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Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
THE POSTURE OF UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
AND UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Washington, D.C.

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1 HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
2 THE POSTURE OF UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
3 AND UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND  
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5 Tuesday, March 15, 2022  
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7 U.S. Senate  
8 Committee on Armed Services  
9 Washington, D.C.  
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11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in  
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,  
13 chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],  
15 Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren, Peters,  
16 Manchin, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton,  
17 Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Blackburn,  
18 Hawley, and Tuberville.  
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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM  
2 RHODE ISLAND

3           Chairman Reed: I would like to call the hearing to  
4 order.

5           Good morning. The committee meets today to receive  
6 testimony from General Kenneth McKenzie, Commander of United  
7 States Central Command, and General Stephen Townsend,  
8 Commander of United States Africa Command. Thank you both  
9 for your service, and I am grateful to the men and women  
10 serving under your commands. And I understand this will  
11 likely be the last appearance before this committee for both  
12 of you, and I thank you for your dedicated, diligent service  
13 to the nation and to the men and women you have led over all  
14 these years. And thanks also to your families who stood by  
15 you and sustained you throughout this distinguished career.  
16 Thank you.

17           Central Command remains one of our most challenging  
18 theaters. Of its many responsibilities, CENTCOM's top  
19 priority is "deterring the Iranian regime's destructive and  
20 destabilizing activities without undue provocation." This  
21 is a complicated and urgent mission. Just this weekend,  
22 Iran claimed responsibility for a missile strike near the  
23 American consulate in Irbil, Iraq. This strike comes on the  
24 heels of escalating malign behavior by Iran and its proxies,  
25 who continue to mount drone and missile attacks in the

1 region, including against military bases in Iraq and Syria,  
2 Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

3 On the nuclear front, in the five years since then-  
4 President Trump pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan  
5 of Action, or JCPOA, Iran has made key advances. It has  
6 decreased "breakout time" to several weeks from a year under  
7 the agreement. It has increased uranium enrichment to 60  
8 percent, instead of just under 4 percent allowed under the  
9 agreement. Iran has hardened its infrastructure and  
10 replaced damaged equipment with more advanced models. And  
11 while negotiations to return Iran to the JCPOA are in the  
12 final stages, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has introduced  
13 new complications.

14 General McKenzie, given these current dynamics, I would  
15 like your thoughts on how to best respond to Iranian malign  
16 behavior in the region, including collaborating with allies  
17 and partners to counter drone and missile attacks, while  
18 preserving space to return to the JCPOA.

19 Last August marked the end of our 20-year military  
20 mission in Afghanistan. Despite transitioning all forces  
21 from Afghanistan, the Biden administration has maintained  
22 its commitment to ensuring that Afghanistan cannot be used  
23 as a base for ISIS-K, al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups  
24 to conduct attacks against the United States or its allies.  
25 As such, we have assumed an "over the horizon" posture to

1 counter and degrade such threats. I would ask for an update  
2 on our capabilities and whether additional regional  
3 agreements have been reached to ensure we have a robust  
4 counterterrorism architecture to address the threats from  
5 these terrorist groups.

6 AFRICOM presents a similarly complex area of  
7 responsibility. The security situation in East Africa has  
8 been on a downward trajectory following the previous  
9 administration's decision to withdraw the majority of U.S.  
10 military personnel from Somalia in December 2020. Since  
11 then, U.S. forces have been conducting periodic engagements  
12 to train and advise Somali partners. However, as you note  
13 in your testimony, General Townsend, "U.S. and partner  
14 efforts to disrupt and degrade the most dangerous violent  
15 extremist organizations have not achieved the success we  
16 need." The Biden administration is taking a comprehensive  
17 look at our strategy in Somalia. I hope you will share your  
18 views on the current security situation as well as the  
19 status of our engagement with Somali partners.

20 The security situation in West Africa is also  
21 increasingly fragile. Over the past 2 years, extremist  
22 operations have expanded across the Sahel, including pushing  
23 down into the littoral states in the Gulf of Guinea.  
24 Political unrest in Chad has led to the departure of all  
25 nonessential U.S. personnel, and high-profile attacks

1 against civilian and military targets in Mali, Burkina Faso,  
2 and Niger have increased. These extremist groups are not  
3 currently capable of carrying out attacks outside the  
4 region, but several have professed their intent to do so.  
5 Given these challenges, General Townsend, I would like to  
6 know what can feasibly be accomplished with partner security  
7 forces and how sustainable our posture is in such a  
8 politically fractured environment.

9 Finally, both CENTCOM and AFRICOM play important roles  
10 in our long-term strategic competition with China and  
11 Russia. In the Middle East and Central Asia, Russia  
12 continues to leverage hybrid warfare capabilities to expand  
13 its own influence and stymie Western security interests.  
14 China has also increased its presence in the region,  
15 including by deepening economic and security ties with Iran.  
16 And, on the African continent, both Russia and China are  
17 looking to expand their security and economic investments,  
18 and may seek to leverage such access to undermine U.S.  
19 influence in critical regions. During today's hearing, I  
20 hope you will discuss your efforts to engage with partners  
21 and the ways in which the United States can best leverage  
22 its competitive advantages to maintain key relationships.

23 Thank you, again, to our witnesses. I look forward to  
24 your testimonies.

25 As a reminder for my colleagues, there will be a closed

1 session immediately following this hearing in Room SVC-217.

2 Now let me welcome back the ranking member, and  
3 recognize the ranking member, Senator Inhofe.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM  
2 OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I join  
4 you in welcoming our witnesses and thank them for their  
5 decades of service, I think particularly with -- I did not  
6 get the order of that. But anyway, I appreciate the time  
7 that we have worked together and the short time remaining  
8 for certainly some of them.

9 I see three challenges in CENTCOM: Iran's terrorist  
10 proxies acting more aggressively, our partners increasingly  
11 doubt America's resolve, and Russia and China trying to fill  
12 that void.

13 These challenges are a direct result of, in my opinion,  
14 President Biden's misguided policies. He downgraded support  
15 to our partners against Iran and its proxies. He reversed  
16 President Trump's terrorist designation of the Houthis. He  
17 offered Iran massive sanctions relief to rejoin the failed  
18 2015 Iran deal, even as Iran increases its aggression  
19 against us.

20 Iran is the foremost threat in the region. Yet our  
21 partners see the Administration's appeasement of Iran and  
22 ask themselves, are we on our own? Is America abandoning  
23 us?

24 Last summer's disastrous drawdown from Afghanistan,  
25 which culminated with the killing of 13 servicemembers, only



1 reinforced these questions.

2 We also face significant challenges in Africa,  
3 including the growing presence and capability of the jihadi  
4 groups across the continent. China and Russia are  
5 exploiting Africa to destabilize our partners, project their  
6 military power, and expand their influence at our expense.

7 I have always viewed Africa as critical to our national  
8 security, which is why I pushed for its creation of AFRICOM.  
9 That was back in 2007, and it is right now more of a concern  
10 than it was at that time. General Townsend, I will speak  
11 more about this issue of Western Sahara during my questions,  
12 but I am pleased the Secretary provided guidance to assess  
13 alternative locations and hosts for DoD exercises in Africa,  
14 including the annual African Lion exercise. This will be  
15 crucial to ensuring we grow better relationships in Africa,  
16 and help reverse the tide in our strategic competition with  
17 China and Russia.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

20 Let me now recognize General McKenzie for his statement.

21 General, thank you, sir.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL MCKENZIE, COMMANDER, UNITED  
2 STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

3           General McKenzie: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member  
4 Inhofe, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you for  
5 allowing me the opportunity to testify for the final time  
6 regarding U.S. Central Command's posture in an area of  
7 responsibility that encompasses 21 nations and 600 million  
8 people, and it is at the strategy nexus of the world's most  
9 important corridors of trade.

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

14           America's interest in the Central Region and the  
15 challenges we confront there have proven remarkably  
16 resilient. CENTCOM's mission, to direct and enable military  
17 operations and activities with allies and partners to  
18 increase regional stability in support of enduring U.S.  
19 interests, is essentially unchanged from the day of the  
20 command's founding.

21           The primary threats to that security and stability are  
22 also very familiar. CENTCOM was established nearly 40 years  
23 ago to counter the malign influence of a revolutionary  
24 regime that had seized power in Tehran and to compete with a  
25 great power that had, in spite of international

1 condemnation, invaded the sovereign state of Afghanistan and  
2 imposed a puppet regime.

3 Today Iran is no less of a threat to American interests  
4 or to the stability of the region than it was in 1979. To  
5 the contrary, the threat posed by Iran is graver than ever.  
6 Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moreover, has violently  
7 demonstrated its willful regard for international norms,  
8 just as we have seen through Russia's actions in Syria and  
9 elsewhere, in fact, anywhere it sees an opportunity to  
10 diminish confidence in America's leadership. In a more  
11 measured fashion, China is also vying for increased  
12 influence, at an American expense, in a region it depends  
13 upon for over 40 percent of its fossil fuels.

14 Meanwhile, violent extremist organizations, or VEOs, in  
15 the CENTCOM area continue to pose a credible threat to the  
16 homeland. In sum, the Central Region remains today a vital  
17 and volatile arena for strategic competition and the  
18 decisive theater in the campaign against VEOs.

19 The campaign to defeat the so-called Islamic State in  
20 Iraq and Syria has entered a new phase. As of 1 January of  
21 this year, Iraq has assumed sole responsibility for counter-  
22 ISIS combat operations on its own soil. In Syria, CENTCOM  
23 and its partners are degrading ISIS's ability to regenerate  
24 by improving the security of the facilitates for detained  
25 ISIS fighters as well as the displaced person' camps, IDP

1 camps, where their families reside. More than half of this  
2 population comes from other countries, and addressing the  
3 threat of ISIS in northeast Syria ultimately will require  
4 these countries to reclaim and repatriate whatever citizens  
5 of theirs remain in these prisons and camps, ending one of  
6 the world's worst humanitarian crises and depriving ISIS of  
7 what currently is fertile soil for indoctrination and  
8 spreading terror.

9 In Afghanistan, our campaign against al Qaeda and ISIS-  
10 Khorasan has also entered a new phase. We are now  
11 conducting this campaign from bases over the horizon. As I  
12 have said, this is difficult; it is not impossible.

13 I should add today that we will be able to do this only  
14 so long as CENTCOM has the requisite resources to find, fix,  
15 and finish threats to the homeland before those threats  
16 develop the capability to conduct external operations. I am  
17 talking specifically about ISR assets and strike platforms.  
18 CENTCOM has the tools it needs to perform this mission but  
19 the margins are thin and risk will increase should resources  
20 diminish.

21 I would like to specifically address our posture in the  
22 Middle East. Here Iran continues to pose the greatest  
23 threat to U.S. interests and the security of the region as a  
24 whole. With proxies and clients, Iran has fomented conflict  
25 in an arc tracing from Yemen through the Arabian Peninsula,

1 across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon, into the very borders of  
2 Israel.

3 Saudi Arabia endures regular attacks from the Houthis,  
4 who wield some of the most advanced unmanned aerial systems  
5 and cruise missiles in the region, courtesy of the Iranians.

6 Recently the Houthis expanded these attacks to include  
7 urban centers and bases with U.S. forces in the United Arab  
8 Emirates.

9 Tehran also enables its aligned militias in Iraq and  
10 Syria to carry on a persistent, low-level campaign of  
11 indirect fire and unmanned aerial system attacks against  
12 U.S. and coalition forces, hoping to drive us from the  
13 region. Of late, this campaign has been relatively  
14 restrained, but Iran only loosely controls the militias that  
15 conduct these attacks, and as recently as 2020, Iran  
16 demonstrated its willingness to target U.S. forces directly  
17 with its highly capable ballistic missile forces.

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

24 China and Russia are also watching closely for any sign  
25 that America's commitment to the collective security of the

1 region is wavering, and they are poised to capitalize on  
2 whatever opportunities emerge.

3 In closing, let me thank you again for this opportunity  
4 to testify. I would like to thank the soldiers, sailors,  
5 marines, airmen, coast guardsmen, and guardians who have  
6 served and sacrificed in the CENTCOM AOR. It has been the  
7 greatest honor of my life to serve as their commander.  
8 Thank you.

9 [The prepared statement of General McKenzie follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General  
2 McKenzie. General Townsend, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL STEPHEN TOWNSEND, COMMANDER,  
2 UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Townsend: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member  
4 Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee, good  
5 morning. Thank you for inviting me to appear today, even as  
6 the eyes of the world are focused on Russia's lawless attack  
7 on Ukraine, an unjust war which impacts Africa as well.

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

12 I am here this morning with my battle buddy and command  
13 senior enlisted leader, Sergeant Major Richard Thresher, and  
14 my friend, General Frank McKenzie, as we make our final  
15 appearances before you. Our joint testimony highlights  
16 continued and pressing challenges and opportunities faced by  
17 our respective commands and our nation.

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

22 As AFRICOM's fifth commander I have come to learn five  
23 truths about Africa. First, America cannot ignore Africa.  
24 Africa's challenges, opportunities, and security interests  
25 are inseparable from our own. Weak or poor governance,



1 conflict, and climate change stress the stability of many  
2 African nations, which will, in turn, impact U.S. security  
3 and prosperity.

4 Second, our competitors clearly see Africa's rich  
5 potential. Russia and China both seek to convert soft and  
6 hard power investments into political influence, strategic  
7 access, and military advantage. China's economic and  
8 diplomatic engagements allow it to buttress autocracies and  
9 change international norms in a patient effort to claim  
10 their second continent. Russia stokes conflict, pursuing a  
11 faded aspiration to imperial power. Across the continent,  
12 mercenaries from the Kremlin's Wagner Group offer a one-  
13 stop-shop for regime protection, resource exploitation, and  
14 horrific violence against Africans, just as we see in  
15 Ukraine today.

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

22 Fourth, a battle between democracy and authoritarianism  
23 is raging across Africa. Despite a recent surge in  
24 democratic backsliding, our values, our democracy, and our  
25 willingness to work together with African partners creates a

1 huge demand for U.S. engagement and partnership.

2 Fifth, in Africa a few troops and a few bucks still  
3 goes a long way. Modest and predictable investments yield  
4 outsized returns for U.S. and African security interests.  
5 As an economy of force and posture-limited theater, AFRICOM  
6 employs just 0.3 percent of DoD operating budget and  
7 manpower. Modest investments today can yield a continent of  
8 partners tomorrow.

9 We are most effective when we synchronize diplomacy,  
10 development, and defense, so we are grateful for your  
11 continued leadership and backing to help field our whole-of-  
12 government leaders by confirming ambassadors and funding the  
13 State Department and USAID, thanks to the authorities and  
14 resources you provide, and for your continued interest and  
15 support in the capabilities that AFRICOM requires to  
16 accomplish our mission. In summary, USAFRICOM remains cheap  
17 insurance for America's security.

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

19 [The prepared statement of General Townsend follows:]  
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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General Townsend.

2 General McKenzie, do you assess that successfully  
3 concluding a nuclear deal with Iran will provide additional  
4 stability in the region, particularly with respect to  
5 proliferation of nuclear weapons, not just in Iran but in  
6 other states, and also give to the United States and to the  
7 West essentially almost daily insights into the nuclear  
8 posture of Iran?

9 General McKenzie: Chairman, a primary objective of our  
10 policy in the region is for Iran not to possess a nuclear  
11 weapon, and I think the best and most effective way to get  
12 to that position is through a negotiated agreement, which I  
13 fully support. And I think that is probably the best way to  
14 actually get to that and be able to talk about other Iranian  
15 activities in the region that are equally threatening to  
16 states that are non-nuclear in character.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, sir.

18 General Townsend, what is your operational assessment  
19 of removing the majority of U.S. forces out of Somalia to  
20 Kenya and Djibouti, and what have been the impacts on our  
21 partners?

22 General Townsend: Chairman, my view is that our  
23 periodic engagement, also referred to as commuting to work,  
24 has caused new challenges and risks for our troops. My  
25 assessment is that it is not effective, it is not efficient,

1 and it puts our troops at greater risk.

2 Chairman Reed: And General McKenzie, the MQ-9 strike  
3 on 29 August 2021, was a complicated and difficult  
4 situation, including civilian casualties. CENTCOM did a  
5 report, but that report was reviewed by the Air Force  
6 inspector general, General Said, and he indicated that  
7 assigning the 15-6 to the same organization that conducted  
8 the strike and further assigning it to the individual that  
9 conducted the civilian casualty assessment report and did  
10 not recommend a 15-6 was less than optimal, real conflicts  
11 of interest, or simply perceptions of conflicts of interest  
12 were too significant, conducting the 15-6 in 4 to 5 days as  
13 directed was too rushed and did not allow sufficient time to  
14 comprehensively assess the facts.

15 Do you concur with that conclusion?

16 General McKenzie: Chairman, I concur with that  
17 conclusion.

18 Chairman Reed: And what steps are you taking to  
19 correct the situation, in terms of standard operating  
20 procedures for CENTCOM?

21 General McKenzie: Chairman, since that time we have  
22 enacted ten specific things that affect the way we conduct  
23 strike operations, the way we have oversight of strike  
24 operations, the way we investigate those strike operations.  
25 Rather than go through a list of all of them I will call out

1 three, very quickly.

2 Chairman Reed: Yes, sir.

3 General McKenzie: The first thing we have done is we  
4 have re-invigorated and re-institutionalized the idea of a  
5 red cell process within each strike cell. The red cell  
6 prevents the problem of confirmation bias, which is when  
7 operators sometimes, under the pressure of what they believe  
8 to be, and probably is, a mortal threat seized on a course  
9 of action and do not properly evaluate all of the  
10 possibilities, other possibilities. That is one.

11 At the same time, I have upped the reporting of this so  
12 these things are brought to senior leadership much more  
13 quickly, so we have an opportunity to have a good view on  
14 what is going on inside the entire system. And I  
15 particularly acknowledge the issues about who is  
16 investigating who. You cannot investigate yourself. Even  
17 if you do it right there is still a perception there that we  
18 need to take a look at. We are taking that on directly.

19 So a number of things within Central Command we are  
20 changing. I believe, in all these cases, it is the  
21 commander at each level who needs to be the responsible  
22 officer, and you have got to get your commanders directly  
23 involved in that. And I believe we are on the path to doing  
24 that.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, sir.

1           General Townsend, you indicated in your testimony that  
2 efforts in AFRICOM, like every major combatant command, have  
3 to be whole-of-government. But Africa seems to be even a  
4 much more significant case, where without State Department  
5 support, AID support, other departments, that your mission  
6 is not as effective. Can you elaborate a bit?

7           General Townsend: Thanks, Chairman. I think it is not  
8 only not as effective, I think it is not possible for any  
9 one arm of diplomacy development or defense to succeed  
10 without the other, especially in Africa. The economic  
11 challenges, the political challenges, and the security  
12 challenges are so great that we can only make headway  
13 together, and that is particularly important because we have  
14 such modest investments there, modest resources focused on  
15 the continent. So, therefore, we have got to all row  
16 together.

17           Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Gentlemen, thank  
18 you for not only your testimony but for your distinguished  
19 service. Thank you.

20           Senator Inhofe, please.

21           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General  
22 Townsend, as I said in my opening statement I want to talk  
23 more about the plight of the people of Western Sahara. Many  
24 of my colleagues may not be familiar with what they have  
25 been going through out there, but it is nothing short of a

1 tragedy. The fate of the Sahrawi people has been in limbo  
2 since Western Sahara was decolonized and the United Nations  
3 adopted the resolution calling for a referendum on self-  
4 determination in 1966. That was 1966. More than five  
5 decades later, no referendum has been held, and their  
6 destiny has been subjected to broken promise after broken  
7 promise by the Moroccan government.

8 Some in the Administration believe Morocco is now  
9 serious about negotiating a mutually acceptable resolution  
10 in Western Sahara after blocking it for all these years, and  
11 I could not disagree more. Nothing I have seen from Morocco  
12 makes me think that they are serious about the resolution.  
13 And that is why I am pleased that the Secretary has directed  
14 you to look at alternative locations for DoD exercise in  
15 African, like African Lion in the coming years.

16 I have more that I want to say about Western Sahara but  
17 we are pressed for time so I will submit that in writing.

18 [The information follows:]

19 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           Senator Inhofe: General Townsend, I want to turn to  
2 Somalia. As you know, I opposed the last administration's  
3 decision to pull nearly all of our troops out of Somalia and  
4 move them to Djibouti and Kenya and pursue an over-the-  
5 horizon counterterrorism strategy. It increases risk. It  
6 decreases our effectiveness. We are seeing this play out on  
7 the ground on Somalia as things get worse and al Shabbab  
8 gains strength.

9           General Townsend, you have called al Shabbab our  
10 primary enemy in Somalia. Your quote was "the largest and  
11 most kinetically active al Qaeda network in the world."

12           I have two question, General Townsend. Have you  
13 submitted a request to your chain of command to put DoD  
14 forces back in Somalia on a full-time basis, and if the  
15 answer is yes then when did you submit the request and have  
16 you gotten any response yet from that request?

17           General Townsend: Thanks, Ranking Member. All the  
18 characterizations you just related there about Somalia and  
19 the threat from al Shabbab are correct. Respectfully,  
20 Senator, I have submitted advice to my chain of command, and  
21 my chain of command is still considering that advice, and I  
22 would like to give them space to make that decision. And I  
23 can go into it in a bit more detail in closed session.

24           Senator Inhofe: All right. Thank you very much.

25           General McKenzie, I do not really have any further



1 questions, but I do want to comment that it is hard for me  
2 to believe that -- I can see now why we are not smiling and  
3 you are smiling. Apparently it is going to be, I think, in  
4 2 more weeks that you will be bailing out of here, and I  
5 wish you the best for your retirement. All right? Great.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

8 Senator Gillibrand, please.

9 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 General McKenzie, thank you for your testimony. How  
11 has Israel's integration into CENTCOM's AOR improved  
12 coordination among U.S. regional partners, particularly as  
13 it relates to countering Iran and the Middle East and  
14 supporting over-the-horizon counterterrorism capabilities?

15 General McKenzie: Senator, the entry of Israel into  
16 the AOR has given us great opportunities, particularly in  
17 the area of integrated air and missile defense, which I  
18 think is one of the most pressing issues that all of the  
19 states in the region confront when they think about Iran.

20 And so I think of Israel coming into the AOR as sort of  
21 the operational effect of the other normalization of Israeli  
22 relations across the Gulf and with other states. We have  
23 great opportunities here, and I would be prepared to talk a  
24 little bit more about it in the closed session.

25 Senator Gillibrand: As a follow-up, have the Abraham

1 Accords, which have allowed for economic and military  
2 integration between Israel and the Arab State signatories  
3 enhanced our ability to counter China's influence in the  
4 Middle East through coordinated economic policy or enhanced  
5 foreign military sales?

6 General McKenzie: On the question of China's entry  
7 into the theater, obviously I only control a small part of  
8 the perspective on that. I would say that in terms of  
9 foreign military sales we have an opportunity here to pursue  
10 greater integration, again, particularly in the domain of  
11 air defense systems, which I think is low-hanging fruit.  
12 Everyone is interested in it, particularly since the keyword  
13 "defense" is in the design. These are not offensive  
14 systems. These are systems designed to protect those  
15 nations that are there.

16 Senator Gillibrand: And this question for General  
17 McKenzie and General Townsend. General McKenzie, China has  
18 extensive influence in the Middle East and Africa, both  
19 through its Belt and Road Initiative and through increasing  
20 foreign arms sales. Can you comment on China's economic  
21 influence within your command and your concerns that our  
22 regional partners increasingly turn to China for military  
23 assistance?

24 Senator McKenzie: Senator, I will begin with their  
25 economic penetration into the region. They draw a

1 significant portion of their hydrocarbons from the region.  
2 A lot of it goes through the Strait of Hormuz. We see, as a  
3 result of that, they are interested in pursuing close, deep,  
4 and economic relationships with nations that adjoin the  
5 Strait of Hormuz the Gulf itself so that they can protect  
6 that long-term investment. I believe ultimately that will  
7 move from economic to a military component. They think in  
8 the long term, but I believe that is inevitable, that we are  
9 going to see that.

10 Finally, I believe that we remain a partner of choice  
11 for military systems. Our military systems are the best in  
12 the world. You get what you pay for. You get what you pay  
13 for if you buy a Chinese system.

14 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. General Townsend?

15 General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. There is a handout  
16 there. There should be a handout there that depicts the  
17 question you are asking, China's investments across the  
18 spectrum in Africa, and it is daunting. They are investing  
19 primarily in the economic realm, then followed by the  
20 diplomatic realm, and then, to a lesser degree, in the  
21 military domain. However, their military investments are  
22 playing out in Africa. They have their one overseas base  
23 there, and they are working hard to develop other overseas  
24 bases there.

25 And I would reiterate what General McKenzie said about,

1 we remain the partner of choice, and our equipment and our  
2 training is second to none. However, it can sometimes take  
3 a long time to unfold, and that sometimes forces our African  
4 partners to reach for the bird -- go with the bird in hand,  
5 which is sometimes China, sometimes Russia.

6 Senator Gillibrand: General Townsend, how do you view  
7 our African partners' opinion of Russia's invasion of  
8 Ukraine? Will they distance themselves from Russia, based  
9 on its unprecedented action, or how do we hold them  
10 accountable if Russia is allowed to remain economically  
11 relevant to those markets?

12 General Townsend: Senator, I think if you saw the vote  
13 play out in the UN the other day, it sort of covers the  
14 spectrum. So about half of Africa voted to condemn Russia's  
15 invasion. The other half either abstained or did not vote.  
16 I think there was only one vote from the continent, Eritrea,  
17 voted to support Russia. But it was troubling to me that  
18 half of the continent either abstained or did not vote, and  
19 I think that is because they are trying to see how this is  
20 going to play out. Many of them have strong economic ties  
21 to Russia and China, and I think they are biding their time.

22 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

24 Senator Fischer, please.

25 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank

1 you to both of you gentlemen for your service to the people  
2 of this country.

3 During and after the retrograde, President Biden touted  
4 over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations as our new  
5 strategy to deal with the terrorist threat in Afghanistan.  
6 I expressed serious concerns with this approach, including  
7 directly to you, General McKenzie, for CENTCOM, during that  
8 CENTCOM posture hearing last April, but was repeatedly told  
9 by the Administration that challenges associated with this  
10 strategy could be overcome.

11 General McKenzie, have we conducted any over-the-  
12 horizon strikes against ISIS-K targets in Afghanistan since  
13 August of last year?

14 General McKenzie: Senator, we have conducted no  
15 strikes in Afghanistan.

16 Senator Fischer: Would you agree that without  
17 sustained CT pressure, terrorist groups are more able to  
18 focus on planning and preparing for external attacks?

19 General McKenzie: I would agree with that statement.

20 Senator Fischer: Do we have any information on  
21 terrorist planning in Afghanistan?

22 General McKenzie: Senator, I have considerable  
23 information on that, and I am prepared to brief you in great  
24 detail in the closed session that will follow.

25 Senator Fischer: I look forward to hearing your brief

1 on that.

2 General McKenzie, in an interview with the Associated  
3 Press in December you stated that we are probably at about 1  
4 or 2 percent of the capabilities we once had to look into  
5 Afghanistan. Will you be telling us about that in  
6 classified as well?

7 General McKenzie: The brief I will give you I believe  
8 will be exhaustive in all the disciplines of intelligence.  
9 What we had, what we have now, what the difference in those  
10 are, and you will be able to draw your own very stark and  
11 clear conclusions from that.

12 Senator Fischer: Is your conclusion about the strategy  
13 that we have in dealing with the terrorist threat that we  
14 are effective or not effective in sustaining that CT  
15 pressure on the groups?

16 General McKenzie: It is going to take a little time  
17 for that to play out. I believe that, as you noted earlier,  
18 sustained CT pressure is what prevents groups from being  
19 able to grow, to train, to think about plotting beyond their  
20 immediate survival. For example, up and down the Euphrates  
21 River Valley in Iraq and Syria, ISIS is unable to think  
22 beyond surviving that night or the next night. In place  
23 where they do not have that question of immediate personal  
24 survival, then the threat begins to grow. But I would like  
25 to talk about that in a closed session if I can, ma'am.

1           Senator Fischer: Okay. In October, Under Secretary  
2 Kahl told this committee that we could see ISIS-K generate  
3 the capability to conduct external operations, including  
4 against the United States in somewhere between 6 and 12  
5 months, and that was 5 months ago. Today, in your written  
6 testimony, you stated that, quote, "The Department of  
7 Defense assess ISIS-K could establish an external attack  
8 capability against the United States and to our allies in 12  
9 to 18 months, but possibly sooner if the group experiences  
10 unanticipated gains in Afghanistan," end quote.

11           What has caused this intelligence estimate to shift  
12 from October, when Secretary Kahl made those comments, to  
13 what you are telling us today?

14           General McKenzie: Again, I will talk a little bit more  
15 about this in the closed session. But the period I gave,  
16 which is 12 to 18 months for ISIS-K represents our best  
17 whole-of-intelligence community thinking on this. And it  
18 does change over time, as we see groups gather, as we see  
19 groups fall apart. But I will be able to give you a lot  
20 more detail on that in the closed session.

21           Senator Fischer: Okay. Let me shift gears a little  
22 bit then with you, and we will continue the CT in closed  
23 session.

24           We look at Iran's proxies throughout CENTCOM AOR and  
25 they continue to pose a significant threat to our partners

1 and also to our own forces in the region. What more do you  
2 think can be done to deter Iran from their malign  
3 activities?

4 General McKenzie: We have established a very clear set  
5 of redlines with Iran, and I think as a result of that over  
6 the last several months their attacks have tapered off,  
7 particularly in Iraq, which I believe Iran views as the  
8 principal battleground for confronting the United States,  
9 and our partners in the region. And we have been able to do  
10 that by increasingly effective counter-UAS and other systems  
11 to defend ourselves, and at the same time they are finding  
12 it increasingly difficult to gain any kind of political  
13 traction with the government of Iraq. I think for a long  
14 time Iran, frankly, tried to pursue a political solution in  
15 Iraq that is not open to them anymore.

16 Senator Fischer: And do you believe that we have a  
17 good working relationship with our partners in the area in  
18 providing them defense against missiles and drones?

19 General McKenzie: I believe that we do. You know, I  
20 worked very hard at the military, the military channel, with  
21 my peers, the chiefs of defense, in each of these countries.  
22 I believe we do have a very good relationship with them.

23 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr.  
24 Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.



1 Senator King, please.

2 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, two  
3 observations. One is the important day in U.S. history that  
4 this represents -- 202 years ago the state of Maine joined  
5 the union, and I just wanted to note that. Secondly, I am  
6 sorry that our Ranking Member has gone, because there is no  
7 Senator that knows more about African than Senator Inhofe  
8 and has committed more time and effort and diplomatic  
9 outreach to that continent. And I just wanted to recognize  
10 that, as this may be the last posture hearing involving  
11 Africa that he is still a member of this committee.

12 A couple of questions to follow up on Senator Fischer's  
13 questions, General McKenzie. What is the status of the ALOC  
14 with Pakistan, and do we have any understanding whatsoever  
15 with regard to the ALOC for a kinetic strike as opposed to  
16 ISR?

17 General McKenzie: So right now we are flying at the  
18 ALOC to conduct our ISR. For further discussions on that,  
19 Senator, I would really prefer to go into the closed  
20 session, and I will be able to answer your questions very  
21 directly in that session.

22 Senator King: Okay. Can you give us -- and I know we  
23 are going to talk about this in closed session, but since  
24 our leaving of Afghanistan late last summer, compare ISIS  
25 and al Qaeda, because the Taliban is hostile to ISIS, not so

1 hostile to al Qaeda. Is Taliban maintaining pressure on  
2 ISIS?

3 General McKenzie: The Taliban is attempting to  
4 maintain pressure on ISIS. They are finding it difficult to  
5 do. ISIS has been able to execute some high-profile  
6 attacks, even in Kabul, over the last several months. We  
7 are coming out of the winter. Traditionally, this would now  
8 begin the fighting season. It is my expectation that ISIS  
9 attacks will ramp up in Afghanistan as we go into the  
10 summer.

11 And you are correct. The Taliban is going to go after  
12 ISIS. They have done so in the past. But it is going to be  
13 tough fight. They did not help themselves -- "they" being  
14 the Taliban -- when they released a number of prisoners from  
15 Pul-e-Charkhi and Parwan, over 1,000 ISIS fighters that  
16 reverted back to the group and significantly empowered the  
17 group within Afghanistan. And now they are going to reap  
18 the results of that action. So I think that is a problem  
19 for the Taliban.

20 As for al Qaeda, I think they are much less firm on the  
21 al Qaeda issue, in terms of opposing them and being able to  
22 limit them, although they have done some things publicly  
23 that would tend to make you think they at least want to send  
24 the signals that they are doing. And I will talk a little  
25 bit more about that in the closed session.

1           Senator King: Thank you. I want to return to the  
2 chairman's opening questions about Iran. A deal, by  
3 definition, is something where there are things on both  
4 sides, advantages and disadvantage. One side gives up  
5 something. One side gains something. Let us assume for a  
6 moment that there is a renewed JCPOA, which significantly  
7 limits Iran's nuclear capability for the foreseeable future,  
8 for some period of years. At the same time, sanctions are  
9 relieved in some way that enables them to have additional  
10 resources, which they could put into their malign activities  
11 in the region. Would you view that as a reasonable  
12 tradeoff? In other words, realizing you cannot have  
13 everything, do you view a nuclear Iran as more dangerous  
14 than an Iran with more money in their pockets?

15           General McKenzie: Well, Senator, as you know, CENTCOM  
16 is the land of less-than-perfect solutions, so I am always  
17 comfortable with a less-than-perfect solution. It is an  
18 overriding national policy objective of the United States  
19 for Iran to not have a nuclear weapon and be able to possess  
20 a nuclear weapon. So I think that is a very important goal,  
21 and you might have to make some tradeoffs to get to that  
22 point.

23           But the military level, my concern is, first of all,  
24 that they not have that nuclear weapon, but I am also very  
25 concerned about the remarkable growth in number and

1 efficiency of their ballistic missile force, their UAV  
2 program, their long-range drones, and their land attack  
3 cruise missile program. All of those concern me.

4 Senator King: That was going to be my next question.  
5 What is our current, if we can do this in an unclassified  
6 setting, of the range of Iranian missiles? In other words,  
7 can they get to Paris? Can they get to London? Can they  
8 get to New York? Or are they simply a regional weapon?

9 General McKenzie: They have over 3,000 ballistic  
10 missiles of various types, some of which can reach Tel Aviv,  
11 to give you an idea of range. None of them can reach Europe  
12 yet, but over the last 5 to 7 years, Senator, they have  
13 invested heavily in their ballistic missile program. Their  
14 missiles are significantly greater range and significantly  
15 enhanced accuracy. We saw that in the attack on al-Asad in  
16 January 2020, where their missiles hit within tens of meters  
17 of the targets they were intended to hit.

18 Senator King: General Townsend, any buyer's remorse,  
19 or I should say borrower's remorse in Africa with regard to  
20 the relationship of these countries to China? Well, I think  
21 borrower's remorse is the right phrase. Second thoughts  
22 about these relationships?

23 General Townsend: Senator, I would say yes, we see  
24 that across the continent. So as you are familiar, when  
25 China started investing heavily in Africa, this term "debt

1 trap diplomacy" was born.

2 Senator King: I call it "debt colonialism."

3 General Townsend: That is another way of saying it as  
4 well. I think our African partners, by and large, are very  
5 well aware of that, and the countries that we see still  
6 hewing to China are those that, well, they are not well  
7 governed, or they are autocrats. So I think there is a  
8 growing awareness of that, and we are seeing that.

9 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

11 Senator Rounds, please.

12 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen,  
13 first let me begin by saying thank you to both of you for  
14 your service to our country. Let me also thank your  
15 families for their participation as well.

16 General Townsend, while Russia and China are  
17 aggressively expanding their physical footprint in Africa, I  
18 am concerned with their even more aggressive and nefarious  
19 activity in cyberspace. Can you discuss how Russia and  
20 China have used cyber to advance their objectives in your  
21 AOR and how your team is combatting the threat?

22 General Townsend: Senator, I will be able to go into  
23 more detail in closed session but I can say this about  
24 Russia. Russia, and you are familiar with the oligarch  
25 Prigozhin, he has troll farms. He invests in troll farms in

1 Africa, and a number of those were involved in election  
2 interference globally, to include our country, and that is  
3 continuing. We are seeing that continue. With China, not  
4 as much, and I can probably go into more detail in closed  
5 session.

6 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. Also, I think Senator  
7 Inhofe hit on this but I would like to re-emphasize the  
8 challenges in the Sahrawi region and south Sahara regions,  
9 where you have challenges where literally you have got  
10 40,000 people that have been displaced out of their  
11 homeland, waiting for a UN resolution, or at least some sort  
12 of an opportunity for independence, and certainly Morocco is  
13 right in the middle of it. And it seems to me that I think  
14 what Senator Inhofe has indicated is the fear that in the  
15 future if we are not observant to the real problems that  
16 have developed there that we are going to have a hotbed  
17 there, and it is going to be one that will not go away, and  
18 we are going to wonder why we suddenly have extremists  
19 developing in that region, recognizing, though, for the last  
20 40 years they have been displaced from their homeland and  
21 the rest of the world has done nothing to try to resolve the  
22 situation.

23 I know that it is an area that you are aware of. Do  
24 you have any comments on what is going on right now in that  
25 region?

1           General Townsend: Senator, I think primarily this is a  
2 diplomatic or political program, less a military one, but  
3 for all the things that you just mentioned I agree with and  
4 we are watching it.

5           Senator Rounds: If it is not fixed diplomatically I  
6 fear that it will become a problem for the military.

7           General McKenzie, I really think, along with a lot of  
8 us here, that the way that we left Afghanistan on a date  
9 certain put our military men and women in a very precarious  
10 position, and that it was not the correct way to leave  
11 Afghanistan. We believe that it was reckless, haphazard,  
12 and it endangered the lives of our service men and women.  
13 Our deeds helped to reshape the current worldwide  
14 operational environment, where our adversaries have been  
15 emboldened to take greater risks in challenging our national  
16 security.

17           We also broke faith with my Afghans who directly  
18 supported U.S. forces. These brave Afghans are eligible for  
19 special immigrant visas, or SIVs, if they are trapped and  
20 have been threatened in Afghanistan. The Washington Post  
21 has reported that Qatar Airways has been chartering one to  
22 two U.S. government flights from Kabul every week, from  
23 August to December. These flights briefly stopped, then  
24 resumed after the new year began.

25           One of the SIV applicants who my office has assisted

1 for the last 8 months just recently was able to get out of  
2 Kabul, in fact just this week, but he was forced to take a  
3 rather adventurous and long, roundabout way through a third  
4 country in order to get out.

5 Can you tell me, General, who specifically has been on  
6 these weekly flights and whether they are the Afghans who  
7 risked their lives to help our servicemembers?

8 General McKenzie: Senator, our responsibility in this  
9 matter is to support the Department of State by providing  
10 lily pads at Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar. When people come  
11 out of Afghanistan, we process them and we make sure that  
12 they are physically fit. We do all the things to move them  
13 on to their final destination. Whether that is the United  
14 States or another country, that is the State Department's  
15 call, not our call. But we are fully committed to assisting  
16 in that. The same thing in UAE, where there is a facility  
17 that is not really run by the United States by rather by our  
18 UAE partners.

19 As to your question about who is coming out, who is on  
20 the flight that Qatar Airways is running every couple of  
21 weeks, I believe they are largely SIV applicants. But,  
22 Senator, I am actually not in minute-to-minute command of  
23 that information. You know, that is actually run by the  
24 Department of State. We support logistically, but those  
25 decisions fall all within the Department of State.



1 I will simply close by saying we have the capability to  
2 support this effort with systems and procedures in place  
3 well into the future.

4 Senator Rounds: Thank you. And once again, thank you  
5 to both of you for your service to our country.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

8 Senator Manchin, please.

9 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
10 you both again for your service, and thank you for all the  
11 hard work you are doing here.

12 I just have two questions, really, and whoever, I think  
13 probably General McKenzie, I might come to you. First of  
14 all, the Afghanistan situation. I was reading this morning  
15 an article that said basically the road from Kabul to  
16 Kandahar is now safe. Commerce is coming back a little bit  
17 and you are seeing different roadside things going on, and  
18 this and that. And basically for the peace in the country,  
19 do you see that basically to where people are embracing that  
20 and believe they have the ability to build any type of an  
21 economy whatsoever, or without our assistance? Because I  
22 read of the famine and I read of all the different hardships  
23 that are going on there also. The only economy they had was  
24 ours. That is gone.

25 General McKenzie: I do not believe it is a

1 particularly safe place to be. I think you can probably  
2 drive on what we would call the Ring Road --

3 Senator Manchin: Yeah.

4 General McKenzie: -- from Kabul down to Kandahar in a  
5 way that you could not do it in the past. But at the same  
6 time we know that the Taliban is actually carrying out, you  
7 know, searches for former Afghan government officials. We  
8 know that women are entering a new and repressive existence  
9 under their rule. So while you may not see the kind of  
10 violence that you saw over the last 10 or 15 years there, I  
11 am not sure it is a place where anyone would want to be, and  
12 I believe the continued press of people that want to leave  
13 Afghanistan is perhaps the best indicator of just what  
14 conditions are like on the ground.

15 Senator Manchin: Us leaving Afghanistan the way we  
16 did, does it leave us in worse shape as far as our allies?

17 General McKenzie: I think it is too soon to tell, but  
18 I think our principal goal in Afghanistan was and remains to  
19 ensure that attacks against the United States are not going  
20 to be generated from there, from al Qaeda and from ISIS-K.

21 Senator Manchin: And right now you believe that we  
22 have subdued that from happening, or are they building back  
23 up again?

24 General McKenzie: Sir, I believe it is much harder to  
25 do it now than it was before. It is not impossible to do

1 it. But I will have a considerable level of detail on that  
2 in the closed session.

3 Senator Manchin: Putin's war on Ukraine with the  
4 energy, that is an energy war, Putin's war on Ukraine and  
5 what we are going through there and also seeing us now, I  
6 have a little bit of a concern with the Administration's  
7 position on the energy we produce in our country and we  
8 could do a little bit more, working with our Canadian and  
9 our Mexican allies. With that being said, the Iran  
10 situation that we are talking, I think things have stalled  
11 there on the Iran deal again, but also I am concerned about  
12 Iran. The last deal that we made with Iran was not made on  
13 basically earning your way back into a productive society,  
14 from the standpoint we were giving them too many reliefs on  
15 their sanctions up front and they never did come through.

16 With the Iran situation right now and the oil that we  
17 have and the sanctions to be removed to get Iran back into  
18 the oil business, or bigger, and also in Venezuela, what  
19 effect do you think that would have on the Iranian  
20 government, for them to have that flow of cash again?

21 General McKenzie: Senator, I am probably not the best  
22 witness to answer that part of the question. I can tell  
23 you, from a military stability perspective, which I am  
24 confident to talk about, my principal interest in Iran is  
25 ensuring that they do not attack us or our partners in the

1 region, directly or indirectly, to keep Iran deterred from  
2 undertaking those kinds of activities. We have had some  
3 success doing that over the last couple of years -- not  
4 complete success.

5 Senator Manchin: But there are still, I mean,  
6 indications they are still basically one of the largest  
7 proliferators of terrorist attacks in that part of the  
8 world. Correct?

9 General McKenzie: That is absolutely correct, Senator.

10 Senator Manchin: And basically with Yemen and all that  
11 they are still very much involved there, supplying them.

12 General McKenzie: Iran is the principal region that  
13 the conflict in Yemen cannot be brought to a conclusion, in  
14 my judgment.

15 Senator Manchin: General Townsend, given the situation  
16 we have in Africa right now, what are your thoughts about  
17 that?

18 General Townsend: Senator, I did not catch the middle  
19 part.

20 Senator Manchin: Basically the situation that we have  
21 in Africa right now, what are your concerns that you have,  
22 the most concerns that you do have?

23 General Townsend: Thank you. Thanks for repeating the  
24 question. Well, I think probably number one is ensuring  
25 that the U.S. maintains strategic access and influence, and

1 I think, for me, the primary concerns there are China, and  
2 to a little bit lesser degree, Russia. I can go more into  
3 detail on that in closed session, but I am concerned about  
4 China's basing ambitions in Africa. And then the second  
5 thing would be countering threats of violent extremists  
6 there, primarily al Qaeda's arm, al Shabbab, in East Africa.

7 Senator Manchin: Okay. If I can have one further  
8 question, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman Reed: Go ahead.

10 Senator Manchin: My further question would be this.  
11 You know, I remember back that -- I was a young person back  
12 in the Cuban Missile Crisis and the concerns we had with  
13 nuclear attacks and things, all the tests we ran and  
14 everything, we were prepared for, and all the things we had  
15 to go through, the exercises. Today we have so many  
16 countries with a nuclear arsenal. What is the most  
17 dangerous you think that we have, the country that you are  
18 most concerned about with nuclear capabilities, that could  
19 do harm, not just basically upend the world, approach on the  
20 world order, if you will, but basically do damage to the  
21 homeland?

22 General Townsend: Senator, for me, I think I subscribe  
23 to what is laid out in our National Defense Strategy, which  
24 is China is the longer-term threat, the pacing threat, but  
25 today it is Russia.

1           General McKenzie: Senator, I think you have to respect  
2 capability. Russia has that capability. China aspires,  
3 perhaps, in the future, to have that capability. But I  
4 think the acute threat right now, of course, is Russia, and  
5 I agree with General Townsend.

6           Senator Manchin: Thank you.

7           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Manchin.

8           Senator Ernst, please.

9           Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and gentlemen,  
10 thank you very much for being here today and to your command  
11 teams as well. And General McKenzie, thank you so much for  
12 your commitment and your service during a very difficult  
13 time during that transition in the Middle East. We truly  
14 appreciate it. We are grateful.

15           General McKenzie, 2 weeks before the final withdrawal  
16 from Afghanistan the on-the-ground commander of U.S. forces  
17 in Afghanistan at that time stated, in what are now open-  
18 source documents, that the U.S. forces had targeted and  
19 killed over 100 Taliban members who were moving on the city  
20 of Kabul on August 14th. Is that correct?

21           General McKenzie: Senator, I believe that is correct.

22           Senator Ernst: Okay. So we know at that time the  
23 situation was very tenuous. The Taliban was on the move.  
24 And an official DoD after-action report had clarified that  
25 the President and other senior DoD officials' statements,

1 some of which were under oath, and that both on-the-ground  
2 commanders and the intelligence community assessed that the  
3 government of Afghanistan's capacity to defend the country  
4 from being overrun by the Taliban was for 6 to 12 months  
5 following the U.S. withdrawal, and those statements were  
6 unequivocally false.

7           Were the assessments of Rear Admiral Peter Vasely and  
8 General Scott Miller, who were the last two commanders of  
9 the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and yourself, were they  
10 passed on to the Office of the Secretary of Defense?  
11 Because I think there was a different assessment that came  
12 from you and the on-the-ground commanders. Were those  
13 assessments passed on to the Office of Secretary of Defense?  
14 Were they passed on to the State Department? Were the  
15 passed on to the National Security Council?

16           General McKenzie: Senator, I am confident that my  
17 assessments, the assessments of General Miller, as well as  
18 subordinate commanders, which informed my assessment, all  
19 those were passed to the Secretary, and, in fact, to the  
20 highest levels of government. And I was present at some of  
21 those meetings where those recommendations were discussed.

22           Senator Ernst: Were those assessments given to the  
23 President?

24           General McKenzie: I believe that at the very highest  
25 level, everyone saw and knew these assessments.

1           Senator Ernst: Okay. Were you ever involved in a  
2 discussion with the President when dissention was voiced?

3           General McKenzie: Senator, I will not be able to  
4 comment on any discussions I had with the President. But I  
5 can tell you this. My position, which I have expressed  
6 before, in front of this committee, was that in the fall of  
7 2020, it was a probably a mistake to go below the level of  
8 4,500, and in the spring of 2021, it was a mistake to go  
9 below the level of 2,500. If, in fact, we did so, we  
10 expected the government of Afghanistan to collapse. That  
11 reflected my opinion and also the opinion of General Miller.

12           We had an opportunity to freely express that opinion,  
13 and I am confident I was heard, and that is really all a  
14 military commander can ever hope to have the opportunity to  
15 do. Those decisions, to stay or go, and what force level  
16 you are going to put in Afghanistan are not inherently  
17 military decisions. Those are decisions made at the highest  
18 level of the United States.

19           And so I appreciated the opportunity to be a part of  
20 that discussion.

21           Senator Ernst: No, and I appreciate your clarity as  
22 well, General McKenzie. Thank you so much. And as well,  
23 now that we are out of Afghanistan we do see that China and  
24 Russia are becoming more active in Afghanistan, and they are  
25 seeking to capitalize on the void that has been left in that



1 area.

2 What are some of the tools and capabilities that will  
3 be required by the United States to really deter our  
4 adversaries that are in Afghanistan right now?

5 General McKenzie: I think primarily it is how you work  
6 with the government of Afghanistan, such as it is, you know,  
7 as we have not formally recognized the Taliban as the formal  
8 government. But there are levers that we can apply against  
9 that entity -- economic levers, diplomatic levers. They  
10 seek diplomatic recognition, principally from the United  
11 States but also from other nations as well.

12 And so there are things that we can -- I believe, and  
13 it is not a military question, really -- there are things  
14 that we can do to shape their behavior, and I believe our  
15 diplomats are working very hard to that end right now.

16 Senator Ernst: Very good. Whole-of-government. And  
17 General Townsend, just very briefly, do we see a lot of  
18 Russian activity in Africa and the use of contractors,  
19 military contractors, other types of contractors, and what  
20 are those contractors, and give us your assessment of  
21 whether that makes our job more difficult in Africa.

22 General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. We do see a lot of  
23 Russian activity. It is almost all in the form of these  
24 private military contractors that you are referring to,  
25 namely the Wagner Group and some other smaller ones. They

1 are a malign influence. They do not follow anybody's rules.  
2 They do what they want. They buttress dictators. They do  
3 gross violations of human rights. I think it is bad for  
4 Africa's security and prosperity in the future.

5 Senator Ernst: Thank you very much, gentlemen. Again,  
6 thanks so much for your service. We truly do appreciate it.  
7 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

9 Senator Kaine, please.

10 Senator Kaine: Thank you Mr. Chair and the committee  
11 members, and to Generals McKenzie and Townsend, thank you  
12 for your service and for your frequent and always  
13 illuminating appearances before the committee.

14 General Townsend, I want to talk to you about a  
15 situation that is not getting a lot of attention in the  
16 media these days, and that is the humanitarian crisis and  
17 war crimes being committed by many sides in Ethiopia and the  
18 Tigray region. The ongoing battle, 20 months now, between  
19 the Ethiopian military and the Tigray region forces has  
20 created a huge humanitarian crisis, war crimes, famine.

21 You know, it is important that we focus as much energy  
22 as we are focusing on the situation in Ukraine right now,  
23 but one of the things that I grieve a little bit is when we  
24 focus on one part of the world atrocities and other parts of  
25 the world sort of go below the radar screen. And so whether

1 it in Ethiopia Tigray or whether it is persecution of the  
2 Rohingyas in Burma, or whether it is the ongoing  
3 humanitarian crisis in Yemen, some of these crises grab the  
4 world's attention, grab America's attention, and some of  
5 these crises do not.

6 And there are many, many reasons for that. I am not  
7 going to speculate on them now. But in a situation like the  
8 ongoing atrocities in Ethiopia, which are internal civil  
9 strife although there are presence of foreign actors  
10 inciting that strife, or supporting signs in that strife,  
11 what can AFRICOM do, what can the United States do to try to  
12 advance a better chapter for people of Ethiopia?

13 General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. As you stated,  
14 that civil war erupted in late 2020, and so civil war has  
15 played out for over a year there, on top of a humanitarian  
16 crisis there, famine, et cetera. And it started culminating  
17 there at the end of last year, it looked like the capital,  
18 Addis, may fall. The Ethiopian government rallied and they  
19 pushed the Trigrayans back into Tigray, and today it is sort  
20 of quiet. But we think we are maybe in a period in between  
21 conflict erupting again. I hope that is not the case.

22 I know that there is a lot of diplomacy going on.  
23 There is a U.S. special envoy, there is a UN special envoy,  
24 to work this. I think both sides right now are trying to  
25 reset themselves and gather strength. And this diplomacy

1 includes our efforts as well. We have been involved in  
2 supporting State Department diplomatic efforts in the  
3 region. Right now, for AFRICOM, we are watching and  
4 assisting, buttressing the State Department.

5 Senator Kaine: I appreciate that, and I just want to  
6 again underline this point. When there are crises and  
7 challenges in the world people turn to the United States for  
8 help. You know, it is interesting that, again, and it is  
9 worthy and important that we be paying the attention we are  
10 paying to the Russian illegal war against Ukraine, and yet  
11 in Ethiopia there are war crimes occurring, there is  
12 genocidal activity occurring. It may not be an invasion of  
13 sovereignty by a neighbor there are neighbors and other  
14 nations that are inciting violence and supporting violence.  
15 And, you know, I hope that we may all strive to be even-  
16 handed in the attention that we pay to humanitarian crises  
17 all over the world.

18 With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

20 Let me now recognize Senator Tuberville, please.

21 Senator Tuberville: Well thank you very much, Mr.  
22 Chairman. Thank you guys for your service. I know you are  
23 looking forward to doing something else possible for the  
24 next few years.

25 General Townsend, as you have mentioned in your

1 testimony, Russia has continued to encourage chaos in the  
2 AFRICOM AOR via the Wagner Group. What has been done to  
3 counter their efforts and what do you think need to continue  
4 to be done?

5 General Townsend: So the Russian efforts, as I  
6 mentioned earlier, are predominantly done through these  
7 private military companies like Wagner, and they are present  
8 in Libya, in number, to a lesser extent in Sudan, they  
9 essential run the Central African Republic, and they are now  
10 in Mali, and gathering strength in Mali, over 1,000 Wagner  
11 operators there now.

12 What we have been doing is shining a spotlight on that  
13 with information operations and some public diplomacy and  
14 advising our African partners to try to steer clear of these  
15 groups. I think that they are not going to help, our  
16 African partners, and I think that the government and the  
17 people of Mali are going to regret inviting Wagner into  
18 their country.

19 Senator Tuberville: As we speak we have one military  
20 base in Africa. In your opinion, do we need two?

21 General Townsend: In my view I do not believe we do  
22 need any other permanent U.S. installations. Our presence  
23 and our activities there is not dependent on permanent bases  
24 in Africa.

25 Senator Tuberville: Okay. Thank you.

1           General McKenzie, recently we have seen several  
2 attempts to block weapons sales to Saudis and UAE and Egypt.  
3 Those attempts, we all know, could severely weaken our  
4 influence in CENTCOM AOR. Even President Biden recognizes  
5 that, and has changed his mind on some of these in the last  
6 year.

7           What have the Saudis and the Emiratis and the Egyptians  
8 specifically requested that we have not given them?

9           General McKenzie: Senator, let me just begin by saying  
10 we remain the partner of choice for all these countries --  
11 Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE. They value their relationship  
12 with us. They find it frustrating that, in the case of UAE,  
13 they have expressed an interest in the F-35, the fifth-  
14 generation fighter, and we are in a process with them right  
15 now to see how that is going to work out. That is one  
16 example.

17           Saudi Arabia is also interested in advanced aircraft,  
18 advanced air defense systems, which, generally speaking, we  
19 have been able to give Saudi Arabia. In the case of Egypt,  
20 I think we have good news in that we are going to provide  
21 them with F-15s, which was a long, hard slog. They felt it  
22 was too long, that it took too long. And, Senator, that is  
23 the basic criticism of our ability to provide weapons to our  
24 friends and partners. It takes too long to actually get  
25 them. It moves in fits and starts.

1           And, of course, with our weapons come our values,  
2 Senator. And so they are not going to be able to do  
3 anything they want with those weapons. They are going to  
4 have to be applied in a manner consistent with the law of  
5 armed conflict and the law of war. You do not have that  
6 caveat if you buy a Russian or Chinese system. On the other  
7 hand, the Russian and the Chinese system cannot complete  
8 with the ability of an American system.

9           Senator Tuberville: Thank you. General Townsend, in  
10 2021, China unveiled its plan to complete several thorium-  
11 powered nuclear reactors in Africa. Thorium, unlike  
12 uranium, cannot be used for nuclear weapons but can provide  
13 cheap, clean energy that China can export and impose on low-  
14 income countries. The most concerning part to me is we  
15 realized this years ago but our Department of Energy gave  
16 this technology to China.

17           As you mentioned in your opening statement, there are  
18 many reasons and resources within your AOR that are tied to  
19 the U.S. transition to clean energy. If China integrates  
20 thorium nuclear reactors to the Belt and Road Initiative  
21 would that pose a threat to the United States?

22           General Townsend: Senator, I do not know enough about  
23 the Chinese nuclear reactor program to say that it proposes  
24 a threat to the United States. However, I know that Africa  
25 is a source of vast deposits of strategic minerals that

1 America and the world needs for our technology in the 21st  
2 century, and China is working hard to corner the market on  
3 those resources. I am more worried about that, I think,  
4 than Chinese nuclear energy projects in Africa.

5 Senator Tuberville: Again, thank you both of you for  
6 your service.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator  
8 Tuberville.

9 Let me now recognize Senator Warren, please.

10 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you  
11 to both of our witnesses for being here today and for your  
12 many years of service to our nation.

13 The RAND Corporation, a nonpartisan research  
14 organization that studies national security issues, recently  
15 published a report that found a number of pitfalls in the  
16 way that our military prevents, investigates, and responds  
17 to reports of civilian harm, including -- and I want to read  
18 from the report -- "DoD is not adequately organized,  
19 trained, or equipped to fulfill its current responsibilities  
20 for addressing civilian harm," end quote.

21 Now I think that is a pretty damning finding,  
22 particularly as this is far from a new issue for the United  
23 States. I know that Secretary Austin has asked DoD to  
24 develop an action plan, and I agree with him that protection  
25 of civilians is both a strategic and a moral imperative.



1           So I want to learn more about your work to prevent  
2 civilian harm in your respective commands. General  
3 Townsend, if I can I will start with you on this. AFRICOM  
4 provides a quarterly report updating the public on the  
5 status of all reports of civilian casualties, and it issued  
6 one just late last week. What benefit do you see in regular  
7 reporting of civilian casualties to the public?

8           General Townsend: Senator, I believe that being  
9 transparent is probably -- you know, it shows the difference  
10 between us and, well, for example, the Russians in Ukraine  
11 right now. So I believe that publishing those reports  
12 publicly and regularly, on a routine basis, is our best tool  
13 for gaining the trust of the American public.

14          Senator Warren: And I agree with you, and I commend  
15 you for doing this. You know, that kind of regular  
16 transparency shows that the command is prioritizing and  
17 investigating claims of civilian harm, and I would like to  
18 see that kind of regular reporting from all of the combatant  
19 commanders.

20          So, General, let me ask you another question about  
21 this. Would you agree that there are several reputable,  
22 trusted NGOs and independent observers in civil society that  
23 produce reliable reporting on civilian harm?

24          General Townsend: I think I would.

25          Senator Warren: Good. Has AFRICOM undertaken a formal

1 process to incorporate feedback from these groups to improve  
2 how it tracks and responds to civilian harm?

3 General Townsend: Yes, Senator. We take their  
4 feedback with every report they make.

5 Senator Warren: Well, that is important, but let me  
6 ask you. Do you have a formal process for doing this or do  
7 you just kind of integrate it as you go along?

8 General Townsend: We have a portal that anyone that  
9 has access to the internet can report civilian casualties or  
10 take exception to our evaluation of those.

11 Senator Warren: Good. I am glad to hear this. You  
12 know, these groups can provide essential information, not  
13 only to accurately identify where you need to investigate  
14 claims of civilian harm but also to help prevent the killing  
15 of civilians in future strikes. RAND's report recommended  
16 that DoD engage with outside groups more, and I am glad to  
17 see you doing this.

18 General McKenzie, if I can let me talk with you a  
19 minute here. The vast majority of the civilian casualties  
20 caused by the U.S. military operations have occurred in  
21 CENTCOM's AOR. Not only that but reporting from the New  
22 York Times found major instances of civilian harm in Syria  
23 that had been covered up. Does CENTCOM have an established  
24 process for incorporating feedback from trusted civil  
25 society groups to improve the ways that it prevents and

1 responds to instances of civilian harm?

2 General McKenzie: Senator, we did, and it was not as  
3 robust, as straightforward a program as it should have been,  
4 in the wake of the RAND report and other reports. But we  
5 have taken ten discrete actions that are designed all to  
6 more formalize and provide additional oversight on the  
7 possibility of civilian casualties.

8 Senator Warren: Good. I am very glad to hear that,  
9 General, because given their expertise I think we have a lot  
10 to learn from these groups, and it can help improve  
11 processes. It is long past time that the United States took  
12 seriously the impact of the way that hit treats civilian  
13 harm, and I am glad that Secretary Austin is addressing  
14 this. But meaningful change is going to take buy-in from  
15 the two of you, from your successors, and from the rest of  
16 the DoD leadership.

17 I am working on legislation to address these problems,  
18 but in the meantime I will be paying close attention to the  
19 Department's action plan and to your work implementing it,  
20 in the hopes that some of the principles that we have talked  
21 about today will be implemented soon.

22 So thank you very much. Thank you for your work on  
23 this.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Warren.

1 Senator Tillis, please.

2 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen,  
3 thank you for being here.

4 General Townsend, the prior administration reduced  
5 nearly all of the 700 troops that we had in Somalia. Now  
6 you are commuting from Djibouti and Kenya for  
7 counterterrorism over-the-horizon operations. How is that  
8 working now and what are we going to do to increase  
9 effectiveness and reduce risk?

10 General Townsend: Senator, in my view we are marching  
11 in place, at best. We may be backsliding in the security in  
12 Somalia, the security situation, and that is for a number of  
13 reasons, not just our commuting to work. But it is also  
14 political dysfunction in Mogadishu, and it is also  
15 inactivity by the AMISOM partners. Those also factor in.

16 I just think that what we are doing is not providing  
17 sufficient pressure, and the best we can do is maintain a  
18 secure area around the bases that we return to, and we  
19 really cannot get at the al Shabbab problem set.

20 Senator Tillis: General McKenzie, you have had a  
21 similar challenge with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and  
22 we have not seen any strikes since our withdrawal last year.  
23 I suspect some of that is information gathering, a lot of  
24 logistical challenges. But what are we doing there to  
25 overcome the massive reduction in our CT efforts in

1 Afghanistan, and if you could, give me an update on how ISIS  
2 and al Qaeda are doing rebuilding their efforts in  
3 Afghanistan.

4 General McKenzie: Senator, let me preface what I am  
5 going to say by saying in the closed session that will  
6 follow I am prepared to provide an exhaustive laydown of  
7 exactly what we are doing in Afghanistan, at a very granular  
8 level of detail. So I am prepared to do that.

9 Senator Tillis: Great.

10 General McKenzie: I would tell you we have not  
11 undertaken any strikes in Afghanistan since the 1st of  
12 September. We continue to watch carefully as ISIS grows.  
13 They have gone through the winter. They have been able to  
14 carry out some high-profile attacks. They still aspire to  
15 attack the United States and our partners abroad. And so we  
16 are going to watch very carefully what the Taliban is able  
17 to do and not able to do in terms of controlling ISIS,  
18 because as we all know, Taliban actually will fight ISIS.  
19 They have a theological dispute so they are in opposition.

20 Al Qaeda is a little more difficult to understand  
21 because of their cultural interweaving with the Taliban.  
22 They still have an aspirational desire to attack us. It  
23 will be harder for the Taliban, I predict, to ultimately  
24 control their actions.

25 Senator Tillis: With Haqqanis in the Taliban

1 government, how well are they doing countering the al Qaeda  
2 threat in Afghanistan?

3 General McKenzie: I think they have done some things  
4 that are very public in order to limit them. I think it  
5 remains to be seen if this is actually going to be  
6 translated into action.

7 Senator Tillis: Yeah. I doubt that it will.

8 General Townsend, when you look at these maps that you  
9 have about the footprint in your area of responsibility for  
10 Russia and China, are we kind of -- you used the words  
11 "marching in place" with respect to the CT threat? And in  
12 answer to the prior question, are we more or less marching  
13 in place or are we gaining any ground, particularly over  
14 China's, what I see as a massive investment and increasing  
15 footprint in Africa?

16 General Townsend: Senator, you are right. You just  
17 said China's massive investment. We do not have to compete  
18 with China everywhere. We have to be selective about where  
19 we compete with China, and I think we are being successful  
20 in that targeted competition.

21 Senator Tillis: On the PMCs that Russia has, the 4,000  
22 or 5,000, you mentioned that a part of what you are doing is  
23 exposing their activities, their malign activities in the  
24 area. Give me an example of one or two that are publicly  
25 known that the American people should be aware of that

1 Russia's malign, savage influence not only in Ukraine but  
2 down in Africa.

3 General Townsend: I think some great examples were in  
4 spring of 2020, when Russia provided fighters to their  
5 mercenaries in Libya, and we were able to conduct an aerial  
6 photography ambush and expose to the world the provision of  
7 those fighters going to Libya, that wound up in the hands of  
8 Wagner.

9 I think probably the best one, though, to get at the  
10 heart of the matter you are talking about there, is as the  
11 fighting ended, as the civil war ended in Libya, Wagner  
12 began a withdrawal from along the line of contact there, and  
13 they left behind anti-tank mines, anti-personnel mines, and  
14 booby traps, IEDs, in their wake. And one of the most  
15 heinous ones was found in a teddy bear when they withdrew.

16 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Tillis.

18 Senator Kelly, please.

19 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and General  
20 McKenzie, General Townsend, thank you for being here.  
21 General McKenzie, congratulations on your upcoming  
22 retirement on the 1st of April.

23 General Townsend, I want to follow up a question that  
24 Senators Tillis and Tuberville asked specifically about the  
25 Wagner Group. I know that you share this committee's

1 concern about the Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine, and  
2 our allies have come together to cut off Putin's support  
3 around the world and the influence that he has. And I am  
4 really glad we have taken these strong measures necessary,  
5 and we need to do more. But we also need to continue to  
6 monitor Russian-backed activity around the world, so  
7 specifically with regard to the Wagner Group in Africa, I  
8 find this increasing presence disturbing, and affects our  
9 strategic goals in the area.

10 So, General, specifically, how do you see the Wagner  
11 Group's activity impacting our efforts to, one, suppress  
12 violent extremist groups, and two, support a transition to  
13 democratic governance in the region?

14 General Townsend: Well thanks, Senator. I think in a  
15 number of ways. First, for example, overflight permissions.

16 So with a continent as vast as Africa we absolutely depend  
17 on air movement for everything. And when you see Wagner  
18 move in they impose overflight restrictions, either through  
19 the government withdrawing permissions for overflight, or,  
20 in the case of Libya, Wagner importing sophisticated  
21 advanced surface-to-air missile systems to protect their  
22 activities there, but also deny the airspace. We can see  
23 some of this playing out in Mali, as Wagner first started  
24 arriving there, and now overflight permissions are becoming  
25 more challenging then.



1           Then, secondly, usurping partnerships. So as we have  
2 seen--and it happened just now in Mali -- the Malian  
3 government has asked the French forces to depart and instead  
4 have invited in this Russian PMC. And I think that is  
5 disturbing. It is impacting our partnership with that same  
6 government as well, and I think it is not good for Mali's  
7 future.

8           Senator Kelly: And what do you think the strategic  
9 goals that they might be advancing for Russian leadership  
10 would be? What is the overall goal here?

11          General Townsend: So for Wagner, they are guns for  
12 hire. They are a for-profit organization. And they are  
13 going to be extracting natural resources of Africa. We see  
14 this in all the countries that they are located in, whether  
15 it is oil, gas, gold, diamonds, strategic minerals. That is  
16 what they are going to be going after, and that is how they  
17 are probably going to earn their remittance.

18          But what they are doing for the Kremlin, though, is  
19 they are usurping those partnerships. They are displacing  
20 Western influence, like France, for example, in Mali. And I  
21 think they are trying to block us out, and Wagner is trying  
22 to make a profit while they do it.

23          Senator Kelly: And it sounds like they are being  
24 somewhat successful. So what do we need to be doing? What  
25 kind of changes do we need to make, either alone or with our

1 partners, to counter this expanding Russian influence in the  
2 region?

3 General Townsend: Senator, despite their recent gains  
4 or success in Mali -- and I think that remains to be seen  
5 whether they will be successful there or not. I predict  
6 they will not be successful in the long run. An example,  
7 though, is in Libya, where they have worn out their welcome  
8 there, and the even the Libyans who the Russians supported  
9 in the civil war now want them to depart. So actually I  
10 think that they are probably their own worst enemy.

11 Senator Kelly: So the Libyan people are now against  
12 this, I do not want to call it an occupation, but this force  
13 being there and amongst the community. It seems that in  
14 Mali they do have support, general support from the public.  
15 Do you see that turning at some point?

16 General Townsend: I do, and they are in the very early  
17 stages. They have only been arriving in the last couple of  
18 months, and they are preparing to get under operations. So  
19 I think they will wear out their welcome. I do believe  
20 that.

21 Senator Kelly: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr.  
22 Chairman.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly.

24 Senator Cotton, please.

25 Senator Cotton: I want to return to what Senator Kelly

1 and earlier Senator Rounds were speaking about, the Wagner  
2 Group. General McKenzie, the Wagner Group is a Russian  
3 paramilitary organization run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close  
4 ally of Vladimir Putin?

5 General McKenzie: Sir, I believe it is, Senator.

6 Senator Cotton: And I know that they are active in  
7 Africa. There have also been reports that they have  
8 recently been deployed into Ukraine as well.

9 I will give this to either one of you. The Wagner  
10 Group, is it fair to characterize it as essentially an arm  
11 of the Russian state?

12 General Townsend: That is my view of it.

13 Senator Cotton: Yeah, that is my view of it too, much  
14 more so than, say, any American security company would be  
15 linked to the United States government. Correct, General  
16 Townsend?

17 General Townsend: I would agree with that.

18 Senator Cotton: General McKenzie, this was a year  
19 before your time but I bet you remember it, something called  
20 the Battle of Khasham in Syria. Do you want to tell us a  
21 little bit about what happened in Syria in early 2018?

22 General McKenzie: I believe it was in February of that  
23 year. A large group of Wagner-centered fighters tried to  
24 cross the Euphrates River down around Deir ez-Zor. We  
25 brought them under fire and killed several hundred of them.

1 It was a direct attack on us. And I think we defeated them  
2 in a pretty shocking manner that was widely reported.

3 Senator Cotton: Do you remember the numerical  
4 superiority that these Wagner mercenaries had against U.S.  
5 forces?

6 General McKenzie: It was probably 10 to 1.

7 Senator Cotton: Ten to one, they outnumbered U.S.  
8 forces.

9 General McKenzie: Probably.

10 Senator Cotton: I believed at the time, and probably  
11 still do, we had a deconfliction hotline set up with Russian  
12 commanders in the region. Right?

13 General McKenzie: That is correct, Senator.

14 Senator Cotton: And Secretary Mattis, at the time,  
15 testified that we used that deconfliction hotline to ensure,  
16 with Russian counterparts, that these were not Russian  
17 soldiers. Is that right?

18 General McKenzie: Sir, I believe that is correct.

19 Senator Cotton: I think his exact testimony here was  
20 that once we confirmed that "Once we confirmed that Russia  
21 did not claim these soldiers as their own I ordered that  
22 they be destroyed, and they were destroyed."

23 General McKenzie: Sir, that is correct.

24 Senator Cotton: What do you think that tells us about  
25 the quality of Wagner's mercenaries, whether they are in

1 Syria, Africa, or now in Ukraine?

2 General McKenzie: Well, I think it tells you that any  
3 mercenary force is going to have a qualitative disadvantage.  
4 It also tells you a lot about our capabilities, Senator.

5 Senator Cotton: Yeah. And also if they are fighting  
6 against an extremely determined people that are digging in  
7 their heels within their homeland, like the Ukrainian army,  
8 that maybe we should not think that they, or even Russian  
9 regulars are ten feet tall.

10 General McKenzie: Sir, I could not agree more.

11 Senator Cotton: General Townsend, I want to return to  
12 something that you mentioned to Senator Tuberville, that  
13 Africa has vast strategic minerals, which is correct. It is  
14 also the case that they are not exclusive to Africa. You  
15 can find these minerals in a lot of places around the world.  
16 It is just that we have largely declined to mine them around  
17 the world, and now it is predominantly mined in Africa. Is  
18 that right?

19 General Townsend: That is right, Senator.

20 Senator Cotton: Senator Kelly and I have introduced  
21 something called the REEShore Act, with bills to shore up  
22 domestic and defense supply chains for these critical  
23 minerals. Do you think that China is targeting these  
24 minerals in its Belt and Road Initiative in Africa?

25 General Townsend: I do. There are some minerals, and

1 I did not provide the chart now but I can have it in closed  
2 session. There are some minerals that are if not unique to  
3 Africa, they are predominantly found there, and all of our  
4 countries, to include us, rely on those imports. And I  
5 believe China is maneuvering to secure those.

6 Senator Cotton: Probably a bad idea to make ourselves  
7 dependent on China, ourselves being the civilized world,  
8 dependent on China mining these minerals in Africa, wouldn't  
9 you say?

10 General Townsend: I would agree.

11 Senator Cotton: Okay. General McKenzie, I want to  
12 turn to a topic that Senator Reed and Senator King addressed  
13 as well, about a nuclear deal with Iran. They both asked  
14 you kind of in the abstract if it is better to have a  
15 nuclear deal with Iran that prevents them from getting a  
16 nuclear weapon, irrespective of their aggression in the  
17 region. In the abstract I would agree with that, and I  
18 think you did as well. But the deal actually needs to stop  
19 them from getting a nuclear weapon or becoming a threshold  
20 state to achieve that goal, right?

21 General McKenzie: Senator, I would agree. Yes, sir.

22 Senator Cotton: And I would say that just like the  
23 2015 deal did not achieve that objective, certainly the  
24 media reports about the directions of the current  
25 negotiations would not achieve that objective either.

1           What kind of message are we sending to both Iran and  
2 Russia, who is acting as Iran's lawyer in these  
3 negotiations, and to allies like the United Arab Emirates,  
4 and Saudi Arabia, when Iran is, itself, shooting ballistic  
5 missile as they did over the weekend, or supplying, as you  
6 said, their proxies in Yemen with the missiles and drones to  
7 shoot into downtown Dubai or downtown Abu Dhabi or into the  
8 Al Dhafra Base, where we have soldiers? What kind of  
9 message does that send to Iran and Russia, on the one hand,  
10 and our allies?

11           General McKenzie: Senator, my share of the task is to  
12 deter Iran from large-scale attacks, and we have had some  
13 success doing that. Our success has not been perfect. But  
14 Iran has largely been deterred from launching direct attacks  
15 on us over the past couple of years. I would not speak for  
16 the future, and I would agree that they are actively  
17 fomenting malign activities across the region. Their intent  
18 is to do it at a low enough level that it will not, in their  
19 view at least, disrupt the negotiating process. Again, it  
20 is my judgment that is a dangerous position for them to  
21 have.

22           Senator Cotton: Well that would be the intent,  
23 usually, of weaker revisionist powers throughout history, to  
24 always operate right below the level of retaliation and to,  
25 therefore, gradually accumulate more strategic advantage.

1 Right?

2 General McKenzie: Sir, it is an asymmetric approach  
3 that is founded in history, as you noted.

4 Senator Cotton: All right. Thank you.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

6 Senator Cramer, please.

7 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you  
8 both for being here and for your service.

9 I want to drill down a little bit on where we just  
10 wrapped up, General McKenzie, with Senator Cotton, as he ran  
11 out of time. I guess for me there are a couple of things.  
12 And, by the way, your characterization of CENTCOM as the  
13 land of imperfect solutions describes the United States  
14 Senate as well, and we do better to realize that sometimes  
15 as a body.

16 But anyway, that said, there are a couple of things  
17 specific to, I think, where Senator Cotton was going and  
18 where you were going. One are the timelines themselves.  
19 The sunsets create almost an implication of license to  
20 accumulate the very thing we are trying to prevent them from  
21 getting. There is that, and then there is just now to  
22 compel compliance. And maybe you could elaborate a little  
23 bit for me a better understanding of the relief of  
24 sanctions, again, getting back to Senator King asked the  
25 relevant question, in the give and take. So the sanctions



1 relief that provides money and then the time that the  
2 sunsets provide, are we balancing that right? Maybe that is  
3 the way to ask the question.

4 General McKenzie: I would defer to the Department of  
5 State and to our negotiators for the details on that. But I  
6 would tell you, just from where I sit, my guidance is  
7 clearly we do not want Iran to possess a nuclear weapon.  
8 And so the best way to get to that solution is for them to  
9 agree not to pursue it. They may be closer than we like  
10 when we reach that level of agreement. We do not know.  
11 That is a matter for the diplomats, not for me.

12 Senator Cramer: Let me ask this then. In your  
13 opinion, do you think that the IRGC belongs on the foreign  
14 terrorist organization list, and should that be under  
15 consideration in this negotiation?

16 General McKenzie: Well, from everything that can see  
17 from where I sit, the IRGC is a terrorist organization.

18 Senator Cramer: Well, I would say you have a pretty  
19 good seat, pretty good view of that, so thank you for that.

20 I also then want to -- none of these, by the way, were  
21 in my original list of things to talk about -- but in your  
22 response to, I think it was Senator Tuberville, you talked  
23 about the other relationships, the allied relationships.  
24 You specifically brought up F-35 sales to UAE, for example,  
25 as an example. And you talked about the long slog.

1           Specifically to the UAE and the F-35s -- and, in fact,  
2 let me back up for a second. I just read a report -- I  
3 cannot keep track of my weeks -- either earlier this week or  
4 last, I think it was last week, reports of leadership at  
5 UAE, Saudi leadership not even taking phone calls from U.S.  
6 leadership as a result of some of this. Do you think the F-  
7 35 sales to UAE should have gone through sooner, and should  
8 we be doing it as soon as possible? You know, what are the  
9 ramifications if we do not do it in this imperfect solution  
10 world we live in?

11           General McKenzie: Well, I think, in general, any time  
12 we undertake weapons sales to a foreign nation you want to  
13 do it as soon as practically possible. In an advanced  
14 system like the F-35 -- and I am not an expert on the  
15 procurement and delivery of that weapon system -- it is  
16 going to take some time to get there. It is not a system  
17 that you can build rapidly beyond the existing scale of  
18 production, so it is going to take some time to be there.  
19 But I think our friends sometimes find it frustrating when  
20 the timeline slips and goes well into the future.

21           Senator Cramer: So do you have a basic philosophy of  
22 how you have the appropriate guardrails in our system that  
23 provides a comfort level for the overseers who have to  
24 provide a comfort level for the people we work for and then  
25 maintaining those relationships?

1           General McKenzie: Sir, I can talk more about it in a  
2 closed session, but briefly the answer is yes, I am  
3 comfortable with those guardrails.

4           Senator Cramer: All right. Thank you, General  
5 McKenzie.

6           General Townsend, in my last minute just some questions  
7 of my favorite topic, and honestly, we all, I think,  
8 struggle with the maintenance of legacy systems and making  
9 room for modern systems, particularly in the ISR realm. So  
10 I am just going to ask you a very open-ended question.

11           Are you getting the ISR you need? Are you concerned  
12 about any gaps in ISR coverage, and do you have any thoughts  
13 or, literally and seriously and sincerely, any thoughts for  
14 us as we consider the balance of all of that?

15           General Townsend: Thanks, Senator. No combatant  
16 commander has the ISR they wish to have. AFRICOM does the  
17 best work we can with the ISR that we are allocated. I  
18 could certainly use more ISR.

19           Your point about the legacy ISR systems and  
20 transitioning to more capable systems, I think that is  
21 something that our nation is doing and our services are  
22 doing for the future. We have to do that because we need  
23 platforms that are more capable against the higher-end  
24 competitors. However, in theaters like mine, and even  
25 General McKenzie's, the legacy ISR systems that we have work

1 just fine. We do not exquisite, high-end capabilities to do  
2 the work we are doing in Africa. But I do understand why  
3 our Department needs those for other theaters.

4 Senator Cramer: I appreciate you both. Thank you.  
5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cramer.

7 Senator Rosen, please.

8 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Reed and Ranking  
9 Member Inhofe for holding this hearing. I would also like  
10 to thank Generals McKenzie and Townsend for testifying today  
11 and, of course, for your service to our country. And  
12 General McKenzie, as this will be the last time before our  
13 committee, thank you for your decades of distinguished  
14 service to our nation, for leading the brave men and women  
15 of our Armed Forces and navigating the many challenges  
16 within Central Command. Thank you.

17 And General McKenzie, I want to talk a little bit about  
18 combatting Iranian aggression. As I have noted in several  
19 previous hearings, Iran and Iranian-backed militia groups  
20 are increasingly targeting U.S. installations and  
21 servicemembers in both Iraq and Syria via drone and rocket  
22 attacks. We do not even have to look beyond this weekend,  
23 when the IRGC claimed credit for missile attacks on the U.S.  
24 Consulate in Irbil. On a regular basis Iran, the world's  
25 leading state sponsor of terrorism threatens U.S. and allied

1 interests in the Middle East and around the world, via both  
2 direct attacks, like the ones we have just witnessed, and  
3 through its support for Hezbollah and the Islamic republic's  
4 other terrorist proxies.

5 So can you discuss the threat Iranian-aligned militia  
6 groups in the Middle East pose to U.S. troops and our  
7 allies, and how do you believe the U.S. should respond, how  
8 are you addressing the threat, and does CENTCOM have the  
9 necessary authorities to target these militias, other than  
10 the ability to act in self-defense?

11 General McKenzie: Senator, first of all you are right.  
12 Iran foments a particularly virulent form of anti-  
13 Americanism across the theater. It is a long-term objective  
14 of Iran for the United States to be forced to exit the  
15 region. They see the principal battleground for that as  
16 being Iraq because that is where we are the most  
17 distributed. That is where we are most vulnerable. And for  
18 the last couple of years they have actually tried to pursue  
19 a political solution to that. That has not worked out for  
20 them. The seated government of Iraq is interested in  
21 maintaining a long-term relationship with the United States,  
22 and, in, fact, with NATO.

23 And what that has done is it has driven Iran and its  
24 proxies, its proxies in particular, to seek kinetic  
25 solutions to push us out. They believe that by causing a

1 significantly high level of pain we are going to leave, and  
2 that actually, of course, has not proven to be the case.

3 For one thing, over the past several months, they have  
4 attacked us. They have not been particularly successful  
5 with those attacks, and there are a number of reasons for  
6 that. First of all, commanders on the ground, our  
7 commanders on the ground, have been very aggressive in  
8 protecting their men and women, by actions that we take when  
9 we learn of an impending attack. Second, our anti-drone  
10 systems are beginning to work. It has taken us awhile to  
11 get to this point, but I am gratified to see that capability  
12 coming forward. And finally, their own attacks have not  
13 always been the most artfully conceived and executed.

14 One point I would make, we do not believe the attack of  
15 this last weekend, the ballistic missiles, was actually  
16 targeted against us. We believe it was going against other  
17 targets, hit near us, and if that would have been the same -  
18 - and I can talk more about it in the closed session.

19 But in order to close out your question, ma'am, I do  
20 have the authorities I need to act in U.S. Central Command  
21 against Iranian proxies, should the threat require me to do  
22 that.

23 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I want to move on a little  
24 bit to Israel. Now that Israel is within CENTCOM's area of  
25 responsibility it is my sincere hope that this transfer will

1     potentiate even greater military cooperation between U.S.,  
2     Israel, and our shared goals, as well as greater cooperation  
3     between our Arab and Israeli partners.

4             So, General McKenzie, building on Senator Gillibrand's  
5     question on leveraging the Abraham Accords, are there plans  
6     to integrate joint exercises with Israel and Arab states who  
7     signed normalization agreements with Israel, and what do you  
8     see as the greatest benefits and opportunities to Israeli  
9     inclusion in CENTCOM?

10            General McKenzie:    Senator, I would say that bringing  
11    CENTCOM into the AOR really operationalizes the Abraham  
12    Accord, and it puts a military component to the broad  
13    normalization that is already proceeding with Israel and  
14    many of its Arab neighbors.

15            Now in terms of practical things we can do right now,  
16    number one is integrated air and missile defense.  Everyone  
17    in the region is seized by the Iranian threat and they want  
18    to be able to defend themselves against that threat, and  
19    that threat is primarily in the air.  Setting aside the  
20    proxies, which we talked about, it is primarily Iran's  
21    ballistic missiles, their cruise missiles, and their UASs.  
22    So that is a significant issue for nations in the region.  
23    Israel is going to be able to assist us in all of those  
24    areas.

25            Additionally, in specific answer to your question, we

1 have been and will continue to expand Israel's participation  
2 and exercises across the region. That is an invaluable tool  
3 for getting partners to know each other and laying plans for  
4 the future.

5 Senator Rosen: Thank you. And Mr. Chairman, I have  
6 questions for the record for General Townsend about Chinese  
7 technology in Africa, and I will submit them for the record.  
8 Thank you both.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

10 Senator Blackburn, please.

11 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
12 you to each of you for being with us today.

13 General McKenzie, I want to go back to this Iran deal,  
14 because the threat assessment, the annual threat assessment  
15 noted that they anticipated that Iran would continue to  
16 threaten U.S. interests, U.S. individuals. I have read  
17 public reports of them threatening you. I know that this  
18 Iran deal would unlock billions of dollars for Iran, and I  
19 am very concerned about what they would do with that money.  
20 They have already recently, and in the recent past, the past  
21 decade, \$16 billion is what we know of that they have  
22 transferred to these terrorist groups.

23 So the IRGC, you mentioned, as Senator Rosen just  
24 talked about the attack this week, but Iran goes in to fill  
25 these power vacuums. We have seen, and we have talked a



1 good bit about AFRICOM and Wagner and the way they are  
2 filling that, and General Kurilla, when he was with us for  
3 his confirmation hearing, touched on the risk that sanctions  
4 relief to Iran would make to us and to our interests because  
5 of this money transfer.

6 Do you agree with General Kurilla as we are talking  
7 about a new JCPOA or a new Iran deal and unleashing all of  
8 this money to them? Are you concerned about that and how  
9 that would be used by these proxy groups and the way they  
10 would benefit from that?

11 General McKenzie: Senator, our primary policy  
12 objective with Iran is to prevent them from having a nuclear  
13 weapon.

14 Senator Blackburn: And we realize that and appreciate  
15 that.

16 General McKenzie: And so I am not an expert on the  
17 negotiations that are currently going on, so I am not able  
18 to give you --

19 Senator Blackburn: Is your expectation they would be  
20 more lethal, that they would move forward with developing --

21 General McKenzie: I would say that there is a risk  
22 that they could use that money in ways that we would not  
23 want them to use that money. I can certainly say that is a  
24 risk. But I think that we would have to balance that if we  
25 got a good agreement that prevented them from obtaining a

1 nuclear weapon.

2 Senator Blackburn: Okay. All right. So I know that  
3 the JCPOA, under the terms for that they could buy weapons  
4 from Russia and China as of October 2020, and they would be  
5 able to buy advanced weaponry and ballistic missiles from  
6 Russia next year. So what is your concern about their  
7 ability to purchase arms from Russia or China? Would they  
8 be able to purchase even more lethal weapons, if they get  
9 that sanctions release, and what would that do with the  
10 capabilities for the Houthis or for any of these other  
11 terrorist organizations?

12 General McKenzie: Senator, over the last 4 or 5 years,  
13 under a very significant sanctions regime, Iran has made  
14 remarkable advances in their ballistic missiles. I believe  
15 if open to bringing in advanced weapons from other states,  
16 such as you have named, it would increase the risk in the  
17 theater considerably.

18 Senator Blackburn: Have we provided everything to the  
19 Israeli government that they have requested in order to  
20 respond to an Iranian nuclear buildup?

21 General McKenzie: Senator, at my level, at the Chief  
22 of Defense level, we are in complete agreement about the way  
23 ahead and about what we are giving them. I cannot talk  
24 about the whole-of-government, but I can talk about it in my  
25 --

1           Senator Blackburn: Well, I was pleased to see the  
2 realignment of Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM. I felt like  
3 that was the right move, and I was happy to see CENTCOM's  
4 combined naval exercise involving Israel, the UAE, Bahrain.  
5 That was last November. So how are you actively working  
6 with partner nations to integrate the IDF into the regional  
7 security architecture?

8           General McKenzie: I think the low-hanging fruit is an  
9 integrated air and missile defense. All of these nations  
10 see the threat from Iran -- the ballistic missile threat,  
11 the cruise missile threat, the unmanned aerial system threat  
12 -- and they want to be able to defend themselves. And I  
13 think that is where we can make great headway involving  
14 Israel but also other nations in the region, and I will be  
15 able to talk a little bit more about that in the closed  
16 session.

17          Senator Blackburn: In the closed session. Thank you  
18 all. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19          Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

20          Senator Peters, please.

21          Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22          Gentlemen, first let me congratulate both of you on  
23 your upcoming retirements, and thank you for your collective  
24 82 years of experience between the two of you. That is  
25 truly remarkable and outstanding service to our country, and

1 certainly our nation owes both of you a debt of gratitude  
2 for your sacrifice and commitment, so thank you so much.

3 In the last few months, the United States has announced  
4 the rerouting of \$67 million of security assistance to the  
5 Lebanese Armed Forces to support members of the military as  
6 Lebanon grapples with some very severe financial challenges.  
7 Notably, the aid package will include some livelihood  
8 support payments, and these will go directly to troops to  
9 help them weather the extreme economic conditions that the  
10 country is facing right now.

11 So General McKenzie, my question for you, sir, is can  
12 you discuss why supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces is a  
13 national security interest for the United States, and more  
14 broadly, what the U.S. can do to support Lebanon during this  
15 time of severe crisis there?

16 General McKenzie: Senator, I support the \$67 million  
17 and I support it more broadly as well. It is our view that  
18 the LAF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, are the sole  
19 representative of the state of Lebanon in terms of defending  
20 itself. As you know, there are competitor entities in  
21 Lebanon -- LH, Lebanese Hezbollah, as an example -- that  
22 exercise a malign influence, not only inside Lebanon but  
23 indeed regionally from a Lebanon base. Our best hope to  
24 keep the lid on Lebanon is to continue to support the LAF as  
25 the representative of the state of Lebanon.

1           And I will just say briefly, the financial situation in  
2 Lebanon is dire. I am not an economist but I can recognize  
3 it probably is the worst I have ever seen it, and this money  
4 is going to be critical to maintaining cohesion inside the  
5 LAF. And they have performed very well in the aftermath of  
6 the Beirut port explosion. It was the LAF that did a lot of  
7 great work there.

8           So I think it is in all of our interests for the LAF to  
9 be supported, and supported appropriately, and that would  
10 include allowing its soldiers to feed their families.

11           Senator Peters: General McKenzie, my next question is  
12 for you as well. According to UNICEF, at least 47 children  
13 have been killed or maimed in Yemen just in January and  
14 February of this year. In total, at least 10,000 minors  
15 have been killed or injured since the Saudi-led coalition  
16 began their bombing in 2015. And this is in the context of  
17 a conflict in which the UN estimates nearly 377,000 people  
18 have died since the conflict began. And now the World Food  
19 Programme is warning that 13 million Yemenis are facing  
20 starvation.

21           My question for you, General, is very forward. What  
22 leverage does the United States have to bring all the  
23 parties to the table, to end this conflict, and what are we  
24 doing to make it happen?

25           General McKenzie: Senator, so it is my assessment --

1 and again, I only see a part of the problem; we have a  
2 negotiator who works this at a higher level -- I believe  
3 that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is willing to come to an  
4 agreement with events in Yemen. I believe that is  
5 attainable from their end. I think it is the Houthis who  
6 are intent on continuing to prosecute this fight, and I  
7 believe they are prodded directly by their Iranian masters.  
8 And that is the reason that the situation exists now, where  
9 they are firing almost daily weapons into Saudi Arabia, and  
10 of course as recently as several weeks ago began to fire  
11 ballistic missiles into UAE. In both cases they were and  
12 are prodded to do it, again, by their sponsors, Iran, who  
13 has no interest, actually, in this war coming to an end, no  
14 interest in solving the humanitarian dispute. And I do not  
15 dispute the tragedy, the tremendous tragedy of children  
16 being maimed by these weapons. I understand that  
17 completely.

18 But there is a path forward. Some of the parties are  
19 willing to take that path. Unfortunately, not all of the  
20 parties are willing to take that path.

21 Senator Peters: Well, I appreciate your efforts in  
22 working to try to get to that path. Thank you for that.

23 General Townsend, in the spring of 2020, some of  
24 Michigan's National Guardsmen engaged with military partners  
25 in Liberia. As part of AFRICOM's Command Advice,

1 Investigations, and Coordination Initiative. I would like  
2 to hear your assessment of how effective this initiative has  
3 been in promoting effective military legal frameworks within  
4 a variety of our African partners.

5 General Townsend: Well, Senator, much like our values  
6 and our democracy we also try to pass on our views of the  
7 rule of law whenever we engage with our African partners.  
8 So that program that you are talking about is part of that  
9 effort. Every training that we do has discussion about the  
10 rule of law and the law of armed conflict. That program,  
11 you can debate how effective it is, but I think we have to  
12 actually try. Every time we engage with our African  
13 partners it is important that we talk about our values and  
14 the rule of law and civilian control of the military, et  
15 cetera. So I think it is an important program.

16 Senator Peters: Thank you, General. Again,  
17 congratulations to both of you on your retirement. Well  
18 deserved. Thank you for your service to our country.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters.

21 Senator Hawley, please.

22 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to  
23 both of you for being here.

24 General McKenzie, if I could start with you. You  
25 directed U.S. Army Central to investigate the events

1 surrounding the Abbey Gate bombing on August 26, 2021. Is  
2 that correct?

3 General McKenzie: Senator, that is correct.

4 Senator Hawley: And they issued, in fact, a report.  
5 Is that correct?

6 General McKenzie: Senator, they did.

7 Senator Hawley: Totaling about, I think, 2,000 pages.  
8 You said, in a letter to the Secretary, "I have reviewed the  
9 investigation completed at my direction by U.S. Army Central  
10 and concur with and endorse the findings," end quote. Is  
11 that correct?

12 General McKenzie: That is correct.

13 Senator Hawley: And do you stand by that, General?

14 General McKenzie: I do.

15 Senator Hawley: Let's talk about some of the findings,  
16 if we could. This committee has been told repeatedly, was  
17 told repeatedly that the collapse of the Afghan Security  
18 Forces on such a rapid timetable could not be predicted.  
19 For example, General Milley testified to this committee, and  
20 I am going to quote him now, quote, "There was nothing I or  
21 anyone else saw," end quote, that suggested the rapid  
22 collapse of Afghan Security Forces on the timetable that  
23 they did collapse.

24 The CENTCOM report that you ordered, I think to put it  
25 gently, cast some doubt on that. For example, it says



1 General Miller -- that is the commander on the ground, of  
2 course, as you know, General -- General Miller was extremely  
3 worried from May 2nd onward about the rapid collapse of the  
4 Security Forces, especially as he was seeing key districts  
5 fall. Of course, General Miller also has testified to this  
6 committee that he warned you, General Milley, and Secretary  
7 Austin as early as March or April about the rapid collapse  
8 of the Security Forces. The report also says, quote, "Rear  
9 Admiral Vasely provided assessments weeks prior to the fall  
10 of the Afghan government that the trajectory of Afghanistan  
11 was in a downward spiral and likely not recoverable," end  
12 quote.

13 General, can you confirm for us, based on the findings  
14 in the report, that the Administration was, in fact, warned  
15 that Afghan Security Forces and the government could  
16 collapse rapidly after we left, and by "we" I mean our  
17 military forces who evacuated fully in July?

18 General McKenzie: Senator, I will answer that but  
19 first I would like to very briefly talk about the Abbey Gate  
20 investigation. That was a narrowly scoped investigation to  
21 determine what happened at Abbey Gate. The quotations you  
22 are drawing from testimony inside it were not part of the  
23 formal final findings of the investigation. That does not  
24 mean they are accurate or inaccurate. They are just simply  
25 not --

1           Senator Hawley: They are in the report, though,  
2 General. Correct?

3           General McKenzie: There are 14,000 pages in the  
4 report, involving a lot of testimony from a lot of people,  
5 and I am sure they are in the report. However, they are not  
6 the reason the report was created and they were not in the  
7 formal final findings of the report, which was focused on  
8 the nature of the attack at Abbey Gate.

9           Now having said that, as early as -- and I have  
10 testified here earlier today and in the past, as early as  
11 the fall of 2020, my recommendation was -- not my  
12 recommendation but my view was that if you go below 4,500 in  
13 Afghanistan that would be a mistake, put us on a slope that  
14 we would not be able to recover from. And then also, in the  
15 spring of 2021, General Miller and I both agreed that 2,500  
16 was a number that we could maintain in Afghanistan. That is  
17 not ultimately the number that was selected. But we had the  
18 opportunity of full and free airing of our views, which I  
19 think is all any commander can ask. Another decision was  
20 made, which is the way the process is supposed to work.

21           Senator Hawley: Fair enough. Fair enough. You did,  
22 in fact, it sounds like to me, and the report certainly  
23 indicates that the Administration was warned and that you  
24 were ignored.

25           This investigation contains other remarkable testimony

1 about the State Department and the White House's  
2 disengagement. Let me just go through a little bit of that.  
3 Multiple sources said, for the record, for the testimony to  
4 the State Department, he refused even to talk about a  
5 civilian evacuation until it was too late, that they delayed  
6 efforts to start evacuating Americans. For example,  
7 Brigadier General Sullivan told investigators, and I am  
8 going to quote him now, quote, "Trying to get the embassy to  
9 discuss non-combatant evacuation operations was like pulling  
10 teeth until early August." He goes on to say, "The embassy  
11 didn't fully participate in evacuation planning until a week  
12 prior to the fall of Kabul." And other Marine said that as  
13 a result of the State Department's intransigence, quote, "We  
14 essentially planned the evacuation in about 5 days," end  
15 quote.

16 General, is it fair to say the State Department's  
17 delays undermined the broader evacuation effort?

18 General McKenzie: I think the Department of State  
19 always tries to find a solution to remain engaged in a  
20 country. It is alien to their nature to cut and run. They  
21 prefer to not do that. I would tell you that we were  
22 involved in a lot of discussions back and forth with the  
23 State Department, beginning in the spring of that year, and  
24 even earlier, in fact, as we looked at possible  
25 contingencies for departure.

1           Senator Hawley: So, yeah, you said you were engaged in  
2 discussions with the State Department. What the report  
3 shows is that the State Department refused, and frankly the  
4 White House refused to engage until the very last minute.  
5 For example, this is the testimony again of Rear Admiral  
6 Vasely. On the morning of August 14th, he says, "The  
7 ambassador there in Kabul finally got a call from National  
8 Security Advisor Sullivan and Secretary Blinken who told  
9 him, the ambassador, we needed to move. We had heard the  
10 night before that they were looking at a 2-week plan to get  
11 250 U.S. personnel to HKIA and get them out by 31 August.  
12 I"--Vasely--"told him he didn't have 2 weeks, that he only  
13 had 24 to 48 hours." Vasely goes on, "I would like to know  
14 where this level of urgency to get these people in before  
15 August 15th was before because it didn't exist until it  
16 became a crisis."

17           I could go on and on here, General. There are  
18 thousands of pages here. And I want to thank you for  
19 ordering this investigation. I think that was the right  
20 thing to do. I wish this committee would show some interest  
21 in it. My staff and I have been through all of it that is  
22 publicly available. It is astounding, frankly.

23           So thank you for ordering it. Thank you for what you  
24 were able to uncover. I again call on this committee to  
25 have hearings on this report, which is now in the public

1 domain, much of it, and that, frankly, contains shocking  
2 information about this Administration's total failure to  
3 plan for the collapse of the Afghan Security Forces, despite  
4 being warned about it for months upon months, and to  
5 withdraw American civilians in time before the tragedy at  
6 Abbey Gate, which led to the death of 13 servicemembers.

7 I have got more questions for you for the record.  
8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Senator King: Mr. Chairman, as a member of the  
10 Intelligence Committee I can assure the Senator that there  
11 were not months and months of warning of imminent collapse.  
12 that is categorically untrue, and I wish the Senator would  
13 get off of this hobby horse.

14 Senator Hawley: May I --

15 Chairman Reed: Gentlemen --

16 Senator Hawley: -- open session --

17 Chairman Reed: Gentlemen, I will now recognize --

18 Senator Hawley: But Mr. Chairman, the Senator just  
19 invoked me. Has the Senator read the 2,000-plus pages --

20 Chairman Reed: Senator Hawley --

21 Senator Hawley: Would you like --

22 Chairman Reed: -- your time has expired.

23 Senator Hawley: Do you have any interest in it?

24 Chairman Reed: Senator Hawley, your time has expired.

25 Senator Hawley: Do you doubt what I am quoting? Do

1 you think that I am misquoting this evidence? Before the  
2 Senator impugns my integrity in an open session I would like  
3 him to at least give me the courtesy of reading the material  
4 that I am quoting and engage with it.

5 Senator King: I would be glad to do so.

6 Chairman Reed: Senator Sullivan, please.

7 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
8 gentlemen, I want to also reiterate what many have said  
9 here. Thank you for your service, exceptional service to  
10 our nation. I know facing retirement probably one of the  
11 things you are most happy about is you probably do not have  
12 to testify in front of this committee again, but we really  
13 appreciate all you have done for our nation.

14 I wanted to follow up on the important questions  
15 Senator Warren had asked about civilian casualties. Nobody  
16 wants civilian casualties, of course. One question that was  
17 not asked, though, that I think is important, we do not  
18 target civilians, ever, our military, do we, General  
19 McKenzie? General Townsend?

20 General McKenzie: Senator, we do not target civilians.

21 Senator Sullivan: General Townsend, in your  
22 experience?

23 General Townsend: You are absolutely right, not like  
24 what we see in Ukraine right now.

25 Senator Sullivan: Right. But other countries do.

1 Correct?

2 General McKenzie: I can only observe what you are  
3 seeing in Ukraine.

4 Senator Sullivan: Ukraine. Syria, perhaps.

5 General McKenzie: Many other places.

6 Senator Sullivan: ISIS. Al Qaeda. So we do not do  
7 that. It is just important to recognize and say that for  
8 the record, and I know that has been your experience in your  
9 command.

10 You know, I was in, like a lot of Senators, as part of  
11 a bipartisan delegation to the Munich Security Conference.  
12 I went on to do consultation with allies in NATO and the EU  
13 in London, and it was mostly about Ukraine, some Asia-  
14 Pacific issues. I was actually quite surprised how  
15 literally, in every meeting, our allies raised with me the  
16 Afghanistan withdrawal and how it undermined U.S.  
17 credibility and trust, particularly as it related to NATO  
18 allies that were also in the country.

19 General, what do you recommend is our best way to  
20 regain that credibility? I did not raise it. It was raised  
21 in literally every meeting with me, and it was quite an  
22 important experience that I had, that hey, this is still  
23 having an impact. What would you say is the best way to re-  
24 establish that kind of credibility and trust with our  
25 allies, particularly NATO allies?

1           General McKenzie: Senator, I think there is still a  
2 thirst for U.S. leadership. There is certainly a thirst for  
3 it in my region, where I interact with chiefs of defense  
4 daily and have visited literally every one several times  
5 since we left Afghanistan. They are taken aback by it.  
6 They still believe that the United States remains their  
7 partner of choice and, in fact, their preferred choice.

8           Now NATO is a little bit out of my wheelhouse, but I  
9 would tell you that I think the things that we are doing  
10 with NATO right now are things that absolutely restores some  
11 of that.

12          Senator Sullivan: Good.

13          General McKenzie: I think from what I see, from my  
14 perch on the sideline, it is CENTCOM looking into what  
15 European Command is doing and NATO is doing, and this  
16 Administration is doing, I think they are doing all the  
17 right things to re-establish that.

18          Senator Sullivan: Okay. Good. Thank you.

19          I noticed that in your CENTCOM priorities, deter Iran  
20 is listed at the top. Is that your number one priority?

21          General McKenzie: Sir that is my number one priority.

22          Senator Sullivan: And let me talk about -- I am sure  
23 you are familiar with this, the Quds Force, General  
24 Soleimani, starting in about 2004, 2005, supplied very  
25 sophisticated IEDs to the Iraqi Shia militias in Iraq. Over



1 2,000 American soldiers wounded in action, over 600 killed  
2 in action because of those EFPs. For years we did not do  
3 much to hold Soleimani, the Quds Force accountable for this  
4 very devastating killing of our best and brightest. I was  
5 in a hearing when the chairman then, General Dunford,  
6 mentioned that Soleimani, in particular, may have learned  
7 the wrong lesson back then, that he could attack Americans  
8 with impunity and not pay a price.

9 Do you agree with that? I know you were very familiar  
10 with that. And this is prior to, of course, him being  
11 killed.

12 General McKenzie: Well I think he is an objection  
13 lesson that you cannot attack Americans with impunity.

14 Senator Sullivan: So you think that -- were we able to  
15 re-establish some of the deterrence that General Dunford had  
16 talked about by killing him, when he was looking to kill  
17 more Americans?

18 General McKenzie: I think that contributed to  
19 deterrence being re-established, and I think that was a  
20 factor in their calculation. The Iranians have never  
21 doubted our capability. Occasionally they doubt our will.

22 Senator Sullivan: And you think that has been re-  
23 established now?

24 General McKenzie: Yes, but I think as with all things  
25 with Iran, it is an extraordinarily complex subject, and I

1 think there is deterrence but it is what I would call  
2 contested deterrence. They still seek to push us out by  
3 hurting us, and they will continue to do so.

4 Senator Sullivan: Let me ask one final question. You  
5 were quoted in a New Yorker article in December of 2020,  
6 titled "The Looming Threat of a Nuclear Crisis with Iran,"  
7 where you were quoted as saying that "a more immediate  
8 threat than the nuclear program is Iran's missiles."

9 Two very quick questions. Did the Iranians target the  
10 consulate with this most recent missile attack in northern  
11 Iraq, and would re-entering the JCPOA positively or  
12 negatively impact Iranian ballistic missile capability,  
13 which you, I think, have rightly called out back in December  
14 as a much more immediate threat from them? So two questions  
15 on that. Were they targeting us?

16 General McKenzie: They were not. They were not  
17 targeting us.

18 Senator Sullivan: So we are sure of that.

19 General McKenzie: I am sure of that.

20 Senator Sullivan: Okay. And the second question.

21 General McKenzie: The second question is, I think that  
22 is a hard question. I think, you know, what you would like  
23 to do, if you execute a JCPOA you would want to go to  
24 limiting other elements of the Iranian portfolio, and that  
25 would be a bridge to get to where you are maybe talking

1 about ballistic --

2 Senator Sullivan: Like the missiles.

3 General McKenzie: -- missiles. You are talking about  
4 proxy activities. So that would give you an opportunity to  
5 try to work that diplomatically.

6 Senator Sullivan: But should that be part of the  
7 agreement?

8 General McKenzie: Senator, I do not believe that the  
9 current -- it is under the current profile that we are  
10 looking at right now. I am saying if you were successful in  
11 negotiating an agreement it might lead you to an opportunity  
12 for further successful negotiations on other issues.

13 Senator Sullivan: No, but I am just asking -- sorry,  
14 Mr. Chairman -- in your personal opinion, do you think that  
15 threat, which you said is actually more immediate than the  
16 nuclear threat, should that be part of any agreement that we  
17 are trying to do with them right now, in your personal  
18 opinion? I know you are not negotiating it.

19 General McKenzie: I do not believe it is feasible to  
20 come to an agreement that incorporates both elements right  
21 now. I do not believe it is feasible in the world we live  
22 in, with the state of our negotiations with Iran, it is  
23 feasible to get to both of those things at the same time  
24 right now.

25 Senator Sullivan: Thank you. Thank you again,

1 gentlemen.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Sullivan.

3 Senator Scott, please.

4 Senator Scott: I want to thank both of you for your  
5 service and I wish you the best of luck in your retirement.  
6 I hope you move to Florida. You will enjoy the weather and  
7 the taxes.

8 General McKenzie, I am hearing that Middle Eastern  
9 fighters are right now joining the Russians and attacking  
10 the Ukraine. Do you have any knowledge that this is true?

11 General McKenzie: We believe that out of Syria there  
12 are perhaps small, small, very small groups of people that  
13 may be trying to make their way to Ukraine, but I have got  
14 nothing beyond that, and I can talk a little more about that  
15 in the closed session. Very small. Right now it is a very  
16 small trickle.

17 Senator Scott: Okay. General McKenzie, the State  
18 Department says there are about 182 citizens left in  
19 Afghanistan to evacuate. Do you know if that is accurate,  
20 and is there anything CENTCOM is doing to help them?

21 General McKenzie: The number I am tracking is about  
22 153 U.S. citizens and about 2,100 long-term permanent  
23 residents that are there. Some people want to come out.  
24 Some people do not want to come out. It is my understanding  
25 that if someone wants to leave and they are a U.S. citizen

1 they are going to be able to leave. And we have regularly  
2 scheduled flights that actually fly. CENTCOM is prepared to  
3 repatriate them when they come to what we call a lily pad in  
4 the theater, whether that is in Qatar or in UAE, where they  
5 can be medically assessed and moved on, you know, back to  
6 the United States if they are an American citizen. And we  
7 are fully prepared to support the lead agency in this, who  
8 is the Department of State.

9 Senator Scott: Thank you. What has Central Command  
10 been doing to punish ISIS-K for the killing of our military  
11 personnel at Abbey Gate, and right now do you think ISIS-K  
12 is getting stronger under the Taliban or weaker?

13 General McKenzie: We are concerned about the  
14 developmental trajectory of ISIS-K in Afghanistan. And in  
15 the closed session I can talk a little bit more about what  
16 we are looking at, when we look into Afghanistan, and in  
17 particular at the ISIS elements that were associated with  
18 that attack.

19 Senator Scott: All right. Moving on to the Iran deal,  
20 it appears, and you talked to Senator Blackburn a little bit  
21 about this, that about \$90 billion in sanctions relief might  
22 be awarded to the Iranian government, when then they will be  
23 able to use to foment more terrorism. So if that happens,  
24 what resources would CENTCOM have, and our allies have, to  
25 put up to be able to fight these proxies?

1           General McKenzie:  Senator, I have got to be honest  
2 with you.  I am not an economist.  I am not familiar with  
3 the economic impacts of that deal.  I would say this.  From  
4 where I sit, the number one objective that I have been given  
5 is we do not want Iran to have a nuclear weapon.  And it  
6 would seem to me that approaching that through a diplomatic  
7 solution would be the best way to get to that end.

8           I recognize there are second-order effects that might  
9 proceed from that, in terms of sanctions relief, and I  
10 acknowledge that.

11          Senator Scott:  You spoke a little bit earlier about  
12 more cooperation with Israel.  Are there things that we need  
13 to be doing in the NDAA that would help make sure we  
14 continue to expand our opportunities with Israel?

15          General McKenzie:  Sir, I think right now we are in a  
16 pretty good place in terms of cooperation with Israeli as  
17 the latest member of Central Command area of responsibility.  
18 I think I have all the authorities and permissions I need to  
19 move forward on that.

20          Senator Scott:  General Townsend, when you look at  
21 these maps you see Communist China has quite a few goals in  
22 Africa.  One is to continue to develop military bases.  So  
23 if they are continuing to be able to develop more military  
24 basis, including the one in Equatorial Guinea, what threats  
25 will that pose to the United States?

1           General Townsend: Senator, I can be more specific in  
2 closed session, and I look forward to that. But suffice it  
3 to say they are not on the Atlantic coast of Africa. That  
4 is going to put them several thousand miles closer to the  
5 U.S. homeland if they get a base on the Atlantic coast of  
6 Africa.

7           Senator Scott: So this is a general question for both  
8 of you. You know, we have watched the Ukraine situation and  
9 we have been able to do sanctions against Russia, which it  
10 sure seems like that could have a positive impact and  
11 hopefully reduce their ability to fund the war effort. How  
12 important do you think it is when we have an adversary,  
13 whether it is Russia or China or Iran, that we do everything  
14 we can to make sure they do not have the resources to  
15 continue to develop, and we should do everything we can to  
16 make sure that our citizens are not dependent on them for  
17 any resources, such as, in China's case, pharmaceuticals,  
18 things like that. Do you think this is important, it makes  
19 your job easier if we are not dependent on other countries?

20          General McKenzie: Senator, it makes my job a lot  
21 easier if we have a whole-of-government approach to the  
22 problems that we confront. You know, the Department of  
23 Treasury, all the economic power of the United States, all  
24 the diplomatic power of the United States is wielded in  
25 concert, and preferably as a substitute for the military

1 element of power. That is by far the most effective way to  
2 obtain our goals.

3 General Townsend: I cannot say it better than that.

4 Senator Scott: And do you think our military power  
5 should be the last thing we use?

6 General McKenzie: Yes. As a general principle we have  
7 far more effective tools to address these problems. The  
8 military element of power should be in support of all other  
9 elements of U.S. national power.

10 General Townsend: I agree.

11 Senator Scott: Thank you.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. At this  
13 point I will adjourn the open hearing. The closed session  
14 will reconvene at 12 noon in SVC-217. Again, thank you,  
15 gentlemen, for your testimony, and we will see you shortly.

16 [Whereupon, at 11:43 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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