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Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
UNITED STATES MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Tuesday, September 22, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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Tuesday, September 22, 2015

U.S. Senate  
Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Graham, Cruz, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN McCAIN, U.S. SENATOR  
2 FROM ARIZONA

3           Chairman McCain: Committee will come to order.

4           Since a quorum is now present, I ask the committee to  
5 consider a list of 3,725 pending military nominations. All  
6 of these nominations have been before the committee the  
7 required length of time.

8           Is there a motion to favorably report?

9           Senator Reed: So moved.

10          Chairman McCain: Second?

11          Senator Sessions: Second.

12          Chairman McCain: All in favor, say aye.

13          [A chorus of ayes.]

14          Chairman McCain: The motion carries.

15          Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to  
16 receive testimony on U.S. strategy in the Middle East.

17          Eight years ago -- eight years ago, our Nation was  
18 losing a war in Iraq. Despite the assurances of the Bush  
19 administration, the generals and leaders there, despite the  
20 favorable comments of, at that time, Secretary of Defense,  
21 who said, quote, "Stuff happens" and other equally  
22 ridiculous comments, we were losing the conflict. In fact,  
23 we were at a point where there was almost sufficient votes  
24 in the United States Senate to force a complete withdrawal  
25 from Iraq.

1           And then a seminal event took place before this  
2 committee, a day that I will never forget. On September  
3 11th, 2007, General David Petraeus appeared before this  
4 committee with Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Their compelling  
5 testimony was critical in securing support for the surge.  
6 An integrated civil-military campaign plan that defeated al-  
7 Qaeda in Iraq brought security to the Iraqi people and  
8 created the possibility for meaningful political  
9 reconciliation.

10           Now we meet again. Now we meet again. At a time of  
11 grave security challenges around the world, more than ever  
12 our Nation must be able to draw upon the wisdom and  
13 experience of its most distinguished leaders. That's why  
14 I'm so pleased to welcome back before this committee -- who  
15 has had many appearances before this committee -- one of our  
16 most extinguished -- distinguished leaders. I'm welcoming  
17 back General David Petraeus for his first appearance before  
18 Congress since leaving government.

19           General, it's good to see you. I want to thank you, on  
20 behalf of this committee, for your willingness to testify  
21 today and offer insights from your decades of distinguished  
22 service, especially your leadership in Iraq, Afghanistan,  
23 and as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

24           Across the Middle East today, the old order is  
25 collapsing both the regional balance among states and social

1 order within states. No new vision has emerged to take its  
2 place. And across the region, chaos fills the vast  
3 ungoverned spaces left behind. Filling this vacuum have  
4 been terrorist groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda, on the one  
5 hand, and hostile states such as Iran and now Russia, on the  
6 other. This regional disintegration has only been made  
7 worse by a failure of U.S. strategy and leadership to shape  
8 events in this vital part of the world for the better. Too  
9 often, we have confused our friends, encouraged our enemies,  
10 mistaken an excess of caution for prudence, and replaced the  
11 risks of action with the perils of inaction.

12 In Iraq and Syria 1 year after the President commenced  
13 airstrikes and committed U.S. troops, the Chairman of the  
14 Joint Chiefs of Staff and Commander of Central Command have  
15 characterized the fight against ISIL as a stalemate. ISIL  
16 has consolidated control of its core territories and  
17 expanded its control in Syria. Efforts to retake Iraqi  
18 cities, like Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi, have foundered.  
19 ISIL is expanding globally to places like Afghanistan,  
20 Lebanon and Yemen, Libya and Egypt. This appearance of  
21 success only enhances ISIL's ability to radicalize, recruit,  
22 and grow.

23 The Obama administration now tells us their strategy is  
24 working. Ultimately, ISIL is not 10 feet tall. It can and  
25 must be defeated. However, the current policy does not

1 appear sufficient to achieve our goal of degrading and  
2 destroying ISIL. To put it mildly, this committee's hearing  
3 last week on counter-ISIL strategy did little to alleviate  
4 these concerns. In the absence of an effective strategy,  
5 violent extremist groups like ISIL, al-Qaeda, and their  
6 adherents are expanding across the Middle East, Africa, and  
7 South Asia, including Afghanistan.

8 After 14 years of fighting in Afghanistan, decisions  
9 made in the months ahead will determine whether our  
10 sacrifices were worth it. After pulling out of Iraq,  
11 against the advice of our military leaders, the President's  
12 plan to withdraw from Afghanistan would risk a replay of  
13 that failure. We look forward to your views on this policy.

14 In addition to the so-called Islamic State, the Islamic  
15 Republic of Iran has been another main beneficiary of the  
16 Middle East descent into chaos. For years, many of us have  
17 urged the administration to adopt a regional strategy to  
18 counter Iran's malign activities in the Middle East.  
19 Unfortunately, that has not happened. Instead, the  
20 administration has too often treated Iran as merely an arms-  
21 control challenge rather than the wider geopolitical  
22 challenge that it is. Left unchecked, Iran has stepped up  
23 its destabilizing activities in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon,  
24 Bahrain, Gaza, and elsewhere. Whatever one thinks of the  
25 nuclear agreement, it will not resolve this larger Iran

1 challenge, and will likely make it worse as Iran gains new  
2 legitimacy, the lifting of sanctions, and billions of  
3 dollars in sanctions relief.

4       Into the wreckage of our Middle East policy has now  
5 stepped Vladimir Putin. As in Ukraine and elsewhere, he  
6 perceives the administration's inaction and caution as a  
7 weakness, and he is taking advantage. Putin's ongoing  
8 military buildup in Syria is the greatest expansion of  
9 Russian power in the Middle East in four decades, and it  
10 will allow Putin to prop up Assad, play kingmaker in any  
11 transition, undermine U.S. policy and operations, and  
12 ultimately prolong this horrific conflict. The main  
13 beneficiary will be ISIL.

14       In classic fashion, the administration first condemned  
15 Putin's move, but has now capitulated, agreeing to military-  
16 to-military talks. The first step toward a solution is  
17 recognizing there's a problem. Unfortunately, that has  
18 appeared beyond the capacity of the administration.  
19 Instead, they continue to resort to a litany of truisms,  
20 strawman arguments, partisan attacks, and talking points  
21 that, to borrow a phrase, require, quote, "a willing  
22 suspension of disbelief."

23       In a display of self-delusion that can rival the Bush  
24 administration's Iraq policy at its worst, the Obama  
25 administration now tells us their strategy is working, that

1 we're making progress, that time is on our side, that  
2 strategic patience is all we need, and that we should just  
3 stay the course.

4       When our earlier strategy in Iraq in the broader Middle  
5 East was failing, not so long ago, we, thankfully, had  
6 leaders, like our distinguished witness, who were willing to  
7 face that situation with realism and a President who, to his  
8 everlasting credit, took responsibility for that failure and  
9 changed course. Other American Presidents, including Jimmy  
10 Carter and Bill Clinton, have demonstrated a similar  
11 capacity for change. There's no reason President Obama  
12 could not do the same. No one believes that there are good  
13 options. There never are. No one believes that these kinds  
14 of problems lend themselves to purely military solutions.  
15 They never have and never will. No one expects us to  
16 succeed overnight, and no one believes that America can or  
17 should solve every problem by itself. But, that does not  
18 absolve us of our responsibility to make the situation  
19 better, where we can.

20       Yes, these problems are hard. But, as our witness once  
21 said, they are not hopeless. Now more than ever, we need  
22 some reasons to be hopeful again.

23       I thank you for appearing before the committee today,  
24 and look forward to your testimony.

25       Senator Reed.



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

3           Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4           And, General Petraeus, welcome back to the Armed  
5 Services Committee.

6           This morning's hearing continues the committee's review  
7 of the policy issues confronting the United States in the  
8 Middle East. And your long experience in a number of  
9 leadership positions, both in the United States military and  
10 as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, makes you  
11 superbly prepared and qualified to provide your perspective  
12 on the current situation in the Middle East. And, once  
13 again, thank you for being here.

14          The situation in the Middle East presents a deeply  
15 complex problem set, and it is a near certainty that the  
16 problems that were there challenge our Nation's security  
17 today and for many years to come. And, while our Nation's  
18 military is playing a critical role in addressing the  
19 threats emanating from the Middle East and lasting solutions  
20 will require, in addition, dogged diplomacy and persistent  
21 attention by our Nation's civilian and military leaders and  
22 those of our allies and partners who share a security  
23 interest in the region.

24          As the committee heard at last week's hearing, the  
25 immediate threat confronting the United States, our

1 partners, and allies in the Middle East is ISIL. ISIL's  
2 control over portions of Syria and Iraq provides this  
3 violent extremist organization a base from which to  
4 terrorize civilians and spread its poisonous ideology,  
5 regionally and globally. The brutality of ISIL, coupled  
6 with that of the Assad regime and other armed elements in  
7 Iraq and Syria, has caused a collapse of stability in many  
8 areas and forced millions to flee the wanton violence.

9       The emerging refugee crisis in Europe highlights the  
10 urgent need for the international community to focus on  
11 restoring security in the region. The U.S.-led  
12 international coalition, enabled by the leadership of  
13 retired General John Allen, has brought together 60-plus  
14 countries to respond to the ISIL threat, including a  
15 multinational air campaign to degrade ISIL's capabilities  
16 and programs to train and equip local forces in Iraq and  
17 Syria.

18       General Petraeus, we are very interested in your views  
19 on the value of a multilateral approach to confronting ISIL.  
20 I would also be interested to hear whether you support the  
21 efforts to build and work through local forces on the ground  
22 to liberate and then restore stability to areas previously  
23 under ISIL control.

24       In Iraq, U.S. and partner nations are once again  
25 training and equipping Iraqi Security Forces and helping to

1 recruit Sunni tribal forces to the counter-ISIL effort.  
2 General Petraeus, given your experience on the ground in  
3 Iraq, which is extensive and detailed both as an operational  
4 and strategic-level commander, I look forward to hearing  
5 your assessment of the broader military campaign, but also  
6 on whether the Iraqi Security Forces can summon the will to  
7 fight successfully against ISIL and other opponents within  
8 Iraq.

9 Further, the administration has rightly, I believe,  
10 conditioned our support to the Iraqi government on their  
11 continuing efforts to be more inclusive and responsive to  
12 the concerns of the Sunnis, Kurds, moderate Shi'as, and  
13 minorities. Again, your assessment of these political  
14 efforts would be deeply appreciated.

15 In Syria, according to public reports, the DOD-run  
16 train-and-equip program has experienced a variety of  
17 setbacks. Many observers have criticized this program. And  
18 again, I would be interested in your assessment of the  
19 viability of this program.

20 At the same time, the already difficult task of  
21 restoring security in Syria has only been further  
22 complicated by Russian President Putin's recent provocative  
23 act of deploying Russian marines and equipment, including  
24 fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles to Assad-  
25 regime-controlled areas under the guise of joining the

1 counter-ISIL effort. What President Putin hopes to gain  
2 from this brazen military intervention in this volatile  
3 situation is unclear. And we'd, again, like your  
4 perspective on that issue.

5 The other major issue of the United States in the  
6 Middle East is Iran. Last well, the Joint Comprehensive  
7 Plan of Action, or JCPOA, entered the implementation phase.  
8 In the coming months, the Iranians have much work to do, and  
9 the world will be watching to see whether Iran will  
10 discharge its obligations. Holding Iran accountable during  
11 this phase of the agreement is, I would suggest, one of the  
12 most significant efforts that we can take, along with our  
13 allies.

14 Aside from the JCPOA, General Petraeus, Iran's malign  
15 and destabilizing activities are of critical concern. This  
16 includes the continued support and financing of the Assad  
17 regime, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Shi'a  
18 elements in Bahrain, and Shi'a militias in Iraq. Countering  
19 Iran's malign influence is an area where the administration  
20 has made a significant commitment to our partners in the  
21 Gulf Cooperation Council, among them an increase in training  
22 and exercise programs to ensure these partners have the  
23 necessary capabilities to counter Iranian threats. Again,  
24 your assessment of these efforts would be appreciated.

25 While much attention is focused on the Middle East, the

1 United States continues to have nearly 10,000 U.S. forces  
2 deployed in Afghanistan as part of the Resolute Support  
3 Mission. A critical decision will have to be made in the  
4 next few months regarding the size of U.S. forces to be  
5 retained in Afghanistan during 2016 and beyond. Again, your  
6 advice in this respect would also be appreciated.

7 And lastly, we cannot forget that al-Qaeda, especially  
8 its affiliates in Yemen and adherents in Syria, remain a  
9 transregional threat to the United States and other  
10 interests around the world. Your insights with respect to  
11 what might be done to keep the pressure on al-Qaeda, both  
12 their senior leadership and their organizational structure,  
13 is -- would be deeply appreciated.

14 Once again, thank you for your service -- your  
15 distinguished service, and thank you for joining us today.

16 Chairman McCain: General Petraeus, welcome back.

17 General Petraeus: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's good  
18 to be back.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS, USA (RET.),  
2           FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY;  
3           COMMANDER, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE;  
4           COMMANDER, UNITED STATES FORCES AFGHANISTAN; COMMANDER,  
5           UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND; AND COMMANDER, MULTI-NATIONAL  
6           FORCES-IRAQ

7           General Petraeus: Mr. Chairman, Senator Reed, members  
8           of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss  
9           the situation in the Middle East.

10          As you noted, Mr. Chairman, this is the first time I  
11          have testified in open session before Congress since  
12          resigning as Director of the CIA nearly 3 years ago. As  
13          such, I think it is appropriate to begin my remarks this  
14          morning with an apology, one that I have offered before, but  
15          nonetheless, one that I want to repeat to you and to the  
16          American public.

17          Four years ago, I made a serious mistake, one that  
18          brought discredit on me, and pain closest -- to those  
19          closest to me. It was a violation of the trust placed in me  
20          and a breach of the values to which I had been committed  
21          throughout my life. There's nothing I can do to undo what I  
22          did. I can only say again how sorry I am to let -- to those  
23          I let down, and then strive to go forward with a greater  
24          sense of humility and purpose, and with gratitude to those  
25          who stood with me during a very difficult chapter in my

1 life.

2 In light of all that, it means a great deal that you  
3 have asked me to share my views on the challenges in the  
4 Middle East, where, as you noted, I spent most of my last  
5 decade in government. I thank you for that, Mr. Chairman.  
6 And I thank you for the support and friendship that you have  
7 long extended to me.

8 The Middle East today is experiencing revolutionary  
9 upheaval that is unparalleled in its modern history. At the  
10 root of this upheaval is the weakening or disintegration of  
11 state authority in multiple countries. This has led to a  
12 violent struggle for power across a vast swath of territory,  
13 the competition both between different groups within states,  
14 and one between different states in the region, and some  
15 outside it. Almost every Middle Eastern country is now a  
16 battleground or a combatant in one or more wars.

17 The principal winners, thus far, have been the most  
18 ruthless, revolutionary, and anti-American elements in the  
19 region. This includes Sunni extremists, like the so-called  
20 Islamic State, which is attempting to carve a totalitarian  
21 caliphate out of the wreckage of the old order, and the  
22 Islamic Republic of Iran, which hopes to establish a kind of  
23 regional hegemony.

24 All of the revolutionary forces, whether Sunni or  
25 Shi'ite, are exploiting the upheaval in the Middle East

1 while also exacerbating it. While hostile to each other,  
2 the growth of each is feeding the sectarian radicalization  
3 that is fueling the other. But, none of them reflects the  
4 hopes of the overwhelming majority of Middle Easterners.

5       The crises of the Middle East pose a threat not just to  
6 regional stability, but also to global stability and to  
7 vital national interests of the United States, for the  
8 repercussions of developments in the Middle East extend well  
9 beyond it. Indeed, the Middle East is not a part of the  
10 world that plays by Las Vegas rules. What happens in the  
11 Middle East is not going to stay in the Middle East. We see  
12 this in the global reach of the Islamic State from the  
13 sanctuaries it has seized in the region, in the tsunami of  
14 refugees fleeing the conflicts of the Middle East, in the  
15 danger of a nuclear cascade sparked by Iranian actions, and  
16 in the escalating tensions between the U.S. and Russia over  
17 Syria. And it is in the Middle East today where the rules-  
18 based international order, the foundation of American  
19 security and prosperity since the end of World War II, is  
20 most in danger of coming apart at the seams.

21       International peace and security do not require the  
22 United States to solve every crisis or to intervene in every  
23 conflict. But, if America is ineffective or absent in the  
24 face of the most egregious violations of the most basic  
25 principles of the international order that we have



1 championed, our commitment to that order is inevitably  
2 questioned and further challenges to it are invited.

3 I will focus here this morning on three countries at  
4 the eye of the present geopolitical storm: Iraq, Syria, and  
5 Iran. It has been more than a year since the United States  
6 commenced military action against the Islamic State in Iraq  
7 and Syria. And, while there have been significant  
8 accomplishments, the progress achieved thus far has been  
9 inadequate. An impressive coalition has been established.  
10 Key ISIS leaders have been killed or captured. And support  
11 for local forces in Iraq and Syria has helped roll back ISIS  
12 in certain areas. Some elements of the right strategy are  
13 in place, but several are under-resourced, while others are  
14 missing. We are not where we should be at this point.

15 In Iraq, we have halted and reversed ISIS's momentum in  
16 some areas, but we have seen gains by ISIS in others, such  
17 as Ramadi. In my judgment, increased support for the Iraqi  
18 Security Forces, Sunni tribal forces, and Kurdish peshmerga  
19 is needed, including embedding U.S. advisor elements down to  
20 the brigade headquarters level of those Iraqi forces  
21 fighting ISIS.

22 I also believe that we should explore use of joint  
23 tactical air controllers with select Iraqi units to  
24 coordinate coalition airstrikes for those units. And we  
25 should examine whether our rules of engagement for precision

1 strikes are too restrictive.

2 That said, we should exercise restraint to ensure our  
3 forces do not take over Iraqi units. I would not, for  
4 example, embed U.S. personnel at the Iraqi battalion level,  
5 nor would I support clearance operations before a viable  
6 hold force is available.

7 As critical as the front-line fight against ISIS is,  
8 however, the center of gravity for the sustainable defeat of  
9 ISIS in Iraq lies in Baghdad. In this respect, we should  
10 recall that the cause of Iraq's unraveling over the past  
11 several years was the corrupt sectarian and authoritarian  
12 behavior of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his  
13 government. This is what alienated the Sunni Arab  
14 population we worked so hard to get back into the fabric of  
15 Iraqi society during the surge. Maliki's actions, in turn,  
16 created the conditions for the Islamic State to reconstitute  
17 itself in Iraq, after which it gained additional strength in  
18 the Syrian civil war and then, of course, swept back into  
19 Iraq.

20 The key now is for the United States to help strengthen  
21 those in Baghdad who are prepared to pursue inclusive  
22 politics and better governance, goals that unite the  
23 majority of Iraq's Shi'ites, Sunni, and Kurds. It is vital  
24 that Sunni and Kurds, in particular, are again given a stake  
25 in the success of the new Iraq rather than a stake in its

1 failure.

2       There is, at present in Iraq, an unprecedented  
3 opportunity to support Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who,  
4 with the back of Iraqi citizens in the streets, Iraq's  
5 senior Shi'a cleric, and one Shi'a party, is embarked on  
6 very serious reforms that are being resisted by the leaders  
7 of the major Iranian-supported militias and former Prime  
8 Minister Maliki.

9       The reality, then, is that the challenges in Iraq are  
10 neither purely political nor purely military. They are  
11 both. What is required, therefore, is an integrated civil-  
12 military plan in which diplomatic and military lines of  
13 effort are coordinated to reinforce each other. That is  
14 what Ambassador Crocker and I pursued during the surge, and  
15 all the elements of that effort are once again required,  
16 though it is the Iraqis who must provide the ground forces  
17 and achieve reconciliation if the results are to be  
18 sustainable.

19       Unfortunately, we do not yet have the proper civil-  
20 military architecture in place to support this, though we do  
21 appear to be moving closer to it. Notably, the operational  
22 headquarters for the military campaign against ISIS in Iraq  
23 is based in Kuwait. This means that the U.S. Ambassador in  
24 Baghdad does not always have a day-to-day military  
25 counterpart. I would strongly recommend facilitating this

1 by moving key elements of the headquarters to Baghdad and  
2 ensuring that a comprehensive civil-military plan is  
3 pursued.

4 I note here that I'm very encouraged that the general  
5 selected to lead the campaign in Iraq is the officer who, as  
6 a brigade commander in Ramadi in the fall of 2006, launched  
7 the reconciliation initiative on which we subsequently built  
8 during the surge, leading eventually to what became the  
9 Anbar Awakening.

10 I should also note that, in my view, the commander in  
11 Baghdad should focus primarily on Iraq while another  
12 commander, perhaps positioned in Turkey, perhaps under the  
13 three-star in Iraq, should be designated to focus on  
14 operations in Syria which clearly need greater unity of  
15 effort.

16 Let me now turn to the situation in Syria. Syria  
17 today, Mr. Chairman, is a geopolitical Chernobyl, spewing  
18 instability and extremism over the region and the rest of  
19 the world. Like a nuclear disaster, the fallout from the  
20 meltdown of Syria threatens to be with us for decades, and  
21 the longer it is permitted to continue, the more severe the  
22 damage will be.

23 It is frequently said that there is no military  
24 solution to Syria or the other conflicts roiling in the  
25 Middle East. This may be true, but it is also misleading.

1 For, in every case, if there is to be any hope of a  
2 political settlement, a certain military and security  
3 context is required, and that context will not materialize  
4 on its own. We and our partners need to facilitate it.  
5 And, over the past 4 years, we have not done so.

6 It has been clear, from early on in Syria, that the  
7 desired context requires the development of capable,  
8 moderate Sunni Arab ground forces. Such Sunni elements are  
9 critical for any objective one might have in Syria:  
10 defeating extremists like ISIS, changing the momentum on the  
11 battlefield to enable a negotiated settlement, and upholding  
12 that agreement while keeping ISIS down. Unfortunately, we  
13 are no closer today to having that Sunni force than we were  
14 a year ago or when support for such forces was first  
15 considered, several years ago.

16 The central problem in Syria is that Sunni Arabs will  
17 not be willing partners against the Islamic State unless we  
18 commit to protect them and the broader Syrian population  
19 against all enemies, not just ISIS. That means protecting  
20 them from the unrestricted warfare being waged against them  
21 by Bashar al-Assad, especially by his air force and its use  
22 of barrel bombs. This, not ISIS, has been the primary  
23 source of civilian casualties. It has also been a principal  
24 driver of the radicalization fueling ISIS and the refugee  
25 crisis.

1           The problems in Syria cannot be quickly resolved, but  
2 there are actions the U.S., and only the U.S., can take that  
3 would make a difference. We could, for example, tell Assad  
4 that the use of barrel bombs must end and that if they  
5 continue, we will stop the Syrian Air Force from flying. We  
6 have that capability. This would not end the humanitarian  
7 crisis in Syria or end the broader war or bring about the  
8 collapse of the Assad regime, but it would remove a  
9 particularly vicious weapon from Assad's arsenal. It would  
10 demonstrate that the United States is willing to stand  
11 against Assad. And it would show the Syrian people that we  
12 can do what the Islamic State cannot: provide them with a  
13 measure of protection.

14           I would also support the establishment of enclaves in  
15 Syria, protected by coalition airpower, where a moderate  
16 Sunni force could be supported and where additional forces  
17 could be trained, internally displaced persons could find  
18 refuge, and the Syrian opposition could organize.

19           Now, no one is more conscious of the costs of military  
20 intervention or of the limits of our military power than I  
21 am. As Commander in Iraq and then Afghanistan during the  
22 height of combat in those countries, I wrote more letters of  
23 condolence to parents of America's sons and daughters than  
24 any of my contemporaries. I do not make recommendations for  
25 any kind of military action lightly.

1           But, inaction can also carry profound risks and costs  
2 for our national security. We see that clearly today in  
3 Syria. And Russia's recent military escalation in Syria is  
4 a further reminder that, when the U.S. does not take the  
5 initiative, others will fill the vacuum, often in ways that  
6 are harmful to our interests.

7           Russia's actions to bolster Assad increase the  
8 imperative of support for the moderate opposition and Syrian  
9 civilians. We should not allow Russia to push us into  
10 coalition with Assad, which appears to be President Putin's  
11 intention. While we should not rush to oust Assad without  
12 an understanding of what will follow him, Assad cannot be  
13 part of the solution in Syria. He is, after all, the  
14 individual seen by Sunnis across the region as responsible  
15 for the deaths of some 250,000 Syrians, the displacement of  
16 well over a third of Syria's population, and the destruction  
17 of many of Syria's once thriving communities.

18           Finally, let me turn to Iran. The nuclear agreement  
19 negotiated by the Obama administration contains many  
20 positive elements. It also contains problematic elements.  
21 Over the next 10 to 15 years, the agreement will impose  
22 meaningful constraints on Iran's nuclear activities. It  
23 will also, however, increase considerably the resources  
24 available for the Iranian regime to pursue malign  
25 activities. And, in the longer term, as constraints imposed

1 by the agreement expire, the risk of Iranian proliferation  
2 will increase.

3 The key question, going forward, is, What will be the  
4 relationship of the United States to Iranian power? Will we  
5 seek to counter it or to accommodate it? As the Obama  
6 administration sought to promote the nuclear agreement, its  
7 senior members pledged the former: to counter malign  
8 Iranian activity. But, many in the region worry that the  
9 White House will now pursue the latter, attempting to work  
10 with Iran, perhaps beginning with Syria. This would be a  
11 mistake. To be sure, the idea of reconciliation with Iran  
12 should not be dismissed. But, it is one thing if  
13 reconciliation means that Iran abandons its Quds Force-  
14 driven foreign policy, sponsorship of extremist proxies, and  
15 pursuit of hegemony over its neighbors. It is a very  
16 different matter if reconciliation entails accommodating  
17 those actions.

18 As we have seen in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, Iran's  
19 activities are not only hostile to us and our partners, they  
20 also exacerbate Sunni feelings of alienation and  
21 disenfranchisement, which, in turn, drive sectarian  
22 radicalization and the growth of groups like ISIS. Thus,  
23 rather than viewing the nuclear agreement as marking the end  
24 of a hostile relationship with Iran that will enable our  
25 disengagement from the Middle East, we should see it as



1 inaugurating a new, more complex phase of that competition  
2 that will require intensified U.S. involvement in the  
3 region. This should include several important actions:

4       First, the United States should make absolutely clear  
5 that we will never allow Iran to possess highly enriched  
6 uranium and that any move in that direction will be met with  
7 military force. This guarantee must be ironclad to reassure  
8 our partners in the region and have the desired effect with  
9 Iran. Such a declaration would carry maximal credibility if  
10 issued by the President and Congress, together.

11       Second, we must intensify our work with our Arab and  
12 Israeli partners to counter Iran's malign regional  
13 activities. This can take several forms, including  
14 continued use of existing sanctions authorities against  
15 Iranian entities tied to terrorism, ballistic missile  
16 development, and human rights abuses. It should also  
17 include expedited approval of weapon systems sought by our  
18 partners in the region and greater integration of their  
19 capabilities. And it should encompass additional actions to  
20 demonstrate that the theater remains set with respect to our  
21 capabilities to carry out military operations against Iran's  
22 nuclear program, if necessary.

23       Beyond these actions, we should understand that the  
24 most immediate test for the credibility of our policy will  
25 be what we do in Iraq and Syria. The outcome in those

1 countries will be the basis for the judgments of friend and  
2 foe alike about our steadfastness and competence in  
3 thwarting ISIS, other extremists, and Iran's quest for  
4 hegemony.

5 Mr. Chairman, the situation confronting the U.S. in the  
6 Middle East today is very hard, but, as I observed and as  
7 you recalled, when I took command in Iraq in early February  
8 2007 amidst terrible sectarian violence, "hard" is not  
9 "hopeless." As complex and challenging as the crises in the  
10 region are, I'm convinced the United States is capable of  
11 rising to the challenge if we choose to do so.

12 I ended my statements before the Senate Armed Services  
13 Committee in the past by thanking its members for their  
14 steadfast support of our men and women in uniform. I will  
15 end my statement this morning the same way, repeating the  
16 gratitude that so many of us felt during the height of our  
17 engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, for the committee's  
18 extraordinary support for so many critical initiatives on  
19 and off the battlefield, even when a number of members  
20 questioned the policies we were executing.

21 This committee has also long played a critical  
22 oversight role posing tough questions about U.S. policy and  
23 strategy. I highlight the leadership of Chairman McCain in  
24 this regard for questioning the strategy in Iraq before 2007  
25 and calling for many of the key elements that ultimately

1 made possible the stabilization of that country. The  
2 questions that members of this committee ask about our  
3 approach in Syria and the broader fight against ISIS  
4 continue in this tradition.

5 Again, this committee's unwavering support of those  
6 serving our Nation in uniform has meant a tremendous amount  
7 to those on the battlefield and to those supporting them.  
8 And it is with those great Americans in mind that I have  
9 offered my thoughts here this morning.

10 Thank you very much.

11 [The prepared statement of General Petraeus follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much, General. And  
2 thank you for probably the most comprehensive overview that  
3 this committee has received on the situation. I'm very  
4 grateful.

5 And I would mention, perhaps one of the most admirable  
6 and important part of my experience was watching your  
7 leadership, not only in the architect of the surge, but your  
8 motivation of the young men and women who are serving in the  
9 military as officers and enlisted. Your inspirational  
10 leadership to them was something which I will always  
11 remember with great admiration.

12 You called for, in your statement, what some of us have  
13 been asking for, for years, and that is, the barrel bombs  
14 have got to end. It's not ISIS that's dropping the barrel  
15 bombs. And when my colleagues say ISIS is the problem,  
16 they're not the ones that have killed 230,000 of their  
17 countrymen. It's Bashar Assad. And let's -- and we should  
18 own up to that. And some kind of accommodation with Bashar  
19 Assad, of course, would fly in the face of everything that  
20 the United States of America has ever stood for.

21 So, you are calling for, in your statement, that we  
22 tell Bashar Assad to stop the barrel bombs and establish an  
23 enclave where people could take refuge, could have  
24 protection from the incredible, insane cruelties of Bashar  
25 Assad. There's going to be blowback on that. "Well,

1 doesn't that mean that we're going to have to have American  
2 boots on the ground? Doesn't that mean we're back in the  
3 quagmire? Doesn't that mean" -- I can see the reaction now  
4 from some of my friends who -- by the way, the same ones  
5 that oppose the surge when they're around. But, what's your  
6 response to that, General Petraeus, that this would then  
7 cause us to be involved with boots on the ground and the --  
8 back into the quagmire that characterized our involvement  
9 prior to the surge?

10 General Petraeus: Well, a couple of points, if I  
11 could, Mr. Chairman.

12 First of all, I think very important to underscore the  
13 fact that Bashar al-Assad can't be part of the longrun  
14 solution in Syria. He is, as you noted, as I noted, the  
15 individual held responsible for well over 200,000, and  
16 perhaps as high as 250,000, Syrians dead, and he cannot --  
17 he is the magnetic attraction that is bringing jihadis to  
18 Syria to fight him. And, indeed --

19 Chairman McCain: And --

20 General Petraeus: -- if we are to support a force, it  
21 won't work for us, it won't be supportable if we don't  
22 support it against Bashar al-Assad's actions against it, the  
23 most horrific of which are the dropping of barrel bombs.  
24 And that can be stopped. We have the capability to do that.  
25 We don't have to put 165,000 troops on the ground to do

1 that. We don't have to put any boots on the ground to do  
2 that, although I think, at some point in an enclave, we  
3 should not be closed to the possibility of some advisors or  
4 support elements being in something like that, in the same  
5 way that we have them on the ground in Iraq. So, I don't  
6 see this as the -- entering a quagmire. I see this as  
7 taking out the most horrific casualty-producing item.

8 I think General Allen has said that well over 50  
9 percent of the casualties overall in Syria have been caused  
10 by these indiscriminate barrel bombs that can, at a moment's  
11 notice, drop from the sky. We have the capability to stop  
12 that. And we should.

13 Chairman McCain: Speaking of Russia, I noted that the  
14 Russians have now -- have aircraft that are primarily as  
15 interceptors, not close air support. ISIS doesn't have an  
16 air force. It's very interesting. And what is your  
17 assessment of what Vladimir Putin is trying to accomplish  
18 with this incredible buildup in Syria? And what should the  
19 United States do in response?

20 General Petraeus: Well, first of all, I think you have  
21 to look at this, writ large. I think that what Vladimir  
22 Putin would like to do is resurrect the Russian Empire. You  
23 see this in a variety of different activities. Or at least  
24 the Soviet Union. He has a number of different activities  
25 -- diplomatic, economic, and, of course, military -- in a

1 variety of countries around Russia. And now he is, of  
2 course, in Syria, as well, and trying to revive Russian  
3 relationships with countries in the Middle East.

4 I think the immediate objective that he has in Syria is  
5 to solidify the corridor on the Mediterranean coast between  
6 Latakia, where he has his airbase, and Tartus, where they  
7 have the Russian naval base, the only naval base left in the  
8 Mediterranean. Clearly, he would like to shore up his ally,  
9 Bashar al-Assad. At the very least, he wants to make sure  
10 that Bashar is not thrown under the bus by either other  
11 regime members or perhaps even Iran until at least he has  
12 some better sense of the way forward. His objective is to  
13 keep that naval base, and indeed to keep the airbase that is  
14 also useful for solidifying it in that corridor. I would  
15 think, beyond that, he wants to help Bashar solidify his  
16 grip, which has been challenged increasingly in recent  
17 months by ISIS and then by other opposition forces, as well,  
18 that runs from the coast to Holmes and then down to Damascus  
19 and so that he can at least keep a rump Syrian state.

20 But, again, as I said, Assad cannot be part of the  
21 longrun solution. But, as I also said, we should not be  
22 quick to oust Assad until we have some sense of what will  
23 follow him.

24 Chairman McCain: So, the United States, in the short  
25 term, should do what in regards to this -- in response to

1 this significant military buildup?

2 General Petraeus: Well, the first is, we should not go  
3 in league with this, we should not think that we should --  
4 we can partner with Russia and Iran and Bashar al-Assad  
5 against ISIS. Again, if Russia wanted to fight ISIS, they  
6 could have joined the 60-plus-member coalition that General  
7 Allen has so capably put together, and helped drop bombs on  
8 ISIS. They have some capabilities that would be useful to  
9 that fight. So, this is clearly not what they're up to.  
10 And we have to be very clear in our resolve to ensure that  
11 we deter action by Russia that would involve any of the  
12 forces we're supporting and certainly anything that we're  
13 doing in that region, and show firmly, not provocatively,  
14 that we will not accept that.

15 I might add that this also extends, of course, to  
16 what's going on in Ukraine. I was there a week or so ago.  
17 The good news is that the violence is down somewhat in the  
18 east, probably because Putin is going to the U.N. General  
19 Assembly, then has another negotiating round and would like  
20 to get out from underneath the sanctions that are so  
21 crippling.

22 I might note that I think that Putin is not playing  
23 the strongest hand in the world, although he's playing his  
24 hand, tactically, quite effectively. But, at the end of the  
25 day, Vladimir Putin is going to run out of foreign reserves.



1 He's probably got 200 billion or so left. He will burn  
2 through those in the course of the next 2 years. And if the  
3 sanctions are still imposed at that time, he and the  
4 companies that have debt coming due -- he running a very  
5 large fiscal deficit -- are not going to be able to go to  
6 the world markets and get money to finance their government  
7 operations. So, I think he has, actually, a limited window  
8 of a couple of years to continue provocative actions in  
9 Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Syria, Georgia, and so forth.  
10 And we have to be very careful during this time, when he  
11 could actually lash out and be even more dangerous than he  
12 has been.

13 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

14 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.  
15 And thank you, I think, for calling this very important  
16 hearing.

17 And, General, thank you for your very incisive and  
18 extraordinarily erudite treatment of these complex issues.  
19 It's been very helpful.

20 Just want to sort of go back to the point that you  
21 made. Long term, Assad cannot be the future of Syria.

22 General Petraeus: Correct.

23 Senator Reed: But, short term, you acknowledge that  
24 there has to be some recognition of what the following on --

25 General Petraeus: Absolutely.

1 Senator Reed: -- would be.

2 General Petraeus: Sure. I mean, Syria could actually  
3 get worse.

4 Senator Reed: Right.

5 General Petraeus: And we --

6 Senator Reed: Now, the --

7 General Petraeus: It's hard to believe that, but it  
8 could get worse.

9 Senator Reed: Does that in some way imply that, for at  
10 least the temporary expedient measure, we would have to work  
11 with Assad, with the Russians, et cetera, to create a  
12 transition? You know, your -- you seem to pose this dilemma  
13 as, "He can't go until we know what's following him. But,  
14 he can't stay forever. But, we don't know" --

15 General Petraeus: Right.

16 Senator Reed: -- "where to move."

17 General Petraeus: Sure.

18 Senator Reed: I think that's a key --

19 General Petraeus: I --

20 Senator Reed: -- to the question.

21 General Petraeus: I think actually being seen to work  
22 with Assad would unravel our relationships with our Sunni  
23 partners in the region. And I think it's, therefore, not  
24 something we can do.

25 Having said that, what we can do is ensure that we

1 don't launch an offensive or support an offensive by  
2 opposition forces that could precipitate his departure  
3 before, again, there is some sense of what will follow.

4 As I mentioned, again, this Sunni Arab force that we  
5 need to support is essential not just to fight ISIS. It's  
6 essential to create --

7 Senator Reed: Right.

8 General Petraeus: -- the context within which you  
9 might actually get a political agreement. And that context  
10 is not there right now.

11 Senator Reed: So, essentially what your advice would  
12 be is that this Sunni opposition force, composed of a whole  
13 range of elements with different political philosophies, if  
14 it put sufficient pressure on Assad, could force him to  
15 leave. Is that the solution?

16 General Petraeus: Well, but -- well, I don't know  
17 about "force him to leave." Again, they can force a  
18 negotiated settlement, out of which, I would think, there  
19 will come something that will not include Assad.

20 Senator Reed: Well, let me ask --

21 General Petraeus: Again, I don't see how he's possibly  
22 part of the longrun --

23 Senator Reed: -- let me ask -- again, I think you have  
24 -- because of your insights, you have continually revealed  
25 the complexity of this issue, and let's -- if we could

1 pursue it -- who's going to do the negotiations if we're  
2 looking for a negotiated agreement?

3 General Petraeus: Well, there is the U.N.'s Special  
4 Representative of the Secretary General. He happens to be  
5 the same individual, Staffan de Mistura, who was the SRSG in  
6 --

7 Senator Reed: Iraq.

8 General Petraeus: -- Iraq during the surge, as you'll  
9 recall.

10 Senator Reed: Yeah.

11 General Petraeus: And, candidly, I played a role in  
12 persuading him to do the same position in Afghanistan, where  
13 he was also highly capable. So, he -- we have -- there is a  
14 -- an extant process. I actually am seeing him on Sunday in  
15 New York, just purely coincidentally.

16 Senator Reed: So, you know, in a practical sense, we  
17 should begin to energize this U.N. process as --

18 General Petraeus: We --

19 Senator Reed: -- an effective means to create at least  
20 a forum for negotiations --

21 General Petraeus: Correct. Now --

22 Senator Reed: -- without embracing --

23 General Petraeus: -- I mean, this does exist. It's  
24 been -- it's had -- been halting, to put a happy face on it,  
25 but it does exist, and it is something on which we could

1 build, again, as there is a sense of the context developing,  
2 where those in Damascus are going to realize that perhaps  
3 it's time to cut a deal, and those who are supporting  
4 Damascus in Tehran and now --

5 Senator Reed: Right.

6 General Petraeus: -- in Moscow.

7 Senator Reed: Let me -- you, early on, were advocating  
8 a train-and-equip program for Syria, to get effective  
9 counter-ISIL and counter- -- at least counter-ISIL forces on  
10 the ground. Now, what can we do to revitalize that effort?  
11 Is it possible to revitalize it, to be very --

12 General Petraeus: I think it is. Frankly, again, it  
13 has to. If we cannot do this, we aren't going to defeat the  
14 Islamic State. We've done a great deal with the Syrian  
15 Kurds.

16 Senator Reed: Yeah.

17 General Petraeus: But, you can't push Kurds, there or  
18 in Iraq, farther than the areas that they can hold with  
19 legitimacy. So, you can't push them all the way, I don't  
20 think, to take out the capital of the Islamic State, for  
21 example, and expect them to hold that. It's not their  
22 traditional territory. And the same is true in Iraq. Those  
23 who say, "Well, just keep pushing the peshmerga further."  
24 The peshmerga shouldn't go further. Masuhd Barzani knows  
25 that. I have heard that. And there's recognition that that

1 shouldn't go. So, again, in Iraq there also has to be the  
2 development of this force. And that is moving along.

3 I think, actually, the pieces are in place if we will  
4 resource them and actually make a critical policy decision.  
5 And I think that's the critical element for a Sunni force in  
6 Syria. They are not going to be willing to be supported by  
7 us if we're not going to support them when they're under  
8 attack by Bashar as well as when they're under attack by  
9 ISIS. Oh, by the way, for that matter, Jabhat al-Nusra, the  
10 Khorasan Group, or some others.

11 Senator Reed: So, you think the -- it's been a long  
12 and winding road, but it can be done, putting in the field  
13 indigenous forces, Syrian forces, et cetera. And the key  
14 policy decision is that they would be protected against any  
15 foe that --

16 General Petraeus: Indeed. And taken down the barrel  
17 bombs. If the barrel bombs continue, then the air force  
18 goes down.

19 Beyond that, I think we're going to have to support  
20 some forces that will not have gone all the way through our  
21 train-and-equip program. Again, I think pushing everybody  
22 through that is not necessarily the solution for ramping up.

23 Senator Reed: If the President -- if the Chairman  
24 would indulge -- one of the approaches to taking down the  
25 barrel bomb is eliminating the airfields, although some of

1 these can be dropped by helicopters, so that makes it very  
2 difficult. But, the other is to destroy the aircraft, et  
3 cetera. Is there any sort of -- that runs the risk,  
4 obviously, of some response -- if not by the Syrians, some  
5 response by even in the Russians, at least protesting.

6 General Petraeus: Well, there was a -- it was publicly  
7 reported that, had we taken out the chemical systems in the  
8 redline issue, that a lot of that would have been done, if  
9 not all of it, by sea- and air-launched cruise --

10 Senator Reed: Right.

11 General Petraeus: -- missiles and a variety of other.  
12 So, you don't even have to fly in the airspace, necessarily.  
13 The fact is, we're already in Syrian airspace. We're flying  
14 over it all the time. We've already put boots on the ground  
15 in Syria, special mission-unit boots. So, we have the  
16 capability to do a great deal, and I think we know how to do  
17 it capably and without undue risk.

18 Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Thank you, General.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

21 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 I'm -- I agree with Senator McCain when he said that  
23 it's refreshing to get a very succinct presentation,  
24 breaking it out -- Iran, Iraq, Syria. And you've -- you  
25 have certainly done that, and I appreciate it very much.

1           General Petraeus:  Yes, sir.

2           Senator Inhofe:  One thing we haven't talked about very  
3 much is the refugee situation.  And it's been our feeling,  
4 or at least my feeling for a long time, that until such time  
5 as we develop a strategy in the Middle East, that it's going  
6 to be very difficult to address this.  It's also, as you  
7 pointed out, become more severe if we don't.

8           In January, General Mattis testified before this group.  
9 He said, quote, "We have many potential allies around the  
10 world in the Middle East who have rallied to us, but we have  
11 not been clear about where we stand in defining or dealing  
12 with the growing violent jihadist terrorist threat."  He's  
13 saying the same thing.  We don't have a specific strategy  
14 there.

15          Dr. Kissinger stated before this committee, "The role  
16 of the United States is indispensable.  It's time for a  
17 global upheaval.  And the consequences of American  
18 disengagement magnifies and requires larger intervention  
19 later."

20          First of all, I'd ask, Do you agree with these  
21 assessments?

22          General Petraeus:  I do.  Yes.

23          Senator Inhofe:  You know, I'm embarrassed to say that  
24 if we have a strategy in the Middle East and dealing with  
25 specifically these countries and others, I don't know what



1 it is, because we've been waiting for that strategy. And it  
2 seems to me that you're not going to resolve the refugee  
3 problem, that's a very real one -- here we are, expanding  
4 the numbers that we would be willing to accept. And that's  
5 just a drop in the bucket when you look at 4 million that  
6 are out there, plus another 8 million that have been  
7 displaced within -- are still in Syria. So, until that  
8 time, I don't think that's going to resolve the problem.  
9 Would you have a specific explanation of the strategy of the  
10 administration in the Middle East, affecting the whole  
11 Middle East along with the Syria, Iran, and Iran? Do you  
12 know what that is?

13 General Petraeus: I'll defer to the administration for  
14 that.

15 Senator Inhofe: Well, I've been deferring to the  
16 administration for that, also, and we still don't have it.

17 The -- you mentioned Ukraine. I know this is supposed  
18 to be the Middle East subject, but I happened to be there  
19 right after the Ukrainian elections, with Poroshenko, with  
20 Yatsenyuk, the Prime Minister, and how proud they were, and  
21 how committed they were to us, that they, for the first time  
22 in 96 years, don't have one Communist on their -- in their  
23 Parliament. And then immediately -- of course, the -- Putin  
24 started invading, sending troops in, sending equipment in.  
25 Very similar to what's happening in Syria. Now, you did

1 respond to what they're trying to, I guess, do with their  
2 military buildup in Syria. Is there anything you would like  
3 to add to that, in terms of what their end game is, what  
4 they're trying to accomplish with that?

5 General Petraeus: Let me go back to Ukraine, if I  
6 could, actually, because I think --

7 Senator Inhofe: Sure.

8 General Petraeus: -- what Putin wants in Ukraine is to  
9 ensure that the -- that Ukraine does not succeed. His worst  
10 nightmare would be a thriving, vibrant, prosperous democracy  
11 with free-market economy on his western border. He knows --  
12 he can look at Poland and see what's -- what happened in the  
13 20 years since -- Poland and Ukraine had roughly the same --

14 Senator Inhofe: That's right.

15 General Petraeus: -- per capita GDP. Poland is twice  
16 as much now. Ukraine is still mired where they were. So,  
17 he's going to do everything he can, not only now that the  
18 conflict seems to be freezing, to keep it bubbling, but what  
19 he really wants to do is, again, ensure that there is  
20 failure in Ukraine. And, in that regard, the future of  
21 Ukraine is going to be determined in Kiev, not out in the  
22 Donbass.

23 Senator Inhofe: Yeah.

24 General Petraeus: And there are concerns about  
25 political infighting and so forth. And the Ukrainian

1 leaders have got to pull together and get the politics  
2 right, just the way, by the way, Iraqi leaders have got to  
3 pull together, because the center of gravity, as I  
4 mentioned, of the fight in Iraq is actually not on the front  
5 lines. As important as fighting on the front lines is, and  
6 pushing back ISIS and out of Ramadi and out of Mosul and so  
7 forth, the future of Iraq is going to be determined by  
8 politics in Baghdad. And, as I mentioned, we have a unique  
9 opportunity right now to support the Prime Minister of  
10 Baghdad, who is, a year into the job, pursuing very  
11 aggressive reforms. He's done away with the vice  
12 presidencies, the deputy prime ministers, eight ministries,  
13 and is now asking for examination of the activities of the  
14 chief justice, somebody who was actually a solid, reasonable  
15 chief justice during the surge and a few years after that,  
16 but then increasingly became used, I think, is an accurate  
17 description, by Prime Minister Maliki to go after the senior  
18 Sunni Arab politicians and to support other activities that  
19 ultimately alienated the Sunni population and undid what we  
20 achieved during the surge.

21 Senator Inhofe: But -- General Petraeus, my time is  
22 expired, but here's what I'd like to do. I'd like to have  
23 you answer, for the record -- I go back to Oklahoma, and I  
24 talk to people, and they contend, and I do, too, that we're  
25 over-complicating this deal that we have proposed with Iran,

1 and that you don't really need to go beyond the fact that,  
2 as our -- Ronald Reagan used to say, verify. Verification  
3 is important. I don't think verification is there. So, I'd  
4 like to have you analyze just that part of this proposed  
5 deal. If we have something that can go as long as 54 days  
6 before going in to find out whether or not Iran is  
7 developing some of the things that we think they are, I'd  
8 like to know how that is -- verification plays into this, if  
9 you'd do that for me.

10 General Petraeus: Sure.

11 [The information referred to follows:]

12 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Nelson.

3 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 General, thank you for your service.

5 Characterize, if you would, on the solution that  
6 follows Assad in order to get there. How could we interact  
7 with Russia, in the U.N. context, in order to bring about a  
8 political solution?

9 General Petraeus: Well, first of all, I think it's  
10 just important to acknowledge that there are various  
11 potential options for Syria. One could be, you could put  
12 the whole country back together again and have a  
13 multiethnic, multisectarian, pluralist democracy -- I find  
14 that probably remote, in terms of possibilities -- all the  
15 way to acknowledging that we can't put Humpty Dumpty back  
16 together again and there will be a number of states carved  
17 out of the old Syria, perhaps a Sunnistan, a Shi'a-Alawite-  
18 stan, and Kurdistan. Perhaps more than one. But, again,  
19 none of this is going to happen. They're not going to have  
20 negotiations, certainly unless the individual most  
21 responsible for this civil war, Bashar al-Assad, and his  
22 regime feel that they are threatened and that their survival  
23 is in question.

24 I think if you can get to that point, then you might  
25 have the leverage to conduct negotiations, in which case we

1 would expect that Russia would be on the side of keeping a  
2 favorable regime to them, because, again, their overriding  
3 national interest in this case, beyond President Putin  
4 striding the world stage again, as he did to provide the way  
5 out of the chemical weapons conundrum, is to maintain the  
6 seaport that he has at Tartus, and the airbase in that  
7 corridor that connects them on the Mediterranean coast.

8 Senator Nelson: In your opinion, are we not getting  
9 close to that point, where Assad feels completely  
10 threatened?

11 General Petraeus: I think probably the Russian  
12 intervention gives him a degree of new hope. I think he has  
13 been losing recently, gradually, steadily over the course of  
14 recent years -- or a sense that he might not be able to  
15 continue the fight. But, of course, progressively what has  
16 happened over the years has been that, first, Quds Force  
17 advisors entered to help, Iran bankrolled and provided  
18 equipment and so forth, Russia's provided some of that, and  
19 then Lebanese Hezbollah entered the fray on the side of  
20 Syria, as well. There are also reports of various Shi'a  
21 militias from neighboring countries fighting on his behalf.  
22 And certainly the support from Russia, especially if it  
23 includes a considerable amount of military hardware, will  
24 bolster him further.

25 Senator Nelson: Turning to Iran and the agreement, I

1 read your op-ed with Ambassador Ross, and I find it very  
2 compelling. There are a lot of conclusions that the two of  
3 you drew that I had drawn, as well, in determining how I was  
4 going to vote. And that was that, in the short term, it  
5 certainly is, in my judgment and apparently what you  
6 articulated, in the interest of the United States with the  
7 agreement, but, in the long term -- and you speak in terms  
8 of 10-15 years down the road. Do you want to expand, then,  
9 on your idea? And I'll quote from your op-ed. "In other  
10 words, deterrence is the key to ensuring not just that the  
11 Iranians live up to the agreement, but also to preventing  
12 them from developing nuclear weapons."

13 General Petraeus: Absolutely. And not only that,  
14 deterring, if you will, or dissuading or persuading,  
15 countries in the region that they don't need to go to that  
16 similar point that Iran is, or will be at the 15 year mark  
17 and perhaps beyond, because then we're going to have a real  
18 threat to the proliferation regime that is in place -- the  
19 nonproliferation regime.

20 So, again, the key element here is an ironclad U.S.  
21 position -- again, ideally from both Congress and the White  
22 House -- that states unequivocally that if Iran ever moves  
23 toward enriching to weapons-grade, that we will stop that,  
24 militarily.

25 Senator Nelson: And your other sentence that leapt out

1 at me, "But, verification means only that we catch the  
2 Iranians if they cheat. What matters more is that the  
3 Iranians recognize that they will pay a meaningful price  
4 when we catch them."

5 General Petraeus: Correct. Absolutely. Yeah. Again,  
6 they've got to know in advance. And there are provisions in  
7 this. The snap-back provision actually, I think, is fairly  
8 artful. Again, there are many positive features in this.  
9 The elimination of other entire 20-percent stockpile,  
10 elimination of 97-98 percent of the low-enriched 3.5  
11 percent, ends the plutonium path to a bomb, intrusive  
12 inspections, with some wrinkles, to be sure, and some  
13 challenges that have been noted. But, again, a number of  
14 positive, but some problematic ones, because along with that  
15 will come the release of at least \$50 billion, according to  
16 the Under Secretary of the Treasury, that has been frozen  
17 around the world. And this is for a country -- that's 10  
18 percent of its GDP, just given to it. And, while most of  
19 that undoubtedly will go to worthy programs for Iranian  
20 citizens, there will be a portion that will end up in the  
21 pockets of the Quds Force and enable them to further enable  
22 Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis in Yemen, who, when  
23 they couldn't get their way at the political table, got  
24 their way with force of arms and so forth, and Shi'a militia  
25 in Iraq.



1 Chairman McCain: Senator Sessions.

2 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Senator Sessions: Thank you.

4 General Petraeus, thank you for your service to your  
5 country. It's been so valuable to us. Those who have  
6 watched your career, who have been with you in Iraq, seen  
7 you serve the country, I'm not aware of anyone who's done a  
8 more superior job than you. And my respect for you and your  
9 integrity is unmatched.

10 And Senator McCain, I believe his opening statement is  
11 very important for all of us. I think the questions Senator  
12 Reed has asked raise the kind of practical questions we've  
13 got to deal with. And I believe that, at this point in  
14 time, we, as a Congress, needs to assert itself.

15 I think the first thing Congress should say to this  
16 administration is, "Show us a strategy that will leave us --  
17 lead us out of this morass that we're in." And we don't  
18 have that today. I believe -- and I'll ask you. You've  
19 seen the political world, and you see the disagreements and  
20 agreements that occur. Don't you think it's possible for  
21 the Republicans and Democrats on this panel, in this  
22 Congress, to agree on a long-term overall strategy for the  
23 Middle East that could guide us for decades to come? And  
24 isn't that important?

25 General Petraeus: Well, what's interesting is that

1 this is one of those moments in time where there seems to be  
2 bipartisan -- a bipartisan sense of a need to do more,  
3 frankly. And that includes to define all the elements of a  
4 strategy. As I mentioned, some of those elements are there,  
5 some are under-resourced, and some are missing.

6 Senator Sessions: Well, if we had an overall goal, I  
7 think it would be important to have our allies also join in  
8 that. I think -- do you think that's possible -- our  
9 European --

10 General Petraeus: I --

11 Senator Sessions: -- allies, particularly --

12 General Petraeus: I --

13 Senator Sessions: -- could join with us in a -- on a  
14 plan that we could -- it's got to extend beyond the next  
15 presidential election. We can't change our strategy every  
16 time a President changes.

17 General Petraeus: Look, I -- you know, it's always  
18 good to recall Winston Churchill on allies, and he said the  
19 only thing worse than allies is not having any. And I spent  
20 a good bit of my time in Afghanistan, in particular, but  
21 also in Iraq, doing what might be termed "coalition  
22 maintenance." And I firmly believe that we should never go  
23 it alone if we can avoid doing that, although we should also  
24 recognize that there will be different contributions from  
25 different countries. And, at the end of the day, there was

1 -- there were virtually no countries in Afghanistan that did  
2 not have some caveat of some type. And the art of that --  
3 of coalition command is figuring out what each country can  
4 uniquely do well, where each country needs to be augmented,  
5 frankly, by U.S. assets to enable it to do what it -- to  
6 contribute the most that it can, given the limitations that  
7 it has.

8           Senator Sessions: I think this is a historic hearing.  
9 I remember Senator McCain's reference to your testimony with  
10 Ambassador Crocker. I asked you at that time, and you've  
11 already answered it, about the Middle East, I think, today,  
12 what you said. And we worried, "Could we be successful?"  
13 And I asked you, "Do you believe, if you go to Iraq with the  
14 -- that we can achieve a successful result?" You said yes.  
15 I asked you, "If you got to the point where that wasn't  
16 possible, would you tell us so?" And you said yes. And you  
17 succeeded as you suggested that we could succeed.

18           I just can't tell you how much I value your opening  
19 statements. And I think we all should appreciate the  
20 efforts of Senator McCain at that time in 2007, when his  
21 presidential election -- he placed everything he believed  
22 about the forces and our men and women in combat above any  
23 personal political goals. And I think that's a good example  
24 for all of us today.

25           General Petraeus: I seem to recall him saying that he

1 would rather lose an election than lose a war.

2 Chairman McCain: So, I did both.

3 [Laughter.]

4 General Petraeus: And he -- you know, if I could just  
5 make one quick comment, Senator. It's really important to  
6 remember the surge that mattered most was not the surge of  
7 forces, it was the surge of ideas. It was a change in  
8 strategy. Big ideas are everything. And shifting from  
9 consolidating on big bases and getting out of the  
10 neighborhoods to recognizing that the only way to secure the  
11 people is by living with them was big idea number one. It  
12 was very difficult to execute. It was costly. But, it was  
13 necessary, and it actually did help bring security and,  
14 ultimately, brought violence down by some 90 percent,  
15 coupled with the other big idea, which was, you can't kill  
16 or capture your way out of an industrial-strength  
17 insurgency. You have to promote reconciliation. And that's  
18 why I singled out building on that case of reconciliation  
19 that had been established in late 2006 in -- outside Ramadi  
20 by Lieutenant -- now Lieutenant General MacFarland, who is  
21 actually back in that region and spending the bulk of his  
22 time in Baghdad.

23 Senator Sessions: Thank you for your service. Thank  
24 you for your wise words. And I think it's a challenge to us  
25 to see if we can't, at this point in history, develop an

1 overall view of the Middle East. There's been studies that  
2 show the violence that have been around where extremists --  
3 extreme Islam tends to cause conflicts. And I think we need  
4 to see the whole region. And, within it, we'll have allies,  
5 and we'll have problems, we'll have things we have to accept  
6 even if we don't like. Some things we're going to have to  
7 try to provide leadership on. And a long-term agreement of  
8 that kind among both parties and all of our people,  
9 including our allies around the world, I believe would be a  
10 positive development. My hand is open to try to reach that  
11 kind of agreement.

12 Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

13 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 And, General, thank you again for your service --

15 General Petraeus: Yes, sir.

16 Senator Manchin: -- but also for being here today and  
17 presenting to us. I think it's most valuable.

18 You know, we look at trying to find something that  
19 would resonate over in that part of the world, especially  
20 with Syria being so unstable right now, and our  
21 relationships in that area. You can only look back at our  
22 past performance and find out, you know, and learn from  
23 that. So, you know, when Qadhafi was taken out of Libya and  
24 we had nothing to replace Qadhafi with, we see what's  
25 happened to Libya. We're gone out of there.

1           In Iraq, when Maliki was put in, there had to be  
2           somebody making decisions on this was the person we're going  
3           to put in, knowing he had to be a hardline Shi'ite, knowing  
4           that he would divide up the Sunni-Shi'ite forces there and  
5           cause, basically, the instability that we have. Was that  
6           not considered, or is it just impossible to find a moderate  
7           that can work with the different sectors involved?

8           General Petraeus: First of all, there's been a lot of  
9           discussion of this, and a lot looking back. Ambassador  
10          Jeffrey, who was the Ambassador at the time --

11          Senator Manchin: I might add, so I --

12          General Petraeus: -- has written about this.

13          Senator Manchin: That's the caution that we have with  
14          Assad right now. Everyone's saying, "Who do you replace him  
15          with?" What do you do, since we've had failures in both of  
16          those?

17          General Petraeus: Again, this is -- you know, you play  
18          the --

19          Senator Manchin: Sure.

20          General Petraeus: -- part you're dealt. You can  
21          influence that sometimes. There may have been a moment to  
22          do that. I actually ended up being in Afghanistan during  
23          the penultimate months of that. But, I was there for the  
24          initial piece.

25          We should remember that -- you know, I've been tough in

1 Prime Minister Maliki here, but Prime Minister Maliki during  
2 the surge and, indeed, in the years after the surge, he's  
3 the one who went after the Shi'a militia in Basrah, very,  
4 frankly, impulsively, as you may recall, in the charge of  
5 nights in -- in March. We called it March Madness, in March  
6 of 2008. And it was a very close-run affair until we could  
7 get all of the forces marshaled to support his elements that  
8 were on the ground. And ultimately, it was a resounding  
9 victory there, in Sadr City, in Khatami, in a number of  
10 other places in Baghdad, and actually set the conditions for  
11 a period of relative stability and reasonable harmony that  
12 lasted for several years after that. Tragically, he undid  
13 much of what was done during the surge, no longer honored  
14 agreements that were made with the Sunni population, with  
15 the so-called Sons of Iraq, and so forth. And again, there  
16 has been a lot of academic and pundit discussion, think-tank  
17 discussion on why we hung with him, especially because --  
18 former Prime Minister Allawi got one more vote in the  
19 Parliament, but then just couldn't form a government, and so  
20 there was a lot of wrangling back and forth.

21 Without question, this is something that is in  
22 everyone's mind and in everyone's memory. And again,  
23 certainly the experience with Qadhafi, although I think, at  
24 the point at which we committed to support the upspring --  
25 wellspring of citizens going after Qadhafi, that that,

1 arguably, was the right move. What needed to happen after  
2 that, of course, was to immediately, as quickly as possible,  
3 try to carry out a DDR program -- a disarmament,  
4 demobilization, and reintegration program -- for all the  
5 different militias, try to help form security forces as  
6 quickly as possible. And I think that we have learned some  
7 lessons in that regard so that, when you've got an inclusive  
8 government, that it's supported wholeheartedly and you move  
9 forward.

10 Senator Manchin: If I may, sir, I --

11 General Petraeus: Sure. Yes, sir.

12 Senator Manchin: Time's limited here. But, the Iran  
13 nuclear decision was probably the most difficult for all of  
14 us, not just in this committee, but, I think, in the whole  
15 Senate membership. With that being said, I leaned strongly  
16 toward supporting, because I wanted to work with our allies.  
17 And I always said, if I couldn't go home and explain it, I  
18 couldn't vote for it. And I could not explain to West  
19 Virginians, basically, when they would ask the question,  
20 What happens at the end of 8 and a half to 10 years? What  
21 happens at 15? Because we put them in a position to be  
22 stronger if they had not changed their ways. And, since we  
23 didn't hold them accountable, basically, for their actions  
24 of terrorists, then how do you expect them to change their  
25 ways later on? So, that was the one thing to stop me from



1 supporting it.

2           What I would ask you is, How damaging to our allies  
3 would we have been -- would the U.S. have been if it had  
4 been defeated, if we had not -- those who voted for it had  
5 not voted for it? Would it have damaged our relationships,  
6 since our allies were all saying, "We're going to go without  
7 you"?

8           General Petraeus: Oh, absolutely. Sure. And I think  
9 there are big questions about what would have happened --  
10 what would happen to their sanctions regime. Could you get  
11 it back together? We had kept Russia and China onboard  
12 through this whole process. Does it all become unraveled?  
13 And so forth.

14           And, look, I think the real question -- this is a  
15 reality. Focusing forward, taking the rearview mirrors off  
16 the bus, the biggest question is, What happens after 15  
17 years? That's when virtually all -- there's a few that  
18 linger.

19           Senator Manchin: I got it.

20           General Petraeus: But, virtually all of the  
21 restrictions of the agreement end, and Iran can move out  
22 quite smartly in a variety of different areas in building  
23 its enrichment capacity and other elements of a program.  
24 And that's why it is so vitally important that the U.S. be  
25 very, very clear, crystal clear, ironclad, why the White

1 House and Congress, together, should be very clear about  
2 what would happen if Iran ever made a move towards weapons-  
3 grade enrichment. That will also, again, not only,  
4 hopefully, deter Iran, but also reassure our Gulf allies.  
5 And that's another very important consideration.

6 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 General Petraeus: Thank you, sir.

8 Senator Manchin: Thank you.

9 Chairman McCain: Senator Wicker.

10 Senator Wicker: General Petraeus, thank you for your  
11 testimony.

12 I think we could have gotten a Status of Forces  
13 Agreement in Iraq if we'd really, really tried. Do you  
14 agree with that?

15 General Petraeus: Actually, I -- let me put it to you  
16 another way. I -- I mean, if it goes through the Parliament  
17 -- the problem was, it was not probably going to be approved  
18 by the Parliament.

19 An interesting fact is that I believe we now have 3500  
20 troops on the ground without a Status of Forces Agreement.  
21 So, we seem comfortable doing this now that we really have  
22 to. And, candidly, that was something I think we might have  
23 considered trying, given that the Prime Minister was going  
24 to give his personal assurance, and tested out. There's no  
25 guarantee that having 10,000 troops on the ground would have

1 given us the influence or prevented Prime Minister Maliki  
2 from taking the highly sectarian actions that he did, but I  
3 would have liked to have tested the proposition.

4 Senator Wicker: Thank you for that.

5 I'm encouraged that you're so positive about Prime  
6 Minister Abadi and his reforms, and the fact that he is --  
7 has the backing of Iraqi citizens in the streets. I assume  
8 by that you mean Kurdish Iraqi citizens in the street.  
9 Sunni --

10 General Petraeus: No, I mean -- I mean Shi'a Iraqi.  
11 If you look at the --

12 Senator Wicker: Okay. Well, what about --

13 General Petraeus: I think folks haven't --

14 Senator Wicker: -- the Sunnis --

15 General Petraeus: -- picked up --

16 Senator Wicker: -- and the Kurds?

17 General Petraeus: I don't think folks have picked up  
18 -- well, they very much want to see inclusive governance.  
19 The Sunnis desperately need it, because, without this, they  
20 have no source of revenue. So, those who say, "Let Iraq  
21 break up," by the way -- it's one thing to -- for Kurdistan,  
22 which is largely autonomous, now actually has pretty good  
23 oil revenues coming in, although not enough. I can -- they  
24 are running a deficit, and they still need what they can  
25 get, their 17 percent out of the oil revenues from Iraq

1 proper, which means really the two southern provinces that  
2 produce the most. But, there's no oil or gas revenue going  
3 to be provided for the Sunni areas. There's no production  
4 in those areas. So, one of the really serious problems is,  
5 How would they survive? The second is, Who draws the  
6 boundaries? Where are the borders? I mean, if you have a  
7 state of politics that's so fractious that you have a  
8 population that's alienated, how in the world are you going  
9 to have an amicable divorce? This will be a very fractious  
10 divorce, and it will be another civil war, perhaps, along  
11 the lines of Syria.

12 Senator Wicker: Okay.

13 General Petraeus: So, great concern about that. Abadi  
14 wants to pursue inclusive politics. But, I don't think  
15 people have picked up that there are huge demonstrations  
16 going on in the cities of Iraq in the southern part of the  
17 country, because of citizens who are outraged by  
18 insufficient services, particularly electricity, during  
19 extraordinarily hot weather in recent weeks -- really, month  
20 -- and then corruption. And they are just flat outraged.  
21 The Grand Ayatollah, then, seeing this outrage through his  
22 clerics, issued statements that really encouraged the kinds  
23 of reforms that Prime Minister Abadi has now pursued, and  
24 they are now moving -- each week, he has pursued more  
25 reforms. And, indeed, he knows that the only way to get --

1 to combat ISIL sustainably is to get the people in the area  
2 where ISIS is located to turn against them in the same way  
3 that we did with reconciliation with the Anbar Awakening  
4 with the Sons of Iraq Program. But, of course, citizens  
5 can't turn against a particularly barbaric force unless they  
6 have a sense that they're going to be secured. So, this  
7 will have to proceed. But, to do that, you have to have  
8 Sunni Arab Iraqis who will not only clear, but then be able  
9 to hold these forces, with a considerable assistance from us  
10 in the form of intelligence, surveillance, and  
11 reconnaissance and precision strike assets.

12 Senator Wicker: Okay. So, let me make sure I  
13 understand. That -- this sort of divorce you talk about is  
14 something really to be avoided in Iraq. And you have a  
15 different view about Syria, where you seem to suggest in  
16 your testimony it wouldn't be the end of the world if Syria  
17 as we've known it does split up into three or four --

18 General Petraeus: Well, because they've had this  
19 horrific situation. I mean, Syria --

20 Senator Wicker: So, you have --

21 General Petraeus: -- has gone through considerable --  
22 you can call it sectarian cleansing. I mean, you've had  
23 horrific sectarian displacement. I mean, this would not  
24 have been the solution for Syria 4 years ago. But, we are  
25 where we are with Syria, and you see enormous displacement

1 of different sects. You --

2 Senator Wicker: But, we can avoid that in Iraq, and we  
3 should make every effort to --

4 General Petraeus: No guarantee we can, at all. This  
5 is a -- going to be a very close-run affair. But, we should  
6 try to avoid it, I think. There will be greater devolution  
7 of power. There's going to be -- have to be a different  
8 political bargain, if you will, between Baghdad and the  
9 Sunni Arab provinces. And, by the way, one of the  
10 challenges on the Sunni Arab side is that the Mosulawis  
11 don't agree with the Tikrikis who don't agree with the  
12 Anbaris. So, you even have a fractious situation among the  
13 various Sunni leaders -- by the way, all whom come through  
14 here or see you somewhere out in the region. So, that's  
15 going to be difficult, as well. There is nothing easy about  
16 this situation right now. But, I don't think we should just  
17 say, "Okay, we'll just let it go further," because there are  
18 still mixed areas in Baghdad, there are still mixed areas in  
19 the Baghdad belts. Diyala Province is still highly mixed.  
20 There have been efforts to reduce that amount of mixing.  
21 There has been sectarian displacement; indeed, in some  
22 cases, perhaps worse than that. But, the only way to  
23 prevent that kind of horrific civil war breaking out, which  
24 is what will -- the result will be if there is a  
25 determination to break it into Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdistan

1 -- you've got to get inclusive politics. You, once again,  
2 have to give the Sunnis a sense that they have a stake in  
3 the success of the future of Iraq rather than a stake in its  
4 failure. And that's what they came to feel, back in 2006,  
5 before the surge, and it's what they have come to feel in  
6 the last couple of years, as well.

7 Senator Wicker: Well, your answers are very thorough,  
8 and we're way out of time. I -- let me just ask for  
9 something on the record, because Senator McCain mentioned it  
10 in his opening statement. I would hope that, on the record,  
11 you can give us your insight as to what lessons we might  
12 apply in Afghanistan that we've learned from our experience  
13 in Iraq. That will -- but I'll --

14 [The information referred to follows]

15 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           General Petraeus:  Could -- Chairman, could I make two  
2 quick points on Afghanistan, possibly?

3           First of all, there have been reports recently that  
4 there was a policy or an acceptance of what clearly is  
5 absolutely reprehensible, unacceptable behavior by certain  
6 Afghans with using male, essentially, sex slaves and so  
7 forth.  I was very pleased to see General Campbell issue a  
8 statement today, the current Commander in Afghanistan, who,  
9 by the way, was a two-star in Afghanistan, as you'll recall,  
10 with the great 101st Airborne Division when I was the  
11 Commander of the International Security Assistance Force.  
12 He was also there as a brigade commander.  And he stated  
13 very clearly that has never been a policy, it is not a  
14 policy now, and it certainly was not something that was  
15 acceptable or even discussed, frankly, when I was the  
16 Commander of the International Security Assistance Force.

17           The very first line of a counterinsurgency guidance  
18 that I put out as COM ISAF said we have to help -- we have  
19 to be seen to be helping secure and serve the people, and we  
20 have to help the Afghan forces do the same.  There's no way  
21 that that kind of behavior would be seen as helping to serve  
22 the Afghan people.  And it is absolutely unacceptable.

23           Second, look, I do think that we have to take a very  
24 hard look at our future plans for the footprint that we have  
25 in Afghanistan, recognizing that now there is an Islamic



1 State presence being established there, recognizing there  
2 still is work to be done to continue the disruption, the  
3 further disruption of al-Qaeda senior leadership in the  
4 Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. That  
5 campaign has had considerable -- considerable progress,  
6 success, indeed not only on Osama bin Laden, but, over a  
7 certain period, three number-twos in about an 18-month  
8 period. And that is a very, very much diminished in  
9 capability central headquarters for al-Qaeda, but it has to  
10 continue to be disrupted, because we don't own the ground,  
11 and really nor does Pakistan, fully.

12 Beyond that, we're in a situation where, with a  
13 relatively modest number of U.S. forces providing assistance  
14 to our Afghan partners, we are able to continue to  
15 accomplish the mission that we went to Afghanistan to  
16 achieve. And we cannot forget why we went there and why we  
17 stayed. It was because Afghanistan was where al-Qaeda  
18 planned the 9/11 attacks and conducted the initial training  
19 for those attacks. And our mission was to ensure that never  
20 again would Afghanistan be a sanctuary for al-Qaeda or other  
21 transnational extremists to do that again.

22 That mission has been accomplished, so far, as you  
23 know, Senator. It is now being done with a relatively  
24 modest number of U.S. forces. There still are casualties,  
25 but way, way less for us. In the meantime, Afghan forces

1 are very much fighting and dying for their country to help  
2 achieve the mission that is so important to us and to them,  
3 to not allow the force retake their country, the Taliban,  
4 that did allow al-Qaeda to camp out on its soil and plan  
5 those attacks.

6 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you very much.

7 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator  
8 Donnelly.

9 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 And, General, thank you and your family for your  
11 service to this country. And it is good to have you back  
12 here with us today, and we appreciate your ideas, your  
13 advice a great deal.

14 One of the things I want to ask you about is, you  
15 emphasized the need to work with the Kurds, Turkey, Israel,  
16 and other allies, to interdict Iranian arms bound for  
17 extremist groups. We've had the authority to cut off these  
18 shipments. What are the challenges, and what are your  
19 recommendations, to help finish the job on this?

20 General Petraeus: Well, the challenges have been that  
21 there has been fairly devious and difficult operational  
22 security carried out by Iran when it has provided weapons to  
23 different forces, whether it's Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis,  
24 whatever. We do have a unique situation with respect to  
25 Hamas now that is quite extraordinary, and that is that

1 Egypt, for the first time, is cutting the tunnels and  
2 absolutely obliterating the tunnels that used to enable the,  
3 basically, free movement of goods and -- including weapons  
4 and ammunition, from the Sinai into Gaza. That is no longer  
5 a reality, and that is a major development in that regard,  
6 and a big help to us.

7 Beyond that, I do think we make gains in a variety of  
8 different technologies and forms of intelligence, whether  
9 it's so-called maritime big data or a variety of other  
10 advances that can help us interdict that flow of -- maritime  
11 flow, first, as it has, to some degree, limited the flow to  
12 the Houthis, where, of course, in Yemen, where the Saudis,  
13 the Emirates, the Qataris, other Gulf Cooperation Council  
14 countries are engaged in rolling back the action of the  
15 Iranian-supported Houthis, who, as I mentioned earlier, are  
16 trying to get at the point of a gun what they couldn't get  
17 at the negotiating table.

18 Senator Donnelly: Because I see this as a critical  
19 part of the nuclear agreement that was just put together,  
20 is, what you were talking about, the promise and the  
21 guarantee that we'll stand with them to push back on the  
22 conventional side from corner to corner here. And one of  
23 the areas is Lebanon, as well, and Hezbollah. How do you  
24 feel we can be most effective at interdicting materiel,  
25 missiles, and others going to Hezbollah?

1           General Petraeus: I think what we can most effectively  
2 do is assist our Israeli allies, frankly, with the provision  
3 of intelligence from a variety of different sources. And  
4 they have certainly not shrunk from taking action when there  
5 have been meaningful movements of military capabilities  
6 going from Syria to Lebanon, for example.

7           The concerns that President Netanyahu discussed with  
8 President Putin yesterday, I believe it was, undoubtedly  
9 included a discussion of Israel saying, "We will continue to  
10 take action if hardware that matters moves from, say,  
11 Damascus to -- into the Beqaa Valley into Lebanon  
12 Hezbollah."

13           Senator Donnelly: I wanted to follow up with a  
14 question about Baghdad, where you say so much has to be  
15 determined. When we were in Iraq not too long ago, it was  
16 pretty clear that the Shi'a leadership in Baghdad was not  
17 creating any confidence with the Sunni leaders in the tribal  
18 belt out in Anbar and in other areas. And so, how do we  
19 change that mix? I know supporting Abadi is critical, but  
20 how do we change the mix of so many of the Shi'a leaders who  
21 are tied to Iran so closely in getting some understanding in  
22 them that it's not going to work against ISIS unless we have  
23 our Sunni tribal leaders with us, and they're not going to  
24 be with us until they start to feel that the Shi'a leaders  
25 in Baghdad understand that, give them a piece -- give them,

1 in effect, a piece of ownership of the country?

2 General Petraeus: Well, what's very, very important is  
3 that the elected Prime Minister of the country recognizes  
4 the criticality of inclusive politics. That is hugely  
5 important. It's also important to recognize that the people  
6 right now are quite supportive of the actions the Prime  
7 Minister is taking, because the people are outraged about  
8 the lack of basic services, the corruption --

9 Senator Donnelly: He has a real --

10 General Petraeus: -- and so forth.

11 Senator Donnelly: -- window now, then.

12 General Petraeus: He has a window. This is a very  
13 tenuous situation, because, again, opposing him are the very  
14 forces that, arguably, saved Baghdad when the Islamic State  
15 was threatening it on its -- on the belts. And then, these  
16 are the forces that some people are allied with. And they  
17 -- by the way, at least a couple of these forces are led by  
18 individuals who were in detention, during my time as the  
19 commander of the multinational force, because of their  
20 involvement in the killing of our soldiers. They are now  
21 leading, not only militias, but parties in the Parliament,  
22 to give you some sense of how challenging this is.

23 So, we're going to have to patiently, painstakingly,  
24 day after day, engage, use our convening authority, our  
25 support for the establishment of Iraqi Security Forces not

1 beholden to a particular political party with Iranian  
2 support, and so forth.

3 But, this is going to be a close-run affair, make no  
4 mistake about it. Prime Minister Abadi has crossed the  
5 Rubicon into -- in the form of the reforms that he is  
6 pursuing. Keep in mind that when he did away with the vice  
7 presidencies, he did away with the jobs of the former Prime  
8 Minister of Iraq, Maliki, another former Prime Minister,  
9 Allawi, and the former Sunni Arab Speaker of the Parliament.  
10 These are considerable figures, and I think it was the right  
11 move, a very strong move, but he is going to have to be  
12 shored up in every way that is possible, not just by the  
13 United States, but by the coalition, and, more importantly,  
14 by forces within Iraq that want to see their country move  
15 forward again as an inclusive country rather than one that  
16 practices exclusive politics that are carried out, in many  
17 cases, at the force of a gun.

18 Keep in mind the outrageous activities that have taken  
19 place in Baghdad, where one of these militias just recently,  
20 basically, kidnapped -- I think it was 18 or so Turkish  
21 workers, moved them all the way from Baghdad down to Basrah  
22 without being stopped, and is holding them ransom down there  
23 for some not particularly clear objective, other than Turkey  
24 stopping the flow of ISIS into Iraq. There have been very,  
25 very public threats by some of the militias against serving

1 leaders, including the Prime Minister.

2 So, this is a moment of real consequence, a moment of  
3 considerable drama in Baghdad, and I think we have missed  
4 how significant it is to see this number of Iraqi citizens  
5 in the streets expressing their outrage at what's going on  
6 in Baghdad, a Prime Minister who's moving to take action in  
7 response to that, but very powerful elements that are going  
8 to oppose him.

9 Senator Donnelly: Thank you again for your service to  
10 the country.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Isn't it true that the  
13 major political influence is Iranian in Baghdad?

14 General Petraeus: It is certainly a very important  
15 one. I'd have to think through what other one might  
16 possibly rival it. But, I can't think -- come up with one.

17 But, you know, having said that, Chairman, as you know,  
18 Iraq has never wanted to be the 51st state of Iran and use  
19 that support like a crutch when it's required. The problem  
20 is that, when that support gets tentacles into parties and  
21 so forth, it's very hard to get it back out.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

23 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Thank you, General, for your --

25 General Petraeus: Senator.

1           Senator Fischer: -- service to this country, but also  
2 for being here today so that you can provide us with, I  
3 think, some very important insights.

4           Our approach in Syria and Iraq seems to be that we're  
5 going to be relying on local partners to be the boots on the  
6 ground. Just how far do you think these local partners are  
7 going to be able to take us?

8           General Petraeus: Well, again, they'll go as far as is  
9 in their interest to do so, which is why I mentioned earlier  
10 -- we just have to be realistic about that. That is  
11 reality. That's why I mentioned earlier, we should not  
12 think that the Kurdish peshmerga, for example, can be pushed  
13 much farther below where it is that they are in Iraq right  
14 now, or, frankly, the Syrian peshmerga. Again, you might  
15 get them a bit farther, you might employ them for some  
16 specific operations. They'll play a role in clearing parts  
17 of Mosul, one would think. But, they can't, ultimately,  
18 hold those areas if they are predominantly Sunni Arab. So,  
19 I think, in that sense, we just have to be realistic. They  
20 have a stake, however, in doing, generally, what it is that  
21 we want done, which is to defeat the extreme -- the most  
22 extreme of extremists, the Islamic State, and then also, of  
23 course, ultimately to create a context within which Bashar  
24 al-Assad will be ushered from the scene in Syria, although  
25 it's difficult to tell, again, what ultimate shape Syria



1 will have at that point.

2           Senator Fischer: General Dempsey speaks about patience  
3 and risk, and weighing of the patience needed and against  
4 how much risk we're looking at. How much patience should we  
5 be exhibiting towards our local partners in Iraq and Syria?  
6 How long should we stick with them before we reach a point  
7 where we've assumed too much risk and there may be no  
8 options left that the United States can look at? When do we  
9 reach that point? And is a tactical stalemate where we want  
10 to be?

11           General Petraeus: Well, look, as I said, we are not  
12 where we should be. And the tactical stalemate is actually  
13 a fairly dynamic stalemate. This is not a stalemate that  
14 has, you know, World War I trenches, and so forth. There's  
15 a lot of movement. We are rolling back ISIS in certain  
16 places, inflicting very heavy casualties on them. I would  
17 not want to be a leader in the Islamic State in Iraq or  
18 Syria, because I think it would be very hard to get a life  
19 insurance policy if you were in those shoes.

20           Having said that, there's a lot of reinforcements  
21 flowing in. And yes, we've pushed them out of this area or  
22 that area, and then they go into Ramadi. Or, in Syria,  
23 they've sustained defeats around Khobani, and they go into  
24 lightly defended Palmyra. So, again, this is still a lot of  
25 movement. And ISIS is on the defensive in certain areas --

1 without question, in many areas -- but still has the freedom  
2 of action to exercise initiatives, certainly in some places.

3 The key with our partners is, of course, to be -- we  
4 should be impatient, we should push it as hard as we can.  
5 But, as you know, this is one of those where you can't rush  
6 to failure. And that's, unfortunately, what can happen if  
7 we push it just too hard.

8 Senator Fischer: I believe, in your opening, you said  
9 that, in the future, what will be our relationship to the  
10 Iranian power, as we see this after the agreement, and that  
11 the United States used to be a counter to Iran, and now we  
12 may be looking at accommodating them. Can you tell me what  
13 you feel would be the challenges and if there are any  
14 opportunities to both of those positions --

15 General Petraeus: Well --

16 Senator Fischer: -- if we find ourselves as --

17 General Petraeus: Sure.

18 Senator Fischer: -- a counter or if we find ourselves  
19 as being there just to accommodate Iran?

20 General Petraeus: Yeah. And again, what I said was  
21 that there are concerns in the region that we might  
22 accommodate Iran, that we might work with them, and now  
23 Russia --

24 Senator Fischer: And certain comments --

25 General Petraeus: -- and Bashar.

1 Senator Fischer: -- I think --

2 General Petraeus: Now --

3 Senator Fischer: -- have challenged our credibility  
4 recently, from the Secretary of State, with -- in Syria, for  
5 example, though, as well. So, it goes to our credibility in  
6 the region, too, beyond that.

7 General Petraeus: And credibility matters.

8 Senator Fischer: Yes.

9 General Petraeus: I can tell you, I was just out in  
10 Asia, Mr. Chairman, and Australia, and it's all about U.S.  
11 credibility and what does it -- what does that mean for the  
12 South China Sea? Does what happened in Syria a few years  
13 ago have implications for that? The answer is yes, it does.

14 At the end of the day, if Iran's foreign policy is  
15 continued to be dictated by the Revolutionary Guards Corps  
16 Quds Force and enables proxies like Lebanese Hezbollah, a  
17 designated terrorist organization by the U.S., Hamas,  
18 another one, Houthis, again, with what they're doing, and  
19 murderous Shi'a militia in Iraq, then obviously we have to  
20 counter that malign activity. If, on the other hand, Iran  
21 changes spots, whatever changes its approach and so forth, I  
22 -- by all means, if the conditions change, then we should be  
23 always alert for opportunities to work with what used to be  
24 a former enemy. We've done this throughout our history. I  
25 think the chances of that are not particularly high, but

1 it's not something one can rule out if something happens as  
2 a result, perhaps of Iran being reintegrated into the global  
3 economy and deciding that it wants to be a responsible world  
4 citizen instead of trying to achieve regional hegemony.

5 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir.

6 Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

7 Senator Cotton: General Petraeus, thank you very much  
8 for joining us today. Thank you for your many decades of  
9 distinguished service --

10 General Petraeus: Thanks for your own service.

11 Senator Cotton: -- to our country.

12 In your testimony, you've broken your main areas of  
13 focus down to Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and also you recognized  
14 the interrelated nature of them. I want to start with the  
15 section on Iran where you emphasize that the nuclear deal,  
16 whatever its short-term implications for the nuclear  
17 program, cannot be seen as ushering in a new age of  
18 accommodation or conciliation of Iran's interests in the  
19 regions. Given what's happened in Syria over the last month  
20 with Russia entering the picture, how do you think that our  
21 Arab and Israeli partners in the region view our current  
22 posture towards Iran's influence in Syria?

23 General Petraeus: Well, I think they're actually  
24 waiting to see right now, frankly. I think -- that's why I  
25 inserted the point. I talk to a number of those

1 individuals, and -- on a quite regular basis -- and they  
2 have expressed concerns about the future. And they want to  
3 see us continue to counter malign activity by Iran if that  
4 continues. And we have to be very, very clear about that.  
5 Beyond that, I think, again, the very clear, ironclad  
6 statement about what would happen if Iran moves towards  
7 weapons-grade uranium enrichment after the 15-year mark, or  
8 if they should do it before then, has -- that has to be very  
9 clear, as well. That would speak volumes.

10 Senator Cotton: You helpfully recommend in your  
11 testimony a few concrete suggestions for policy direction  
12 for each of Iran, Syria, and Iran. There is one related to  
13 Iran that says, quote, "additional actions to demonstrate  
14 that the theater remains set with respect to our own  
15 capabilities to carrying out military operations against  
16 Iran's nuclear program, if necessary," end quote. Would you  
17 elaborate on what you mean by that?

18 General Petraeus: Thanks, Senator.

19 Back -- in fact, when I was the Commander of U.S.  
20 Central Command, we developed a plan that would attack  
21 Iran's nuclear program. It was quite thoroughly developed,  
22 rehearsed, and the theater was set. In other words, as a  
23 logistician, as Senator Ernst would appreciate, we -- you  
24 know, we had all the bed-down sites, we had munitions  
25 positioned, the fuel. Everything is there so that if you

1 need to conduct an attack like that on relatively short  
2 notice, you can do it. The theater has remained set, by and  
3 large, ever since. I think there's the possibility of  
4 adjustments now, because some of the countries in the  
5 region, I think, would be more accommodating to basing than  
6 they were at that time. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia foremost  
7 among them. So, again, I think it's time to very publicly  
8 lay out how we have postured our forces -- again, not giving  
9 away major secrets, here, or something like that -- but  
10 ensuring that the region knows, and Iran knows, that, if  
11 need be, we can do what is necessary with our military  
12 forces.

13 Senator Cotton: What message does the absence of a  
14 United States Navy aircraft carrier group in the Persian  
15 Gulf send to Iran, Syria, and Russia, on the one hand, and  
16 the Sunni Gulf states, on the other hand?

17 General Petraeus: It says that there are limits to  
18 U.S. military power. What I don't know is whether that  
19 means that there's none in, not only the Arabian Gulf, but  
20 also in the Arabian Sea. In the past, we've actually had  
21 two out there, at a -- or at least a minimum of one,  
22 although that one might sit off the coast, sort of south of  
23 Pakistan, flying its aircraft up into Afghanistan every day.  
24 And if there's none in either of those locations, again,  
25 that's a statement that there are distinct limits to what it

1 is we're capable of doing, and therefore, there are limits  
2 to what we can do to help the forces in the region.

3 Senator Cotton: Moving northward to Syria, you write,  
4 in one of your proposals for Syria, "We could, for example,  
5 tell Assad that the use of barrel bombs must end, and, if  
6 they continue, we will stop the Syrian air force from  
7 flying." I suspect that he will not listen to us if we tell  
8 him that, so we must stop him if we want them to stop. Did  
9 you propose this policy to President Obama while you were in  
10 government?

11 General Petraeus: Yeah. When Syria started, I was the  
12 Director of the CIA, not in uniform anymore, and certainly  
13 didn't have any responsibility for military actions with  
14 respect to Syria.

15 Senator Cotton: Did you support that policy that  
16 others recommended?

17 General Petraeus: I don't remember a recommendation of  
18 it. I don't remember barrel bombs at that time, frankly.  
19 Again, this is the very early stages, where there was no  
20 Lebanese Hezbollah, there was no ISIS, there was no Jabhat  
21 al-Nusra, there was no Khorasan Group, and there was no --  
22 maybe limited Quds Force advisors on the ground.

23 Senator Cotton: And now there's Russia, with surface-  
24 to-air missiles and fighter aircraft. Could you explain to  
25 us what exactly it would look like if we were to stop Assad

1 from using these barrel bombs or to ground his aircraft,  
2 given the presence of Russia in such heavy numbers now?

3 General Petraeus: Well, I think Russia would probably  
4 get a little bit of advanced warning once certain assets are  
5 in the air. This doesn't mean that you have to penetrate  
6 into the integrated air defense of what might be left of  
7 that integrated air defense of Syria. You can do this with,  
8 again, lots of different forms of cruise missiles coming off  
9 of ships, subs, and planes.

10 Senator Cotton: Thank you. My time is expired.

11 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

12 On behalf of the Chairman, let me recognize Senator  
13 Kaine.

14 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 And, General Petraeus, great to have you with us. This  
16 testimony has been quite helpful. So, I'm going to just go  
17 into areas where I'm confused and I'm really interested in  
18 your opinion.

19 We've had a lot of testimony before this committee,  
20 really over the last year and a half, most recently General  
21 Austin's posture hearing in March of this year, that talks  
22 about the instability we're seeing in the region as kind of  
23 a spiking of a longstanding Sunni/Shi'a divide that is, at  
24 some points, relatively calm, and, at other points, you  
25 know, pretty significant. And yet, I've also heard others



1 say that that might overstate it. It could be more Arab v.  
2 Persian or, you know, Revolutionary Guard v. monarchy, or it  
3 could be all of them together. But, I just would like to  
4 ask your question -- your opinion on this. Do you think the  
5 Sunni/Shi'a divide, kind of the sectarian divide, is  
6 widening? And is that a significant contributing factor to  
7 the challenges that we're seeing?

8 General Petraeus: I think that there has been a  
9 widening of the sectarian divide. I think what you see in  
10 Syria is very much a sectarian civil war. But, I would also  
11 point out, there are also ethnic overtones, because, in  
12 Syria alone, you have a Kurdish -- Syrian Kurdish element  
13 that clearly wants, and has now achieved, a degree of  
14 greater autonomy. And you have, of course, the same in  
15 Iraq. And then, frankly, in some other countries you have  
16 what might be more of a tribal -- or, say, an Islamist  
17 versus non-Islamist, as is the case in Libya, with a real  
18 civil war, but largely between Sunni Arabs, or in Tunisia,  
19 which has been more of a political contest, where,  
20 thankfully, the two leaders of the major parties actually  
21 agreed to agree with each other, or at least not to be a --  
22 opposed to the bitter end, but actually reach some  
23 compromise.

24 Senator Kaine: To the extent that -- so, multiple  
25 factors. And that's my sense, too, from my more limited

1 experience. But, to the extent that some of the divide --  
2 some of the instability is caused by a widening sectarian  
3 divide, would you agree that it is pretty important that the  
4 United States not unwittingly sort of, you know, plant our  
5 feet on one side or the other of a sectarian divide? Sunni  
6 versus Shi'a is not the U.S.'s issue, and we do need to be  
7 careful and just kind of be mindful of not giving the  
8 impression that we're taking a side in a sectarian divide.

9 General Petraeus: No, I think that's -- that is  
10 accurate. And I think all we have to do if people say,  
11 "Well, you're on the side of the Gulf Cooperation Council  
12 countries or all Sunni Arab," we would then merely point  
13 out, of course, that we have supported the Shi'a Arabs in  
14 Iraq, and if it were not for our action, Sunni Arabs would  
15 still be ruling the country.

16 Senator Kaine: Right. Indeed.

17 General Petraeus: A Shi'a-majority country, by far.

18 Senator Kaine: Indeed.

19 Another strategic challenge. It seems like the areas  
20 where we've done best in the battle against ISIL are the  
21 areas where we've worked in close cooperation with the  
22 Kurds. I was at the -- with Senator Donnelly at the Joint  
23 Operations Command in Erbil in July, I guess, and then some  
24 of the activities of the U.S. and Kurds working together in  
25 northern Syria have had some success. But, sadly, "no

1 success" doesn't create some of its own challenges. And, on  
2 the Syrian side, it just struck me as odd that, after a long  
3 time of trying to get Turkey more engaged in the battle of  
4 -- against ISIL, it was -- when we started to do a lot of  
5 work together with the Kurds, around Khobani and elsewhere,  
6 and achieved some success, that Turkey then decided, "Okay,  
7 now is time we want to really participate in this." And  
8 then, there's obviously been tension between Turkey and some  
9 of the, you know, very elements that -- Kurdish elements in  
10 northern Syria that are having some success against ISIL.  
11 I'd be interested in your, kind of --

12 General Petraeus: Sure.

13 Senator Kaine: -- thoughts on the Turkish role, here,  
14 and how we maintain that NATO alliance with Turkey and get  
15 them involved in the battle against ISIL without them  
16 cutting the legs out from under the Kurds, who have been  
17 effective partners.

18 General Petraeus: I mean, Turkey's been an ally for  
19 decades, very, very important country in the defense, first,  
20 against the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union, and continues to  
21 play a very important role. And I think it's very  
22 significant that, again, General Allen and others did great  
23 work to get access to Incirlik Airbase and to get pledges by  
24 Turkey to -- certainly to make the movement of ISIL through  
25 their country into Syria much more difficult.

1           But, clearly there are historic tensions between Turkey  
2 and their Kurdish population. Very sadly, very tragically,  
3 there is now much greater violence as a cease-fire -- and  
4 there are various explanations as to why this has happened,  
5 and whether the blame lies in the capital of Turkey or out  
6 with the Kurds, themselves.

7           But, this another complicating factor, without  
8 question. And I think we saw that the Kurdish Regional  
9 Government of Iraq, which was starting to think that Turkey  
10 would be very, very supportive as they were exporting oil  
11 through Turkey and so forth, when they tried to reinforce  
12 Khobani with Kurdish peshmerga from Iraq, found it very  
13 difficult to move that until the U.S. again offered its  
14 convening authority and brought people together and helped  
15 push that through. So, there are some historic tensions  
16 there, as well.

17           And so, again, the - I mean, the bottom line, as you  
18 very, very rightly identified, there aren't -- there are  
19 sectarian divides that are very, very important, probably --  
20 arguably, the most important, unless you're caught in the  
21 middle of an ethnic divide --

22           Senator Kaine: Yeah.

23           General Petraeus: -- between, say, Arab and Kurd or  
24 Arab and Persian, when that's the most important. And then  
25 there's also a tribal overlay, and even in -- Islamist

1 versus non-Islamist in countries like, again, Libya,  
2 Tunisia, and, frankly, in Egypt, for that matter.

3 Senator Kaine: Great.

4 General, thank you.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Senator Reed: On behalf of the Chairman, let me  
7 recognize Senator Rounds.

8 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir.

9 General Petraeus, thank you very much for your service  
10 to our country.

11 Over the last year or so, Prime Minister of Israel has  
12 come before us and explained and expressed his concern with  
13 regard to the -- what I would call the nuclear concession  
14 agreement which our administration has proposed. King  
15 Abdullah of Jordan has been before us and has requested, as  
16 he said -- first of all, on the day that it was announced  
17 that one of his pilots had been incinerated, he said, "Thank  
18 you for the F-16s, but," he says, "it would be very  
19 appropriate if we could also receive some of the armaments,  
20 which we have been waiting on as a country for literally 24  
21 months." And then, in the spring of this year, Saudi  
22 Arabia, along with a coalition of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar,  
23 Jordan, Iraq, Sudan, Egypt, and UAE, when they began their  
24 campaign in support of, or at least in their attempt to make  
25 headway in Yemen, we found out about it as a nation after it

1 had occurred. Seems to me that that does not suggest, in  
2 any one of those occasions, a deep degree of cooperation and  
3 trust with those traditional partners that we have. You  
4 mentioned the need for coalition maintenance. Could you  
5 give us your assessment on what needs to be done right now  
6 to perhaps begin the process of building and maintaining  
7 that coalition that we've been relying on in the Middle East  
8 for years?

9       General Petraeus: Sure. And some of the elements, of  
10 course, were in my opening statement, where I talked about,  
11 again, first and foremost, reassuring them that Iran will  
12 never be allowed to enrich to weapons-grade, then approving  
13 requests for various weapon systems that have taken a long  
14 time to be approved and wouldn't seem to threaten any of the  
15 balances about which we are concerned. That's particularly  
16 interesting now that there is a convergence of interest  
17 between Israel and the Gulf states, as an example. The  
18 integration of different military capabilities of the  
19 countries themselves -- take ballistic missile defense,  
20 early warning systems, and so forth -- again, this is  
21 something we have been pushing. Secretary Carter has  
22 encouraged, as Commander of Central Command. Again, there's  
23 more we can do in those areas, as well.

24       Again, this is -- really comes down to a question of  
25 whether we'll be there when they need us most. There's no

1 question there have been strains. There's no question that  
2 some of the episodes in recent years have generated some  
3 concern. We have to be careful not to overdo it, because  
4 there's an insatiable desire for certain -- you know, the  
5 requests never stop. But, I think we do have to reassure  
6 these countries, and I've laid out some ways, in the opening  
7 statement, I think, on how we should go about that.

8 Senator Rounds: I'd like to go back to one of those  
9 thoughts, and that was that you indicated we should make it  
10 crystal clear that we would not allow uranium enrichment to  
11 occur with regard to the Iranians' activities.

12 General Petraeus: To weapons-grade.

13 Senator Rounds: To weapons-grade.

14 General Petraeus: Right.

15 Senator Rounds: Do you think that's missing in the --  
16 or one of the items which was missing in the arrangement or  
17 the proposal that the administration has brought forward?

18 General Petraeus: I think we can make it more clear.  
19 And, frankly, if Congress and the White House were to do it  
20 together, if this was, you know, seen as ironclad -- again,  
21 remember that, of course, it's not Members of this Congress  
22 or this White House that are going to be around 15 years  
23 from now. It'll be their successors' successors. But,  
24 establishing a U.S. policy that becomes, again, very, very  
25 foundational, I think would be a very important move. The

1 President did, in a letter to one of your House of  
2 Representatives, Congressman Nadler, lay this out, but then  
3 there was a little qualification later on. So, again, this  
4 is a time just to be absolutely clear, straightforward. And  
5 I think that that opportunity is there.

6 Senator Rounds: I agree with you. I wish it would  
7 have been included in the proposal that we saw.

8 Finally, with regard to reconciliation, I just noted  
9 one item -- when we talk about building and trying to find  
10 those coalitions and so forth, I just wanted to -- a  
11 clarification, and that is with regard to ISIS. Do you see  
12 any reconciliation ever available with those who we now term  
13 as ISIS?

14 General Petraeus: Certainly not with any of their  
15 leaders, middle leaders, or probably the bulk of the rank-  
16 and-file. I mean, this is such an extremist organization  
17 that it is probably beyond redemption. I wouldn't rule out  
18 the possibility of a few misguided souls that want to come  
19 back to the fold.

20 A fair amount was made that I said that we should deal  
21 with Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. I  
22 really didn't say anything of the sort. What I did say is,  
23 we should try to strip away from within -- Jabhat al-Nusra  
24 has had a number of groups that probably would have been  
25 classified as moderate Sunni Arab elements drift to it



1 because it had resources, and they did not, and because it,  
2 probably more importantly, is actually fighting against  
3 Bashar al-Assad, and the forces that we were supporting had  
4 to accept that they'd -- they would not do that, as a  
5 condition of our providing them weapons and training.

6 And I do think that there's a possibility that there  
7 might be some sub-sub elements, and certainly some fighters,  
8 that could be wooed back to the cause of the -- we did this  
9 -- you know, it was not popular throughout the ranks in Iraq  
10 in February 2007 when I said that we are going to have to  
11 sit down with people who have our blood on their hands --  
12 al-Qaeda Iraq and associated insurgent groups. That did not  
13 mean that we sat down with the leaders of Iraq -- of al-  
14 Qaeda Iraq. We tried to kill or capture them. The same  
15 with the major insurgent groups. It did mean that there  
16 were a number of individuals, though, below that with whom  
17 we did deal and did bring them in. Ultimately, you know,  
18 there were 103,000 or so Sons of Iraq, of which about 80,000  
19 or so were Sunni Arab. And, by the way, there were Shi'a  
20 Arab Sons of Iraq, as well, ones that wanted to shed their  
21 ties with the militia, particularly after the militia were  
22 defeated.

23 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 General Petraeus: Thank you, Senator.

1 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Hirono.

2 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Thank you, General, for being here today.

4 The Middle East is an area that is very complicated,  
5 and there's a lot of instability there, to say the least.  
6 So, how would you rank the most destabilizing forces in the  
7 Middle East, if you were to look at Assad, ISIL, Iran and  
8 its malign activities in the region, al-Qaeda?

9 General Petraeus: Well, I mean, they're all sources of  
10 enormous instability and, really, again, problems that  
11 extend beyond the region. The --

12 Senator Hirono: So, would you be able to rank them?

13 General Petraeus: I don't think I can, no. And I --  
14 you know, on a given day, we might be more concerned with a  
15 plot by the Islamic State, which might actually do enormous  
16 damage in Europe to one of our allies, or perhaps even  
17 inspire something in the United States. On another day, it  
18 might be the actions of Iran in providing lethal munitions  
19 to Hamas to rain indirect-fire --

20 Senator Hirono: So --

21 General Petraeus: -- objects on Israel.

22 Senator Hirono: -- General, in the 10 years that you  
23 were -- that you served in the Middle East, then, has it  
24 always been thus there? It could have been the Taliban, it  
25 -- you know, there was always just a whole range of entities

1 who created tremendous instability in that area -- has it  
2 always been that way in the Middle East?

3 General Petraeus: Oh, no, I think the instability in  
4 the Middle East is much greater now than it was, say, when I  
5 was the Commander of U.S. Central Command, from 2008 through  
6 2010. I mean, for one thing, we've had the Arab Spring.  
7 So, it's not just a result of extremist elements, Bashar al-  
8 Assad, or Iran. It is the throwing over of longtime  
9 dictators who did achieve a degree of stability in their  
10 countries, but obviously at such great expense --

11 Senator Hirono: Yes.

12 General Petraeus: -- that, ultimately, the people  
13 rejected them. So, I think that's probably the single  
14 biggest cause of the instability. And what you see then is  
15 groups like the Islamic State and, indeed, in some degree --  
16 to some degree, Iran and others, that are taking advantage  
17 of ungoverned or inadequately governed spaces. I think one  
18 of the lessons of the post-Arab Spring is that if an area is  
19 ungoverned or inadequately governed, extremists may well  
20 seek opportunities in those locations.

21 Senator Hirono: Well, hence your caution about Assad  
22 and, if he were to be toppled, then who would come in to  
23 take his place.

24 There are some who have said that we ought to support  
25 the partitioning of Iraq, turning to Iraq, so that the

1 Kurds, the Shi'a, the Sunnis would have their areas. And I  
2 believe you said, today, that that would be a bad idea. Did  
3 you say that?

4 General Petraeus: I did.

5 Senator Hirono: And do you see any kind of scenario  
6 where partitioning Iraq in some way would actually lead to  
7 some level of stability in allowing that country to go  
8 forward?

9 General Petraeus: It's a wonderful question. I have  
10 no intellectual objection to the concept of a Shi'astan,  
11 Sunnistan, and Kurdistan. I have never had anyone explain  
12 adequately to me, though, how you get to particularly the  
13 Sunnistan and the Shi'astan. Who is it that draws the  
14 boundaries? What happens, in terms of oil revenue for  
15 Sunnistan, which has no oil production in the footprint that  
16 it now occupies? So, again, this is a -- there are some  
17 very serious practical issues here which, if not resolved,  
18 result in a civil war, and you'll have Syria Part 2, except  
19 in Iraq. So, again, intellectually, academically, okay.  
20 Tell me how you're going to get there in a country in which  
21 the politics are so fractious --

22 Senator Hirono: Yes.

23 General Petraeus: -- that the Sunni Arabs feel  
24 alienated from Baghdad. They're not going to agree. This  
25 is not going to be an amicable divorce. This will be a

1 civil war.

2 Tragically, there has been further sectarian  
3 displacement during the latest violence, as there was, in  
4 fact, in the 2005-2006 timeframe, to a considerable degree.  
5 But, they're certainly by no means divided. And again, the  
6 concept for how the Sunnis would survive, how they'd  
7 generate revenue, how all of this would work, I think, are  
8 quite problematic.

9 Senator Hirono: So, would you say that any kind of  
10 movement toward that kind of partitioning should come from  
11 within? It certainly shouldn't be imposed upon them from --

12 General Petraeus: Very, very good point. Indeed --

13 Senator Hirono: We have not had --

14 General Petraeus: -- you may --

15 Senator Hirono: -- much luck doing it -- doing things  
16 that way.

17 General Petraeus: You -- well, I mean, the boundaries  
18 were drawn by outsiders, and --

19 Senator Hirono: Yes.

20 General Petraeus: -- you see them be obliterated now,  
21 to some degree.

22 Yeah. No, I think you have raised a very, very  
23 important point, and that is that, whatever the future is,  
24 it's going to have to be agreed upon or it's going to be  
25 fought over.

1           Senator Hirono: Thank you.

2           Mr. Chairman, I did have one more question, if I -- I'm  
3 running out of time, but -- would you mind?

4           Chairman McCain: Actually, you've run out, but please  
5 go ahead.

6           [Laughter.]

7           Senator Hirono: Thank you.

8           Over the weekend, the U.S. began military-to-military  
9 talks with Russia following the arrival of additional  
10 Russian military equipment, including tanks and fighters  
11 already in aircraft in Syria. And I just wondered, What  
12 would your primary objectives be if you were holding these  
13 talks with Russia?

14          General Petraeus: Make sure that nothing goes bump in  
15 the night, you know, that there's not an operation carried  
16 out by either side that is misconstrued by the other, is  
17 misinterpreted, and ends up in shooting where there doesn't  
18 need to be shooting.

19          Senator Hirono: Thank you.

20          Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21          General Petraeus: I mean, the same as we actually have  
22 ship-to-ship conversations with Iranians. We had ship-to-  
23 ship conversations with Chinese in the counter-piracy  
24 mission off Somalia. Actually, we had ship-to-ship with  
25 Iranian ships that were actually helping with the counter-

1 piracy mission.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis.

3 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4 General Petraeus, I apologize for having to step out.  
5 I've been to a committee meeting, two meetings, and a vote  
6 since then, but I was here to listen to your opening  
7 statements, and I have to agree with the Chair, I think you  
8 did a extraordinary job in kind of setting the stage for the  
9 discussion and some of the concerns we should have in the  
10 region.

11 I did want to go back -- and I do apologize if others  
12 asked you to expand on this; if you did, just let me know  
13 and I'll go back to the record -- but, when you were talking  
14 about proposing enclaves as potential safe havens within  
15 Syria, could you give me an idea of what that would look  
16 like? Over what reasonable timeframe could we do it? To  
17 what extent could that potentially have a positive impact on  
18 the refugee situation in the region? Just give me a little  
19 bit better idea of how that would play out.

20 General Petraeus: Yeah. I don't think I can give you  
21 a timeline. I mean, it's going to start with us actually  
22 making a declaration that the barrel bombs are going to stop  
23 and that we're going to defend what's-ever in that enclave.

24 Senator Tillis: And what statement or what strategic  
25 positions are we taking to end the barrel bombing? I mean,

1 what, precisely, would the U.S. military, and potentially  
2 coalition partners, be doing to make sure that that just  
3 ceases?

4 General Petraeus: Well, you have a policy decision and  
5 a policy statement that says, "The barrel bombs stop, and,  
6 if they don't, your air force stops flying." Our military  
7 can figure out how to stop the -- Bashar's air force from  
8 flying.

9 Senator Tillis: I have another question, and --

10 General Petraeus: Could I --

11 Senator Tillis: Oh, of course.

12 General Petraeus: On the enclave, Senator, I'm -- the  
13 enclave is hugely important when it comes to refugees. I  
14 mean, what's happening is, the refugees are just -- they're  
15 just giving up. And so, they are very much -- they would  
16 want to go back, I think, still now, if there's any hope.  
17 And an enclave gives them hope. Without that, over time  
18 you're just going to see a continued exodus. And it's -- it  
19 is already overwhelming, obviously, borders and countries in  
20 Europe.

21 Senator Tillis: Now, we -- you know, once you create  
22 an enclave, it could, on the one hand, be a safe haven, on  
23 the other hand, be a huge target. So, then how do we -- you  
24 know, we have attempted to train the Free Syrian Army as a  
25 potential -- the original thought was not to put them in an



1 offensive posture, but to put them in some sort of defensive  
2 posture so they, themselves, could create, I guess, enclaves  
3 around the areas that they, maybe, came from, and that  
4 that's not working. But, how do we then make sure that we  
5 have the presence on the ground to ensure the security of  
6 these so that they would be perceived as a safe haven in the  
7 region, versus the mass exodus that we're seeing now?

8 General Petraeus: Well, first, again, there's a policy  
9 decision that says, "We're going to protect you against all  
10 enemies, not just against the Islamic State." And I think,  
11 if they understand that, and if you put a sufficient  
12 constellation of assets over them, that you could do a  
13 reasonably good job with that and equip them with some  
14 radios and other communications devices so that we can be  
15 alerted if they're experiencing pressure. I -- again, I  
16 don't want to make light of this. This is very complicated  
17 military activity, but it is doable.

18 Senator Tillis: Can they --

19 General Petraeus: And, at a certain point, I'm not,  
20 you know, at all against having some of our forces in an  
21 enclave --

22 Senator Tillis: And I think --

23 General Petraeus: -- assuming it's reasonably secure.

24 Senator Tillis: -- you said in an advise-and-assist  
25 role.

1 General Petraeus: That's right. That's right.

2 Senator Tillis: I have a -- shifting to a different  
3 direction -- Iran -- the -- last week, the President doubled  
4 down on his position to now allow petroleum exports from the  
5 United States while, at the same time, the Iran deal was  
6 going to allow Iran to export oil. I think some estimates,  
7 after the sanctions are lifted, as many as a million barrels  
8 a day. It's my understanding they need a price point of  
9 about \$130 a barrel for them to really start balancing their  
10 books.

11 General Petraeus: Oh, I -- no, I don't think so at  
12 all, Senator. Not Iran.

13 Senator Tillis: So, you think it's lower than that.

14 General Petraeus: Oh, I think it's much -- it's a good  
15 bit lower than that, yeah.

16 Senator Tillis: I may have my --

17 General Petraeus: Yeah.

18 Senator Tillis: -- facts wrong. But, just  
19 conceptually --

20 General Petraeus: I mean, they wouldn't sell the extra  
21 million barrels -- again, you're --

22 Senator Tillis: If they didn't --

23 General Petraeus: -- you're saying to --

24 Senator Tillis: Let me finish --

25 General Petraeus: -- for their budget?

1 Senator Tillis: -- the thought process.

2 General Petraeus: I think they're okay.

3 Senator Tillis: Well, let me finish the thought  
4 process, though.

5 For -- based on your military and intelligence  
6 experience, do you believe that the United States being able  
7 to also participate in the global markets and being able to  
8 export oil and other energy products to other nations who  
9 may become dependent on Iran at the same time that Iran is  
10 benefiting economically from it, is also a strategic weapon  
11 that we should be looking at?

12 General Petraeus: Look, this is not just based on my  
13 military intelligence. I'm the chairman of the KKR Global  
14 Institute, and I'm a partner in KKR, one of the global  
15 investment firms, big private equity firms in our country.  
16 And, first of all, by the way, the analysis on crude oil  
17 exports shows that not only would the price of WTI, West  
18 Texas Intermediate, go up slightly so the producers would be  
19 better off, it would actually have an impact on Brent crude  
20 prices, which would come down -- the global price -- which  
21 is a lot of what we refine. And the price at the pump  
22 probably would go down. So, it's --

23 Senator Tillis: So --

24 General Petraeus: -- a very interesting -- if you look  
25 at -- I think it's the CBO that did the analysis of this.

1 One of our analytical organizations here, I think, on  
2 Capitol Hill has looked at this. And it's a very  
3 interesting dynamic.

4 Senator Tillis: And, General --

5 General Petraeus: Beyond that, I don't think we should  
6 get involved in markets, as a country, unless we want to do  
7 something like sanctions. So, again, you wouldn't do it --  
8 if you want to use sanctions or economic tools as a weapon,  
9 fine, but otherwise I think you have to be very careful  
10 about intervention in global markets.

11 Senator Tillis: Mr. Chair, I apologize. I'll be  
12 brief.

13 The 130 number, I think, was the kind of profit they  
14 would have to throw off to also fix their fiscal problems,  
15 versus the actual market price.

16 But, the other question --

17 General Petraeus: Or maybe to do investment --

18 Senator Tillis: That's right.

19 General Petraeus: -- in the fields in the future.

20 There's --

21 Senator Tillis: That's --

22 General Petraeus: -- there's something there. But,  
23 again --

24 Senator Tillis: That's what I was referring to.

25 But, I guess, finally, I'm -- I want to make sure I

1 understand the answer to your question. Do you believe that  
2 the United States being able to extract more energy from the  
3 regions under our jurisdiction, and provide that energy, is  
4 a part of a strategic play to hedge against Iran's ability  
5 to go out, make more money, fund more malign activities, do  
6 more of the bad things they're already doing?

7 General Petraeus: Look, we ought to produce all the  
8 oil and gas that we can, if we're making a profit. If we  
9 can enable countries like Iraq to revive their oil industry  
10 as we did, it helps Iraq, it funds their government. By the  
11 way, they're running a fiscal deficit now.

12 But, again, we -- this is really about market forces, I  
13 think, much more than getting involved in this as a country.  
14 The fact is that the energy markets right now, because of  
15 the U.S. shale gale, the oil energy revolution so far, most  
16 significant with crude oil in the global markets, and next  
17 -- by the way, the next big disruption is going to be in the  
18 liquified natural gas markets because of the approval now of  
19 whatever it is, six or seven LNG plants for the United  
20 States -- they'll be -- and that's going to be a huge  
21 challenge for President Putin. And, as I mentioned earlier,  
22 Putin's hand is getting weaker. He's running enormous  
23 deficits, he's carrying out very costly adventures outside  
24 his country, he's got a limited amount of foreign reserves  
25 left to fund this, and he doesn't have access to the global

1 markets, because of the sanctions on him and on the major --  
2 many of his major banks. So, I think he's got problems down  
3 the road. And, oh, by the way, when our LNG hits European  
4 markets, just as Australian LNG is hitting Asian markets,  
5 you're going to see a compression of natural gas prices,  
6 even though he's selling it off the pipeline and we'll have  
7 had to liquefy, ship, and regasify.

8 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen.

9 Senator Shaheen: General Petraeus, thank you for being  
10 here and for your insights into what's happening in the  
11 Middle East.

12 I know -- last week General Austin was here, and he got  
13 questioned by a number of members of this committee about  
14 the train-and-equip mission. And, unfortunately, what he  
15 had to say about that mission suggests to me, and I think to  
16 others on the committee, that it has not accomplished what  
17 it was supposed to. And I -- my recollection is that you  
18 advocated for a similar kind of mission -- early, before it  
19 actually started. And I wonder if you have thoughts about  
20 what can be done at this point. I think, as it has been  
21 operating, it has not been successful. So, what should we  
22 be doing? Is there any way to right it? Should we just  
23 abandon it and go on to --

24 General Petraeus: Look --

25 Senator Shaheen: -- other areas?

1           General Petraeus: First of all, you can't abandon it,  
2 because anything we want to accomplish in Syria has to be  
3 enabled by a Sunni Arab force on the ground, whether it's  
4 the defeat of the Islamic State or creating a context within  
5 which the Bashar al-Assad regime might be willing to go to  
6 the negotiating table, or stemming the flow, the exodus, of  
7 refugees from Syria that is overflowing European countries.

8           Senator Shaheen: So, how --

9           General Petraeus: I think the central --

10          Senator Shaheen: -- do we make it work?

11          General Petraeus: -- the central issue is that we have  
12 to pledge, and then take action, to support these fighters  
13 against anybody who comes at them, whether it's ISIS, which  
14 we want them to fight, or Bashar al-Assad or Jabhat al-Nusra  
15 or even other elements. So, again, we're going to have to  
16 support them against all of these. They want to fight  
17 Bashar. We've at least got to enable them to fight Bashar's  
18 forces in a local way, without, as I mentioned in my  
19 statement, creating the conditions where Bashar goes before  
20 we have a sense of what it is that we want to see follow him  
21 or what will follow him.

22          Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

23          In your testimony, you talked about establishing  
24 enclaves in Syria that would be protected, which I  
25 interpreted as what's normally described as safe zones. Is

1 that what you're -- you were suggesting by the enclaves you  
2 were talking about?

3 General Petraeus: Save havens, I think, it --

4 Senator Shaheen: I had a -- last --

5 General Petraeus: And, by the way, they can be in the  
6 south as well as the north. I mean, and actually there's a  
7 reasonable one in the south, I think, arguably, contiguous  
8 to Jordan.

9 Senator Shaheen: Well, last week we heard, at the  
10 Foreign Relations Committee, from Michael Powers, who -- of  
11 Mercy Corps, which has done a lot of work -- humanitarian  
12 work in Syria. And he expressed grave concerns about  
13 establishing safe zones. He suggested that it would be very  
14 difficult to keep them actually safe without a lot of  
15 investment of additional airpower and troops. He also  
16 thought they could become a target for extremists and that  
17 they could be used by some countries as an excuse to reject  
18 refugees. So, how does your proposal suggest we address  
19 those issues --

20 General Petraeus: Well, we're going to defend it. I  
21 mean, we have to make very -- what he's saying -- you just  
22 can't declare something a safe zone and expect everybody to  
23 honor that. We would have to -- again, this is the key.  
24 The forces that we support aren't going to stay supportable.  
25 They won't even stay alive, as we have seen, if we don't



1 take very active measures, have a credible campaign for them  
2 to pursue. And part of that campaign should be establishing  
3 enclaves. That's -- I don't really like the word "safe  
4 zones." There's nothing safe about a safe zone, unless  
5 you're going to defend it. And the people on the ground  
6 will judge whether or not you're doing that, and they'll  
7 vote with their feet whether they're willing to stay or even  
8 come back or depart with all -- a number of the others.

9         So, we would have to invest in supporting that zone.  
10 It doesn't mean, I don't think, that you have to have our  
11 boots on the ground in that enclave. Although, again, at  
12 some point, security is adequate, I would be comfortable  
13 doing that, just as we were comfortable doing it in Iraq.

14         Senator Shaheen: Finally, one of the things that I  
15 think we have not done as successfully as we need to is to  
16 counter the ISIL propoganda. And do you have thoughts about  
17 how we could be better responding?

18         General Petraeus: This is a really, really difficult  
19 problem because of the magnitude of it, the sheer number,  
20 the way that machines are used to amplify, to magnify. I  
21 think we've got to get smarter about that. I've talked to  
22 people at Google Ideas, for example, about various  
23 techniques that could be used on our side in the same way  
24 that they're used on their side. We did have a program at  
25 CENTCOM during part of the time that I was the Commander,

1 where we had what we termed "credible voices." These were  
2 native speakers, sometimes dialect speakers, with academic  
3 training in various religious disciplines and so forth. And  
4 they were quite effective. The problem is that it's very  
5 costly. And again, whether that effect is really measurable  
6 is something that could be debated.

7 So, I think we do have to partner more effectively with  
8 those that really understand the technology. And then we  
9 have to activate those who are willing to engage in this. I  
10 don't know that it can, by any means, be all government. I  
11 just don't think we can generate the critical mass that  
12 would be sufficient for this task.

13 Senator Shaheen: My time is up, but should it be  
14 spearheaded by CENTCOM or by State Department? Or  
15 coordinated --

16 General Petraeus: The problem with it being  
17 spearheaded by State Department can be best explained by an  
18 episode when I was the CENTCOM Commander and the Under  
19 Secretary of State, high-ranking government official, came  
20 to CENTCOM to ask, I think, for \$1- or \$2 million for --  
21 from us, which we provided, somehow, to help them with their  
22 program. So, it's -- State Department has never been  
23 adequately funded. I don't know if Senator Graham is here.  
24 He would -- he's the subcommittee chair, I think, still --

25 Senator Shaheen: Right. He is.

1           General Petraeus:  -- of the key committee, and has  
2           generally agreed with that.  But, we have always called for  
3           State and AID to do more, and more and more, and yet we have  
4           not given them the appropriations, nor, in some cases, the  
5           authorization to do that.

6           Senator Shaheen:  Thank you.

7           Chairman McCain:  Senator Ernst.

8           Senator Ernst:  Thank you, Admiral McCain.

9           [Laughter.]

10          Senator Ernst:  General Petraeus, thank you for  
11          appearing in front of the committee today.

12          And I think you can see, from the attendance at this  
13          committee today, that your opinions and your thoughts are  
14          very highly valued.  So, thank you for sharing with us --

15          General Petraeus:  Thank you.

16          Senator Ernst:  -- today your thoughts.

17          I would like to go back to the Kurds a little bit.  I  
18          think we've talked a lot about it, and everybody's asked  
19          questions, but maybe not in all manners.  So, the Kurds have  
20          been a great ally to us.  And I've heard that from many of  
21          the men and women that have served in that region.  They've  
22          been a great partner for 25 years or so.  And they have a  
23          healthy respect for the rule of law.  They've been very  
24          helpful with a number of minorities -- ethnic minorities,  
25          religious minorities.  And what can we do to better provide

1 support for the Kurdish regional government, the Kurdish  
2 peshmerga? I believe we need to double down in this effort,  
3 regardless of whether they may push beyond their regional  
4 boundaries. But, they do provide an area, whether we can  
5 engage them in shaping operations, whether it is to provide  
6 an area for us to base -- can you give us some thoughts?

7 General Petraeus: I --

8 Senator Ernst: The advantages --

9 General Petraeus: I can. The fact is, we are based  
10 there. As you know, we have headquarters, we have  
11 operational headquarters, we have very close relationships.  
12 In both my military and intel lives, we were very, very  
13 closely linked.

14 I think the single biggest issues are the provision of  
15 weapons and other supplies, to streamline that. You know,  
16 I've said we have to support Prime Minister Abadi. We need  
17 to strengthen him. That means we can't bypass him on these  
18 issues. But, we need to figure out how to get this so that,  
19 ideally, it doesn't have to touch down in Baghdad, it can go  
20 directly to them. Some coalition members are doing that, I  
21 think, actually, with --

22 Senator Ernst: They are, correct.

23 General Petraeus: -- our tacit approval, if not  
24 applause. I think that's the single biggest step that we  
25 could take, and to look very carefully at what it is we're

1 providing. And there are some additional items -- again, I  
2 was in -- happened to be there for a conference in  
3 Sulaymaniyah, back in the earlier part of this year, and had  
4 a lot of people come and plead that particular case.

5         The other is to determine -- you know, the KRG, the  
6 Kurdish Regional Government, is in very, very difficult  
7 financial times right now because of the price of oil going  
8 down by 55 percent. It's not only reduced what they get,  
9 but it's reduced the amount from which the 17 percent that  
10 they get from the central government is. And so, they're  
11 having a very difficult time. They're supporting hundreds  
12 of thousands of refugees on their soil. Anybody who goes up  
13 there and flies over this will see a camp every few  
14 kilometers. And, indeed, they're fighting a war. And  
15 again, if we could provide additional assistance to them  
16 that would be of support, I think that would be very  
17 valuable, also.

18         We have very much enabled them. We helped them hold  
19 off -- had it not been for decisive action, actually, at a  
20 critical moment last year, it's very possible that the  
21 Islamic State might have gotten closer to the capital of  
22 Erbil. That held that off, and then has really retaken most  
23 of the area around the Kurdish Regional Government. And,  
24 candidly, there are no more disputed internal boundary areas  
25 in Iraq. They are generally controlled by the Kurdish

1 Regional Government as a result of the operations that have  
2 taken place with our support.

3 Senator Ernst: Very good. I appreciate those thoughts  
4 very much. I would tend to agree.

5 I would love to see more assistance going to the KRG,  
6 of course, in consultation with the Iraqi government. I  
7 applaud you on that, as well.

8 If we could turn to Turkey, just very briefly, we've  
9 talked a little bit about the fact that they have mobilized.  
10 And, unfortunately, what we have seen is that, through their  
11 mobilization of resources, whether it's political, military,  
12 instead of really pushing back against ISIS, we see there's  
13 been a turn to mobilize against PKK. And what do you see  
14 the impact is to those coalition forces, the anti-ISIS  
15 coalition forces? And what are the greater implications of  
16 that, and thoughts, maybe, from some of those coalition  
17 members?

18 General Petraeus: I don't know that this has a huge  
19 effect on U.S. or coalition forces. They're not being  
20 diverted to assist. There's a certain -- slight degree of  
21 support that we have provided in the past in the  
22 intelligence realm that I don't imagine has changed a great  
23 deal. What I think is very significant is what's happening  
24 within Turkey as a result of this. The sheer escalation of  
25 the violence, a situation that was relatively calm and

1     seemed to be heading toward one in which there was greater  
2     and greater reconciliation between the government in Ankara  
3     and the sizable part of their population in Turkey that is  
4     Kurdish, with the allowance of certain -- meeting certain  
5     desires of that Kurdish population. And all of a sudden,  
6     the wheels have come off the bus. And whether this is  
7     connected with a future election in Turkey or something  
8     else, it is very distressing to see, because, again, the  
9     violence on both sides now has escalated very, very rapidly  
10    and quite considerably.

11           Senator Ernst: Great. Thank you.

12           My time is expired. Thank you, General.

13           Thank you, Admiral.

14           Chairman McCain: Senator King.

15           Senator King: General, first, courage is an element of  
16    character. And courage to admit mistakes, particularly in  
17    an open forum such as you did at the beginning of your  
18    testimony today, to me is a huge indicator of character,  
19    which I think is the essential quality of leadership. And I  
20    want to compliment and acknowledge that you did something  
21    that wasn't easy this morning. And it's very meaningful.

22           Question about Russia and Syria. The recent buildup of  
23    Russian troops, of course, is very worrisome. On the other  
24    hand, Russia was -- you should pardon the expression -- an  
25    ally when it came to getting rid of the chemical weapons.

1 Is there a geopolitical opportunity where Russia may  
2 recognize the danger of ISIS to them, to Chechnya and to the  
3 -- that ideology -- and there could be common cause with  
4 them, not to dump Assad precipitously, but to work on a  
5 negotiated agreement, where Assad would be moved aside?  
6 Because Assad is ISIS's evil twin. He brought them into  
7 being.

8 General Petraeus: Exactly. And continues to inspire  
9 the recruiting and the -- it's a magnetic attraction.

10 Senator King: Exactly. So, talk to me about the  
11 possibility of talks with the Russians seeing -- I believe  
12 countries act in their interests. And, in this case, they  
13 have an interest in not seeing ISIS metamorphose into  
14 terrorism in their country. Do -- is there an opportunity  
15 here for working in concert with the Russians to move Assad  
16 aside, perhaps guaranteeing their presence? You mentioned  
17 the bases on the Mediterranean.

18 General Petraeus: This is not something I'd rule out  
19 at all, Senator. I think, again, there's no question they  
20 have an interest. They're worried about the effect on -- in  
21 the Caucasus. There are Chechens that are down, fighting,  
22 without question, in Syria. There's a worry, of course,  
23 they'll go back, presumably, and be more effective. So, the  
24 problem is, if they had wanted to have done this, if that  
25 was really their goal in life, they could have contacted the



1 coalition of more than 60 countries and said, "Where could  
2 you bed down our aircraft? How can you integrate us into  
3 the air tasking order? We'd like to drop bombs on ISIS,  
4 just like you guys."

5 Senator King: It appears --

6 General Petraeus: And, of course --

7 Senator King: -- that these recent moves, they've  
8 simply said, "We're going to shore up Assad, no matter  
9 what."

10 General Petraeus: It -- well, it's really -- again,  
11 you -- you're right. This is about national interest, and  
12 their national interest is to preserve the naval base that  
13 they have at -- in Tartus, down --

14 Senator King: So, perhaps there's a way to --

15 General Petraeus: -- down on the coast --

16 Senator King: Perhaps there's a way to assure --

17 General Petraeus: -- and then Latakia, the airbase.

18 Senator King: Perhaps there's a way to assure that  
19 without necessarily guaranteeing the presence of Assad.

20 General Petraeus: There could be, at some point.

21 Again, if there are serious negotiations. It's not the kind  
22 of thing that you would just rule out unequivocally. The --  
23 this is real complicated right now, though, and if they  
24 really enter the fight on the side of Assad, rather than  
25 just sort of protecting, again, this coastal enclave that

1 matters to them, strategically, geostrategically, then we're  
2 going to see real complications. And, ultimately, you could  
3 end up -- you don't want to be in direct conflict.

4       You know, I'm -- look, Russia is an important power.  
5 It has carried out very provocative actions. It doesn't  
6 mean that we need to be provocative in return, but we do  
7 need to be firm in return. We do need to establish what is  
8 unacceptable actions -- Ukraine, as an example. And we have  
9 to do that here, but we've got to see this develop a bit  
10 further, recognizing, again, that there is a very clear way  
11 for them, if they just wanted to attack ISIS, and that would  
12 be to join the coalition.

13       Senator King: Changing the subject. You talked about  
14 barrel bombs and airpower. Is there an alternative -- and  
15 I'm keenly -- I'm very aware of the problem, but an  
16 alternative closely vetted Syrian opposition with MANPADs or  
17 similar weapons, which could neutralize Assad's air force  
18 without mobilizing a major air war and coordinated strikes  
19 and essentially escalating the conflict? In other words,  
20 you --

21       General Petraeus: The --

22       Senator King: -- you can take care of barrel bombers  
23 from the ground or from the air.

24       General Petraeus: This has been an issue in virtually  
25 any of these kinds of endeavors that we've --

1 Senator King: Since Afghanistan.

2 General Petraeus: -- engaged in. Exactly. And the  
3 concern, of course, is that one gets out of hands and drifts  
4 over somewhere else and takes down a civil airliner. And  
5 so, the risk in this has to be very, very carefully measured  
6 and mitigated. There are some techniques, some  
7 technologies, some other things that can be employed. I'm  
8 not sure that we have not done that or that other countries  
9 have not done that. I -- but, it's a very risky  
10 proposition. And we would -- we have to do -- exercise  
11 enormous caution if we employ that.

12 Senator King: And those mitigation factors would be  
13 crucial. Final --

14 General Petraeus: Yes.

15 Senator King: -- question. Do people wake up in Iraq  
16 and think of themselves as Iraqis, or as Sunnis and Shi'as,  
17 or as Kurds?

18 General Petraeus: Sadly, I think, in recent times, it  
19 is more their sectarian or ethnic identity, rather than  
20 Iraqi. Having said that, I remember when the Iraqi soccer  
21 team won the -- I think it was the Asia Cup, and that night  
22 there were cheers all the way from Basrah through Baghdad to  
23 Erbil. So, there can be unifying features.

24 And let's never forget, the most important centrifugal  
25 force in Iraq is still there, and that is the distribution

1 of the oil revenues by the central government to the  
2 provinces, the ministries, and so forth, including the  
3 Kurdish Regional Government.

4 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you, General.

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

6 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 And, General, good to see you again. I also want to  
8 echo what Senator King said about your comments earlier. We  
9 very much appreciate you being here, and what you did, what  
10 you've done for the country.

11 I wanted to just talk a little bit -- I know there's  
12 been a lot written on the surge and what you did, and what  
13 the Chairman and others did, with regard to that important  
14 strategy. To me, it's an example of where you have a  
15 strategy, you have rhetoric, and then you actually have  
16 action. And what I mean by "rhetoric" is, we -- you know,  
17 the President and others announced what we are going to do,  
18 and then we took action. And I think one of the broader  
19 strategic failures right now that certainly we're seeing  
20 with all the chaos in the world is that we -- in many ways,  
21 as a country at the high levels, whether it's the President  
22 or the Secretary of Defense or others -- we're talking about  
23 things -- redlines in Syria, Bashar al-Assad's got to go --  
24 even Secretary Carter gave what I thought was a very  
25 powerful speech at the Shangri-la dialogue --

1 General Petraeus: I was there.

2 Senator Sullivan: -- when we were out there.

3 General Petraeus: Right.

4 Senator Sullivan: -- on the built-up islands in the  
5 South China Sea. But, the -- but, none of these statements  
6 have been followed up by action, unlike what you did with  
7 the surge. What happens when, as a country, we talk a lot,  
8 but don't act?

9 General Petraeus: Well, first of all, I think we have  
10 taken action. And I have to be somebody who sits here and  
11 says that I --

12 Senator Sullivan: Where have we -- on those three  
13 examples --

14 General Petraeus: We killed Osama bin Laden --

15 Senator Sullivan: No, no, I just gave you -- I gave  
16 three examples.

17 General Petraeus: Well, no -- but, I was merely going  
18 to say that this is not a record of unmitigated lack of  
19 action. But, in my statement, I said that inaction -- in  
20 some cases, inaction has consequences. And I think that is  
21 the case with some of the cases that we're dealing with in  
22 Syria, without question.

23 Senator Sullivan: So, what do you think happens when  
24 we don't take action?

25 General Petraeus: Well, if you do not act --

1           Senator Sullivan:  If you say -- if you make a  
2 statement --

3           General Petraeus:  -- others may.  Others will  
4 question.  Again, you know, the art of this is figuring out  
5 when to take action and, of course, what action to take.  
6 This is not an argument that you should always take action,  
7 everywhere, all the time.  As I said --

8           Senator Sullivan:  But, shouldn't you take action if  
9 you --

10          General Petraeus:  -- we can't solve all the problems.

11          Senator Sullivan:  Should you take action if you're  
12 actually -- what I'm talking about is not just random  
13 action.  I'm talking about --

14          General Petraeus:  Sure.

15          Senator Sullivan:  -- to implement stated policies that  
16 you've already announced as a country.  Are you hearing, in  
17 your travels throughout the world, that the United States is  
18 losing credibility, in terms of our national security and  
19 foreign policy?

20          General Petraeus:  Look, there are some questions out  
21 there.  And what I was going to do was point out where there  
22 have been actions, because there -- this is not, again, a  
23 record of no action.  There have been some very, very  
24 courageous actions.  I took very tough issues to this  
25 President, and he took action.  There have also been some

1 that -- on which there was not action. And if those in  
2 which there is not action taken really matter, then,  
3 obviously, again, there are consequences. They accumulate.

4 I do think that the Syrian redline that was not a  
5 redline, which had a decent outcome in the end, as was  
6 pointed out -- you know, 90 percent or so of the chemical  
7 weapons gone. But, the way we got to that was quite a  
8 circuitous path. And to be bailed out by President Putin,  
9 at the end of the day, was, again, a very interesting  
10 outcome. That is not the kind of case, I don't think, that  
11 instills -- you know, and again, a great sense of confidence  
12 in the United States.

13 Senator Sullivan: Let me ask another -- in terms of  
14 actions. You know, in another area of the world, in the  
15 Arctic, we're seeing a lot of strategic interest from the  
16 Russians and other nations, for reasons of natural  
17 resources, transportation routes. And you've seen a really  
18 pretty dramatic aggressive move by the Russians, in terms of  
19 a new Arctic military command, four new BCTs there, 40  
20 icebreakers, a lot of heated rhetoric there. And then, in  
21 terms of the U.S. action, if we were to remove a -- our  
22 substantial Arctic forces, say the only airborne BCT in the  
23 entire Arctic or Asia Pacific, what do you think that would  
24 do, in terms of additional Russian reactions in that part of  
25 the world?

1           General Petraeus: I'm just not -- I have expertise in  
2 a reasonable number of places in the world, but I'll defer  
3 to you on the Arctic, I'm afraid.

4           Senator Sullivan: Okay, let me ask one final question,  
5 General. You know, I think there's a bit of a strategic  
6 irony going on, where some of us think that, in certain  
7 parts of the world, we're withdrawing. And yet, when you  
8 look at -- and you and I have talked about the instruments  
9 of American power, not only the military, but things like  
10 energy that we've talked about, the ability, in terms of  
11 finance, the ability -- resurgence of manufacturing in the  
12 United States, best universities in the world, by far. I  
13 mean, the list -- agriculture -- the list is very, very  
14 strong, where we have so many advantages over other  
15 countries, whether it's China, whether it's Russia -- long-  
16 term advantages. How do we utilize those in a way that show  
17 that we still are the country holding all the cards in -- on  
18 so many different instruments of power that countries  
19 measure power by?

20           General Petraeus: Well, first of all, we don't all the  
21 cards, but rumors of America's demise have been greatly  
22 exaggerated, to paraphrase Mark Twain. I teach a course  
23 called "The Coming North American Decades" at the Honors  
24 College of the City University of New York. I've just done  
25 a monograph at Harvard as a Fellow, again, on "The Great New



1 Emerging Economy: North America." When I was asked, a year  
2 or so ago, in London, "After the American Century, what?" --  
3 and I think they asked -- expected me to say, "The Asian  
4 Century" or "The Chinese Century." I said "The North  
5 American Decades."

6 The bottom line is that our economy is fundamentally --  
7 it's got lots of challenges and there's a lot of issues that  
8 we need to resolve, some with the help of this body, working  
9 together with the other body. All that notwithstanding as  
10 -- at a time when the number-two economy is slowing down  
11 quite significantly, we don't yet see the rise of India, the  
12 Eurozone has got a very differentiated recovery. The U.S.  
13 has continued -- we may be in the longest recovery in our  
14 history. It has not achieved escape velocity. There's  
15 aspects of it, again, that are not great. But, when you  
16 look at the rest of the world, and when you look at the  
17 fundamentals of the United States, whether it's demography  
18 compared to the others, whether it is the values that we  
19 share with our two neighbors -- I mean, you don't see Mexico  
20 asking China to pivot to North America to help them balance  
21 against the United States the way every country that has a  
22 maritime boundary with China is doing to us.

23 So, there are enormous strengths here in this country.  
24 You enumerated a number of them. I've laid them out  
25 elsewhere. There are a number of actions that this body,

1 again, could take to address issues that are really  
2 headwinds to us capitalizing on this tremendous opportunity,  
3 because of the Energy Revolution, foremost, but also the IT  
4 Revolution, which enables all the others, the Manufacturing  
5 Revolution that's now beginning to gather steam, and the  
6 Life Sciences Revolution, which is starting to gather  
7 momentum, as well. We are the leaders, or among the  
8 leaders, in every one of these areas. And we have a number  
9 of really great, again, fundamentals here that are going to  
10 keep this country and North America, writ large, in a very  
11 enviable position. I would not want to be in any other  
12 economy than this one right here. And I now get paid to  
13 analyze those kinds of factors and elements.

14 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, General.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

17 Senator Graham: General, thank you very much for a  
18 lifetime of extraordinary service under difficult  
19 circumstances.

20 General Petraeus: And thanks to you for yours. As I  
21 noted in a response to --

22 Senator Graham: Yes, sir.

23 General Petraeus: -- a local newspaper's article here,  
24 you served nine stints under my command in Iraq, CENTCOM,  
25 and Afghanistan alone, each of those as a week or a bit

1 longer. I was very skeptical before the first one. I  
2 didn't --

3 Senator Graham: Yeah.

4 General Petraeus: -- appreciate the great opportunity  
5 we were going to have.

6 Chairman McCain: We can understand the skepticism.

7 [Laughter.]

8 General Petraeus: And -- yes -- and, under duress, I  
9 accepted Colonel Lindsey Graham of the Judge Advocate  
10 General Corps of the U.S. Air Force Reserve, and I must say  
11 that, after every single one of those visits, you came back  
12 and provided a real nugget and one of these big ideas that  
13 helped us come to grips with one of the serious issues we  
14 were confronting, starting with issues that we had at Camp  
15 Bucca, as you'll recall, in Iraq, and carrying all the way  
16 through various legal conundrums that we had with President  
17 Karzai in Afghanistan.

18 Senator Graham: Well, thank you. You've certainly  
19 made my day. And it was a very small contribution, and it  
20 --

21 General Petraeus: And I am nonpartisan, by the way --

22 [Laughter.]

23 General Petraeus: -- Mr. Chairman. I -- really.  
24 Honestly.

25 Senator Graham: But, I really appreciate that. The

1 bottom line is, I enjoyed the heck out of it, and I learned  
2 a lot under your command and working with people in the  
3 region.

4 So, let's try to see if we can make some sense out of  
5 the world as it is. There's two things going on at once, I  
6 think, in the Mideast: a fight for the heart and soul of  
7 Islam and a demand for social justice, particularly by young  
8 people and women. Do you agree with that?

9 General Petraeus: Certainly among the two biggest  
10 issues. I don't know if -- I'd put some economic issues  
11 that might be in the social justice category, but that one  
12 be another element that's --

13 Senator Graham: The only reason I mention this -- I  
14 just want the American people to understand that young  
15 people are not going to live in dictatorships for our  
16 convenience any longer. Do you agree with that?

17 General Petraeus: They're not doing it for our  
18 convenience, to begin with, but I think what -- the real  
19 point here is that the age of the --

20 Senator Graham: Yes.

21 General Petraeus: -- dictators is certainly under a  
22 certain degree of strain. And we've seen it boil over in  
23 Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria -- some degree, Yemen.

24 Senator Graham: Well, would you agree that America  
25 should take sides in this struggle, and side with young

1 people and say, "Yes, you're right to demand a larger voice  
2 about your children if you're a mother, you're right to want  
3 more economic opportunity." We should say -- we should  
4 embrace what they're asking for.

5 General Petraeus: Yeah, I don't know that I would do  
6 this as a universal declaration, but I would certainly have  
7 that in the back of my mind as I looked at each --

8 Senator Graham: Well --

9 General Petraeus: -- each and every case.

10 Senator Graham: Well, I'm going to do it as a  
11 universal declaration. That's just me, though.

12 Now, on the other side of Islam, there's a -- do you  
13 agree with me that most Muslims reject radical Islam?

14 General Petraeus: Yes. Yeah.

15 Senator Graham: And that is a -- to suggest otherwise,  
16 you really don't understand the region -- that the biggest  
17 victim of radical Islam is other people in the faith.

18 General Petraeus: It's generally Muslims.

19 Senator Graham: Yeah. And you have been there more  
20 than anyone I know. Don't you agree with me that the good  
21 news for all of us is that we can partner with people within  
22 the faith who are willing to partner with us and destroy  
23 this radical ideology? And it's going to require these  
24 partnerships.

25 General Petraeus: Correct. I mean, we have sought to

1 do that. We have done that. We do it --

2 Senator Graham: So, when people say they're --

3 General Petraeus: -- in our own country.

4 Senator Graham: -- all the same, they don't know what  
5 they're talking about. You have seen --

6 General Petraeus: I'm a Presbyterian. I don't think  
7 all Presbyterians are the same, either, frankly.

8 Senator Graham: Good. Good. Nor do I, General.

9 But, the point I'm trying to make, for people to look  
10 at the Mideast as "everybody's the same, everybody is  
11 radical," they miss the boat. Most fathers and mothers  
12 don't want to give their daughters to ISIL.

13 General Petraeus: Correct.

14 Senator Graham: So, that is something we need to build  
15 upon.

16 In terms of Iraq, the President has said the goal is to  
17 degrade and destroy ISIL. That is the right goal. Do you  
18 agree?

19 General Petraeus: "Destroy" is a very high bar in the  
20 military lexicon, and I think it's actually been lowered  
21 slightly to "defeat," which I think is adequate.

22 Senator Graham: Okay.

23 General Petraeus: I'd love to destroy them, as well.  
24 We did destroy al-Qaeda in Iraq, I think --

25 Senator Graham: You --

1 General Petraeus: -- it's safe to say.

2 Senator Graham: -- certainly did. And I want --

3 General Petraeus: And, sadly, they were able to  
4 resurrect themselves in the form of ISIS, and then gain  
5 strength in Syria and come back into Iraq.

6 Senator Graham: Absolutely. Now -- but we are where  
7 we are. The surge --

8 General Petraeus: Right.

9 Senator Graham: -- didn't work, and it was a marvelous  
10 thing to witness.

11 Do you believe more American ground forces would help  
12 lead to the defeat of ISIL in Iraq?

13 General Petraeus: What I've laid out here today is,  
14 indeed, a requirement for additional forces -- not ground  
15 combat forces.

16 Senator Graham: I agree.

17 General Petraeus: Additional advisors at brigade  
18 headquarters level, probably augmentation at -- what's going  
19 to happen is, you know, you will get a critical mass, at  
20 some point, of Sunni forces. And it will start off -- set  
21 off a chain reaction, as we did when we had the --

22 Senator Graham: Sure.

23 General Petraeus: -- the Anbar Awakening, where we --  
24 it rippled up and down the Euphrates River, then ultimately  
25 it goes up the Tigris. We have to be prepared to capitalize

1 on that. And I suspect we'll have more training locations,  
2 more locations where we'll have advisors in assistance.

3 Senator Graham: Right. But, would a couple of  
4 aviation battalions help -- Army aviation battalions?

5 General Petraeus: It would help. You're going to  
6 incur greater risk, obviously --

7 Senator Graham: Definitely.

8 General Petraeus: -- and you're now getting into the  
9 -- into this in a way -- we have, obviously, attack  
10 helicopters, which we have employed.

11 Senator Graham: Right.

12 General Petraeus: Now you're starting to add numbers  
13 quite considerably, and I'd be concerned about possible  
14 ramifications of that.

15 Senator Graham: And I -- I'm over, but I do want to  
16 talk about Syria. Is there anyone left to train in Syria  
17 that would have the capability to both destroy ISIL and push  
18 Assad out? Is there an indigenous force left to train?

19 General Petraeus: I think there are forces that, if we  
20 pledge to support them against everybody, not just the --  
21 fight the Islamic State -- and start off by actually  
22 allowing them to solidify control over an enclave --

23 Senator Graham: Right.

24 General Petraeus: -- before we launch them or push  
25 them into an offensive --



1           Senator Graham:  What about a regional force?  Would  
2 you support the creation of a regional force with two goals  
3 in mind:  to destroy ISIL and push Assad out?

4           General Petraeus:  I'd have concerns about that.  I  
5 think that --

6           Senator Graham:  What concerns?

7           General Petraeus:  -- to have neighbors go into one of  
8 the countries in this region -- again, every country is  
9 different, and -- but, to go into a country that is as  
10 already fractured as is Syria, I think there are some  
11 complications with that.

12          Senator Graham:  Finally, Assad should go?  He must go?

13          General Petraeus:  He has to go, ultimately.

14          Senator Graham:  Right.

15          General Petraeus:  But, the keyword there is  
16 "ultimately," underscored and bold letters, because, until  
17 we have a sense of what will replace him, we need to be very  
18 careful not to push him out, because what comes after could  
19 actually be even worse.

20          Senator Graham:  How many people do you think are left  
21 that would be willing to fight both ISIL and Assad?  And how  
22 long would it take to train this indigenous force?  And  
23 would you have American boots on the ground as part of that  
24 training?

25          General Petraeus:  I -- I'd put them, certainly, on the

1 ground, first in Turkey and Jordan. I'd certainly be  
2 willing to put them into an enclave, when it's solidified,  
3 secure, and you're not going to put people in jeopardy of  
4 ending up in an orange jumpsuit in a cage.

5 Senator Graham: Right. But, do -- how long do you  
6 think it would take to --

7 General Petraeus: I don't know, Senator. Again, you  
8 give me the assumptions, and I could give you a timeline.  
9 But, again, there's a host of assumptions that we'd have to  
10 make before we could get any precision on that.

11 Senator Graham: Thank you very much.

12 General Petraeus: Thank you, Senator.

13 Senator Reed [presiding]: General, on behalf of  
14 Chairman McCain, let me thank you for your extraordinary  
15 testimony, insightful and thought provoking as always, and  
16 also for your incredible service to the country. And one  
17 thing that always impressed me about you is that your  
18 dedication to the men and women you led was unshakeable, and  
19 everything you did was about those young soldiers and  
20 sailors and marines and airmen. Thank you, sir.

21 General Petraeus: Thank you, Senator.

22 Senator Reed: The hearing is adjourned.

23 [Whereupon, at 12:23 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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