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Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON UNITED  
STATES MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
UNITED STATES MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:02 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

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

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

3           Chairman McCain: Good morning. The committee meets  
4 today to receive testimony on U.S. Strategy in the Middle  
5 East.

6           And I want to thank our distinguished witnesses for  
7 appearing this morning and for their service to our Nation.

8           Before I proceed, I'd like to remind our witnesses,  
9 this committee's rules require written testimony to be  
10 submitted 24 hours in advance of a hearing, and I'd like,  
11 from now on, to try -- for our witness to try to adhere to  
12 that.

13           The tragic loss last week of Master Sergeant Joshua  
14 Walker, a veteran of 14 combat deployments, reminds us of  
15 the high stakes of our mission in the Middle East and how  
16 grateful we are to those Americans serving there. We need a  
17 strategy worthy of those who carry it out. And,  
18 unfortunately, we don't have that.

19           What's worse, it appears the administration has not  
20 even defined the problem correctly. A policy Of "ISIL  
21 first" fails to understand that ISIL, for all of the threat  
22 it poses, is actually just a symptom of a deeper problem,  
23 the struggle for power and sectarian identity now raging  
24 across the Middle East, the epicenter of which is Iraq and  
25 Syria. That is why ISIL exists today with the strength that

1 it does. And this problem will only get worse the longer  
2 this conflict rages on.

3 We hear it said all the time, quote, "There is no  
4 military solution to this problem," which is a truism. But,  
5 that, too, is misleading. The real problem is that there  
6 can be no diplomatic solution without leverage, and there is  
7 a clear military dimension to this problem. Secretary Kerry  
8 can take all the trips he wants to Geneva, but, unless the  
9 military balance of power changes on the ground, diplomacy,  
10 as has been amply proven, will achieve nothing. Changing  
11 those conditions is what the administration has consistently  
12 failed to do. Instead, it is assumed our Nation could  
13 withdraw from the Middle East and avoid the conflict at its  
14 heart. Moreover, on those occasions when the administration  
15 has felt compelled to respond, after the use of chemical  
16 weapons, for example, or with the rise of ISIL, and now amid  
17 the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, the  
18 administration has merely addressed the symptoms of the  
19 underlying problem rather than the problem itself, and, all  
20 too often, made that problem worse.

21 There is no clearer example of this than the Syrian  
22 train-and-equip program. From the start, the administration  
23 said the fighters in this program could only fight ISIL, not  
24 Assad's forces, which have slaughtered and displaced  
25 exponentially more Syrians than ISIL has. In addition, the

1 administration made no commitment, until only recently, to  
2 provide these forces with any meaningful military support  
3 once they returned to Syria. After millions of dollars and  
4 months of effort, the program failed to come anywhere close  
5 to the Department's original expectations.

6 The President has expressed surprise about this  
7 failure. It was not a surprise. It was completely  
8 predictable, and many of us here did predict it. Only  
9 someone who does not understand the real problem, which is  
10 the underlying conflict in Syria and Iraq, or does not care  
11 to, could think that we could effectively recruit and train  
12 large numbers of Sunni Syrians to fight only against ISIL,  
13 with no promise of coalition assistance if they came under  
14 fire from Assad's forces. Rather than fixing the problem,  
15 the President suspended it. But, this is tantamount to  
16 killing the program, because it's destroying what little  
17 trust our Syrian partners have left in us, to say nothing of  
18 allies like Turkey and Jordan, which invested their own  
19 money and prestige in this program.

20 The President now says, incredibly, the failure of this  
21 program -- his program -- the President's program -- proves  
22 he was right for not wanting to do it in the first place.  
23 Harry Truman must be spinning in his grave. If there is an  
24 opposite for Commander in Chief, this is it.

25 The training and effort in -- the training effort in

1 Iraq has its own challenges. Indeed, it is deja vu all over  
2 again. We don't have enough U.S. forces to train and advise  
3 Iraqi units at the right levels. We're still not providing  
4 sufficient support to Sunni tribes, which are the center of  
5 gravity in this fight against ISIL. We're looking the other  
6 way as Shi'a militias go on the offensive in the Sunni  
7 heartland. We hear complaints that Iraqis have no will to  
8 fight. But, we're prohibiting U.S. forces from bolstering  
9 their will to fight by advising them in combat or calling in  
10 airstrikes. We learned all of these lessons in Iraq just a  
11 few years ago, and apparently we have to relive these  
12 failures now.

13 For nearly 7 years, the administration has tried to  
14 extract America from the Middle East. Instead, we have  
15 created a massive power vacuum that has been filled by ISIL,  
16 al-Qaeda and its affiliates, on the one hand, and Iran and  
17 its proxies, on the other. Now into this vacuum has stepped  
18 Vladimir Putin. Putin's intervention in Syria really began  
19 in Ukraine. The administration's failure to impose greater  
20 costs on Russia, particularly by providing defensive arms to  
21 Ukrainian forces, allowed Putin to annex Crimea, dictate the  
22 terms of a frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine, and then  
23 pivot to Syria. It's also confirmed Putin's belief that the  
24 administration is weak. And, to Putin, weakness is  
25 provocative.

1           The administration's response, thus far, to Russia's  
2 intervention in Syria has only made this problem worse.  
3 First, it urged Russia not to build up its forces in Syria.  
4 Putin ignored these warnings. The administration then tried  
5 to deny Russia the airspace to move into Syria. And failed.  
6 Putin responded by bombing moderate Syrian forces, many of  
7 whom are allied with the United States. And what has been  
8 the result? The number of U.S. airstrikes in Syria has  
9 dropped. The train-and-equip program in Syria was halted  
10 just as it was starting to show some battlefield results.  
11 And the administration scrambled to pen a so-called  
12 "deconfliction agreement" with the Russians that spells out  
13 more of what we will not do in Syria. Indeed, this  
14 agreement means the United States is now moving out of the  
15 way and watching as Russian aircraft, together with Iranian,  
16 Hezbollah, and Assad's ground forces, attack and kill brave  
17 Syrians, many of whom our Nation has supported and  
18 encouraged. This is not only harmful to our interests, it  
19 is immoral.

20           What we must do to hasten the end of the conflict in  
21 Syria and Iraq, in particular, we must stop Assad's use of  
22 airpower and his horrific barrel bombs, which are the major  
23 killer of Syrians and driver of refugees out of the region.  
24 We must establish areas in Syria where civilians can be safe  
25 and do what is necessary to protect these areas in the air

1 and on the ground. We must recognize that Putin is not  
2 interested in a negotiated solution in Syria that favors  
3 U.S. interests. So, we should, instead, impose real costs  
4 on Russia, not just in Syria, but everywhere we have  
5 leverage to do so. Finally, as General David Petraeus has  
6 recently said, we must devise a strategy to confront Iranian  
7 power and designs in the region rather than acquiescing to  
8 them.

9       Some will object, as they have for years, that we  
10 cannot bear the costs of these actions. But, consider the  
11 costs of our current inaction and half measures. Mass  
12 atrocities in Syria will continue. Our allies and partners  
13 in the Middle East will be put at greater risk of  
14 existential danger. Europe will continue to be destabilized  
15 and consumed by the internal challenge of managing the  
16 refugee challenge. The cancer of ISIL will grow more potent  
17 and spread across more of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia,  
18 posing a greater threat to our national security. Iran will  
19 be emboldened in its pursuit of its malign regional  
20 ambitions. Putin will establish Russia as a dominant  
21 military power in the Middle East for the first time in four  
22 decades. And all the while, America's credibility and  
23 influence will continue to erode.

24       Make no mistake, this is the course we are now on.  
25 This will be the consequences of our current policy. No one

1 believes there are easy answers to the underlying problems  
2 in the Middle East, but this much should be clear: We  
3 cannot go on pretending that we can somehow avoid these  
4 problems or that the current approach of trying to treat the  
5 symptoms of the disease, rather than its cause, will work if  
6 only we give it more time. It will not. Policies of  
7 gradual escalation never do.

8           Senator Reed.

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

3           Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4           Let me join the Chairman in welcoming back the  
5 Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of  
6 Staff. Thank you, gentlemen, for your service.

7           Today's hearings comes in the midst of a series of  
8 events altering the security situation in the Middle East.  
9 These include a massive wave of refugees fleeing the  
10 continued violence on the ground in Syria and Iraq, the  
11 deployment of Russian air and ground forces in Syria, the  
12 suspected ISIL attack in Turkey that killed over 100 people  
13 and injured hundreds more during a peace rally in Ankara,  
14 and the deployment recently of Lieutenant General McFarland,  
15 the new commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, Secretary  
16 Kerry's recent meetings with the Foreign Ministers of  
17 Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the hearing  
18 also comes only weeks before the G20 summit in Turkey, where  
19 these issues and the international response will be at the  
20 forefront.

21           General McFarland has been in the command of military  
22 operations in Syria and Iraq for a little more than 45 days.  
23 I understand that he has used this time to evaluate the  
24 situation on the ground and may be recommending changes to  
25 the campaign. General McFarland's arrival comes at a

1 critical time, as the coalition military campaign requires a  
2 reevaluation of our strategy.

3 In Syria, the coalition faces a series of intermingled  
4 conflicts, including the counter-ISIL fight, the Syrian  
5 civil war, a regional proxy war between the Gulf states and  
6 Iran, a sectarian Sunni-Shi'a conflict, our counterterrorism  
7 fight, and the intervention of Russia, a potential great  
8 power struggle. Considering these challenges, it is  
9 important that we continually assess the role of our  
10 Nation's military in helping to bring about the conditions  
11 for an acceptable and sustainable settlement.

12 In Iraq, the recent visit by Chairman Dunford and  
13 General Austin have focused attention on the coalition's  
14 effort to train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces.  
15 However, taken as a whole, the ISF have not shown the will  
16 to make necessary advances in the operation to take Ramadi,  
17 for example. And the political leaders in Baghdad have not  
18 made the progress needed in the broader agenda of improving  
19 the inclusiveness of the Iraqi government and addressing the  
20 longstanding grievances of Kurds, Sunnis, moderate Shi'a,  
21 and minorities.

22 The recent operation by Kurdish Peshmerga forces,  
23 accompanied by U.S. Special Operations Forces in northern  
24 Iraq, despite the tragic loss of one of our finest soldiers,  
25 demonstrated that such targeted efforts can have significant

1 success in protecting innocent civilians and degrading ISIL.  
2 These kinds of operations can also result in critical  
3 intelligence to support the coalition's broader campaign  
4 against ISIL. While these operations are obviously not  
5 without risk, the time may have come to evaluate whether the  
6 tempo of such counter-ISIL operations can be increased and  
7 whether our troops can play an even more active role in  
8 enabling the ISF, including by accompanying their forces at  
9 lower echelons, especially when direct contact with the  
10 enemy is not expected.

11 According to reports, the coalition's provisions of  
12 close air support to Syrian Kurdish forces have shown  
13 success in northern Syria. The recent decision by the  
14 administration to equip a group of Sunni tribes who have  
15 come together to form a Syrian Arab coalition to fight  
16 alongside Syrian Kurdish forces shows promise for placing  
17 additional pressure on ISIL in Raqqa and the surrounding  
18 areas. If successful, this would be a positive development  
19 towards the objectives of the broader campaign. However, I  
20 am concerned that the decision to completely suspend the  
21 Department's overt train-and-equip program may not enable us  
22 to accomplish our goals in Syria. Where the program clearly  
23 failed to live up to heightened expectations, my  
24 understanding is that the Combined Joint Interagency Task  
25 Force had recently recalibrated the program based on lessons

1 learned, and that later graduates today are having a direct  
2 impact as enablers in the fight against ISIL. The coalition  
3 cannot succeed in Syria without a reliable Sunni force on  
4 the ground to hold any territorial gains. Building this  
5 force will require time and patience. And, critically, it  
6 will require the building of trust through training  
7 engagements and persistent contact between the coalition and  
8 our new partners on the ground. I hope the Secretary and  
9 the Chairman will provide the committee a clear  
10 understanding of the conditions required to reengage in  
11 training of vetted individuals or small groups.

12 The deployment of Russian forces in Syria, and their  
13 indiscriminate military operations targeting the moderate  
14 opposition, have the potential to set off another wave of  
15 refugees across Europe. More specifically, Russia's  
16 military operations in Syria have complicated the coalition  
17 air campaign and have the potential to draw the attention of  
18 moderate Syrian operation -- opposition forces, rather, away  
19 from counter-ISIL operations. Russian operations have also  
20 negatively impacted the distribution of humanitarian and  
21 other nonlethal aid to the Syrian people.

22 In the coming months, I hope General McFarland will be  
23 provided with the operational flexibility to implement  
24 necessary modifications to the campaign against ISIL.  
25 Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford, I would be interested

1 in your recommendations for how to ensure that General  
2 McFarland receives the operational flexibility and support  
3 needed to be successful, going forward.

4 Thank you, and I look forward to your testimony.

5 Chairman McCain: Welcome the witnesses.

6 Secretary Carter.

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1           STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF  
2 DEFENSE

3           Secretary Carter: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking  
4 Member Reed, members of the committee. Thanks for inviting  
5 us to come here today before you to discuss the counter-ISIL  
6 campaign in Iraq and Syria, and, along the way, to address  
7 some of the concerns, Mr. Chairman, that you raised, and to  
8 share with you, Senator Reed, some of the plans and  
9 initiatives that the Chairman and I are formulating for our  
10 campaign in both Iraq and Syria.

11           This is the first time, for me, appearing before this  
12 committee alongside Chairman Joe Dunford, who was just in  
13 the region last week, as was noted. I'm grateful to Joe for  
14 answering my and the President's call to step down from what  
15 every marine knows is a higher position -- namely,  
16 Commandant of the Marine Corps -- to become Chairman of the  
17 Joint Chiefs of Staff. And to this committee, for  
18 conforming Joe, thank you.

19           I'm glad to have you here with me today.

20           Before I turn to the subject of today's hearing, I want  
21 to reiterate, as I've said consistently since March and  
22 continue to believe, that Washington needs to come together  
23 behind a multiyear budget deal that supports our defense  
24 strategy, the troops and their families, and all elements of  
25 Americans' national security and strength. I understand

1 significant progress was made on this overnight, and I'm  
2 looking forward to reviewing the details. But, I welcome  
3 this major positive development, and applaud the members of  
4 this committee for what you're doing to help us get there.

5 The Middle East presents a kaleidoscope of challenges.  
6 But, there, as everywhere, our actions and strong military  
7 posture are guided by what's in America's interests. That's  
8 our North Star. And amid this region's complexity and  
9 uncertainty, those interests are to deter aggression, to  
10 bolster the security of our friends and allies, especially  
11 Israel, to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf, to  
12 check Iran's malign influence even as we monitor the  
13 implementation of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and  
14 to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. This last one, ISIL,  
15 poses a threat to our people and to friendly countries, not  
16 only in the Middle East, but around the world.

17 Today, I will, first, outline the changes in the  
18 execution of our strategy that we have considered and are  
19 now pursuing militarily to gather battlefield momentum in  
20 the fight against ISIL. Then I'll address what Russia is  
21 doing in Syria and why we won't let it interfere with our  
22 campaign against ISIL.

23 When I last spoke to this committee about our counter-  
24 ISIL campaign and its nine lines of essential military and  
25 nonmilitary effort, I made three things clear about the

1 military aspects: first, that we will deliver ISIL a  
2 lasting defeat; second, that truly lasting success would  
3 require enabling capable, motivated local forces on the  
4 ground, recognizing that this will take time and new  
5 diplomatic energy; and third, that our strategy's execution  
6 can and must and will be strengthened. All that's still  
7 true. Our determination is unchanged even as the situation  
8 continues to evolve and we continue to adapt to execute our  
9 campaign more effectively. And today, I'd like to elaborate  
10 on the third point and explain how we're adapting our  
11 campaign to do more, reinforcing what we know works.

12 The changes we're pursuing can be described what I --  
13 by what I call "the three R's": Raqqa, Ramadi, and raids.  
14 Before I explain what they mean, let me also note that I  
15 took actions to streamline command and control of the  
16 counter-ISIL military campaign by assigning the entire  
17 effort to a single general officer, Lieutenant General Sean  
18 McFarland, where, in the urgency of the early phase of the  
19 campaign last year, several layers were added to the general  
20 officer already present in Iraq.

21 The first "R" is Raqqa, ISIL's stronghold and  
22 administrative capital. We've been clear for some time that  
23 we need to keep up pressure on Raqqa. And, to that end, we  
24 will support moderate Syrian forces fighting ISIL that have  
25 made territorial gains near Raqqa. Indeed, some of them are

1 within 30 miles of Raqqa today. The Syrian Arab coalition,  
2 which we plan to strengthen through our new equipping  
3 approach -- more on that in a moment -- will work over time  
4 with other Syrian anti-ISIL forces to push towards Raqqa.  
5 To the south, we plan to further strengthen our partner,  
6 Jordan. And, from the skies above, we expect to intensify  
7 our air campaign, including with additional U.S. and  
8 coalition aircraft, to target ISIL with a higher and heavier  
9 rate of strikes. This will include more strikes against  
10 ISIL high-value targets as our intelligence improves, also  
11 its oil enterprise, which is a critical pillar of ISIL's  
12 financial infrastructure. As I said last Friday, we've  
13 already begun to ramp up these deliberate strikes.

14 Part of this pressure includes our new approach to the  
15 Syria train-and-equip program. I, like President Obama and  
16 members of this committee, was disappointed with that  
17 program's results. We, accordingly, examined the program  
18 this summer and have since changed it. I use the word  
19 "change," not "end." "Change" the program. While the old  
20 approach was to train and equip completely new forces  
21 outside of Syria before sending them into the fight, the new  
22 approach is to work with vetted leaders of groups that are  
23 already fighting ISIL, and provide equipment and some  
24 training to them, and support their operations with  
25 airpower. This approach builds on successes that local

1 Syrian Arab and Syrian Kurdish forces have made along  
2 Syria's northern border to retake and hold ground from ISIL  
3 with the help of U.S. airstrikes and equipment resupplies.  
4 If done in concert, as we intend, all these actions on the  
5 ground and from the air should help shrink ISIL's territory  
6 into a smaller and smaller area and create new opportunities  
7 for targeting ISIL, ultimately denying this evil movement  
8 any safe haven in its supposed heartland.

9       The second "R" is Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar  
10 Province, which serves as a critical example of the Abadi  
11 government's commitment to work with local Sunni  
12 communities, with our help, to retake and hold ground from  
13 ISIL, and, in turn, to build momentum to eventually go  
14 northward to Mosul. Under Prime Minister Abadi's  
15 leadership, the Iraqis have begun to use American-made F-16s  
16 to support counter-ISIL operations, and have empowered  
17 capable battlefield commanders to step forward. As we see  
18 more progress towards assembling capable and motivated Iraqi  
19 forces under Baghdad's control and including Sunni elements,  
20 we're willing to continue to provide more enabling  
21 capabilities and fire support to help them succeed.  
22 However, the Iraqi government and security forces will have  
23 to take certain steps militarily to make sure our progress  
24 sticks.

25       We need to see more in the direction of multisectarian

1 governance and defense leadership. For example, we've given  
2 the Iraqi government two battalions' worth of equipment for  
3 mobilizing Sunni tribal forces. As we continue to provide  
4 the support, the Iraqi government must ensure it is  
5 distributed effectively. Local Sunni forces aren't  
6 sufficiently equipped, regularly paid, and empowered as  
7 coequal members of the Iraqi Security Forces, ISIL's defeats  
8 in Anbar will only be temporary.

9       The third and final "R" is raids signaling that we  
10 won't hold back from supporting capable partners in  
11 opportunistic attacks against ISIL or conducting such  
12 missions directly, whether by strikes from the air or direct  
13 action on the ground. Last week's rescue operation was led  
14 by Iraqi Kurdish forces with U.S. advisors in support. One  
15 of those accompanying advisors, Master Sergeant Joshua  
16 Wheeler, heroically acted to ensure the overall success of  
17 the mission, and lost his life in the process. The death of  
18 any servicemember is a tragedy. And, as I told his family  
19 and teammates this weekend, we offer our condolences to  
20 Master Sergeant Wheeler's loved ones for their loss.

21       While our mission in Iraq is to train, advise, and  
22 assist our Iraqi partners in situations such as that  
23 operation, where we have actionable intelligence and a  
24 capable partner force, we want to support our partners, and  
25 we will. At the same time, the raid on Abu Sayyaf's home,

1 the strikes against Junaid Hussain, and, most recently,  
2 Sanafi al-Nasr, should all serve notice to ISIL and other  
3 terrorist leaders that, once we locate them, no target is  
4 beyond our reach.

5 As we've looked at how to gather momentum and adapt to  
6 the changing battlefield, some have discussed putting a  
7 buffer zone, humanitarian zone, or no-fly zone in Syria. We  
8 have analyzed various options, and the political and  
9 military requirements of each. These options are complex  
10 and raise some challenges, which I'm prepared to discussed  
11 in answer to your questions.

12 Let me now turn to Russia's involvement in Syria. To  
13 be clear, we are not cooperating with Russia, and we're not  
14 letting Russia impact the pace or scope of our campaign  
15 against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. While we negotiated a  
16 document on safety of flight with the Russian Minister of  
17 Defense, we do not align ourselves more broadly with their  
18 military actions, because, instead of singularly attacking  
19 ISIL, as they said they were going to do, they're primarily  
20 attacking the Syrian opposition, as the Chairman has noted,  
21 which further fuels the tragic civil war there. Their  
22 actions suggest a doubling down on their longstanding  
23 relationship with Assad, sending advisors, artillery, and  
24 aviation to enable and support the Assad regime and Iranian  
25 forces in attacking moderates who oppose the regime and are

1 essential to Syria's political transition. And it appears  
2 the vast majority of their strikes, by some estimates as  
3 high as 85 to 90 percent, use "dumb bombs," which obviously  
4 increases the possibility of civilian casualties.

5         So, as Russia acts in a coalition of two with Iran at  
6 its side, the United States will continue to strengthen our  
7 65-nation global coalition. Even as we've reached an  
8 understanding with the Russians on safety protocols for  
9 coalition pilots over Syria, we will keep prosecuting our  
10 counter-ISIL campaign unabated. We will keep supporting the  
11 moderate Syrian opposition, along with our other commitments  
12 to friends and allies in the region. And consistent with  
13 our strong, balanced approach towards Russian aggression  
14 elsewhere in the world, including NATO and Ukraine, we will  
15 keep the door open for Russia to contribute to efforts  
16 towards a political solution in which -- which, in the final  
17 answer -- analysis, is the only answer to the Syrian  
18 conflict.

19         I've discussed the military strategy and accompanying  
20 campaign, but, before I conclude, I remind the committee  
21 that defeating ISIL and protecting America requires  
22 coordinated efforts across all of the so-called "nine lines  
23 of effort," to include supporting effective governance in  
24 Iraq, enhancing intelligence collection, disrupting ISIL's  
25 financing, countering ISIL's messaging, stopping the flow of

1 foreign fighters, providing humanitarian support, and  
2 protecting our homeland, where other departments and  
3 agencies of our government have the lead.

4 Thank you.

5 [The prepared statement of Secretary Carter follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: General Dunford.  
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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR., USMC,  
2 CHAIRMAN OF OTHER JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

3           General Dunford: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,  
4 distinguished members of the committee, thanks for the  
5 opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our  
6 challenges in the Middle East, and specifically the military  
7 dimension of our campaign against ISIL.

8           I've been in my current position for just short of 4  
9 weeks, and spent much of that time reviewing our counter-  
10 ISIL campaign. I also followed up on a commitment I made in  
11 my confirmation hearing to visit the region early in my  
12 tenure. Last weekend, to get a personal perspective on the  
13 campaign, I visited Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. I was  
14 extremely impressed with the focus and commitment of our  
15 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that I met during the  
16 visit. And, thanks to your support, I can report that they  
17 are well trained and equipped.

18           Before taking your questions, I'd like to share a few  
19 thoughts on the counter-ISIL military campaign in Iraq and  
20 Syria. ISIL's primary source of strength is its claim to be  
21 a caliphate. To be successful, the coalition's military  
22 campaign must reduce ISIL's territorial control, destroy its  
23 warfighting capability, and undermine its brand and aura of  
24 invincibility. There are two critical elements of the  
25 military campaign:

1           The first is to conduct strikes against ISIL targets.  
2           The strikes are intended to kill key leadership and  
3           fighters, interdict their lines of communication, and deny  
4           them sources of revenue.

5           The second critical element in the military campaign is  
6           to develop and support effective partners on the ground to  
7           seize and secure ISIL-held terrain.

8           Many weeks before I became the Chairman, the leadership  
9           across the Department recognized that we needed to increase  
10          pressure on ISIL from multiple directions to generate  
11          momentum in the coalition's military campaign. As with any  
12          campaign, we're continuing to examine ways to enhance the  
13          effectiveness of our operations.

14          But, we all recognize that ISIL is a transregional  
15          threat requiring a broader strategy. The immediate priority  
16          is to bear down on core ISIL across Iraq and Syria  
17          simultaneously. The framework for the campaign is the same  
18          for Iraq and Syria, but the conditions on the ground present  
19          unique challenges and opportunities. The end state is to  
20          defeat ISIL. Without a partner on the ground, Syria has  
21          clearly presented the most difficult challenge. No one is  
22          satisfied with our progress to date. Moving forward, we  
23          must continue to work with our Turkish partners to secure  
24          the northern border of Syria. We must do all we can to  
25          enable vetted Syrian opposition forces willing to fight

1     ISIL.  And we must be more aggressive in strikes that will  
2     deny ISIL the access they have to oil revenue.

3             The Secretary has already addressed the adjustments to  
4     the Syrian train-and-equip program.  And I support the  
5     refined approach.  While there will be challenges, we'll be  
6     supporting groups who have already demonstrated the will to  
7     fight ISIL.  And our support will be contingent upon their  
8     attacking specific objectives in meeting specific standards.  
9     We'll look for opportunities to support vetted opposition  
10    groups in both the north and along the border with Jordan.

11            In our initial efforts to build ground forces in Syria,  
12    Major General Mike Nagata and his team were operating under  
13    extraordinarily difficult conditions, and I'd like to thank  
14    them for their hard work.  Due to their efforts, we have a  
15    much better understanding of the operating environment and  
16    the opportunities.  We'll be able to leverage their  
17    initiative and lessons learned as we make course and speed  
18    corrections.

19            Last week, we began to move the campaign forward in  
20    another important way by striking a major oil facility and  
21    source of revenue for ISIL.  Based on some superb analytic  
22    work and planning, CENTCOM is now postured to accelerate  
23    broader interagency efforts against ISIL's economic means.  
24    The Central Command is also continuing to work with Turkey  
25    to secure border -- the border area in northwest Syria.  And

1 we still have some work to do.

2 In Iraq, we've also been frustrated with the pace of  
3 operations. That said, there's been recent progress in  
4 Baji, some movement around Ramadi, and the Peshmerga have  
5 made progress in the north. After talking to the commanders  
6 on the ground, I believe we'll have an opportunity to  
7 reinforce Iraqi success in the days ahead. We've developed  
8 a variety of options to do that.

9 To be successful in Syria and Iraq, in addition to the  
10 initiatives I've mentioned and those outlined by the  
11 Secretary, we also need to continue to improve how we  
12 leverage our intelligence capabilities and do more to cut  
13 the flow of foreign fighters. I have a better understanding  
14 of these two issues after my visit, and those will be a  
15 priority for me in the days ahead.

16 We will also continue to look hard at other ways to  
17 increase the effectiveness of coalition operations in the  
18 tempo of the campaign. The Secretary and the President have  
19 made it clear that they expect me to bring to them all of  
20 the options that may be -- that may contribute to our  
21 winning the fight against ISIL. I've made a commitment to  
22 them that I would do that, and I'll meet that commitment.

23 In closing, as I complete my initial assessment of the  
24 campaign, I believe we've identified and started to  
25 implement a number of initiatives to move the campaign

1 forward. We're not satisfied or complacent about where we  
2 are, and we won't be satisfied until ISIL is defeated.

3 Thank you again for the opportunity to join you, and I  
4 look forward to your questions.

5 [The prepared statement of General Dunford follows:]

6 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much, General.

2 Secretary Carter, the President's spokesman, after it  
3 was clear that the arm and train and equip by the DOD  
4 program had failed -- President's spokesman said that the  
5 President was -- felt vindicated that this program had  
6 failed, because he never supported it to start with. This  
7 was a program that we invested 43 million, at least, of a  
8 \$500 million program. I'm not sure how many young people  
9 were killed in trying to implement this failed program. Did  
10 you feel vindicated when this program failed?

11 Secretary Carter: Mr. Chairman, I thought that the  
12 effort -- and I want to repeat something that the Chairman  
13 just said -- I think that General Nagata, who was given this  
14 program, which was conceived last summer --

15 Chairman McCain: Yeah, I just asked --

16 Secretary Carter: -- approved through the winter --

17 Chairman McCain: -- the question whether you felt  
18 vindicated, or not --

19 Secretary Carter: No, I was --

20 Chairman McCain: -- as the --

21 Secretary Carter: -- disappointed.

22 Chairman McCain: -- President's spokesman --

23 Secretary Carter: I was actually -- no, I was  
24 disappointed in it.

25 Chairman McCain: I see.

1 Secretary Carter: I wished it had turned out  
2 differently.

3 Chairman McCain: I see.

4 Secretary Carter: However, we --

5 Chairman McCain: But, the --

6 Secretary Carter: -- are learning our lessons from  
7 that, and, therefore, our new approach differs in --

8 Chairman McCain: Well, then would one of those --

9 Secretary Carter: -- a fundamental way from --

10 Chairman McCain: Go ahead.

11 Secretary Carter: And I can describe the difference  
12 between the old and the new. But, we think that we have  
13 learning lessons from that.

14 Chairman McCain: So, you don't feel vindicated that  
15 the program failed.

16 Secretary Carter: I was disappointed that it failed.

17 Chairman McCain: I see. But, the President obviously  
18 wasn't. He felt vindicated, according to his spokesperson.

19 In this change that you were talking about -- and  
20 already we're seeing some of the changes -- does that mean  
21 that we -- these young people that we train and equip and  
22 send in to fight -- that we're going to protect them from  
23 being barrel-bombed and attacked by Russian aircraft?

24 Secretary Carter: I think we have conveyed the same  
25 obligation last time I was before you --

1 Chairman McCain: Right now, as we speak --

2 Secretary Carter: -- to protect --

3 Chairman McCain: -- Russian aircraft --

4 Secretary Carter: -- these forces --

5 Chairman McCain: -- are bombing -- right now, as we

6 speak, Russian aircraft are bombing moderate Syrian forces

7 in Syria while we have deconflicted. Do you believe that we

8 should be protecting those young people --

9 Secretary Carter: Our Title 10 forces, we have an

10 obligation to protect. We've stated that. We will have --

11 Chairman McCain: Are we protecting them?

12 Secretary Carter: -- options to do that. We have

13 authority to do that.

14 Chairman McCain: Are we protecting them now?

15 Secretary Carter: They have not come -- they're

16 operating in a -- they have not come under attack by either

17 Assad's forces or Russia's forces --

18 Chairman McCain: Russia's air has not been --

19 Secretary Carter: -- the Syrian Arab --

20 Chairman McCain: -- attacking --

21 Secretary Carter: -- coalition and the Kurdish YPG.

22 Chairman McCain: No, no, I'm asking about the moderate

23 Syrian forces that are there, some of whom we trained.

24 Secretary Carter: I'm sorry, I was speaking of our

25 train-and-equip --

1 Chairman McCain: I'm asking the question about those  
2 that we -- some of those we trained and equipped, moderate  
3 Syrian forces that are now being bombed by Russia.

4 Secretary Carter: With respect to the Title 10 forces  
5 that the Department of Defense trains and equips in Syria,  
6 they have not come under attack, but we have expressed --

7 Chairman McCain: None of the moderate forces that --  
8 some of whom we have trained, are -- have come under attack  
9 by Russia from the air?

10 Secretary Carter: Not in our train-and-equip program,  
11 our Title 10 program, no.

12 Chairman McCain: That's fascinating. It --

13 Secretary Carter: But, let me be clear, Chairman, the  
14 Russians -- and, obviously, Assad -- do attack moderate  
15 Syrian forces --

16 Chairman McCain: Yes.

17 Secretary Carter: -- which are supported by --

18 Chairman McCain: Primarily --

19 Secretary Carter: -- the international coalition. And  
20 the -- one of the reasons why the Russian approach is so --

21 Chairman McCain: So, are we going to train --

22 Secretary Carter: -- wrongheaded --

23 Chairman McCain: -- are we going to train these young  
24 people, you say, in the change -- are we going to send them  
25 into Syria to fight -- are we going to protect them from

1 being barrel-bombed by --

2 Secretary Carter: The ones --

3 Chairman McCain: -- Bashar Assad and protected from --

4 Secretary Carter: The ones that --

5 Chairman McCain: -- Russians --

6 Secretary Carter: Yes, the ones that we --

7 Chairman McCain: Anyone we send in and --

8 Secretary Carter: -- train and equip --

9 Chairman McCain: -- train, we're --

10 Secretary Carter: -- we have that --

11 Chairman McCain: -- going to --

12 Secretary Carter: -- obligation.

13 Chairman McCain: -- protect from Russian air attacks.

14 Secretary Carter: We have an obligation to do that,

15 and we've made that clear, right from the beginning of the

16 train-and-equip program.

17 Chairman McCain: We haven't done it. We haven't done

18 it --

19 Secretary Carter: They have not --

20 Chairman McCain: -- Secretary --

21 Secretary Carter: -- come under attack.

22 Chairman McCain: -- Carter.

23 Secretary Carter: But, I've --

24 Chairman McCain: I promise you they have. We will --

25 Secretary Carter: -- we have an obligation --

1 Chairman McCain: We -- you will have to correct the  
2 record.

3 Now, General Petraeus and General -- and former  
4 Secretary Gates, SECDEF, and now, we understand, Secretary  
5 Clinton, have all stated that they think we should stop the  
6 barrel-bombing and that we should train and equip, and we  
7 should have no-fly zone or aircraft exclusionary zones. And  
8 I might point out, General Dunford, as complicated as it is,  
9 we were able to do Northern Watch and Southern Watch rather  
10 successfully in Iraq, although it's not exactly the same.  
11 So, are you recommending that we should stop the barrel-  
12 bombing, as General Petraeus and Secretary -- former  
13 Secretary Gates and now Secretary Clinton -- have suggested,  
14 to stop the barrel-bombing, to provide a no- -- an aircraft  
15 exclusionary zone in order to protect the innocent civilians  
16 that are being driven into refugee status, in the greatest  
17 refugee situation since the end of World War II?

18 Secretary Carter: Yeah, Chairman, I -- we have, as I  
19 indicated in my statement, analyzed zones of various kinds  
20 and -- humanitarian zones, buffer zones, and you're talking  
21 about --

22 Chairman McCain: Yeah

23 Secretary Carter: -- no-fly zones. And I can give you  
24 some of the considerations --

25 Chairman McCain: And stop the barrel-bombing.

1 Secretary Carter: -- the -- that would be one of the  
2 --

3 Chairman McCain: Yeah.

4 Secretary Carter: -- intents of a no-fly zone. And if  
5 you'd like, I can tell you some of the considerations that  
6 --

7 Chairman McCain: I'd just like to know whether you  
8 support, or not.

9 Secretary Carter: We have not made that recommendation  
10 to the President. He has not taken it off the table. I can  
11 explain some of the reasons for our recommendation -- or our  
12 --

13 Chairman McCain: It's not an issue that has not been  
14 examined, Secretary Carter. It's been recommended for years  
15 by some of us. I mean, you have to examine it --

16 Secretary Carter: But, we have looked at it quite --

17 Chairman McCain: -- all over again?

18 Secretary Carter: We've looked at it quite closely.  
19 And I'm prepared to describe it. I know the Chairman is, as  
20 well.

21 Chairman McCain: It's not a -- it's a matter -- it's  
22 an issue that's been on the table for 3 or 4 years that I  
23 know of. It's not a -- we received information when General  
24 Dempsey said it would cost a billion dollars a day or  
25 something incredible. But, it's not a new issue.

1 Secretary Carter: It is not a new issue. It is a  
2 substantial military --

3 Chairman McCain: So, it seems to me you should have a  
4 position on it.

5 Secretary Carter: We have not recommended that. We  
6 have analyzed it. We've presented the alternatives --

7 Chairman McCain: So, you do not --

8 Secretary Carter: -- to the President.

9 chairman -- support --

10 Secretary Carter: We've not --

11 Chairman McCain: You do not agree with General  
12 Petraeus and former Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton.

13 Secretary Carter: We do not have a concept of  
14 operations for a no-fly zone at this time that we're  
15 prepared --

16 Chairman McCain: After all these years, we don't have  
17 a concept of operations.

18 Secretary Carter: That we're prepared to recommend.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

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

21 I just, Mr. Secretary, want to clarify. You have  
22 spoken exclusively about forces trained by the Department of  
23 Defense. You kept -- Title 10, but there are a lot of  
24 titles in the U.S. Code. But, there are other forces on the  
25 ground that our coalition partners have trained, that have

1 come under attack by the Russians. Is that -- that's clear,  
2 correct?

3 Secretary Carter: Absolutely true.

4 Senator Reed: But, the forces that are subject to  
5 direct training by the Department of Defense have been  
6 placed in areas which, for many reasons, have not been  
7 subject to aerial attack --

8 Secretary Carter: Well, they're fighting ISIL.

9 Senator Reed: They're fighting ISIL.

10 Secretary Carter: And so -- and the Russians, as I  
11 stated, are not, even though they said they were.

12 Senator Reed: Now, let me go back to the points you  
13 made about the train-and-equip program. It has shifted from  
14 trying to train individual units, insert those units into  
15 the counter-ISIL fight, to identifying leaders and providing  
16 some training to the leader, and then --

17 Secretary Carter: Right.

18 Senator Reed: -- some support. There is another  
19 aspect of this approach which I'd like to clarify. That is  
20 training not just leaders, but individual enablers, people  
21 with technical skills that can go into a deployed unit and  
22 provide those skills. Is that still being done?

23 Secretary Carter: Yes, that is still part of the  
24 approach. That was part of the old approach, as well. But,  
25 the big difference is that, rather than trying to form

1 brand-new units, we are identifying units that are already  
2 fighting ISIL, providing them equipment, and, as you point  
3 out, after vetting their leadership, providing them with  
4 selected abilities that help them leverage our enablement,  
5 particular with -- from the air.

6 Senator Reed: From the air. So, the program still is  
7 able to do that and, in addition, grow not so much units,  
8 but teams of Syrian nationals that can go in as specialists  
9 on a whole range of issues: air support, medical support,  
10 logistics support -- and aid these units in Syria.

11 Secretary Carter: Exactly. Now, we're very  
12 transactional in this, so we are giving some equipment,  
13 seeing how they perform, give some more equipment, and how  
14 -- see how they perform. But, these are groups that already  
15 exist. The Syrian Arab Coalition, moving in the areas north  
16 of Raqqa, is an example of that.

17 Senator Reed: Thank you.

18 General Dunford, you just returned from Iraq, and you  
19 had conversations with the -- Prime Minister Abadi because  
20 there were disconcerting reports of invitations to the  
21 Russians, collaboration at the intelligence level with the  
22 Russians. What's your latest estimate of that? Is it  
23 something that was a more political statement by the Prime  
24 Minister, or is there actual ongoing, real efforts?

25 General Dunford: Senator, thanks -- I asked that

1 specific question to all the senior ranking leaders that I  
2 met with, and I explained to them how difficult it would be  
3 for us to continue to provide support if the Russians were  
4 invited in to conduct airstrikes. And I was assured, at  
5 every level, that that wouldn't be the case.

6 Could I follow up on the train-and-equip?

7 Senator Reed: Yes, sir.

8 General Dunford: In your opening statement, you  
9 mentioned that we completely suspended the program, and I  
10 just wanted to clarify one point. The individuals that we  
11 had previously trained, we are still supporting them when  
12 they're still in the fight. And there are a number of them  
13 that are doing exactly the kind of things you spoke about,  
14 Senator Reed. They're providing JTAC-like support for  
15 forces that are fighting ISIL.

16 Senator Reed: And it's -- based on the Secretary's  
17 comments, it's our intention to expand that as rapidly as we  
18 can.

19 General Dunford: Where there are opportunities. And I  
20 would just say, you know, for the T&E program, although  
21 we're talking now about the Syrian Arab Coalition and  
22 training those large groups, my perception and the guidance  
23 that we have from the President is, where there are other  
24 opportunities, we should bring those forward to him. And  
25 when I talked to the team on the ground, I made that clear

1 to them, that, when we see opportunities, we ought to  
2 develop concept of operations, bring that back, and expand  
3 the program, where it will work. And we'll look to do that  
4 both in the northern part in Syria as well as along the  
5 Jordanian border.

6 Senator Reed: One final question, General Dunford, is  
7 that -- and you -- both your testimonies highlighted this  
8 inability of the government in Baghdad to fully support  
9 Sunni forces in Anbar, particularly. And some of that is  
10 historic mistrust, et cetera. Do your -- from your  
11 testimony, they're -- you're considering having American  
12 advisors at -- not at the company level, but higher up, and  
13 the one function they could perform is to be an honest  
14 broker, which would allow the payment of troops, would allow  
15 the government of Baghdad to feel that they have some  
16 control, and, in addition, demand, on behalf of Sunni  
17 forces, that they get the fair share. Is that part of your  
18 thinking, going forward?

19 General Dunford: It is, Senator. And I think there's  
20 actually four reasons why you might consider putting forces  
21 in an accompany role. The first is what you're suggesting,  
22 which is to really to bring some campaign coherence. I  
23 think the other is to ensure that our logistics support is  
24 effective. Another challenge we've had is situational  
25 awareness and intelligence. And so, that would be another

1 -- that would be another advantage of doing that. And then,  
2 also the better delivery of combined arms. So, there's  
3 really four factors, I think, that would be considered. And  
4 if it had operational or strategic impact and we could  
5 reinforce success, that would be the basic framework within  
6 which I'd make a recommendation for additional forces to be  
7 colocated with Iraqi units.

8 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman McCain: Just to make the record clear,  
10 Secretary Carter, there are coalition-supported and  
11 American-supported forces that are in Syria that are being  
12 attacked by Russian aircraft. Is that true or false?

13 Secretary Carter: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. There are  
14 moderate Syrian opposition forces --

15 Chairman McCain: Coalition-supported.

16 Secretary Carter: -- in Syria supported by the  
17 coalition, and, of course, people that we think are part of  
18 Syria's future and part of the Syrian political transition.

19 Chairman McCain: It's hard to be part of --

20 Secretary Carter: They are being attacked. And that's  
21 -- and not ISIL -- and that's why the Russian approach is  
22 backwards, or --

23 Chairman McCain: And that's why --

24 Secretary Carter: -- I've called it wrongheaded.

25 Chairman McCain: And that's why it's immoral to train

1 people in and watch them -- to go in and fight, and watch  
2 them being destroyed and maimed and killed --

3 Secretary Carter: For our part --

4 Chairman McCain: -- by Russia.

5 Secretary Carter: For our part, in our train-and-equip  
6 program, as I've said before this committee before, we have  
7 a moral obligation --

8 Chairman McCain: You are making a distinction without  
9 a difference, Mr. Secretary. These are American-supported  
10 and coalition-supported men who are going in and being  
11 slaughtered.

12 Secretary Inhofe -- Senator Inhofe.

13 Senator Inhofe: Yes. My understanding, Mr. Chairman,  
14 that Senator Cotton is presiding, so I'll defer to him and  
15 then ask that we return to regular order.

16 Senator Cotton: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Yes, I do  
17 have to go preside over the Senate. And, General Dunford,  
18 that's the Senate equivalent of staff duty for a junior  
19 officer.

20 Secretary Carter, you talked about our "nine lines of  
21 effort." Not all of those are military lines of effort. Is  
22 that correct?

23 Secretary Carter: That's correct.

24 Senator Cotton: Now that General Allen has departed as  
25 our envoy in charge of those "nine lines of effort," who are

1 minding those nondefense lines of effort?

2 Secretary Carter: Well, it's a good question. And  
3 what -- one of the things that I have proposed, and  
4 Secretary Kerry has accepted, that he and I meet  
5 periodically with the other agency heads who have the other  
6 nine -- the other lines of effort. General Allen's been  
7 present at those meetings. His successor, Ambassador  
8 McGuirk, will be present at them. And I thought -- it's one  
9 of the things I noticed when I began to look at this  
10 campaign -- that since all of these lines of effort are --  
11 it is necessary to have moving in concert, we needed a  
12 better effort to do that. So, Secretary Kerry's agreed to  
13 do that with me. We've had, I think, four meetings --  
14 General Dunford was at the last one -- focused on --  
15 counterfinancing was the last one. Before that was foreign  
16 fighter flow both into the conflict region and out of the  
17 conflict region to Europe, around the world. We are  
18 addressing messaging and ISIL's messages and efforts to  
19 recruit people online.

20 So, there are lots of different dimensions to this that  
21 are not military, per se, but I believe that they're  
22 opportunities to make the whole greater than the sum of the  
23 parts, and I've sought to seize those opportunities with  
24 Secretary Kerry, now with General Dunford, and make sure  
25 that all these different efforts are coordinated. They're

1 all important. And the other participants are doing  
2 important things -- the diplomatic people and the  
3 intelligence people and the homeland security and law  
4 enforcement folks. But, I think the whole can be greater  
5 than the sum of the parts. And, just per your question,  
6 that's exactly the intent.

7 Senator Cotton: Is that a detailed way of saying  
8 there's not a single person taking over all of the  
9 nondefense lines of effort?

10 Secretary Carter: There has not been a single person  
11 who had that responsibility. Remember, General Allen, who  
12 was superb -- General Allen had the responsibility for  
13 assembling the coalition, which he did with great skill,  
14 and, to his credit and Ambassador McGuirk's, we have a broad  
15 coalition. I'm talking about something different, which is  
16 assembling the mechanics of all of the nine lines of effort.  
17 And so, that's something I'm undertaking to do with  
18 Secretary Kerry, and we're gathering in the other parties  
19 that are involved. And Ambassador McGuirk will be part of  
20 that effort. But, I think it's necessary --

21 Senator Cotton: I'd like to --

22 Secretary Carter: -- necessary organizational change.

23 Senator Cotton: I'd like to shift briefly now to  
24 Russia's move into Syria. A few weeks ago, before the major  
25 Russian movement into Syria, the United States Government

1 requested that Bulgaria and Iraq close its airspace to  
2 Russian aircraft. How did we transmit that request to Iraq?

3 Secretary Carter: I do not know what the mechanics of  
4 that were. Can I get back to you on that, Senator? I  
5 simply don't know.

6 Senator Cotton: Is that something the State Department  
7 would --

8 Secretary Carter: I'm happy to --

9 Senator Cotton: -- typically do? The Department of  
10 Defense?

11 Secretary Carter: I --

12 Senator Cotton: The White House?

13 Secretary Carter: I -- Joe, go ahead.

14 General Dunford: Senator, I believe that message would  
15 have been delivered by Ambassador Jones, in Baghdad.

16 Senator Cotton: And Iraq obviously declined our  
17 request, while Bulgaria accepted it.

18 General Dunford: Declined the request --

19 Senator Cotton: And let Russian aircraft fly through  
20 their airspace.

21 General Dunford: There was -- there has been Russian  
22 aircraft that's flown through Iraqi airspace. My  
23 understanding is, it was not at the invitation of the Iraqi  
24 government.

25 Senator Cotton: Does it -- does the Iraq air force

1 have the capability to protect its own air force and exclude  
2 a foreign air force like Russia's?

3 General Dunford: They have limited capability,  
4 Senator. They recently were fielded with F-16s, but they  
5 have limited air-to-air capability.

6 Senator Cotton: So, if the United States Government  
7 requested that the Government of Iraq close its airspace to  
8 Russia, surely the United States Government was prepared to  
9 assist Iraq in closing its airspace and stopping Russian  
10 aircraft from flying over Iraq?

11 Secretary Carter: Well, I -- it's a sovereign decision  
12 by Iraq, but, I'll tell you, we're not uninterested in it.  
13 And -- but, you're raising a very important question, which  
14 is, Is Iraq going to cooperate with the Russian -- what I  
15 would regard as mis- -- I called it wrongheaded approach I  
16 Syria? We have received -- and I believe that General  
17 Dunford received, just last week -- from Prime Minister  
18 Abadi, in no uncertain terms, the statement that he will not  
19 work with the Russians, he will -- he will not allow them to  
20 be partners with Iraq in that regard, that we are the  
21 preferred partners of Iraq. We've been insistent on that  
22 point. And Prime Minister Abadi has repeated those pledges  
23 to us. I only say that because I -- we feel emphatically  
24 about that -- receiving those pledges, and intend to have  
25 them implemented by Prime Minister Abadi. But, he has not

1 been ambiguous about that. And I believe the most recent  
2 conversation was held by General Dunford, and perhaps you'd  
3 like to say something about that, Joe. It's a serious  
4 issue.

5 General Dunford: No, Senator, I raised it both with  
6 the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister and, again,  
7 tried to explain to them that our continued support really  
8 would be problematic, were they to invite the Russians in to  
9 conduct strikes. I was assured that they had not extended  
10 that invitation, and they did not intend to extend an  
11 invitation to do that.

12 Senator Cotton: Well, in closing, I would say it's  
13 problematic for Russia to be resupplying its forces in Syria  
14 by flying through Iraq. We should renew our request that  
15 they exclude Russian aircraft from their airspace, and our  
16 military should be prepared to assist them in excluding  
17 Russian aircraft from their airspace.

18 Thank you, Senator Inhofe, Chairman.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

20 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Thank you both for your service and for being here.

22 Let me -- I think my question would be, What is our end  
23 game? And the end game would be -- we've been there, bogged  
24 down for quite some time. And if you look at -- when I go  
25 home to West Virginia and talk to the citizens, you know,

1 they say, "Well, to stop this migration, you're going to  
2 have to have a no-fly zone. You have to have protection  
3 where people feel like they're safe. And as the country  
4 regroupes or rebuilds, that -- there are still people there  
5 that, basically, are peace-loving, well-educated." So, we  
6 haven't made a decision on that. And I know the Chairman  
7 has asked directly on that.

8         And then I start looking at, basically, with Russia's  
9 involvement, and Russia being involved to protect Assad.  
10 Russia is more involved in protecting Assad and working with  
11 Iran to have some influence of what happens there, in my  
12 evaluation. And then, you look at the United States. We're  
13 more concerned about fighting ISIL, if you will -- or it  
14 looks to be -- more so than protecting or fighting with our  
15 coalition, who wants to defeat Assad.

16         So, what would be the end game? And who -- what part  
17 are we going to be able to play in this unless we take on  
18 Russia or basically check Russia from what they're doing,  
19 unless we have some type of diplomatic relations with Russia  
20 and an agreement with Russia? I see Russia as being in a  
21 situation -- and they have involved themselves -- to where  
22 they're going to be a major broker in that region, because  
23 Iran seems to be, if you will, more influential, as far as  
24 in Iraq and in Syria, with Assad. Now with Assad being  
25 helped and propped up by Russia, we're out there fighting

1     ISIL.  We don't -- we're not protecting the people that can  
2     basically put any security back into Syria.  I just -- it's  
3     a very confusing situation.  It's hard for us to say, "Okay,  
4     at the end of the day, here's our end game."

5             And if somebody has any explanation for that and tells  
6     me what we're trying to accomplish, I'd be happy to hear it.

7             Secretary Carter:  I'll take that, Senator.

8             The -- for us, the paramount objective is the defeat of  
9     ISIL.  That will require --

10            Senator Manchin:  That's our number-one --

11            Secretary Carter:  -- in Iraq --

12            Senator Manchin:  -- priority right now in Syria.

13            Secretary Carter:  -- because they're trying to attack  
14     Americans.

15            Senator Manchin:  I gotcha.

16            Secretary Carter:  And we have to take that very  
17     seriously.

18            Senator Manchin:  Okay.

19            Secretary Carter:  They must be defeated, and they must  
20     be --

21            Senator Manchin:  And you agree --

22            Secretary Carter:  -- defeated very --

23            Senator Manchin:  I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary.

24            Secretary Carter:  Sorry.

25            Senator Manchin:  You do agree that Russia's primary is

1 to protect Assad.

2 Secretary Carter: Yeah. They said they were going to  
3 fight ISIL, and that's not what they're doing.

4 Senator Manchin: Okay. So --

5 Secretary Carter: They're propping up --

6 Senator Manchin: -- we --

7 Secretary Carter: -- Assad, which just fuels the civil  
8 war, which is the point the Chairman was making --

9 Senator Manchin: Okay.

10 Secretary Carter: -- and fuels the --

11 Senator Manchin: So, we have two different --

12 Secretary Carter: So, they're on the --

13 Senator Manchin: -- objectives right now --

14 Secretary Carter: -- they're on the wrong side of the  
15 --

16 Senator Manchin: The United States and Russia has two  
17 complete different objectives.

18 Secretary Carter: Well, they say they have the same  
19 objectives, but --

20 Senator Manchin: But, we don't --

21 Secretary Carter: -- their actions --

22 Senator Manchin: -- see that. I gotcha.

23 Secretary Carter: -- belie that.

24 Senator Manchin: And they're basically in line with  
25 Iran in helping prop up Assad and protect Assad.

1 Secretary Carter: Iran has also supported Assad,  
2 absolutely, as well.

3 And so, to get to the question of the end game, the end  
4 game in Syria has to be a transition in which Assad is no  
5 longer running the country. We would like to see that  
6 transition occur in as peaceful and prompt a way as  
7 possible, because we would like there to be the -- a --

8 Senator Manchin: Is it obvious that -- basically, that  
9 Russia and Iran will have more influence on who the next  
10 leader or the leadership of Syria's going to be than we  
11 will?

12 Secretary Carter: Well, I think that -- I wouldn't --  
13 I don't think they can be sure of that, because the --

14 Senator Manchin: But, I'm saying they're --

15 Secretary Carter: -- the future of --

16 Senator Manchin: -- positioning themselves for that.

17 Secretary Carter: -- Syria -- the future of Syria will  
18 be in the hands of the Syrian people, and many of those are  
19 Syrian moderate opposition leaders who are being attacked by  
20 Assad's forces, with Russia's help, right now.

21 Senator Manchin: Have we --

22 Secretary Carter: That's why Russia's --

23 Senator Manchin: -- been able to assist --

24 Secretary Carter: -- on the wrong side of --

25 Senator Manchin: -- the migration of the people from

1 Syria as being --

2 Secretary Carter: Some of them.

3 Senator Manchin: -- more of the leaders --

4 Secretary Carter: Some of them.

5 Senator Manchin: -- more of the well-educated, more of  
6 the peace-loving?

7 Secretary Carter: Yes. There's a spectrum there that  
8 goes all the way over to true extremists, like al-Nusra and  
9 al- -- and ISIL, all the way through groups --

10 Senator Manchin: Can I ask, General --

11 Secretary Carter: -- much more moderate.

12 Senator Manchin: -- Dunford, if -- on this -- General,  
13 I know that we've talked before on some of this, but it's  
14 just so -- it's so hard to go home and explain our  
15 involvement unless we're going to have a no-fly and protect  
16 those who want to be there to rebuild their country. We're  
17 not going to have much to work with.

18 General Dunford: The Chairman said something important  
19 in his opening comments. And I think that's exactly what  
20 the military campaign is designed to do, and that's to  
21 provide some leverage. And I think what we owe -- what we  
22 owe the President is options that will allow us to generate  
23 the kind of momentum and confidence in the military campaign  
24 against ISIL that will give us leverage politically.

25 So, the decision's been made that the issue with Assad

1 is being solved politically right now. So, I think there's  
2 two separate approaches, here, in Syria that'll come  
3 together at some point in the future. One is that we're  
4 dealing with ISIL on the ground, and we're doing that  
5 militarily, and that's with the strikes and the partnership  
6 capacity that I spoke about a minute ago. Meanwhile, there  
7 are broader political negotiations that are taking place to  
8 determine the future of the transitional government. I  
9 think right now it's pretty clear to me what we should be  
10 doing on the military side, and that is taking the fight to  
11 ISIL, generating momentum, keeping the coalition together,  
12 giving confidence in the campaign. And then, again --

13 Senator Manchin: If I can just --

14 General Dunford: -- the Chairman talked about --

15 Senator Manchin: Mr. Chairman, if you indulge us, one  
16 more.

17 If I can just ask: Is the rebels or the coalition  
18 forces, which we are supporting in Syria -- are they more  
19 intent on fighting Assad or fighting ISIL?

20 General Dunford: The individuals that we are  
21 supporting, specifically those in the north, are supporting  
22 -- fighting ISIL.

23 Senator Manchin: More so than Assad.

24 General Dunford: More so than Assad.

25 Senator Manchin: Even though --

1           General Dunford: So, that includes the Syrian Arab  
2 Coalition and the YPG and some smaller groups that we've  
3 supported. And we have some other groups that we're  
4 beginning to negotiate with in the south that have expressed  
5 the same intent.

6           Senator Manchin: Thank you, sir.

7           Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

8           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9           Our committee rules have always been to submit the  
10 statements 24 hours in advance, and I -- that didn't -- it's  
11 really helpful to us if we can get that. And so, I'd ask  
12 you, in the future hearings, to do that.

13           Appreciate the fact that both the Chairman and you,  
14 Secretary Carter, mentioned by name Josh Wheeler. Josh  
15 Wheeler is from Roland, Oklahoma. He's one who is certainly  
16 a -- he was a hero before all of this happened, and, by his  
17 actions, he saved 70 lives of hostages and fellow members of  
18 the Coalition Task Force. And I -- so, I appreciate very  
19 much your talking about him.

20           I -- since the -- you were here before, Secretary  
21 Carter, in July, ISIL still controls much of the northern  
22 and western Iraq, despite more than a year of U.S.  
23 airstrikes and the loss of Ramadi. Significant setback.  
24 Russia continued its military buildup in Syria, as we've  
25 been talking about, and began operations to support Iraq.

1 Iran Quds Forces in Syria have been joined by Iranian  
2 support forces from Lebanon's Hezbollah to support the Assad  
3 regime. All under the command of General Soleimani, who  
4 previously directed attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. And we  
5 talked about the change in the train-and-equip program,  
6 which I would like to get -- have you elaborate a little bit  
7 more on. But, in your statement that we got this morning,  
8 Secretary Carter, you said, quote, "To be clear, we are not  
9 cooperating with Russia, and we are not letting Russia  
10 impact the pace and scope of our campaign against ISIL in  
11 Iraq and Syria."

12 Last week, we had -- well, some time ago, we had Dr.  
13 Kissinger in as a witness, but then last week we had five  
14 professors that were there in one of our really good  
15 hearings that we had on -- I think it was on Wednesday or  
16 Thursday. And we quoted Dr. Kissinger when he said, quote,  
17 "Syria is the latest symptom of a disintegration of the  
18 American role in stabilizing the Middle East order,"  
19 unquote.

20 Now, do you think that's inconsistent with the  
21 statements that you've made, Secretary Carter?

22 Secretary Carter: I think that the Middle East is  
23 certainly very tumultuous, but, once again, I come back to:  
24 our role is to protect American interests in that  
25 circumstance. And that's --

1 Senator Inhofe: Yeah, but are --

2 Secretary Carter: -- what we're doing. Whether it be  
3 the fight against ISIL, our alliances and partnerships with  
4 Gulf countries, and Israel, our posture in the Gulf, all of  
5 that is intended to protect American interests in the Middle  
6 East. And is the Middle East tumultuous? You bet it is.  
7 But, our anchor is the protection --

8 Senator Inhofe: Well, when I read your statement, it  
9 seemed to me that it's not totally consistent with that.

10 What do you think, General Dunford, about Kissinger's  
11 statement, in terms of our role in that part of the world?

12 General Dunford: Senator, thanks.

13 I mean, I -- what I would agree with, with former  
14 Secretary Kissinger, is that we have a critical role to play  
15 in the Middle East. We have national interests in the  
16 Middle East, and we should be decisively engaged in  
17 advancing those national interests.

18 Senator Inhofe: Yeah, okay, but -- and I know this is  
19 about the Middle East, but -- and Ukraine is another good  
20 example of what our posture is in that part of the world.  
21 And a lot of us here were actually -- well, I was there  
22 during the last election that they had, in October, when,  
23 for the first time in 96 years, they don't have one  
24 Communist on -- in their Parliament in the Ukraine. And so,  
25 Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk and -- they're all -- that was a

1 pro-Western effort. And then, immediately, Putin started  
2 killing them all. And our response was sending blankets and  
3 K-rations -- well, they don't call them K-rations anymore,  
4 but -- anyway, do you agree, General Dunford, that this is  
5 the right response that we should have had, to maintain what  
6 you have always perceived to be our role?

7 General Dunford: Senator, I don't want to be evasive,  
8 but I'm not sure it would be appropriate for me to comment  
9 on an issue of policy and what we ought to do. I mean, it  
10 -- I think my job is to provide military options to our  
11 leadership --

12 Senator Inhofe: Okay.

13 General Dunford: -- in support of the policy.

14 Senator Inhofe: Okay. We've been -- let me ask you a  
15 question, because I don't know. What is the current status  
16 of Fallujah?

17 General Dunford: Fallujah, right now, is being held by  
18 insurgents. And that is one of the areas that's been  
19 identified for future operations by Iraqi Security Forces.

20 Senator Inhofe: Well, yeah, that's -- you know what --

21 Chairman McCain: That's comforting. We know it's been  
22 identified.

23 Senator Inhofe: All right. Well, thank you, Mr.  
24 Chairman.

25 Chairman McCain: Senator Heinrich.

1           Can't make it up.

2           Senator Heinrich: Secretary Carter -- Secretary  
3 Carter, if there is one lesson it seems to me we should have  
4 learned in the Middle East and North Africa by now, it's  
5 that every time we think it can't get worse, if there's not  
6 an end game, it can. Removing Saddam Hussein at the cost of  
7 thousands of American lives gave us a chaotic civil war, an  
8 ethnic war that led to the vacuum that helped spawn ISIL.  
9 In Libya, we removed a brutal dictator, only to see chaos  
10 and extremism reign across what can now only loosely be  
11 called a country.

12           So, to reference Senator Manchin's comments that we  
13 need to think about an end game, here, I think about the  
14 fact that many of our colleagues now believe that the  
15 solution to Syria today is to focus directly on the removal  
16 of the Assad regime rather than the current administration  
17 focus on ISIL.

18           So, I want to ask you: Were the Assad regime to fall  
19 without a plan in place for follow-on governance and a  
20 political settlement that could create some sort of  
21 stability, how confident are you that Syria wouldn't just  
22 slip into an even more chaotic state, you know, potentially  
23 threatening our allies in the region, creating new  
24 opportunities for ISIL, and creating a new wave of refugees  
25 that could make the current outpouring of refugees look

1 modest?

2 Secretary Carter: Well, that -- the end game we seek  
3 is both the defeat of ISIL and a transition in Syria. And,  
4 you're right, the sooner that occurs, the more likely it is  
5 that their -- the structures of Syrian society aren't  
6 completely destroyed by the time that transition occurs.  
7 That's why hastening that political transition -- Assad out  
8 and the political forces, to include the moderate Syrian  
9 forces now opposing Assad, have the opportunity to rebuild  
10 the country. That's the only way to put Syria back  
11 together. And the sooner that occurs, the better. That's  
12 why we -- we're supporting that political transition. But,  
13 at the same time, we have to defeat ISIL. They have to be  
14 militarily defeated. There's no --

15 Senator Heinrich: My point with respect to Assad is  
16 that, should Assad fall, we need to be thinking about what  
17 comes next so it's not just an opportunity for ISIL and  
18 other extremist groups in that region.

19 Secretary Carter: I believe that the talks that  
20 Secretary Kerry is having with various partners -- parties  
21 in the region this week are precisely aimed at deciding what  
22 the contours of that political settlement would be and what  
23 would come after it. But, one of the reasons why it's so  
24 important that this occur quickly is that the structures of  
25 the Syrian state are going to be important to the future,

1 and we don't want them to disintegrate entirely. And that's  
2 why fueling the Syrian civil war, which is what the Russians  
3 are doing, is so wrongheaded.

4 Senator Heinrich: General Dunford, with respect to the  
5 potential no-fly-zone issue that was brought up earlier,  
6 what would be the limitations of that kind of course of  
7 action, given particularly the new fairly sophisticated air  
8 defenses from Russia that are now inside Syria?

9 General Dunford: Senator, from a military perspective,  
10 we can implement a no-fly zone, and we have the capability  
11 to do that. The challenges are political, legal, and then a  
12 diversion of the resources that are currently fighting ISIL  
13 in support of that no-fly zone. So, those are among the  
14 factors that were considered when we looked at the no-fly  
15 zone.

16 Senator Heinrich: Moving back to you, Secretary  
17 Carter, during your previous appearance before this  
18 committee, in July, you emphasized that Prime Minister Abadi  
19 was doing everything he could to recruit Sunnis to the  
20 fight. And I think you said that, quote, "Only" -- or --  
21 "Sunnis can take back Anbar." Do you still feel this way?  
22 And can you update the committee on the progress, or lack of  
23 progress, in training Iraqi Security Forces?

24 Secretary Carter: It is still true. The recapture of  
25 western Iraq is going to require Sunni forces that

1 participate in that recapture and then, of course, that keep  
2 the peace after the peace is won. That's why we're in -- so  
3 intent on getting Sunni fighters into the fight. And the  
4 legacy of Prime Minister Maliki was to make the armed forces  
5 of Iraq more sectarian, to the detriment of the Sunnis.  
6 That's one of the things that led to ISIL. I think that  
7 Prime Minister Abadi is trying, but I think they -- that --  
8 I'm going to be honest with you -- Iraq needs to --

9 Senator Heinrich: A lot of that --

10 Secretary Carter: -- do more --

11 Senator Heinrich: -- damage has been done.

12 Secretary Carter: -- to attract -- well, but if we're  
13 going to reverse it, we need to try to recruit, pay, arm,  
14 and equip the Sunni forces. That is our purpose. That's  
15 what we're doing with the Iraqis. And that needs to be part  
16 of the future.

17 If I can also address the no-fly zone, I just -- I just  
18 want to be clear. We have studied the no-fly zone as -- the  
19 Chairman's absolutely right, one knows how to do that. And  
20 I thought it -- I'll give you some of the considerations  
21 that go into that. And, by the way, I should -- the  
22 President hasn't taken anything like this off the table.  
23 You asked whether we've recommended that. At this stage,  
24 we've not. A no-fly zone would be intended to prevent the  
25 Syrian air force from, as the Chairman said, "barrel-

1 bombing" or otherwise using airpower, both fixed-wing and  
2 rotary-wing, against the civilians population. Where  
3 they're doing that is over in the western part of the  
4 country, which is not the area where we're flying in now,  
5 because we're flying and attacking ISIL, further to the  
6 east. That area is protected by the Syrian Integrated Air  
7 Defense System. So, were we to fly there, we would need to  
8 deal with the Syrian Integrated Air Defense System, which is  
9 a substantial undertaking of its own that we have, as the  
10 Chairman indicated, analyzed, and we certainly have  
11 capabilities to do. And then, we would be interdicting both  
12 fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft that were attacking the  
13 Syrian population.

14 The -- I should note that it -- however, that most of  
15 the civilian casualties inflicted by Assad's forces on the  
16 civilian population have been from artillery. And,  
17 obviously, this wouldn't do anything about artillery, but it  
18 would do something about airstrikes.

19 It's a substantial new undertaking. We've analyzed it.  
20 We've not made the recommendation to do it at this time.  
21 But, I respect people who are making recommendations for  
22 these kinds of zones. And then there are also humanitarian  
23 zones, which have been referenced also, which are a portion  
24 of Syria, now speaking conceptually, where people could  
25 congregate and be protected. Now, those -- a zone thus

1 created would be contested by ISIL, by al-Nusra, at a  
2 minimum, and so it would have to be defended. So, again, it's  
3 a substantial military undertaking. The people who live  
4 there would, therefore, take a ground force, with  
5 accompanying air forces, to accomplish that. And the people  
6 who were protected could be people who live there or -- and  
7 I think some people who have moved into Turkey, whom Turkey  
8 wishes to move back. But, I just want to be clear that, to  
9 keep it safe would require fighting to keep it safe, because  
10 the people who want to terrorize the population would  
11 attempt to attack such a zone. So, you need to think, in  
12 each case -- and we've thought through several different  
13 cases -- who's in, who is kept out, and how the enforcement  
14 of it is done.

15 So, there are air zones and there are ground zones. We  
16 have considered all of them. And again, the President  
17 hasn't taken anything off the table. We've not made any  
18 specific recommendations in that regard, but we've looked at  
19 a variety of such possibilities.

20 Let me ask the Chairman if he has anything to add to  
21 that.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

23 Senator Graham: Thank you, to my colleagues, for  
24 letting me jump ahead. I appreciate it very, very much.

25 I want to see if I've got this right. We're going to

1 train people inside of Syria to fight ISIL, rather than  
2 training them outside of Syria; equip them inside and train  
3 them inside, right? New strategy.

4 Secretary Carter: Yes. That's where they are.

5 Senator Graham: Okay. So, you know, count me in for  
6 trying to help. Do we still want to replace Assad?

7 Secretary Carter: Oh, absolutely. I mean --

8 Senator Graham: Is that a goal of ours?

9 Secretary Carter: A -- yes -- a transition from Assad  
10 --

11 Senator Graham: Okay.

12 Secretary Carter: -- to a government --

13 Senator Graham: Okay.

14 Secretary Carter: -- of Syria that is --

15 Senator Graham: General Dunford --

16 Secretary Carter: -- inclusive and moderate --

17 Senator Graham: Right.

18 Secretary Carter: -- and together.

19 Senator Graham: Right.

20 Secretary Carter: Absolutely.

21 Senator Graham: General Dunford, is it smart to let  
22 Russia fight ISIL and we stay out of the fight?

23 General Dunford: Russia is not fighting ISIL, Senator.

24 Senator Graham: But, that wouldn't be a good idea, to  
25 rely on Russia to fight ISIL for us.

1           General Dunford:  Senator, I think we need to be  
2 engaged in advancing our own national interests.  We have a  
3 national interest in dealing --

4           Senator Graham:  Okay.

5           General Dunford:  -- with ISIL, and --

6           Senator Graham:  Okay.

7           General Dunford:  -- we should be doing that.

8           Senator Graham:  Okay, here's --

9           General Dunford:  We can do it --

10          Senator Graham:  -- the question.

11          General Dunford:  -- it more effectively.  I'm not  
12 confident --

13          Senator Graham:  Right.

14          General Dunford:  -- that Russia --

15          Senator Graham:  Right.

16          General Dunford:  -- is effective --

17          Senator Graham:  I am --

18          General Dunford:  -- would be effective at doing it.

19          Senator Graham:  I'm a million percent with you.

20          Are we going to supply air support for the people we  
21 train to fight ISIL?

22          General Dunford:  We are, Senator.

23          Senator Graham:  Do those same people want to take  
24 Assad down?

25          General Dunford:  The ones that we are supporting right

1 now are focused on ISIL, sir.

2 Senator Graham: Do they have a goal to take Assad  
3 down?

4 General Dunford: Senator, I don't know.

5 Senator Graham: What do you mean you don't know?

6 General Dunford: Well, the ones we're -- we -- I don't  
7 know because --

8 Senator Graham: Don't you think most people in Syria  
9 want two things: they want to fight -- they want to destroy  
10 ISIL and get rid of Assad, the person who's killed 250,000  
11 of their family?

12 General Dunford: The --

13 Senator Graham: Is that really a mystery?

14 General Dunford: No, it's not --

15 Senator Graham: It's not --

16 General Dunford: -- Senator.

17 Senator Graham: -- a mystery. Okay. Is Russia going  
18 to fight for Assad?

19 General Dunford: Russia is fighting for Assad.

20 Senator Graham: Will Iran fight for Assad?

21 General Dunford: They are doing that, sir.

22 Senator Graham: Will Hezbollah fight for Assad?

23 General Dunford: They were doing that.

24 Senator Graham: When the people we train to fight ISIL  
25 turn on Assad, which they surely will, are we going to fight

1 with them to replace Assad?

2 General Dunford: I can't answer that question,  
3 Senator.

4 Senator Graham: Can you answer it, Secretary Carter?

5 Secretary Carter: Yeah, I -- just to be clear, let's  
6 take the --

7 Senator Graham: That days is coming.

8 Secretary Carter: -- YPG Kurds -- well, I -- the --

9 Senator Graham: Do you see a scenario where the --

10 Secretary Carter: Let me just --

11 Senator Graham: -- people in Syria --

12 Secretary Carter: Let me just address the --

13 Senator Graham: -- don't take --

14 Secretary Carter: -- the people that --

15 Senator Graham: -- on Assad?

16 Secretary Carter: -- the people that are -- that we  
17 are equipping are people who live in or come from ISIL-  
18 occupied territory, and they're --

19 Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad down?

20 Secretary Carter: -- on defeating ISIL and --

21 Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad down?

22 Secretary Carter: For the most part, they're focused  
23 on defeating --

24 Senator Graham: Do they want to take Assad -- have you  
25 asked them?

1 Secretary Carter: We know what their intent is, and it  
2 is to fight ISIL.

3 Senator Graham: Come on.

4 Secretary Carter: They're fighting ISIL now.

5 Senator Graham: You know as well as I do, both of you  
6 know, that the average Syrian not only wants to destroy  
7 ISIL, but they're intent on destroying Assad because he's  
8 killed 250,000 of them.

9 And here's the question for this committee. How do we  
10 leverage Assad leaving, when Russia's going to fight for  
11 him, Iran's going to fight for him, Hezbollah's fighting for  
12 him, and we're not going to do a damn thing to help people  
13 take him down? And y'all both know that. So, when Kerry  
14 goes over to Geneva, he is turning over Syria to the  
15 Russians and to the Iranians.

16 Is there any credible military threat to Assad now that  
17 Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah's on his side? Do you see any  
18 credible military threat to take him down, General Dunford?

19 General Dunford: I think the balance of forces right  
20 now are in Assad's advantage.

21 Senator Graham: Not his advantage. He is secure as  
22 the day is long.

23 So, this is what's happened, folks. The strategy is  
24 completely fallen apart. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah are  
25 going to fight for their guy, and we're not going to do a

1 damn thing to help the people who want to change Syria for  
2 the better by getting rid of the dictator in Damascus.

3 Do you see a scenario, Secretary Carter, where we would  
4 fight to support an effort to take Assad down, that we would  
5 fight alongside of people who want to take Assad down in  
6 Syria? Is that remotely possible?

7 Secretary Carter: We are -- our approach to removing  
8 Assad has been to --

9 Senator Graham: Does it have a military component?

10 Secretary Carter: It is principally a political effort  
11 in Syria. Our --

12 Senator Graham: So, the answer --

13 Secretary Carter: -- military effort in Syria --

14 Senator Graham: -- is no.

15 Secretary Carter: -- our military effort in Syria --

16 Senator Graham: Are we going to fight with people who  
17 want to take Assad down? Are we going to provide them  
18 military help?

19 Secretary Carter: Our train-and-equip program --

20 Senator Graham: The answer is no.

21 Secretary Carter: -- is to provide --

22 Senator Graham: The answer is no --

23 Secretary Carter: -- is supportive of people --

24 Senator Graham: The answer is no.

25 Secretary Carter: -- who are fighting ISIL.

1           Senator Graham: So, let me just end this. If I'm  
2 Assad, this is a good day for me, because the American  
3 government has just said, without saying it, that they're  
4 not going to fight to replace me. The Russians and the  
5 Iranians and Hezbollah, this is a really good day for them,  
6 because their guy has no military credible threat.

7           So, now you tell me what kind of deal we're going to  
8 get, folks. I'm sure we'll get a really good deal with this  
9 construct. So, what you've done, gentlemen, along with the  
10 President, is, you've turned Syria over to Russia and Iran.  
11 You've told the people in Syria, who have died by the  
12 hundreds of thousands, we're more worried about a political  
13 settlement than we are about what follows.

14           All I can say, this is a sad day for America, and the  
15 region will pay hell for this, because the Arabs are not  
16 going to accept this. The people in Syria are not going to  
17 accept this. This is a half-assed strategy, at best.

18           Chairman McCain: Since a quorum is now present, I ask  
19 the committee to consider a list of 1,663 pending military  
20 nominations. All of these nominations have been before the  
21 committee the required length of time. Is there a motion so  
22 -- favorably report these 1,663 nominations --

23           Senator Reed: So moved.

24           Chairman McCain: -- to the Senate?

25           Is there a second?

1 Senator Kaine: Second.

2 Chairman McCain: All in favor, say aye.

3 [A chorus of ayes.]

4 Chairman McCain: The motion carries.

5 Senator Kaine.

6 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 And thank you, to the witnesses, for your service and  
8 testimony.

9 Secretary Carter, you stated that the primary objective  
10 of our actions, as you've described this morning, is the  
11 defeat of ISIL. And I want to dig into that a little bit.

12 Currently -- I think I'm right on this -- we are  
13 engaged in activities against ISIL, military activities in  
14 Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and then, when we  
15 were on a -- during that week of congressional recess, the  
16 President sent to Congress a war powers letter indicating  
17 the detachment of, I think, 300 American troops to Cameroon  
18 to assist in activities against Boko Haram, which has  
19 pledged allegiance to ISIL. Have I omitted any countries  
20 where there is currently activity that is either ISIL  
21 activity or groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIL?

22 Secretary Carter: We're watching ISIL all over the  
23 world, Senator. As you know, it has aspirations and tries  
24 to metastasize, uses the Web. I mean, you -- we have had --  
25 and Director Comey's made this very clear -- Americans who

1 have self-radicalized --

2 Senator Kaine: That -- actually, that --

3 Secretary Carter: And so --

4 Senator Kaine: That's going to be my --

5 Secretary Carter: -- this is a --

6 Senator Kaine: -- next question.

7 Secretary Carter: -- phenomenon that is around the

8 world. We're watching it around the world -- not just

9 ourselves, but in law enforcement and intelligence circles.

10 It's one of the reasons why ISIL needs to be defeated.

11 Senator Kaine: In terms of kind of kinetic activities

12 by the military, though, am I right that currently, it's

13 Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and then the

14 deployment of troops to Cameroon?

15 Secretary Carter: It depends on what you mean by that.

16 You want to go ahead, Joe?

17 General Dunford: Senator, we don't currently have

18 operations ongoing in Yemen -- direct operations against

19 ISIL. We don't have operations against -- Libya against

20 ISIL. And our support in Cameroon is ISR support in support

21 of operations against Boko Haram.

22 Senator Kaine: Okay. But, Secretary Carter --

23 Secretary Carter: We can get you what we're doing --

24 Senator Kaine: Yeah.

25 Secretary Carter: -- in each country. But, it's --

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1 Chairman McCain: And I don't want to get into asking  
2 about non-DOD title activity, so I'll omit that, but just --  
3 I think the record, in the public record, about activities  
4 in those countries is fairly plain.

5 Secretary Carter, you indicate we're watching ISIL in  
6 other countries. Is it fair to assume, based on your joint  
7 professional judgment, that ISIL continues to mutate and  
8 find adherents in other countries, and we may well have to  
9 contemplate DOD activity against ISIL in nations other than  
10 those that I've mentioned?

11 Secretary Carter: It could come to that. And that's  
12 why I think we need to kill the source of it, which is in  
13 Syria and --

14 Senator Kaine: Iraq.

15 Secretary Carter: -- Iraq.

16 Senator Kaine: Is it fair to assume -- you know, we  
17 pray that this is not the case, but that the death of Master  
18 Sergeant Wheeler may not be the last death of an American  
19 servicemember in this campaign to defeat ISIL?

20 Secretary Carter: I think we need to be realistic. We  
21 are -- our people will be in positions -- they are right  
22 now, every day; there are people flying right now, there are  
23 people training and advising forces there, and they are in  
24 harm's way. There's no doubt about it.

25 Senator Kaine: And we've lost service personnel,

1 before Master Sergeant Wheeler, not necessarily in direct  
2 combat or kinetic activities, but, as you say, they were in  
3 positions of danger because of their support for this  
4 mission against ISIL.

5 Secretary Carter: Yes. Make no mistake, they are in  
6 harm's way in this fight against ISIL. No doubt about it.

7 Senator Kaine: In your professional judgment, your  
8 notion that the primary objective is the defeat of ISIL, how  
9 long will that take?

10 Secretary Carter: It needs to be -- I can't tell you  
11 how long it will take, but I think that the -- it needs to  
12 be soon, which is why we're so intent upon strengthening our  
13 effort, which is why we are working with the Iraqis and  
14 trying to get them to field more Sunni forces, strengthening  
15 our training and equipping of Sunni forces, why we're  
16 prepared to do more with those forces in Iraq. The  
17 President's indicated that, and indicated a willingness for  
18 the Chairman and me to make him recommendations in that  
19 regard. So, to enable those Sunni forces so that they can  
20 take back the Sunni territories of Iraq. And, over in  
21 Syria, it's Raqqa.

22 Senator Kaine: If I can --

23 Secretary Carter: And that's why the Syrian -- the  
24 coalition forces that are intent -- to get back to the  
25 question that Senator Graham was raising -- they want to

1 attack Raqqa and --

2 Senator Kaine: If I can --

3 Secretary Carter: -- take back Raqqa, which is  
4 occupied by ISIL. And they, therefore, deserve our support,  
5 and are receiving our support.

6 Senator Kaine: Mr. Secretary, when you say "soon,"  
7 let's just be realistic, sitting here today. Aren't we  
8 talking -- I mean, with all the countries that we've  
9 mentioned, and your acknowledged possibility that there  
10 could be more, aren't we talking about an effort that is  
11 likely to be a multiyear effort, certainly well into the  
12 next administration?

13 Secretary Carter: That's probably the case. And the  
14 reason is that the strategy is to -- and this is an  
15 important part of the strategy, and we've said it right from  
16 the very beginning -- is to support capable and motivated  
17 forces that can retake and hold territory, not to try to  
18 substitute for them. That's the only way to have a lasting  
19 victory. And that -- it takes some time to identify those  
20 forces, to motivate those forces, to train those forces.  
21 And it depends upon the political circumstances in both Iraq  
22 and Syria. So, it does depend upon the political  
23 circumstances. That isn't something that is anything other  
24 than a very real factor there. But, that's necessary in  
25 order to have a lasting defeat, because we want ISIL not

1 only to be defeated, but it has to stay defeated. And that  
2 means the people who live there need to govern themselves  
3 and restore the peace and order. And that's what takes the  
4 time, is to develop those forces. And it is hard work, but  
5 that's what we're doing in Iraq, and that's what we're doing  
6 in the new train-and-equip program in Syria. It will take  
7 some time.

8 Senator Kaine: Mr. Chair, I'll just conclude and say  
9 that I think that that answer, about the complexity and the  
10 fact that this, under any circumstances, is going to take  
11 significant time, is a very relevant one for us. The  
12 administration's position about the authority to wage this  
13 war is based upon an authorization that was passed on  
14 September 18, 2001, before many of us were here, that  
15 specifically says the President is authorized to use force  
16 against those who planned, authorized, committed, or aided  
17 the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.  
18 And I would just renew my observation that I think it would  
19 have been far beyond the contemplation of the Members of  
20 Congress who voted on that at the time, and it's certainly  
21 beyond the contemplation of those of us who did not vote on  
22 that at the time, that those words would be applying, 15  
23 years later, to an effort in the countries I just mentioned  
24 that may mutate to other countries that is, by the admission  
25 of our witnesses today, likely to take a good deal more. I

1 think it's very much time that Congress revisit the question  
2 of this authorization and try to provide some underlying  
3 legal justification for the ongoing military action.

4 With that, Mr. Chair, I thank you.

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

6 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Secretary Carter, would you assess ISIL and al-Nusra to  
8 be among the most capable rebelled groups that are on the  
9 Syrian battlefield?

10 Secretary Carter: I would. They -- they're ferocious,  
11 they are extremely cruel and brutal. And, of course, some  
12 of these forces that are not trying to brutalize the  
13 population, but trying to fight Assad, are, as has been  
14 indicated, more moderate Syrian forces, and they don't  
15 behave that way, and that's why they deserve to be, and will  
16 be, part of the Syrian political future after Assad.

17 Senator Fischer: Are you concerned that the Russian  
18 and Iranian attacks are going to further polarize the  
19 battlefield and we're going to see more moderate fighters  
20 cooperate with ISIL and al-Nusra because those groups are  
21 more capable?

22 Secretary Carter: Well, that's precisely the point  
23 I've made to the Russians. The way I put it is, they --  
24 pouring gasoline on the civil war in Syria by supporting  
25 Iraq, and they're going to -- they're going to enhance the

1 very extremism that they say they fear, and they have every  
2 reason to fear, because now ISIL and other groups, including  
3 Syrian opposition groups of all stripes, are turned against  
4 Russia. And Russia's had very bitter experience with  
5 extremism in their own country. And this is why their  
6 actions are not consistent with their words and are -- I  
7 keep using the phrase "wrongheaded."

8 Senator Fischer: Have you --

9 Secretary Carter: They say they're doing one thing,  
10 and they're actually doing another.

11 Senator Fischer: Have you told Russia not to attack  
12 units that have been trained by the U.S. or to avoid certain  
13 areas where U.S.-affiliated groups may be operating? Or  
14 have you indicated to the Russians in any way that the  
15 United States will respond to such attacks?

16 Secretary Carter: Well, we've certainly indicated that  
17 we intend to prosecute our counter-ISIL campaign unchanged,  
18 and we don't intend to make any changes, and that we're  
19 determined to do that. And we haven't.

20 Senator Fischer: So, you have communicated to the  
21 Russians that, if there are attacks on U.S.-trained troops  
22 -- or U.S.-trained units in any way, that we will respond.

23 Secretary Carter: I've said earlier in this testimony,  
24 and I've said publicly, that we have an obligation to our --  
25 the forces that we've trained and equipped, to protect them.

1 And we intend to do that.

2 Senator Fischer: But, that does not include the  
3 coalition-trained troops -- units. Is that correct?

4 Secretary Carter: Well, we don't control all of the  
5 opposition forces to Assad. This gets back to the earlier  
6 question. Our train-and-equip program that the Department  
7 of Defense runs is oriented towards fighters whose principal  
8 preoccupation is fighting ISIL. There are others who are  
9 fighting Assad, and they do come under attack by the  
10 Russians. And that's why -- and -- because some of them --

11 Senator Fischer: Would it --

12 Secretary Carter: -- deserve to be part of the Syrian  
13 political future, that's a serious mistake on Russia's part.

14 Senator Fischer: Would it be a serious mistake on  
15 Russia's part to attack any units that have been trained by  
16 other agencies besides the Department of Defense? Would we  
17 have a response in that case?

18 Secretary Carter: I -- that's something we'd have to  
19 talk about separately, Senator.

20 Senator Fischer: Under Secretary Warmuth stated that  
21 Article 2 of the Constitution allows the President to use  
22 force against Assad if he attacks Syrian rebels trained by  
23 the U.S. I would assume that a similar determination has  
24 been made with respect to using force against Russian planes  
25 if they attack U.S.-trained rebels. Is that true?

1 Secretary Carter: Let me just repeat what I said about  
2 the -- for the Department of Defense forces that we are  
3 training and equipping in Syria, we have an obligation to  
4 protect them. They're fighting ISIL. They're far from the  
5 territory that is contested or where the Russians are  
6 operating. But, we do have an obligation to defend them.

7 With respect to other Syrian opposition forces and so  
8 forth, that's something we'd have to discuss in a closed --

9 Senator Fischer: Would the United States take action  
10 against Russian planes if Russian planes were attacking  
11 U.S.-trained units?

12 Secretary Carter: I -- just to repeat, we have  
13 indicated that we have an obligation, we have options, to  
14 protect our people, whom we have trained, against attack.

15 Senator Fischer: I would appreciate if you could  
16 provide us with some more information for the record.  
17 Specifically, if United States forces have the legal  
18 authority to intervene if Assad's forces attack U.S.-trained  
19 fighters, but not if Russia attacks such fighters, if you  
20 could provide some clarification there; specifically, legal  
21 authority.

22 Secretary Carter: Will do. But, the short form is, as  
23 I say, we have an obligation, I believe we have the legal  
24 authority to do that. But, I'm happy to put that in more  
25 detail.

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1 Secretary Carter: And then, there are other aspects  
2 that you're alluding to that we'd simply have to talk about  
3 in closed session.

4 Senator Fischer: Okay.

5 Thank you.

6 Chairman McCain: Senator King.

7 Senator King: Mr. Secretary, before Senator Graham  
8 began his important line of questioning, I wrote, in my  
9 notes, "The opposition will never push Assad out as long as  
10 Russia and Iran are all-in." I think that's just the  
11 reality. And the question is, What do we do about that?  
12 And there will be no -- we can't say, "Well, there'll be a  
13 political solution, there'll be negotiations." The  
14 negotiations will flow out of the military situation.  
15 They've already shown they're not going to negotiate as long  
16 as they think they're solidly in power, which they clearly  
17 think they do. On the other hand, talking about a no-fly  
18 zone, which would bring us in direct conflict with the  
19 Russian air force, raises very large geopolitical questions.

20 But, give me some more thoughts on Senator Graham's  
21 line of questioning. Let's be realistic. You know, wishing  
22 is not going to make a policy. Assad is going to be there  
23 as long as Russia and Iran are willing to stay all-in. How  
24 do we change their calculus without a significant additional  
25 commitment of military power?

1 Secretary Carter: Two things. The -- first of all,  
2 the -- Russian support to Assad is having the effect of  
3 increasing and catalyzing and motivating the opposition to  
4 Assad. And so, I believe that both the Russians and the  
5 Syrians will see the effects of that on the battlefield.  
6 You're right, there will be -- conditioned by the military  
7 situation on the ground there.

8 With respect to the political transition and at what  
9 point Russia would recognize that its actions were fueling  
10 Syria's civil war and fueling the extremism it fears, I  
11 can't say -- speak to that.

12 Senator King: That's what that --

13 Secretary Carter: Now, that is --

14 Senator King: They --

15 Secretary Carter: -- what Secretary --

16 Senator King: The --

17 Secretary Carter: Kerry is exploring with the  
18 Russians.

19 Senator King: The Russians --

20 Secretary Carter: But, I can't --

21 Senator King: -- have to decide --

22 Secretary Carter: -- say when and whether they will  
23 reach that conclusion.

24 Senator King: They have to decide that ISIS is a  
25 bigger threat to them than the loss of Assad. And I don't

1 know when that's going to occur; but I agree with you,  
2 that's the narrow diplomatic opening. But, right now, they  
3 seem to be trying to have it both ways. And you -- as you  
4 point out, they can't. As long as they prop up Assad,  
5 they're essentially propping up ISIS.

6 Secretary Carter: This is --

7 Senator King: Because Assad is --

8 Secretary Carter: This is the --

9 Senator King: -- the stimulus.

10 Secretary Carter: -- logical contradiction in their  
11 approach. There's no question about it. I've said that  
12 from the day that it started, and I said that to the Russian  
13 counterpart, why it's so wrongheaded, their approach. And  
14 at what stage they'll recognize that, I don't know. I do  
15 commend Secretary Kerry for talking to them and trying to  
16 find a different way, but they'd have to reach that  
17 recognition, and a part of that will be learned on the  
18 battlefield, and part of it will be learned in terms of  
19 extremism and how it is turned on Russia.

20 Senator King: But, I think the question that the  
21 administration has to address is, How do we ratchet up  
22 pressure on Assad to change the military calculus in such a  
23 way that it's going to move that calculation?

24 Let me just change the subject for a minute. Both of  
25 you used the term, with regard to the Iraqi army, "capable,

1 motivated Iraqi forces." Isn't that an oxymoron? You,  
2 yourself, have pointed out that this -- that's what's been  
3 missing in Iraq. Is there any likelihood that that's  
4 changing? Do we --

5 Secretary Carter: There are some --

6 Senator King: -- have any intelligence on that?

7 Secretary Carter: There are some, but not nearly  
8 enough. For example, the Counter-Terrorism Service, the  
9 Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, which has been trained by  
10 the United States over time, is an effective, capable,  
11 motivated force. What we lack enough of in Iraq are capable  
12 and motivated Sunni forces. That is the type of force that  
13 is in short supply, and that is why it's so important that  
14 the Government of Iraq continue to recruit Sunnis, pay them.  
15 We will equip them and train them, and we'll support them in  
16 the battlefield. But, it will require Sunni forces to  
17 retake Sunni territory --

18 Senator King: Does Abadi understand that in his gut,  
19 or is he just giving lipservice to this inclusion? Because  
20 if he doesn't, if this isn't real inclusion, we're sunk.

21 Secretary Carter: He has been consistent in what he  
22 has told us, and --

23 Senator King: But, is his actions --

24 Secretary Carter: -- including --

25 Senator King: -- are his actions bearing that out?

1           Secretary Carter: I think you have to be -- I'd have  
2 to be candid and say that Prime Minister Abadi does not have  
3 his -- complete sway over everything that happens in Iraq.  
4 We have insisted that anything we do to support Iraqi forces  
5 must be by and through the Government of Iraq. But, very  
6 clearly -- and you see it -- there are militias of various  
7 kinds, Shi'a militias, that are inadequately under the  
8 control of the government in Baghdad, and that's one of the  
9 challenges there. But, the forces --

10           Senator King: Well --

11           Secretary Carter: -- we support are those that are  
12 under the control of Prime Minister Abadi. And I have  
13 talked to him, and I believe he is sincere in wanting to do  
14 the right thing there. But, again, wanting to do the right  
15 thing and having a complete authority are two different  
16 things in Baghdad. I think his authority is growing in that  
17 regard, but we do not yet have all the Sunni forces  
18 recruited, paid, enrolled, trained, and so forth, that we  
19 need and want.

20           Senator King: Well, I certainly hope we'll use our  
21 influence to the maximum, because if that doesn't -- if that  
22 inclusion doesn't happen, then this whole enterprise is for  
23 naught.

24           Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25           Chairman McCain: Senator Ernst.

1           Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2           Gentlemen, thank you for being here today. Thank you  
3 very much for your service.

4           It's a very difficult time, General Dunford. I was in  
5 theater with a handful of colleagues about the week before  
6 you were in theater. I was very disturbed at what I see  
7 going on on the ground. It's a very tumultuous time.

8           Chairman Dunford, you did state that we need to take  
9 the fight to ISIL, and we need to continue the momentum.  
10 And it's concerning, because to continue the momentum, we  
11 actually have to have momentum, going forward. And, right  
12 now, the only group that I see in Iraq that's fighting ISIL  
13 that has momentum is the Kurdish Peshmerga. And again,  
14 everybody knows how I feel about this. They've been great  
15 allies to us. And, in testimony before this committee over  
16 the past several months, we've had many, many prestigious  
17 military -- former military commanders and governmental  
18 officials, such as General David Petraeus, General Mike  
19 Hayden, General Jack Keane, and, of course, former Secretary  
20 Bob Gates. And all of them agree that we really do need to  
21 enhance our support to the Iraqi Kurds as part of a more  
22 comprehensive strategy against ISIS.

23           And I'm very concerned that right now our current  
24 strategy piecemeals the weapons, the equipment, and -- my  
25 gush, we have so many various types of calibers of weapons

1 -- that's going from our coalition partners and the United  
2 States to the Kurdish Peshmerga. And, as a logistician, as  
3 a transporter, you know, supported those forces, our forces  
4 in Iraq, I know how difficult this would be for any army,  
5 that we are piecemealing so much up to the Peshmerga.

6 So, what is our strategy to develop a more capable  
7 Peshmerga force for the long-term fight for ISIS? Secretary  
8 Carter, if you could address that, please.

9 Secretary Carter: Absolutely. You're absolutely  
10 right. The Kurdish Peshmerga are an excellent example of  
11 capable and motivated ground forces. And so, they have  
12 taken and held territory. We support the -- and most  
13 recently, of course, in the operation conducted this past  
14 week.

15 With respect to equipping them -- and you know from  
16 your logistics background, as you indicated very well --  
17 that rapidity and certainty of supply are very important to  
18 them. And we have a policy of routing equipment to the  
19 Kurdish Peshmerga through the government of Baghdad and -- I  
20 think that's where -- the hinge on which your question turns  
21 -- for the reason -- to get back to what Senator King was  
22 asking earlier -- that our approach to Iraq is to try to  
23 support a multisectarian government in Baghdad. So, we're  
24 trying to do both: supply the Peshmerga and support Prime  
25 Minister Abadi as the leader of the country overall.

1           Now, in the early days, that led -- that issue led to  
2 some delay in our supplies to the Kurdish Peshmerga. Those  
3 delays do not occur now. And so, we -- and, by the way,  
4 it's not just us; I think there are more than 14 other  
5 countries that are shipping tons and tons --

6           Senator Ernst: Quite a few.

7           Secretary Carter: -- of question to the Kurdish --

8           Senator Ernst: Quite a few.

9           Secretary Carter: -- Peshmerga. And so, I do not  
10 believe there now is a bottleneck in our supply to the  
11 Kurdish Peshmerga. We still do go through the routine of  
12 shipping through and with the permission of the government  
13 of Baghdad, for the very simple reason that we want to stick  
14 up for the principle of --

15          Senator Ernst: I do believe that we need to do a  
16 better job at this.

17          General Dunford, just very quick, if I could turn to  
18 you. How do the Iraqi Security Forces, or the Iraqi Army --  
19 how do their maneuver, fires, and effects units compare to  
20 the Kurdish Peshmerga's units?

21          General Dunford: I think the best of the Iraqis, the  
22 CTS forces and some of the brigades we trained, compare  
23 favorably to the Peshmerga. The Peshmerga also have, you  
24 know, very competent forces. But, I think the best of the  
25 Iraqis are about comparable to the Peshmerga.

1           Senator Ernst: Okay. And we're utilizing them to the  
2 best of our capability?

3           General Dunford: We are. And we -- and, Senator,  
4 that's an important question, because the one thing that the  
5 commanders told me is, those brigades that we actually have  
6 put through training, there is a qualitative difference in  
7 their performance. There's two brigades, for example,  
8 surrounding Ramadi right now that have gone through our  
9 training program, and those two brigades have performed at a  
10 much higher level than the other units, as well as the CTS,  
11 the Counter-Terrorism Service, who's also performed very  
12 well.

13          Senator Ernst: So, you believe that training and  
14 advising and assisting below the division level would be  
15 very important in any future operations.

16          General Dunford: I do --

17          Senator Ernst: For --

18          General Dunford: From a training perspective, in  
19 particular, yes, Senator.

20          Senator Ernst: I do believe that needs to be part of  
21 our decisionmaking process as we move forward.

22          Thank you, Mr. Chair.

23          Chairman McCain: Senator Hirono.

24          Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25          General Dunford, in your testimony, you went over a

1 number of areas that we need to focus on in our fight to  
2 defeat ISIL. And you said that we need to do more to cut  
3 the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL. Can you briefly  
4 describe what we're doing now and what more we need to do in  
5 this area?

6 General Dunford: I can, Senator. I had an -- we have  
7 a team on the ground. They're part of a ten-nation  
8 coalition that's working on foreign fighters right now.  
9 But, it's mostly a military view of foreign fighters. And  
10 so, when I sat down and spoke to that team, you know, one of  
11 the challenges that became clear is that we really don't  
12 have, amongst all the coalition, kind of a common view of  
13 where the foreign fighters come from, how they move back and  
14 forth into the area, but, more importantly, not much of a  
15 track on where they go once they leave back to their home  
16 country. So, from my perspective -- and this is an area  
17 that Secretary Carter and I have spoken to Secretary Kerry  
18 about last week -- from my perspective, we need to do much  
19 more: one, to get a view of foreign fighters as a whole,  
20 and then make sure we maximize the legal, the military, and  
21 the political tools that are available to us to cut off the  
22 flow of foreign fighters.

23 Senator Hirono: So, is this an area that we're going  
24 to see some kind of a measurable improvement?

25 General Dunford: Senator, for me, when I came back

1 from my visit, there are two areas that I think we need to  
2 focus on to move the campaign forward. Two of many. And  
3 the two that I personally engage on is, one, foreign  
4 fighters, and the other is intelligence.

5 Senator Hirono: So, you're -- we're going to see some  
6 appreciable, measurable improvements. And I know you can't  
7 talk about the intelligence side of things in this setting.

8 So, Secretary Carter, in response to a question, you  
9 said that the timeframe for defeating ISIL is -- it better  
10 be soon. And, from everything that we understand, this is  
11 -- this whole area of the world is a -- very complicated.  
12 And so, it is, I realize, difficult to really hone in, I  
13 suppose, on what a reasonable timeframe may be. At the same  
14 time, with regard to Assad, there were indications that he  
15 was about to collapse, that his regime was about to  
16 collapse. But, now that Russia has come in to bolster the  
17 Assad regime, two questions: How long do you think that  
18 Assad can be propped up by Russia's actions? And, two, do  
19 you think that Putin really is looking at a long-term  
20 scenario, where Assad stays in place, or is he much more  
21 interested, long term, in the stability of Syria for  
22 Russia's own interests?

23 Secretary Carter: I can't say what Vladimir Putin is  
24 thinking about Assad's future, but I can tell what his  
25 behavior suggests. And that is that he is -- does want to

1 support, at least for now, Assad, avoid the collapse of the  
2 Syrian state, which, as you indicated, I think he believed  
3 could occur, and that was one of the things that spurred his  
4 support -- enhanced support for Assad. I've told you what I  
5 think of that approach. I think that it has the -- it's  
6 going to backfire, and that is have the opposite of the  
7 effect that he is seeking. It enhances the opposition to  
8 Assad, and it also enhances the extremism he says he fears.  
9 So, it's not a very sensible strategy, but that appears to  
10 be what his behavior is --

11 Senator Hirono: Well, that --

12 Secretary Carter: -- suggests.

13 Senator Hirono: That appears to be his immediate goal,  
14 but I think that Putin is also smart enough to figure out  
15 that if he really wants stability in Syria, he may not be  
16 able to get it as long as Assad is in power.

17 I wanted to get to the no-fly zone. What would we need  
18 to do -- if a no-fly zone is declared in Syria, what would  
19 we need to do to make sure that that no-fly zone sticks?

20 Either one of you.

21 Secretary Carter: Yeah, I'll start, and then maybe the  
22 Chairman can say.

23 So, we have now, for quite a while, and preceding my  
24 time as Secretary of Defense, analyzed the possibility of  
25 no-fly zones. And I've tried to give you some of the -- an

1 indication of some of the considerations there. That would  
2 involve operating in the part of the country which is not  
3 generally where we're conducting air operations now and  
4 where there are Syrian air defenses.

5 Senator Hirono: Yes.

6 Secretary Carter: And if we were going to put air  
7 crews in that environment, we would have to take care of  
8 those air defenses, which is a substantial military  
9 undertaking in its own --

10 Senator Hirono: So, one scenario could --

11 Secretary Carter: -- right.

12 Senator Hirono: -- be that Assad would be -- would not  
13 abide by a no-fly zone, and we would need to protect --

14 Secretary Carter: No. I think you have to --

15 Senator Hirono: -- it. Therefore, we would be in --

16 Secretary Carter: -- assume it would be contested.

17 Senator Hirono: -- direct conflict --

18 Secretary Carter: Yeah, I think you have to assume --

19 Senator Hirono: -- with Assad.

20 Secretary Carter: -- that these -- an air -- no-fly  
21 zone would be contested by Assad, because --

22 Senator Hirono: Yes.

23 Secretary Carter: -- its very intent was to engage his  
24 air force. And just, again, to get back to Senator Graham's  
25 point, we have not undertaken to have U.S. forces engage

1 Assad's forces in a war for control --

2 Senator Hirono: And that's probably one of the reasons

3 --

4 Secretary Carter: -- of Syria.

5 Senator Hirono: -- with that kind of --

6 Secretary Carter: We haven't taken that step.

7 Senator Hirono: -- excuse me -- with that kind of

8 likely scenario, it's probably one of the reasons that we

9 hesitate in --

10 Secretary Carter: That's a --

11 Senator Hirono: -- creating a no-fly zone.

12 Senator Hirono: -- substantial and new military

13 undertaking. And, likewise --

14 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

15 Secretary Carter: -- zones on the ground would be have

16 to be defended, as well, so there are military implications

17 to the declaration of such zones. We have thought them

18 through, but we have not made recommendations to --

19 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much, Chairman.

20 Chairman McCain: What you're saying is the strongest

21 nation in the world with the most capable military can't

22 even establish a no-fly zone to protect people from being

23 barrel-bombed by Bashar Assad. That's -- it's an

24 embarrassing moment.

25 Secretary Carter: Just to be --

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis.

2 Secretary Carter: -- clear, Chairman, we could do it.

3 I -- but I --

4 Chairman McCain: Of course we could do it. People  
5 like General Petraeus and General Keane and every other  
6 military leader that I have know of -- and we're talking  
7 about having to shoot down all the -- all we have to do is  
8 protect it and tell them not to fly into it, show -- history  
9 shows that they won't, if they're going to get shot down.

10 Senator Tillis.

11 Senator Tillis: General Dunford, Secretary Carter said  
12 that the Russian presence in Syria has not affected the pace  
13 or the scope of U.S. operations there. Is that because the  
14 pace is slow and the scope is narrow? How does that -- I  
15 mean, how does that happen, when we have the administration  
16 saying that we're not going to have any sort of conflicts  
17 with Russian air presences in Syria? It would seem like it  
18 is affecting the pace and scope. Do you agree with  
19 Secretary Carter?

20 General Dunford: Senator, I do. We are -- because  
21 we're focused on ISIL, and the Russians are largely  
22 conducting operations to the west, we are not operating in  
23 the same area as the Russians right now. And we've had two  
24 or three incidents where we've had contact with Russian  
25 aircraft, and those preceded the Memorandum of Understanding

1 that was signed on the 20th of the month.

2 Senator Tillis: So, that -- I guess that goes back to  
3 what Chairman McCain said. A part of that is because we're  
4 not necessarily providing support to those who are not  
5 trained, who are trying to take the fight to Assad but were  
6 not specifically trained by us. Is that -- I mean, is that  
7 --

8 General Dunford: That's correct, Senator. We're  
9 operating in two different areas.

10 Senator Tillis: I want to get to Iraq, and  
11 specifically in your meetings in Iraq. First, I'd like an  
12 update on Iranian presence there; and then, secondly -- I've  
13 only been here for 10 months, and the discussion about  
14 having the Iraqi government reengage the Sunnis is already a  
15 broken record. Over the last year, is there any tangible  
16 evidence that they've actually acted on the words --

17 General Dunford: Senator --

18 Senator Tillis: -- of reengaging?

19 General Dunford: Yeah. Senator, with the caveat that  
20 we're not satisfied with the outreach to the Sunni, and very  
21 aware that that's a necessary condition for us to be  
22 successful, is that we actually do have an inclusive  
23 government, inclusive of the Sunni, there has been some  
24 progress. For example, in the Anbar Province, there was an  
25 agreement to train and equip 8,000 Sunni. We've had about

1 5,000 that have been identified, have been recruited, and  
2 have been trained, of that 8,000 number. So -- and that's  
3 slow progress --

4 Senator Tillis: Is that more --

5 General Dunford: -- for some --

6 Senator Tillis: Is that more transactional -- sorry,  
7 General Dunford, I want to be sensitive to time -- is that  
8 more of a transactional win, or do you -- are you seeing any  
9 sort of systemic changes that are going to make sure that  
10 that remains sustained and that we build on it?

11 General Dunford: I can't tell you that I've seen  
12 systemic changes, Senator.

13 Senator Tillis: I don't think there is any.

14 What about the Iranian presence in Iraq right now?  
15 Where are they? What are they doing? And what should we be  
16 concerned with?

17 General Dunford: Well, they still have the provisional  
18 forces that are there.

19 Senator Tillis: So, that's --

20 General Dunford: Soleimani's --

21 Senator Tillis: -- still around 1,000?

22 General Dunford: You know, Senator, the numbers have  
23 been bounced around. I think it's been more -- you say  
24 1,000?

25 Senator Tillis: Uh-huh.

1           General Dunford: Yeah, I think there's more than 1,000  
2           Iranians that are on the ground in Iraq.

3           Senator Tillis: And in Syria?

4           General Dunford: In Syria, we think the numbers are  
5           probably something less than 2,000, is our assessment.

6           Senator Tillis: Secretary Carter, I appreciate you  
7           mentioning Sergeant Wheeler. I know that he was from  
8           Oklahoma, but he and his wife and four sons, including a 3-  
9           month-old, live down in North Carolina. I think that, in  
10          that particular operation, you made a comment that those are  
11          the -- those are operations that are probably occurring  
12          frequently, if -- not a daily basis, but frequently, and  
13          American soldiers are at risk. In my opinion, I think the  
14          Peshmerga would consider that a combat operation. Do you  
15          consider what Sergeant Wheeler was doing a combat operation?

16          Secretary Carter: Sure. He was killed in combat. It  
17          -- that wasn't the intent, obviously. He was accompanying  
18          those forces. But, when he saw that they were running into  
19          trouble, he very heroically acted in a way that all the  
20          reports suggest spelled the difference between the success  
21          and failure of that important mission.

22          Senator Tillis: Thank you.

23          Secretary Carter: So, it clearly was a --

24          Senator Tillis: My final --

25          Secretary Carter: -- heroic.

1           Senator Tillis:  -- question.  I want to start with  
2   General Dunford.

3           General Dunford, were you consulted by the President  
4   before he vetoed the NDA?

5           General Dunford:  I was not, Senator.

6           Senator Tillis:  Do you consider the NDA being --  
7   having been passed either positive or negative to the men  
8   and women in uniform in your efforts?

9           General Dunford:  Senator, I think my job is to  
10   identify the requirements that we need to support the force  
11   --

12          Senator Tillis:  Do you think some of those  
13   requirements were fulfilled by our passage of the NDA?

14          General Dunford:  There were -- absolutely, sir.

15          Senator Tillis:  Okay.  And --

16          General Dunford:  Inside the ND- --

17          Senator Tillis:  -- as a result of the veto, those  
18   requirements are not going to be fulfilled unless we can  
19   come up with a solution?

20          General Dunford:  Unless there's a solution, Senator.

21          Senator Tillis:  Thank you.

22          Senator -- or, Secretary Carter, were you consulted by  
23   the President before he vetoed the NDA?

24          Secretary Carter:  I was, yes.

25          Senator Tillis:  And what was your recommendation to

1 him?

2 Secretary Carter: My recommendation was to support his  
3 veto.

4 Senator Tillis: Was to support his veto?

5 Secretary Carter: I did -- I supported it. I'll tell  
6 you why. Two --

7 Senator Tillis: That was going to be my next question.

8 Secretary Carter: Sure. Two principal reasons. The  
9 first is that I -- and I started saying this in March, and I  
10 -- it -- I believe it --

11 Senator Tillis: Mr. Carter, I'm going to be out of  
12 time. There may be other people --

13 Secretary Carter: Well, let me just --

14 Senator Tillis: -- following up with it, but I --

15 Secretary Carter: -- tell you what those two --

16 Senator Tillis: Let me -- let me finish.

17 Secretary Carter: It's an important subject.

18 Senator Tillis: And then, to the extent the Chair will  
19 let you continue, I will defer to him.

20 But, are you telling me, then, that you think that the  
21 President's veto leaves our military -- of the NDA -- better  
22 than with it?

23 Secretary Carter: I -- the President's veto of the  
24 NDAA is something that reflected two facts, just to get back  
25 to what I was going to say. One is that we need -- and I

1 believe the Department of Defense needs -- budget stability  
2 greater than a 1-year horizon --

3 Senator Tillis: And so, taking a step back --

4 Secretary Carter: -- and a foundation of base funding  
5 that is adequate --

6 Senator Tillis: Mr. Secretary, nobody on this --

7 Secretary Carter: -- to our needs --

8 Senator Tillis: -- committee disagrees with you.

9 That's a well-worn path in discussions that goes all the way  
10 back to sequestration. But, I find it remarkable, given the  
11 circumstances we're in now and the testimony today, that we  
12 would take a step back with this NDA while we continue to  
13 fight that fight, because that's going to require a willing  
14 administration. And one thing's clear to me, this  
15 administration is not willing to confront the challenges  
16 that these men and women have in uniform today. Taking a  
17 step back in these dangerous times, I don't think makes  
18 sense. And I respectfully disagree with your recommendation  
19 to support the veto.

20 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

21 Secretary Carter: Well, if I can just say, I think  
22 that I -- just to say what I think we need. What we need is  
23 what I hope is going on now, which is a true budget  
24 agreement, where Washington comes together behind a honest,  
25 straightforward budget with some multiyear horizon. That's

1 what the Department deserves, and that's what I've been  
2 saying for months. And perhaps that is occurring as we  
3 speak.

4 But, I can only be honest and say what I think is best  
5 for the Department. And that's, honestly, what we need. I  
6 realize that no individual member or individual committee  
7 can deliver that. It requires a coming together of  
8 gridlocked Washington behind an overall budget deal. I  
9 fervently hope that that occurs. I know there's some  
10 indication -- I'm not involved in it -- over the last couple  
11 of days that that might occur, and that is what I have been  
12 urging ever since March. And I fervently hope that can  
13 occur. That's what the troops deserve. That's what the  
14 world needs to see.

15 Chairman McCain: I would point out that OCO will be  
16 part of this agreement, as well.

17 Mr. Secretary, if you want to complete your answer,  
18 please continue. Or have you completed it?

19 Secretary Carter: There's just one other aspect that  
20 I'd ask the committee, also apropos of the NDAA. There are  
21 a number of reforms that we have requested now for several  
22 years consecutively that have been denied in the  
23 authorization bill. And I'd ask for --

24 Chairman McCain: For example?

25 Secretary Carter: -- that they be -- some having to do

1 with healthcare, some having to do with readjustments in  
2 force structure. These are things that the relevant armed  
3 services have determined are the optimal use of their  
4 resources. And the authority to carry out those reforms has  
5 been denied. And I'd just appeal to you not to -- to allow  
6 those reforms, because it is the professional judgment of  
7 the Department of Defense that better use for those funds  
8 can be had. And in years when it's difficult to find  
9 funding for the Federal Government -- and I understand all  
10 the reasons for that -- we have to use every dollar we do  
11 get to the -- for the -- to best use. And we're not able to  
12 do that with some of the restrictions that are in the NDAA.  
13 And that's another reason why I'd ask you to reconsider some  
14 of its provisions.

15 Thank you for the time to elaborate on that, Senator.

16 Chairman McCain: Well, I'd also point out that there's  
17 about \$11 billion in savings, including in a mandatory 7-  
18 and-a-half-percent-per-year reduction in headquarters staff,  
19 which we'll be glad to show you the dramatic growth in  
20 those, tooth-to-tail, and many other reforms that have been  
21 made. And I look forward to looking at further reforms with  
22 you as we begin new hearings when we resolve this issue and  
23 further very necessary reforms that we feel are called for.

24 And I'm proud of the reforms, frankly, that, in a  
25 bipartisan basis, this committee enacted. I am proud of the

1 fact that we have dramatically revised the retirement  
2 system. I am proud of the fact that we are finally trying  
3 to get a handle on the cost overruns that has characterized  
4 acquisition practices.

5 So, you may have some concerns. I can't tell you,  
6 after being on this committee for nearly 30 years, how proud  
7 I am of the bipartisan product that we've produced. And I  
8 hope that maybe sometime you might recognize that.

9 Senator Blumenthal.

10 Secretary Carter: May I just second that?

11 Chairman McCain: Yes, go ahead.

12 Secretary Carter: We're proud, too. I -- and I thank  
13 you. And I thank you, personally. I don't mean to say  
14 there -- --

15 Chairman McCain: No problem.

16 Secretary Carter: -- that reforms haven't been  
17 enacted. There are some additional ones that we would like  
18 to have. But, I salute the committee. And the only way we  
19 can ask the taxpayer to give us more money for defense,  
20 which we need, is if we can also show that we use every  
21 dollar well. So, I appreciate your leadership in that  
22 regard.

23 Chairman McCain: Well, I thank you, Mr. Secretary. We  
24 do look forward to it. We'll have hearings, beginning this  
25 week, on restructures that I -- restructuring that I think

1 are necessary. We want to work very closely with you. And  
2 I'm very proud to work very closely with a graduate of West  
3 Point.

4 Senator Blumenthal.

5 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

6 And I thank both of you for your service to our Nation,  
7 and for your candid and forthright answers today in an area  
8 that is exceedingly difficult.

9 As you may know, I'm working with a number of  
10 colleagues who both supported and opposed the Joint  
11 Comprehensive Plan of Action to strengthen United States  
12 policy toward Iran; in other words, to improve and  
13 strengthen that agreement -- among other ways, by providing  
14 more military assistance to our allies in the area, and  
15 anticipating that some of the financial windfall will go  
16 toward increased extremism and even terrorist violence in  
17 that area. And so, to bolster the defenses and military  
18 capacity of our allies in that region, this legislation will  
19 reassert the United States policy that a nuclear-armed Iran  
20 will never be permitted. It will reaffirm our dedication to  
21 imposing sanctions related to terror financing and human  
22 rights abuses. And it will ensure that our allies, most  
23 especially Israel, will be provided with the assets that  
24 they need so that their defense will be bolstered and they  
25 will be able to deter Iran.

1           General Dunford, you've just visited the area. Can you  
2 tell us what additional assets we can provide? And can you  
3 commit -- and, Secretary Carter, I ask you to join in this  
4 question -- that the United States will, in fact, bolster  
5 assets going to Israel and our other allies in the Middle  
6 East, and comment on this legislation?

7           Thank you.

8           General Dunford: Senator, I can't talk to the details  
9 now. I can tell you that the Minister of Defense from  
10 Israel is here today for meetings with Secretary Carter.  
11 We'll have dinner with him this evening. And, as you  
12 probably know, they're developing their perspective on what  
13 cooperation further we might have with them, to include the  
14 details of capability development that I had some initial  
15 discussions with their Chief of Defense -- Minister of  
16 Defense and Prime Minister last week during my visit.

17           Senator Blumenthal: In the conversations that preceded  
18 our votes on the agreement, I was assured -- and I think  
19 other colleagues were assured -- that, in effect, Israel  
20 will receive all the necessary assistance to make sure that  
21 its qualitative edge is not only maintained, but enhanced.  
22 Is that the policy of the administration?

23           Secretary Carter: Yeah, qualitative military edge of  
24 Israel is an important part of our overall policy toward the  
25 Middle East, and that's exactly what I'll be talking to --

1 along with the Chairman -- the Defense Minister of Israel  
2 about today. And, of course, that's one ingredient of our  
3 overall support for Israel and also, I should add, other  
4 Gulf partners and allies.

5 And I also need to add, since you're asking about the  
6 Iran nuclear agreement, the maintenance of the military  
7 option, which we are charged with continuing to do. And I  
8 continue to pay personal attention to that. I believe the  
9 Chairman does, as well. And our efforts to counter Iranian  
10 malign influence around the region and protect our friends  
11 and allies. So, there are a lot of dimensions to what we do  
12 there.

13 And all of that, which is our activity, remains  
14 unchanged with this Iran agreement. All of those things --  
15 the military option, support to Israel, support to other  
16 Gulf countries -- that is longstanding pursuit of American  
17 interests in the Gulf, and we're going to keep doing that.

18 Senator Blumenthal: I recognize that the policy  
19 remains unchanged, but the military assets will have to be  
20 increased, won't they?

21 Secretary Carter: We will be doing more with Israel.  
22 That's one of the reasons -- that's one of the subjects of  
23 my discussions with Defense Minister Ya'alon, as it was when  
24 I visited there a couple of months ago and he hosted me the  
25 way I'll be hosting him over the next couple of days.

1           Senator Blumenthal: And can you tell us whether you're  
2 satisfied with the progress that's been made in those  
3 discussions?

4           Secretary Carter: He and I have a very good  
5 relationship, a very easy relationship, so these -- we --  
6 these discussions are discussions among friends. We do  
7 things with Israel and have a closeness there that we have  
8 with very few other countries around the world. And I can't  
9 go into all the details here, but we can share them  
10 separately. But, it's a very close defense -- and a trusted  
11 defense relationship.

12          Senator Blumenthal: I would appreciate your sharing  
13 those details in a different forum. I am very interested in  
14 the details of the discussions that are underway now, and I  
15 want to be satisfied that we are fulfilling the commitments  
16 that were made to myself and my colleagues in the course of  
17 our discussions before the Iran agreement vote.

18           Thank you very much, to you both.

19           Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20          Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

21          Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22           Thank you, gentlemen.

23           You know, like Chairman McCain's statement today,  
24 General Petraeus was here recently, and in his testimony, he  
25 also emphasized that, in the Middle East, there's no easy

1 answers, but that inaction has costs, whether it's others  
2 filling the vacuum, like we're seeing with Russia in the  
3 Middle East and in Syria, or whether U.S. credibility is  
4 undermined, especially when inaction contradicts policy  
5 statements. I think this is a -- I think most of the  
6 members of the committee see this as a significant problem,  
7 not only in the Middle East, but beyond.

8       General Dunford, do you believe that inaction has its  
9 own costs? And how does the U.S. military weigh the costs  
10 of inaction, of doing nothing, when you're presenting  
11 options to the President for -- options on what we should be  
12 doing in the military -- in the Middle East?

13       General Dunford: First of all, Senator, you know, I  
14 absolutely agree that inaction is unacceptable when we talk  
15 about protecting our national interests. So, there's no  
16 question about that.

17       And with regard to when we provide military options to  
18 a particular challenge, absolutely I think it's my  
19 responsibility to clearly articulate both the opportunity  
20 costs and the risk associated with not taking action against  
21 a particular issue.

22       Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

23       Secretary Carter, you know, many members of the  
24 committee have been concerned about U.S. inaction in another  
25 part of the world, in the South China Sea. And a lot of us

1 on this committee saw that inaction was raising costs and  
2 undermining U.S. credibility. There was a number of us who  
3 were complimentary of your speech at the Shangri-la  
4 Dialogue. I was going to express concern about that, but  
5 just read in the paper about the freedom of navigation  
6 operation that we evidently conducted inside a 12-mile zone  
7 of a built-up Chinese island, just yesterday. Is that true?  
8 Did we do that?

9 Secretary Carter: We have made a commitment -- and I  
10 appreciate your support -- as part of our rebalance to the  
11 Asia-Pacific, which is so important to America's future.  
12 We're doing more at sea, we're doing more in the way of  
13 presence. And, just to give a general answer to what you  
14 said, we have said, and we are acting on the basis of  
15 saying, that we will fly, sail, and operate wherever  
16 international law permits --

17 Senator Sullivan: Did we send a destroyer yesterday  
18 inside the 12-mile zone of one of the --

19 Secretary Carter: -- to do that. There have been  
20 naval operations in that region in recent days, and there  
21 will be in the weeks and months --

22 Senator Sullivan: Inside the 12-mile zone of a China  
23 --

24 Secretary Carter: I don't want to comment --

25 Senator Sullivan: -- built-up --

1 Secretary Carter: -- on a particular operation, but --

2 Senator Sullivan: You don't want to comment? It's all  
3 over the press right now.

4 Secretary Carter: I'm sure it is, but I -- we reserve  
5 the right to conduct --

6 Senator Sullivan: If we do that within a built-up  
7 island that was undersea submerged rock, is that within --  
8 is that consistent with international law?

9 Secretary Carter: Yes, it is.

10 Senator Sullivan: So, should we be doing that on a  
11 regular basis, in terms of freedom of navigation exercises?

12 Secretary Carter: We will fly, sail, and operate  
13 wherever international law permits and whatever -- whenever  
14 our operational needs require --

15 Senator Sullivan: It would be good to know, just for  
16 the committee's --

17 Secretary Carter: -- that we will --

18 Senator Sullivan: -- perspective, whether or not the  
19 press reports are accurate on what we did.

20 Let me ask another question about another area in the  
21 world where it seems like U.S. inaction clearly seems to be  
22 inviting more Russian aggression, where Russian actions are  
23 changing facts on the ground. Mr. Secretary, in your  
24 confirmation hearing, you talked about the Arctic is going  
25 to be a major area of importance to the United States, but

1 -- strategically and economically in the future -- but you  
2 said it's fair to say that we're late to the recognition of  
3 that. I think it's also fair to say that the Russians are  
4 not late to the recognition of that. Since your  
5 confirmation, the Russians have done the following in the  
6 Arctic: a new Arctic military command, four new Arctic  
7 brigade combat teams, 14 new operational airfields in the  
8 Russian Arctic, announcements of up to 50 new airfields in  
9 -- by 2020, a 30-percent increase of Russian special forces  
10 in the Arctic, 40 icebreakers -- we have two, one is broken  
11 -- huge new land claims in the Arctic, increased long-range  
12 air patrols with their Bear bombers, the most since the Cold  
13 War, a major military exercise in March that caught the U.S.  
14 military completely off guard -- 45,000 troops, over 3,000  
15 military vehicles, 41 naval ships, 15 submarines, 110  
16 military aircraft, numerous elements of Russia's western  
17 military district and elite airborne troops in that  
18 exercise. A lot of this concerns the committee. In the  
19 NDAA, which the President vetoed, we had a unanimous  
20 agreement here to have -- to create an operations plan for  
21 the Arctic. That's an important step to ensuring we have  
22 continued good options in the Arctic.

23 Can I get your commitment, both of you, to work with  
24 this committee on a robust -- a robust -- military O-Plan  
25 that will enable us to check Russia's aggressions in the

1 Arctic, keep our options open, and maintain our credibility  
2 in that important area of the world, given that that's in  
3 the NDAA right now?

4 Secretary Carter: Yeah, you have mine. And I  
5 appreciate your leadership in this regard. The Arctic is an  
6 important region for the United States, and actually for the  
7 entire world. And so, we need to do more there. And I  
8 appreciate the fact that you are a champion of that and can  
9 consider me a supporter. And I appreciate -- and we'll have  
10 a chance, actually, to discuss that in Alaska later this  
11 week --

12 Senator Sullivan: Yes, sir. Thank you.

13 General Dunford?

14 General Dunford: Yes, Senator.

15 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

17 Chairman McCain: Mr. Secretary, sometimes here in this  
18 committee we have a sense of frustration. The news reports,  
19 all day, are about a U.S. destroyer, naming the destroyer,  
20 going inside the 12-mile zone around these islands. Why  
21 would you not confirm or deny that that happened, since all  
22 the details and the action happened? This is what  
23 frustrates members of this committee, when it's out there in  
24 the media, throughout, saturating the media, and you won't  
25 even tell us. Is it -- what -- maybe you understand our

1 frustration, here, Mr. Secretary. That's --

2 Secretary Carter: I do understand your frustration,  
3 and I'd just match it with my own frustration, which is that  
4 -- these are operations that we should be conducting  
5 normally, and --

6 Chairman McCain: But, the American people should know  
7 about it. And we're their representatives. And you refuse  
8 to even confirm or deny something that is all over the media  
9 and confirmed by everyone? And you come before this  
10 committee and say you won't comment on it? Why?

11 Secretary Carter: Well, I don't -- I'm going to not be  
12 coy with you. I don't like, in general, the idea of talking  
13 about our military operations. But, what you read in the  
14 newspaper is accurate. And -- but, I don't want to say more  
15 than that. And I don't want to say when, whether --

16 Chairman McCain: Well, at least --

17 Secretary Carter: -- and how we operate anywhere in  
18 the world. One of the things --

19 Chairman McCain: I don't that --

20 Secretary Carter: -- about freedom of navigation --

21 Chairman McCain: -- that the Senator asked you to tell  
22 why, when, and how. He just asked you to -- whether you  
23 could confirm it, or not.

24 Secretary Carter: I can.

25 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

1 Mr. Donnelly -- Secretary -- Senator Donnelly.

2 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 I just want to get back to Syria and to some of the  
4 questions the Chairman was asking about safe zones. We seem  
5 lost. We seem lost and at -- confusion about what to do  
6 next, unable to put any real marker down or have any plan  
7 for success. The people are voting, and they're voting with  
8 their feet. They're leaving. There's refugees all over the  
9 world now. And we have the opportunity to set up safe  
10 zones. And what I hear is, we're worried about the  
11 Russians, we're worried about the Syrians, we're worried  
12 about all of these things. I mean, at what point do we put  
13 a plan together, execute the plan, tell them what we're  
14 going to do, and say, "Stay out of the way"?

15 Secretary Carter: With respect to a safe -- I'd  
16 distinguished a safe zone from a no-fly zone. A safe zone  
17 is a zone on the ground. We have analyzed them and  
18 discussed them with partners in the region. They are  
19 principally not in regions where we would expect them to be  
20 contested so much by Assad as by ISIL and al-Nusra. And  
21 therefore, they have to be defended against that threat, and  
22 that's a military undertaking --

23 Senator Donnelly: And are we unwilling to --

24 Secretary Carter: -- people in the region who -- we  
25 have not made that recommendation. And the reason --

1           Senator Donnelly: At what point -- how many people  
2 have to leave before we make that decision?

3           Secretary Carter: Senator, let me go back to -- if you  
4 create a zone like that, then you do have to ask who is  
5 going to come into the zone. Are there people who have left  
6 Syria who are going to return to Syria from Turkey or Europe  
7 to occupy a zone from which they didn't come? Are there  
8 people elsewhere in Syria who are going to come to that  
9 zone? So, you do have to ask yourself: For whom would it  
10 be attractive to be in such a zone? And then, secondly, who  
11 is going to defend --

12          Senator Donnelly: Probably some of the folks in  
13 Germany and in other countries who would rather have stayed  
14 in their own country.

15          Secretary Carter: If they wished to return to the part  
16 of the country for which the zone -- in which the zone is  
17 created. But, again, it would depend on where it was, and  
18 it would be contested --

19          Senator Donnelly: Well, let me ask you --

20          Secretary Carter: So, this --

21          Senator Donnelly: -- in barrel bombs -- we've talked  
22 this time and after time here -- why are we unwilling to  
23 send a message to Assad that if he continues with barrel-  
24 bombing, we will stop him and crater his runways?

25          Secretary Carter: We have not undertaken to engage, as

1 the U.S. military, the Syrian military. We have not taken  
2 that step --

3 Senator Donnelly: So, how do you ever stop the barrel-  
4 bombing?

5 Secretary Carter: The way that the civil war in Syria  
6 will end, just to get back to what we've been saying  
7 repeatedly, is for Assad to depart and for there to be a  
8 political --

9 Senator Donnelly: Why would he depart, at this point?

10 Secretary Carter: Because the opposition to him is  
11 intense, and strengthening.

12 Senator Donnelly: Well, as far as I can see, he's had  
13 three or four additional allies come onboard. If anything,  
14 the calculation for him is, his cards are getting better.

15 Secretary Carter: Yeah. Again, our priority has been  
16 to combat ISIL. We are not, as the U.S. military,  
17 undertaking to combat Syrian --

18 Senator Donnelly: Well, let me just ask you --

19 Secretary Carter: That's not a decision --

20 Senator Donnelly: -- this. In the process of --

21 Secretary Carter: -- not a decision --

22 Senator Donnelly: -- combating ISIL, does the United  
23 States stand by as another nation barrel-bombs the people  
24 we're trying to protect?

25 Secretary Carter: We have sought now, for some time,

1 and continue to do, a political transition in Syria that  
2 would end the Syrian civil war. We have not pursued a  
3 military solution --

4 Senator Donnelly: Well --

5 Secretary Carter: -- to that.

6 Senator Donnelly: -- I would just say, from my  
7 perspective -- and I am not an expert like both of you -- we  
8 seem lost. And I have extraordinary confidence in the  
9 leadership at this table, but we seem lost. And I would  
10 love to see alternate plans that may be out there.

11 General Dunford, I was in Iraq a few months ago, was  
12 with the Sunni tribal leaders, and I just want to ask your  
13 best military judgment. In spending time with them, they  
14 said, "Look, if you showed an interest in us, if you showed  
15 -- you know, had a helicopter come by every now and then,  
16 showed you really wanted to provide us with guidance, with  
17 logistics, with advice, et cetera, that partnership, that  
18 friendship we've always felt, we'll be there. We'll get the  
19 job done." Do you think they have that capability?

20 General Dunford: Senator, I do. There are Sunnis that  
21 absolutely can take the fight to the enemy, and we've seen  
22 that in the past.

23 Senator Donnelly: So, while we try to continue to hope  
24 and pray that the Iraqi Security Force gets better, are we  
25 sitting here with Sunni tribal leaders who have the

1 individuals who can actually start to move ISIS out of  
2 Ramadi?

3 General Dunford: I think if the central government  
4 would do better at outreach to the Sunni, we absolutely  
5 could recruit more, train more, equip more, and support more  
6 Sunni in the fight.

7 Senator Donnelly: So, I think it's almost fair to say  
8 the team is ready to go; they just need to get the signal to  
9 go.

10 General Dunford: It would take some work, Senator, but  
11 there are people out there that we could put together to  
12 fight ISIL.

13 Senator Donnelly: And that's how we start to move ISIL  
14 out, I think.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you.

17 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator  
18 Lee.

19 Senator Lee: Thank you.

20 And thank you, Secretary Carter and General Dunford,  
21 for appearing in front of our committee today, and for your  
22 service to our country.

23 The White House has been sending mixed and, at times,  
24 contradictory messages about what our interests are and what  
25 threats to our security exist in the Middle East. Many

1 Americans are understandably coming to find our current  
2 strategy somewhat reminiscent of the old Warren Zevon song,  
3 since the President's reaction to -- it seems to be to send  
4 in lawyers, guns, and money whenever and wherever a crisis  
5 breaks out.

6       The situation in the Middle East is a very complicated  
7 problem for our current posture, but it's certainly not  
8 historically aberrational. For more than 100 years, this  
9 region has been dominated by either external powers or  
10 internal authoritarians who have destroyed cultural  
11 institutions and disrupted the natural development of  
12 societies. The decentralization of power in these states,  
13 compounded by radical Islamism and ancient sectarian  
14 grievances, amounts to a time-tested recipe for the kind of  
15 conflict and instability that we're seeing today and that  
16 tends to threaten our security.

17       We continue to receive mixed contradictory reports  
18 about the effectiveness of ongoing efforts to retain, train,  
19 and equip the Iraqi Security Forces. When I ask why we  
20 believe it will work this time around, I'm usually told by  
21 Defense officials something like the following, something  
22 like, "Well, we have a better political partner in Baghdad  
23 now than we did before, and we have a partner who will not  
24 repeat the mistakes of his predecessor." Now, this is not  
25 encouraging, as we know how quickly political institutions

1 -- political situations and calculations can change in the  
2 Middle East, particularly right now.

3         So, General Dunford, I'm more concerned by what your  
4 predecessor, General Dempsey, described as the "will to  
5 fight" factor among the ISF. And I believe that extends  
6 beyond simply having a better leader in Baghdad. Do you  
7 believe the kind of united Iraq that we have seen for the  
8 past century -- that is with borders drawn by the British  
9 and French, and held together either by a Western-backed  
10 monarchy or a Ba'athist dictator -- is something for which  
11 the people of Iraq have the genuine will to fight,  
12 especially when they don't have emergency assistance from a  
13 coalition like they have right now?

14         General Dunford: Senator, I think, for most people in  
15 Iraq, it's a lot more local than it is national. And I do  
16 think that if a central government, for example, would  
17 outreach to the Sunni in the Anbar Province and provide  
18 basic services, that we would get Sunni fighters that would  
19 fight on behalf of the government. We've seen that in the  
20 past.

21         Senator Lee: So, I'd like to expand the question a  
22 little bit more broadly, to places like Syria or Yemen. Do  
23 people of those countries have the will to fight for united  
24 governments in places where current territorial lines may  
25 have been imposed by a foreign force?

1           General Dunford: There's no evidence that I would know  
2 of that would indicate that they would.

3           Senator Lee: Unfortunately, I think that we're looking  
4 too hard for an easy answer -- or a simple answer to some of  
5 these complicated questions. And I encourage my colleagues  
6 and the American people to thoughtfully consider options in  
7 the Middle East before continuing down paths that I believe  
8 may lead to mission creep and to an indefinite U.S. military  
9 presence to prop up weak and sort of artificially created  
10 states designated around unsustainable boundaries.

11           Now, the Department of Defense's Syria train-and-equip  
12 program failed. It failed by a longshot. Define and train  
13 the level of fighters desired under the vetting requirements  
14 established by Congress and the White House. Congress put  
15 these requirements in place because we were very concerned  
16 about who would be using U.S. assistance, and for what  
17 purposes they would be using it.

18           Secretary Carter, does the failure of this program  
19 indicate to you that the viable ground force we desire for  
20 Syria simply does not exist within the parameters that the  
21 American taxpayer may be willing to support?

22           Secretary Carter: Well, I was disappointed in it, as  
23 well, but I don't draw that conclusion. There are forces in  
24 Syria willing to fight ISIL and capable of fighting ISIL.  
25 The -- we talked about the Kurd -- Syrian Kurds as an

1 example of that, the so-called Syrian Arab Coalition. And  
2 in the new train-and-equip effort that we described today,  
3 we will look to identify and then support capable and  
4 motivated forces in -- on Syrian territory that are willing  
5 to take on ISIL. We have identified some of them already.  
6 And the new approach is to enable them, train them and equip  
7 them, rather than trying to create such forces anew, which  
8 was the previous approach.

9 And I do understand why that approach was taken, and,  
10 you're right, it was authorized by this committee last  
11 December. And I understand the considerations that went  
12 into that. I have concluded, and the President concluded,  
13 that that approach wasn't working the way that it was  
14 conceived of a year ago, and that's precisely why we've  
15 changed the approach.

16 So, we have a different approach that we think will  
17 allow us to gain more momentum and, in particular, to allow  
18 us to put pressure on the city of Raqqa, which is the self-  
19 declared capital of the caliphate. So, on the Syrian side  
20 of the counter-ISIL fight, that is our intent, and we're  
21 trying to gather momentum in that and several other ways  
22 that we detailed.

23 Senator Lee: Okay. Thank you.

24 I see my time's expired, Mr. Chairman.

25 Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me

1 recognize Senator McCaskill.

2 Senator McCaskill: Yes. Senator Reed --

3 Thank you all for being here.

4 And, by the way, let me, just at the beginning of my  
5 questions, give a mention to Master Sergeant Joshua Wheeler.  
6 He is -- there probably is no better example of someone who  
7 has run to danger for this country over and over and over  
8 again. I believe this was his 14th deployment. So, I  
9 wanted to mention his name in the hearing today. We all  
10 mourn his loss and the loss of his family, and we support  
11 them as they move through this trying time.

12 Senator Reed asked you about the new Syrian forces in  
13 northern Syria. Have we provided resupply to those forces?

14 General Dunford: We have, Senator.

15 Senator McCaskill: Okay. And have they successfully  
16 called in airstrikes?

17 General Dunford: They have, Senator.

18 Senator McCaskill: Okay. And can you tell us, for the  
19 record, how many?

20 General Dunford: I cannot, Senator. I can get that  
21 information for you. I don't know the number.

22 [The information referred to follows:]

23 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           Senator McCaskill: That would be terrific.

2           On Iraq train-and-equip -- as you all know, I have a  
3 tendency to read those IG reports. The one that came out  
4 September 30th raised several concerns that I'm worried  
5 about. One is asking us to refurbish the conditions under  
6 which these Iraqis are training. The DOD IG recommends that  
7 the coalition work with the Iraqi Minister of Defense to  
8 devise and implement a plan that clarifies the contributions  
9 of Iraq and the United States to improve their living  
10 conditions. Evidently, they are -- the IG is saying that  
11 we're having desertions because they're living in such  
12 squalor, in terms of the conditions under which they are  
13 training. I just think of the billions and billions on  
14 infrastructure we spend in Iraq, and I'm trying to get my  
15 arms around: Are we going to go in and fix up something  
16 that's going to rot when we leave, or is Iraq going to step  
17 up and do what's necessary to make these conditions  
18 palatable for our -- the recruits?

19           General Dunford: Senator, what I would tell you -- and  
20 this is my perspective, and I think this is where we're at  
21 right now -- is that our relationship with Iraq has to be  
22 transactional, and there has to be certain conditions that  
23 they would meet before we would provide support. And that  
24 absolutely is the framework within which I'll provide  
25 recommendations for any support to the Iraqi forces -- would

1 be that it would be based on their behavior and their  
2 willingness to be true partners and meet certain conditions  
3 that would indicate they'd be heading the direction that you  
4 described.

5 Senator McCaskill: Capital expenditures, you know,  
6 just really grate, I think, on many of us who have watched  
7 the amount of money that we wasted on capital expenditures  
8 in Iraq. And on that same line of questioning, the MRAPs  
9 that are coming from Afghanistan, the same IG report points  
10 out that many of them are missing parts, and there's a real  
11 question whether they have the capability of maintaining  
12 these MRAPs, going forward. Once again, are there  
13 discussions about who is going to bear the costs of making  
14 these MRAPs that we're giving them actually operational?

15 General Dunford: Senator, are you talking about the  
16 MRAPs we gave to the Afghan Security Forces?

17 Senator McCaskill: I'm talking about the ones -- the  
18 excess ones that we're moving over -- U.S. is providing 250  
19 MRAPs to the Iraqi Army. They're excess defense items and  
20 being shipped to Iraq from Afghanistan. Those are the MRAPs  
21 I'm talking about.

22 General Dunford: Yeah. I can't comment on what the  
23 arrangements are, but I'll get that information for you,  
24 Senator, in terms of what arrangements were made of giving  
25 them. Typically, when we provide that equipment, it's in

1 as-is condition when we provide it to another country. And

2 I assume that's the rule --

3 [The information referred to follows:]

4 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           Senator McCaskill: I just want to make sure we're not  
2 going to the expense of sending them something that isn't  
3 operational, that we don't want to have to spend a lot of  
4 money to fix up, and, secondly, that they don't have the  
5 capability of maintaining. You know, sustainability. I  
6 mean, Secretary Carter knows this has been a refrain from  
7 the very beginning. It does us no good to give them things  
8 if they cannot sustain it. And, of course, that's one of  
9 the reasons that we're having the problems in Iraq we have  
10 right now, is they were politically incapable of  
11 sustainability.

12           Briefly, on a separate subject, I just want to bring  
13 this up. And I won't go into the details here, but I am  
14 desperately trying to get at helping the veterans that were  
15 subjected to mustard gas experiments. And I'm having a  
16 really difficult time with your folks about this. They're  
17 saying that even if I have the name of a veteran and the  
18 privacy waiver, they will not give me information out of  
19 your mustard gas database without a letter from the  
20 Chairman. I don't understand why this is so hard. Why is  
21 everyone not opening up these records and doing everything  
22 we can to get the word to these people? There are a lot of  
23 folks out there that were subjected to mustard gas  
24 experiments. And the VA wants to point at you. And I'm  
25 hitting a wall at DOD on this. And I really need a

1 commitment from you all today that you will get me the  
2 information as to why this is -- why me trying to help  
3 veterans who maybe have been exposed to mustard gas -- why  
4 this should be so hard. Would you all be willing to make  
5 that commitment, that you will work with my office instead  
6 of --

7 Secretary Carter: Yeah, I --

8 Senator McCaskill: They just keep throwing up  
9 roadblocks. I've been at this for months.

10 Secretary Carter: Senator, I'm not familiar with this  
11 issue, but, as always, I will make sure that we support your  
12 request. I'll look into it, and we'll -- with the Chairman  
13 -- and we'll get back to you, as appropriate.

14 [The information referred to follows:]

15 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           Senator McCaskill: And I've been waiting since July  
2 for evidence to back up your claim that there was  
3 justification for the \$36 million, 64,000 square-foot  
4 building in Afghanistan. There was a call for discipline  
5 for the people who had okayed that building. It's sitting  
6 empty. And I've been asking since July as to -- you said  
7 that you didn't think -- Secretary Carter, you contested the  
8 findings and said that you didn't think disciplinary action  
9 was appropriate. I've asked what the evidence is that would  
10 indicate disciplinary action is not appropriate. And I've  
11 been waiting since July. So, if you could get that on your  
12 To Do List, too, I would really appreciate it.

13           Secretary Carter: I will do that.

14           [The information referred to follows:]

15           [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1           Senator McCaskill: You've got an able helper behind  
2 you there who ought to help with this.

3           Thank you very much.

4           Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me  
5 recognize Senator Sessions.

6           Senator Sessions.

7           Thank you, Senator.

8           Senator Sessions: Thank you very much.

9           Senator McCain laid out some serious criticisms of how  
10 we're being -- how we're conducting our policy in the Middle  
11 East. I share most of those. I don't think they're little  
12 matters. They're important matters. And I think we've made  
13 some mistakes and struggled in ways that are not well, not  
14 good. I think it's -- so, I'll just leave it at that.

15           What I'd like to address today is the need for a  
16 strategy, long term, in the Middle East. I asked Kenneth  
17 Pollack, of the Brookings Institution, several months ago --  
18 he had mentioned in his statement, "This may take a long  
19 time." So, I asked him -- the whole problem of extremism in  
20 the Middle East, this spasm of violence we're seeing  
21 throughout the entire region, how complex it is and how --  
22 and I asked him -- and so, I followed up with him and said,  
23 "So, you're saying this could last 10, 20, 50 years." And I  
24 remember very vividly. He looked at me, and he gave an  
25 answer you don't often get. "Yes." That was his answer.

1           So, we've -- and do we need a strategy -- a long-term  
2 strategy that could deal with that? I've asked that  
3 question to Walter Russell Mead, and he said he's never seen  
4 us, as a Nation, be so unfocused in a strategy, the  
5 historian that he is.

6           The entire panel, I believe, week before last --  
7 General Jimmy Jones, President Obama's National Security  
8 Advisor, General Keane, Ambassador, another scholar -- all  
9 agree that we need a strategy, and we really don't have one.

10           Then I asked Secretary Gates, last week, and this is  
11 what he said that I think is relevant. He said, "My concern  
12 is that I don't see an overreaching -- or overriding  
13 strategy on the part of the United States with this complex  
14 challenge for the next 20 or 30 years." And one of the  
15 benefits of containment -- and there are lots of  
16 disagreements about how to apply it and how the wars we've  
17 fought under it, and so on -- but, I will always believe  
18 that critical to our success in the Cold War was that we had  
19 a broad strategy, called containment, that was practiced by  
20 nine successive administrations of both political parties.  
21 It had bipartisan support, the general notion of how to deal  
22 with this. So, we don't have anything like that with  
23 respect to the Middle East. And I think that is long -- and  
24 so, we're kind of dealing with each of these crises  
25 individually rather than backing up and saying, "What's our

1 long-term game plan, here? And who are going to be our  
2 allies? Who are going to be our friends? Where do we  
3 contain? Where do we let it burn itself out?" We just  
4 haven't really addressed those long-term questions, because  
5 it seems to me we're thinking strictly in the short term of  
6 month-to-month.

7       What -- I know we've got nine points, Secretary Carter,  
8 but I don't sense anyone in the region or anyone in the  
9 Congress believes that we have a deeply studied and long-  
10 term policy for the Middle East that could extend for  
11 decades. First of all, do you think we need one? And do we  
12 have one?

13       Secretary Carter: We have a strategy toward the Middle  
14 East. And many elements of it are, in fact, of longstanding  
15 -- decades longstanding. And again, the -- our strategy  
16 begins with the pursuit of American interests, and that  
17 involves protecting our own country and our people,  
18 defending longstanding friends and allies, who include the  
19 Gulf states and especially Israel, which was discussed  
20 already, opposing the introduction of nuclear weapons to the  
21 region, which gets us to the Iran circumstance, and, in the  
22 current matter of ISIL, protecting our people and our  
23 friends and allies against ISIL by defeating it where it  
24 began, which is in Iraq and Syria. We described, today,  
25 that -- the implementation of the strategy in both of those

1 places to defeat -- degrade and defeat ISIL. So, we're  
2 doing that.

3 So, I -- it is a complicated region. I called it  
4 kaleidoscopic in my statement. But, American interests are  
5 not unclear. They're clear. And we -- our strategy is  
6 intended to pursue those interests, and that is what we're  
7 doing. And strengthening the pursuit of that strategy is  
8 why the Chairman and I have been describing to you today the  
9 new steps we're taking in Iraq and Syria and with respect to  
10 unilateral actions.

11 Senator Sessions: Well, I know that's the position of  
12 the administration, but, frankly, our Middle East allies  
13 that we talk to and come and visit us don't feel confident  
14 that they know what the long-term goals of the United States  
15 are. Were they to defend Iraq against ISIL, who we'd shared  
16 shoulder-to-shoulder, General Dunford, for a decade? Are we  
17 going to pull out all troops? Apparently not, now, in  
18 Afghanistan, regardless of the situation on the ground.  
19 What about red lines in Syria? Are we going to honor those?

20 Look, you can say that, but I think it's clear that  
21 confidence in understanding of where we stand and what we're  
22 going to do for the next 10, 20, 30 years, as any leader of  
23 a Middle Eastern nation has got to think, and as we should  
24 think, as a great Nation, I don't think we're there.

25 So, I really believe more work needs to be done. I'm

1 talking to my colleagues in the Senate. I believe we can  
2 reach a bipartisan policy. I really do. I don't think it's  
3 impossible. And I'm going to work toward that goal.

4 Senator Reed: Thank you.

5 Senator Sessions: One more thing. My time is over.  
6 But, I believe the Defense Department may underestimate the  
7 critical nature of the refugee crisis. This is not like  
8 Iran-Iraq war that went on for many, many years. This is  
9 impacting Europe right now. It is a humanitarian crisis.  
10 It's being exploited by everyone else in the Middle East  
11 that would like to come to Europe. Europe is facing what  
12 one top diplomat told me was the greatest crisis since the  
13 -- World War II. And I think we've got to think about this  
14 safe haven, these safe zones, and get busy on it. And if we  
15 -- and General Petraeus said it might have to have some of  
16 our people at risk, defensively, to try to protect those  
17 areas, but we wouldn't take a lot. You and I talked,  
18 Secretary Carter, about it. Can't we get moving on this?  
19 How many more millions are going to have to flee and being  
20 lined up in areas that we don't -- before we act? Just  
21 morally, my judgment is that Europe needs to know there is a  
22 place for these refugees to go, other than to flee the  
23 entire region. That will strengthen them. Can we not do  
24 that?

25 Quickly.

1 Secretary Carter: Well, the -- insofar as the refugees  
2 are coming from Syria -- they're actually coming to Europe  
3 from several --

4 Senator Sessions: All over.

5 Secretary Carter: -- places, but, to the extent  
6 they're coming from Syria, this is why it is so important  
7 that the Syrian civil war be put to an end. And our  
8 approach to that is political. It's not military. And  
9 that's been a persistent subject of discussion here. We  
10 have not undertaken to achieve that goal militarily. Our  
11 approach to that is political. We hope that that transition  
12 occurs and that the civil war in Syria ends. And that is  
13 something that --

14 Senator Sessions: What if it takes 3 years? Can't we  
15 provide some sort of area there for people who are in danger  
16 to have safety and not have to leave the entire region?

17 Secretary Carter: I'll just -- I'd just repeat what  
18 I've said. We have analyzed it. I'm prepared to have  
19 shared with you the analysis we've done of safe zones,  
20 buffer zones, and no-fly zones. We have looked at the  
21 advantages and costs of those. And the President has not  
22 taken them off the table, but we have not undertaken to  
23 create any of those zones at this time. I don't rule that  
24 out in the future, Senator. And we're happy to discuss it  
25 with you, and discuss, in a different setting, the analysis

1 that we have done.

2 Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me  
3 recognize Senator Ayotte.

4 Senator Ayotte: I want to thank the Chair. Also thank  
5 Senator Donnelly. Appreciate it.

6 I wanted to ask Secretary Carter -- recently, the  
7 Iranians have actually tested a long-range missile, in  
8 violation of existing U.N. Security Council resolutions.  
9 This is something that Ambassador Power has confirmed. And,  
10 in fact, if you look at what the Iranians have done post-  
11 agreement, not only have they tested this missile, but, of  
12 course, they've wrongfully convicted a Washington Post  
13 reporter in Iran, and they -- of course, we've had a lot of  
14 discussion today about the cooperation between Russia and  
15 Iran undermining stability in Syria and our interests there.

16 So, I've also brought -- been brought to my attention  
17 recently that the Supreme Leader of Iran has actually said,  
18 about the recent agreement, that, "Any imposition of  
19 sanctions at any level under any pretext, including  
20 repetitive and fabricated pretexts of terrorism and human  
21 rights on the part of any countries involved in the  
22 negotiations, will constitute a violation of the JCPOA."

23 So, here's my question to both of you, and primarily to  
24 you, Secretary Carter. What are we going to do about their  
25 violation of already existing U.N. resolutions when it comes

1 to testing ballistic missiles and long-range missiles? And  
2 you know -- you're the one that testified before this  
3 committee, the "I" in ICBM is "intercontinental." And, as I  
4 see it, already Iran is violating resolutions, with no  
5 response from us. Already the Supreme Leader is basically  
6 saying, "You impose sanctions on any reason, even our  
7 support for terrorism or other human rights violation, we're  
8 going to walk away from the JCPOA." So, do you not agree  
9 that their violation of the missile resolution warrants a  
10 response from the United States of America? And what is  
11 that response going to be? Because, at this point, I  
12 haven't seen any response.

13 Secretary Carter: I think that it's -- it needs to be  
14 very clear -- it's certainly clear to us, in the Department  
15 of Defense -- that the conclusion of the nuclear deal with  
16 Iran, assuming it gets implemented, which was part of what  
17 your question gets to you -- does not address all of our  
18 security concerns with respect to --

19 Senator Ayotte: But, let me ask you this.

20 Secretary Carter: -- Iran. And --

21 Senator Ayotte: Just yes or no, should we respond to  
22 their testing of this missile, that violates existing U.N.  
23 resolutions?

24 Secretary Carter: I -- I'll describe one response that  
25 is in our area, and that is our continuing commitment to the

1 development of missile defenses. That's one of the reasons  
2 why we are developing and fielding --

3 Senator Ayotte: I understand that we're developing  
4 missile defenses, but what is our response when they behave  
5 badly already? Shouldn't there be a response from the  
6 United States of America? We had, recently, a panel of  
7 experts here, and I asked each of them -- and they came from  
8 different perspectives -- if we should respond. And they  
9 all agreed, "Yes."

10 Secretary Carter: Well, the -- in our area of  
11 responsibility, I would say this, Senator. I'll let the --  
12 Ambassador Power and Secretary Kerry address the diplomatic  
13 side of it. But, in our area of responsibility -- and I  
14 made this clear right from the beginning of the negotiations  
15 on the Iranian nuclear deal, that that does not end all of  
16 our security concerns with respect to Iran.

17 Senator Ayotte: I mean --

18 Secretary Carter: That is why we --

19 Senator Ayotte: Mr. Secretary, I'm sorry --

20 Secretary Carter: -- continue to --

21 Senator Ayotte: -- I don't have a lot of time, but  
22 ending -- it seems not ending. It seems like it's just  
23 beginning, really, as we think about this unholy alliance  
24 between Russia and Iran, undermining our interests in Syria,  
25 as we think about them testing, in our faces, this long-

1 range missile, as we think about what the Supreme Leader has  
2 basically said, "Any sanctions, we're going to walk away  
3 from the JCPOA." I would say that it's really just  
4 beginning.

5         That said, before I leave -- I don't have much time,  
6 but I need to ask question of you, General Dunford. I had  
7 the privilege of, recently, on Friday, going to the  
8 Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility and meeting with our men  
9 and women who serve there. And they're doing an excellent  
10 job under difficult circumstances, as you know. And one of  
11 the issues that was brought to my attention -- and I know  
12 that you, as a leader in our military, one of your jobs,  
13 having been a commander and serving, obviously, in the  
14 highest position in our military, understand that taking  
15 care of our men and women in uniform is so critical. And  
16 yet, we have a situation down there where we met with women  
17 guards who are being prevented from fully performing their  
18 mission because the five 9/11 attackers, who are charged  
19 with killing 3,000 Americans, will not allow them to perform  
20 their duties because they're women. Can you tell me what  
21 you think about that and whether you think that is right,  
22 and how we should be addressing that?

23         General Dunford: Senator, I can tell you how I feel  
24 about it. I feel the same way as the Commander, U.S.  
25 Southern Command, General Kelly, who describes it as

1 outrageous. And I read his weekly report, and have read it  
2 for about -- probably the last 7 or 8 weeks, to include the  
3 2 or 3 weeks before transition. So, it's outrageous. He's  
4 identified it. And, as you probably know, Senator, that's  
5 being worked by lawyers. It's an injunction. I don't --  
6 I'm not using that as an excuse, I'm just sharing with you  
7 that's actually the -- where it's at right now. It's being  
8 worked by lawyers. The Commander has identified it. I  
9 think it ought to be -- it is outrageous. It ought to be  
10 fixed. It hasn't been, to date.

11 Senator Ayotte: I'd like to see the administration  
12 speak out against this. Here we talk about giving women  
13 more opportunity in combat, but this is a area where these  
14 women that we met with, by the way, that are serving there,  
15 they're the very best. And they are not being able to  
16 perform the full responsibilities of their positions simply  
17 because they are women, because 9/11 terrorists are  
18 manipulating the system to say that our women cannot guard  
19 them.

20 Secretary Carter, I hope you would agree with me that  
21 this is outrageous. And I would hope that the  
22 administration would do everything in its power to stand up  
23 for our women in the military.

24 Secretary Carter: I do want to associate myself with  
25 what the Chairman said. It is outrageous. And what General

1 Kelly said, this is the -- pursuant to an action of a  
2 Federal judge, and I understand that. But, if you're -- I  
3 think it is counter to the way we treat servicemembers,  
4 including women servicemembers, and outrage is a very good  
5 word for it.

6 Senator Ayotte: Well, I appreciate both of you being  
7 here.

8 Thank you.

9 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Mr. Secretary and General  
10 Dunford, I've known both of you for many years, and I have  
11 appreciated very much your outstanding work. And I am great  
12 admirers of both of you. And I appreciate your service.

13 But, could I, again, caution you, Mr. Secretary. It  
14 isn't helpful to our relations and members of this committee  
15 when there's a widely spread story stating the name of the  
16 ship, where it went, how it went, and then you come and tell  
17 us that you can't confirm or deny something that is out  
18 there in the media. So, meaning that somebody has leaked  
19 all that information to the media and it's out there, but  
20 you can't tell this -- members of this committee, who have  
21 the responsibility -- it isn't a privilege, it's a  
22 responsibility to exercise oversight.

23 The second issue I want to mention to you is  
24 Guantanamo. I understand that the President has said many  
25 -- on numerous occasions, that one of his objections is

1 Guantanamo. You and the President's top aide came to my  
2 office and said you were going to give me a plan. I've  
3 always favored closing Guantanamo, for a whole variety of  
4 reasons. And yet, we still haven't got a plan from you. In  
5 fact, not only not a plan -- until I asked you about it  
6 specifically, there was no communication, after coming to my  
7 office and saying that you're going to give me that plan and  
8 I said we needed it before we marked up the defense  
9 authorization bill. We got nothing. Not an update, not a  
10 briefing on what was going on. So, we put in the language  
11 in Guantanamo, and the President then voices his strong  
12 objection to Guantanamo.

13 Finally, this issue of whether we are protecting those  
14 people who we are asking to fight against Bashar Assad and  
15 ISIS. Isn't it true that we've dropped munitions, General  
16 Dunford, to these -- to a group of people who we are  
17 supporting in Syria?

18 General Dunford: It is true, Senator.

19 Chairman McCain: It is true? And yet, are we going to  
20 protect them from Russian air attacks?

21 General Dunford: Senator, we have the authority, we  
22 have the capability, and we have options to defend the  
23 forces that we've --

24 Chairman McCain: But, is it true that the Russians are  
25 already attacking them?

1           General Dunford: The ones we have trained, it -- they  
2 have not.

3           Chairman McCain: I'm not asking the ones we've  
4 trained. The ones we dropped munitions to.

5           General Dunford: No, the Russians have not attacked  
6 the ones we've dropped munitions to, Senator.

7           Chairman McCain: They have not.

8           General Dunford: No, Chairman.

9           Chairman McCain: And they have not --

10          General Dunford: To make sure that you and I are  
11 speaking of the same group, the group I'm referring to is  
12 what's known as the Syrian Arab Coalition. They're  
13 operating in the northeast part of the country, north of  
14 Raqqa. And we recently provided resupply to those  
15 individuals -- ammunition --

16          Chairman McCain: And if they're attacked by the  
17 Russians, we'll defend them.

18          General Dunford: Senator, we have the capability to do  
19 that, and we'd provide options. I can't answer that  
20 question.

21          Chairman McCain: They'd be interested. They'd be  
22 interested --

23          General Dunford: Yes, sir.

24          Chairman McCain: -- in knowing, I think, if we're  
25 going to give them equipment and ask them to fight, and then

1 they're going to be -- we can't answer to them whether we're  
2 going to protect them, or not. I don't think -- I think  
3 it's a degree of immorality.

4 So, anyway, Chairman, this --

5 Secretary Carter: May I -- the two parts you raised,  
6 just take a moment?

7 First of all, again, I don't mean to be coy about the  
8 ship sailing. And I know things are in the newspaper. I'm  
9 just going to tell you where I'm coming from on that. It  
10 has nothing to do with this particular operation. There are  
11 all kinds of things in the newspaper that -- and it -- and  
12 that should not be in the newspaper. I don't like to talk  
13 about military operations publicly. You are, of course,  
14 entitled to know everything, and be briefed on everything.  
15 But, talking about things in a public setting, I'm, in  
16 general, not --

17 Chairman McCain: But, what --

18 Secretary Carter: -- not in favor of.

19 Chairman McCain: Why shouldn't --

20 Secretary Carter: So, I don't want you to think I'm  
21 being coy --

22 Chairman McCain: But, what is --

23 Secretary Carter: -- or evasive. I --

24 Chairman McCain: But, what is classified about it?  
25 What is it that you wouldn't want -- I mean, it's -- in

1 fact, I think literally every member of this committee  
2 applauds it. So, I'm not sure that -- what the reason is,  
3 why you wouldn't want to just state what has already been,  
4 from somebody that works for you -- the name of the ship,  
5 where it went, when it went, how it went, but yet you won't  
6 tell us. That causes frustration, Mr. Secretary.

7 Secretary Carter: Okay. All right. Well, I don't  
8 mean to cause you frustration. I just wanted you to know  
9 where I'm coming from.

10 Chairman McCain: Well, I hope you understand our  
11 frustration.

12 Secretary Carter: Yeah, I do. I do. But, I -- and  
13 maybe my hesitation is excessive, but I don't like to talk  
14 about military operations in public. And perhaps this one  
15 should be an exception.

16 But, let me go on to the other thing you said, about  
17 Gitmo. I, too, favor, like you, closing Gitmo, if that is  
18 at all possible. That -- because some of the detainees in  
19 Gitmo are not -- cannot be safely transferred to another  
20 location, in order to close Gitmo, as you know, we would  
21 need to find a location in the United States, or locations,  
22 in which they could continue to be detained. What has taken  
23 the time, Chairman, is that we had to survey a number of  
24 sites. We've done that in a number of sites around the  
25 country. We've completed that -- and we have -- some of

1 those are Department of Defense sites, some of those are  
2 Bureau of Prisons sites. And we needed to have them  
3 nominated by the Justice Department and then to do the site  
4 surveys there. All of that took some time.

5 Chairman McCain: I understand.

6 Secretary Carter: And the process is now complete, and  
7 I expect you'll get your proposal shortly.

8 Chairman McCain: All right. I understand, but I would  
9 have appreciated an update. And the cynicism over on this  
10 side, at the Capitol, is, to my view, somewhat justified,  
11 because the law was broken when Mr. Bergdahl was swapped for  
12 five people. The law required that the President of the  
13 United States notify the Congress of the United States. And  
14 he didn't do it. So, frankly, there's a credibility gap  
15 that is huge, when the President acts in direct violation of  
16 the law, and using the excuse, well, he was afraid there was  
17 going to be a leak. Well, to me, that's not sufficient  
18 reason to violate the law. And so, therefore, the cynicism  
19 here is immense. And to expect -- the President complains  
20 about the NDAA -- to expect that this committee would act,  
21 after the President has violated the law and there is no  
22 plan, is, of course, something that is not -- neither  
23 reasonable nor in keeping with our responsibilities.

24 And so, could I say, again, of my respect. I  
25 appreciate the great work that both of you do. As I've

1 said, we've known each other a long time. But, I also have  
2 to tell you, there's a certain amount of frustration here  
3 because of the lack of communication. What we just talked  
4 about, of Guantanamo, is one. Another one is this policy,  
5 or lack of policy, about what people we train and equip, and  
6 whether we're going to defend them, or not. The lack of a  
7 strategy to say that we can -- have to take out Syrian air  
8 defenses in order to establish a no-fly zone is simply not  
9 true. You can ask -- I'll ask any military expert. That's  
10 not true. You don't have to take out Syrian air defenses.  
11 It's Syrians that can't fly into our places. And we've had  
12 military's -- members like General Petraeus and General  
13 Keane and many others who obviously have a very different  
14 view of the whole issue of what we're going to do, which, by  
15 doing nothing, has triggered a flood of millions of  
16 refugees, which is a problem we're going to be grappling  
17 with for many years to come. It didn't have to happen.

18 Well, I look forward to more conversations with you. I  
19 appreciate you coming to the committee, I appreciate your  
20 service.

21 And this hearing, I'm sure you'll be glad to know, is  
22 adjourned.

23 [Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

24  
25