

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
BUDGET REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 AND THE FUTURE
YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Washington, D.C.

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WASHINGTON, DC 20005
(202) 289-2260
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1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUDGET
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3 PROGRAM

4
5 Tuesday, April 9, 2024

6
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 9:31 a.m.,
12 in Room 216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,
13 chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
15 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
16 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Wicker,
17 Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott,
18 Tuberville, Mullin, Budd, and Schmitt.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM RHODE ISLAND

3 Chairman Reed: The committee will come to order.
4 Good morning. The committee meets to receive testimony on
5 the President's budget request for the Department of
6 Defense for Fiscal Year 2025.

7 Witnesses this morning are Secretary of Defense Lloyd
8 Austin, Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller, Mike
9 McCord, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General
10 C.Q. Brown, Jr.. I would like to take a moment to
11 recognize that this is General Brown's first posture
12 hearing before the committee as Chairman of the Joint
13 Chiefs.

14 We are grateful for our witnesses, for their service,
15 and for their testimony today. This is a critical moment
16 for our National Security. There is broad consensus among
17 Congress, the White House, and the Department of Defense
18 about the threats we face.

19 We know that China seeks to challenge the security and
20 economic interests of the United States and our allies, and
21 that it increasingly has the ability to do so. We know
22 that Vladimir Putin is committed to recreating a vision of
23 the old Soviet empire, and that his war against Ukraine is
24 one step toward that vision.

25 And we know that Iran is seeking to exploit the war

1 between Israel and Hamas, and expel the United States from
2 the region, and further sabotage the free world rule in the
3 Middle East. It is worth noting that each of these threats
4 I just mentioned can be addressed through the National
5 Security supplemental that the Senate passed nearly two
6 months ago.

7 The bill would support Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan,
8 provide humanitarian relief in Gaza, and replenish the U.S.
9 defense industrial base. Indeed, the dire humanitarian
10 crisis in Gaza and the separate fight for freedom in
11 Ukraine demand our immediate attention.

12 The most important step Congress can take right now is
13 to pass this legislation, and I urge the House to vote on
14 it. Last month, President Biden released his Fiscal Year
15 2025 budget request for the Department of Defense with a
16 top line of \$850 billion.

17 I understand that this budget is below what the
18 Department had planned for Fiscal Year 2025, but it adheres
19 to the cap set by last year's debt ceiling agreement, known
20 as the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.

21 In effect, the Department of Defense had to follow the
22 law and submit this level of funding to the Congress. I
23 expect -- we will stand in recess for a moment.

24 [Recess.]

25 Chairman Reed: We will resume. Senator, it's a

1 liability of being unusually tall.

2 [Laughter.]

3 Chairman Reed: Again, the Department is responding to
4 the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 in terms of the
5 budget they had to present, and I expect there will be a
6 discussion today about whether the top line is adequate to
7 meet the National Security challenges we face.

8 This was a demand by Republicans in the House in order
9 for us to pass the debt ceiling, and that has constrained
10 your operations and your budgeting, and we understand that.
11 With those limits in mind, the President's defense budget
12 request well to the national -- aligns well to the National
13 Security threats before us.

14 As the National Defense Strategy makes clear, the
15 United States is in a long term strategic competition with
16 China and Russia, and we will continue to face persistent
17 threats from Iran, North Korea, violent extremist groups,
18 and issues like climate change.

19 During today's hearing, I would ask for witnesses to
20 explain how the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request
21 supports the National Defense Strategy, the Nuclear Posture
22 Review, and the Missile Defense Review.

23 Keeping our competition with China front and center,
24 this budget request includes \$9.9 billion for priorities
25 covered by the Pacific Defense Initiative, or PDI. I am

1 encouraged by the progress we have made through PDI thus
2 far, and this committee will continue working to help
3 improve the design and posture of the Joint Force in the
4 Indo-Pacific region.

5 This should include strengthening logistics,
6 modernizing infrastructure, conducting exercises and
7 training, and building the capabilities of our allies and
8 partners. Indeed, our approach to the Indo-Pacific should
9 continue to be informed in part by lessons drawn from the
10 European Defense Initiative, or EDI, which has played a
11 decisive role in strengthening U.S. force posture and
12 enhancing the readiness of allies and partners in Europe
13 over the last 10 years.

14 The Department's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request
15 includes \$2.9 billion for EDI related investments and \$300
16 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. I
17 am encouraged that the President's budget request would
18 provide significant funding to strengthen America's cyber
19 defenses and develop cutting edge technology such as
20 hypersonics, microelectronics, artificial intelligence, 5G,
21 and quantum computing.

22 Our strategy towards China and Russia should not be
23 defined in dollars by how much, but rather where and why we
24 are investing to achieve the greatest comparative
25 advantage. I am also pleased to see that this budget

1 request prioritizes taking care of our men and women in
2 uniform by providing a 4.5 percent pay raise and increase
3 in basic needs allowance eligibility, expanding the
4 benefits for military families.

5 These actions are an important message to the force at
6 a time when recruiting is particularly challenging. With
7 regard to our nuclear strategy, this budget request
8 supports important steps for the modernization of our
9 nuclear triad.

10 Given Putin's reckless behavior and China's rapidly
11 growing nuclear capabilities, we must continue to modernize
12 our strategic forces to reassure our allies and deter
13 aggression from our nuclear arms competitors. Even as we
14 modernize, we should seek ways to promote strategic
15 stability, reduce the risk of miscalculation, and if
16 possible, reduce nuclear stockpiles.

17 Finally, the proposed investment in next generation
18 combat aircraft, tactical vehicles, and naval vessels is a
19 prudent decision. However, there are a number of long
20 standing challenges for our defense acquisition system that
21 must be addressed to effectively field these platforms.

22 I understand that the military services have made
23 difficult but practical decisions in this budget request to
24 identify supply chain problems, pinpoint shortages of
25 critical materials, and to reinvigorate the defense force.

1 In particular, the Navy has requested \$2 billion to
2 improve the capabilities of the submarine industrial base,
3 and I would appreciate our witnesses' views on how Congress
4 can help to overcome these issues.

5 Again, I thank the witnesses for their participation
6 today, and I look forward to their testimonies. And now,
7 let me recognize the Ranking Member, Senator Wicker.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 MISSISSIPPI

3 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today's
4 hearing is an opportunity to take stock in our National
5 Security over the past year and examine how the Department
6 of Defense is preparing for the future. Unfortunately, the
7 security environment, as we all know, has deteriorated
8 significantly since we last had this hearing.

9 Armed conflict is ongoing in multiple continents.
10 Regional instability threatens peace and prosperity and
11 freedom around the world, and several malign nations are
12 forming a new axis of evil. We are approaching a window of
13 maximum danger.

14 Despite this, our Government is failing to modernize
15 our defense capabilities and to provide sufficient
16 resources to fund our National Defense Strategy. XI
17 Jinping will continue China's historic military
18 modernization with another 7.2 percent defense budget
19 increase this year.

20 China's military production rates, advanced training
21 improvements and innovation strategies are troubling, and
22 they are stunning. In addition to Xi's designs in Taiwan,
23 there is a very real prospect of Chinese action against our
24 Filipino treaty allies in the South China Sea. Both will
25 test American resolve.

1 Outgunned and outmanned, the brave defenders in
2 Ukraine have exceeded expectations in holding the line
3 against the Russian dictator, Putin's army. If Congress
4 passes a supplemental, we can help Ukraine win. But to
5 make that happen, the Biden Administration will need to
6 articulate a real plan for provisioning and training
7 Ukrainian forces at scale once Congress passes the
8 supplemental appropriation bill.

9 And I share the chair's comments about the decision
10 that the House of Representatives, led by the speaker, will
11 have to make this week. This is an occasion that history
12 will look back on. This is a time for statesmanship and
13 bipartisanship, and I certainly share the chair's hope that
14 this supplemental will be enacted and signed into law very,
15 very soon.

16 I am disappointed in the drip, drip, drip approach to
17 military aid that has characterized this Administration's
18 policy thus far. As to General Brown, I would appreciate
19 your comments on the situation in Ukraine, and whether a
20 more timely, aggressive posture toward training and
21 equipping the Ukrainians is called for after the hopeful
22 passage of the supplemental.

23 U.S. strikes in Iraq and Syria led to a temporary
24 pause by Iran backed terrorist groups, but those attacks
25 have restarted. By contrast, we have still not figured out

1 how to compel the Houthis to stop attacking maritime trade.

2 I would remind my colleagues that Central Command for
3 National Defense Strategy was supposed to be an economy of
4 force theater in which we relied upon our allies. Instead,
5 the Administration has ignored our allies and partners for
6 the most part in the Middle East, and the damage to long
7 term U.S. interests could be profound.

8 We face threats on multiple fronts. On top of that,
9 the threats are worsening at a pace that our National
10 Defense Strategy simply does not contemplate. Secretary
11 Austin and General Brown, I would welcome both of your
12 comments on whether you think it is time to actually
13 rewrite that National Defense Strategy.

14 Is it adequate for the threats that I have mentioned?
15 And let me say this with regard to my good friend's
16 comments with regard to the caps in the Fiscal
17 Responsibility Act. I disagree that the Administration was
18 prevented from asking more for National Security and
19 national defense than is contained in the Fiscal
20 Responsibility Act cap.

21 As a matter of fact, the President's budget request
22 for Fiscal Year 2025 with regard to domestic spending is
23 some \$76 billion over the fiscal responsibility cap. And
24 for some reason, the Administration chose to adhere to that
25 cap only with regard to our most important duties, and that

1 is defending this country and making sure our National
2 Security is in order.

3 So, we will have a discussion about that. And I do
4 have confidence that working together with members on
5 either side of the dais, the chair and I will be able to
6 work alongside the committee members and get closer to
7 where we need to be with regard to defending our country
8 and keeping the peace.

9 What is alarming more than that, and it should be
10 clear to members on both sides of the aisle, is that our
11 budgetary resourcing does not meet even the inadequate
12 defense strategy we do have. We are dealing with a
13 recruitment crisis, a languishing industrial base, an
14 acquisition bureaucracy, and massive maintenance backlogs.

15 We need to invest more, and we need to invest more
16 wisely. We should cut red tape, speed up the acquisition
17 process, guard against unnecessary requirements, creep and
18 use more innovative companies, which can respond to defense
19 needs at the speed of relevance. More military spending is
20 absolutely necessary, but it alone will not fix our
21 problems.

22 We can never directly outspend the Chinese Belt and
23 Road Initiative, for example, and there are other forms of
24 predatory investment. However, we have the deepest and
25 broadest capital markets in the world.

1 They can be used on behalf of the American people
2 living inside the United States, and we should actively
3 work to bring those capital markets to bear outside the
4 United States for National Security purposes. Mr.
5 Secretary, you championed the Office of Strategic Capital,
6 and the team there can do this work if you direct them to
7 it.

8 Mr. Secretary, we have much work to do. No time to
9 lose. Unfortunately, the time -- the last time we were
10 together, we discussed what I can only describe as, and I
11 must say this, the contempt with which the Administration
12 has treated Congress. When we pass a law and the President
13 signs it into law, that is the law of the land, and we
14 would appreciate it being adhered to by the Administration.

15 Your responsiveness to many of my simple inquiries,
16 Mr. Secretary, has been lacking, to say the least. To take
17 but two examples, you failed to follow the law and canceled
18 the sea launched cruise missile again. We will of course
19 have to revisit that in the NDAA.

20 And you have decided not to implement my provision
21 from the Merit Act, again, which has been enacted by both
22 houses and signed by the President. Your Department has
23 also failed to act on simple provisions of the law, which
24 would help repair the relationship between you and the
25 elected representatives of the public in Congress.

1 I hope we can fix these issues this year. Thank you,
2 Senator Reed.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Wicker.
4 And now, let me recognize Secretary Austin for your
5 testimony. Mr. Secretary, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, SECRETARY OF
2 DEFENSE

3 Secretary Austin: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member
4 Wicker, and distinguished members of the committee, thanks
5 for the opportunity to testify in support of President
6 Biden's proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for the
7 Department of Defense.

8 I am pleased to be joined for the first time by our
9 outstanding Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General
10 C.Q. Brown, and I am also glad to be back with Under
11 Secretary of Defense Mike McCord, the Department's
12 comptroller.

13 [Protest interruption.]

14 Chairman Reed: The committee stands at ease until the
15 Capitol Police restore order.

16 [Pause.]

17 Chairman Reed: The committee will be in order.
18 Secretary Austin.

19 Secretary Austin: Let me start by thanking this
20 committee for all that you do to support the U.S. military,
21 our troops, and our military families. As Secretary, I
22 have always been guided by three priorities, defending our
23 nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through
24 teamwork.

25 Our budget request for Fiscal Year 2025 will advance

1 all three of these priorities. First, the President's
2 request will invest in cutting edge capabilities across all
3 domains, and that includes \$48.1 billion for naval and
4 shipbuilding capabilities to strengthen and modernize our
5 fleet, and \$61.2 billion to reinforce U.S. air dominance,
6 and \$13 billion to bolster Army and Marine Corps combat
7 capabilities.

8 Our request will also provide \$33.7 billion to
9 strengthen our space architecture, and \$14.5 billion to
10 develop and field cyber security tools. It will direct
11 \$49.2 billion to modernize and recapitalize all three legs
12 of our nuclear triad, and it will sharpen our tech edge
13 through a \$167.5 billion investment in procurement and
14 \$143.2 billion in R&D.

15 Second, this budget request will support our
16 outstanding troops and their families. And that includes
17 raising base pay and housing allowances, investing in
18 better housing, and making childcare more accessible and
19 more affordable.

20 The request will also fund vital work to prevent
21 sexual assault and suicide in the military. And third,
22 this request will help the Department further deepen our
23 teamwork around the globe.

24 Our network of allies and partners remains a strategic
25 advantage that no competitor can match, and you can see its

1 power in our strengthening ties across the Indo-Pacific, in
2 today's expanded and united NATO, and in the 50 country
3 Ukraine Defense Contact Group that I convened to ensure
4 that Ukraine can repel Putin's aggression.

5 Our budget remains rooted in our 2022 National Defense
6 Strategy. Our request positions the United States to
7 tackle that the Department's pacing challenge, the People's
8 Republic of China, with confidence and urgency.

9 We will also provide resources to meet the acute
10 threat of Putin's increasingly aggressive Russia. It will
11 help us tackle the persistent danger from Iran, North
12 Korea, and global terrorist organizations, and other malign
13 actors.

14 And it will help us continue to deter aggression
15 against the United States and our allies and partners, and
16 to prevail in conflict if necessary. Now, today I want to
17 underscore three key messages. First, even as our budget
18 request --

19 [Protest interruption.]

20 Chairman Reed: The committee stands at recess until
21 the Capitol Police can restore order. The committee is in
22 recess.

23 [Recess.]

24 Chairman Reed: Let me once again reiterate that is
25 not appropriate for comments or demonstrations by the

1 spectators and audience here. We are conducting a hearing,
2 and we will do so. We are --

3 [Protest interruptions.]

4 Chairman Reed: I will direct the Capitol Police to
5 remove the demonstrators. Mr. Secretary, you are
6 recognized for your remarks.

7 Secretary Austin: Thank you, Chairman. Again, I want
8 to underscore three key messages. First, even as our
9 budget request abides by the mandatory caps set by the
10 Fiscal Responsibility Act, it is aligned to our strategy.

11 We made tough but responsible decisions in this budget
12 that prioritize near-term readiness, modernization of the
13 force, and support our tremendous troops and their
14 families. Our approach dials back some near-term
15 modernization for programs that are not set to come online
16 until the 2030s, which will require top line growth and on
17 time appropriations in future budgets.

18 Second, we can only fully reach the goals of our
19 strategy with your help. I am grateful that Congress
20 passed the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations in March, and
21 the single greatest way that Congress can continue to
22 support the Department of Defense is to pass predictable,
23 sustained, and timely appropriations.

24 My third and final message today is that the price of
25 U.S. leadership is real, but it is far lower than the price

1 of U.S. abdication. As the President has said, we are in a
2 global struggle between democracy and autocracy.

3 Our security in these turbulent times relies on
4 Americans' strength of purpose. We remain determined to
5 meet this moment, and that is why our budget request seeks
6 to invest in American security and in America's defense
7 industrial base.

8 It is also why the Administration has requested nearly
9 \$60 billion in a National Security supplemental for the
10 Department of Defense, and that supplemental would support
11 our partners in Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan, while making
12 investments to increase submarine production.

13 About \$50 billion of this supplemental would flow
14 through our industrial base, rushing aid to our partners
15 while creating good American jobs in more than 30 states.
16 I would like to thank all those who have worked to pass an
17 effective funding package. And now we are more than two
18 years into the Kremlin's war of aggression against Ukraine,
19 and Putin is betting that the United States will falter and
20 abandon our friends and leave Ukraine in mortal danger.

21 If the Kremlin prevails in Ukraine, it would embolden
22 would be aggressors around the globe. The United States
23 would be far less secure if Putin got his way in Ukraine.
24 And President Biden has warned that Putin will not stop at
25 Ukraine.

1 If America walked away, we would put the free world in
2 peril and risk unimaginable cost and dangers. And we know
3 that China and others are watching and learning from what
4 Putin does and how we respond. We look to our partners in
5 Congress to help us make the investments needed to
6 strengthen America's security through both the supplemental
7 and the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request.

8 The U.S. military is the most lethal fighting force on
9 Earth, and with your help, we are going to keep it that
10 way. I am grateful for your support for our mission and
11 for our troops, and with that, I look forward to taking
12 your questions. Thank you, Chairman.

13 [The prepared statement of Secretary Austin follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

2 General Brown, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL CHARLES Q. BROWN, JR., USAF,
2 CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

3 General Brown: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker,
4 and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to
5 join Secretary Austin and Honorable Mike McCord to appear
6 before you today.

7 On behalf of the Joint Force, the Department of
8 Defense civilians, and our families, I want to thank
9 Congress for your steadfast support and the opportunity to
10 testify on the Fiscal Year 2025 defense budget request,
11 which reflects our shared commitment to our new security.

12 The global security environment is increasingly complex.

13 The 2022 National Defense Strategy identifies five key
14 challenges, the People's Republic of China, our pacing
15 challenge, continues its risky behavior around the globe, a
16 really aggressive Russia with its unprovoked war against
17 Ukraine, a destabilizing North Korea and Iran, which
18 threaten regional security, and violent extremist
19 organizations which leverage instability to advance their
20 cause.

21 These challenges are interconnected, which demands a
22 strategic approach addressing the immediate threats, while
23 also preparing for future contingencies. Days after
24 becoming the Chairman, I laid out three expectations in my
25 message to the Joint Force. Honing our warfighting skills

1 has primacy in all we do. Modernizing and aggressively
2 leading with new concepts and approaches.

3 And trust is the foundation of our profession. Our
4 military exists to fight and win our nations wars. We
5 train every day to ensure we are so good at what we do that
6 we deter any adversary from engaging the U.S. in conflict.
7 This budget requests \$147 billion to sustain readiness and
8 ensure the Department can counter near-term threats.

9 We are also focused on better integrating our allies
10 and partners in our planning and operations by investing in
11 critical programs and capability, expanding security
12 cooperation, exercises, training, interoperability.

13 Our investments in readiness ensure the Joint Force
14 can respond when the nation calls. While we remain focused
15 on our readiness for the day, it is critical to modernize
16 and leave with new concepts to prepare for tomorrow. The
17 Department continues to invest in capability and capacity
18 to outpace our competitors, while transforming from costly
19 legacy platforms that are no longer relevant to the threat.

20 This budget strategically invests \$167.5 billion in
21 procurement, underscoring our commitment to equip the Joint
22 Force with unparalleled combat capabilities across every
23 domain. This budget also invests \$143.2 billion in
24 research, development, test, and evaluation of future
25 capabilities that will retain our strategic edge.

1 Finally, this budget invests significantly into
2 nuclear modernization, digital innovation, multi-year
3 procurement of critical munitions, and to strengthen the
4 defense industrial base. With rapidly evolving threats and
5 technologies, accelerating our modernization is crucial.
6 Lastly, trust is the foundation of our profession.

7 The Joint Force must build upon and uphold trust in
8 each other, trust with our families, trust of our elected
9 leaders, and trust of our nation. Enhancing the quality of
10 service and quality life for our personnel is not just a
11 moral obligation, but a strategic imperative.

12 This budget includes investments in quality service
13 efforts such as advanced training, educational benefits,
14 and career development, while also investing in quality of
15 life projects like housing, medical clinics, and childcare
16 facilities, as well as funding spouse employment
17 initiatives, enhance mental health resources, and robust
18 programs to combat sexual assault.

19 We must create an environment where all can reach
20 their full potential. Trust that our Joint Force stands
21 ready. Ready to defend our national interests. Ready to
22 deter aggression. And ready, if necessary, to fight and
23 win our nation's wars.

24 I thank you for your support and collaboration in our
25 shared commitment to face the security challenges of today

1 and prepare for tomorrow. We are living in consequential
2 times and there is no time to waste. Thank you, and I look
3 forward to your questions.

4 [The prepared statement of General Brown follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, General Brown. General
2 Austin, the most pressing issue is the supplemental in my
3 view because of the consequences, not just in Ukraine, but
4 throughout the world.

5 In fact, CIA Director Burns recently stated, no one is
6 watching U.S. support for Ukraine more closely than Chinese
7 leaders. One of the surest ways to rekindle Chinese
8 perceptions of American fecklessness and stroke Chinese
9 aggressiveness would be to abandon support for Ukraine.

10 Do you think that is an accurate assessment?

11 Secretary Austin: I do, Chairman. I think we would
12 ask that Congress pass the supplemental as soon as
13 possible, because Ukraine matters, and the outcome of the
14 conflict in Ukraine will have global implications for our
15 National Security as well, so.

16 And we take a look at what Ukraine has done with the
17 support that we provided them, Chairman, has been quite
18 remarkable. You know, not only have they stopped a much
19 superior force in terms of quality of equipment and
20 numbers. They have taken back some 50 percent of the
21 ground that the Russians initially occupied.

22 And so, they are not asking for someone to fight the
23 fight for them. They are asking for the means to sustain
24 their efforts. And without security assistance, they won't
25 be able to resupply the much needed air defense

1 interceptors and air defense systems that they need to
2 protect their skies and protect their people.

3 And so, we would see things continue -- begin to
4 atrophy in a very meaningful way in a short period of time.
5 And so, I think it is really important that we pass this
6 -- that Congress pass this legislation as quickly as
7 possible. And I would remind everyone that, you know, we
8 don't give -- the military doesn't give Ukraine money.

9 It provides security assistance in the form of weapons
10 and ammunitions. And we replace those weapons and
11 ammunitions by, you know, buying new weapons and
12 ammunitions for our inventory, and that flows through our
13 industrial base. And so, some \$50 billion of this request
14 would flow through our industrial base, and it would create
15 good jobs for Americans in some 30 states.

16 And so, I think, this is about -- as much about our
17 National Security and our industrial base capacity as
18 anything else. But Ukraine matter is not only for Europe,
19 it matters for the entire world.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Shifting gears to another
21 area of contention, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is
22 something that is obvious to the whole world.

23 The United States is trying to assist. And for many
24 people, this is a moral principle, but it is also, I think,
25 an operational principle, because unless you can separate

1 the Palestinian people from Hamas, you will never defeat
2 Hamas, in my view.

3 That this is something that operationally we
4 encountered in Iraq, and you served there, Mr. Secretary.
5 And let me emphasize, Mr. Secretary, rather than your
6 former rank, Mr. Secretary, and you understand, I think
7 these dynamics, as well as General Brown.

8 I assume you concur with that comment.

9 Secretary Austin: Absolutely, Chairman. If we want
10 to -- if Israel wants to create lasting effects, then it
11 must address the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian
12 people. And not in a marginal way, in a meaningful way.

13 And so, we continue to encourage the Israeli
14 leadership, and I talk to my counterpart on a weekly basis.
15 I just talked to him yesterday. And encouraged him to
16 increase the volume of humanitarian assistance that is
17 going into Ukraine. And we have seen him do that most
18 recently. But we need to sustain that.

19 And the United States continues to do everything that
20 we can to assist. You have seen airdrops on our part, and
21 you see us working to provide a maritime corridor to
22 provide additional assistance as well.

23 Chairman Reed: And that maritime corridor, in your
24 opinion, is a legitimate mission for the United States
25 military. Both you and General Brown consider that to be a

1 legitimate mission?

2 Secretary Austin: I do, Chairman. It is -- you know,
3 we are using a capability that we have, joint logistics
4 over the shore, and certainly our troops are trained to be
5 able to put this into place.

6 And we expect that the initial operation capability
7 will probably be there -- be in place by the third week in
8 -- of this month. And so, it is something that we have the
9 ability to do, and we should do.

10 Chairman Reed: And the number one priority is force
11 protection.

12 Secretary Austin: It is, and it always will be,
13 Chairman.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Thank you very much,
15 Senator Wicker, please.

16 Senator Wicker: Thank you very much. Secretary
17 Austin, did a genocide occur around the Gaza region, and
18 around the Gaza, Israeli border on October 7th of last
19 year?

20 Secretary Austin: What we witnessed on October 7th,
21 Senator, was a horrific terrorist attack by Hamas.

22 Senator Wicker: But was it a genocide?

23 Secretary Austin: Well, it --

24 Senator Wicker: Well, let me be more specific. When
25 noncombatant Israelis were killed, when their families were

1 burned alive, was that a genocide?

2 Secretary Austin: Well, I -- again, Israel suffered a
3 terrific blow when --

4 Senator Wicker: Okay, so you are not willing to call
5 it a genocide. Was it a war crime?

6 Secretary Austin: It certainly is a war crime.

7 Senator Wicker: And when noncombatant Americans were
8 taken prisoner by Hamas, was that a war crime?

9 Secretary Austin: All of that, you know, the rape,
10 the murder, the taking of hostages or prisoners, all of
11 that was a war crime.

12 Senator Wicker: Was a war crime. And that on October
13 7th, that was -- the war crime was entirely committed on
14 the part of Hamas that day, was it not?

15 Secretary Austin: It was.

16 Senator Wicker: And since that time, General, is it
17 true that Hamas has, in violation of international law,
18 placed civilians in places that they knew would be
19 vulnerable to attack and use the civilians as a human
20 shield?

21 Secretary Austin: We have consistently seen Hamas use
22 civilians as --

23 Senator Wicker: During the times since October 7th
24 and in Gaza, right?

25 Secretary Austin: That is right.

1 Senator Wicker: And that is a continuation of war
2 crimes, is it not?

3 Secretary Austin: It is.

4 Senator Wicker: Secretary Austin, if Hamas laid down
5 their arms today, would the conflict stop in and around
6 Gaza? It would stop, would it not?

7 Secretary Austin: We certainly would hope so. But,
8 you know, that is left to be seen. And I don't want to
9 speculate, but that is the goal.

10 Senator Wicker: Well, who started the conflict on
11 October?

12 Secretary Austin: Hamas initiated this conflict,
13 Senator.

14 Senator Wicker: If Israel laid down its arms today,
15 would Hamas stop their aggression against Israel?

16 Secretary Austin: I seriously doubt that.

17 Senator Wicker: They wouldn't, would they? All
18 right, I think we -- I think we have made that clear. Let
19 me ask this, Secretary Austin, with regard to INDOPACOM.
20 Admiral Aquilino has convinced, I think, convinced us that
21 a standing joint task force of -- a separate standing joint
22 task force for operations is needed. Are you in support of
23 Admiral Paparo going forward as soon as possible with the
24 standing joint task force?

25 Secretary Austin: Let me just say that, you know, it

1 is clear from our strategy and our budget request, which is
2 linked to our strategy, that the PRC remains our pacing
3 challenge. We have done a lot to, in terms of force
4 posture and investments in the region, to ensure that --

5 Senator Wicker: I am aware of that, but my question
6 is specifically about the joint task force. So, we are
7 going to go forward with it with all due speed.

8 Secretary Austin: Command and control is really
9 important to me because it is important to all of us. And
10 so, what I have asked my team to do is look at this and do
11 our assessment to make sure that we get -- you know, we get
12 it right and we understand the operational and cost issues
13 associated with this. And they are doing that, and they
14 will come back to me shortly on that.

15 Senator Wicker: How soon will they come back to you?

16 Secretary Austin: They will -- in a couple of weeks.

17 Senator Wicker: And how soon do you think we can then
18 move forward with actually implementing this plan?

19 Secretary Austin: Really depends on what their
20 assessment is. But as soon as we have a readout, I will
21 come back and brief you on it.

22 Senator Wicker: And then finally, do you agree with
23 my opening statement that the Defense Department and the
24 Administration could have asked for more? That under the
25 law, they were not constrained to ask to for the number,

1 much as the defense part of the Administration did not feel
2 constrained by the caps.

3 Secretary Austin: Again, we have to comply with the
4 law and --

5 Senator Wicker: Why did the domestic Departments of
6 the Biden Administration not comply with those caps?

7 Secretary Austin: I can't answer that, Senator, but
8 --

9 Senator Wicker: Will you acknowledge that the
10 Administration asked for far more money, above the caps,
11 than was provided in that statute, and they did not ask for
12 more money with regard to defense spending. Will you
13 acknowledge that?

14 Secretary Austin: Well, again, with \$850 billion
15 budget -- again, what we try to do, what we have done is
16 link our budget request to our strategy --

17 Senator Wicker: It is okay if you answer the
18 question.

19 Secretary Austin: I support the President's budget,
20 Senator.

21 Senator Wicker: Would you acknowledge that the
22 President's budget request with regard to domestic spending
23 was far in excess of the fiscal responsibility cap?

24 Secretary Austin: I can't speak to the domestic
25 budget. I can only speak for the defense budget.

1 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Wicker. Senator
3 Shaheen, please.

4 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary
5 Austin, General Brown, and Under Secretary McCord for your
6 service to the country. One of the things that I think we
7 would all agree, as we are talking about budgets, is that
8 if Congress would pass the budget bills on time, with
9 certainty, it would make the job of budgeting a lot easier.
10 Is that -- do you agree with that, Secretary Austin? I
11 think you made that point in your opening statement.

12 Secretary Austin: I absolutely agree with that,
13 Senator.

14 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. And Chairman Reed talked
15 about this, and I think you made it pretty clear, but
16 Senators Gillibrand, Kelly, and I just returned from a trip
17 to the Indo-Pacific, and what we heard from our partners
18 was concern that our failure to follow through on our
19 commitment to Ukraine would embolden the PRC.

20 Again, I think you made that pretty clear in your
21 earlier statement, but can you speak again to what the
22 impact would be for global security if we fail to live up
23 to our commitment to Ukraine?

24 Secretary Austin: It would be a signal that the
25 United States is an unreliable partner, and that would

1 encourage and embolden autocrats around the globe to do the
2 types of things that Putin has done.

3 Senator Shaheen: And it would have an impact not only
4 on Xi, but on Iran as well, would it not, given that they
5 are the major contributors of drones to Russia, and they
6 are benefiting from this war in Ukraine?

7 Secretary Austin: That is correct, Senator.

8 Senator Shaheen: So, if we care about what is
9 happening in Iran, this is a good way to address what is
10 happening there as well, correct?

11 Secretary Austin: I believe so, Senator.

12 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Last week and thank you
13 for taking time to talk with me last week, but one of the
14 things we saw last week was a CBS news investigation, which
15 was the first public report that pointed to evidence of
16 Russia's responsibility in the anomalous health incidents,
17 also known as Havana syndrome.

18 Our office has been in touch with victims almost since
19 the first reporting of those incidents and what we have
20 heard from a number of those victims is that they believed
21 that there was an adversary who was involved in those
22 incidents.

23 So, can you tell me, in light of the reports, do you
24 believe that the intelligence community should take another
25 look at its assessment? And you have oversight over two

1 intelligence agencies, the Defense Intelligence Agency and
2 the National Security Agency.

3 Have you encouraged them to take another look at the
4 reports and provided any resources towards that action?

5 Secretary Austin: Let me just say that I take the
6 health and well-being of the force extremely seriously.
7 And, you know, I have spoken to leaders in the intelligence
8 community and addressed this issue with them.

9 They have assured me that they will continue to
10 address and investigate any new evidence that presents
11 itself, and they will continue to assess. And my -- the
12 intelligence agencies that are part of the Department of
13 Defense will continue to support that overall effort. But
14 yes, to answer your question.

15 Senator Shaheen: And so, do you consider the
16 revelations from that CBS report that included several
17 other news outlets and a fair amount of real investigation,
18 do you consider that new information that would warrant
19 that kind of an investigation, further investigation?

20 Secretary Austin: They do. And they are looking into
21 those things, each element that of that report.

22 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. And do you have any
23 sense of when you might be able to report back to the
24 committee on what they have found? Do you have any kind of
25 a timeline for that?

1 Secretary Austin: I don't, but I certainly will get
2 with the leadership of the intelligence community and get a
3 feel for the progress that they are making.

4 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. I would appreciate
5 hearing what they expect and what they are finding out. I
6 think this is both for you, Secretary, and for General
7 Brown. One of the things that we continue to hear about is
8 Russia's maligned activities in the information space.

9 And in fact, just this week, we heard from two members
10 of the House, the Chair of the Intelligence Committee and
11 the Foreign Relations Committee in the House that they see
12 Russian disinformation being parroted by members of
13 -- Republican members of the House.

14 Is this a concern that you all share? And how do the
15 Russian tactics in the information domain address or impact
16 what is happening in Ukraine?

17 Secretary Austin: Well, this is -- the Russians have
18 always endeavored to use -- to be effective in the
19 information space. And we have seen that from the very
20 beginning here with the Russia, Ukraine conflict, and that
21 work continues to today.

22 And they will also seek to influence attitudes and
23 operations in countries that are supporting Ukraine, not
24 only in the United States but in other Western countries,
25 and that work continues. But I expect that we will see

1 that in the future and there will be a greater effort on
2 the part of Russia to take advantage of what they consider
3 to be an opportunity here.

4 And so, I think anything that we can do to burst
5 Putin's bubble is -- in terms of providing support to
6 Ukraine, would be very, very helpful. And the big thing
7 that we could do is pass the supplemental.

8 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen.
10 Senator Fischer, please.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank
12 you, gentlemen, for being here today. Six months ago, the
13 Congressional Commission on Strategic Posture of the United
14 States released their final report on America's strategic
15 posture.

16 This bipartisan, bicameral commission found that our
17 nation is on the cusp of having not one but two nuclear
18 power adversaries, each with ambitions to change the
19 international status quo by force if necessary, a situation
20 which the United States did not anticipate and for which it
21 is not prepared.

22 These conclusions are not surprising. Our planned
23 nuclear force posture was decided in 2010, when the United
24 States considered Russia to be a partner, and back before
25 China's nuclear breakout, the scale and speed of which were

1 called breathtaking by the Commander of USSTRATCOM before
2 this committee just two months ago.

3 In order to ensure that we have a safe, reliable,
4 effective, and credible nuclear deterrent as we look to the
5 2030s and beyond, we need to start laying the groundwork
6 for significant changes now.

7 I strongly encourage, Mr. Secretary, the Department to
8 take seriously the recommendations made in the Strategic
9 Posture Commission report, and I am also working with
10 colleagues here to address many of these recommendations
11 through upcoming legislation.

12 So, Secretary Austin and Chairman Brown, do you agree
13 with the commissioner's statement that "the nuclear force
14 modernization programs of record are absolutely essential,
15 although not sufficient, to meet the new threats posed by
16 Russia and China, and that the elements of the program of
17 record should be completed on time, expedited wherever
18 possible, and expanded as needed"?

19 Secretary Austin: Thank you, Senator. And thanks for
20 your sustained support for our efforts to modernize our
21 nuclear triad.

22 We agree with the Strategic Posture Commission that
23 U.S deterrence remain sound, and we have been taking a
24 fresh look at the assumptions that are underlying our
25 modernization program. And we also agree with the

1 Commission's assessment that the program of record is
2 necessary but may not be sufficient.

3 And to the point that you made, we need to be looking
4 forward and making sure that we have the agility to adjust
5 our modernization program as we go forward to make sure
6 that we keep -- not only keep pace but maintain a
7 competitive edge.

8 Senator Fischer: Thank you. General Brown.

9 General Brown: Well, thank you, Senator Fischer. I
10 had the real pleasure to have the Commission come to my
11 office to sit down and brief me here about six weeks ago,
12 and I do agree with their assessment that our nuclear
13 migration is necessary but not sufficient.

14 One of the areas we did talk about when it comes to
15 deterrence was not only our nuclear capability, but also
16 our conventional capability. So, it is all things we are
17 doing to modernize our force.

18 They will be important to support our nuclear
19 portfolio, but also our unconventional portfolios as well.

20 Senator Fischer: Did you discuss with Madelyn Creedon
21 and Jon Kyl any specific recommendations that are put
22 forward by the report that you would support?

23 General Brown: We did. I don't have them off the top
24 of my head, but we did kind of -- we came to a pretty good
25 agreement on it. We see -- I saw the report very much in a

1 way that I think -- and I really do appreciate the work
2 that they did to highlight the key areas we need to focus
3 on for the Joint Force.

4 Senator Fischer: Yes, they have a number of really
5 great recommendations, and we are working on those.
6 Hopefully, we will get by and by this committee, and look
7 forward to working with you as well on that.

8 Also, I recognize that the White House tied the
9 Department's hands through the Fiscal Responsibility Act,
10 and as soon as the deal was made, we knew that the
11 President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2025, it just
12 wasn't going to cut it. It is not sufficient. And to be
13 clear, a 1 percent increase in defense spending is not
14 sufficient.

15 So let me say it is difficult for Congress to budget,
16 to pass appropriations bills to meet those threats that
17 this country faces when your Department, Mr. Secretary, and
18 this Administration do not even acknowledge those threats
19 in the President's budget request that he sends us. Our
20 adversaries, they don't constrain themselves like this.

21 In fact, China has announced it would increase its
22 defense budget by 7.2 percent, and this is despite
23 significant challenges that the Chinese are now facing in
24 their economy. So, Secretary Austin and Chairman Brown, do
25 you assess that the threats from China, Russia, and our

1 other adversaries are more likely to increase in complexity
2 and severity in the future years? I assume you do.

3 And so, I would ask, when will you step forward and
4 appropriately offer your concerns on what we need in order
5 to meet those problems, those existential threats that this
6 country faces?

7 Secretary Austin: Well, thanks, Senator. Again, our
8 budget request is linked to our strategy, and we look at
9 our adversaries over periods of time and not just in the
10 moment. And we know that our adversaries, to your point,
11 will continue to evolve, and the challenge is will -- it
12 will increase.

13 Again, we -- give the constraints that we were faced
14 with, we had to make some tough choices, and we made those
15 tough but responsible choices to invest in near term
16 readiness and to take care of our troops and our families.

17 And so, I think, again, based upon where we are, I
18 think, you know, our budget request addresses our needs
19 that are outlined in our strategy.

20 Senator Fischer: I thank the chairman of this
21 committee and the committee members for two years of going
22 beyond what the budget was that you presented from
23 President Biden to this committee. It is a responsibility
24 of Congress. I agree with Senator Shaheen. I am also on
25 Appropriations Committee.

1 And we as Senator Shaheen, Senator Reed, and I
2 advocate for what we need, but you also have to be an
3 advocate there. You also have to bring forward a sincere,
4 a thoughtful, a reasonable budget from this Administration
5 that addresses the threats that this country faces.

6 We hear it from you, from others within the Department
7 on those threats in classified briefings. This country
8 needs to realize it as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Senator Fischer: Thank you very much, Senator
10 Fischer. Senator Gillibrand, please.

11 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
12 Secretary Austin, I recently returned from a bipartisan
13 Congressional delegation to Asia, where we met with key
14 allies and partners and with U.S. forces in the region.

15 I can say that each of the countries where we met with
16 leaders, they were very grateful for the posture in the
17 Indo-Pacific and very eager to grow it, to expand it, and
18 to deepen it. And so, I wanted you to know, the feedback
19 was extremely positive of the commitments that you have
20 already made and the great work that our service members
21 are already doing in the region.

22 So, thank you for that. With the National Security
23 Supplemental stalled in the House, can you speak to how the
24 lack of funding impacts our strategic posture in the
25 Pacific, and what are we losing in the region by failing to

1 get the Senate passed bill to the President?

2 Secretary Austin: Well, as you know, Senator, this
3 supplemental not only provides us the ability to provide
4 security assistance to Ukraine, but also our partners in
5 the Indo-Pacific, specifically Taiwan.

6 And so, there is provisions -- there are provisions in
7 this supplemental request to continue to help Taiwan attain
8 the capabilities to be able to defend itself. And so, I
9 think it is for all -- for that reason, it is really
10 important to make sure that we continue to press forward
11 and get the supplemental across the goal line.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Our military representatives from
13 the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command met with PRC military
14 representatives for the Military Maritime Consultative
15 Agreement Working Group in Honolulu, Hawaii, on April 3rd
16 and 4th.

17 This was the first meeting of its kind since the
18 Virtual Working Group meetings in 2021. What is the goal
19 of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, and what
20 progress is being made with the PRC to prevent
21 miscalculations and possible escalation within the
22 INDOPACOM?

23 Secretary Austin: I think you have heard me say a
24 number of times, Senator, that it is really important in
25 this competitive relationship, and it is a relationship

1 based upon competition, that we have guardrails and that we
2 can prevent incidents from spiraling out of control and
3 causing a conflict at any one point in time.

4 So, that dialog between military professionals, I
5 think, is really important. We have seen very aggressive
6 behavior in the region on by the PRC, and we continue to
7 raise these issues to the PRC. This forum allows military
8 professionals to meet and really talk in detail about those
9 issues and talk about things that, you know, we can put
10 into place to prevent accidents from happening.

11 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Secretary Austin,
12 over the last two NDAA cycles, I have created the Cyber
13 Service Academy Scholarship program to provide students
14 with a free education in exchange for post-graduation
15 service in DOD and the intelligence community. As you look
16 at the Department's cyber and digital needs, how does this
17 scholarship help DOD meet its mission?

18 Secretary Austin: Well, I think it is going to help
19 in a significant way. I mean this is some -- working with
20 some 420 institutions and providing 100 scholarships this
21 year alone. And that increases the pool of qualified
22 youngsters that can come on board and be -- and contribute
23 to our efforts in the cyber domain.

24 Senator Gillibrand: You may not have this data, but
25 do you know whether we are on target to fill the 1,000

1 slots that are provided for this program this year? This
2 year was the first year students could apply, and I think
3 the application period concluded in March. Do you have any
4 information about whether we are on target?

5 Secretary Austin: I don't have that specific
6 information, but I will get it for you right away.

7 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. And do you have any
8 information about how many additional schools have applied
9 to be part of the program?

10 Secretary Austin: I don't have that either. But
11 again, the number that we have, the 420, is really
12 impressive. And it will continue to grow.

13 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. The military services
14 have started to look at privatizing barracks in order to
15 address barracks that are outdated and in need of repair.
16 Given the problems that the military privatized housing
17 initiative has encountered, how will the Department ensure
18 that those problems are not recreated in the barracks?

19 Secretary Austin: Well, we number one have to invest
20 in making sure that we create the right kind of
21 unaccompanied housing for our troops. And then number two,
22 we got -- we have to make sure that we invest in the
23 resources required to supervise the maintenance of these
24 facilities.

25 And we are doing both of those. In this budget, we

1 are asking you for \$1.1 billion for unaccompanied housing,
2 \$2.2 billion for family housing, and \$171 million for
3 housing oversight.

4 So, I think, you know, there is -- we have to -- there
5 is a lot of work that we need to do going forward. And I
6 think, we are investing in the right things, and we will
7 continue to keep -- maintain an emphasis on this.

8 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.
10 Senator Cotton, please.

11 Senator Cotton: Secretary Austin, thank you for
12 acknowledging, in response to Senator Wicker, that Hamas
13 committed war crimes on October 7th and has been committing
14 them every day since about using human shields. I want to
15 address what the protesters raised earlier, is Israel
16 committing genocide in Gaza?

17 Secretary Austin: Senator Cotton, I -- we don't have
18 any evidence of genocide being created.

19 Senator Cotton: So, that is a no. Israel is not
20 committing genocide in Gaza.

21 Secretary Austin: We don't have evidence of that to
22 my knowledge, yes.

23 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Better than Director
24 Burns and Director Haynes did last year -- last month at
25 the Intelligence Committee when they dodged that question.

1 You stand accused by those protestors of greenlighting
2 genocide. Would you like to respond to that accusation?

3 Secretary Austin: What I would say is, Senator
4 Cotton, from the very beginning is that we committed to
5 help assist Israel in defending its territory and its
6 people by providing security assistance.

7 And I would remind everybody that, you know, what
8 happened on October 7th was absolutely horrible. And, you
9 know, numbers of Israeli citizens killed, and then a couple
10 of hundred Israeli citizens taken hostage.

11 Senator Cotton: American citizens as well.

12 Secretary Austin: American citizens as well.

13 Senator Cotton: So, you deny the accusation that you
14 greenlit genocide?

15 Secretary Austin: I absolutely do not.

16 Senator Cotton: For the record, I don't think Israel
17 is committing genocide. I don't believe you greenlit
18 genocide, either. You talked a lot with Senator Reed about
19 Israel's responsibility to provide aid in Gaza. Why does
20 Israel have a responsibility to provide aid to Gaza?

21 Israel was the victim of an unprovoked, vicious attack
22 on October 7th. Why should they provide aid to the
23 aggressor nation or aggressor -- Gaza is not a nation -- to
24 the aggressors on October 7th. We didn't provide aid to
25 Germany and Japan during World War II.

1 Secretary Austin: We did provide aid to and
2 assistance to many of the countries that we have operated
3 in recently.

4 Senator Cotton: But not in World War II. If you had
5 would been in George Marshall's or Dwight Eisenhower's
6 position in World War II, would you have wanted to provide
7 aid to Germany?

8 Secretary Austin: I really do believe, Senator, that
9 if they want to create a lasting effect in terms of
10 stability, then I think that something needs to be done to
11 account -- to help the Palestinian people.

12 Senator Cotton: Again, I get that, but they are in
13 the middle of the war. We believed that too after World
14 War II. That is why we had the Marshall Plan and that is
15 why we rebuilt Japan. But that was after the war was won,
16 not in the middle of it.

17 And in the meantime, like it is not Israel's
18 responsibility to provide aid, certainly not our
19 responsibility, but we are spending our tax dollars to
20 build this giant pier as an aid into Gaza. Who is going to
21 accept that aid? Who is going to be at the end of the pier
22 on the shore taking aid from American forces?

23 Secretary Austin: That is still being worked out.
24 But there will be NGOs that that will help to distribute
25 that aid.

1 Senator Cotton: Hamas is in charge of Gaza. When aid
2 goes to Gaza, Hamas doesn't divert it or commandeer it or
3 steal it, it accepts it. And anybody operating in Gaza is
4 under the thumb of Hamas. I just think it is very ill-
5 considered, and I don't think it is going to end very well.
6 Let me move on to Ukraine.

7 The Biden Administration has discouraged Ukraine from
8 launching refinery strikes against Russia. Why is the
9 Biden Administration discouraging Ukraine from undertaking
10 some of the most effective attacks on Russia's war making
11 capabilities?

12 Secretary Austin: Certainly, those attacks could have
13 a knock on effect for -- in terms of the global energy
14 situation and -- but quite frankly, I think Ukraine is
15 better served in going after tactical and operational
16 targets that can directly influence the current fight.

17 Senator Cotton: It sounds to me like the Biden
18 Administration doesn't want gas prices go up in an election
19 year based on all the other actions it has taken to drive
20 up gas prices further. But anyway, I want to turn to one
21 final point about the recruiting crisis our services face.

22 the Army is the most acute. It is challenging all
23 services, though. I have spoken to numerous recruiters,
24 front line recruiters, heads of recruiting battalions. Two
25 of the most common things I hear is Genesis and a lack of

1 medical providers to process new recruits. Do you have a
2 memo on your desk from the services to place a pause on
3 Genesis?

4 Secretary Austin: No, not --

5 Senator Cotton: Have you received that, because my
6 sources tell me you have received a request from the
7 services to pause the Genesis.

8 Secretary Austin: You know, I talked to the services
9 about -- the service secretaries about Genesis, and also
10 have talked to the service chiefs about Genesis as well.
11 And I have -- I don't have knowledge of any -- of that
12 memo, but what I will tell you is that, you know, we are
13 doing everything we can to improve the number of health
14 care providers that are available and to streamline the
15 operations with Genesis.

16 Now, Genesis is a, you know, it is an issue that our
17 recruiting force had to work through, but it is not the
18 sole cause of --

19 Senator Cotton: No, I know it is not the sole cause.
20 There is a lot of other causes. I just, it comes up
21 constantly. And just for those listening home, Genesis is
22 not just the first book of the Bible, it is this giant
23 medical records system that now catches everything that has
24 ever happened to you.

25 So, you know, every drill sergeant accuses recruits of

1 lying to their recruiters so they can get into the service.
2 But now Genesis catches all that. So, if you broke your
3 arm and you are 12 playing peewee football, Genesis knows
4 it. If you were prescribed an SSRI because you were
5 depressed when you are 13, because your parents were
6 getting a bad divorce, Genesis knows it.

7 And you got to go through a whole lot of rigmarole to
8 get a waiver. Now, look, we can't have psychotics join the
9 military, but if the kid was on an SSRI when he was 13,
10 does that really matter? Does that really matter? If he
11 broke his arm when he was 13 -- he can't have a degenerate
12 bone condition, but he broke his arm.

13 And I know you will say, because I have heard it
14 before, that there is waiver approvals here. It takes a
15 long time. And like, if you are like a super gung ho
16 Captain America kid who wants to serve above everything
17 else, you will wait that time.

18 But if it is going to take 120 or 150 days to join,
19 when you get a job at Amazon for \$20 or \$25 an hour, you
20 are going to lose those people. I think you really need to
21 look at the way Genesis works and the approval authority.

22 And even if you have approval authority, you know,
23 whether it is an E8 out on the front lines -- or a
24 lieutenant colonel at the headquarters, you are counting on
25 them to take what they might see as some serious personal

1 risk that doesn't have a lot of reward.

2 That is why I think this has to be written into
3 policy. My time is over, but I do think this is a serious
4 question for all the services, and that I would encourage
5 you to look at it and take action sooner rather than later.

6 Secretary Austin: I don't disagree with you, Senator.
7 I have been a recruiter, and I know how important this is
8 to recruiters.

9 And so, what we need to continue to do is upgrade what
10 requires a waiver and make sure that we are doing
11 everything we can to provide enough medical professionals
12 to be able to shorten the time that it takes to get that
13 waiver.

14 And so, I think there are a number of things that that
15 we can do and should do, and we are doing some of those
16 things. And we will continue to press on this to shorten
17 the time that it takes for recruiters to get these packets
18 through.

19 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator
21 Hirono, please.

22 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
23 McCord, Secretary Austin, and General Brown, thank you very
24 much for your service. Senator Austin, I want to thank you
25 for your leadership regarding Red Hill in Hawaii, and it

1 was the right decision to close this massive World War II
2 fuel storage facility.

3 Admiral Wade and the Joint Task Force have worked
4 diligently alongside the State and Federal partners to
5 safely remove all of the fuel from the facility in recent
6 months, but of course, more work remains.

7 What is your view regarding the Department's long term
8 responsibility for the environmental restoration and
9 remediation efforts following the closure of Red Hill, to
10 ensure that no contamination of the aquifer that the people
11 of Oahu rely on for drinking water occurs now and in the
12 future attributable to military installations or actions?

13 Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator. Protecting public
14 health and the environment in the communities where we have
15 our troops stationed is a Department priority. And, you
16 know, we made a promise to the citizens of Hawaii to
17 conduct any and all necessary environmental remediation
18 around the Red Hill facility.

19 And we are going to live up to that promise. As you
20 know, as you just pointed out, last month, JTF Red Hill
21 completed the fueling. And so, the work has transitioned
22 to the Department of the Navy now for the Red Hill closure,
23 efforts. And we are going to stay focused on that.

24 And, you know, I will continue to make sure that I get
25 briefed on this routinely, and make sure that we are doing

1 the right things to meet our timelines. But most
2 importantly, make sure that we do the right things in terms
3 of environmental restoration.

4 Senator Hirono: Thank you for your continuing
5 commitment, because there will be long term, I would say,
6 requirements as to monitoring, etcetera. So that brings me
7 to another question that I have for you.

8 I am concerned about the Department's ability to hold
9 senior officials accountable following major incidents such
10 as the fuel leak at Red Hill and the fire onboard the USS
11 Bonhomme Richard.

12 I am including a provision in this year's NDAA that
13 would create a new investigation category to provide
14 consistency when there is a catastrophic incident resulting
15 in a significant loss of life or billions of dollars in
16 taxpayer money, to ensure those responsible are held
17 accountable for their actions.

18 Would you be amenable to changes in this area,
19 especially for catastrophic incidents such as the ones that
20 I cited, so that really the investigation and the
21 responsibility issues are before the Department as opposed
22 to the services that are involved?

23 Secretary Austin: Thank you, Senator. I have seen
24 your correspondence on this issue, and I have asked my
25 people to take a look at this, and certainly we will do so,

1 analyze it and come back and have a discussion with you on
2 where we are. But I really appreciate your continued focus
3 on this.

4 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much. I have talked
5 about how important infrastructure is to readiness, and I
6 know that during the last year's posture hearing, you
7 agreed that the military services need to invest in
8 infrastructure to make sure our service members have the
9 facilities they need to execute their mission.

10 However, even in the INDOPACOM priority theater, there
11 are billions in infrastructure projects in Hawaii alone and
12 the rest of the region, either on a service or INDOPACOM's
13 unfunded priority list.

14 Secretary Austin, how does the Department ensure the
15 infrastructure maintenance and modernization needs are met
16 if there are multiple critical projects in Hawaii and
17 throughout the region that are not being funded in the
18 President's budget?

19 Secretary Austin: Well, there -- we have, as you know
20 Senator, invested a lot into infrastructure and throughout
21 the region. And our -- the PDI, Admiral Aquilino's request
22 for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative this year is some
23 \$9.9 billion, and it includes infrastructure projects. And
24 that is on top of the \$20 billion that we have requested
25 over the last couple of years in support of the PDI.

1 So, we continue to invest in this. And again, in
2 terms of specific projects, you know, the services will
3 have to continue to rank order what, you know, their
4 priorities are based upon, you know, what their specific
5 budget --what is available in their budget. But this is
6 very important to us, and it is something that we will
7 continue to work on.

8 Senator Hirono: Well, you testified today that tough
9 choices need to be made in near term readiness, which is
10 also making sure that our infrastructure is maintained. I
11 just want to note one more thing.

12 I am concerned about the cost overruns for the
13 Critical Drydock 3, which is the biggest infrastructure
14 project within the DOD replacement at Joint Base Pearl
15 Harbor Hickam. And despite the lessons learned from
16 Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the cost of Pearl Harbors'
17 drydock recently increased by over \$800 million.

18 No sooner did I go and give a speech about how
19 important this drydock is, that I am confronted by this,
20 what I consider to be a massive cost overrun. How can we
21 -- I mean, I just want to note that I would like to hear
22 from you.

23 I am out of time right now, but we need to be a lot
24 more accurate in planning for infrastructure projects from
25 the beginning to enable us to better estimate how much

1 these costs are going to be because to go from one week to
2 say that, you know, this is great where we learn lessons
3 from Portsmouth, and then two weeks later, it is \$800
4 million more.

5 So, Secretary Austin, I really would like to be
6 assured that we are going to keep track of what is going on
7 with this drydock infrastructure project in Hawaii, because
8 I have a feeling that I may be confronted with even more
9 costly increases. It is a statement that I am making, and
10 I expect to be apprized as we go forward.

11 Secretary Austin: Absolutely. And you mentioned that
12 this drydock is important. It is absolutely important.
13 One of the things that happened here was that, you know, we
14 didn't fully appreciate the impact of COVID on the supply
15 chains and some other things. And so, that -- those
16 effects have lasted longer than we anticipated, and that is
17 part of what is going on here.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator
19 Rounds, please.

20 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
21 Austin, Secretary McCord, General Brown, thank you for your
22 service to the nation at such a time in history.

23 Close coordination between Congress and the
24 Administration is critical to making sure that our troops
25 are resourced and postured in a way that deters conflict

1 and enables them to dominate our enemies if deterrence
2 fails.

3 Mr. Secretary, the -- Secretary Austin, the assessment
4 of the DOD, NTIA led study on the electromagnetic spectrum,
5 which was completed last fall, was that the adoption of
6 dynamic spectrum sharing is the only way that the DOD can
7 share the portions of the critical bands it uses to defend
8 our country and our forces.

9 Developing that capability is one of my highest
10 priorities. I am aware of coordination between this
11 committee and the DOD CIO, which is centered around a
12 demonstration project to investigate dynamic spectrum
13 sharing being executed sometime at the end of 2025.

14 I applaud the effort, but I am also aware of a
15 simultaneous transmit and receive capability, or STAR, that
16 is ready for test and evaluation right now. Can you give
17 me your commitment that you will investigate the STAR
18 capability and accelerate testing and evaluation if you
19 discover that it is promising? I can assure you that I
20 would work with you and the committees of jurisdiction to
21 address any hurdles that need to be overcome to fund such
22 an acceleration.

23 Secretary Austin: Senator, you have my commitment
24 that, you know, we will investigate and make sure that, if
25 there is capability there, then we will work to take

1 advantage of it.

2 But I just want to re-emphasize the point that you
3 made, and that is that it is really important that we have
4 access to the spectrum so that we can provide -- continue
5 to provide security for this country and that we can -- we
6 have the capability to enable all of our platforms here.

7 And so, I understand that there will continue to be a
8 demand from the commercial sector to access more of the
9 spectrum, but we have to do everything that we need to do
10 to make sure that we have the provisions to protect this
11 country.

12 And so, I appreciate your support. And I am also
13 committed to working with the Secretary of Commerce and
14 with anybody else that can create a capability to allow
15 -- to enable that dynamic sharing. So, thanks for your
16 efforts on that.

17 Senator Rounds: Well, thank you, sir. And once
18 again, I think this new capability may very well be a key
19 to addressing this issue in an expedited basis, and I
20 appreciate your agreement to work with us on that. Thank
21 you, sir. General Brown, the B-21 Raider and the next gen
22 air dominance platform will be critical in a fight against
23 a near peer adversary. Can you briefly share why these
24 platforms are so essential to the Joint Force when it comes
25 to fighting a capable enemy in a contested environment?

1 General Brown: Well, we have an advancing threat.
2 And if you think about the areas we have been operating in
3 the course of the past several decades, we do not have
4 advanced threat. It was mostly a violent extremist or
5 other countries without advanced threats.

6 What I see going forward is that with that advancing
7 threat, we have to modernize and bring in capabilities that
8 will not only match that threat but exceed that threat and
9 stay ahead of the threat. And that is why these particular
10 platforms are so important.

11 Senator Rounds: I think it says without question that
12 both of these two programs need to move forward, fully
13 funded. Right now, I think we have identified that we are
14 going to purchase a minimum of 100 B-21s. I suspect that
15 you would agree with me that that number may very well have
16 to go up if we appropriately take care of the needs that
17 our men in uniform, men and women in uniform require.

18 General Brown: I know in my last job, we --as the Air
19 Force chief, we did talk about the aspect that we may need
20 to go above 100. I will defer to the Air Force, but I will
21 just say that I am focused as a chairman to make sure that
22 we have the joint capabilities for the force and making
23 sure that we are working very closely together with all the
24 services to bring that capability forward.

25 Senator Rounds: And how important is it that NGAD be

1 fielded as a full program of record?

2 General Brown: That is also important. You know, as
3 you are aware, you know, the Air Force is also looking at a
4 collaborative combat aircraft as well to increase capacity
5 at a cost and create more dilemmas for our adversaries.

6 Senator Rounds: Thank you. I see my time has
7 expired, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.
9 Senator Kaine, please.

10 Senator Kaine: Thank you to our witnesses for your
11 service. I want to return to the heartbreaking tragedy in
12 Israel and Gaza. Israel, of course, must defend itself
13 against those who would annihilate it. No one asked the
14 question about whether the United States had a right to
15 defend itself after 9/11.

16 Israel has that right. And that would include Hamas.
17 It would include Hezbollah. It would include Iran. It
18 would include militias connected to Iran. It would include
19 the Houthis. But in the days after the October 7th attack,
20 I offered this advice to the Israeli Ambassador, the United
21 States Ambassador Herzog, learn from our own mistakes and
22 confine your vigorous defense to a defense against Hamas,
23 and don't let it look like it is a war against Gazans or
24 Palestinians who are not the same as Hamas, who often are
25 under the thumb of Hamas.

1 I gave advice to the Ambassador then that the world
2 would be watching to see what happened. And there is
3 various bits of evidence that you look at to determine
4 whether this is a defense against Hamas or whether it is a
5 war against Gazans or Palestinians. First, the extent of
6 civilian casualties. The civilian casualties in this war
7 have been heartbreaking.

8 And yet, because Hamas chooses to embed with civilian
9 populations, it is extremely difficult to defend against
10 Hamas without that heartbreak. Second, how you talk about
11 the war? Are you talking about it as a war against Hamas,
12 or are you more broadly talking about it as a war against
13 all Gazans and Palestinians?

14 In the weeks after the October 7th attack, yes, there
15 was trauma. You don't necessarily say the most precise
16 thing when you are traumatized, but there were too many
17 statements from Israeli leadership, the President, the
18 defense minister suggesting we are going to shut off all
19 water, all food, all everything into Gaza, collectively
20 punishing Gazans who are not necessarily part of Hamas.
21 That is unfortunate.

22 Third, the allowance of humanitarian aid, 500 trucks a
23 day were supplying the needs of these 2 million people into
24 Gaza. Aid was throttled off immediately. Water was turned
25 off. Just two days ago, the amount of aid into Gaza hit

1 300 trucks, and yesterday it got near 500 trucks six months
2 into this.

3 If you are not allowing what you were allowing before,
4 food and medicine to get to a civilian population, you are
5 making the situation worse, not better. There is no reason
6 the United States should have to build a pier in the
7 Eastern Mediterranean. There is no reason we should have
8 to airdropped supplies, often endangering people who have
9 to go out into the water and get them.

10 I applaud the President for convincing finally
11 President -- Prime Minister Netanyahu to open the crossing
12 from Erez after it took months to get them to open the
13 crossing from Kerem Shalom. But the pace of humanitarian
14 aid is insufficient. The widow of our former chair,
15 Senator McCain, Cindy McCain, said two days ago that we are
16 on the verge of a catastrophic famine in Gaza, and we may
17 not be able to recover.

18 If you wanted to maintain a vigorous war against
19 Hamas, but not against Palestinians, you would protect
20 Palestinians from violence on the West Bank. It was
21 shocking to me to hear reports from our own U.S. military
22 officials that settlers' violence against Palestinians on
23 the West Bank is not only increasing, but in many
24 instances, the violence is accompanied by escorts from IDF
25 reservists and Israeli border officials who are protecting

1 settlers committing violence against Palestinians.

2 My understanding is that the escort phenomenon has
3 abated, but the violence against Palestinians on the West
4 Bank has not. And finally, if you wanted to make plain
5 that it was a war against Gaza, not against Palestinians,
6 you would hold out some hope to Palestinians that they
7 might have a future of autonomy, as they were promised in
8 1948.

9 The world made a promise to two people in 1948, that
10 there would be a state of Israel and a state of Palestine
11 living side by side peacefully. One promise the world has
12 kept. One promise the world hasn't kept. There is a
13 million reasons for that. There is a million reasons for
14 that, but the fact is, 75 years later, one promise has been
15 kept and one hasn't.

16 And it is important for Palestinians to believe they
17 might have a future with autonomy. It might look different
18 than 1948, but they should believe it. Instead, Israeli
19 leadership in their statements has essentially closed that
20 off. It is so very important that we provide assistance to
21 Israel to allow itself to defend against those who would
22 annihilate it.

23 It is so very important that we take dramatically more
24 steps to encourage Israel, to push Israel, to urge Israel
25 and other nations to make plain that a war against Gazans

1 or Palestinians is going to make this worse. Cindy McCain
2 predicts that there will be a famine, a mass famine in
3 Gaza.

4 Secretary Austin, if that were to occur, if women and
5 children who are already dying but start to die in great
6 numbers because of lack of access to food or medicine, will
7 that improve or will that de-escalate the violence in the
8 region, or will that accelerate violence in the region?

9 Secretary Austin: It will accelerate violence, and it
10 will have the effect of ensuring that there is a long term
11 conflict because of, you know, the Palestinian people have
12 been disadvantaged to such a great degree.

13 And it doesn't have to happen, I think to your point.
14 I think, you know, we should continue to do everything we
15 can, and we are doing this to encourage the Israelis to
16 provide humanitarian assistance, to open up more land
17 routes, and to and to separate the Palestinian people from
18 Hamas. Failure to do so, I think, would just create more
19 terrorist --

20 Senator Kaine: And I am going to close and say, we
21 already see dangerous escalation. The U.S. has had to wage
22 460 strikes against the Houthis who are firing into the Red
23 sea. They weren't really doing that in any significant
24 quantity until the war in Gaza started.

25 And the U.S. has put our own personnel on high alert

1 in the Middle East, because there is the expectation that
2 Iran will retaliate against Israel for an Iraqi attack on
3 -- for an Israeli attack on Iranian positions in Syria. We
4 have got to find a path to de-escalation here. The world
5 is depending on us to do so. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator
7 Sullivan, please.

8 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
9 Gentlemen, thank you for your testimony. I appreciate the
10 discussion of the supplemental, and I would encourage you
11 to continue to talk about it, not as a Ukraine aid package,
12 but as a package that actually builds out our own
13 industrial base to protect our own country, because that is
14 what it is.

15 As you mentioned, Mr. Secretary, it is actually closer
16 to 60 percent of that entire bill goes directly into the
17 defense industrial base. When you look at the AUKUS
18 dollars, it actually unlocks about \$6 billion to build
19 subs, the weapons system that Xi Jinping is scared to death
20 of. So, I think, you know, labeling it as Ukraine aid
21 isn't helpful. It should be called the Fighting
22 Authoritarian Aggression Supplemental or the Defense
23 Industrial Base Enhancement Act.

24 So, I would encourage you to continue to talk about it
25 in that regard, and the amount it focuses on Israel and

1 Taiwan. So, I think that is important, particularly this
2 week with the House. I want to get to the defense budget,
3 which is what you are testifying here.

4 Would you both agree, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Secretary,
5 that we are facing one of the most dangerous times in our
6 history since World War II?

7 Secretary Austin: This is one of the most complex
8 times that I have seen, Senator.

9 Senator Sullivan: General.

10 General Brown: The 39 years I have been wearing
11 uniform, this has probably been the most complex I have
12 seen.

13 Senator Sullivan: So, I know these are hard
14 questions, but I am going to ask them. You know, the
15 President has put forward defense inflation adjusted cuts
16 to the Department of Defense every year. Now, the chairman
17 mentioned well this was a House Republicans. This is the
18 Commander in Chief's leadership, and he is failing on it.
19 Every year he puts forward Defense Department cuts during
20 one of the most dangerous periods.

21 Right now, this budget, if it continues in the
22 direction the Biden Administration is pushing, will get us
23 below 3 percent of GDP for our defense. We have only done
24 that four times since World War II. Do you think being at
25 3 percent of GDP, or below 3 percent of GDP for the

1 Department of Defense, meets the moment in terms of the
2 dangers we are seeing right now? Mr. Secretary.

3 Secretary Austin: I think, again, operating within
4 the guidelines of the law --

5 Senator Sullivan: But I am not asking about the law.
6 I am just saying, if we go to below -- 3 percent or below,
7 do you think that meets the -- we have been there four
8 times. It was mostly in the late 90s when we have the so-
9 called peace dividend. Is 3 percent of GDP for our
10 Department of Defense what we need during these very
11 dangerous times?

12 Secretary Austin: No, we are -- again, we have linked
13 our request to our strategy. And again, I think we had to
14 make some tough choices, as I said earlier --

15 Senator Sullivan: General -- I am sorry to interrupt
16 you, Mr. Secretary. General, in your personal opinion, do
17 you think that below 3 percent of GDP spending is what we
18 need to meet these dangerous times, which we all agree are
19 dangerous times?

20 General Brown: Well, Senator, what I really believe
21 on this is that we have to get a budget on time. For the
22 past 15 years, we have been --

23 Senator Sullivan: I agree with that. Talk to Senator
24 Schumer --

25 Senator Sullivan: We have had five years in continued

1 resolutions. When the budget is on time, it actually
2 impacts our buying power.

3 Senator Sullivan: I agree with that. But can you
4 answer my question? 3 percent of GDP -- it is pretty easy
5 to answer. The answer is no, right.

6 General Brown: Senator, as a warfighter, I don't --

7 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, I would like to
8 submit this chart for the record. It just shows where we
9 have been -- four times since World War II, we have been at
10 3 percent of GDP or below. The answer is no. I think we
11 all know that. This committee knows that. It is important
12 -- I respect both of you very much. Have a lot of
13 experience. But it is important to come before this
14 committee and tell us what you believe.

15 None of you believe going below 3 percent of GDP is
16 good for the Department of Defense. I know that. I know
17 it is hard. The President clearly thinks it is good for
18 Department of Defense. He cuts the budget every year. It
19 has got to make your job really tough.

20 Let me go to an area that you understand very well,
21 both of you, and that is deterrence with regard to Iran.
22 Tom Friedman, The New York Times columnist, recently
23 observed that fighting through Tehran's proxies, Hamas in
24 Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria,
25 Shia militias in Iraq, Iran is reaping all the benefits and

1 paying virtually no costs of the work of its proxies.

2 I asked General Kurilla if he agreed with that. He
3 said yes, I think they are not paying the cost. That is
4 your CENTCOM Commander with regard to Iran. Vice Admiral
5 Brad Cooper mentioned on 60 minutes that the Houthis are
6 actually supplied -- being supplied by the Iranians,
7 advised by the Iranians, trained by the Iranians, and very
8 importantly, they are receiving targeting information on
9 American warships in the Red sea.

10 So, the Iranians are providing the Houthis targeting
11 intel to shoot and sink the USS Carney and USS Eisenhower.
12 Both of you are, I think, very clear eyed on the threat
13 that Iran poses. You have seen them killing our troops
14 over the years. General, you have had an up close -- I am
15 sorry, Mr. Secretary, you have seen that very up close with
16 the EFPs in Iraq. Why are we not sinking Iranian warships,
17 intel ships that are providing targeting intel to kill
18 Marines and Sailors from Alaska or North Dakota?

19 I mean, I find this outrageous. Why are we not doing
20 that? Why are we not telling the Iranians, overtly or
21 covertly, next time you send intel to target an American
22 warship through the Houthis, we will sink your ships. Why
23 aren't we doing that? That is so basic to me. Mr.
24 Secretary, you have been very strong against Iran your
25 whole career.

1 Secretary Austin: And I maintain the point that Iran
2 needs to be held accountable for what it is doing --
3 continues to do.

4 Senator Sullivan: Providing intel to kill American
5 sailors in the Red sea. Why don't we sink their ships?

6 Secretary Austin: Attacking Iran is a different issue
7 and I think --

8 Senator Sullivan: They are attacking us.

9 Secretary Austin: Their proxies are attacking --

10 Senator Sullivan: No, they are providing intel to
11 kill Americans. General, your advice on this, in your
12 personal opinion?

13 General Brown: As the Secretary said, we will
14 continue to hold Iran accountable for much of this
15 activity. I can talk to you more in a classified session
16 about some of the options that we are working through
17 should one of our attacks -- our ships get attacked.

18 Senator Sullivan: This is not an unreasonable
19 position that I am proposing. Here is the problem, and I
20 have talked to the CNO of the Navy. There was this barrage
21 against the USS Carney -- 28 missiles and drones recently
22 from the Houthis.

23 If one of those slipped through and sunk that ship,
24 the President would have pressure to go to war with Iran.
25 My view is we should just tell them right now, enough.

1 Operation Praying Mantis, I know you are both familiar with
2 that.

3 That was very successful operation. We sank Iranian
4 warships when they were mining the Persian Gulf. So, I
5 would like to talk to you more about this in the classified
6 setting, but I don't think it is even a difficult decision.
7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the
9 quotes attributed to Mark Twain, which has never been
10 verified, but if he didn't say it, he should have, which is
11 that history doesn't always repeat itself, but it usually
12 rhymes.

13 In the late 1930s, there was a very deliberate and
14 sophisticated Nazi propaganda effort in the United States
15 up to and including members of Congress to affect American
16 opinion and political opinion toward the Nazi regime and
17 the defense of Europe. And it worked until Pearl Harbor.

18 Today, Chairman McCaul and Chairman Turner in the
19 House have both acknowledged a very sophisticated and
20 concentrated Russian misinformation and propaganda attempt
21 here in the United States to affect our public policy
22 toward Ukraine.

23 And indeed, both of them acknowledged that this has,
24 up to and including members of Congress. Do you see, Mr.
25 Secretary, a danger to this country from this kind of

1 concerted, conscious, misinformation campaign on the part
2 of the Russians?

3 Secretary Austin: Absolutely, Senator. And that
4 danger increases on a daily basis. And to your point, it
5 is sophisticated to the degree that people don't know that
6 -- you know, where the, the information is coming from and
7 how Russia is doing these kinds of things. But, again,
8 there is a danger.

9 Senator King: Well, it is one of the vulnerabilities
10 that we have is also our greatest strength, which is the
11 openness of our society, the First Amendment, free speech.
12 The vulnerability is that our democracy is based upon
13 information, and if the information stream is compromised
14 by a foreign actor, that endangers our country.

15 One of my concerns is that it is very difficult to
16 defend against such attacks. We don't want to be censoring
17 the internet. We don't want to be censoring free and
18 -- free flow of information. Our whole defense strategy in
19 every other area is deterrence. In other words, that is
20 -- deterrence is the key to our defense strategy. It has
21 been for 75 years. Except in cyber and misinformation.

22 I would hope that you would take back to CYBERCOM and
23 the NSA the necessity of a deterrent. That is the
24 adversary, in this case Russia, if you are going to meddle
25 in our politics, in our system, in our information pool, in

1 a deliberate and conscious way, you will pay a price for
2 that. Not necessarily kinetic, but it could be cyber, it
3 could be sanctions, it could be others. But one of my
4 problems is that there doesn't seem to be a deterrent in
5 this field, which indeed is the new frontier of warfare.

6 Mr. Secretary, I hope you will take that thought back.
7 If deterrence works in nuclear policy, in conventional
8 kinetic policy, it also can work in this new frontier of
9 misinformation to undermine the National Security of this
10 country.

11 Secretary Austin: I will take that back and we will
12 take it for action. We will drill on possibilities to
13 create that deterrent effect that you are talking about.

14 Senator King: I am afraid if we don't do that, it is
15 just going to continue. There is no reason why it
16 shouldn't. It is cheap for them, and it is very damaging
17 to this country. With regard to Gaza, Senator Kaine laid
18 out the situation very effectively. It has become apparent
19 -- I met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in January.

20 The President has talked to him repeatedly. You use
21 the word encourage. It has become apparent to me that the
22 current government of Israel needs more than encouragement.
23 And I was surprised that at the very week that the World
24 Kitchen attack occurred and the continuing humanitarian
25 crisis, that the Administration approved the transfer of

1 additional munitions to Israel, particularly offensive
2 munitions. 2,000 pound bombs are not defensive, they are
3 offensive, and they are not very precision.

4 Why did the Administration make that decision? It
5 seems to me the President's hand would be strengthened
6 significantly if he had said, we are going to pause this
7 planned conveyance of these offensive weapons until we see
8 some serious attention to the humanitarian crisis and also
9 to the problem of civilian casualties.

10 Secretary Austin: So, I had the opportunity to speak
11 with my counterpart on his attack, and I was very upfront
12 in terms of, you know, how horrific this was and the fact
13 that they needed to be investigated and people held
14 accountable.

15 We are seeing some of that activity. In terms of
16 -- as the President engaged the Prime minister, I won't
17 speak to that, you know, the contents of that conversation,
18 but it clearly had an effect. We have seen changes in
19 behavior, and we have seen more humanitarian assistance
20 being pushed into Gaza.

21 There needs to be more still. But, again, I think,
22 you know, the President's conversation did have a positive
23 effect. Now, hopefully that trend will continue but that's
24 left to be seen.

25 Senator King: Well, again, I think all of us feel

1 Israel absolutely has a -- not only a right, but a
2 responsibility to defend itself. But it is the conduct by
3 which they are doing so that is actually hurting Israel.
4 That is what bothers me.

5 I consider myself a friend of Israel. And by not
6 separating the Palestinian civilians from Hamas, they are
7 playing into Hamas's hands. When you kill a civilian
8 child, their parents are not going to be very sympathetic
9 to the people that let that bomb loose.

10 And my concern is that particularly when those bombs
11 are coming from this country, we have a responsibility as
12 well in terms of that -- the way that war is being
13 conducted, because we are engaged also in terms of the
14 supply of the weapons.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Let me
16 recognize Senator Cramer, please.

17 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,
18 gentlemen, for being here and for your service to our
19 country. General Brown, I am going to start with you. I
20 am going to follow up on a number of things that my
21 colleagues have brought up, but I want to ask you very
22 specifically, is it your best military advice to the
23 Commander in Chief, and the Secretary of Defense to cut
24 -- continue to cut the defense budget to the point where we
25 are now below 3 percent of our GDP? Is that your best

1 military advice?

2 General Brown: You know, I give more advice on our
3 operational capability, but --

4 Senator Cramer: You guys are very good at not
5 answering questions.

6 General Brown: But I will also tell you, one of the
7 things we will do is actually continue to advocate for the
8 resources required for the Joint Force. And this is an
9 area that I will continue to work on not only with the
10 -- my boss, the Secretary, but also with this committee.

11 Senator Cramer: Mr. Secretary, Senator Cotton asked
12 you about, you know, striking energy assets in Russia,
13 particularly refineries. Isn't -- and you sort of said
14 maybe there is a better place. I don't want to say that is
15 what you said, but better places for them to strike. Isn't
16 energy -- hasn't energy become a weapon in the war in
17 Russia and Ukraine, and frankly, in Iran?

18 In fact, regarding Iran, I think somebody said that
19 the position of the Administration is to make Iran pay for
20 what they have done, and we will talk about, you know, some
21 of those options, General, in the other session. But
22 aren't sanction waivers for Iran -- I mean, that doesn't
23 seem like a great way to make them pay.

24 They have now been able to use oil to build their
25 reserves, their financial reserves, some \$4 billion, which

1 is what they had at the end of the Trump Administration to
2 \$75 billion today. So, isn't energy, aren't energy assets
3 actually almost like hitting say, you know, a military
4 side?

5 General Brown: They can and will have, eventually
6 have an impact on a country's ability to produce military
7 capability. There is no question. The question is, if you
8 are in a fight and you are fighting for your life, is that
9 most important to you or is something -- can something else
10 be addressed that is, that can affect the battlefield, the
11 current battlefield, more effectively?

12 Senator Cramer: Okay. If I buy that, couldn't we be
13 doing at least more on our part to provide some of those
14 much cleaner energy resources rather than letting Iran, for
15 example, continue to sell to China, another adversary, and
16 build up their reserves?

17 Leaving that for a minute, I want to get to something
18 even more specific and something that I was planning to
19 bring up before all this came up, and that is and won't
20 surprise either one of you, that I continue to be
21 concerned, and your Combatant Commanders are sounding the
22 alarm about the Air Force continually not only eliminating
23 legacy and current ISR assets, but now future ISR assets,
24 with the hope that somehow lower earth orbiting satellites
25 are going to solve the day.

1 And I know you will say, because we always hear, well,
2 the Combatant Commanders never have enough ISR. They will
3 always say they don't have enough. But their concern is
4 escalating along with the deterioration of our airborne ISR
5 assets.

6 I know about the priorities, and we need to do more,
7 but could General Brown maybe, now that you have this
8 broader responsibility than just the Air Force, maybe you
9 could speak to that a little bit for me and help me feel
10 better about it, and again, we can talk about it in more
11 detail later.

12 General Brown: Senator, I appreciate the question.
13 And I will just tell you, based on experience, having been
14 a Deputy Commander to Combat Command, Air Command
15 Commander, as well as a Service Chief, and now as a
16 Chairman, I do think about all the capabilities that we
17 have and ISR is one of those.

18 And this, I will just say, is one of the more
19 contentious issues that we have across the Joint Force.
20 The things we are going to have to continue to do is this,
21 not only look at the ISR that we do have to keep that
22 moving, but at the same time, look at opportunities,
23 particularly -- and you mentioned space based capabilities.

24 That is going to give us access into areas we can't
25 get with some of the ISR that we have today. And so it is

1 a combination of things of how we work together with the
2 Joint Force, and this is an area that I am focused on with
3 the Joint Chiefs and the Combat Commands to ensure that we
4 are making best use of the resources that we do have, the
5 capabilities in ISR, but I would also say all the other
6 capabilities that we provide for the Joint Force and how we
7 balance that out to make sure we are putting it in the
8 right place at the right time, to provide those gateways.

9 And so, I am having pretty deep conversations with the
10 combat commanders and with the Joint Chiefs on these very
11 topics about how do we ensure that we are identifying
12 areas, like ISR, that we need to continue to resource, and
13 how we best do that across the service and across the Joint
14 Force.

15 Senator Cramer: Earlier -- I can't remember who was
16 asking the questions, but you brought up CCA as a force
17 multiplier. My term, not yours, but I think that is the
18 term commonly used. I think it was in responses to NGAD.

19 But I just want to wrap up with this maybe admonition
20 or -- please, please, please, as you -- whether we are
21 talking about CCA or we are talking about something new in
22 space, we have got to find a way to move at the speed of
23 China.

24 And we have talked a little bit about that with regard
25 to R&D, with regard to procurement. We have got to knock

1 down some of these barriers, and please ask us for help if
2 we need to do some things from a policy standpoint so that
3 our innovators are in the fight with you, rather than just
4 the three or four primes that have the same bureaucratic
5 traditions that, frankly, the military has. We have got to
6 become faster. With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.
8 Senator Warren, please.

9 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
10 Austin, under your leadership, the United States has made
11 preventing civilian harm a top priority. You have
12 repeatedly said that it is both a moral and a strategic
13 imperative.

14 I have pressed the DOD to take this issue more
15 seriously for years. And in 2022, DOD issued its Civilian
16 Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan, which directs the
17 Department to systematically take steps to prevent,
18 mitigate, and respond to civilian harm. Policy makes clear
19 that we expect our military partners to prioritize civilian
20 harm prevention as well.

21 Since October, Israeli strikes have killed over 30,000
22 Palestinians, the majority of them are women and children.
23 Rafah has become the latest refuge of Palestinian
24 civilians, is now home to more than 1.4 million people.

25 Given the number of civilians there, the Biden

1 Administration has repeatedly urged Israel not to attack
2 Rafah, saying that doing so would be "a disaster.

3 Secretary Austin, do you think an attack on Rafah that
4 kills another 30,000 civilians would enhance either U.S. or
5 Israeli security?

6 Secretary Austin: Thank you, Senator. There is no
7 question that there have been far too many civilian
8 casualties in this conflict, far too many.

9 And what we continue to emphasize to the Israelis is
10 that, you know, civilians in that battle space need to be
11 not only evacuated but properly taken care of once they are
12 evacuated out of that battle space, before anything is
13 contemplated.

14 And, you know, this is a point that I have stress with
15 my counterpart on a number of occasions just recently as
16 yesterday -- and again, it cannot be, going forward, what
17 we have seen in the past in terms of the type of activities
18 that we have seen in Gaza City and in Khan Yunis.

19 Far too many civilians have been killed as a result of
20 combat operations, and they need to get civilians out of
21 that battle space around Rafah.

22 Senator Warren: All right. So, the United States has
23 an important responsibility here, because we are the ones
24 giving the Israeli Defense Forces the bombs that they are
25 using to destroy homes and hospitals and refugee camps.

1 At the President's direction, through his February
2 National Security memorandum, the Department of Defense and
3 the State Department are currently assessing whether Israel
4 is in compliance with international humanitarian law.
5 There are serious concerns that Israel is not complying
6 with the international humanitarian law.

7 According to recent investigations by Plus 972 and The
8 Guardian, Israeli intelligence officials allege that the
9 IDF often deliberately prefers to wait until its targets
10 are at home, among their children and neighbors, to launch
11 a strike.

12 Secretary Austin, I understand that civilians are
13 often at risk in a time of war, but would the United States
14 systematically choose to execute on military strikes that
15 are more likely to kill civilians, including children?

16 Secretary Austin: Absolutely not. Just the opposite.
17 You know, we routinely go out of our way to make sure that
18 we do everything we can to minimize civilian casualties.
19 Even with that, even with extraordinary efforts, there will
20 be collateral damage and casualties from time to time. But
21 it is something that we really work hard to prevent.

22 Senator Warren: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. U.S.
23 policy explicitly states that we expect our allies to meet
24 the same standards that we do to prevent and mitigate
25 civilian harm. Israel is failing to do that in its bombing

1 campaign.

2 Under your leadership, DOD has made significant
3 progress in putting policies in place to protect civilians.
4 But we also need to push our closest allies to meet the
5 same standard and to cut off U.S. support if they refuse to
6 do so. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren.
8 Senator Scott, please.

9 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you
10 each of you for being here. Thank you for your service.
11 First, I want to talk about Homestead. I am from Florida.
12 The -- we watch what China's doing in Latin America.

13 We watch what Russia is doing. We watch what Iran is
14 doing. We know we have a Chinese spy station in Cuba. I
15 have talked to Chairman Brown, Secretary Kendall, General
16 Richardson about the importance of Homestead Air Force
17 Base, and it is from a standpoint of power projection, and
18 the need to have a flying mission.

19 And I think all of them have agreed the importance of
20 Homestead. So, Secretary Austin, do you believe that
21 homestead is important for power projection to Latin
22 American, and should we have a flying mission there? And
23 will we get a flying mission there?

24 Secretary Austin: Homestead Air Reserve Base is
25 strategically located, and it provides valuable

1 contributions to our efforts in the SOUTHCOM AOR. And
2 -- we continue to be grateful for your support for
3 Homestead. I know that there has been questions about
4 whether or not we are going to close Homestead. And I can
5 tell you that that is not under consideration right now.

6 Senator Scott: Right. Number two, China. China has
7 elected to be our enemy. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.
8 We finally got through the NDAA an elimination of the
9 Federal Government's ability to buy Chinese drones, but I
10 don't personally understand how the Department of defense
11 would ever buy anything made in China.

12 Specifically, to you, Secretary Austin, do you believe
13 that we ought to be buying Chinese lighter systems to use
14 on our vehicles or Chinese computers, which are connected
15 to our top secret networks?

16 Secretary Austin: I do not. And I also -- we will
17 work hard and are working hard to make sure that our supply
18 chains are not vulnerable to manipulation by adversaries.
19 So, it is important to us to make sure that we don't have,
20 you know, elements from our adversaries included in our
21 weapons systems and repair parts and you name it. So, this
22 is something that we pay very, very close attention to.

23 Senator Scott: Right. So, I will take that if we
24 propose things where we are going to prevent DOD, our
25 Federal Government to buying Chinese products, you will be

1 supportive. Next, let's talk about Israel.

2 I just got back from Israel. Met with the Prime
3 Minister, met with the war cabinet. I went to the Nova
4 Film Festival. I talked to families that lost their loved
5 ones there. I went to a kibbutz that I had been to in
6 2019, where 63 people were murdered by Hamas. Hamas, about
7 half a mile from there.

8 And there is a video of a young lady that was about to
9 be and was murdered by Hamas. I went to a house where a
10 mother was burned alive. I went where babies were killed.
11 It is disgusting.

12 What I found in my conversation there is that the
13 -- in contrast to what some of my colleagues have said, the
14 IDF is absolutely committed to the safety of Palestinians.
15 They have zero interest in killing civilians.

16 And actually, they put a lot of effort into making
17 sure that that doesn't happen. My takeaway, this was
18 -- they don't understand why the Biden Administration
19 doesn't try to hold Qatar accountable. Why they don't
20 -- because everybody believes that Qatar can get the
21 hostages out today. And I met with American hostage
22 families.

23 And I met with them -- you know, some have families
24 alive and some that have bodies still in, in Gaza. They
25 don't -- they there's not a lot of understanding of what

1 the Biden Administration has actually done to get our
2 American hostages home.

3 And then the last thing is that a lot of people I have
4 talked to don't understand why they would -- the Biden
5 Administration would attack Israel for the civilian deaths,
6 which were horrible on the humanitarian effort that was
7 done. We are including where the Kitchen program was done,
8 where even American was killed.

9 At the same time, the Biden Administration has done
10 nothing to hold anybody accountable for the 13 service
11 warriors death at the Kabul airport or the death of
12 innocent Afghan family, killed in a U.S. drone strike
13 during the withdrawal.

14 So, three questions, do you believe that we ought to
15 demand accountability by Qatar? Should the Biden
16 Administration do more to get our hostages home? And
17 three, why do we demand -- why does the Biden
18 Administration demand accountability -- which actually
19 Israel did do an investigation, but to my understanding, we
20 have never done an investigation to hold anybody
21 accountable for the drone strike that killed an Afghan
22 family or do anything about the 13 service members that
23 died at the Kabul airport.

24 Secretary Austin: Regarding the recovery of hostages
25 in Israel, this has been a priority for the United States

1 since the very beginning. The President and all the senior
2 leadership have been focused on this and doing everything
3 possible to try to get these hostages released, and that
4 work continues.

5 I know you have seen Director Burns go back and forth
6 to the Middle East, working with his counterparts on this
7 issue. We remain hopeful that we will see movement at some
8 point in the future. But this is very, very important.
9 And again, Hamas is responsible ultimately for, you know,
10 what has -- for the beginning -- for the start of this war.

11 This brutal attack on Israel and the killing of
12 Israeli citizens and Americans, it was just -- it is
13 unthinkable, quite frankly. But having said that, there
14 have been far too many civilian casualties, and you know, I
15 think there is a way to be successful operationally and
16 tactically, and also protect civilians.

17 The two are not mutually exclusive, Senator. And I
18 think we just need to see a better job in terms of being
19 more precise and protecting the civilian population.

20 Senator Scott: How about Qatar?

21 Secretary Austin: I am sorry?

22 Senator Scott: How about Qatar holding them -- demand
23 accountability. I mean, they have got Hamas leaders
24 sitting in -- living in luxury. And the Biden
25 Administration, as far as I can tell, has done nothing to

1 hold them accountable. We have a military base.

2 Secretary Austin: We do have a military base there,
3 and it is very important to us. And Qatar has done a lot
4 to help get hostages released, and they continue that work.

5 And so, you know -- and I -- you know, I have talked
6 to the leadership in Qatar. I know the leadership there.
7 And I can tell you, they are intensely focused on making
8 sure that we can get hostages released as soon as possible.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator
10 Peters, please.

11 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
12 Austin, General Brown, as you know very well, the Air Force
13 plans to field several different types of collaborative,
14 combat aircraft with varying capabilities, including
15 surveillance, jamming, and deception.

16 These CCAs, combined with both fifth and sixth
17 generation fighters, will certainly play a significant role
18 in disrupting as well as defeating our adversaries counter
19 air operations in any future conflict.

20 However, maintaining air superiority is also going to
21 require that all components, including the National Guard,
22 train with CCAs in real world training environments. These
23 training opportunities found in locations like we have in
24 Michigan, the National All Domain Warfighting Center, I
25 think will be likely to play a very key role in realizing

1 that potential.

2 So, my question for both of you, Secretary Austin and
3 then General Brown, with this in mind, how can active duty,
4 reserve and guard components, best prepare for CCA
5 integration and training, given the near term acquisition
6 of these uncrewed autonomous systems that we are going to
7 see in the near future. Secretary Austin, if you would
8 answer first, please.

9 Secretary Austin: Well, as you would imagine,
10 Senator, I remain focused on making sure that we have the
11 right mix of capabilities to execute our strategy. And I
12 will just speak to the point that the CCA capability is
13 really, really important, and it will ensure that we
14 maintain a competitive edge in the future. And this is
15 something that our Air Force has been working on for quite
16 some time.

17 And we are asking to invest in this, continue to
18 invest in this in this budget. But your specific question
19 about the training of reserve pilots, you know, perhaps I
20 will let the chairman speak to that, because he is a pretty
21 good F-16 pilot and understands that -- the training
22 requirements, very, very well.

23 But I would just emphasize that this is a tremendous
24 capability. We are investing in the right things. And the
25 total force at some point needs to have that capability.

1 Senator Peters: Thank you. General Brown.

2 General Brown: Senator Peters, thanks for the
3 question. And as -- I think about the Joint Force -- as a
4 joint warfighter, I often think and address the total force
5 and its active guard, reserve, and our civilians.

6 And in my role as -- my previous role as an Air Force
7 Chief, as we started the path on collaborative combat
8 aircraft, we looked at it from a total force perspective
9 and will apply that capability to make sure it is in all
10 three components across United States Air Force.

11 I would also add, as we go down the path of uncrewed
12 systems, not only in the air but maritime and other areas,
13 how we leverage that capability with our -- aspects of Air
14 Force will be most important to ensure we are able to, you
15 know, have the full capability, you know, not only from our
16 active force, but also from our guard and reserve as well.

17 Senator Peters: Right. Well, General Brown, as a
18 former fighter pilot, you know better than anyone that
19 aerial refueling is a foundation of global mobility and
20 power projection for the U.S. Air Force.

21 And I am thrilled that Michigan will continue to
22 support this mission as we welcome a squadron of 12 KC-46
23 refueling tankers to Selfridge Air National Guard Base.
24 The capabilities of the KC-46 will support our current and
25 future fighter and bomber missions for decades to come.

1 And I think their value to the Joint Force was again
2 highlighted in last year's multinational mobility exercise,
3 Mobility Guardian '23. But my question for you, General
4 Brown, is what strategic role do you see the KC-46 is
5 playing in the Indo-Pacific, and how will they really
6 contribute to our broader National Security goals?

7 General Brown: Well, as you highlight the -- our
8 tankers are strategic assets, and it actually allows us to
9 be able to move combat power around the world like no other
10 country and -- to include the Indo-Pacific.

11 And so, what it does is it increases our combat reach
12 and our combat effectiveness with these tankers. And
13 having flown the KC-46, it is an outstanding airplane. It
14 arises where -- you know, bring it in on, we are learning
15 some things about the airplane.

16 But, as you highlight, Mobility Guardian last year was
17 a great opportunity for us to show not only what we could
18 do with the KC-46, but with the rest of our mobility force
19 in support of a potential conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you, Mr.
21 Chairman.

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters. For the
23 knowledge of everyone, the first of two votes has begun.
24 And let me recognize Senator Tuberville.

25 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good

1 morning, gentlemen. How are you all? Secretary Austin,
2 glad to have you back. You look like you are in good
3 playing shape. So, I know you have had a tough couple of
4 months, but we are glad you are back.

5 Secretary McCord don't go to sleep onus over there,
6 and I am going to ask you a question. It is my
7 understanding, the work that we have done, my staff, we
8 have spent \$300 billion since 2014 in Ukraine. Does that
9 sound about right to you? I know that is before your time.

10 Mr. McCord: That does sound high to me. We did about
11 \$300 million a year for Ukraine for a number of years. And
12 then just in the last two years, we have done about \$40.
13 So, if you are talking whole of Government, it might be
14 -- I would have to check. But for DOD, that does sound
15 high.

16 Senator Tuberville: Yes. Well, my staff looked into
17 it. It is about \$300 billion, their best guesstimate.
18 Right now, we are we are printing or borrowing \$80,000 per
19 second. \$4.6 million a minute.

20 We can't sustain that much longer. We got to find the
21 best ways to spend our money. The DOD Inspector General
22 has said that there is 50 criminal investigations going on
23 right now from money sent to Ukraine.

24 By the way, one of the most corrupt countries in the
25 world. Are you familiar with that, Secretary Austin?

1 Secretary Austin: What I am familiar with is that we
2 have given our Inspector General the access that he needs
3 to be able to exercise oversight. And we have just
4 increased his authorization in terms of number of people to
5 have forward there.

6 That is really important. But in terms of monies,
7 specific monies that are being provided to Ukraine, we
8 don't -- as you know, Senator, we don't provide money. We
9 provide, security assistance in a way of equipment,
10 munitions, and that sort of stuff.

11 And we replenish -- when we replenish the things that
12 we have taken out of our own stock to provide to Ukraine,
13 that work comes through our industrial base. You know,
14 our, you know, companies in Alabama are helping to create
15 the weapon systems to replace those systems that we
16 provided to Ukraine.

17 Senator Tuberville: But I want to --

18 Secretary Austin: In terms of specific cases that the
19 IG may be referring to, I don't have knowledge of that.

20 Senator Tuberville: Yes. I also want to remind you,
21 we are building munitions in our country and in Alabama we
22 do build quite a few, boats, submarines, missiles, and
23 those things. But we do spend a lot of money out of the
24 country on munitions, because our industrial base is not
25 what -- near what it used to be. General, can Ukraine win?

1 Secretary Austin: Yes, yes.

2 Senator Tuberville: And what does that look like?

3 Secretary Austin: Well, what we have said all along
4 is we want to see Ukraine remain a sovereign, independent,
5 and democratic state that has the ability to defend its
6 sovereign territory and deter aggression. And that has
7 been our aim from the very beginning, and it remains our
8 aim. But yes, they can be successful.

9 Senator Tuberville: I heard Secretary Blinken say
10 last week in Brussels that Ukraine will soon be a NATO. Do
11 you agree with that?

12 Secretary Austin: That is the goal of the NATO
13 members is to at some point bring Ukraine into NATO. And
14 that is certainly something that Ukraine wants to see.

15 Senator Tuberville: If you are Russia, would you want
16 that? I am just asking. I mean, we are playing games with
17 Russia right now. I just want to understand why we would
18 do that.

19 Secretary Austin: Certainly, if I was Russia, I would
20 not want that, Senator. I would also not want Finland and
21 Sweden to be a part of NATO, and they are. And the reason
22 that they are is because Putin invaded his neighbor.

23 And, you know, without provocation, without
24 justification. And so, that is why we want -- well, that
25 is where we are where we are. And, you know, instead of

1 making things better for himself, he enlarged -- he had the
2 effect of enlarging NATO, which obviously creates worse
3 conditions for him.

4 Senator Tuberville: Do we have 12 CIA bases in
5 Ukraine? Can you answer that in this setting?

6 Secretary Austin: CIA bases? Before --

7 Senator Tuberville: I got this out of The New York
8 Times, which I don't read very often, but --

9 Secretary Austin: I will defer that question to the
10 Director of the CIA, Senator.

11 Senator Tuberville: All right. Thank you. General
12 Brown, just a quick question. I had the opportunity to
13 travel bases all over the world since I have had this job
14 three months -- or three years. Our morale is not very
15 good.

16 Our recruiting is really dropping. What are you doing
17 to help solve that problem? We need a strong military.
18 And a lot of them tell me, they say basic, Coach, listen,
19 we are taking all these classes.

20 It has nothing to do with killing our adversary. It
21 is about getting along with each other. And I can
22 understand part of that. But we also need a killing
23 machine. What is your answer to that?

24 General Brown: Well, as I said in my opening
25 statement, honing our warfighting skills has primacy in all

1 we do. And part of building a joint warfighting team is
2 being able to build a team. And I know you are fully aware
3 of that based on your background.

4 And so, it is the work that we do with each one of
5 those service members to bring them and give them all the
6 opportunity and full potential to make this most lethal
7 combat, credible force in the world.

8 Senator Tuberville: How do we stop people from
9 getting out of the military?

10 General Brown: Senator, I will tell you, I can give
11 you the numbers, but our retention right now across all the
12 services is really good. Our recruiting is --

13 Senator Tuberville: I would love to see that.

14 General Brown: Our recruiting is also trending up
15 here. In the course of the past several weeks, I have sat
16 down with recruiters from all the various services. I went
17 to a military entrance processing station here to talk to
18 them about their process as well.

19 Genesis was highlighted earlier. It is a system, and
20 there is some things we can do better. And I gave them
21 some feedback while I was here.

22 And so, recruiting is on the upswing. And the thing I
23 would -- last thing I will close on is, we need to talk
24 about the value of service and talk about what it is to
25 wear the uniform, and the great opportunity, whether you

1 spent four years or four decades, is really important.

2 And what serving in our military or serving at all
3 within our nation and the impact it can have. And I think
4 that those are things that we can continue to do together.

5 Senator Tuberville: And I totally agree with you.
6 Our military is about people. It is not really about
7 machines and all those things. It is about people. So,
8 thank you.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.
10 Senator Rosen, please.

11 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Chairman -- Chairman
12 Reed. And thank you, Ranking Member Wicker is not here,
13 but we thank him in his absence.

14 And I want to thank Secretary Austin, Secretary
15 McCord, and, of course, General Brown for being here, for
16 testifying, and for all your service and hard work. I want
17 to start to talk a little bit about Israel and defending
18 against Iran, because the October 7th terrorist attack on
19 Israel must never be allowed to take place again.

20 The U.S. security assistance to Israel must therefore
21 continue unimpeded. But Israel's security has only become
22 more complicated in recent weeks and months, as it not only
23 works to defeat Hamas and free the hostages, but also faces
24 frequent threats and attacks by Iran and its proxies like
25 Hezbollah and of course so many others.

1 So, Secretary Austin, beyond the House finally passing
2 the Senate passed supplemental security package, which I am
3 fighting for, what more can be done to help Israel defend
4 itself, including from what are reportedly imminent threats
5 from Iran?

6 Secretary Austin: We are doing a lot, Senator. And
7 first of all, thanks for your support for the supplemental.
8 And like you, I hope, sincerely hope that we can get this
9 across the goal line in the near future here.

10 The chairman and I talk to our counterparts frequently
11 and assess what additional things that we could be doing to
12 help Israel, try to understand, you know, what their
13 priorities are, and our direction of travel is.

14 And again, we do in those conversations, talk about
15 the necessity to protect civilians, as you would expect,
16 and to provide humanitarian assistance. But we are doing
17 everything we can to make sure that we get them what they
18 need, as quickly as possible. And again, I would expect
19 that things would, as the nature of this fight begins to
20 change to become a more precision fight, their requirements
21 will -- should change a bit.

22 And so, we will stay abreast of their needs, and we
23 will continue to provide security assistance as quickly as
24 we can. But we remain committed to helping Israel defend
25 itself, but we expect that they, you know, would execute

1 operations responsibly.

2 And again, these are constant conversations that we
3 have.

4 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I want to move on to,
5 Secretary McCord, and talk about remote bases and incentive
6 pay/ and, of course, General Brown, you know, about Creech
7 Air Force Base a little bit outside of Las Vegas, remote.

8 But Secretary McCord, I want to ask you about this
9 issue facing Nevada service members stationed at Creech Air
10 Force Base and at Naval Air Station Fallon, and of course,
11 everyone who is stationed at other rural or remote
12 installations who have to commute many, many miles to get
13 to the base from where they live.

14 Creech and Fallon have very limited housing nearby, so
15 the vast majority live either in Las Vegas or in the Reno
16 region, respectively, each or both about an hour away. It
17 is an even longer commute for Creech Airmen who have to
18 drop off their kids for childcare, utilize other services
19 at Nellis Air Force Base, which is on the opposite end of
20 town.

21 So, Secretary McCord, given the long travel distances
22 and, of course, the challenges that servicemembers have to
23 face when they travel these distances between their home
24 and their duty station, is the Department considering
25 providing a stipend to alleviate the cost?

1 And if not, how can Congress ensure that it does? We
2 have a lot of challenges, and our remote bases is just one.

3 Mr. McCord: Senator, I will need to consult with my
4 colleagues in Personnel and Readiness as well, who will
5 often make the final recommendation to the Secretary and
6 where we might go on benefits that we are authorized to do.

7 And, of course, we need to work with the committee if
8 it is not something we have the authority to do. First
9 things we tend to look at, of course, are housing costs in
10 the area where you are stationed.

11 You know, in some cases there is a CONUS COLA. Your
12 issue is a little more unique to a couple phases, and I
13 don't know that we have a particular proposal on the table
14 working, but I will check with my colleagues and get back
15 to you.

16 Senator Rosen: Thank you. We will look forward to
17 that. And I want to continue with you, Secretary Austin,
18 on some of these challenges that our servicemen and women
19 have with affordable housing and childcare, because in
20 order to build a resilient military force, we have to meet
21 the critical needs of service members' families.

22 Two of the greatest areas they face in these
23 challenges are affordable housing, like I said, affordable
24 childcare. So, what additional authorities or funding does
25 the Department of Defense need to improve this access to

1 affordable housing and really importantly, affordable
2 childcare?

3 When we talk about Creech, those drones go 24 hours a
4 day, 365 days a year. They need childcare. And so how do
5 we ensure that our service members can fully focus on their
6 duties?

7 Secretary Austin: Regarding housing, as you may have
8 heard me say earlier, Senator, we -- in terms of family
9 housing, we are investing -- we are asking to invest some
10 to \$2 billion in this budget.

11 And then, \$1.1 billion in unaccompanied housing. And
12 it is important to note that \$171 million is being carved
13 out for oversight of our housing efforts. So, this is very
14 important. We are also, you know, increasing the basic
15 allowance for housing. We have increased the BAH some 20
16 percent since 2023.

17 And I think that is material. That is meaningful to
18 our troops. And I go out and talk to them about it and
19 they really appreciate that. So, thanks for your support
20 in that regard. Your comments on childcare, I could -- I
21 absolutely agree with.

22 Just had our senior enlisted leaders together and we
23 meet on occasion to talk about what is important to the
24 force, and this is one area that they continue to raise
25 that, you know, we need to work together to improve, and we

1 have made some improvements. We have provided additional
2 assistance in terms of helping them with childcare fees.

3 We are investing in childcare facilities, you know,
4 some -- I think some \$4 billion or so that we are asking
5 for to -- for new childcare facilities in the '25 budget.
6 And also, we are investing in the quality of the workforce.

7 We, you know, we have seen that the more we can do to
8 recruit the right -- a better quality of workforce, is
9 going to continue to help us. And so, we have invested in
10 that as paying dividends. We need to do more.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

12 Senator Rosen: Thank you very much.

13 Chairman Reed: Senator Budd, please.

14 Senator Budd: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank
15 you, gentlemen, for being here. Mr. Secretary, in your
16 written testimony, you state that, and I quote, "the
17 Department continues to prioritize investments in our
18 activities and infrastructure to reinforce security and
19 stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

20 So, I am all about prioritization, but it is hard to
21 square that when the Department has done so and properly
22 prioritized deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, when we are
23 told that there is at least \$11 billion in unfunded
24 requirements for the INDOPACOM.

25 Over the weekend, this committee received a letter

1 from Secretary McCord in fulfillment of your, Mr.
2 Secretary, responsibility to submit a report that
3 prioritizes matters identified as unfunded priorities by
4 the senior military officers of the services and combatant
5 commands.

6 So, Mr. Secretary, is there a reason that you chose
7 not to rank prioritize the list of unfunded priorities
8 submitted to this committee?

9 Secretary Austin: Our most pressing priority
10 currently, Senator, is to try to get the supplemental pass.
11 And if we can get that through, I think that will help us
12 in a number of ways. And so, I certainly appreciate the
13 Senate's help in terms of, you know, the bill that you
14 passed, and I would hope that we would see some progress on
15 this going forward.

16 Our commanders are required by law to submit unfunded
17 priority list. We encourage and require commanders, and
18 service chiefs, and secretaries, to invest in their base
19 budget. What? You know what, what's needed to, to make
20 sure that we can maintain a credible fighting force.

21 And this year, we chose to invest in readiness, and
22 also in taking care of our people. And that caused us to
23 make sure -- they have to make some choices about
24 modernization for, you know, for the longer term. But
25 those are choices that I think with a higher top line in

1 the future, we can certainly recover from.

2 Senator Budd: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I want to
3 cut in. Now, you mentioned that it is required by law.
4 That is actually section 222(a) of Title 10. And I would
5 just like to point out that it requires rank
6 prioritization, and that was not ranked with priority.

7 And the letter that this committee received further
8 states that he, meaning you, Mr. Secretary, has determined
9 it is not necessary to fund these programs in Fiscal Year
10 2025 to execute the defense strategy at an acceptable level
11 of risk.

12 So, my question you with Secretary is what is an
13 acceptable level of risk to you as described in this
14 letter?

15 Secretary Austin: Well, you know, and as you may have
16 heard me say earlier, Senator, we go through great pains to
17 link our budget request directly to our strategy.

18 And so, we are confident that we can execute the
19 strategy with the things that we have asked for, even
20 though we have had to make some tough choices because of.

21 You know, a top line has been mandated. So, again, I
22 think we have every ability to execute the strategy.
23 Certainly, in the out years we are going to need an
24 increase in top line. And we certainly would appreciate
25 Congress's support in that endeavor.

1 Senator Budd: Thank you, Secretary. General Brown,
2 again, thank you for being here. Would you agree that
3 ships, aircraft, munitions form the basis of military
4 capacity, capability?

5 General Brown: Well, Senator, thanks for the
6 question. I think there is two parts that, yes, that
7 capability is important, but it is just as important to
8 have our service members.

9 Senator Budd: Thank you for --

10 General Brown: Every one of those is defense.

11 Senator Budd: Thank you for including them. I
12 appreciate that. So here is what is concerning me about
13 that first part, ships, aircraft, munitions, of course, in
14 addition to our all-important service members.

15 I am a little bit confused because the budget request
16 simultaneously divests ships and aircraft while making
17 smaller than expected buys of newer platforms. And another
18 concern is that it leaves slack in the production lines of
19 critical munitions. So, if I had to take our best aviator,
20 and perhaps General, you are one of those.

21 And we had to put them up against our adversaries'
22 best aviators, I would take our guys, our men and women, 10
23 out of 10 times. But at some point, any conflict becomes a
24 numbers game. It becomes about mass.

25 So, if China were to decide to invade Taiwan next year

1 instead of 2027 or 2035, are you concerned, General, at all
2 that we are leaving ourselves with a massive capacity gap?

3 General Brown: Senator, one of the things I focus on
4 as a chairman and as a warfighter is to be ready at all
5 times, no matter what because you can't predict the future,
6 but we have a responsibility to shape the future, and that
7 is why we are here to testify on this budget. It is also
8 the reason why, you know, for example, the multi-year
9 procurement that was put out in the '24 NDAA is so
10 important.

11 And to be able to continue that with consistent
12 funding in the industrial base, so we don't have that slack
13 in the system. And so, getting the budgets on time help to
14 decrease that slack, to increase the trust and bring down
15 the cost, and to keep it in the hands of our warfighters
16 much faster than we do today.

17 Senator Budd: Thank you, General. Just briefly, the
18 committee heard -- and you and I have talked about the F-
19 15, the Strike Eagle. The committee heard from the
20 Commander of INDOPACOM that there is a role for Strike
21 Eagles in the scenario in INDOPACOM.

22 Now the head of NORTHCOM told this committee just
23 recently, in many ways that the F-15 Strike Eagle is
24 unmatched air to ground, and in many ways it is unmatched
25 air to air. It is a phenomenal -- it has a phenomenal

1 radar that can pick out low, slow moving, and also low
2 radar cross-sections such as drones or other threats like
3 cruise missiles. Do you agree with their assessments,
4 General?

5 General Brown: The F-15 Strike Eagle is a very
6 capable platform, I would agree.

7 Senator Budd: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I keep
8 highlighting these issues, Mr. Chairman, because the Air
9 Force plans to divest 26 of these Strike Eagles, at the
10 same time buying less than expected F-15 EXs and F-35s.

11 Meanwhile, China is rapidly expanding their air force.
12 So, I am seriously concerned about the growing fighter gap.
13 Thank you for the additional time. And thank you,
14 gentlemen, for being here.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Budd. Senator
16 Kelly. And we are in a vote, so if you would adhere to
17 five minutes, it would be much appreciated.

18 Senator Kelly: I will. Senator Budd, fantastic
19 question. I am going to have some follow-ons to your
20 question with General Brown.

21 So, General, on the munitions, so the war in Ukraine
22 has exposed real concerns about our industrial base. And
23 even during this limited conflict, that is an air conflict,
24 industry is struggling to produce the number of munitions
25 that we need even to replenish our stores.

1 And if we had a conflict with a peer adversary, we
2 would expend munitions at -- possibly at a higher rate than
3 we are seeing with Ukraine -- in a higher rate than they
4 might be able to be replaced.

5 So, it is clear that more needs to be done to prepare
6 our defense industrial base for a possible future conflict.
7 General, last year, I asked your predecessor about the
8 importance and impact of multi-year procurement on
9 replenishing our munitions stockpiles.

10 So, General, how have the multi-year procurements that
11 we passed out of this committee impacted our munitions
12 stores to date?

13 General Brown: Well, they will have an impact. The
14 challenges that came -- the NDAA in '24 gave us the multi-
15 year procurement. We didn't get a budget for '24 until 170
16 days in. But I do see the opportunity going forward and
17 the future of how multi-year procurement will assist us
18 first to create a concept demonstrable to industry.

19 So, industry then can get facilities, get a workforce.
20 Gives us some consistency, which builds trust, which brings
21 down costs. And then there is a steady stream of
22 munitions. And these are the things we need to work on,
23 you know, in addition to get the budget on time. All those
24 together are going to help us increase our stocks.

25 Last thing I would add to that, you know, the

1 supplemental that has been talked about several times
2 today, that doesn't only help our partners in Ukraine, it
3 helps to build out a defense industrial base that will help
4 us in the future to make sure we have the capacity
5 ammunition that we will require for any future contingency.

6 Senator Kelly: Okay. So, beyond what you just
7 mentioned in the supplemental, is there anything else we
8 could be doing to make sure we have the right types and
9 quantity of munitions going forward?

10 General Brown: Well, you know, I guess the other
11 piece that I would talk to you about is having gone out to
12 visit some of our industry partners just recently, one of
13 things we talked about is the workforce.

14 And, you know, that can be a long lead item, to make
15 sure we have the engineers, the skilled workforce to bring
16 in that capability. And that is why consistent funding and
17 all that, so you can actually -- you know, once they have
18 that workforce, they can maintain that workforce, to
19 continue to move forward as well.

20 Senator Kelly: All right. Well, thank you. Separate
21 subject, drones, the drone problem. Incursions on military
22 installations have gone up and is a real threat to our
23 National Security. I think some of it is, you know,
24 hobbyists, but there are also foreign actors that are
25 certainly involved here.

1 In December, we saw a large number of drone incidents
2 at Langley. We still don't know who was behind those. We
3 had an F-16 about a year and a half ago in the Barry
4 Goldwater range strike a drone. Not a lot of damage to the
5 F-16.

6 If it would have went down, the intake, General, as we
7 both know, that could have been catastrophic for that
8 airplane and possibly the crew member on board if he
9 couldn't get out. And we see consistent incursions around
10 sensitive Government facilities.

11 So, General, you know, why are the current drone
12 detection and defeat systems that we currently have, why
13 are they failing? And could you maybe go into why we need
14 to continue to -- why we continue to field these outdated
15 measures?

16 General Brown: Senator, one of the things we have to
17 continue to work on is to continue to understand the
18 technologies moving forward and then move at the same pace,
19 as it was highlighted. We do have to move faster.

20 If you go back to what happened in December, one of
21 the things I did as a chairman was establish a cross-
22 functional team that wasn't just from the military, but
23 also with the interagency, to work together on this
24 particular problem set.

25 Because it is a combination of factors. It is not

1 only the detection, but it is the defensive systems that
2 you use and how those may impact aviation and other areas.
3 And so, it is an area that we collectively have to continue
4 to work on, not only here in defense here, in the United
5 States, but also in our forward locations where we have
6 many of our service members deployed.

7 Senator Kelly: Okay. Well, we are prepared to work
8 with you on that to make sure we have the right technology
9 moving forward that we could do more to solve this problem.
10 So, thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Right on
11 time..

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Right on time, Senator
13 Kelly. L.D., you crossed it. Senator Schmitt, we are
14 trying to adhere to five minutes because of the votes.

15 Senator Schmitt: Okay. That is what happens when you
16 are last, right, on this dais.

17 Chairman Reed: Yes, sir.

18 Senator Schmitt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
19 Austin, the United States has appropriated \$112 billion
20 previously for Ukraine aid. \$60 billion in the
21 supplemental that is being considered. Based on this
22 budget, am I to assume then that as of September 30th,
23 there will be no more Ukraine aid from the United States?

24 Secretary Austin: This request takes us out through
25 the end of month September.

1 Senator Schmitt: Right. But there is no money, so
2 there -- I can only be left to assume one of three things.
3 One is the war is over, two or B, the United States won't
4 be allocating any more dollars, or C, that this is a
5 dishonest request.

6 So, I guess the question is, are we going to -- it is
7 not in this, but we are going to get another supplemental
8 because members of this committee had been told there could
9 be another request for \$100 billion.

10 So, I guess I am just trying to understand the
11 totality of the request of the American people for this war
12 that does not seem to be represented in this request.

13 Secretary Austin: Well, I assure you that the request
14 is not dishonest, Senator. It is based upon, for this
15 Fiscal Year, what we see Ukraine needs and our ability to
16 provide security assistance and replenish our stocks. And
17 again, this is not -- this goes through our industrial --

18 Senator Schmitt: I understand the argument, but I
19 would also make the argument that the weapons that are
20 being procured for Ukraine aren't necessarily the weapons
21 that our industrial base would produce to defend the United
22 States, or even in the Indo-Pacific. Those are more long
23 range fires. That is really not what Ukraine needs.

24 And so, with an industrial base that does not have the
25 capacity to do all of these things, we are making decisions

1 about what is produced and what is sold, and those may not
2 be in the interest of the United States. I mean, do you
3 understand the point?

4 Secretary Austin: I do, Senator. And I think you are
5 right. I think, you know, there are munitions that we will
6 need for a peer competitor fight that we are not using in
7 Ukraine right now. But having said that, Ukraine needs air
8 defense capabilities, weapons systems and interceptors. It
9 needs artillery munitions.

10 And of course, our industrial base produces all of
11 that, and we have worked to expand our capacity in our
12 industrial base to produce anti-tank weapons systems, you
13 know --

14 Senator Schmitt: I appreciate the point. I don't
15 mean to cut you off. I just, as you have heard, I have
16 limited time. I just want to get through a couple more
17 questions. So, what does victory look like for Ukraine?
18 How do you define victory?

19 Secretary Austin: You may have heard me say this
20 earlier, Senator, but we have said from the very beginning
21 that what we want to see is a Ukraine that is a democratic
22 country, that has -- that is independent and has the
23 ability to protect its sovereign territory, to defend its
24 sovereign territory, and to deter aggression.

25 Senator Schmitt: Does that mean Crimea is part of

1 Ukraine?

2 Secretary Austin: Crimea is a part of Ukraine.

3 Senator Schmitt: Well, okay. Right. But in order
4 for the war to be over, doe Ukraine have to control Crimea?

5 Secretary Austin: In terms of how things transition,
6 going forward, you know, I would not, want to predict what
7 President Zelensky will decide.

8 Senator Schmitt: I think part of the problem, with
9 all due respect, is that this Administration has not
10 articulated what an exit strategy is. To me, this is a
11 blank check for a war that, without any clearly defined
12 goals, will be endless.

13 And that is -- so the skepticism among -- I didn't
14 vote for the supplemental because I don't think that we
15 have -- we don't have adequate controls on how the money is
16 being spent. Victory hasn't been defined.

17 So, for America's interests, I understand America's
18 interest, we are continuing to head down this road, and now
19 we are getting a budget request that doesn't -- isn't
20 reflective of the Administration's, for however long it
21 takes, statement.

22 So that is part of the objection. I guess one of the
23 issues, too, is and I want to make sure I am clear, is it
24 the Administration's position that Ukraine should be
25 admitted into NATO?

1 Secretary Austin: It is NATO position overall that --

2 Senator Schmitt: No, the United States of America.

3 What is the Administration's position on Ukraine's
4 admission to NATO?

5 Secretary Austin: I think you have heard the
6 President say that -- and of course, NATO has an open door
7 policy. So, all of the countries have worked towards --

8 Senator Schmitt: I am really not trying to put you in
9 a weird spot. I just heard Secretary Blinken say, or maybe
10 it was a mistranslation, so I am just looking for clarity.
11 If it is the position of the United States of America that
12 Ukraine should be admitted into NATO?

13 Secretary Austin: Was that question as to whether or
14 not they should be admitted right now or in the future?

15 Senator Schmitt: Either, or.

16 Secretary Austin: Well, right now they are in a war,
17 Senator --

18 Senator Schmitt: Right, so that would be a disastrous
19 result because we would go to war. Right. But let's say
20 the war ends tomorrow, or September 30th based on this
21 budget -- in September 30th. Is it the position of this
22 Administration that Ukraine should be admitted into NATO?

23 Secretary Austin: It is unlikely that the war will
24 end on September 30th, but again, it is the goal of the
25 alliance to bring Ukraine into the alliance at some point

1 in the future.

2 Senator Schmitt: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
3 I am out of time. Thank you.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator. Senator
5 Duckworth, please.

6 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me
7 just say that a free, independent, democratic Ukraine that
8 can defend itself is in America's national interest.

9 And in fact, should Russia overrun Ukraine, it will
10 not stop with Ukraine and then Article V of NATO will be
11 invoked, bringing U.S. troops. So, this is about keeping
12 U.S. troops out of a war in Europe. Good morning to our
13 witnesses.

14 Secretary Austin, I want to applaud your engagement in
15 the Indo-Pacific. Your nine official visits to the region
16 underscores the United States deep commitment to our allies
17 and partners.

18 And it is so important that the Department of Defense
19 continues to make the region a priority for investments,
20 including in Guam, Hawaii, and addressing contested
21 logistics in the region.

22 Next month, I am leading a CODAL with my colleague,
23 Senator Sullivan, to the Shangri-La dialogs, where we will
24 engage with our partners on a range of National Security
25 issues. Secretary Austin, I have long been an advocate for

1 strengthening our mil to mil partnerships in Southeast
2 Asia.

3 What investments do you plan to make in the Fiscal
4 Year 2025 DOD budget to implement the U.S., ASEAN
5 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and how can Congress
6 help you in that effort?

7 Secretary Austin: By the way, I will see you at the
8 at the dialog. As you know, the Secretary of -- the U.S.
9 Secretary of Defense has supported that every year. And
10 again, I think we have made great progress in strengthening
11 our relationships with partners in the region.

12 In terms of ASEAN, we have continued to develop our
13 relationships with ASEAN members. Every year we attend the
14 defense ministerial meeting members plus. And so, I think
15 we have gained a lot of ground in reassuring partners in
16 the region. We also recognize the primacy of ASEAN.

17 And again, I think, relationships are as strong as
18 they have ever been based upon the continued efforts of not
19 only the Department, but leaders like yourself who continue
20 to go out to the Indo-Pacific.

21 And I suspect you have more than my nine visits to the
22 Indo-Pacific since you have been in office. So, thank you
23 for everything that you are doing.

24 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I have
25 discussed the need to improve DOD's medical readiness in

1 the Indo-Pacific with every service chief and Combatant
2 Commander who comes before this committee.

3 It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the
4 DOD has adequate military treatment facilities for service
5 members and their families during peacetime and in the
6 event of a conflict. I would like to discuss an NDAA
7 proposal for Fiscal Year 2025 that is a priority for me.

8 The golden hour for saving lives will be rarely
9 achievable due to the great distances within the Indo-
10 Pacific, should there be conflict in the region. So, I
11 would like the DOD to establish a medical readiness program
12 in the Indo-Pacific to address current gaps in DOD's
13 medical capacity, allowing DOD to access accredited foreign
14 medical facilities for patient care, while also creating a
15 medical readiness strategy within the region.

16 DOD already does a version of this in the Republic of
17 Korea, and we need to expand this concept across the region
18 where appropriate. And in fact, the DOD helped to set up,
19 among others, Ajou Trauma Center, which is designed -- and
20 to be exactly like the San Diego Trauma Center. I met the
21 doctor there, Dr. Lee Cook-jong was trained by U.S.
22 surgeons.

23 And in fact, that is where the Korean -- North Korean
24 dictator -- defector was sent in 2018 and his life was
25 saved because he was able to be operated on at that center.

1 Secretary Austin, DOD has a limited number of military
2 treatment facilities West of the International Date Line.

3 Do you think working with our allies and partners in
4 the Indo-Pacific can help DOD improve its medical
5 readiness, both in peacetime, but also in the event of a
6 large scale conflict where we are not able to medevac
7 servicemembers back to the United States?

8 Secretary Austin: I do, Senator. And I agree with
9 you, I think Korea is a great example from talking to our
10 troops and family members. They really appreciate having
11 the ability to do what you describe and take advantage of
12 existing capabilities. So, there is no doubt,
13 possibilities to do those types of things in other places,
14 and I think we should explore that.

15 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. Secretary Austin, and
16 Under Secretary McCord, and General Brown, can you work
17 with my staff and me to refine this proposal with a goal of
18 potentially establishing this medical readiness program in
19 the Fiscal Year 2025 NDAA?

20 Secretary Austin: We will, Senator.

21 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I yield back, Mr.
22 Chairman.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator
24 Duckworth. Senator Blumenthal will be recognized. He will
25 terminate the hearing. I must go vote.

1 We will reconvene at 12:30 p.m. in SVC 217, on or
2 about 12:30 p.m., for the closed session. So, we will see
3 you again in the closed session, SVC 217. I will recognize
4 Senator Blumenthal as the last member, and he will adjourn
5 the open session. Senator Blumenthal, please.

6 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I will be
7 brief. I want to thank you all for your service, as I am
8 sure my colleagues have, and apologize that I haven't been
9 here for the full hearing. I was here earlier.

10 I want to ask about Navy shipbuilding, and
11 particularly submarines, and the industrial base. As you
12 know, the Navy's recently released 45 day shipbuilding
13 review offered a pretty sobering look into the future of
14 procurement efforts by the Navy.

15 And according to this assessment, every major program
16 faces multiple years of delays, including the Columbia and
17 Virginia class submarines, which give the Navy an essential
18 edge in undersea warfare over our competitors. Russia and
19 China are trending in the opposite direction. They are
20 building more. They are developing more, and more advanced
21 submarine.

22 The decision to fund the production of just one
23 Virginia class submarine seems highly alarming. And in
24 addition, it sends a signal to our key AUKUS partner that
25 the United States may not fulfill its commitment to

1 providing a key capability.

2 So, I am troubled that this decision seems to
3 undermine procurement stability, the workforce development,
4 and our credibility in this area with some of our key
5 allies. So, I would, appreciate your comments, Mr.
6 Secretary, on how we are going to correct any potential
7 loss of capability, loss of progress in undersea warfare,
8 and the kind of respect from our allies that we need to
9 continue in this area of undersea superiority.

10 Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator. And our undersea
11 supremacy is indeed a strategic advantage that no country
12 in the world can match, and we are going to work to keep it
13 that way.

14 The current issue is one of capacity, and there is a
15 backlog currently in terms of, industry's ability to
16 produce, submarines on time. So, we could increase the
17 backlog, or we could choose to invest in the industrial
18 base to expand capacity so that they can speed production
19 up. And that is what we are doing.

20 In Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024, we requested some \$1.9
21 billion to invest in the submarine industrial base. In
22 this budget, we are asking you for a total of \$4 billion.
23 And in addition to that, the supplemental that we have
24 spoken so much about today, includes a \$3.3 billion request
25 to also invest in the industrial base, and that will help

1 us strengthen supply lines and it will also help industry
2 recruit and retain the workforce that it will need to
3 produce these really sophisticated platforms.

4 You know, I just met with the CEOs of General Dynamics
5 and Huntington Ingalls, and we talked about the challenges
6 that they were facing and, you know, what we are going to
7 do to -- with the resources that we are providing them to
8 expand their capability and capacity.

9 So, it was a good discussion, and they are investing
10 some of their own, capital to do that as well. So, in
11 terms of, Australia and, and the signal that it sends to
12 Australia, you know, I have -- I remain in contact with my
13 counterpart, the Australian minister of defense, and we
14 have talked about this issue, and they get it.

15 And so, and by the way, Australia is investing in our
16 submarine industrial base as well. So, we are doing the
17 right things and investing in the industrial base, and
18 hopefully -- but that will get us on the right path in the
19 mid to longer term.

20 But increasing the backlog is probably not the right
21 thing to do at this point in time. Investing in capacity
22 and capability is the right thing to do, I think.

23 Senator Blumenthal: I respect that answer because it
24 recognizes the realities of what we face. Electric boat
25 has hired 5,300 more people in the next year or so -- 5,300

1 skilled welders, pipefitters, electricians. Not just
2 people hired off the street.

3 And I know that on paper you could easily say, well,
4 we are going to build two submarines a year, but it
5 wouldn't happen. And I think that the candor and realism
6 are very much to be respected.

7 My urging would be that we make the investment of
8 sufficient size to meet the reality of the challenge,
9 because, as you have said so well, our undersea warfare
10 supremacy is a key capability, and I would hope the
11 Congress would support you in this effort.

12 Thank you. I am going to respect the five minute
13 rule, even though there is no one to discipline me. And
14 thank you for your testimony on behalf of the committee and
15 adjourn the committee. Thank you very much.

16 Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator.

17 [Whereupon, at 12:21 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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