volatile, putting the country at risk for internal conflict. As you are aware, Syria is a patchwork of ethno-sectarian constituencies with competing regional interests and has been a key operating area for terrorist groups and Iran-backed malign elements. The Syrian governing authorities' ability to deliver on civil services, foster commerce, mend sectarian divides, combat terrorism, and establish good governance with popular representation all play into Syria's trajectory and ultimately the risk to our homeland.

(U) From a military perspective, a critical challenge for the transitional government is providing a secure and stable environment for Syrians, and that comes at a massive financial cost following decades of conflict amid the Assad regime's rule. If it is unable to fund essential services and a cohesive, functioning security apparatus, the government is at risk of collapse. If the government collapses, it could trigger another civil war with significant regional and transregional impacts. Lifting sanctions and allowing foreign aid can provide the government a way to establish security partnerships that build and enable effective Syrian security forces to confront internal and external threats. With our help, and that of the international community, Syria could grow into a strong and reliable regional partner with robust economic, political and military institutions.

Mr. Crow. GEN Kurilla, what is the current state of Russian and Iranian operations in Syria? How would increased Iranian influence in Syria affect the security and stability of your area of operation? How have Turkish forces along Syria's northern border reacted to the SDF-HTS integration agreement?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. Crow. GEN Langley, in your opening statement before this committee last year, you said "USAID resources can cultivate economic and human development so

African governments have more resources for security independence.” How has shuttering USAID initiatives affected internal stability and security cooperation in your area of operation? Do you believe the freeze in foreign assistance has allowed China to expand its influence in Africa?

General LANGLEY. As the State Department continues to assume and assess the roles that were previously fulfilled by USAID, USAFRICOM remains committed to working with the interagency to ensure a whole of government approach to addressing the causes of terrorism and countering the PRC on the African continent. Through DoD’s Office of Strategic Capital, we are also working with the Department of State, Department of Commerce, and other appropriate agencies to address the malign activity of China and Russia that exploits African nations for critical resources that feed their respective defense economies.

Mr. CROW. GEN Langley, a new Health Policy analysis estimates that 1 million children could become infected with HIV, nearly half a million could die from AIDS by 2030, and 2.8 million children could be orphaned in the region without consistent, stable funding programs like PEPFAR. What kind of destabilizing effect would this have in your area of operation?

General LANGLEY. The USAFRICOM AOR, with 53 sovereign nations and over 1.5 billion people, has many acute challenges that require a whole of government approach to address. USAFRICOM, with its limited resources, is focused on the most pressing terrorist threats to the U.S. Homeland and PRC military encroachment on the continent. As we continue assessing our campaign activities to ensure alignment to the interim national defense strategic guidance, we will remain linked with OSD Policy to discuss potential opportunities for interagency coordination. We value the investment of our allies and partners on shared interests, to include health diplomacy activities, that help enable African Partners to become more stable and more effective security exporters. We will continue to collaborate with the State Department to better enable our allies and Partners to address this issue.

Mr. CROW. GEN Langley, you recently stated before a conference on African defense in Kenya that the US is assessing the future of AFRICOM and its potential merger with EUCOM. How would merging AFRICOM and EUCOM impact your ability to coordinate operations with African allies and partners? What effect would a merger have on your capabilities and operational control across Africa?

General LANGLEY. As I stated in my testimony to the Senate on April 3rd, I will not speculate on evolving defense policy. However, I will reiterate the importance of the African theater of operations. It is a nexus of serious threats to U.S. national security, and where global terrorist organizations, the PRC, Russia, and Iran all are actively pursuing malign activities on the continent to undermine U.S. influence.

In 2007, the amount of worldwide terrorist activities originating from Africa represented only 2% of the total. Today, 43% of the world’s terrorist activity is found on the African continent. In that same timeframe, the PRC has invested \$72 Billion dollars across Africa. China is Africa’s largest trading partner, with trade reaching \$295.6 billion in 2024 alone. Africa must continue to be prioritized as a theater that reflects its role as the fastest growing continent in the world, but one with nearly 50% of the world’s terrorist activity, and its great importance to the PRC for long-term resource sustenance.

Mr. CROW. Ms. Thompson, Given the importance of civilian harm mitigation and response efforts and the vital role of the CPCOE in furthering our capabilities, why is the Department of Defense trying to dismantle the CPCOE?

Ms. THOMPSON. DoD is in the process of reviewing multiple programs to ensure their alignment with administration priorities. Any organizational changes to the CP CoE will reflect our effort to optimize its functions, potentially integrating them into other existing structures, while still fulfilling the underlying objective of minimizing civilian harm. The Secretary of Defense retains the authority to determine the most effective organizational structure for the CP CoE and other offices to ensure they effectively support DoD efforts to mitigate and respond to civilian harm without compromising operational effectiveness.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. RYAN

Mr. RYAN. General Kurilla and General Langley: Several COCOMs have successfully fielded an initial scaling of Maven Smart System. However, there are still large gaps in who has it and on what networks. In your experience, has this system been successful in maximizing speed, accuracy and better information and decisions? And should it be further scaled to ensure all CENTCOM and AFRICOM warfighters have this joint warfighting software to enable a data-centric approach to informing decisions and operations?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. RYAN. General Kurilla and General Langley: Several COCOMs have successfully fielded an initial scaling of Maven Smart System. However, there are still large gaps in who has it and on what networks. In your experience, has this system been successful in maximizing speed, accuracy and better information and decisions? And should it be further scaled to ensure all CENTCOM and AFRICOM warfighters have this joint warfighting software to enable a data-centric approach to informing decisions and operations?

General LANGLEY. Maven Smart Systems (MSS) and Advana have been successful in improving the speed, accuracy, and quality of information that feeds our decision-making processes. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) guidance to pipe data from authoritative source systems into Advana's data lake makes it easy for combatant commands to quickly service relevant and valuable information into our decision-making processes that resides within MSS. The centralized deployment of Advana and MSS by the OSD Chief Data Analytics Officer (CDAO) is a critical factor in successfully providing combatant commands with decision-advantage. OSD CDAO's management of software licenses, hardware, and the IT security overhead would be overwhelming for any single combatant command. Further still, the centralized deployment of Advana and MSS allows each of the combatant commands to see, learn, and quickly copy successful decision-making processes from other combatant commands for their own use.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GOODEN

Mr. GOODEN. General Kurilla, Physical AI is the process of acquiring data from the physical world through cameras and other sensors to model data outside of traditional text AI platforms. I am aware that at Al Udeid Air Force Base, AFCENT has a pilot program for a physical Artificial Intelligence Monitoring System (AIMS) that integrates with existing infrastructure, leveraging the base's existing cameras and sensors to create a real-time common operating picture, transforming the base into a live data stream that is continuously analyzed in motion. I understand this has saved almost \$150M over the last 5 years in decreasing workforce oversight costs. What are some of the major benefits of this program at Al Udeid and do you see it expanding to other bases across the middle east?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. GOODLANDER

Ms. GOODLANDER. What resources does U.S. Central Command have in the region that could be accessed and delivered to Gaza to provide critical aid to civilians?

What steps would U.S. Central Command need to take in order to mobilize these resources, from an operational perspective?

What barriers are there to access and deliver these resources?

What logistical or other support is required from allies and partners in the region?

If directed by the President of the United States, how quickly could U.S. Central Command mobilize and deliver this aid to civilians?

General KURILLA. (U) USCENTCOM maintains an extensive logistics network across the AOR that could, if directed, be leveraged to provide aid to civilians. These capabilities include fixed and rotary wing cargo aircraft, ground cargo assets, and contingency stockpiles of meals and other supplies. The broader Joint Force has additional logistical capabilities if allocated. In terms of authority, it would require SECDEF or POTUS issue a directive to do so, much like during the 2024 Gaza relief mission. DoD stocks for humanitarian assistance (food, medical, clothing) are relatively limited and require costly replacements.

(U) From an operational perspective, to mobilize resources, CENTCOM would need to coordinate with the Department of State, which serves as the lead federal agency for humanitarian assistance. This would involve requesting unique capabilities from the Department of Defense, which would then require approval from the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Commander of the United States Central Command to execute a Foreign Disaster Relief Operation in support of aid to civilians. However, it's worth noting that the international community is generally better positioned to respond to "slow onset" disasters, such as those involving extreme cases of malnutrition or famine, due to their specialized expertise and resources. The Department of Defense resources and capabilities could be utilized as an in-

terim solution in emergency situations, but a more effective approach would be to leverage the international community's capabilities, with CENTCOM playing a supporting role, such as delivering humanitarian rations and commodities to areas where the humanitarian community does not have access.

(U) The use of Department of Defense capabilities to deliver humanitarian aid is typically not a cost-effective option and requires careful coordination with the Department of State to ensure that goods and commodities are delivered appropriately to provide the most effective support to those in need. Furthermore, the government of Israel, as well as neighboring countries, would need to provide their support and approval for these efforts, including access to basing and overflight privileges. A significant barrier to access and delivery is simply risk to force depending on the delivery method.

(U) Ally and partner logistical or other support would include access, basing and overflight approvals for US Central Command to coordinate and deliver aid whether by air, ground, or sea. In addition, the US would rely on allies and partners for contracting of supplies and services, funding, coordination, donations, security and force protection, and distribution of aid through ally and partner provided distribution resources.

(U) If directed by the President, CENTCOM could mobilize and deliver aid to civilians through various means, including ground, sea and U.S. airdrops, or partner-enabled airdrops. The use of established ports and ground transportation is the most effective and efficient way to deliver assistance and could be done relatively quickly with the appropriate approvals. Air drops could potentially occur within a week, delivering culturally appropriate Meals Ready to Eat, assuming overflight privileges; however, this is the least effective method of delivering aid. Movement of aid by truck is the most effective and cost-efficient method to deliver aid. Ultimately, the success of these efforts would rely on significant and deliberate coordination with Israel and the humanitarian community.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MESSMER

Mr. MESSMER. If you had to start with a blank piece of paper on the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process, in your best military advice, how would you design the process, including DOD's internal process?

General KURILLA. (U) The U.S. FMS process remains a vital and influential tool to bolster partner nation capabilities, integrate regional networks, and build influence with partner leadership that is critical to U.S. interests. Despite this, the process is nuanced, complicated, and appears opaque to our partners. The FMS process remains bureaucratic and rife with delays. Within CENTCOM, we currently have over 30 of our priority cases - all aimed at enabling partners with critical capabilities - stalled. These delays are a persistent relational irritant to partners - who are essential to regional security and stability - and frequently drive them into the arms of our strategic competitors. We assess these delays are tied to four areas: industry delays, partner delays, USG Policy delays, and U.S. process delays.

(U) In response to your question, I would overhaul our legacy FMS process to make it more transparent, more responsive, and better suited to building partner capabilities that will facilitate burden sharing. This is not all inclusive of possible measures, but some examples are below:

1. I believe it is essential that we incentivize industry to invest in expanded capacity for current and surge capacity to ensure we can meet our pacing threats. I would invest in the infrastructure required to create surge capacity among our defense industry partners. Current surge capabilities take years to stand up; this needs to be shortened to months for critical and priority requirements. In addition, I would hold Industry accountable to the timelines and pricing that the partner agrees to in the Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA). The time and cost overruns that afflict the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) should not be passed on to our partners. A stark example of where we have failed at this is in our partnership with Saudi Arabia. Vendor mismanagement and oversight shortfalls have almost derailed Saudi Arabia's attempt to purchase the Multi-Mission Surface Combatant (MMSC) vessel. This mismanagement has resulted in an approximate seven-year delay in delivery and \$430M in cost overruns that our Navy fully intends to bill to the Kingdom. I recommend the USG hold industry to the same standards for partner delivery as for U.S. delivery. Recently, the Pentagon withheld \$5M per aircraft from Lockheed Martin for delays in F-35 deliveries to the USAF. We should exact the same on delivery overages for partner FMS. In the FMS process, we could codify accountability measures when implemented cases move to the contracting phase.

2. I believe we should allow industry to offer only one standardized export variant of each major end item (such as fighter aircraft). Customization, along with resultant design delays and integration challenges, accounts for the single biggest partner nation delay we experience. Industry profits from these custom builds, but the system does not. Customization leads to long delays and increased cost as vendors work through engineering and integration challenges. Proactive review and certification of exportability for standardized systems would accelerate case development, production, and delivery. An example of the pitfalls inherent in customized builds is Jordan's F-16 Blk 70 FMS case. Efforts to customize the jets led to years of negotiations with industry, an exorbitant price for the aircraft and a five-year delay in availability of the aircraft to Jordan.

3. Process transparency is paramount. DSCA should be proactive in keeping partners apprised of process delays. This will be central to restoring and maintaining partner trust in the system. Coordinated, transparent messaging to the partner is essential whenever any policy or process delays pushes agreed upon timelines. AI could help. We could benefit from getting rid of informal Tiered Review and adhering to Congressional Notification (CN) timelines for review. Cases can languish in Tiered Review for years without any communication to the partner. This leads to pricing increase, exasperates the customers and impedes integration with U.S. forces. We must be able to process cases in a reasonable, predictable, clearly understood timeline that keeps partners informed of the precise status of their purchases. The NASAMS case for Egypt has been in staffing for two years. After submitting the LOR in 2023, the CN package cleared Tiered Review in May 2025 and was formally notified to Congress on 24 July 2025. A predictable Congressional Notification timeline would significantly encourage our partners continuing to select us as the partner of choice.

4. I propose we re-evaluate the Congressional Notification dollar thresholds to account for inflation rates and cost increases since originally published in the 1976 Arms Export Control Act. Those thresholds are in the table below. These thresholds should be adjusted to take into account inflationary price increases as a minimum.

For NATO countries, Australia, Israel, Japan, ROK, New Zealand - Major Defense Equipment: \$25M - Any Articles, Services, or Both (TCV): \$100M - Design and Construction Services: \$300M For All other countries, NATO organizations, all other International Organizations - Major Defense Equipment: \$14M - Any Articles, Services, or Both (TCV) \$50M - Design and Construction Services: \$200M

5. I would also right-size the workforce in DSCA, the Service Implementing Agencies and International Program Offices dedicated to case development and case management to match the record increases in sales over recent years. While positive, increased sales and the resultant case load burden the system and challenge the workforce to meet case development timelines. While automation and innovation have helped, the DSCA team that manages the CENTCOM portfolio is roughly the same size as it was a decade and a half ago while our case load has more than doubled and the complexity of the technology in the systems we offer has evolved immeasurably. An example of the impact of enterprise manpower shortages is Egypt's case for AN/TPS-78 Radars. The USAF program office does not have adequate manpower to execute the case once implemented. The program office identified critical shortages of program managers, engineers, and contracting support and assesses contract award post-case implementation could take 12 additional months on top of the normal 9-12-month period to get a case on contract. One potential approach to fix this would be to increase the administrative fee partners pay for execution of FMS cases, perhaps increasing it from 3.2% to 4.2%. Doing this would allow us to fund additional manpower at no cost to taxpayers.

6. I would add Service implementing agency liaison billets to Combatant Command headquarters. This would facilitate information flow, particularly with respect to Combatant Command priorities, which should - along with Department of Defense priorities - focus the efforts of DSCA and the Service Implementing Agencies.

7. Combatant Commanders should have a formal "JUON-like" mechanism to enable the enterprise, including industry, to surge for partner urgent operational needs. This could be actioned through a Cross-Departmental Working Group (CDWG) and would allow Combatant Commanders to nominate specific FMS cases for accelerated case development. Current surge capabilities take years to stand up; this needs to be shortened to months for critical priority partner requirements. To highlight this, our regional partners are currently enduring an existential threat manifested by ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Concurrently, we are resequencing (delaying) delivery of Patriot interceptors purchased via FMS and, on the Counter-UAS front, we have one exportable program of record - the "low, slow, unmanned aircraft integrated defeat system" (LIDS). Seven partners have expressed interest in the LIDS system. The only partner with an active LIDS

case is Qatar, whose LIDS will not be fielded until 2029. That timeline is simply not how we should treat a valued partner nation who hosts our forces in theater.

Mr. MESSMER. How does the deployment of such a large portion of our B-2 bomber fleet in CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR) affect our ability to meet STRATCOM's mission requirements, and the broader deterrence posture that B-2s take part in?

General KURILLA. (U)CENTCOM defers to STRATCOM on the impact to STRATCOM's mission requirements.

Mr. MESSMER. If the security of the ISIS prisons in Syria were compromised and larger ISIS cells reconstituted across Syria and Iraq, would that require a CENTCOM led response, or does our array of allies in the region have what they need to counter a potential ISIS resurgence?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. MESSMER. What recommendations do you have for how we can further strengthen the U.S.-Saudi security partnership?

General KURILLA. (U) As the largest partner in the region, strengthening the U.S.-Saudi security partnership is crucial for building and maintaining regional stability and addressing regional security challenges. Opportunities to further advance the US-Saudi military partnership include support to Saudi Arabia's efforts for continued regional security initiatives; boost defense modernization; increase interoperability through bilateral and multilateral exercises; enhance counter-terrorism cooperation; and support Saudi Arabia's military transformation goals. Additionally, bilateral defense planning highlights the need for additional access and basing in support of contingencies and presents important opportunities to leverage burden sharing for regional security efforts. Key to these efforts is delivering on approved foreign military sales commitments. Overall, these initiatives enable partner capacity and increase interoperability between US and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. MESSMER. In 2024, the Biden Administration came to an agreement with the Iraqi government to transition the current U.S. force posture in the country from one operating under Operation Inherent Resolve to a new U.S.-Iraq bilateral security agreement by 2026. Has this agreement been implemented at any stage in the past few months? In your best military advice, should the implementation of this agreement be reconsidered considering the threat environment in the region?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.

Mr. MESSMER. Coups and regime change have proliferated throughout the Sahel region of Africa, and due to Section 7008, DOD has withdrawn our security partnerships with such governments. Now that we do not have a persistent presence in the Sahel, how is DOD seeking to monitor and counter terrorist organizations in the Sahel going forward?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM is employing the full spectrum of available national intelligence capabilities to try to mitigate our limited footprint in the Sahel. We have some capability to monitor terrorist organizations in the Sahel; however, without appropriate resources - posture locations, overflight, ISR, maneuver forces, partner nations, etc. - we are extremely limited to counter these terrorist threats.

Mr. MESSMER. Do you see the People's Republic of China (PRC) stepping into these recently "Coup Belt" African countries and seeking to become a guarantor of funding and possibly security - effectively replacing us as the partner of choice in the region?

General LANGLEY. China is not interested in becoming a guarantor of security to the "Coup Belt" African countries. Beijing views these nations through an opportunistic lens, only providing superficial and limited military support that reinforces its broader economic and political goals. In the same vein, China does not intend to serve as a funding guarantor for these countries. Instead, it promotes regional economic investment that aligns with its own interests, which are to secure access to these countries' natural resources, such as critical minerals and oil. These investments and incentives include security cooperation, training, and arms sales, which China promotes through its engagement with African countries via its Global Security Initiative, its Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027), and other multilateral fora. The United States is still the preferred partner for FMS/FMF. We must capitalize on this by speeding up those processes and maintaining that competitive edge in the face of growing investment by the PRC.

Mr. MESSMER. You've mentioned during the most recent Africa Lion Exercise that our African partners will be expected to stand up more on their own militarily. In that vein, AFRICOM has trained and assisted partners with Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism operations conducted in the Sahel and across Africa - are these

missions going to persist, or will partner nations be held to an expectation of independent capability?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM continues to maintain strategic partnerships in Africa by working alongside our allies and partners to address shared security concerns. USAFRICOM is prioritizing limited and tailored security cooperation activities and investments that enable our African Partners to defend against regional terrorist threats. As key Partner nations become more capable of independent operations, we will look to transition our limited resources to other willing Partners who share security objectives. Additionally, we will continue to leverage capabilities of NATO and Non-NATO allies to enable African Partners who require continued support.

Mr. MESSMER. Can you touch upon our efforts to support the Somalia National Army against Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia?

Do you expect the Somalia National Army to be able to independently operate and succeed against these terrorist organizations without the support AFRICOM usually provides, including self-defense airstrikes?

General LANGLEY. USAFRICOM's objective with every partner is to achieve operational independence while achieving our shared security objectives. This objective applies equally to the security forces of Somalia; however, the Federal Government of Somalia and its security institutions are realistically years away from the absorptive capacity required for such complex systems as air support, ISR, and fires. On the other hand, al-Shabaab's capabilities in these essential warfighting functions continue to increase thanks to support from groups such as the Houthis. In the near term, the Somali's will continue to rely on air support and fires provided by the United States and other allies and partners in order to maintain any advantage over al-Shabaab. USAFRICOM is pursuing options in the mid to long term to share more of the burden for providing this type of support to other allies and partners, to allow us to focus more on essential counterterrorism activities.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BELL

Mr. BELL. You had been pushing for a more aggressive approach to counter the Houthi threat. With this deal in place, what steps are being taken to reassure and support our regional allies who continue to face these threats?

General KURILLA. (U) CENTCOM continues to aggressively invest in improving our regional partners' capabilities in integrated air and missile defense, maritime security, and counterterrorism. Additionally, US naval vessels continue to transit the Bab al-Mandeb as necessary, exercising freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. CENTCOM is in close coordination with regional partners in efforts to interdict advanced conventional weapons enroute the Houthis and remains postured to immediately counter any Houthi threat that may arise should the Houthis elect to recommence attacks on U.S. maritime traffic. Our forces are ready, and plans are in place to apply US military power at the President's order.

Mr. BELL. Recent plans have been announced to further consolidate U.S. troop presence in Syria and Iraq. I've asked European Command how this might impact our counterterrorism operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Can you expand on any additional concerns CENTCOM has regarding this consolidation?

General KURILLA. The answer provided is classified and is retained in the committee files.