

**HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON U.S.  
CENTRAL COMMAND AND U.S. SPECIAL OP-  
ERATIONS COMMAND IN REVIEW OF THE  
DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR  
FISCAL YEAR 2013 AND THE FUTURE YEARS  
DEFENSE PROGRAM**

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**TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2012**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Lieberman, Reed, Webb, McCaskill, Hagan, Manchin, Shaheen, Blumenthal, McCain, Chambliss, Brown, Ayotte, Graham, and Cornyn.

Committee staff members present: Richard D. DeBobes, staff director; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Jessica L. Kingston, research assistant; Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; Peter K. Levine, general counsel; Jason W. Maroney, counsel; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Michael J. Noblet, professional staff member; and Roy F. Phillips, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: Ann E. Sauer, minority staff director; Adam J. Barker, professional staff member; Christian D. Brose, professional staff member; Paul C. Hutton IV, professional staff member; and Diana G. Tabler, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Jennifer R. Knowles, Mariah K. McNamara, and Brian F. Sebold.

Committee members' assistants present: Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman; Carolyn Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; Ryan Ehly, assistant to Senator Nelson; Gordon Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb; Casey Howard, assistant to Senator Udall; Chad Kreikemeier, assistant to Senator Shaheen; Jordan Baugh, assistant to Senator Gillibrand; Lenwood Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions; Clyde Taylor IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss; Charles Prosch, assistant to Senator Brown; Brad Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte; and Matthew Rimkunas, assistant to Senator Graham.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN**

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. This morning we continue the committee's review of the posture of our combatant commanders to meet the security challenges and operational requirements in their areas of responsibility in light of the President's budget request for fiscal year 2013.

Our witnesses are General James Mattis, Commander, U.S. Central Command, and Admiral Bill McRaven, Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command. Thank you both for your dedicated and distinguished service to our Nation. Also, on behalf of the committee please extend our heartfelt gratitude to the military men and women serving with you. Many have served multiple deployments, often directly in harm's way. We thank them for their dedication and courage, and we thank their families, whose support is so essential.

As reflected in the President's budget request of \$88 billion for overseas contingency operations in fiscal year 2013, the conflict in Afghanistan remains our military's foremost security challenge. The Afghanistan mission is entering a critical phase of transition. The drawdown of the 33,000 U.S. surge force is scheduled to be completed by the end of this summer and the remaining 68,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan are to continue to be reduced "at a steady pace" thereafter through 2014, according to President Obama.

U.S. and coalition forces have begun to move from the combat lead to an advise and assist role in support of the Afghan National Security Forces as those forces increasingly assume the lead for providing security. This transition is to be completed by 2014, when Afghan security forces will have assumed the security lead throughout the country.

As the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan winds down, our Special Operations Forces will assume greater and greater responsibility for the Afghanistan mission and for advising and supporting the Afghan security forces. Even after 2014, our U.S. military plans on having an ongoing presence in Afghanistan to train the Afghan forces, conduct counterterrorism operations, and provide key enablers, such as logistics, airlift, and intelligence support.

The recent violence in Afghanistan following the unintentional and regrettable burning of Korans at a U.S. military base is deeply troubling. President Obama has expressed his regret, and I would hope that President Karzai would condemn the killing of six American soldiers as part of that violence.

While these events could weaken the level of trust between U.S. and Afghan forces, Secretary Panetta has reaffirmed that the United States remains committed to the current approach in Afghanistan, saying that the recent attacks on our troops "will not alter our commitment to get this job done."

The success of the Afghanistan mission will depend on building the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. At the end of the day, the conflict in Afghanistan is an Afghan war and it will be up to the Afghan forces to win it. For this reason, I am concerned by news accounts that the United States is circulating within NATO a proposal to reduce the Afghan security forces by as much as one third. According to the Wall Street Journal, under

this proposal the size of the Afghan army and police would be reduced from 352,000 personnel this year to 230,000 after 2014. Lieutenant General Daniel Bolger, the head of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan, is cited as saying this proposal is based on “what the international community will provide financially and what the Afghans can provide for themselves.”

I am surprised and I’m disappointed to hear our military commanders are focusing on Afghan force size based on what they think might be affordable instead of what number of Afghan security forces they believe will be needed to maintain security. It strikes me as unwise to base decisions on the future size of the Afghan army and police exclusively on projections of future affordability, instead of military requirements to secure the gains that have been made at great cost and to prevent a Taliban return to power.

The sustainability of the progress on security in Afghanistan will also be affected by a number of issues, including the progress of reconciliation talks with the Taliban, whether Pakistan chooses to play a constructive role in those talks, eliminating the threat from insurgent safe havens in Pakistan, the establishment of a long-term strategic partnership between Afghanistan and the United States, and the Karzai Government’s efforts to improve governance, deliver services, increase government revenues, fight corruption and promote inclusive and transparent elections. General Mattis, the committee’s going to be interested in your assessment of the progress on security in Afghanistan and the sustainability of security gains through 2014 and beyond.

There is a strong determination on this committee and in this Congress to do all we can to counter the threat posed by Iran, and in particular to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The National Defense Authorization Act included breakthrough sanctions with respect to Iran by requiring foreign financial institutions to choose between maintaining ties with the U.S. financial system or doing business with the Central Bank of Iran, especially relative to the purchase of Iranian petroleum and related products. President Obama has appropriately focused considerable and determined diplomatic effort “to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon,” and he has repeatedly said that there are “no options off the table” to achieve that goal.

General Mattis has the task of conducting the prudent planning and assembling the military options for the President relative to Iran in case they are needed.

I’m going to put most of the balance of my statement in the record, except for the following: The new strategic guidance and priorities emphasize the importance of special operations personnel for counterterrorism operations, capacity-building, and other theater security cooperation activities in support of the geographic combatant commanders. Admiral McRaven, recent published reports indicate that you are seeking new authorities that you believe would help SOCOM be more responsive to the geographic combatant commanders’ requests for special operations personnel and the unique capabilities that they provide. The committee looks forward to your comments on these reports and learning more about any

authorities that you may be—that you believe may be necessary to fulfill SOCOM's global missions.

Finally, General, we would appreciate your comments relative to the events in Syria, as to what you believe the options might be to end that slaughter of Syrian civilians by the government of Syria. We are all determined that we want to end it. The question is what are the military options that might be available in the case that they were seized upon as being one of the ways to do that, and we would very much appreciate your comment on that.

Gentlemen, again our thanks to both you and the men and women who serve with you for your great work.

Senator McCAIN.

[The prepared statement of Senator Levin follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

#### **STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN**

Senator McCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me thank our distinguished witnesses, who are two of the most impressive military leaders currently serving our Nation. We're all grateful for their many years of dedicated service. We're also grateful for the men and women they lead in U.S. Central Command and Special Operations Command, amazing Americans of every service who carry on the fight after a decade of war.

Admiral McRaven, this is your first time testifying before this committee as the Commander of SOCOM, and it's fitting that you do alongside General Mattis, a seasoned veteran of this committee's hearings who has the scars to prove it.

Nowhere is the work of America's special operators more persistent and important than in CENTCOM's area of responsibility. These forces play an instrumental role in ongoing counterterrorism operations both in the region and around the globe.

While al Qaeda's senior leadership has been diminished by sustained pressure against them in Pakistan, al Qaeda's global operations have become increasingly decentralized and no less deadly. Regional affiliates seek safe haven in countries beset by weak governments and internal instability, particularly in places like Yemen, the Horn of Africa, and the Trans-Sahel.

This is why SOCOM's ongoing efforts to build the capacity of partner nations in troubled regions remain a vital component of our strategy to disrupt and defeat these terrorist organizations. I'm concerned, however, that as the administration seeks to decrease the size of our military's conventional ground forces, many people are already coming to see Special Operations Forces as a fix-all to the myriad security challenges that our country faces.

I look forward to your thoughts, Admiral, as to the proper role of special operations in the total force and what more can be done to ensure that these operators are not stretched at the expense of their unique core responsibilities.

General Mattis, all of us have the utmost respect for you, but we do not envy you. Few of our military leaders have more on their plate, from supporting our friends in Jordan and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, to keeping a watchful eye on the fragile but very different situations in Bahrain, Yemen, and Lebanon.

In Afghanistan, despite the progress that our troops are making on the ground, we are at an impasse with President Karzai on the negotiation of a strategic partnership agreement, which is critical to sustaining our goals and locking in lasting success. In Pakistan, our relationship remains fraught by a series of setbacks and a lack of trust, largely arising from the fact that the country's intelligence service continues to support terrorist groups such as the Haqqani network that are killing Americans.

In Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki continues to centralize power at the expense of the other political blocs, while the threat posed by al Qaeda appears to be growing, along with the kinds of horrific, spectacular attacks like the one we saw yesterday.

The Iranian regime continues working to subvert Iraq and many other countries in the region. Its recent attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, as well as Israeli officials in Southeast Asia and the Caucasus, suggest a growing and increasingly reckless threat, a threat that would expand exponentially if the Iranian regime were to acquire the nuclear weapons that it clearly seeks. Unfortunately, the impressive international effort to impose crippling sanctions appears to have done nothing to dissuade Iran from its military nuclear pursuits.

Then there is Syria. After a year of bloodshed, the crisis has reached a decisive moment. It is estimated that nearly 7,500 lives have been lost. Syria today is the scene of some of the worst state-sponsored violence since the Balkans. Bashar Al-Assad and his top lieutenants appear to be accelerating their fight to the finish, and they're doing so with the full support of Russia, China, and Iran. A steady supply of weapons, ammunition, and other assistance is flowing to Assad from Moscow and Teheran and, as the Washington Post reported on Sunday, Iranian military and intelligence operatives are likely working in Syria to support Assad.

The President has made it the objective of the United States that the killing in Syria must stop and that Assad must go. He has committed the prestige and credibility of our Nation to that goal, and it is the right goal. The United States has a clear national security interest in stopping the slaughter in Syria and forcing Assad to leave power.

The end of the Assad regime would sever Hezbollah's lifeline to Iran, eliminate a longstanding threat to Israel, bolster Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and remove a committed state sponsor of terrorism that is engaged in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It would be a geopolitical success of the first order and a strategic defeat for the Iranian regime.

However, it is not clear that the present policy will be able to achieve our goals in Syria. In recent testimony to this committee, the Director of National Intelligence stated that if the status quo persists Assad could hang on for the foreseeable future. And that was before Homs fell. With each passing day, the international response to Assad's atrocities is being overtaken by events on the ground in Syria.

What opposition groups in Syria need most urgently is relief from Assad's tank and artillery sieges in the many cities that are still contested. But time is running out. Assad's forces are on the march. Providing military assistance to the Free Syrian Army and

other opposition groups is necessary, but at this late hour that alone will not be sufficient to stop the slaughter and save innocent lives. The only realistic way to do so is with foreign air power, and the time has come for it.

Air strikes would help to establish and defend safe havens in Syria, especially in the north, in which opposition forces can organize and plan their political and military activities against Assad. These safe havens could allow for the delivery of humanitarian and military assistance, including weapons and ammunition, body armor, tactical intelligence, secure communications equipment, food and water, and medical supplies. These safe havens could also help the Free Syrian Army and other armed groups in Syria to train and organize themselves into more cohesive and effective military forces, likely with the assistance of foreign partners.

Rather than closing off the prospects for some kind of a negotiated transition that is acceptable to Syria's opposition, military intervention is now needed to preserve this option as credible. Assad needs to know that he will not win. But right now, unfortunately, Assad seems to think he can win, and for good reason, I'm afraid.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' advice about how we can change the balance of power against Assad so as to finally end his bloodshed and brutal rule in Syria.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.

Let me call on you, General Mattis.

**STATEMENT OF GEN. JAMS N. MATTIS, USMC, COMMANDER,  
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General MATTIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, and members of the committee. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the U.S. Central Command region. I have submitted a written statement and request it be accepted into the record.

Chairman LEVIN. It will be.

General MATTIS. It's my privilege to appear today alongside an admired leader and good friend, Admiral Bill McRaven. No two commands work more closely together than U.S. Special Operations Command and Central Command.

Let me begin with what I see today in the region. The Arab Awakening is manifesting differently in each country. While we may hope for and certainly we firmly support all efforts for more democratic governments in the region, the Awakening's origins are not necessarily a rush for democracy. Rather, this Awakening stems from a breakdown in the social contract between governments and their people. Unjust or unresponsive regimes have fallen or are in the throes of falling, as is the case in Syria. However, the transition to a democratic government is never easy, as we see in Egypt. Further, it is not clear what the resulting governments will look like.

Challenges remain beyond the promise of the Arab Awakening. Iran and its surrogates continue to orchestrate violence worldwide, as evidenced by its plot to kill the Saudi Ambassador here in Washington, DC. Iran presents the most significant regional threat

to stability and security. Its reckless behavior and bellicose rhetoric have created a high potential for miscalculation.

While we've made security gains in the fight against terrorists, the threat remains. Al Qaeda and associated groups continue to kill innocents from the Levant to Yemen and are adapting in the face of U.S. pressure. While we maintain our pressure on this enemy, we are nesting our military efforts inside four broad U.S. diplomatic objectives: first, support for each country's political reform to adapt at their own pace; second, support for economic modernization that provides the people ownership of the future; third, a renewed pursuit of Middle East peace, recognizing the status quo is not sustainable; finally, we stand firmly with our friends in supporting regional security, territorial integrity of the sovereign nations, and the free flow of commerce.

As the military commander for the Central Region, my overarching goal is to prevent further conflict. We seek to deter those with hostile intent and, should deterrence prove unsuccessful, we provide military options to the President. As our President has said, our strong presence in the Middle East endures and the United States will never waver in defense of our allies, our partners, or our interests.

The military challenge will be determining how we retain a sustainable presence and operational flexibility in a fiscally constrained environment. Although we are withdrawing some ground forces from the region, we are not withdrawing our support for long-time allies and partners, nor are we pulling back our commitment from a region that too many times has taken a commitment of American blood and treasure to restore stability.

Through persistent military-to-military engagement, our troops reassure our friends and temper adversary intentions. Security cooperation activities, such as foreign military sales, international military education, security force training, and multinational exercises, are cost-effective means for building our friends' defensive capabilities, allowing us to operate in concert with allies and friends and to rapidly respond in times of need.

A sustained joint presence with a pronounced naval character, supported by embarked troops, agile Special Operations Forces, strong aviation elements, and an expeditionary Army ready, demonstrates our commitment to allies, underwrites regional stability, familiarizes our forces with the theater, and builds partner abilities to protect themselves, all while we're providing timely response to crises.

There are some other key needed capabilities that we have: improved counter-IED efforts to protect our troops from a pervasive threat that extends well beyond Afghanistan; information operations and voice programs to counter adversary information and recruiting on the Internet; improved intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets that enable us to locate an elusive enemy; and intelligence expertise to support our deployed elements.

We also need specific resources that are vital to the Afghanistan campaign. Coalition support funds, the Commander's Emergency Response Program, Afghan Infrastructure Fund, and reintegration authority enable us to meet urgent humanitarian and infrastructure needs of a population that is increasingly secured by its own

forces, forces we have been building and training through the Afghan Security Forces Fund.

In conclusion, I appreciate the essential resources you provide, which enable us to carry out the strategy assigned to us. We ask only for what we need and what we request is critical as we carry out the transition in Afghanistan and continue on course to achieve our desired strategic end state there by December 2014, as laid out at the NATO conference in Lisbon.

Thanks to Congressional support and to the sacrifices of our military families, our forces represent America's awesome determination to stand by our friends and maintain regional stability in defense of our values and interests.

I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Mattis follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. General, thank you so much.

Admiral McRaven.

**STATEMENT OF ADM WILLIAM H. McRAVEN, USN,  
COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

Admiral McRAVEN. Well, good morning. Chairman Levin, Ranking Member McCain, and distinguished members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and to represent the extraordinary men and women of the U.S. Special Operations Command. It is an honor to command the world's finest special operations force, a force serving side by side with our broader military and interagency teammates. And I am proud to appear today with my good friend and next-door neighbor Jim Mattis. Admittedly, though, Jim is rarely there, but when he's there he's a great neighbor.

With your permission, I'll submit my written posture statement for the record and open with some brief remarks.

This morning I'd like to provide you an overview of SOF's role in addressing our Nation's ongoing and emergency security—emerging security challenges. Secretary Panetta recently outlined how he viewed the future joint force. He called for low-cost, lean, technologically advanced, agile, responsive, innovative, efficient, and effective forces able to address a variety of challenges and adversaries. As I read those characteristics, I am struck at how accurately they describe your Special Operations Forces and what we bring to our Nation's arsenal.

Special Operations Forces have had a tremendous impact on our Nation's security and never more so than during the last 10 years of war. Since September 11, our forces have doubled in size, now at 66,000, our budget has tripled, and the number of deployed SOF has quadrupled to meet the emerging demands. However, even with that growth, our \$10.4 billion budget in fiscal year 2013 still comprises only 1.7 percent of the total Department of Defense budget. Simply put, SOF remains relevant, in high demand, and offers an unparalleled return on the Nation's investment.

As we evaluate today's rapidly evolving strategic landscape, it is clear that the demand for special operations capabilities will remain high. Our near-term focus is on winning the current fight against violent extremism. First and foremost, we will sustain our

efforts in Afghanistan in support of ISAF by continuing the application of SOF's direct and indirect approach.

The direct approach, lethal and precise, continues to degrade extremist leadership and their facilitation networks. The indirect approach, which I believe offers the greatest opportunity for victory, builds security and governance through efforts such as the village stability operations and development of Afghan security forces. Both the direct and indirect approaches continue to have daily positive impacts on ISAF strategy.

Our sacrifice and effort in Afghanistan has been tremendous, and we continue to make this our highest priority. In addition to our efforts in Afghanistan, we also strive to maintain persistent presence globally. Today U.S. Special Operations Forces are in 78 countries around the world supporting U.S. policy objectives. In the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and other regions, SOF's unique skills, cultural knowledge, and the ability to work with partners creates effects far above our relatively small numbers. All of these international engagements are done with the complete support and approval of the respective geographic combatant commanders and the chiefs of mission.

In addition to our forces—in addition to our focus on winning the current fight, I am committed to strengthening our support to the geographic combatant commanders by reinforcing and enabling their theater special operations commands. As you know, the theater special operations commands are sub-unified commands of the GCCs and provide the regional commander his special operations capability. As the force provider for those SOF capabilities, U.S. SOCOM will ensure theater special operations commands have the human capital, the capability, and the SOF expertise to meet the GCCs' requirements.

Another important aspect of SOF's utility to the GCCs is our ability to partner with other national SOF units. Since the establishment of service Special Operations Forces in the 1960s and then U.S. SOCOM in 1987, our relationship with our allied partner force around the world has strengthened each nation's SOF and each nation's ability to deal with their own security problems. We must continue to build these relationships wherever possible.

To win the current fight and strengthen our support for the geographic combatant commanders, it will be necessary to ensure our force and their families remain strong. My predecessor Admiral Eric Olson established a task force to examine the fraying around the edges in our SOF community. We confirmed that a decade of war, coupled with a consistently high demand for SOF, has exerted a physical and emotional stress on our force and families.

I am committed to taking care of our people with the best support we can provide. I have put a general officer and my command sergeant major in charge of the preservation of the force and families. They are empowered to implement innovative solutions across the SOCOM enterprise, to improve the wellbeing of our warriors and their families.

In conclusion, the demands on SOF will not end in the foreseeable future. With your strong advocacy, we will continue to sustain a world-class special operations capability, thereby providing the

Nation a decisive edge in addressing the challenges that affect us today and will undoubtedly emerge tomorrow.

It is an honor to appear before you today as the commander of the United States Special Operations Command. You can take pride in what the men and women of special operations are accomplishing around the world each and every day. Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral McRaven follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Admiral, thank you so much.

We'll try a seven-minute round for our first round.

General Mattis and Admiral McRaven, first let me ask you about the fiscal year 2013 budget and the administration's recently revised strategy. Does the 2013 budget request reflect the recently revised strategy, General?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, it does.

Chairman LEVIN. Admiral?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, sir, it does.

Chairman LEVIN. General, do you support that budget request?

General MATTIS. I do, completely.

Admiral MCRAVEN. Absolutely.

Chairman LEVIN. Now, in the wake of the violence following the burning of Korans in Afghanistan, including the killing of at least six American soldiers, Secretary Panetta has said that this violence is not "going to alter our commitment to get this job done" in Afghanistan. He added that "Our goal is that by the end of 2014 the Afghans will have the responsibility to govern and secure themselves."

General, following the violence over the Koran-burning incident should we modify our strategy in Afghanistan?

General MATTIS. No, Mr. Chairman, I don't believe so. I'm delighted to defend our strategy. I believe it is working. We should not allow a few criminals, malcontents, to define the Afghan security forces. Even their performance during these last two weeks, disciplined, restrained, standing by us, is an indication that this is a force that's come a long ways.

It's right now nearly at the 352,000 mark that we had set up. It shows that the Afghans are willing to fight for their country. We want it to be at the 352,000 by October. We should be there within 60 days. We're on track, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. How does the events which occurred where we had some Afghans killing Americans and other coalition forces and their own people, how does that strike you? Is that a significant shift in any way in terms of either the Afghans willing to take on the Taliban or the reliability of the Afghan army?

General MATTIS. Sir, treachery has existed as long as there's been warfare, and there has always been a few people that you couldn't trust. I'm one of those who has slept peacefully under Afghan boys guarding me back in 2001. No force is perfect. I would just remind everyone that even Jesus of Nazareth had 1 out of 12 go to mud on him.

My point is that no matter what selection process you use, you're going to have somebody who doesn't cut the standard, doesn't make the standard. In this case, the overwhelmingly positive response by the Afghan security forces, even in the face of what was a very dis-

appointing and unintentional mistake by the U.S. forces, did not shake their confidence in us, it did not shake the teamwork.

I think that right now it does not cause us any question about the overwhelming reliability. At the same time, prudent measures, taken with the full support of the Afghan chain of command—unprecedented, I might add, absolutely unstinting support—means that we're on the right track to address what is a bona fide insider threat concern.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Now, according to the Wall Street Journal the United States has proposed reducing the size of the Afghan National Security Forces from the 352,000 end strength goal for this year to 230,000 after 2014 as a way of reducing the cost of sustaining the Afghan forces. Why—well, first of all, what's your reaction to that? Is this something which we have decided upon and why, if so, are we projecting the need for Afghan troops 2 years in advance, as the security force needs of Afghanistan?

General MATTIS. I understand your question, Mr. Chairman. I completely support General Allen's recommendation that we hold at 352,000 Afghan security forces through 2015. While there can be any number of varying levels of maturity of planning or thinking going on, the conditions on the ground will have to determine the size of that force. But between now and 2015 I think to sustain the gains we've made, especially after 2014 when our troops will have been largely withdrawn other than advisers, the 352,000 is a prudent measure.

Chairman LEVIN. As far as you know, has a decision been made relative to that?

General MATTIS. I am confident there has not been a decision made on that.

Chairman LEVIN. I want to change the subject a bit to the village stability operations. Some have accused Afghan local police units of serious abuses against the populations that they're tasked to protect. I'm wondering whether or not you have a response to that. I really would, I think, ask you both because you're both very much involved in the Afghan local police and their support by our special operations and our general purpose forces.

So first, General, what is your response to the criticisms that we've read of the Afghan local police program? And then, Admiral, I'd like to ask you the same question.

General MATTIS. As you know, Chairman, that program is under the provincial governors' command. They're not on their own out there. They have U.S. special forces as advisers living alongside them. It is interesting that during all these months of difficulty with this insider threat, as we called it, where we've had some of our troops attacked, not one of these troops living out at the very edges in small—the very edges of the battlefield, in small groups, has been attacked.

We find that those forces are ethical. We keep a close watch on them. If we get any indication of unethical behavior, violent behavior, taking advantage of their position, it's investigated immediately, and we keep a very close watch on it.

Chairman LEVIN. Admiral?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, sir. As you know, General Allen investigated some of these allegations, had a joint investigation with the Afghans, and they found the allegations to be false.

As General Mattis mentioned, the village stability program and the Afghan local police in particular are in fact part of the minister of the interior. So that chain of command goes right back to the central government and gives it some credibility from the tribal level, the village level, up to the central government. We think this is very important.

There are currently about 11,000 Afghan local police and we are growing to about 30,000 over the next couple years. We think this is an exceedingly important program for the stability of Afghanistan.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you both very much.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. General Mattis, has the—after all the sanctions have been imposed on the Iranian regime, do you believe the regime has been at all dissuaded from pursuing a nuclear weapons capability?

General MATTIS. No, sir, I have not seen that.

Senator MCCAIN. General Mattis, are there strong indications that al Qaeda is making a comeback in Iraq?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, notably in the western Iraq area, but the threat is extending into Baghdad.

Chairman LEVIN. General Mattis, General Burgess, Director of Defense Intelligence Agency, testified last month that the Assad regime and its military remain “a viable, cohesive, and effective force.” In the same hearing, James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, testified that, absent some kind of external intervention, Assad will “hang in there and continue to do as he’s done.”

Do you agree with General Burgess and Director Clapper’s assessments?

General MATTIS. Sir, Assad has chosen violence. I think his military is under more pressure every day. Their desertion rate is going up. But in aggregate I agree with General Burgess’s assessment.

Senator MCCAIN. If current conditions persist, absent external intervention, how long do you think Assad could remain in power? Indefinitely?

General MATTIS. I don’t think indefinitely, sir. But I would be very slow to put a time horizon on it. I think he’s going to be there for some time because I think he will continue to employ heavier and heavier weapons on his people. I think it will get worse before it gets better.

Senator MCCAIN. Recent reports of increased Iranian involvement, as well as Russian arms supplies, make it worse. Would you say that Assad’s crackdown, especially in recent events in Homs, is gaining or losing momentum?

General MATTIS. He’s gaining physical momentum, sir, on the battlefield. I think he’s creating more enemies. I think he’s creating more reason, more international pressure against him. But on the tactical battlefield, he is clearly achieving what he wants to achieve.

Senator MCCAIN. I think we would agree that Syria out of the hands of Assad and a chance to be free and democratic would be one of the greatest blows to Iran as far as Lebanon is concerned, Hezbollah, Iran's closest ally; that it would be in America's strategy interest to see Assad go?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, it'll be the biggest strategy setback for Iran in 20 years when Assad falls; not if, but when. He's going to go.

Senator MCCAIN. Fundamentally, we went to the Balkans because ethnic cleansing and genocide was taking place in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. Do you see a difference between the kind of slaughter that's going on in Syria now and the kind that was going on in Kosovo and in Bosnia? Maybe a difference in scale, but sort of the same kind of actions being taken by the government?

General MATTIS. Certainly each situation is unique, but as far as the trend I would not disagree with your characterization.

Senator MCCAIN. Under current conditions, would simply providing arms to the opposition be sufficient to help them end the violence and to force Assad to leave power?

General MATTIS. Sir, providing arms is perhaps an option that would be a policy option. I think we'd have to do our best to determine who we're providing the arms to and follow the physician's oath of "First, do no harm," to make certain what we're doing is actually going to reduce the scale of violence ultimately. I mean, it may go up for a short time, but I think you'd have to look at it very closely, because the longer this goes on the more potential there is for al Qaeda and for basically a full-scale civil war.

Senator MCCAIN. Have you seen any evidence that al Qaeda has had any significant role in Syrian opposition today?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, we have, in terms of the rather spectacular IED attacks.

Senator MCCAIN. So every time I've seen one of these crises, the first answer is: We don't know who these people are, and it could be al Qaeda. I heard that, Egypt; I heard that, Tunisia; I heard it, Libya: We don't know who these people are and they're probably al Qaeda.

You know what that flies in the face of, General? People who yearn for liberty and not being under the rule of an oppressive, brutal dictatorship. So all of a sudden now we will again assume: Well, it's al Qaeda. Well, I've just returned from a trip, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and there's always the threat of extremism. But there's no doubt the people that made the revolution were not al Qaeda. In fact, they were in direct repudiation of al Qaeda.

So frankly, one grows a little weary of this: We don't know who they are and they're probably al Qaeda.

General—Admiral, do you think we can find out who they are?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I think it's always prudent to find out who your allies are and who your enemy is.

Senator MCCAIN. Is it prudent to stand on the side of freedom and democracy against one of the most oppressive dictators in the world? Is it?

Admiral MCRAVEN. No, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Is that prudent?

Admiral MCRAVEN. No, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Isn't the what the United States has been standing for for a couple of hundred years at least? Isn't that why we fought wars?

So frankly, I grow irritated and I grow angry when I see and meet these people who have sacrificed their very lives and their family and are wounded, when I visit a hospital in Benghazi where a whole shipload of wounded young men have just returned. And I didn't see a single one of them that was al Qaeda, not a single one. I didn't see a single one of them that died before my eyes that was al Qaeda.

So I suggest, I suggest we find out who these people are. And I guarantee you that you will find out that it's not al Qaeda, that it's not al Qaeda; it's people who have the same yearnings that are universal, and that's freedom, democracy, and our God-given rights.

So I would hope, I would hope we would spend some time with your unique capabilities in finding out who these people are. And I'm surprised you haven't tried to do that before. You should do it, because this conflict is going to go on and a whole lot of people are going to die if we allow the status quo to prevail and the slaughter to continue because "we don't know who they are."

Senator LIEBERMAN [presiding]. Thanks, Senator McCain.

General Mattis, Admiral McRaven, thanks very much for being here. Thanks for your leadership. Honestly, as I consider the records both of you have had and what you're doing now, I don't think we could have two better people in the position that you're in, and we ought to be very grateful to you for that.

General Mattis, I always look forward to your testimony because in some sense I feel when I read your stuff or I listen to it that I'm back in the classroom, because you do have a very developed sense of history. I just want to read in the context from your submitted testimony, and I quote you: "In over 30 years of supporting U.S. forces in the Central Command area of responsibility, I have never witnessed it so tumultuous. Change is the only constant and surprise continues to be the dominant force in the region. While transformation is under way across the region as a result of the Arab Awakening, malign efforts by other regional actors, particularly Iran, to influence the ultimate outcome represent perhaps the greatest immediate and long-term threat to regional stability."

Then I'm skipping here, but again I thought interesting perspective, which maybe we miss in all the tumult in the region: "There is only one state in our AOR actively seeking to destabilize the region and actively foment violence, and that is Iran." I think that helps us put things in context.

Let me go back to something that Senator McCain touched on, but I want to ask you if you could go into it in a little more detail, which is—it's about Syria. Can you describe in more detail, what is the extent of both Iranian and Russian assistance, military assistance, to the Assad government at this time?

General MATTIS. Senator, the Russians have provided very advanced integrated air defense capabilities, missiles, radars, that sort of thing, that would make imposition of any no-fly zone challenging if we were to go that direction. In terms of Iran, they are working earnestly to keep Assad in power. They have flown in ex-

perts. They are flying in weapons. It is a full-throated effort by Iran to keep Assad there and oppressing his own people.

Senator LIEBERMAN. So the Iranians first, to the best of your knowledge, have some expert or high-ranking personnel that have come from Teheran to Damascus to assist the Syrian forces?

General MATTIS. They have, sir, yes, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. And what, generally speaking, what kinds of hardware, what kinds of military assistance, systems, are they providing to the Syrian army?

General MATTIS. They're providing the kind of weapons that are being used right now to suppress the opposition. They're providing listening capability, eavesdropping capability to try and pick up where the opposition networks are at. And they're providing experts who I could only say are experts in oppressing. They're pretty well schooled. They know how to oppress their own people in Teheran. They've flown them into Damascus to help Assad do the same thing.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I'm generally in sympathy with the argument that Senator McCain just described, that the international community, for reasons that are both humanitarian and strategy, really just can't, shouldn't, sit back any longer and watch Assad do what he's doing, because my own sentiment is I suppose eventually he'll fall, but when there's such a disproportion of military power between the government and the opposition he can really, as you suggested earlier and Senator McCain did, hang on there for a long time, and the killing can go on for a long time.

We actually saw this in the Balkans in some sense in the 90s before we got, finally got involved and stopped it.

I don't minimize the difficulty of getting involved here, but I do want to say that your answer to the last question, which I appreciate, does lead me to say this. Some people say if we get involved or some of our Arab allies get involved or people in the European Union to, for instance, provide weapons to the opposition army, that we will be militarizing the conflict. But the conflict is already militarized in one sense. It's only militarized adequately on one side, which is that the Iranians and Russians are providing a lot of military support to the Assad government and the opposition doesn't have much of that at all.

Has the White House asked you as head of CENTCOM to prepare any contingency plans for possible assistance to the Syrian opposition?

General MATTIS. Senator, I'd prefer to answer that question in closed hearing if I could, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Okay, and I hope—the chairman's had to go away to another meeting, but I hope we will have the opportunity to have a closed hearing before this is over. And I note for the record that I don't believe, I don't believe Senator McCain believes, that we should do this on our own. I hope we can help organize something, but I gather that the Saudis and Qataris are now actively thinking about at least supplying some weapons to the Syrian opposition.

Let me move to another area. This also goes to Iran. I have heard reports that the Iranian regime is now involved more actively in malign activities in other countries in the region in a way

that poses some threat to our forces in the region, and I want to ask you to talk about that. I'm thinking particularly of Yemen, but if beyond Syria there are other areas in your AOR where you feel Iran is beginning to threaten our forces I would like to hear about it.

General MATTIS. Well, sir, they're fighting basically a shadow war every day. They're moving weapons into Sudan. They're sending them into Yemen. They are trying to make inroads there by passing out money and ordnance to various factions in Yemen as they take their first steps towards some kind of a democracy in their future, having come out of a very good election.

We see what they're doing in Damascus. They recognized that their link to Lebanese Hezbollah will be cut if in fact Bashar Assad falls. So we see this throughout the region. They have never gotten along that well, the Iranians, with the Taliban, and yet they're willing to help the Taliban to some degree to fight us in Afghanistan. We also see their mischief all around the world, of course, right down here to Washington, DC, where they attempted to kill an Arab ambassador.

So this is an ongoing effort. I think it's now, with this regime, it's something we simply have to accept as part of their modus operandi, and we certainly take a lot of prudent steps to maintain our own force protection. But we also see them trying to find their way in and take advantage of anything, any of these Arab Awakening causes that come up. They've tried it in Cairo. I think they were pretty well rebuffed there. The Iranian revolution is not being seen as an example for any of the Arab nations in their awakening.

So it's not completely successful, but at the same time it's highly concerning.

Senator LIEBERMAN. My time's about up. It is up. I'll just ask you briefly: Is all this activity in the region by Iran evidence of the fear that people, including in the region, have that they really have hegemonic ambitions, that they want to stretch out across the region, or can we not conclude that?

General MATTIS. Sir, I think one of the reasons we're seeing the unity of the Gulf Cooperation Council right now and the way the Arab League is banding together and becoming actually a force for initiating operations, whether it be in Libya or in other areas. There are concerns about Damascus. I think what we're seeing is the whole region is becoming aware of this sort of effort on Iran's part and it's causing a more unified opposition to them, almost akin to 1948 in Western Europe, when NATO was formed out of a fear of the Soviet Union and their forces.

Senator LIEBERMAN. It's a very significant parallel.

Thank you very much, General.

Senator Brown is next.

Senator BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both, obviously, for your service. Admiral, thank you for taking time to come in. I know we—I think it was Senator Levin actually referenced the Afghan local police program, which I had an opportunity and honor to observe as a soldier this summer and go out and visit with the special forces and see that program at work and visit many of the villages and speak with the tribal leaders and also the soldiers that were there.

To me, it's the program we should have implemented from day one. The value for the dollar is incredible. The amount of cooperation between the tribal leaders and people of the villages in the special forces, it's unheard of. It's never happened like it's happening now, that check and balance, when one village is actually coming to the aid of another village when they're being attacked or harassed. It's never happened, and that's obviously because of the advent of just a simple road connecting those villages.

That's why it's very important to continue with the infrastructure in that region, so they can get from point A to point B and see what the other village is doing, create trade with that village, come there and be the safety and security for that village, and vice versa.

Is that your observation, those types of positive activities as a result of our involvement in the Afghan local police program?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, it absolutely is. As you know, the Afghan local police program is one component of the village stability platform or operation, which really kind of looks at security, governance, and then economic development. And the Afghan local police are part of that security aspect at the, again, village level, linking the village to the district, and then the district to the province, and then the province eventually to the central government. We think the program is working exceedingly well.

Senator BROWN. Thank you.

General, regarding—I also had the opportunity as a result of my military duty to actually go to the detainee facility and actually participate in a board, so-called board, to determine whether that detainee should be released. It was not dissimilar to our drug boards and other types of boards that seem to be in concert with everything that I've been taught as a JAG.

I found it fascinating. And I also found it a little bit troubling, especially troubling—potentially troubling, I should say, because the strategy partnership agreement with the Afghan government is absolutely important. It's something we need to get signed and implemented right away, because it puts to bed the notion that we're packing our bags and leaving. However, accelerating of the transfer of detainees to Afghan custody presents real concerns for me.

I don't think they have the capacity at this point, based on my personal observations, to assume the security of these detention facilities. And I found it was one of the best run facilities I have seen ever. I've been down to Gitmo. In my old senate district back home in Massachusetts, I was responsible and participated in getting funding for three or four prisons.

Is that, General, your understanding or position as well? Are you concerned about that transfer and whether they can handle that?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, we are. We're in negotiations with them now. Ambassador Crocker is leading those negotiations, General Allen right alongside him. I think the most important thing is that we figure these things out or a process for figuring them out, and not go into an agreement. What we want is the right agreement and, as you point out, we want to make certain we're not turning people over before the Afghans are ready to take care of them and then we end up with abuse or some failure in terms of how we take care of these prisoners.

Senator BROWN. Well, I mean, it's a top-notch facility. I know they're expanding it, and also—I mean, I've seen the caliber of Afghan corrections officer or soldier who would be manning it. I've got to be honest with you. I have deep concerns. This is something I want to, probably with Senator Graham, monitor very, very closely, along with you. And I know Ambassador Crocker and General Allen are obviously working that through.

Regarding Iraq, I am concerned, as others are, about the vacuum that's been created. As you know, al Qaeda in Iraq has carried out more attacks this year alone than it did in the entire second half of last year. Do you think there's a security vacuum there now since we've left, or what?

General MATTIS. It's not a security vacuum, Senator Brown. But it is a less capable Iraqi security force without our capabilities there. They're scrambling to try and fill in those gaps. We are working with our small footprint there to help them fill in those gaps. But it's a concern, I know, for the Iraqi government and it's a concern for Ambassador Jeffries.

Senator BROWN. Do you think al Qaeda's making a comeback in Iraq?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, they are. It's not significant. It won't threaten the government. It'll kill a lot of innocent people.

Senator BROWN. What about the favoritism in the Iraqi government for the majority Shia political party? Do you think that's fueling another insurgency potentially, and does this play right into al Qaeda's hands to create that instability?

General MATTIS. It's not playing into al Qaeda's hands yet, and I think that there has been some progress back into a political dialogue here in the last couple of weeks, that I think is back on the right track. So I give you a cautious, optimistic view of this, but it's very, very cautious at this point.

Senator BROWN. Regarding Syria, do you see that Iraqi al Qaeda are moving over to Syria to fight against the Syrian regime? How do you think this affects our understanding of the Assad opposition?

General MATTIS. Al Qaeda is just trying to increase the chaos because they like ungoverned spaces. I don't think they have a moral bone in their body. They're simply opportunistic. I don't think that they characterize or represent or define the opposition to Assad. That they would try to take advantage of it I have no doubt. It's in their genes. But they do not define the opposition to Assad.

Senator BROWN. Admiral, can I just touch base? Can you comment on the, sometimes I feel not often understood, but equally effective, contributions of the Guard and Reserve elements in SOCOM? And how do you view their role now or how are they doing, and how do you view the role in the future?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, thank you. As you know, the Guard and Reserve has been absolutely essential to SOCOM's capability and their fight here in the last ten years and really since the establishment of U.S. SOCOM back in 1987. We have two Reserve units, the 19th and the 20th Special Forces Groups, that do phenomenal work for us in Afghanistan. We have the 193rd Special Operations Wing, which flies some of our unique Guard and Reserve assets.

So we are very strongly enabled by the Guard and Reserve across all components, all service components, of special operations. And we expect that they will continue to be well resourced in the years to come and play a vital role in U.S. special operations.

Senator BROWN. And you welcome that role?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Absolutely, sir.

Senator BROWN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Brown.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Senator Lieberman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your extraordinary service to the Nation and to the men and women that you lead with such distinction and their contributions also.

General Mattis, you indicated that the most significant threat in your region is Iran. Given the issue of strategy focus, where if you have limited resources you've got to keep maximum pressure on the key threat, can you comment about what could happen if we either coordinated or supported or encouraged or even participated in military operations in Syria with respect to the Iranians? Would this be neutral in terms of our efforts? Would this disrupt international collaboration? Would this create unanticipated and unwarranted advantages to the Iranians?

General MATTIS. Sir, I think that if we went into providing options, whatever they are, to hasten the fall of Assad, as long as those were put together in a coalition international form it would cause a great deal of concern and discontent in Teheran.

Senator REED. But the one area that would be problematic would be something that was perceived as unilateral or so dominated by the United States that this lack of international collaboration could undermine our intentions and our motives; is that true?

General MATTIS. I think international collaboration would be essential to the successful outcome.

Senator REED. So in effect we're working on as we speak pulling together that international sort of context for efforts that are directed to what many have said, I think, we hope, the ultimate demise of the Assad regime; is that a fair characterization?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir.

Senator REED. Let me just take it one step further, because there's been discussion of establishing safe areas and safe havens. Operationally on the ground, let's assume that could be done. It would seem to pose some problems. First, the Syrian military forces are very well organized and robust and fairly proficient. I don't know how long they would tolerate those safe havens.

But second, given safe havens, it would also I think imply that someone would have to go in and organize training and organize literally an army. That could take months, if not years. Are those considerations being thought through carefully and what it would mean in terms of commitment and resources, and again deflecting efforts away from other more serious threats?

General MATTIS. Sir, I have not been directed to do detailed planning on these. I would prefer to take some of this, Senator Reed, in the closed session. But it would require regional or surrounding state support to do something like this. I've looked at the maps and

there are no terrain-delimiting features where we could create those safe havens. In other words, you would have to create them using military forces. It's not like the mountains of northern Iraq, where the Kurds could be up in that area against Saddam Hussein, helped up in that area against him.

It would be a significant commitment of resources. Of course, the international aspect could reduce our commitment if we got sufficient from others.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

For both you, General Mattis and Admiral MCRAVEN. One of the difficult points negotiating a strategy framework with the Afghans is the persistence of President Karzai to resist operations of our forces at night, even his own forces. Can you, Admiral McRaven, comment on how critical this is to us, and is there a way to somehow ameliorate his concerns but to continue to be tactically effective?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, we think the night raids are essential for our task force to go after high-value individuals. The high-value individuals that we pursue during the course of a 24-hour period or days or weeks generally bed down at night. They are much more targetable at night, and in fact I think if you look at it tactically what you find is the Afghans are actually much safer if we target an individual at night because there aren't so many people out and about the little villages.

What we have done to reduce the Afghans' anxiety on this is the Afghan special forces are in the lead on all of our night operations. I think this is an important point. I know it is an important point that General Allen and General Mattis have made, as well as Ambassador Crocker, to President Karzai, is that these are his forces that are in fact surrounding a particular compound, trying to call out the specific individual, and the first forces through the door. We think that is the best way to reduce the Afghans' concerns.

But it is a critical tactical component of what we do every day in Afghanistan.

Senator REED. General Mattis, do you have any comments?

General MATTIS. I just would emphasize, Senator Reed, that there is less chance of collateral damage, of innocent people being killed. And I think that on itself on both a moral level, besides the military efficiency aspect, dictates that we continue these operations so long as the enemy keeps an active force in the field.

Senator REED. Thank you.

One of the principal assumptions going forward is that we will be able to operate with the Afghan national forces, both their police forces, their special forces, and their army forces, at small unit levels, which means essentially small groups of U.S. and NATO personnel embedded with larger units. This is in particular something that your special forces soldiers and other operators do.

The recent attacks by Afghan military forces against American forces, literally the one on one sort of violence, to what extent has that caused you to reevaluate that approach and that assumption, Admiral McRaven?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I think, as General Mattis mentioned earlier, we have not had any what we refer to as "green on blue" incidents with respect to our partner relationships from the special

forces with the Afghans. But that's not to say, again as General Mattis mentioned, that there couldn't be treachery in the ranks, and I think we are always cognizant of that.

Having said that, we have built these partnerships over many years. They're very strong partnerships. We have great respect for our Afghan partners, and we think that this strategy of partnering with the Afghans is absolutely essential to victory in Afghanistan.

Senator REED. General Mattis, any comments, about the ANA less so than the special ops community?

General MATTIS. Sir, the ANA is definitely defined by the tens of thousands of boys who fight loyally alongside us. Their casualties are routinely higher than ours, significantly higher. They're doing much of the fighting now, and there's an increasing need for us to have mentors among them as they take the lead.

So this will be something we'll take every prudent measure, but at the same time it eventually comes down to the trust between young men fighting alongside each other. This is characterized by a high degree of trust overwhelmingly, although these tragic incidents become understandably what we hear about.

Senator REED. Thank you, gentlemen.

Thank you.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General Mattis, thank you, Admiral McRaven, for your distinguished service to our country.

General Mattis, I wanted to ask you about the recidivism rate from Guantanamo. The Associated Press ran a story yesterday which I believe is misleading, and the headline was: "Not so many Guantanamo re-offenders." The story said that: "Far fewer detainees released from Guantanamo Bay have rejoined terrorist activities than previously reported."

However, before this committee this is an issue that I've questioned many individuals about. Last year Director Clapper said that the reengagement rates from former Guantanamo detainees who were confirmed or suspected of reengaging was 27 percent. In fact, just three weeks ago he was before our committee again and he actually said that the reengagement rate of those who had reengaged, who we've confirmed are in the fight or suspected to be reengaging, was actually increased, close to 28 percent. I believe it's 27.9 percent.

Of course, we've heard the same testimony from Secretary Gates as well as Senator Vickers, that the way that we calculate the recidivism rate is not just those who have returned, but those who are suspected of returning to the fight.

One of the big issues we have, of course, is that it's difficult to determine who has reengaged because we're so poor once they have reengaged of reconfirming. We can't always reconfirm who's out there, who's back fighting us again. Often we find them when we encounter them in the battlefield or elsewhere.

So I want to ask you about two—in my view, one terrorist reengaging us is too many. The reason we've tracked both those who have reengaged and suspected because that is in my view a more accurate reflection of where we are with reengagement rates. Two

individuals I'd like to ask you about, General Mattis, who have re-engaged in the fight. That is, Said Al-Shihri and Abdul Zahir, former Guantanamo detainees who've been released. One became a leader in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the other became a leader in the Taliban in Afghanistan. Both of these former Gitmo detainees have been actively involved against us and our allies.

Can you update the committee on the status of these two former illustrious Guantanamo detainees and what types of activities they're engaging in against us and our allies?

General MATTIS. Yes, thank you, Senator. On Shihri, he is the number two man in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. That's in Yemen. He is their number two military commander right now. He is engaged in active operations and we can confirm that.

On Zahir, he is a Taliban commander in Afghanistan and again engaged with us. I can get back to you with more specifics on what we've picked up in a classified setting, ma'am, not today, but I can get back to you.

Senator AYOTTE. Just to put it—I look forward to having more detail on that. But just to put it in perspective, both of these individuals are engaged in activities to kill Americans or our allies, are they not?

General MATTIS. That's correct, Senator.

Senator AYOTTE. So I can't imagine how frustrating it must be, obviously, for our troops to re-encounter someone we've had already in detention. So one of the concerns I have had is what do we do if tomorrow we recapture them, in terms of where do we detain them to interrogate them?

Admiral McRaven, you testified before the committee last year that, for example, if we got Ayman Al-Zawahiri that we couldn't hold him in Afghanistan, that we needed a place, a long-term detention facility, that that would be helpful.

Can you help me, both of you, where we are on that? And what would we do if we captured, for example, the two individuals we just talked about again tomorrow in terms of interrogating them? Where would we hold them under the law of war? Have we solved this problem? Have we moved forward at all on it?

General MATTIS. Senator, I am confident that we would be able to hold them. Each case is looked at individually, so I cannot tell you in advance how we would do it. But if we—if they're listening, I'd suggest they don't sleep well at night, because we're after them and we will hang onto them if we get them. I'm not quite certain where we'll put them, but we will be interrogating them and we will—if they're alive, and we will do our best not to see them on the battlefield again.

Senator AYOTTE. But we don't have a designated facility, because we're essentially not taking anyone else in Guantanamo as far as I understand it, pursuant to the administration's policy?

General MATTIS. There is not a designated facility, no, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. One of the concerns I have is we certainly can't hold everyone on a ship, particularly if we have to hold them in long-term detention. Would you both agree with me on that principle?

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am.

Admiral MCRAVEN. Completely.

Senator AYOTTE. So it's not clear where we would put them if we captured them tomorrow?

General MATTIS. No, ma'am. We have captured, as you know, some people, Warsame and all, and we have been able to facilitate their transfer to a detention facility.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I would hope that we would not bring those two individuals to the United States of America, because I'd have a hard time explaining that to my constituents when we have the availability of the Guantanamo detention facility. So I would hope that wouldn't be an option, given how dangerous both of those individuals are. Do you think that's a good option, bringing them to the United States?

General MATTIS. That's a policy decision, ma'am. It's certainly an option for the President to consider.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, why wouldn't we just use the facility that's secure at Guantanamo?

General MATTIS. Ma'am, I'm probably not the right person to ask the question, ma'am. It's a policy decision and I have no reservations as long as we have a facility as far as where we put them.

Senator AYOTTE. Admiral, is there anything you'd like to add on this?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Ma'am, in the case of Shihri and Zakir, if they are captured in Yemen and Afghanistan respectively, then obviously we have agreements with both the Yemenis and the Afghans that they could be held in their country of origin. So right now, for those two individuals I think that would be the likely solution.

Senator AYOTTE. Admiral, I just wanted to follow up briefly. When you were before the committee last year for your confirmation hearing, I had asked you about Ayman Al-Zawahiri and I asked you the scenario if we caught him tonight in Pakistan where would we place him for long-term detention. And last year you said you weren't sure what we would do in that circumstance.

Has anything changed since then?

Admiral MCRAVEN. No, ma'am, nothing has changed since then.

Senator AYOTTE. Okay. Certainly we couldn't put him in Afghanistan? We can't take individuals who we've captured outside of Afghanistan, for example in Pakistan or Yemen, and bring them to Afghanistan for detention?

General MATTIS. That's our practice now, is not to do that, that's correct. It would take a government-to-government agreement, I think, to do something like that.

Senator AYOTTE. Where we already have existing issues we're trying to resolve with the Afghans, obviously, on the secure way to deal with the detainees that they have now.

So thank you, both of you. Thank you.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Ayotte.

Next is Senator Nelson.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me add my appreciation for your service as well. Thank you.

I've got a number of concerns about our presence in Iraq at the current time. I don't think that I have a clear understanding of what our mission is there. It's further complicated by the fact that we've got questions about the new embassy, which is a significant

in terms of size building, with a significant number of security contractors located there, perhaps not even functioning in a security role outside of the embassy. And the embassy continues to be expanded, and I understand perhaps the State Department now is in charge of establishing what our mission in Iraq is.

Can you, either of you, help enlighten me about what our mission truly is in Iraq today and how that might relate as well to the providing of security by contractors and the continuing expansion of a building that seems to be gargantuan in size already? General Mattis?

General MATTIS. Sir, as far as our mission in Iraq, it's going from a military-led effort in Iraq over the last 8 years to a State Department-led mission under the ambassador. There I do have a lieutenant general with a small footprint on the ground, part of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, and they are engaged in everything from the sale of certain military equipment, providing contractor-led training, to organizing the Iraqis who want to go to military schools in the United States so we maintain those relationships. That's what they're doing.

As far as the security contractors, sir, who actually protect the embassy, those come under the U.S. embassy, under the State Department. But, having been there recently, they're simply doing the Guard duty you would expect in a high-threat area.

As far as the size of the building, Senator, I'm really not competent to respond on that question, sir.

Senator NELSON. But it is big, isn't it?

General MATTIS. It's big, sir.

Senator NELSON. Thank you.

Trying to understand the role of the contractors there in providing security, in other embassies in other countries are we required—do we require ourselves to provide security or do we look to the host nation to provide security?

General MATTIS. Sir, the host nation provides the external security outside the grounds. Inside the grounds, it's sovereign territory and we do that. We do it with generally contract guards. Many of them are long-serving guards there. Inside the embassy building itself, you have Marine security guards.

Senator NELSON. Is that the way it works in Iraq, in Baghdad?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, it is.

Senator NELSON. The Iraqis provide the external security?

General MATTIS. They do, sir.

Senator NELSON. And if our personnel are moving from one place to another, who provides the security?

General MATTIS. That security is provided by our own contract guards.

Senator NELSON. What level of security would the Iraqis provide externally to the embassy?

General MATTIS. In that zone, when you go there, sir, you see their checkpoints are set up some blocks away. They have patrols that go by. It's not just for our embassy; it's for other embassies in town as well, as they provide the kind of diplomatic security that's expected around the world. Here in Washington, DC, some policemen can provide it because the threat is very low. In a place

like Baghdad, prudent measures require Iraqi army, Iraqi police to do the external security in a much more visible, obvious way.

Senator NELSON. Turning back to Iran, as we all know, the threat in Iran is real. You've discussed the relationship of Iran to Syria, to Hezbollah. On 60 Minutes Secretary Panetta said that there was a red line for us. I know in the discussions between Mr. Netanyahu and the President in the last several days there seemed to be some closing of the gap on our different ideas about dealing with Iran and the growing concern.

What actions, military or otherwise, should we be considering in connection with Iran? I don't mean to put you in a classified position, but just generally could you give us your idea?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir. The Iranian threat is basically along four lines. There's this nuclear program, where they're enriching more uranium than they need for any peaceful purpose, and that one, through denial and deception, they have tried to keep that program going. The IAEA has tried its best to monitor it. They've had an unfortunate visit there recently.

The second threat is the long-range rocket and ballistic missile threat. That one has the attention of all of our friends in the region as far as how they protect against that.

The third threat is the maritime threat, and so we're going to have to be prepared to keep the sea lanes open.

And the fourth threat is what we call the Quds Force, MOIS, their secret service, their surrogates, proxies like Lebanese Hezbollah and other terrorists that they fund. On that one, it's largely a police and intelligence-driven effort as we try to contain that, but also our special forces work that issue very, very closely.

So four basic threats and we look to how we can check each one of those, working alongside some of the most enduring long-term partnerships we've had with some of the countries out there.

Senator NELSON. Well, since this is a budget hearing, in your opinion does the current budget proposal deal sufficiently with the kinds of threats and the responses that we are now providing to those threats?

General MATTIS. It absolutely does, Senator Nelson. I can say this, though, because I'm first among equals when it comes to the combatant commanders. Basically, if I need something I go to Secretary Panetta and I get it. So I'll just tell you that I'm well resourced, sir.

Senator NELSON. Admiral McRaven, from your perspective?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I'm also exceedingly well resourced.

Senator NELSON. You don't think that the budget was prepared under different assumptions and the circumstances have now changed with regard to that?

Admiral MCRAVEN. No, sir.

Senator NELSON. Admiral—General?

General MATTIS. We will always have to adapt, sir. But right now I think the strategy is well supported by the budget.

Senator NELSON. And if circumstances were to change to where military action was required, would we be having to change circumstances then as well?

General MATTIS. Senator, active operations along those lines would be very expensive. Obviously, that's one of the characteris-

tics of war. We're doing everything we can to try and deter war, to try to keep the stability, the peace, or what passes for peace in the Middle East one more year, one more month, one more week, one more day, to allow Secretary Clinton and the diplomats to convince Iran this is not in their best interest, to go the way they're going now.

Senator NELSON. One more question if I might, Mr. Chairman, on the budget.

Would that apply in any engagement that we might have in Syria as well? Very expensive, probably not provided for in the budget?

General MATTIS. I'm absolutely certain it would apply, sir.

Senator NELSON. Admiral?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, sir.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, gentlemen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Cornyn.

Senator CORNYN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Mattis, Admiral McRaven, thank you for your service to our country.

I want to focus a little bit on Iran, not surprisingly, in light of your testimony, General Mattis, where you say that their reckless behavior and bellicose rhetoric create a high potential for miscalculation in the region. In another area of your testimony, you say it represents perhaps the greatest immediate and long-term threat to regional stability.

I wonder if you would agree with the characterization of a think tank here in Washington, the Center for Strategy and Budgetary Assessments, when they define Iran's strategy as "anti-access, anti-denial" strategy, designed to take advantage of, they say, of the unique geographic attributes of the Persian Gulf? Rather than confront U.S. forces generally directly, Iran could attempt to use ballistic missiles, terrorist proxies, to coerce Gulf states to deny U.S. forces permission to operate from their sovereign territory.

Without going on to describe that further, I wonder if you would agree with that characterization of Iran's strategy or if you have a different way you would characterize it?

General MATTIS. Senator, I would agree that anti-access, area denial is their modus operandi as they look toward active operations if it comes to that. But I would also add to the two threats they outlined, I would add the ballistic missile, long-range rocket capability they have.

Senator CORNYN. If the United States had a reliable source of oil from a friendly source, would we be as concerned about Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz?

General MATTIS. I believe we would be, Senator, because of the vital interest to the world economy, which would have immediate and significant impact on our own and our own way of life if one nation, Iran, the only nation that's threatened to close those Straits, did so.

Senator CORNYN. Just to list the areas in the Middle East where Iran has its very clear fingerprints, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves from time to time just how they operate in Lebanon,

through Hezbollah, a terrorist organization. In the West Bank and Gaza, we know that Iran has reportedly received funding—or Hamas, I should say, has received funding from Iran. We know, of course, that in Iraq, that Iran was the source of many of the explosively- formed penetrators that killed United States service men. And of course, in Afghanistan and now in Syria.

Is there any other place that I've left off the list that Iran's fingerprints are most obvious?

General MATTIS. Oh, absolutely, sir. I would add Yemen. I would add they've tried to get involved in the internal aspects in Bahrain of the shaking out there of the opposition to the government and the efforts by the government to engage that opposition. We believe Iran is probably trying to undercut that because they would not want to see those elements get together and come up with a Bahraini solution.

In Kuwait, they've had their spies captured. They've gone all over the place, sir. They enjoy this sort of thing. I would add that in Gaza, however, Hamas' pulling out on Assad, I don't know what the effect is going to be on Iran continuing to fund them since they've just pulled out support from Assad when, obviously, Teheran wanted them to continue supporting Assad. So we'll have to watch and see what happens there.

Senator CORNYN. What do you think that Iran's reaction would be if there was a coalition of forces that intervened in Syria to stop the bloodshed there and the Assad regime? Would they sit quietly on the sidelines?

General MATTIS. No, sir. They'd try through their proxies and their surrogates to do some mischief there. I don't think you would see anything overt. I think they would try to keep their fingerprints off it, especially seeing that it would get them cross-wired with an international organization of some kind, coalition of some kind.

Senator CORNYN. I know you've alluded to al Qaeda activity as opportunistic in the region. Part of their activity is to create sectarian strife and conflict. But it strikes me that, although al Qaeda is a non-state actor, that its goals share a lot in common with that of Iran in terms of creating instability and conflict in the region, which then provides space for them to grow in power and influence.

Do you agree with that or do you have a different view?

General MATTIS. Coming from two different directions, obviously, the al Qaeda would prefer to see Shias killed, as they're doing in Iraq, killing innocent Shias there. Iran, on the other hand, heightens the tensions between Sunni and Shia from a Shia perspective. Frankly, I don't know what the advantage they see accruing to themselves for it, but it goes to your point: They're both doing the same thing; they just come from a different direction on it.

Senator CORNYN. Admiral McRaven, do you have any views on that?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I think General Mattis's characterizing captured it well.

Senator CORNYN. Well, I guess the challenge that the United States has is that Israel has said they will do whatever they need to do in their national self-interest to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear capability that would threaten their existence. Secretary

Panetta has said that gaining a nuclear capability would be a red line that Iran would not be able to cross. The President of the United States said yesterday that his policy was not one of containment; it was to stop Iran.

I'm wondering, where on this continuum—you've talked, I think eloquently, about delay for a day or a week or months. But, having said that, I think to Senator McCain, that nothing that we have attempted so far by way of sanctions has appeared to deter Iran on this pathway toward a nuclear weapon, where do you see this headed?

General MATTIS. Sir, I hate to speculate on something like this because in public I cannot give any—I cannot make any casual statement. However, Iran has obviously missed several opportunities to engage positively with the IAEA, to respond to the United Nations Security Council resolutions. They're very much a problem and I don't see this going in the right direction until the full effect of the sanctions can accrue. And I say "until" because even now as we see inflation going up, unemployment going up, the internal frictions have got to start telling here. At some point I think the Iranian people are going to question, is this the right direction?

So if we can keep this in a diplomatic, economic track and get full advantage of what these sanctions are doing and the international isolation is doing—this country basically lacks any significant strategy ally. There are some that have blocked for their own reasons resolutions in the United Nations, regrettably. But I don't see them having allies, and I don't count that little fellow down in Venezuela as a very significant ally.

Senator CORNYN. If I can just conclude on this, Mr. Chairman.

So it sounds to me like we have a race, one to see if sanctions are successful in causing the regime to implode and thus deny their aspirations for a nuclear weapon; but if that doesn't occur fast enough, there's another parallel track where they are on a pathway to achieve a nuclear capability. The question is, I guess for us and for the world, is who's going to win that race, sanctions or a nuclear weapon.

General MATTIS. Yes, sir. I'm not sure that Iran needs to implode. I think that they can come to realization that this organization that's running the country right now with these cosmetic elections they're running—they're not real free and fair elections—that this leadership is not what those people deserve, and at some point they would say, we want to stop this program, and somehow those voices would be heard in a way that convinced them that this was—they had to—the best we can do otherwise, sir, is delay them. Only the Iranian people can stop this program.

Senator CORNYN. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Cornyn.

Senator Webb.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin actually the same place I began last year with you, General Mattis. Also this comment extends to Admiral McRaven as well. If you look at these two gentlemen's records of service in the military, the ultimate reward of competent leadership is command. If you look at the number of times that command shows up on both

of these leaders' military file, there's no two better people we could have in the positions that you are in, and you have my thanks for the contributions that you're making on behalf of our country.

I'd like to clarify something just as a result of the discussion that has occurred during this hearing. I don't think it's accurate for those who are pushing for a faster pace move toward military involvement in Syria to characterize those, including myself, who have been asking for us to be very careful in terms of how we define the opposition movements as simply some reductionist statement about al Qaeda.

I have put the question to General Dempsey, I put it to Director of Intelligence Clapper, my concern that we really move forward in a careful way to define how much of this opposition is domestic, how much of it is regional, and indeed whether or not al Qaeda has been a player in that. I think this is—in all of these situations we've seen over the last year, it's really important to stay on an examination of those realities.

General Mattis, as you pointed out in your opening statement, a good deal of what has been going on has been, for lack of a better term, the rupture of a social contract, such as it was, in this region. Again as you said, it's not predictable that there's going to be a democratic movement or a democratic result in some of these countries. In fact, the implications of what has been happening are going to play out over years. We're just not going to see a quick resolution in a way that we can say if it's a democracy or something else.

So it's very important to be careful in terms of what sort of military assistance would take place if it were to take place, and with whom. I think I'm hearing that today and I'm glad that I am.

One of the pieces that I think has been missing from this discussion, not just here but in other hearings, is how we should be approaching China and what we should be expecting and asking from China in terms of asking for their assistance in terms of increasing the stability in the entire region. I think this is a good opportunity to get some feedback from you, General Mattis, on this.

We've been talking about Iran. We've been talking about Russia. There was a resolution proposed in the Foreign Relations Committee that originally did not even mention China's participation, the veto in the Security Council resolution, proposed Security Council resolution at the United Nations.

In the region, we I think should be expecting more out of China in terms of stepping forward to attempt to resolve some of these issues. Pakistan calls on their most important friend. We've got the sanctions that we've been attempting to move on Iran and we're not seeing clear assistance there.

With respect to the situation in Syria, I've been asking, why would they, why would China not support the type of resolution that went before the Security Council? Well, let's be honest here. This is a system of government that has not been afraid to repress its own people. Probably the most glaring example of a repressive regime that survived over the past 22, 23 years is the Chinese regime that sent tanks and troops onto its own people at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

We hope that their system has evolved beyond that by now, but perhaps that does play into these situations.

General, can you give us an idea of what it's been like to interact with the Chinese in the region in which you're responsible?

General MATTIS. I can't give you too much on that, Senator. I'll tell you, on counterpiracy efforts there's a collaborative effort pretty fair, at the low tactical level, ship commander to ship commander, no problems between us out there on the station in the Gulf of Aden. I notice that on Iran that China did come out with a rather strong statement that Iran getting a nuclear weapon was not in their interests and they did not support that, that effort.

So I don't have very much contact with the Chinese in my region, though, sir. It's very, very limited. I would suggest it's probably more in the foreign relations, State Department realm; pretty absent as far as mil-to-mil.

Senator WEBB. Well, I would venture that in terms of cooperation on anti-piracy there is a clear benefit, even on a tactical level, to the Chinese because now they're operating their navy in an area that they weren't operating in before. And we welcome collaborative efforts, but I don't think we should look at that as some statement of national intent here.

I just hope that—and I know this is principally a diplomatic question, but I hope that we might be able to pursue ways to encourage China to help us resolve these larger issues, whether it's Korea, whether it's Burma, but particularly in this region, where they clearly have geographic reasons and strategic reasons to be further involved, even in a place like Afghanistan, where they know that they've now started moving economically. But we need to hear more from China.

Admiral, I think my time is going to run out. I have a question and I'd just like in a general sense to hear your policy with respect to officers who handle classified information that might, even on a temporary basis, end up in the hands of foreign nationals. Is there a policy if that were to occur?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, sir, absolutely. Anybody that transfers classified information without the approval of the U.S. Government with that process falls under the Uniform Code of Military Justice with a violation of the UCMJ.

Senator WEBB. What about just through negligence? They left something laying around?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Same thing, sir.

Senator WEBB. Okay, thank you very much, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you, Senator Webb.

Senator McCaskill, I really apologize. I've seen you sitting there, but I think Senator Blumenthal in terms of original arrival is on the list first.

Senator MCCASKILL. Oh, okay. Okay, no problem. I'll wait.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. If Senator McCaskill has another commitment, I'd be happy to—

Senator MCCASKILL. Absolutely not. Go ahead.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks.

Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to add my thanks to both of you and the men and women under your leadership for your really extraordinary service, which I had the privilege to see a bit firsthand during my second trip to Afghanistan last February with Senator McCain and Senator Graham and others of my colleagues. As I mentioned to you, Admiral McRaven, I was particularly impressed by the really remarkable achievements of our special operators there. The numbers tell a powerful story, but so do the more anecdotal information, particularly about turning over a lot of this work and training the Afghans themselves, which I think is a really unprecedented achievement in our military history in terms of special operations.

I hope that we all keep sight of that work and also, General, the work that all of our men and women there are doing, despite the incidents that may sometimes cloud the clearer picture that we should have and the appreciation that we should always maintain of the service and sacrifice and the achievements, a real success there.

I want to begin by asking, Admiral, whether you are satisfied with the work that is being done in terms of turning over that—turning over and training that function to the Afghans themselves, of the night raids, the Special Operations Forces, and what we can do, if anything, to help you in that very critical part of your mission?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, sir. I've actually been very pleased with the progress. We have a number of efforts ongoing and have for quite some time in our partnership with the Afghans. The U.S. special forces has had a collaborative effort with the commandos, the Afghan commandos. They have built an Afghan special forces element. Some of our other special forces have partnered with all the Afghan partner units, and these are the forces that predominantly do the direct action raids and are leading on those direct action raids.

We also have our NATO SOF brethren that are partnered with a number of Afghan forces as well. So across the SOF spectrum, if you will, it is all about partnership and it is all about the Afghans leading in that partnership. Our progress certainly over the last year has accelerated dramatically and I'm very pleased with the glide slope we're on right now.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You know, one of the impediments, I think, to understanding generally in the American public about how successful we've been, not just in targeting and taking out those elements of the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership, but also with the very, very small number of civilian casualties that have occurred—and I know these numbers, at least I was told they were classified. But they are really powerfully impressive. So I would just put a pitch to you that if we can declassify some of this information it would really, I think, enhance the appreciation and understanding of the American public in general.

I want to move to a topic that has concerned me for a long time, the IEDs, the continued flow of IED bomb-making material from Pakistan, which is the source of the vast predominant part of the components that go into the roadside bombs, and of course the

roadside bombs themselves cause the majority of casualties, both injuries and deaths to our troops.

We had testimony recently from Director Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, and from Lieutenant General Burgess, and Director Clapper very specifically said that his view is that Pakistan is not making a significant effort to stop the flow of those bomb-making components. I wonder if either of you have any views on that topic?

General MATTIS. Senator, it has been an area of frustration. It has been a serious topic of dialogue with us. They have passed laws now that will enable them to make arrests that they could not make before in this regard. They have also put together their counter-IED strategy here in the last few months, and I need to get back into Pakistan and talk with them more about it. There is some reason for more optimism today than if I was testifying last year, but I need to do more homework before I can give you a complete answer.

At the same time, Pakistan, as you know—I mean, it's called the federally Administered Tribal Area for a reason up in the north there. It's a very unique status that it's had since Pakistan became a country, and their level of sovereignty over everything that goes on there has also been at times nebulous.

So there are a number of factors that come to bear and I hope to give you a better report on this within about a month or two or three at most about where I really think they're at, are we seeing real progress or not.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I appreciate your care and caution in commenting on the work that the Afghans and the Pakistani forces are doing in this area. My view is that they have not yet made a significant effort to stop the flow of ammonium calcium nitrate and other bomb-making components, based on everything that I have seen and heard. So I would appreciate any additional update you can give me at an appropriate time.

In the time I have left, to turn to a subject that really concerns all of our men and women in uniform, the proposals for changes in the retirement and health care systems. You in particular, General Mattis and Admiral McRaven, work with some of the most dedicated career professionals in our military. I am greatly concerned by the potential impact that some of these proposals on the ability of our military to attract the quality of people, and they are people of truly extraordinary quality, as you know better than I. But I have been very powerfully impressed by the kind of people we are attracting.

Could you give me any concerns you have about these proposals and the ability of our military forces to attract and keep the kind of career professionals we have now?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I guess I'll start on this and then turn it over to General Mattis. But we see right now our recruiting goals in terms of Special Operations Forces are up from previous years. I think if you polled a lot of those young men and women coming in, they probably wouldn't cite the health care and the retirement benefits as the reason that they are joining. However, it could very well be the reason that they stay after a certain point in time.

So I think as we move forward we need to do some very prudent and careful looking at the retirement and the health care system, so that we keep those experienced noncommissioned officers and officers in and take care of them for the service that they have rendered over the life of their career.

General MATTIS. Senator, I would agree with Admiral McRaven. Very few—I've been on recruiting duty. Very few people come in and ask a lot about health benefits, unless they're quite old, and in the Marines we didn't let them in, as you know from your service.

But on retention, I think it's something we have to look at very carefully. The point I make to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines out in the field when I'm asked about it is: You will still have one of the best retirement systems, no matter what, because I'm confident that the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman will only bring forward those proposals that keep us able to attract the high-quality young men and women who look beyond the political rhetoric that goes on every day and sign up to defend this country.

So I'm optimistic that we'll find the right way forward on this, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, thank you very much. Again, I think it is so profoundly important that we find the right way forward, because our greatest asset is the people, the men and women who serve and sacrifice for us. As much as we may talk about the hardware and the weapons systems and all the rest of it, our people are our greatest asset.

So thank you very much.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator McCaskill, patience is once again rewarded.

Senator MCCASKILL. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that the last time I checked the GDP without us in Afghanistan is around \$2 billion, and the GDP with us is around \$16 billion. Does that sound about right? Am I off there, General Mattis?

General MATTIS. I'm not—I'd hate to say it's right, but it sounds about right.

Senator MCCASKILL. And by the way, thank you both for all of your service and your leadership. I have said repeatedly I am supportive of what we are trying to do in Afghanistan. But I have become increasingly skeptical about the infrastructure projects that we are spending money on. I have followed the saga of CERP from my first days on this committee. I have watched it have successes and, frankly, one of the things I've noticed is that, while everyone thinks the idea is good, we yet to have really an objective study that shows the value of a lot of the CERP money.

Now we have first the first time what I am affectionately calling the "Son of CERP," which is the Afghanistan Infrastructure Project, which is part State money and part DOD money, which, while not unprecedented in our history, it is very unusual for our military to be building major infrastructure while we're engaged in a fight on the ground.

There's a reason for that, I think, in history, because I think typically the military would say, you know, the security needs are a problem, the sustainment is a problem. And it seems like we've

blown over some of those considerations as we have engaged in some of this infrastructure building. I can give you anecdotally disasters in Iraq. In fact, I am trying to compile all of the infrastructure we built in Iraq and what the status is of it today.

But I think everyone knows it's not a pretty picture: how much got blown up, how much was never utilized, how much sits crumbling. And that's all an incredible amount of resources of our country that we've invested.

Which brings me to the request for fiscal year 2013 for CERP and AIF. The projects that are being funded in fiscal year 2012 with this AIF money, this new Iraq Infrastructure Fund that DOD has requested, are three power projects, three transportation projects, and three water projects. According to the briefing that my office has received, you will finish these projects with fiscal year 2012 money, but yet here you are—and by the way, they're not going to be finished, some of them, until 2014.

Now, juxtaposition this with what we're envisioning in terms of drawing down. Now we've got requests for 2013, and I guess my question to you, General Mattis, would be what are those for? What is the almost billion dollars that we're requesting in CERP and AIF? What major projects are we going to build beyond the ones that the fiscal year 2012 money is going to finish? And how many years forward are we going to be working on those, and how many contractors will we leave on the ground as we try to manage our transition out of Afghanistan? And then I'll get to sustainment.

General MATTIS. Senator, I need to go back and take part of that question for the record so what I give you is absolutely accurate. I will tell you, ma'am, that we would not disagree that we've had significant problems in the midst of a war trying to do something, you point out, we've not done before.

However, we've also gone through a very rigorous scrub year by year now to try to reduce it to what is actually necessary, not what is good to have, what is absolutely necessary to the counterinsurgency campaign. It's a different kind of war that we fight today. The enemy has identified our strengths and has decided to fight us in a way that does not lend itself to us using our strengths, our mechanized divisions, our aircraft carriers, as the tool to win. They are enablers, but what we have to do is reach the people, and the reason we're in Afghanistan, of course—and I know that you've supported us over the years on this—is to keep it from becoming again a terrorist safe haven for attacks on us.

Part of what we're trying to do here is take a society that was turned upside-down 30 years ago and bring it back into a way forward that at least provides the most basic services. We're not talking about things that perhaps at one time some more idealistic people were coming in with, a much broader idea about what we could do there.

So let me get back to you on this, what the major projects are, and I'll give it to you in great detail. I would tell you that the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund was an attempt to break out of CERP, to give more fidelity to you for your oversight. And I have no reservations about providing this, and if it can't stand the scrutiny that you give it then we'll change it.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator McCASKILL. And I understand. I do think that part of this—maybe I'm being a little cynical here. But I think part of this happened because major infrastructure, it's very hard to get the funds through the State Department budget and generally Congress, it's easier to get the funds for major—because that's typically who's done this, as you well know.

Speaking of sustainment, we've got big projects that were funded through State, that have not been sustained even in Afghanistan, and particularly as you look at the power plant. You look at the power plant in Kabul and it is hundreds of millions of dollars, and it's sitting there idle for most of the time, used for just overload situations. They're still buying electricity from the Stans. I don't think they have the capacity or the resources to operate what we've built for them.

That brings me to sustainment. On the highway funds, I looked at some of the materials that you provided my office on sustainment on the roads. Right now we've got hundreds of millions of dollars we're putting into road and bridge projects, which by the way as an aside I will say we desperately need in this country. And they're not going to get build up while we build them, and we're not going to have to pay off the bad guys to create the security in order to build them.

There is no revenue in place right now to maintain or support these roads after we leave. In fact, there's not even a government road authority to focus on the networking operation. Now, there is talk in the briefing that we received that, well, we think that they could.

Why aren't we requiring that at least the government of Afghanistan—I mean, to me it has a lot more credibility that somehow the government is delivering these services, which is ultimately the theory behind COIN, right, that we're trying to make the Afghanistan Government look like it's a real government to the people of Afghanistan, so they like them better than the Taliban.

Why aren't we requiring that the government do that first, that the government provide some kind of gas taxes or some kind of revenue that would maintain these roads, or at least a government-wide authority that would allow them to operate a system of roads and bridges in Afghanistan, before we put hundreds of millions of dollars of American taxpayers' money into these projects?

General MATTIS. Senator, they're very good questions. I won't tell you I have all the answers, but we are consistent with your view right now in everything we're doing. If they cannot sustain it, we're not going to build it. And if it can't be sustained by the Afghans—in other words, we're not talking about us providing the sustainment—then it's not going to be part of the program.

But I think, too, we have to remember where we started there, and even finding educated people—I mean, there's not a big bench of people that we draw from. But I'm simply outlining the problem. We owe you a solution and I will get back to you with more specifics about the way ahead here.

Senator McCASKILL. I don't want anyone to misinterpret my willingness to pull some of this money out and put it in the highway trust fund in this country as not supporting what our military is

trying to do there. But as we are transitioning out, it's almost like the two views are not matching up here, that we're continuing—and you know what the problem is, General, honestly: We can do this stuff, Afghanistan can't. So our military—let me give you all credit as leaders of an amazing organization. You tell the people under you that we want to do something, you know what? They're going to do it.

So we can build these roads. We can build this power grid. We can contract, we can do all of this, and it is a can-do attitude that is so part of our culture that I think sometimes there is a sense of denial about not whether or not we can do it, but how this ends up at the end. I want to tell you, I believe with every intellectual capacity I have that this is not going to end up well on these infrastructure projects, that it's not going to be a good ending, that there are not going to be roads and bridges and cars, and that the Afghanistan government is not going to have a good handle on this, especially in light of the time that you face in terms of us drawing down.

So I want these things to match up and I want to be realistic. I do think this part of the COIN strategy needs even more examination because, you know, I listened to Prime Minister Netanyahu talk about it talking like a duck and quacking like a duck and looking like a duck and it being a duck last night. This really looks like nation-building in every essence of the word, and I think there is more nation-building here than there really is COIN. That's my bias at this point, but I am certainly willing to be talked out of that bias with good objective proof points.

General MATTIS. Let me try, Senator. If I can't then we'll have to change something.

Senator McCaskill [presiding: Thank you. Thank you very much, General.

Thank you, Admiral.

And I will call on Senator Hagan. She's the only one left.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator MCCASKILL. I was looking around, seeing who else I could call on. But I guess it's just you.

Senator HAGAN. Last but not least.

Gentlemen, General Mattis and Admiral McRaven, thank you so much for your testimony today and even more so for your service to our country. I agree with Senator McCaskill, we certainly do have a can-do attitude and you can do just great things, and I really do appreciate it.

Admiral McRaven, thank you for coming by yesterday. I did want to go over a question that we talked about. Several public reports have indicated that you are seeking several new authorities to give you more control over the deployment and utilization of the Special Operations Forces. For example, the New York Times recently reported that you want authority to deploy the Special Operations Forces without going through the traditional force generation process managed by the Joint Chiefs.

As I said, I know we've discussed this, but if you could also go over again: Are you seeking authorities that would provide USSOCOM with additional control over the deployment and utilization of the Special Operations Forces?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Well, thank you, Senator Hagan. First, I appreciate the question. I appreciate the opportunity to kind of set the record straight. As you said, there's been a lot in the news about this lately.

Every two years the Joint Staff goes through a staffing drill to look at the unified command plan, the UCP, which defines the roles and responsibilities, the missions of the combatant commanders. And every year we go through a review of the forces which talks about the assignment of forces to those COCOMs.

What we at SOCOM have done is we are participating in that staffing process. Right now it is an internal process. My recommendations have not even gotten to the Chairman, much less the Secretary or the Commander in Chief yet. So I think it's premature to talk about what my recommendations are in an open forum.

However, having said that, what I would like to set the record straight is that we will never deploy forces to a geographic combatant command without that geographic combatant commander's approval. We never go into another country without getting country clearance from the chief of mission, and the chief of mission always has a vote in whether or not U.S. forces arrive in the Nation that he or she is sitting in.

So there is nothing in my recommendations now, nor will there ever be, that talks about circumventing either the geographic combatant commander or the chief of mission.

Senator HAGAN. I think it's important to set that record straight. So thank you.

Then, General Mattis, the Jordanians and the Turks share the longest border with Syria and they stand to bear the brunt of any refugee flows out of Syria. Senior officials from both governments have publicly stated that President Assad must go and they have indicated a willingness to receive the Syrians fleeing from the conflict.

But there's been little discussion about what the Jordanians and the Turks are willing to do to support Arab or western efforts to aid or arm the opposition in Syria. What is your understanding of the Jordanian and Turkish views on the situation in Syria, and would they support the provision of non-lethal and-or lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition?

General MATTIS. Thanks, Senator. I don't want to speak for them. I'll give you my view of it. I don't think they want to see the opposition armed right now. I think they want to see a more defined end state. They want to know better who it is they're arming. But again I don't want to speak for them. I think that the refugee flows would be very destabilizing in either country, but especially so in Jordan, if they came in, because of the internal dynamics in the country there and our inability to get the Middle East peace process re-energized that might give some view of a Palestinian state, that would take some of that pressure off the country and leave only the refugees for them to consider.

As it stands now, I don't think they want the refugees inside Jordan. I think they want to set up the camps inside southern Syria and help them there. I know the King would do that.

Senator HAGAN. Is anything like that going on?

General MATTIS. There are humanitarian efforts under the Red Cross, the Red Crescent. Certainly both governments are looking toward what they can do for refugees, yes, ma'am.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you.

Admiral McRaven, concerns have been raised in the past that the heavy concentration of Special Operations Forces in the CENTCOM area of responsibility is degrading the cultural and language expertise of special operations personnel who have been traditionally focused on other parts of the world. You told the committee last year that one of the command's top challenges is to better understand the people and conditions in the places that we go.

How are you addressing the tension between the demand for Special Operations Forces in CENTCOM and the need to maintain regionally aligned expertise elsewhere? It's a big world.

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, ma'am, it is. As I mentioned earlier today, we're in about 78 countries globally. So as we develop particularly our special forces, U.S. special forces, officers and NCOs, part of their career path is to get language and cultural training. As you well know, at Fort Bragg this really is the center of excellence in terms of our throughput for those NCOs and those officers.

So right now we have a pretty robust program that looks across the globe, if you will, at our cultural and language requirements. I'm pretty satisfied with where we are. The issue is, as General Mattis well knows, about 80 percent of my forces are in CENTCOM. Having said that, that doesn't diminish the effort we are putting into the cultural training or the language training with respect to those other folks that are deployed globally.

It will be a function of balancing and probably reemphasizing some languages and some cultures as we move from a CENTCOM-centric environment to a more globally balanced environment over time.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you.

From time to time there are reports of Iranian support to the Houthis in northern Yemen. Given the ongoing surge by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the matter of Iran's involvement in Yemen has been getting less press. General Mattis, can you update me on Iran's activities in north Yemen and are they continuing to provide material support to the Houthis?

General MATTIS. They are providing material support. Compared to last year at this time, they're providing more, to include weapons, not just money. But, interestingly, they are also trying to influence now the non-Houthi tribes and invite their political leadership to Teheran on expense-paid vacations basically, to meet with certain leaders there. So it's very interesting. What you and I have seen over the years with the Houthis is now expanding in Yemen.

Frankly, I think Teheran sees the Lebanese Hezbollah kind of mental model for where they want to go down there.

Senator HAGAN. Have the Saudis raised concern with you about Iranian involvement in Yemen?

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am.

Senator HAGAN. What's your assessment of the new government in Yemen? Are they interested in continuing to cooperate on counterterrorism matters?

General MATTIS. I believe they are, yes.

Senator HAGAN. What's the current status of the DOD's security assistance programs with respect to Yemen, particularly the assistance program authorized under the most recent defense authorization bill?

General MATTIS. Well, as you know, ma'am, Senator, the long delay in President Saleh leaving basically derailed some of our programs. During the internal frictions that were going on, we didn't want our people engaged in what was really something the Yemenis had to sort out on their own. So we're going to have to get with President Hadi and his organization now and start working this forward again.

We've taken a little bit of a lull, frankly, in what we were doing, not across the board, not in all areas. And I can speak more in private with you on some of that.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Hagan.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Mattis, Admiral McRaven, thank you both for being here this morning and for your service to the country.

General Mattis, I'd like to begin asking you about what's happening with Pakistan. I had the opportunity to travel in August with Chairman Levin actually to Afghanistan and to see firsthand what was happening at that time in Afghanistan. One of the things that we did was fly over the Khyber Pass, and it was surprising to me because, obviously, I hadn't been there before, to see just the extent of trucks and vehicles and people lined up to cross at the Khyber Pass. Obviously, that was before the decision to close the pass in November.

I wonder if you could talk about how important it will be to reopen the Khyber Pass? Last week General Fraser said that being able to get through the pass would be important if we're going to withdraw personnel and equipment on the timetable that's been proposed. So can you talk about where we are in negotiating reopening of that pass and how important that will be?

General MATTIS. Yes, Senator, I can. It is important to us. We have proven that we can sustain the campaign through the Northern Distribution Network and through our what we call multimodal, which is basically part by air, part by sea, resupply of our effort there.

However, the withdrawal out of Afghanistan we do need the ground lines of communications through Pakistan. As far as the status of that discussion, I will fly to Pakistan here in about ten days and we'll reopen the discussion. I think the parliamentary process as far as the new relationship with the United States will be reported out by that point, and I think their military will be able to engage with us. They've been waiting for the parliamentary process to be done and that's why there's been a bit of a delay here.

Senator SHAHEEN. So when you say they've been waiting for the parliamentary process to be done, does that mean they're looking for civilian blessing of reopening the pass, or are they waiting for General Kayani and the military to support that effort?

General MATTIS. I think what happened was the parliament took up the issue about the relationship with the United States. As you

know, there's been disappointments on both sides. That parliamentary committee has reported out to the parliament, as I understand it, or will very shortly, and I anticipate General Kayani will then have the parliament's framework for how this relationship will move forward, and will do what two different countries do, some with shared interests and some of our interests are not shared, and we'll try to work a way forward.

Senator SHAHEEN. But you're optimistic that we will see some progress on that?

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. That was a question.

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am, I am.

Senator SHAHEEN. One of the other things we heard about on that trip was the importance of the cooperation that had gone on in the past on the border between Afghan, Pakistan, and ISAF troops in avoiding border incidents. Obviously, that situation seems to have deteriorated since that time. Can you talk about where we are in those relationships and whether there's hope to get them back on track to restore the kind of communication that would allow us to avoid those border incidents?

General MATTIS. Senator, even in our worst days here in the last several months when we were unable to talk about reopening the ground lines of communication and a lot of friction and statements in the press on both sides, even in those worst days our brigadiers and our colonels and our majors were meeting as we tried to coordinate better to avoid the tragedy that happened in late November.

So it's actually been the one area where I can tell you we have not been hobbled. It's actually gotten better under this crisis that we've been through and the tragedy of those Pakistani soldiers that were killed by friendly fire, our fire. So it's going better now in the effort to preclude this from happening ever again.

Senator SHAHEEN. And we're actually seeing that on the ground?

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. It's not just at the negotiation level?

General MATTIS. There are border coordination meetings going on now at different levels, and as soon as we get hit from the other side of the border we're calling to them, to the Pakistani military. In other words, the communication channels now are more mature. It's not perfect. I don't want to make this look like it's all okay. We've got a lot of frictions along a badly demarcated border in some areas. But at the same time, it's the one area that held in there when everything else kind of came off the track, and it's the one area we're making progress on. We've exchanged SOPs for cross-border operations or, excuse me, near-border operations. So when we're operating near the border and they are, we have a shared standard operating procedure for how we will communicate.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. That's encouraging.

General MATTIS. Yes, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. Admiral McRaven, I want to also say, while I'm talking about our visit to Afghanistan, we visited one of the special operations efforts in one of the villages along the Pakistani border, and it was very impressive. Talking to some of the young men who were serving and hearing their enthusiasm for the work

that they were doing was really inspirational. So thank you very much for that.

Admiral MCRAVEN. Thank you, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. I'm pleased to see that the Navy is considering enhancements to the Virginia-class subs. In New Hampshire we pay a lot of attention to what's going on with the Virginia-class subs because they're worked on at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

But can you talk about the work that's being done there and whether you're confident that the investment in that submarine technology is going to be what's needed and what additional capacity that will allow us to be able to do that is important?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Yes, ma'am. So I don't lead you astray, I'd prefer to take that kind of question for the record and then get back to you. What I can tell you, though, is that when it comes to special operations engagement with the U.S. Navy and particularly as the Navy begins to build or refurbish submarines, we are always part of that discussion. So whether it's the Virginia-class or other classes, the Navy has been exceptionally helpful in making sure that new special operations capabilities are incorporated into the submarines, because, as you know, Navy SEALs and some of the Marine Special Operations Forces work off submarines quite often.

[Information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. We will then submit that question for the record and get a more detailed explanation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator MANCHIN.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, and let me just say to both of you, as an American and a West Virginian I appreciate your service and I'm very, very proud of what you do for our country.

With that being said, I'd like to go on to a few things. I've got problems, as you know, with the presence that we have and the direction that we've gone in Afghanistan. I've been very open about that. But with that, what you all do is unbelievable.

What I would like to ask, I think starting with General Mattis, is that, you know, I know that now we reportedly have 150,000 contractors, compared to 94,000 men and women in uniform, in Afghanistan. To me that is troubling. Do you know the percentage of the contractors that would be ex-military? How many of them were in the military, sir?

General MATTIS. I wouldn't even hazard a guess, but I'll take the question, Senator, and try to get an answer for you. You mean of the Americans who are—

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator MANCHIN. Here's what I run into, sir. In the airports I stop the so-called soldiers of fortune, if you will, and I ask them where they're going? They're going to the front line, Afghanistan. I ask them also, I said: How many of you are ex-military? Almost to a tee, 100 percent.

And I said this follow-up question: If it had not been for the contracting that attracted you with the higher salaries, would you still be in the military? Almost unequivocally, yes.

Something tells me something's wrong. Then when I hear people talk about that we're going to be cutting back the Department of Defense and we'll be weakening, and they want to play political football with this—to me, we could cut back on contractors and basically put a certain amount of that towards our men and women in uniform. And your budget, I just noticed, and Admiral McRaven, your request, we waste more money with contracting a year than you have asked almost for half of your budget.

To me, we could strengthen our men and women in uniform, strengthen our military, by basically drawing down what we do and the amount of money we spend on contractors. I don't think that should be a political football. That's just common sense in West Virginia. We say we're going to take care and strengthen the people that basically are on the front lines and not continue to spend so much money in attracting our best and brightest when they get their ten years and, boom, they're dropping over.

I don't know if you can speak on this or not, if you want to some time meet with me privately on this. But to me, when I go home people ask me: What are we doing? Why are we spending so much money trying to rebuild a nation in Afghanistan that doesn't care for us that much and doesn't want us there? We've talked about all of the—we've got more people of our so-called allies killing Americans since February than we do al Qaeda and all the terrorists.

I don't know. General, comment on this, and then, Admiral, what you believe? How could we better strengthen your budget and do the job that we're allowing contractors to do now and do it much more economically? Is that doable?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I will tell you that the budget I have right now meets all the needs for U.S. Special Operations Forces for fiscal year 2013.

Senator MANCHIN. Would that be saying as long as you have the contracting support? If you didn't have that contractor support and we asked you to do the job that maybe they're doing, could we do it more effectively and efficiently?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I will tell you, the contractors play a very vital role and no one should diminish the role that they play. It is expensive, but there are places in times where having a contract force works well for us, as opposed to putting uniformed military to do, whether it's a training mission or a security guard mission, etcetera. There are some places where you would rather have uniformed military than contractors.

So while I don't want to speak to the total size of the U.S. Government's contracting force, what I will tell you is that there are I think an appropriate balance between uniformed and contractors, and the contractors do a good service.

Senator MANCHIN. As a civilian, what I found disturbing is that when I was over there—and I've been there twice now—and I talked to the different military and I said, when are you getting out, when you're getting out are you going to reenlist? No, I'm not; I'm going to go over here and make three times more. Sir, that's disturbing. As a civilian, taxpayer, and a lawmaker, and you go home to West Virginia and explain that our best and brightest are going out because they're going to go right back and do the same

job in a civilian uniform, making two to three times the pay that they were asked to do as the military.

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, we had some of this problem early on within the special operations community after 9–11, where we saw a number of our senior NCOs who looked over the fence, if you will, at what the contractors were providing and decided to kind of make that leap at the time.

However, I will tell you our experience within special operations is most of those folks regretted that move. And while it is only anecdotal in terms of their service, I can tell you the few that did get out—and while we had a trend, we were able to correct that trend through appropriate bonuses and pays—but the fact of the matter is when we were able to correct that trend and we talked to some of those soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, a lot of them said, hey, we preferred to service.

And oh, by the way, when you look at it from a cost-benefit analysis—we talked earlier about the retirement benefits—let me tell you, sir, you're much better off staying in the military over the long haul, because the retirement benefits, the retirement package is very sound, it is very good. So a lot of these young fellows really just didn't do the basic calculation early on.

Senator MANCHIN. Well, as you know, I'm troubled by this. But also, our presence now with the turn of events in Afghanistan, I'm understanding now we have slowed or basically stopped the withdrawal of our troops now because of the violent situation we have there, the really unstable situation. Is that slowing down or are we still on course to draw down, General Mattis?

General MATTIS. No, Senator, we have not stopped it. We have pulled the first 10,000 out. We have the plan coming, I think I'll have it on the 1st of April, for the next 23,000 to come out, which would pull out all of our—

Senator MANCHIN. You're talking about just people, just our men and women in uniform, correct?

General MATTIS. That's correct.

Senator MANCHIN. Not contractors?

General MATTIS. That's correct.

Senator MANCHIN. So contractors, we could even keep the same or beef up?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir, or reduce.

Senator MANCHIN. Yes, I would hope that. But I'm saying that's not been the case.

If I may ask this, General, and then I'm so sorry because I know our time is limited. How many contractors do we still have in Iraq?

General MATTIS. Under the U.S. military, sir, probably—I need to take it for the record, but I think it's probably around 500. They're doing training, they're people who can teach Iraqis how to use the new artillery piece they bought from the United States or the new tank. There are people who do that kind of training.

Senator MANCHIN. Do we have any—I know that we've said that we're out, we've pulled out as a military, we've pulled out of Iraq, correct?

General MATTIS. Yes, sir.

Senator MANCHIN. But we still have contractors doing the job that military would have been doing if we let military in there, correct?

General MATTIS. I have about 200 military personnel there, sir, under the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq. That is a lieutenant general who is under the ambassador. They do the transfer of the actual equipment when it comes in. He has got then several hundreds of instructors, and I'd prefer not to take them out of our ranks. I need them in the serving units.

Senator MANCHIN. I know my time is up, but if I could just finish up. As a West Virginian and the people in West Virginia who support the military as strong as any State that I know of, we believe that we can strengthen your position, the military's position, the men and women in uniform, and by being responsible with the budget, but it would come off the backs of the contractors that we've built up. And I want to make that very clear. We do not, nor would I ever vote to weaken our military. I would strengthen our military. But I would deplete the contracting and the amount of money we spend on contracting to do that.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Manchin.

Senator Shaheen or Senator Manchin, do you have any additional questions? If not—

Senator SHAHEEN. I do, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Sure.

Senator SHAHEEN. I have one—it's not quite 12:00, so come on. We have a minute.

Chairman LEVIN. No, we have more than a minute if you need it.

Senator SHAHEEN. I know. I'm just kidding.

General Mattis, I would like to go to Syria for a minute. I understand there have been a number of questions this morning about the opposition in Syria and who they are. But I'd like to raise a question about the weapons and the stockpiles that are there. Earlier last month, Senators Gillibrand, Collins, and I sent a letter to the administration to raise specific concerns about the threat of what happens to both those conventional and chemical weapons.

According to a recent report, Syria probably has one of the largest chemical weapons programs in the world. So there are two concerns. First is what happens if those weapons are left unsecured? Could they potentially disappear and be used throughout the region?

Second, obviously, is there any suggestion that Assad might actually use these weapons against the people of Syria? I wonder if you could comment on both those questions.

General MATTIS. Yes, Senator, I can. In the conventional weapons, the large stockpiles there are certainly a concern. Out of the conventional weapons, the biggest concern I have are the shoulder-launched anti-air missiles, and you understand the danger.

On the chemical weapons, you're right to characterize it as one of the largest stockpiles in the world. If left unsecured, it would be potentially a very serious threat in the hands of, I will just say Lebanese Hezbollah for example, because they're in close proximity.

At the same time, they're not easily handled. Obviously, it takes very trained troops to do that. So I'm not saying it's a fait accompli that if they're left unsecured automatically someone can grab them and use them. They may end up frying themselves.

But I think that it's going to take an international effort when Assad falls—and he will fall—in order to secure these weapons. I don't think he will use them on his own people, but that is speculation. We have not seen any effort to use it yet, but we're watching very closely. I think that what would stop him would be the international condemnation and probably the call to arms it would bring if he used chemical weapons. But right now that's purely speculation, Senator.

Senator SHAHEEN. Given our experience in Libya with MANPADs, is there—should we be more comfortable that in Syria those are likely to be better secured than they were in Libya?

General MATTIS. I think perhaps better secured until Assad falls, and then we'll have to see if the forces guarding those retain control or not.

Senator SHAHEEN. And is there any planning under way to look at how the international community might address those weapons when Assad falls, in terms of coming in and making sure they are secure?

General MATTIS. I'm sure that would be part of the planning if the international community moves towards taking action. It would probably be a key part of the planning.

Senator SHAHEEN. But there's nothing under way right now that you're aware of?

General MATTIS. I'd prefer to speak privately with you about that, Senator.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Senator MANCHIN. If I could just follow up, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Sure, Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you.

To both of you, I will just say that you probably have more responsibility with your men and women's boots on the ground defending this country than any other branch right now. With that being said, where do you see the greatest threat we have as the United States of America?

General MATTIS. In the near term, sir—and I'm CENTCOM-focused, but I look at North Korea, I look at China, you pay me to be a little broader than just CENTCOM. But my biggest concern is Iran. That is the Nation with four different threats: it's nuclear program, where it's enriching more uranium than it needs for peaceful purposes, and has rebuffed the UN efforts to try to monitor it. They've got the long-range rockets and the ballistic missiles that they can use and hold other nations at risk from the Mediterranean down into the Gulf Cooperation States. They've got their maritime threat, which they've been bellicose about closing the Straits. And then they've got their MOIS, their secret service, their Quds Force, surrogates like Lebanese Hezbollah, that sort of thing that they've got going on as they fight this shadow war.

I think Iran is the biggest threat, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Admiral?

Admiral MCRAVEN. Sir, I would agree with General Mattis that Iran is probably the biggest threat. But I don't think we should take our eye off the ball in terms of al Qaeda or the violent extremist networks that are out there. As you look at al Qaeda's senior leadership, most of which still remains in the federally Administered Tribal Areas, but you begin to see the franchises in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, East African al Qaeda in terms of Al-Shabab, al Qaeda in the Islamic Lands of the Maghreb, and what they are doing in terms of North Africa, and the other al Qaeda franchise movements, these are something we need to continue to pay particular attention to because that cancer continues to grow, albeit at a slower rate.

Senator MANCHIN. I would follow up: If there's support that we should be giving you and the resources that you're going to be needing to meet these threats and keeping America safe, I would hope that you would be forthcoming and probably in that private setting that we could set down and see how we could best make sure that happens.

But again, thank you for your service. I appreciate it very much.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much, Senator Manchin.

We will stand adjourned, with our thanks to both of you for your testimony. In terms of the risk from Iran, I had to leave here for about an hour so I could be with the Israeli prime minister and a number of Senators, and that's what the main focus was of that meeting, as I think it is of much of our concern these days. So your identification of Iran as the great, number one greatest threat we face I think is well placed.

With that, we will stand adjourned, again with our thanks to you and the men and women with whom you serve. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the committee adjourned.]