

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO
RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND UNITED
STATES AFRICA COMMAND

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Washington, D.C.

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UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

Thursday, March 9, 2017

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:29 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Perdue, Graham, Sasse, Strange, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Warren, and Peters.

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

3 Chairman McCain: Good morning.

4 The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning
5 to receive testimony on the posture of U.S. Central Command
6 and Africa Command.

7 We are pleased to welcome our witnesses: General Votel
8 and General Waldhauser. We thank each of you for your
9 decades of distinguished service and for your leadership of
10 our men and women in uniform.

11 More than a decade and a half since the September 11th
12 terrorist attacks, our Nation is still at war with
13 terrorists that seek to attack our homeland, our interests,
14 our allies, and our partners. In this fight, our military
15 service members are doing everything we ask of them from
16 North Africa to the Middle East to South Asia. Thanks to
17 their tremendous talent and dedication, we have made
18 important tactical and operational progress.

19 Our military has gradually eroded ISIS's territorial
20 control and removed key personnel from the battlefield.
21 ISIS has been expelled from its Libyan stronghold in Sirte,
22 and I am confident that soon the same will be true in Mosul
23 and Raqqa. Our military has kept up the pressure on
24 terrorists operating in countries like Yemen and Somalia.
25 And in Afghanistan, we have kept Al Qaeda on the run and

1 helped our Afghan hold the line against renewed Taliban
2 assaults.

3 But much to the frustration of the American people,
4 this hard-won tactical progress has not led to enduring
5 strategic gains. In fact, the sad reality is America's
6 strategic position in the Middle East is weaker today than
7 it was 8 years ago. And the positions of Vladimir Putin's
8 Russia and the Iranian regime and its terrorist proxies have
9 improved. This is not a military failure. Instead, it is a
10 failure of strategy, a failure of policy, and most of all, a
11 failure of leadership.

12 The fact is for at least the last 8 years, we have tried
13 to isolate the fight against terrorism from its geopolitical
14 context. Or as General Mattis put it 2 years ago, we have
15 been living in a "strategy-free environment" for quite some
16 time. The result is that we have failed to address and, at
17 times, exacerbated the underlying conflict, the struggles
18 for power and sectarian identity now raging across the
19 Middle East. We have been unable or unwilling to either ask
20 or answer basic questions about American policy in the
21 region. We have been reluctant to act, and when compelled
22 to do so, we have pursued only the most limited and
23 incremental actions.

24 We are fighting ISIS in Syria but ignoring the Syrian
25 civil war that was its genesis and fuels it to this day. We

1 are fighting ISIS in Iraq but failing to address the growing
2 influence of Iran. We are fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan
3 but pretending the Taliban is no longer our problem. We are
4 fighting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen but
5 refraining from confronting the threat posed by Iran's
6 Houthi proxies. In short, we are treating the symptoms and
7 ignoring the disease, and we should not be surprised at the
8 results: a Middle East aflame, America's influence
9 squandered, America's adversaries emboldened, America's
10 friends disheartened, and America's policy options narrowed
11 and worsened.

12 This is the unfortunate inheritance of the new
13 administration. Yet as difficult and complex as our
14 challenges are in the Middle East, we have an opportunity to
15 chart a new and different course. Seizing this opportunity
16 will require more than just a plan for the accelerated
17 defeat of ISIS. We have to raise our sights, look beyond
18 the tactical and operational fight, and start answering some
19 basic but difficult strategic questions. What enduring
20 objectives do we hope to achieve across the Middle East?
21 How will we achieve those goals, and on what timeline, and
22 at what cost?

23 In Iraq, Mosul will be retaken eventually, but that
24 will only likely reignite the battle for the future of Iraq,
25 a battle in which we have an important stake. What is

1 America's policy and strategy to deal with the problems that
2 lie ahead: combating the malign influence of Iran and its
3 militias, addressing the future of the Kurds and their place
4 in Iraq, and attenuating the disenfranchisement of Sunni
5 Iraqis that gave rise to ISIS in the first place?

6 Likewise in Syria, I believe Raqqa will eventually be
7 liberated. But the closer we come to that day, the more it
8 becomes clear that we cannot avoid difficult questions about
9 Syria any longer. What is America's policy and strategy
10 concerning a political transition in Syria, the future of
11 Assad and his regime, the fate of the Kurds in Syria, and
12 the influence of extremist forces from Sunni terrorists to
13 Iranian-backed militias? In short, what is America's vision
14 of an end-state in Syria?

15 In Libya, the ISIS stronghold in Sirte has been
16 degraded. But what remains is a divided nation littered
17 with independent militias, flooded with arms, and searching
18 in vain for legitimate governance and political unity. What
19 is America's policy and strategy for addressing these
20 conditions, which unless confronted will make Libya fertile
21 ground for extremism and anti-Western terrorism?

22 In Afghanistan, we have settled for a strategy of
23 "don't lose." And the result is that last month, General
24 Nicholson testified before this committee that this war is
25 now in a stalemate after 15 years of fighting. After 15

1 years of fighting, we are in a stalemate. What is America's
2 policy and strategy for rolling back a resurgent Taliban,
3 for addressing the terrorist sanctuaries within Pakistan's
4 borders, and pushing back against Iranian and Russian
5 meddling? In short, what does victory look like in
6 Afghanistan, and what is our strategy for achieving it?

7 Across the region, Russian and Iranian influence is
8 growing at America's expense. Russia and Iran even hosted
9 Syrian peace talks in Moscow last year without America
10 present at the table.

11 Russia's cruise missiles crisscross the region while
12 its aircraft indiscriminately target Syrian civilians.
13 Iran's proxies wield lethal rockets and ballistic missiles
14 with impunity, sensing that the nuclear deal shields them
15 from American pressure. What is America's policy and
16 strategy to counter Russian and Iranian malign influence
17 that often manifests itself below the threshold of open
18 conflict? How do we restore the trust of our regional
19 allies and partners and convince them to forego hedging
20 strategies that only add to uncertainty and instability?

21 These are the major policy and strategy questions
22 hanging in the balance. The stakes are high, not just for
23 the stability of the Middle East and Africa, but for
24 America's national security. It is not the job of our
25 witnesses to provide answers to these questions. That is

1 the job of the President, his administration, and the
2 Congress. We owe our witnesses and the men and women they
3 lead unambiguous national security priorities, clarity in
4 our strategic thinking, and an unwavering commitment to
5 provide them the resources required to support the necessary
6 courses of action.

7 Once again, I want to thank our witnesses for appearing
8 before the committee today and look forward to hearing how
9 the military efforts will help us achieve favorable
10 strategic outcomes.

11 Senator Reed?

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

3 Senator Reed: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
4 you to our witnesses not only for your appearing here today
5 but for your extraordinary service to the Nation over many,
6 many years. And also please relay our thanks to the men and
7 women that you lead, and we appreciate their efforts
8 extraordinarily so.

9 You are in a situation of very challenging times in all
10 of the areas of operation. This hearing is especially
11 timely, given unfolding events on the ground in Iraq and
12 Syria and the reported completion of a proposed strategy to
13 accelerate efforts against ISIS. Our assistance to partners
14 on the ground is helping them to make steady progress in
15 reclaiming areas of Iraq and Syria once held by ISIS, most
16 notably in Mosul.

17 However, the situation in Syria seems to get more
18 complicated by the day as different actors on the ground
19 pursue divergent goals. Russia's continued support for the
20 Assad regime fuels the country's civil war, enables the
21 abuse and killing of the Syrian population, and allows ISIS
22 to exploit the resulting instability for its own gains.
23 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford met
24 with his Russian and Turkish counterparts just this week to
25 discuss deconflicting operations in Syria, a battlespace

1 that has become increasingly complicated as U.S., Turkish,
2 Russian, Iranian, Assad regime, and local partner forces
3 converge in northern Syria. And, General Votel, we look
4 forward to your update on these particular issues.

5 According to public reports, the Defense Department has
6 presented the White House with a draft strategy to
7 accelerate progress against ISIS. While details of the
8 strategy have not been publicly released, reports indicate
9 that it retains many of the core elements of the strategy
10 put in place under the Obama administration. General
11 Dunford has described the strategy as a "political-military
12 plan" and a "whole of government approach" requiring
13 important contributions from other non-DOD departments and
14 agencies, most notably the State Department.

15 This is why it is so concerning to me that the Trump
16 administration's budget would apparently cut the State
17 Department by a reported 37 percent at the very time that we
18 need a surge of diplomatic and other assistance efforts to
19 achieve the political conditions necessary to ultimately
20 prevail in our fight against ISIS. As then General and now
21 Secretary of Defense Mattis warned this committee, "if you
22 don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy
23 more ammunition." We just cannot keep buying bullets as the
24 Trump administration is proposing.

25 General Waldhauser, the importance of a robust

1 interagency is perhaps of even greater importance in your
2 area of responsibility, where you are primarily working by,
3 with, and through partner military forces in conjunction
4 with U.S. interagency efforts. General, as you share your
5 assessment of current and future AFRICOM efforts in places
6 like Libya and Somalia, I look forward to hearing the ways
7 you are incorporating a whole of government approach into
8 your planning. Such incorporation is particularly important
9 in places like these where conflict resolution will
10 ultimately rely less on the military toolkit and more on
11 generating the proper political conditions to sustain and
12 build upon security gains.

13 Turning back the CENTCOM AOR, over the last few years,
14 there has been a persistent focus on Iran's nuclear program
15 and appropriately so. We passed the 1-year anniversary of
16 the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of
17 Action, or JCPOA, in January, and Iran appears to be living
18 up to its commitments under this agreement. However, the
19 JCPOA only addresses one facet of the challenge posed by
20 Iran. Its destabilizing activities in the region, ballistic
21 missile development efforts, and unprofessional and
22 dangerous behavior in the maritime environment continue.

23 Sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program were
24 successful because of the extraordinary unity within the
25 international community. We must approach the remaining

1 challenges in a similar way if we are to be successful in
2 changing Iran's behavior. Any new sanctions must be
3 carefully applied in concert with our international partners
4 so that we do not give Iran a pretext to withdraw from the
5 JCPOA and risk reversing the progress that has been made on
6 limiting their nuclear ambitions.

7 Last month, as the chairman indicated, General Mick
8 Nicholson, Commander of Resolute Support and U.S. Forces-
9 Afghanistan, testified that despite significant security
10 gains and political efforts, Afghanistan is currently facing
11 a stalemate. Further complicating the security landscape
12 are the range of external actors, including Iran, Russia,
13 and Pakistan, who seem intent upon interfering with the
14 stability in Afghanistan. It was General Nicholson's
15 assessments that increased troop levels for the NATO train,
16 advise, and assist mission, as well as the continued growth
17 in the size and capability of the Afghan Air Force, would be
18 necessary to break the stalemate.

19 General Votel, the committee would benefit from hearing
20 your assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan and
21 what can be done to protect the hard-won progress that has
22 been achieved and ensure that further progress is made.

23 Again, thank you both for your continued service to the
24 Nation, and I look forward to your testimony.

25 Chairman McCain: I welcome the witnesses. And your

1 written statements will be made part of the record. We will
2 begin with you, General Votel. And welcome and thanks for
3 the service that you both render to our Nation.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER,
2 U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

3 General Votel: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,
4 distinguished members of the committee, good morning, and
5 thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss
6 the current posture and state of readiness of the United
7 States Central Command.

8 I am very pleased to appear today with my good friend
9 and highly respected brother in arms, General Tom
10 Waldhauser.

11 I come before you today on behalf of the outstanding
12 men and women of the command, military, civilians, and
13 contractors, along with our coalition partners representing
14 nearly 60 nations. Our people are the very best in the
15 world at what they do, and I could not be more proud of them
16 and their families. Without question, they are the strength
17 of our Central Command team.

18 I have been in command of CENTCOM for about a year now.
19 It has been an incredibly busy and productive period. Over
20 the past 12 months, we have dealt with a number of
21 significant challenges in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan,
22 Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt in the Sinai, the Bab al Mandeb
23 Strait, and elsewhere throughout our area of responsibility.
24 We are making progress in many areas, but as you know, there
25 is much work that remains.

1 We are also dealing with a range of malign activities
2 perpetrated by Iran and its proxies operating in the region.
3 It is my view that Iran poses the greatest long-term threat
4 to stability for this part of the world.

5 Generally speaking, the central region remains a highly
6 complex area, widely characterized by pervasive instability
7 and conflict. The fragile security environments, which
8 reflect a variety of contributing factors, including
9 heightened ethno-sectarian tensions, economic uncertainty,
10 weak or corrupt governance, civil wars, and humanitarian
11 crises are exploited by violent extremist organizations and
12 terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. These groups
13 have clearly indicated their desire and intent to attack the
14 U.S. homeland, our interests abroad, and the interests of
15 our partners and allies.

16 At the same time, the central region is increasingly
17 crowded with external nation states such as Russia and
18 China, and they are pursuing their own interests and
19 attempting to shift alliances.

20 The point that I would emphasize to you is this, that
21 while there may be other more strategic or consequential
22 threats in regions in the world today, the central region
23 has come to represent the nexus for many of the security
24 challenges our Nation faces. And most importantly, the
25 threats in region continue to pose the most direct threat to

1 the U.S. homeland and the global economy. Thus, it must
2 remain a priority and be resourced and supported
3 accordingly.

4 The team at U.S. Central Command remains appropriately
5 focused on doing what is necessary to protect our national
6 interests and those of our partners. Our strategic approach
7 is straightforward: prepare, pursue, and prevail. And I
8 will explain what I mean by that.

9 We prepare the environment to ensure an effective
10 posture. We actively pursue opportunities to strengthen
11 relationships and support our interests, and when we do put
12 our forces into action, we prevail in our assigned missions.

13 I would also point out to you that today to the credit
14 and professionalism of our armed forces and coalition
15 partners, we are executing campaigns in the central region
16 with significantly fewer U.S. forces on the ground than in
17 previous years. As you have seen clearly demonstrated in
18 Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere throughout
19 our area of responsibility, we have adopted a by, with, and
20 through approach that places a heavy reliance on indigenous
21 forces. While this approach does present some challenges
22 and can be more time-consuming, it is proving effective and
23 is likely to pay significant dividends going forward.
24 Indigenous force partners continue to build needed
25 capability and capacity and they are personally invested in

1 the conduct of operations and thus inclined to do what is
2 necessary to preserve the gains they have achieved going
3 forward.

4 We also have a vested interest in ensuring increased
5 stability and security in this strategically important
6 central region. To this end, I will close by highlighting
7 three areas where I do believe, if we apply the appropriate
8 amount of energy and effort, we can and will have a lasting
9 impact in this part of the world.

10 First, we must restore trust with our partners in the
11 region while at the same time maintaining the strong trust
12 of our leadership here in Washington. The fact is we cannot
13 surge trust in times of crisis, and we must do what is
14 necessary now to assure our partners of our commitment and
15 our staying power.

16 Second, we must link our military objectives and
17 campaigns as closely as possible to our policy objectives
18 and our other instruments of national power. In other
19 words, we must rely on our military objectives and our soft
20 power capability with desired national and regional
21 strategic end states, recognizing that if we do not do this,
22 we risk creating space for our adversaries to achieve their
23 strategic aims.

24 Finally, we must make sure that we are postured for
25 purpose in the region. We must have credible, ready, and

1 present force, coupled with foreign military sales and
2 foreign military financing programs that serve to build and
3 shape partner nations' capability in a timely and effective
4 fashion.

5 Ours is a challenging and important mission. Much is
6 at stake today in the central region. We recognize this
7 fact, and I assure you that the CENTCOM team stands ready
8 and willing to do what is necessary to protect our national
9 interests and the interests of our allies and partners.

10 Let me close by thanking the committee for the strong
11 support that you continue to provide to the world-class team
12 at United States Central Command and particularly to our
13 forces located forward in the region. As I said at the
14 outset, the 80,000-plus soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines,
15 coast guardsmen, and civilians that make up the command are
16 truly the very best in the world at what they do, and I
17 could not be more proud of them and their families. I know
18 that you are proud of them as well.

19 Thank you again, and I look forward to answering your
20 questions.

21 [The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 General Waldhauser?

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL THOMAS D. WALDHAUSER, USMC,
2 COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman
4 McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of
5 the committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you
6 on the activities and efforts of United States Africa
7 Command.

8 I would like to also say it is an honor for me to sit
9 next to my battle buddy here, General Votel.

10 For the past 9 months, I have been honored to lead the
11 men and women of this geographic combatant command. Africa
12 is an enduring interest for the United States. Small, but
13 wise investments in the capability, legitimacy and
14 accountability of African defense institutions offer
15 disproportionate benefits to America, our allies, the United
16 States, and most importantly, enable African solutions to
17 African problems.

18 Parts of Africa remain a battleground between
19 ideologies, interests, and values. Equality, prosperity,
20 and peace are often pitted against extremism, oppression,
21 and conflict.

22 Today trans-regional violent extremist organizations on
23 the continent constitute the most direct security threat to
24 the United States. To address this threat, our military
25 strategy articulates a long-term, regionally focused

1 approach for a safe and stable Africa.

2 Specifically, the strategy outlines an Africa in which
3 regional organizations and states are willing and capable
4 partners addressing African security challenges all while
5 promoting United States' interests. The Africa Command
6 strategy builds our partners' abilities to direct, manage,
7 and operate capable and sustainable defense institutions.
8 While we have achieved progress in implementing our
9 strategy, threats and challenges still remain.

10 In East Africa, we support African Union and European
11 Union efforts to neutralize al Shabaab and other violent
12 extremist organizations operating in Somalia. And we also
13 support the eventual transfer of security responsibilities
14 from the African Union mission in Somalia to the Somali
15 National Security Forces.

16 In 2016, al Shabaab regained some previously held
17 Somalia territory, and today the group continues to conduct
18 attacks on AMISOM forces, the national security forces of
19 Somalia, as well as the federal government of Somalia.

20 Additionally, we have also seen elements of ISIS begin
21 to make inroads into Somalia, which will further test AMISOM
22 forces and the federal government of Somalia as well.

23 The instability in Libya in North Africa caused by
24 years of political infighting may be the most significant
25 near-term threat to the U.S.'s and allies' interests on the

1 continent. Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition.
2 We must maintain pressure on the ISIS-Libya network and
3 concurrently support Libya's efforts to reestablish a
4 legitimate and unified government. This is a significant
5 challenge, and we must carefully choose where and with whom
6 we work and support in order to counter ISIS-Libya and not
7 to shift the balance between various factions and risks of
8 sparking greater conflict in Libya.

9 In West Africa, our primary focus is countering and
10 degrading Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. Since 2011, Boko
11 Haram has consistently carried out attacks against civilians
12 and targeted partner regional governments and military
13 forces in the Lake Chad Basin region. With forces from
14 Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, we are working
15 with the multinational joint task force located in Niger to
16 enable regional cooperation and expand partner capacity to
17 ensure Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa do not further
18 destabilize the region.

19 The multinational joint task force has been successful
20 in enabling multinational cooperation and coordinating
21 multinational operations and placed a significant pressure
22 on Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa.

23 In Central Africa, through the combined efforts of
24 military forces, civilian agencies, and nongovernmental
25 organizations, we work to build the capacity of our partners

1 to address regional threats, such as maritime security,
2 illicit trafficking of goods and persons, the Lord's
3 Resistance Army, and other criminal networks and
4 enterprises.

5 Africa-wide we support the efforts to enable African
6 partners to respond to humanitarian crises, mass atrocities,
7 disaster contingencies, and to support peace operations.
8 Through the United States National Guard's State Partnership
9 Program, along with their African partners, we have improved
10 disaster management competency and readiness to assist
11 civilian-led efforts. We continue to see great value in the
12 National Guard's persistent engagement and fully support the
13 State Partnership Program's efforts.

14 Africa's security environment is dynamic and complex
15 requiring innovative solutions. Even with limited resources
16 or capabilities, Africa Command aggressively works with
17 partners and allies to execute our missions and mitigate
18 risk. Moving forward, we continue to focus our decisive
19 effort on building African partner capacity and will
20 continue to work closely with the international and
21 interagency partners to make small, wise investments which
22 pay huge dividends in building stable and effective
23 governments, the foundation for long-term security in
24 Africa.

25 I am confident with your support Africa Command will

1 protect and promote United States' interests and keep the
2 United States safe from threats emanating from the African
3 continent

4 And finally, on behalf of the United States Africa
5 Command, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be with
6 you this morning, and I also look forward to your questions.
7 Thank you.

8 [The prepared statement of General Waldhauser follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you, General.

2 General Votel, do you agree that we are in a stalemate
3 in Afghanistan after 15 years?

4 General Votel: Mr. Chairman, I do.

5 Chairman McCain: And in some measurements, maybe you
6 could argue that when we go from control of 72 percent of
7 the country to 52 percent, that is worse than a stalemate.

8 Would you agree that one of the most disturbing things
9 about the attack on the hospital yesterday -- that attack
10 was carried out by ISIS, not by the Taliban, which shows at
11 least to this person that we are seeing an increase in
12 influence of ISIS, as well as Russia providing weapons and
13 the Iranians playing a greater role than in the past.

14 I guess my question is, are we developing a strategy to
15 break the stalemate, and is it going to require additional
16 U.S. troops?

17 General Votel: Mr. Chairman, the answer to your
18 question is yes, we are developing a strategy, and we are in
19 discussions with the Secretary and the Department right now.
20 Both General Nicholson and I are forming our best advice and
21 recommendations to the Secretary, and we look forward to
22 moving forward with that.

23 I do believe it will involve additional forces to
24 ensure that we can make the advise and assist mission more
25 effective.

1 Chairman McCain: Already you have received a
2 capability on rules of engagement which enhance your
3 abilities to combat the enemy. Is that correct?

4 General Votel: That is correct.

5 Chairman McCain: We have got a very interesting and
6 challenging situation in Syria, and that is the whole issue
7 of the Kurds, our relationship with them, Erdogan's
8 relationship with them, the importance of the use of
9 Insurlik, the importance of our relationship with Turkey.
10 And I met with President Erdogan in Ankara recently. He is
11 passionately opposed to Kurdish involvement and our support
12 of the Kurds that I understand are going to be a very vital
13 element in expediting the retaking of Raqqa.

14 This is a complex situation, and it would take all my
15 time, as you know, to go through all this. But I think
16 there is a possibility of an impending conflict between
17 Turkey and the Kurds as opposed to us all working together
18 to try to defeat ISIS and remove them from Raqqa. Do you
19 see that as a scenario that we should be concerned about?

20 General Votel: I do, Mr. Chairman, and to that end, we
21 are trying to take actions to prevent that from occurring.

22 Chairman McCain: Well, we find ourselves in kind of a
23 strange situation that we and the Russians are allied
24 against the Turks, as far as the Kurds are concerned. Is
25 that a correct assessment?

1 General Votel: I would not necessarily say that we are
2 aligned against the Turks. We certainly understand what
3 their interests are and we understand their concerns about
4 the partners that we are working with. Turkey is a vital
5 partner in this effort here. We could not do what we are
6 doing without them. So our efforts are to try to work
7 through this tension through dialogue, through information,
8 and through identifying alternatives that give us a way to
9 move forward against ISIS without damaging the long-term
10 relationship with a NATO partner.

11 Chairman McCain: Well, as you know, we are working
12 with the Kurds and arming and training them, and they are a
13 very effective fighting force, the same Kurds that Erdogan
14 has labeled as a terrorist organization and, in the view of
15 some, a greater threat to Turkey than ISIS is.

16 Who is going to sort all this out?

17 General Votel: Well, I think there certainly has to be
18 an effort, Mr. Chairman, at the military level, and there
19 has to be an effort at the political level to address this.

20 Chairman McCain: I am not sure there is an
21 understanding of how seriously Erdogan views this issue, and
22 I am not sure we appreciate the importance of the role that
23 Turkey plays in our effort to retake Raqqa particularly in
24 the use of Insurlik and other activities that require
25 Turkish cooperation. Unless something changes, I foresee a

1 train wreck here, and I am not sure that the administration
2 recognizes how seriously particularly President Erdogan
3 views the threat that he views that the Kurds oppose.

4 Finally, General Waldhauser, let us talk about Libya a
5 second. Who is the most powerful influence in Libya today?
6 And briefly, what is the answer to this chaos?

7 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator.

8 It is difficult to say who is the most powerful partner
9 right now inside Libya. If you took polls, you would see
10 that the Libyan National Army has got great support in the
11 east and the GNA has support in the west. So there needs to
12 be accommodation of those two organizations in order to get
13 to a political solution there.

14 Chairman McCain: Does it bother you that Haftar has
15 been visiting with the Russians and went out to a Russian
16 carrier? Obviously, now the Russians may be assuming a role
17 in Libya that they never had before.

18 General Waldhauser: It is very concerning, Senator.
19 Haftar has visited, as you said, on the carrier with the
20 Russians. He has also visited in the country of Russia.
21 Also this week, as reported in the open press, Siraj from
22 the Government of National Accord has also visited Russia.

23 Chairman McCain: As is the case with Afghanistan that
24 I mentioned, I hope we will be developing a strategy as
25 regards to Libya as the volatility of that situation can

1 clearly lead to the rise of ISIS and other extremist
2 organizations, as I know you are well aware, General.

3 Senator Reed?

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

5 General Votel, you are now in the process of evaluating
6 the mission and the strategy. For many years, the mission
7 seemed to be very clear with respect to Syria and to Iraq of
8 degrade and defeat ISIS. Now there are activities
9 particularly around Manbij where you are in the process of
10 trying to separate forces. The issue here really is not
11 only define the mission, but preventing mission creep in
12 terms of starting to find ourselves committed not just to
13 destroying ISIS but to somehow refereeing a very complicated
14 situation with Russians, Assad forces, anti-Assad forces,
15 Turkish forces, Kurdish forces, and an array of other forces
16 that you can allude to.

17 How are you going to prevent that mission creep, or is
18 there that possibility?

19 General Votel: Well, thank you, Senator. Yes, I do
20 agree. If we are not careful, we could find ourselves in a
21 different situation. The presence of our forces in Manbij
22 is not new to just the current situation. They have
23 actually been on the ground since Manbij was secured here 6
24 or 7 months ago. And they are principally there to ensure
25 that ISIS is not able to reestablish itself in the area.

1 And we have undertaken a number of operations in that
2 particular regard.

3 As the situation is currently played out, that is the
4 principal focus of our elements there. They do have the
5 benefit by virtue of being there to also provide overwatch
6 and, I would add, a measure of assurance not just for our
7 local partners on the ground there, but I would also suggest
8 for our Turkish partners. We understand what their concerns
9 are about undue Kurdish influence in this particular area.
10 So the best way that we can keep an eye on that I think is
11 through our well trained SOF forces on the ground.

12 Senator Reed: One of the areas I touched upon in my
13 comments was the interagency. And, General Waldhauser, can
14 you accomplish your mission in AFRICOM if you do not have
15 rather robust support by the State Department and other
16 agencies, including our European allies?

17 General Waldhauser: The short answer, Senator, is no,
18 we cannot. We work very closely with various agencies,
19 USAID, the State Department, and the like. I could give
20 numerous examples if you would like of how we partner with
21 them and how they contribute to development, which is so
22 important in our mission.

23 Senator Reed: Thank you.

24 And, General Votel, likewise?

25 General Votel: I absolutely agree.

1 Senator Reed: As we go forward in terms of the new
2 strategy that the President is asking for, one point he made
3 was requesting a recommendation to change any U.S. rules of
4 engagement and other U.S. policy restrictions that exceed
5 the requirements of an international war. My sense is that
6 the requirements and the authorities that the military has
7 asked for is, one, they can do the job, but two, they also
8 do things like minimize civilian casualties, provide for an
9 appropriate relationship with the local populations, which
10 helps you rather than hurts you. Is that still the
11 sensitivity that you have? I mean, adherence to the minimum
12 international law might not be the smartest military
13 approach.

14 General Votel: Well, we conduct all of our operations,
15 of course, in accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict, and
16 we bring our values to the fight wherever we are.

17 I do not think those are particular limitations on us
18 at this particular point. My advice here moving forward has
19 been to ensure that our forces have the operational agility
20 to maintain pressure and sustain our approach of presenting
21 ISIS with multiple dilemmas and really pursuing a military
22 strategy of simultaneous operations to really overwhelm them
23 quickly. And so the preponderance of our discussions and
24 our recommendations really fell within that area.

25 Senator Reed: But again, the rules that we have

1 adopted have been based on best military policy, not just
2 adherence to arbitrary rules. We minimize casualties
3 because it has an effect on the population that will hurt
4 our operations. Is that correct?

5 General Votel: Senator, that is absolutely correct.
6 750,000 people in the west portion of Mosul. And so we
7 certainly have to conduct our operations with the full
8 knowledge that that is the situation.

9 Senator Reed: Again, gentlemen, thank you for your
10 service, and I look forward to continuing these discussions.
11 Thank you.

12 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe?

13 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 General Waldhauser, as you and I discussed in my
15 office, Senator Rounds and I just returned from several
16 areas in your command. You know, when you stop and look at
17 it, it seems like it has been shorter than that, but it has
18 been 10 years since we started AFRICOM. And the continent
19 used to be divided in three different commands. Now, since
20 that time, we have had a lot of successes.

21 General Rodriguez, one of your predecessors said,
22 Africa is an enduring interest to the United States and its
23 importance will continue to increase as African economies,
24 population, and influence grow. Do you agree with that
25 statement?

1 General Waldhauser: Senator, I do.

2 Senator Inhofe: It was not long ago when Chuck Wald
3 had the job that you have right now. He talked about the
4 significance of Phase Zero. He actually wrote an article
5 about the Phase Zero campaign, why is Phase Zero important,
6 and how does it apply to AFRICOM. Could you make any
7 comments about that?

8 General Waldhauser: Senator, thank you. What I would
9 say to that question is that the ability to engage with the
10 population and have such exercises and engagements with
11 agencies, as was previously described, things like
12 education, health care, jobs for the significant youth bulge
13 that is in Africa is very, very important. We have got to
14 get at these drivers that make these individuals, young men
15 especially, want to join groups like al Shabaab. In order
16 to get at that part of the problem, we need to be engaged
17 with education, health care, jobs, and the like.

18 Senator Inhofe: To preclude something from happening,
19 head it off at the pass. And I would agree with that.

20 We were also in Afghanistan, General Votel, and we met
21 with our service members and, of course, the new President.
22 And General Nicholson and I -- I think maybe we might be in
23 my opinion -- and I might be influenced by the fact that I
24 knew the new president's predecessor, and there is no
25 comparison. Summing up kind of what General Nicholson said

1 -- I will read this -- a need for a long-term coalition
2 commitment to Afghanistan, a need for increased coalition
3 forces for training and assisting the Afghan military, the
4 strength and the commitment of the Afghan people who want to
5 take their country back from the insurgents, shifting the
6 focus to winning versus not losing, the high casualty rate
7 among the Afghan forces, the increase in territory
8 controlled by the Taliban, the importance of cutting the
9 Taliban's access to financing their operations.

10 Do you pretty much agree with his assessment with what
11 the situation is there?

12 General Votel: I do, Senator.

13 Senator Inhofe: And do you think that maybe, when we
14 get some of these less than optimistic reports in these
15 committee hearings that we have, that you get a little bit
16 different idea when you are actually there? And one of the
17 things that I think we are not factoring in enough would be
18 President Ghani. I would like to have your idea as to what
19 a difference that can make because I can remember sitting
20 there with his predecessor and then evaluating the
21 situation, what his commitment is right now and what he
22 really believes his people are going to be able to do.

23 General Votel: Senator, I absolutely agree with you.
24 I do think we cannot overestimate the strategic advantage of
25 having a leader like President Ghani in place. His

1 willingness to partner, his visionary ideas about this, and
2 his general approach to bringing the coalition on board I
3 think have been very good, and I think they provide us a
4 very good opportunity to build upon.

5 Senator Inhofe: With him and with your experience from
6 the last fighting season that we had, since we are coming up
7 now to the next fighting season, do you have any projection
8 as to differences we might see with that leadership and
9 where we are right now?

10 General Votel: I think that we will continue to see
11 very steady leadership from President Ghani and his
12 government through the next fighting season. I think the
13 challenge that we will have will be sustaining the Afghan
14 forces as they move forward. As you have noted, as others
15 have noted, they have absorbed a lot of casualties, and yet
16 they have been resilient through that. But there is a need
17 to ensure that they get into a normal operational cycle that
18 allows them to recover, to rebuild themselves, to reset
19 themselves, and then get back into the fight. And I think
20 that as we move forward, that will be the challenge that
21 General Nicholson and I will have to manage.

22 Senator Inhofe: And I would agree with that. And I
23 think that there is an effect that the new president has on
24 the fighting troops over there, on theirs, that will yield a
25 better performance.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman McCain: And the fighting season has begun
3 earlier than ever in Afghanistan. True, General?

4 General Votel: I think the fighting season does not
5 end. I agree with you, Senator.

6 Chairman McCain: Senator Peters?

7 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 And thank you to both of you today for testifying. I
9 appreciate all that you do. You have a very difficult job
10 and both of you do it with honor. So thank you so much for
11 your service to our country.

12 I represent in Michigan probably the largest Arab
13 American, Muslim American community here in the United
14 States and had an opportunity just recently to meet with a
15 number of community members at the Islamic Center and heard
16 some great concern from the Yemeni American community as to
17 what they are seeing in Yemen in terms of Saudi Arabia and
18 the operations, what seems to be indiscriminate bombing, the
19 killing of large numbers of civilians. I think, according
20 to some estimates, close to 4,000 civilians have been killed
21 in Yemen by a Saudi Arabian-led air campaign, which appears
22 to them as indiscriminate and, according to them, does great
23 damage to the United States. People see those Saudi attacks
24 as related to the United States. There has been increasing
25 recruitment for folks who want to do harm to the United

1 States because of the actions that are being undertaken by
2 the Saudi Arabians.

3 So if you could comment, General Votel, a little bit
4 about what is happening there to us, and what do you assess
5 the cause of the large number of civilian casualties that we
6 are seeing in Yemen and what can we do to reduce that?

7 General Votel: Thank you for the question, Senator.

8 I attribute those types of situations more to the
9 competence of the forces that are operating there and their
10 ability to properly target. As you are aware, we do not
11 provide intelligence for those things. We do not make
12 decisions for them.

13 But yet, we have a relationship with Saudi Arabia. And
14 at my level and at levels below me, my air commander, a
15 variety of subordinate commanders, we have engaged with our
16 partner leaders in Saudi Arabia to talk to them about the
17 effects of this and to provide opportunities for them to
18 learn from our experience in terms of this and improve their
19 capabilities in this particular regard. And I think they
20 have done that.

21 In addition, I personally have reached out and talked
22 to my counterpart about the importance of reaching out to
23 international organizations like the ICRC, Doctors Without
24 Borders, who also operate in these areas, and ask that they
25 establish relationships and begin a discussion between the

1 Saudi Arabian Government and Ministry of Defense and these
2 particular organizations so we can better understand what is
3 happening on the ground and we can begin to work through
4 this. And I am very happy to tell you that that is taking
5 place now.

6 Senator Peters: So you would characterize this as a
7 training issue as opposed to some other factor that is
8 causing --

9 General Votel: I do not attribute it to deliberate
10 decisions to target civilians. I attribute it to a growing
11 need to develop a better and more precise targeting process
12 for their operations.

13 Senator Peters: And are we able to assist them in
14 that?

15 General Votel: We do not assist them directly with
16 targeting on the ground, but we are able to, through our
17 experience and through our people, engage them and help with
18 their professionalism and give them the benefit of our
19 experience and tactics, techniques, procedures, processes
20 that we use to try to absolutely minimize those types of
21 events. And we are doing that.

22 Senator Peters: Well, it is good to hear. Thank you.

23 General Votel, to move to Syria now, you were recently
24 quoted in the "New York Times" about saying that we want to
25 bring the right capabilities forward, not all of those

1 necessarily resident in the special operations community.
2 If we need additional artillery or things like that, I want
3 to bring those forward to augment our operations. And I
4 note today in the news there was an artillery unit that I
5 believe is being positioned in Syria now.

6 In your estimate, what is the right mix of conventional
7 and special operations forces that are going to be required
8 to succeed in Syria?

9 General Votel: Senator, I am not sure I can give you
10 an exact percentage-wise mix of this. But what I can tell
11 you is that the way that we operate today with our special
12 operations forces and unique capabilities they bring,
13 through our experience of the last 15 or 16 years, we have
14 become very comfortable and capable of operating together.

15 And so what I have pledged to our commanders and what I
16 expect from them is for them to ask for the capabilities
17 that we need and then for us to ensure that we have the
18 right command and control, the right force protection, the
19 right resources in place to ensure that it can function
20 properly together. And that to me is much more important
21 than a particular mix of whatever the capabilities are. I
22 think as we move more towards the latter part of these
23 operations into more of the stability and other aspects of
24 the operations, we will see more conventional forces
25 requirements perhaps.

1 Senator Peters: Thank you, General.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Wicker?

3 Senator Wicker: Let us get back to Afghanistan,
4 General Votel. Do the Afghan people support the presence of
5 the United States there?

6 General Votel: I believe that they do, Senator.

7 Senator Wicker: And how do you measure that?

8 General Votel: I think we measure that by favorability
9 ratings that we see of them for the Government of
10 Afghanistan and the activities that they are pursuing. And
11 I think we measure that through our direct contact with them
12 with teams that we have out there on the ground and others
13 that interact with the Afghan people on a regular basis.

14 Senator Wicker: And as a matter of fact, several years
15 ago, there was a loya jirga convened of most Afghan leaders,
16 and they overwhelmingly were in support of the United States
17 presence there to protect them against what had happened
18 before.

19 Has there been another loya jirga, or do we simply
20 assume that the elected leadership of the government
21 represents them?

22 General Votel: There has not been another loya jirga I
23 think of the same scope that you referenced, Senator. But
24 we do pay attention to the polling. I would note in some
25 recent polls that I have seen, the favorability ratings for

1 the Taliban are very low in the 6 to 7 percent range as
2 opposed to much, much higher for the Government of
3 Afghanistan.

4 Senator Wicker: You had strong praise for President
5 Ghani. How is the relationship there between the president
6 and Mr. Abdullah who is his nearest competitor?

7 General Votel: It has improved significantly. And I
8 contribute that directly to the engagement of our
9 ambassadors on the ground who have personally invested in
10 that and worked that relationship, and it has had a positive
11 impact on our operations.

12 Senator Wicker: Well, that is good to hear.

13 Now, the information we have -- and the chairman
14 alluded to this -- the Afghan Government controls 57 percent
15 of the country's districts. A year and a half ago, that
16 figure was 72 percent. What happened?

17 General Votel: Senator, I would tell you that there
18 are other numbers out there. We have some slightly
19 different ones, but they are in the general ball park of
20 what you are saying.

21 Senator Wicker: Generally, those numbers are correct.

22 General Votel: In general.

23 Senator Wicker: So there has been a significant drop,
24 as the chairman said, in a year and a half.

25 General Votel: There have been areas that we would put

1 into the contested space area here that have increased over
2 the last year.

3 Senator Wicker: Your testimony would be that this has
4 not happened because the support among the Afghan people of
5 our efforts has diminished.

6 General Votel: I do not think so.

7 Senator Wicker: Something we did?

8 General Votel: I think this is the effect of the
9 fighting that is taking place and of the efforts by the
10 Taliban to be more resurgent in specific areas in
11 Afghanistan.

12 Senator Wicker: Well, okay. General Nicholson said in
13 talking about the stalemate that what will break the
14 stalemate are offensive capabilities such as special forces
15 and allowing the air force to overmatch the Taliban. Also
16 he said we have a shortfall of a few thousand troops in
17 Afghanistan for the train, advise, and assist mission.
18 Would you talk about those two aspects, and would you
19 support a few thousand more American troops to get the job
20 done in this mission?

21 General Votel: Senator, With respect to the last part
22 of your question, that is certainly a discussion we are
23 having with the Secretary right now. I will not pre-stage a
24 decision here. That is certainly his regard. But certainly
25 I agree with what General Nicholson's approach is. And I do

1 agree that one of our efforts to improve the capabilities
2 and equipment of the Afghan Air Force is a big part of this,
3 as is improving and expanding their special operations
4 capability.

5 Senator Wicker: Thank you.

6 General Waldhauser, the Wasp amphibious expedition did
7 over 100 consecutive days of strikes. It is considered to
8 be an impressive success. What lessons have we learned from
9 that deployment, and are we sending you what you need to get
10 the job done in that respect?

11 General Waldhauser: The Wasp and Marine aviation that
12 was on board that ship was a significant contributor to the
13 GNA forces and ridding Sirte of ISIS.

14 Lessons learned at the tactical level have to do with
15 coordination on the ground and special forces who were there
16 on the ground, but I think it is important to point out that
17 from 1 August until middle of December there were nearly 500
18 strikes. Most of them came from ISR platforms, but a lot of
19 them, as you said, came from the ship. And I think the
20 ability to have zero civilian casualties in a very, very
21 dense urban environment underscores the training and the
22 professionalism of those who were conducting that operation.

23 So in sum, that was a huge asset for us. We actually
24 borrowed it from CENTCOM in order to make it happen, but
25 that is how we have to do business these days. AFRICOM and

1 CENTCOM coordinate on various trans-regional asset changes,
2 and that was an example where it worked very well.

3 Senator Wicker: Thank you, sir.

4 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen?

5 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 And General Votel and General Waldhauser, thank you
7 both for your testimony and for your service.

8 General Votel, there has already been reference to the
9 marines who have arrived in Syria. The "Washington Post"
10 story this morning reports that the battalion landing team,
11 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, will man the guns and deliver
12 fire support for U.S.-backed local forces who are preparing
13 an assault on the city.

14 First of all, is that accurate, and should we take that
15 to mean an assault is imminent in Raqqa?

16 General Votel: Well, certainly we will not talk about
17 any timings of any of our particular operations. But our
18 intention here with this -- and this fell within the
19 authorities that are provided to me right now was to ensure
20 that we had redundant capable fire support on the ground to
21 support our partners and ensure that we could take advantage
22 of opportunities and ensure the continued progress that we
23 have been seeing.

24 Senator Shaheen: And are you comfortable that that
25 gives us that progress and support that we need?

1 General Votel: In conjunction with our excellent
2 coalition air forces, yes, I am very confident that that
3 will help us.

4 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

5 Yesterday in our meeting -- and we heard similar
6 comments from General Nicholson when he was here talking
7 about Russian influence in Afghanistan. They are trying to
8 legitimize the Taliban and undermine our mission and NATO's
9 mission there. Can you talk about what alternatives we have
10 to respond to Russian activities there?

11 General Votel: I think the best alternative that we
12 have is to ensure that we demonstrate our commitment to the
13 mission that we have in place here with the Government of
14 Afghanistan. Certainly with our twofold mission, we focused
15 on counterterrorism and then, of course, the train, advise,
16 and assist mission. So the most important thing we can do
17 is send a very clear message that we are going to see this
18 mission through and support the Government of Afghanistan in
19 the way that they require with military capabilities and
20 other things to ensure that they can be successful.

21 Senator Shaheen: And to what extent does our effort in
22 Eastern Europe with NATO affect Russia's ability to
23 undermine what we are doing in Afghanistan? How much do
24 they need to be focused on what is happening in Eastern
25 Europe?

1 General Votel: From my perspective, I would like them
2 totally focused on Eastern Europe and not on Afghanistan. I
3 am being a little facetious here. I am not sure that I can
4 comment that there is necessarily a direct relationship
5 between that, Senator. Certainly I think if their attention
6 can be drawn to other challenges, other problems that they
7 are focused on, that helps us.

8 Senator Shaheen: General Waldhauser, in your
9 statement, you point out that long-term success in slowing
10 the progress of Boko Haram and ISIS in West Africa requires
11 Nigeria to address development, governance, and economic
12 deficiencies, which are drivers of terrorism in that region.
13 As we look at the future where one in four Africans are
14 Nigerian, what happens in Nigeria has a huge impact on what
15 happens throughout the rest of Africa. Do you agree with
16 that?

17 General Waldhauser: I most definitely do. With 182
18 million people in that country -- it is the seventh largest
19 country in the world -- what happens there has a significant
20 impact not only on the continent, but it could be in Europe
21 and the United States as well.

22 Senator Shaheen: And to what extent do we feel like
23 they are addressing the threat from Boko Haram and also
24 addressing those deficiencies that have existed there?

25 General Waldhauser: Senator, 2 weeks ago, I was in

1 Abuja and talked with the acting vice president, and he is
2 very, very aware of the fact that there is still much work
3 that needs to be done in northeastern Nigeria both with Boko
4 Haram and ISIS-West Africa. And I came away from that visit
5 in a positive way because there have been some human rights
6 issues with the Nigerians, but they are taking that on. I
7 mean, they are making some progress there. But I think the
8 acting vice president or acting president understands there
9 is still a threat. Boko Haram has weakened a bit, but they
10 are still a threat. ISIS-West Africa is still there and
11 they are still a threat. But this Lake Chad Basin region
12 task force has been doing fairly well with at least trying
13 to keep the problem inside the Nigerian borders.

14 Senator Shaheen: And are they working to address the
15 historic divisions between the Christian southern part of
16 the country and the Muslim north? Are there any initiatives
17 underway that help to resolve some of those historic
18 conflicts?

19 General Waldhauser: Senator, I am not aware of any per
20 se. I would just say that in my discussions with senior
21 leadership there 2 weeks ago, they have a fairly wide-
22 ranging and overarching strategy of where they want to go
23 which ultimately will turn over northeastern Nigeria to the
24 police forces.

25 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer?

3 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 General Votel, since the nuclear deal with Iran was
5 announced, Iran's behavior in the region, its support for
6 terrorism, and its domestic repression -- it appears to have
7 gotten worse. Iran wields significant power in Syria,
8 Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, and it seeks to destabilize our
9 key allies. What do you see as Iran's goal in the region?

10 General Votel: Senator, I believe Iran seeks to be the
11 regional hegemon, to be the most influential country in the
12 region.

13 Senator Fischer: And how would you characterize Iran's
14 regional behavior since the nuclear agreement? Has it
15 improved or has it worsened?

16 General Votel: I would describe it as destabilizing to
17 the region. It has not been helpful to anything that I can
18 see going on across the region.

19 Senator Fischer: How would you characterize Iran's
20 relationship with Russia in the region?

21 General Votel: Again, not having firsthand knowledge
22 on that, I guess I would characterize it as they find areas
23 of cooperation. I am particularly concerned how both Iran
24 and Russia have cooperated to prop up the Assad regime and
25 make them stronger. That is certainly of some concern. So

1 I do see that level of cooperation being very unhelpful to
2 the things that we are doing across the region. I do not
3 know what the long-term views of each of these countries
4 might be and how that might play out, but it certainly looks
5 like they are taking the opportunity of convenience to join
6 efforts in some regard.

7 Senator Fischer: And I wanted to ask you your long-
8 term view with regards to the United States and our position
9 in the region, first of all, just with Iran's destabilizing
10 activities but also with their relationship with Russia.
11 Can you give us in your best opinion how that affects the
12 United States and our involvement?

13 General Votel: I can, Senator, and I will offer you my
14 observation. It is based on my travels throughout the
15 region over the last year and meeting with our partners
16 across many of the countries. My consistent takeaway here
17 is that the partners in the region would strongly prefer to
18 have a relationship with the United States over any other
19 nation that might be external to the Middle East. And I
20 think that is an opportunity for us to move forward on. We
21 have long-term historical relationships with many of these
22 countries, and we should capitalize on that as we move
23 forward. And I think that offers us the best opportunity.

24 Senator Fischer: As we look over the last year, we
25 have seen Iran has escalated its harassment of our vessels,

1 our personnel in the Persian Gulf. And just last week,
2 multiple fast attack vessels from the IRGC came close to a
3 U.S. Navy ship in the Strait of Hormuz, and they forced it
4 to change direction.

5 What is CENTCOM doing to address that harassment that
6 we are seeing by Iran?

7 General Votel: First off, we are ensuring that our
8 maritime forces have all the right rules of engagement and
9 capabilities and training and techniques to deal with that,
10 and I do believe they are effectively doing that. One of
11 the first things I did after coming into command was get on
12 a ship and go through the Straits of Hormuz so I could see
13 it with my own eyes, and I was extraordinarily impressed
14 with the maturity of our sailors and the judgment of our
15 leaders as we went through that.

16 More broadly, I think we have to hold Iran accountable
17 for their actions. No other nation operates the way they do
18 in the Arabian Gulf. Nobody does that in the Arabian Gulf.
19 And they need to be held accountable for that and they need
20 to be exposed for those types of unprofessional, unsafe, and
21 abnormal activities.

22 Senator Fischer: It sounds like you are very concerned
23 with Iran's growing asymmetrical capabilities, and that
24 includes its acquisition of advanced cruise missiles, I
25 would assume.

1 General Votel: It does, Senator.

2 Senator Fischer: What about naval mines, ballistic
3 missiles, and UAVs? I guess when we are looking at our
4 interests in the Persian Gulf and our allies' interests in
5 the Persian Gulf, how do those growing threats affect that?

6 General Votel: The way they affect us is they provide
7 Iran with a layered capability where they can use their fast
8 boats, they can use cruise missiles, they can use radars,
9 they can use UAVs to potentially dominate specific areas.
10 So this is a concern, and it is something that certainly we
11 look at in our capabilities and it is something that we have
12 engaged our partners in the region on on how we work
13 together to mitigate the effects of that layered approach
14 that Iran pursues in these critical chokepoints.

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman McCain: Senator Warren?

18 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 And thank you for being here.

20 I would like to return to an issue raised by Senator
21 Reed. There is a big debate going on right now, as you
22 know, about military spending, and of course, we need a
23 strong military. But the military is not the only element
24 of our national security strategy. Spending on security
25 outside the military budget is very small. Diplomacy and

1 development combined is about 1 percent of our annual
2 budget, but it includes programs that promote democracy,
3 human rights, the rule of law that boost economic growth,
4 that improve access to education, that fight hunger, that
5 treat infectious diseases, and it provides disaster relief
6 around the world.

7 General Votel and General Waldhauser, you command our
8 armed forces in some of the most active and dangerous parts
9 of the world. Do you think the activities of the State
10 Department and other civilian partners are a waste of time
11 and taxpayer money?

12 General Votel: I do not, Senator.

13 Senator Warren: Thank you.

14 General Waldhauser: Senator, nor do I. They are a big
15 part of what we do.

16 Senator Warren: Thank you. And I agree. But the
17 Trump administration's blueprint budget would increase
18 defense spending in some areas by massively slashing through
19 other programs that are critical for our national security.
20 Not every international problem is the same and the right
21 tool is not always a military response. Recapping our State
22 Department by cutting an already small foreign aid budget
23 makes America less safe, and that is just not smart.

24 I would like to turn to another issue, and that is the
25 ongoing fight against ISIS in Iraq and in Syria. General

1 Votel, you contributed to the Pentagon's plan to accelerate
2 the fight against ISIS which Secretary Mattis delivered to
3 the White House last week. I have every confidence that the
4 U.S. military can defeat ISIS on the battlefield and help
5 retake strategically important cities.

6 But what I want to ask you is about what comes next.
7 You are going to be mediating between armed opposition
8 forces that dislike each other intensely in cities where
9 existing infrastructure has been completely destroyed with a
10 population that has been traumatized and displaced. What
11 will it take to create conditions for normal life to resume
12 in Mosul and Raqqa?

13 General Votel: I think it starts certainly following
14 up our military operations with good local governance and
15 addressing humanitarian aid, addressing issues like
16 demining, of restoring basic services to the people, of
17 trying to bring additional aid in there so small businesses
18 and other things can get going, and then the bigger aspects
19 of governance can begin to take place. And so as we look at
20 our military operations, particularly as we look at places
21 like Raqqa or Mosul, what we have tried to do is ensure that
22 our military planning is very closely linked to the
23 political planning, what comes next so that we do not just
24 finish a military operation and then just leave. It is
25 important that we have local hold forces. It is important

1 that we predetermine local governance that is going to come
2 in and begin to take this over. So I think that is an
3 extraordinarily important point. The transition from
4 military operations to the stability operations and things
5 that come next I think is a significant lesson learned for
6 us -- relearned for us many times, and it is something that
7 we have specifically focused on in this campaign.

8 Senator Warren: Thank you. I am very glad to hear
9 that, General. Planning for peace is hard. We did not do
10 it after we toppled Saddam Hussein, and we are still paying
11 a price for that blindness today. I do not want to see us
12 turn around and make that same mistake again. I think we
13 need to be very careful that we do not create an environment
14 that breeds the next generation of extremists, and I am
15 grateful for your work in this area. I am grateful to both
16 of you for all that you are doing. Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Senator Reed [presiding]: On behalf of Chairman
19 McCain, let me recognize Senator Cotton.

20 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

21 Gentlemen, welcome back to the committee.

22 General Waldhauser, you were speaking with Senator
23 Shaheen about Nigeria and the role that it plays not just in
24 the African continent but around the world. Could you speak
25 a little bit about what President Buhari's absence from the

1 country means and what the status is right now of Nigerian
2 politics for the committee?

3 General Waldhauser: Senator, I would just have to say
4 that open source reporting indicates that he is still in
5 London receiving medical help. That was a topic that was
6 not discussed with officials when I was there.

7 But what I did observe was acting President Osinbajo
8 has done extremely well. He is very competent. He has a, I
9 would say, very wide view of the problems and issues, and he
10 seems to want to get after them. And he was definitely
11 genuinely interested in making things happen, and I thought
12 we had some very frank discussions with him on the way ahead
13 with regard to our support for the defeat of ISIL-West
14 Africa and Boko Haram.

15 Senator Cotton: What is the level of political
16 consensus and stability between the north and the south in
17 that country right now?

18 General Waldhauser: I really could not give you a fair
19 assessment of that. It was not part of the discussion. We
20 did not have that topic.

21 Senator Cotton: I understand.

22 Looking to the east, would you please discuss the
23 strategic implications of China's new base in Djibouti and
24 what it means for our presence there and throughout the Horn
25 of Africa?

1 General Waldhauser: So the Chinese base is right
2 outside Camp Lemonnier, about 4 miles or so from our base.
3 The intention for that location was to provide a port for
4 their ships to have in the area. They have about 2,200
5 peacekeepers on the continent. This is the first time for
6 them that they have kind of journeyed in that direction. So
7 right now, it is due to be completed later this summer.

8 I would just say the concern that I have from an
9 operational perspective is the operational security when we
10 operate so close to a Chinese base. And the Camp Lemonnier-
11 Djibouti area is not only AFRICOM, but CENTCOM uses it,
12 SOCOM uses it, TRANSCOM, EUCOM, and the like. So it is a
13 very strategic location, and visiting Djiboutian officials
14 twice, I have talked with their president and expressed our
15 concerns about some of the things that are important to us
16 about what the Chinese can or cannot do at that location.

17 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

18 General Votel, you have already spoken with several
19 Senators this morning about the stalemate in Afghanistan.
20 For many years now, we on this committee and many leaders in
21 the executive branch have been lamenting the existence of
22 sanctuaries for the Taliban and other terrorist groups in
23 Pakistan. As you think about the strategy to break this
24 stalemate, what is the role of eliminating those sanctuaries
25 inside of Pakistan? How do you plan to get after this

1 longstanding problem?

2 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

3 Pakistan, of course, remains a key partner in this
4 fight here. I have been encouraged by my meetings with the
5 new Chief of Army Staff, General Bajwan, and his commitment
6 to help address this. They have done some things that have
7 been helpful to us. Most recently they have supported
8 General Nicholson in some operations along the border,
9 making sure that they were well coordinated and doing the
10 activities on their side of the border. That is a very
11 positive sign and a move in the right direction. And they
12 have done things against the principal concerns that we
13 have, the Haqqani Network and Taliban. But what we do need
14 is we need that to be more persistent and continue to focus
15 in that particular area. And so we will continue to engage
16 with Pakistan throughout this.

17 I think it is key to ensure that Pakistan and
18 Afghanistan have a very good relationship. There certainly
19 are tensions along the common border between those
20 countries. And I think a key role that we can play is in
21 helping move that relationship forward.

22 Senator Cotton: Let me ask you about a seam on the map
23 between you and Harry Harris, but it is an important seam
24 because it involves Pakistan and Afghanistan and India and
25 PACOM. To what extent do you think Pakistan's Afghan policy

1 is driven in part by its India policy and, in particular,
2 whether an independent Afghanistan conducting its own
3 foreign policy might be adverse to Pakistani interests?

4 General Votel: Senator, I think Pakistan's view of the
5 region I think as they look at their interests, it plays
6 very largely in how they look at both sides of their
7 country.

8 Senator Cotton: One final question. Since the 1970s,
9 Russia's influence throughout the Middle East has been
10 minimal, thanks in large part to the diplomacy of Henry
11 Kissinger and Presidents Nixon and Ford. How would you
12 assess the level of Russia's influence in the region today?

13 General Votel: Russia is attempting to increase their
14 influence throughout the Middle East, as we have seen in
15 Syria. We have seen them do things certainly with our
16 longstanding partner Egypt and others across the region. So
17 it is my view that they are trying to increase their
18 influence in this critical part of the globe.

19 Senator Cotton: Do you think they have been successful
20 in any of those attempts thus far?

21 General Votel: Well, they certainly have been
22 successful in supporting the Assad regime, and so that is
23 certainly an example of that. I am hopeful that we will be
24 able to reassert our own relationships as well.

25 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen.

1 Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me
2 recognize Senator King.

3 Senator King: Thank you, Senator Reed.

4 General Votel, let us talk about four areas where we
5 are engaged in conflict: Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and
6 Afghanistan.

7 By the way, I want to compliment you on your written
8 statement. It is a primer on the region that I think should
9 be required reading for everyone in this body. It is very
10 well done, very thoughtful, and comprehensive.

11 Who are our allies in Iraq? Who are we fighting next
12 to? The ISF. Right?

13 General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

14 Senator King: And the Kurds.

15 General Votel: The Peshmerga in the northern part of
16 Iraq.

17 Senator King: And what religion are the members of the
18 ISF and the Kurds?

19 General Votel: They are Muslims.

20 Senator King: And in Syria we have got the Syrian
21 Democratic Forces and also the Kurds?

22 General Votel: We have Syrian Kurds and we are working
23 with local Syrian Arabs, Turkmen and in some cases local
24 Christian forces.

25 Senator King: But the vast majority of those forces

1 are Muslim. Is that correct?

2 General Votel: That is correct.

3 Senator King: And in Yemen, UAE, Saudi Arabia, those
4 forces are Muslim?

5 General Votel: Absolutely.

6 Senator King: And in Afghanistan, the ANSF, the Afghan
7 National Security Forces, also Muslim?

8 General Votel: They are Muslim.

9 Senator King: One of the statements you made in your
10 opening comments was that our strategy rests upon, quote, a
11 heavy reliance on indigenous forces. Is that correct?

12 General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

13 Senator King: And it is fair to say that the vast
14 majority of those indigenous forces are Muslim.

15 General Votel: That is the case today.

16 Senator King: So it would be a mistake as a matter of
17 national policy, rhetoric, or discussion if we attempted to
18 alienate or marginalize Muslim citizens of anywhere in the
19 world because these are our allies in all of the fights that
20 we are engaged in in your area. Is that not correct?

21 General Votel: I believe it is correct, Senator.

22 Senator King: And you talked about restoring trust
23 with our partners in the region. Our partners in the region
24 are all based upon Muslim societies. Is that not correct?

25 General Votel: They largely are. It is largely a

1 Muslim area.

2 Senator King: The second area -- and this has been
3 discussed to some extent but again it is in your report on
4 page 3 and 5 of your statement. The goals that you define
5 cannot be accomplished solely through military means, you
6 say. The military can help create the necessary conditions.
7 There must be concomitant progress in other complementary
8 areas, reconstruction, humanitarian aid, stabilization,
9 political reconciliation. On page 5, you say, however,
10 solely a military response is not sufficient. This must be
11 accomplished through a combination of capabilities if we are
12 going to achieve and sustain our strongest deterrence
13 posture.

14 Again, just to put a fine point on what has been
15 discussed previously, to solely rely on military strength in
16 solving these very complex and difficult problems would be a
17 serious mistake. Would you agree?

18 General Votel: I would agree, Senator. I think we
19 have to have a combination of all of our elements of power,
20 hard power and soft power.

21 Senator King: Thank you.

22 Next question. This is a slightly different subject.
23 You work with a lot of these allies. You work with these
24 countries, with Iraq and other countries in the region. How
25 would it be received in the Arab world if the United States

1 relocates its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem without a
2 settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

3 General Votel: I think from my personal discussions
4 with some in the region, I think that it would create some
5 challenges for some of those countries.

6 Senator King: Some challenges? Can you expand?
7 Serious challenges?

8 General Votel: It could potentially be very serious.

9 Senator King: And does that include our staunch ally
10 Jordan?

11 General Votel: I believe, yes, sir, it does, Senator.

12 Senator King: Thank you.

13 Final question to both of you. Foreign military sales
14 and foreign military financing programs -- are they
15 appropriately calibrated to meet your needs in the region?
16 My sense is that that is an area where we could use some
17 work.

18 General Votel: From my perspective, Senator, the
19 importance of the foreign military sales and foreign
20 military funding programs is to help build capability for
21 our partners that is interoperable with us. They generally
22 want to buy U.S. equipment because it comes along with
23 training. It comes along with sustainment, and it makes
24 them more interoperable with us. I think we have to take a
25 long-term view in terms of this, and I think it is in our

1 interests for our partners in the region to use capabilities
2 that are interoperable with ours.

3 Senator King: General Waldhauser, in just a few
4 seconds I have left, a quick update on the status of ISIS in
5 Libya.

6 General Waldhauser: The status of ISIS in Libya is
7 they right now are regrouping. They are in small numbers,
8 small groups. We tried to develop the intelligence, but
9 after they left Sirte, we developed intelligence. We bombed
10 them on January 18th and they were in the southern part of
11 Libya. They have scattered again now. They are in small
12 groups trying to regroup.

13 Senator King: No longer control Sirte.

14 General Waldhauser: Correct. No longer control Sirte.
15 They were out of Sirte in the middle of December.

16 Senator King: Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman McCain [presiding]: By the way, General
19 Votel, just to complicate things further, Barzani, the
20 leader of the Iraqi Kurds, does not support the KRG, the
21 Syrian Kurds. Right?

22 General Votel: That is correct, Chairman.

23 Senator King: Senator Ernst?

24 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

25 And thank you, gentlemen, for being here today and your

1 time and attention to all of our questions.

2 General Votel, we had an interesting conversation the
3 other day, and as the chair of the Emerging Threats and
4 Capabilities Subcommittee, you mentioned something to me
5 that I thought was very interesting and something that I am
6 concerned about. And that is the increasing threat that is
7 posed by ISIS's ability to use drones. We had a great
8 conversation about that. And what they are using you say
9 was kind of a modified commercial, off-the-shelf drone. And
10 can you tell us about that emerging threat and maybe
11 describe for those on the committee exactly what they are
12 using and what those capabilities are?

13 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

14 What we are seeing I think are commercially acquired
15 drones. They are generally quadcopters that are available I
16 think very easily by anybody online or at other places,
17 hobbyist locations. And what they are able to do is,
18 obviously, operate them for purposes of their own
19 surveillance, and as we have seen in the news, in some cases
20 they have been able to rig grenades and other things to
21 them. So they have been able to achieve some effects with
22 that.

23 So it is concerning to our partners. It is certainly
24 concerning to us. And I think it is a reminder of just how
25 savvy and challenging of an enemy that we are dealing with

1 here, and I think it requires us to make sure that we are
2 equally savvy in our approach to this, making sure we have
3 the right tools to defend against these types of threats.

4 Senator Ernst: Absolutely. Thank you. It reminds me
5 of the early part of the Iraq war when the forces were using
6 remote controlled cars with explosives as a first form of
7 IEDs. And of course, through the years, they grew
8 technologically advanced. And so I see something so simple
9 as this that could become much more complicated over time.

10 Do the Iraqi forces have the capabilities to defeat
11 those drones?

12 General Votel: We are working on providing them the
13 capabilities. Right now, they enjoy protection against
14 these threats in a number of areas largely because we have
15 capabilities with our forces that are accompanying them and
16 are located in their locations.

17 Senator Ernst: Very good. Thank you.

18 And we also spoke about troop numbers yesterday and how
19 random some of those numbers tend to be when you have that
20 artificial boundary of a country line between Iraq and
21 Syria. And if you could, please share with the committee
22 what is our role in that. Should that role of troop numbers
23 and where those troops are located be left up to our on-the-
24 ground combatant commanders? If you could just share a
25 little bit of that conversation.

1 General Votel: Senator, I think the more we can
2 provide agility for our commanders on the ground to make
3 decisions about where they need forces and when they need
4 it, I think that is the most appropriate thing that can be
5 done. I think we are most successful when we enable our
6 very good and well qualified leaders and people on the
7 ground to make decisions in the situations in which they see
8 it. So I am for making sure that we try to provide them the
9 agility and the process around that. We certainly
10 understand why it is important to look at things like
11 numbers and stuff like that. It certainly drives our
12 resources and budgeting and other aspects of that. So that
13 certainly has to be taken into consideration. But I look at
14 this more from a flexibility and agility standpoint for our
15 commanders on the ground.

16 Senator Ernst: Thank you very much.

17 And, General Waldhauser, thank you as well.

18 As you know, Tunisia has sent more foreign fighters
19 than any other country to join the ranks of ISIS abroad. In
20 addition to supplying the foreign fighters, Tunisia
21 struggles with containing the terrorist activity on their
22 own soil, so much that they have had a physical wall built
23 along the border with Libya in an attempt to deter
24 terrorists from entering their country.

25 Is AFRICOM currently equipped to address the potential

1 influx of ISIS fighters returning home to Tunisia as we
2 strike them elsewhere, whether it is in the Middle East or
3 other places?

4 General Waldhauser: Senator, I would have to
5 characterize Tunisia as one of the bright spots on the
6 continent. They are in the process of transforming their
7 military to be more capable of dealing with terrorist
8 threats. They have purchased equipment from the United
9 States, which we are helping them with right now,
10 helicopters and the like. We have people on the ground who
11 are training, advising, and assisting their special
12 operations forces. And I believe the wall that you refer to
13 is technical equipment provided by DTRA, as well as Germany,
14 to help them contain the foreign fighter flow back and forth
15 between especially Libya and Tunisia.

16 But the bottom line is they are a bright spot. I
17 visited them twice, and they are headed in the right
18 direction. They are struggling with what to do with foreign
19 fighters who return, but again, I think that is not a
20 negative against them.

21 Senator Ernst: Very good. Well, I appreciate it.
22 Gentlemen, thank you very much for your input.

23 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you.

24 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator
25 Blumenthal.

1 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 I want to thank both of you for your service and, as
3 you did in your testimony, General Votel, the outstanding
4 men and women under both your commands who make us proud and
5 who are doing such great work under your command. I want to
6 join Senator King in thanking you for your testimony, which
7 is a very, very enlightening for me, elucidating outline of
8 the challenges and I would note for my colleagues
9 particularly in your description of the next generation of
10 cyber warriors or the use of cyber warfare by our
11 adversaries going from the rather rudimentary weapons of the
12 roadside bombs to the much more sophisticated use of cyber
13 and, as my colleague has pointed out, drones and other
14 challenges that face us there.

15 I want to focus on Iran. In response to Senator
16 Fischer's question about whether Iranian aggression has
17 increased since the nuclear treaty, you pointed out that
18 their conduct there has been destabilizing -- the word you
19 used was "destabilizing" -- and abnormal. And, of course,
20 we know Iran has tested an anti-ship ballistic missile
21 there, a new Russian made S-300 missile air defense system,
22 as well as harassing a Navy ship, the USS Invincible, in the
23 Strait of Hormuz by sending an Iranian frigate within, I
24 think, 150 yards, smaller boats within 600 yards. Last
25 month, the Iranians fired a medium-range ballistic missile

1 in violation of the U.S. Security Council resolution
2 resulting in United States sanctions enforcement against 25
3 individuals and entities. That action was in violation of
4 the U.N. resolution. But none of these other activities are
5 in violation of the nuclear agreement. Are they?

6 General Votel: My understanding, Senator, is the
7 nuclear agreement did not address any of those other aspects
8 of the Iranian threat.

9 Senator Blumenthal: But would you agree with me that
10 they do demand a response from the United States?

11 General Votel: I would absolutely agree, Senator.

12 Senator Blumenthal: And much more aggressive not only
13 sanctions but warnings and actions against their partners in
14 this effort, most prominently the Russians.

15 General Votel: I would agree. I think we should use a
16 combination of both diplomatic and other security-related
17 tools here, economic tools to address this concern.

18 Senator Blumenthal: Would you agree with me that the
19 Russians through the Iranians, in effect, are testing us in
20 that area because they are, in effect, aiding and abetting
21 the Iranians in this increasing destabilizing activity?

22 General Votel: Well, I would, Senator, and I would
23 certainly point to a place like Syria where these two
24 countries have essentially propped up a regime here and made
25 them more capable, more powerful, and kept them from

1 collapsing.

2 Senator Blumenthal: But when we complain about the
3 Iranians -- and all of us probably in this room would agree
4 with you that they are the major destabilizing influence in
5 that area -- we are talking as much about the Russians as we
6 are about the Iranians.

7 General Votel: Senator, in my comments here I was
8 specifically talking about the Iranian threat. That is the
9 one that we confront with. Certainly, as I mentioned also
10 in my opening statement here, we are concerned about
11 external actors and what their interests are in the region
12 as well, and those can contribute to more destabilizing
13 aspects as well. So I think they have to be addressed --
14 they both have to be addressed.

15 Senator Blumenthal: And how would you suggest that we
16 should address the Iranian destabilizing influence of this
17 regime?

18 General Votel: I think there are a variety of things.
19 I think the most important thing is to work with our
20 regional partners here to ensure that we have a common
21 approach to this. I think in some cases we should look at
22 ways that we can disrupt their activities through a variety
23 of means, not just military means. We have to expose them
24 for the things they are doing. They should be held
25 accountable for those things. And I think we have to

1 contest their revolutionary ideology, and it is not just the
2 United States, but it has to be those in the region. Iran
3 has a role in the region. They have been around for a long
4 period of time. Nobody is trying to make Iran go away, but
5 we are concerned about the destabilizing behavior that they
6 pursue on a regular basis.

7 Senator Blumenthal: My time has expired, but this
8 topic is one that I think is profoundly important. I will
9 have some more questions that I hope you and your staff
10 perhaps can answer and maybe in a different setting as well.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Senator Reed: Thank you.

13 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator
14 Perdue.

15 Senator Perdue: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 It is an honor to be here before you two gentlemen.
17 Thank you for your great careers and what you are doing for
18 our country today. And I hope you will take this message
19 back to your troops, that everything they do over there is
20 not missed on us.

21 I have a question about ISIS. General Votel, first of
22 all, I think one of the first things that the President has
23 done is ask for a 30-day review of the current strategy and
24 so forth. Where are we in that process? And what types of
25 things can we expect to see in terms of our strategy there?

1 And I would like you also to address what is our end game,
2 and can you talk about that today or should we wait until we
3 see the 30-day review?

4 General Votel: Senator, I think it is most appropriate
5 for the Secretary who I believe has presented his findings
6 to the new administration, and I think he is probably the
7 person who is most appropriate to talk about the decisions
8 and end states that will come out of that.

9 Senator Perdue: Fair enough.

10 With regard to ISIS in the Sinai, right now Egypt --
11 there are daily efforts there I think. Can you give us an
12 update on what is being done and what other countries are
13 involved in the fight with ISIS? And give us an order of
14 magnitude of the size of that action in the Sinai.

15 General Votel: The Egyptians several months ago have
16 deployed forces into the Sinai and specifically around the
17 area where the multinational force is. That has been
18 helpful. That has helped address a threat that was emerging
19 there, and they are engaged on a regular basis in fighting
20 ISIS in that particular area.

21 Egypt is addressing this. We are helping them in some
22 areas, particularly with some of our expertise in improvised
23 explosive devices. They have asked for that, and so we have
24 been key to help them with that in this particular area.

25 Senator Perdue: Do we have any troops on the ground in

1 the Sinai?

2 General Votel: We do not have any troops on the ground
3 that are fighting ISIS. We do have troops on the ground in
4 the Sinai that are associated with the multinational force
5 mission.

6 Senator Perdue: Thank you.

7 General Waldhauser, I want to go back to a question
8 that was earlier asked of you about China's presence in
9 Africa and particularly the base at Djibouti. Given what
10 Russia has done with Crimea and now at Latakia and at
11 Tartus, are you concerned that we will see other activity of
12 base building in Africa? Have you had any other indications
13 of either Russia or China developing permanent positions or
14 presence in that theater?

15 General Waldhauser: Senator, in 2013, the Chinese laid
16 out a strategic plan of One Belt, One Road where they will
17 have commerce that starts in China, goes down to Indonesia,
18 the Malacca Straits, across over to Djibouti, up into Europe
19 and back. And that is roughly 60 countries and 40 percent
20 of the global GDP that goes on in that area. It is all
21 about trade. This is their first endeavor in an overseas
22 base, and it will not be their last.

23 Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir.

24 I want to ask one more question real quick. I am about
25 out of time. But in Somalia and Sudan, there is a growing

1 threat that there is a real serious famine that is about to
2 happen if it has not already started there. What will that
3 do to the military situation in that area?

4 General Waldhauser: Well, first of all, in Somalia,
5 Senator, this right now is the most pressing issue to the
6 brand new president who was just elected this last month.
7 Right now, there are over 6.2 million individuals who have
8 been affected by it, and it has not been, to my knowledge,
9 actually declared a famine yet. But in terms of combating
10 al Shabaab and the like, movement of people in those large
11 masses has an impact on military operations.

12 But the bottom line in Somalia is right now -- and we
13 have counterterrorism operations. We are trying to build up
14 the national security forces. But that famine for the brand
15 new president and this fledgling national government is the
16 biggest thing on their plate. They have to do well in this
17 because if they cannot provide for this famine, then
18 Somalia, who has been without a national government for over
19 20 years, is going to question what the purpose and what
20 contributions they will make.

21 Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir.

22 One last real quick question. In Moron, Spain, I was
23 fortunate enough to meet and visit with some of your great
24 marines there. They have got a very strong mission.
25 Unfortunately, late last year, they had to move about half

1 of their air assets back to the U.S. for training. Can you
2 talk about readiness with regard to their mission in Africa?

3 General Waldhauser: Senator, the impact right now is
4 really capacity for us. So we have had to kind of center
5 their activity mostly on western Africa. And so some of the
6 missions we have in eastern Africa that they would have been
7 able to deploy to in the past, we would have to coordinate
8 with CENTCOM, and we have actually used marines from the
9 Oregon MEU in CENTCOM on the ground in Djibouti to take care
10 of crisis response activities, specifically South Sudan,
11 that we had at that time. So the readiness of the airplanes
12 has gotten better, but when you go from 12 to 6, the
13 capacity is cut in half. And the impact is we have got to
14 do a better job coordinating and sharing assets because the
15 Africa continent is extremely large.

16 Senator Perdue: Yes, sir. Thank you. Thank you both.

17 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Donnelly?

18 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Thank you both for your service. We are so grateful
20 for your hard work.

21 General Votel, as we move forward in Mosul and some of
22 the ISIS fighters head out, what efforts do we have in place
23 to try to capture them before they head to Raqqa or to other
24 areas, or where are they heading out to?

25 General Votel: Well, Senator, thank you for the

1 question.

2 Our intention, of course, is to prevent them from
3 getting out. And so the first part of all of our operations
4 is to isolate the areas where we are, where our attacks are
5 taking place by our partners, and where we are bringing our
6 enabling capabilities so that we do not let anybody get out
7 or get in. Being a desert, this is obviously a very porous
8 area, so there probably are some that get out. I think they
9 are generally moving into the middle Euphrates River valley,
10 which is a location that is equidistant between Mosul and
11 Raqqa.

12 Senator Donnelly: A while ago, we were just outside
13 Hadditha in Anbar Province meeting with the Iraqi leaders
14 there. And I just wanted to follow up. At that time, they
15 were close to starvation, for a lot of their citizens. It
16 was extremely difficult for all of their families. Where
17 are we now in terms of solidifying Hadditha, Fallujah,
18 Ramadi, those areas, and are they working with us and with
19 the central government?

20 General Votel: Senator, they are and we are making
21 progress with the humanitarian aid and the needs of the
22 people out in all of those areas. This I think is an area
23 that we have to pay particular attention to as we move
24 forward, particularly in the large urban areas. Our
25 military operations -- planning for those has to be done in

1 conjunction with the humanitarian aid planning and providing
2 for the needs of the people that will be left behind. So I
3 think this is a key aspect for us.

4 Senator Donnelly: As we head toward Raqqa, we have
5 seen that marines have come in. Are you getting everything
6 that you need in terms of equipment, manpower, all of those
7 things to take Raqqa back?

8 General Votel: We are, Senator, and I am certainly in
9 discussions with the Secretary about what we might need
10 going forward.

11 Senator Donnelly: Because I think our feeling is we do
12 not want to not get this done as soon as possible because we
13 did not provide you with the necessary equipment, necessary
14 personnel.

15 As we look at Raqqa and moving forward, obviously there
16 is a lot of complication with the Turks and with others.
17 How are all those pieces coming together for you?

18 General Votel: Well, as you know, Senator, this is an
19 extraordinarily complex area here. And so we are trying to
20 work with an indigenous force that has tensions with a NATO
21 ally. And so that is not an easy situation to move through.
22 But I think the way we are addressing it is in the right
23 way. We are being as transparent as we can. We are
24 providing information. We are looking for options on a day-
25 to-basis to ensure we can mitigate and minimize the tension

1 that exists in this area. So I will not try to tell you
2 that there is an easy way through all this complexity.
3 There is not. It is going to take a lot of hard work. It
4 is going to take military work. It is going to take
5 diplomatic work as we move forward. And I do believe that
6 is the approach that we are taking and I think that
7 ultimately it will work for us.

8 Senator Donnelly: I was going to follow up -- you were
9 kind enough to come by my office -- to follow up and say I
10 think your idea of complete transparency, here is what we
11 are doing, here is what we are working on, here is how we
12 plan to do it and to try to cooperate as much as we can with
13 other countries, but to tell them this is the plan and this
14 is where we are going seems to make a lot of sense to me.

15 As you look at what has gone on in the Arabian Gulf, we
16 just saw another incident with our ships recently. And as
17 we move forward, the distances seem to be less. They get
18 closer. They get closer. Do we have a plan ready to go
19 where at some point we say, you know, you have crossed the
20 red line, and if they continue, that we take appropriate
21 action?

22 General Votel: Senator, I am very confident in our
23 ship captains and in our crews for them to deal with the
24 situation. I do believe they have the right rules of
25 engagement. They have the right tools to prevent things,

1 and in the case that prevention does not work or deterrence
2 does not work, then they have the capabilities to defend
3 themselves and take action. So I am very confident in our
4 people.

5 Senator Donnelly: My guess is that there will become
6 an X crosses Y point, and I just want to make sure that our
7 captains and all of them are ready. And I have the same
8 confidence.

9 General Waldhauser, as you look at your area of
10 command, what do you see as our biggest challenge right now
11 that you are dealing with?

12 General Waldhauser: Senator, I think the biggest
13 challenge perhaps is the development piece for the
14 demographics of a very youthful population. 41 percent of
15 the continent is under the age of 15. We have got to find a
16 way to get at education, health care, hopelessness,
17 livelihood, and the like in order to give those individuals
18 a future because we could knock off all the ISIL and Boko
19 Haram this afternoon, but by the end of the week, so to
20 speak, those ranks would be filled. We know from those who
21 have kind of come out of the forest and given themselves up,
22 so to speak, that the reason they joined was they needed a
23 job, they needed a livelihood. It is not, for the most
24 part, in those regions about ideology. That is not the
25 driver. It is those factors I just talked about that drive

1 them into that line of work because there is nothing else
2 for them to do. So I think the youth bulge and the
3 demographics and providing development and a way ahead for
4 those youth are very, very important.

5 Senator Donnelly: So we cannot fight our way out of
6 it. What we have to do is to try to give them hope and
7 dignity and purpose I guess.

8 General Waldhauser: Exactly. I am not the first.
9 Many people, especially those in uniform, have said we
10 cannot kill our way to victory here. And this is about the
11 long-term investment in capacity building because at the end
12 of the day, that is what is going to try to help solve the
13 problem especially on the African continent.

14 Senator Donnelly: Thank you. Thank you both for your
15 service.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis?

18 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 General Votel, thank you for spending the time with me
20 in my office this week. And, General Waldhauser, welcome to
21 the committee. Thank you both for your service.

22 I will ask this of both of you. One area that I would
23 like to get your feedback on is foreign military financing,
24 foreign military sales and to what extent do we need to
25 focus on that with some of our partner nations that you

1 believe is helpful to you completing your missions in each
2 of your commands. General Votel, we will start with you.

3 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

4 I think foreign military funding, foreign military
5 sales are extraordinarily important.

6 Senator Tillis: Can you get more into specifics about
7 certain areas where we need to really look at on a more
8 immediate basis?

9 General Votel: Yes, I do. I think certainly looking
10 at ballistic missile capabilities for some of our Gulf
11 partners is an important area. Certainly some of the
12 aircraft programs out there -- there is a great desire to
13 have U.S. programs in many of these countries, and those are
14 certainly areas where we have to pay strong attention.

15 Senator Tillis: What sort of capabilities in Egypt?
16 Senator Perdue asked you questions about the Sinai and
17 increasing threat in that region because of the
18 consolidation of ISIS and other entities. What kinds of
19 things would be helpful in particular to Egypt in that area?

20 General Votel: Well, certainly the suite of counter-
21 improvised explosive device equipment we have out there,
22 running from jammers to protected vehicles and a variety of
23 things in between, I think would be extraordinarily helpful
24 to them.

25 Senator Tillis: Do you have any specifics? And,

1 General Waldhauser, I want to go to you with the same line
2 of questioning. But any specific things that you can
3 provide us, any specific areas where we need to take a look
4 at and maybe get back to where we are helping build that
5 partnership with Egypt?

6 General Votel: Senator, we do, and with your
7 permission, we will look for an opportunity to come and talk
8 with you specifically about that so we can get into some
9 detail about what we think would be most useful for Egypt
10 and in fact for other partners across the region.

11 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

12 And, General Waldhauser, same line of questions.

13 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator.

14 Interestingly, in Africa, the foreign military sales is
15 a very interesting choice. Many of the countries that we
16 deal with are not financially in good shape, and
17 consequently the ability to pay and the ability to fund for
18 long-term parts blocks behind that is a difficult task. So
19 I am not suggesting that we should alter the rules or change
20 the rules, but I think we need to be very flexible when we
21 deal with some of these poor countries and make sure we
22 understand their absorptive capability so that what we are
23 selling them they not only can use them in the first few
24 years, but there will be a parts block behind that, if you
25 will. There will be an institution, a logistical

1 infrastructure behind that, that will allow them to keep
2 these pieces of equipment, whether they be vehicles or maybe
3 C-130 airplanes, keep them in good shape for years ahead and
4 years to come.

5 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

6 On another subject -- and it relates to foreign
7 military aid. General Votel, when you were in my office, we
8 were talking about Afghanistan. When I was there the year
9 before last, at the time there was a concern that there was
10 going to be a drop-off in foreign investment and the tools
11 that Afghanistan needed for its economic development, which
12 is a key part of stabilizing the country -- what is the
13 current situation there?

14 General Votel: I think the situation looks good, both
15 from a NATO standpoint and from a much broader international
16 standpoint. The donation conferences and other things that
17 have been convened here over the last year --

18 Senator Tillis: Are we building a reliable stream, or
19 is there another cliff that we have to be concerned with?

20 General Votel: I think we are building a reliable
21 stream out to the 2020 time frame and in some cases beyond
22 that. So I think the international community has stepped up
23 to the plate in this particular area.

24 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

25 General Waldhauser, when General Votel and the people

1 that we have assisting countries in CENTCOM are successful
2 in Mosul and Raqqa, it seems to me the good news is maybe we
3 are getting some level of success there. But I have got to
4 believe that that is going to potentially cause some
5 additional challenges for you. Can you talk about the ones
6 that you are specifically concerned with?

7 General Waldhauser: Senator, anytime you put pressure
8 on the network and disrupt or dislodge ISIL from a certain
9 area, movement will occur. So that means the border
10 countries toward that took place are very concerned about
11 foreign fighters moving back and forth. And so that is one
12 of the big concerns that we have. And one of the issues
13 that we have to deal with when we conduct operations, it is
14 important that the neighbors of those countries know what we
15 are trying to do and understand why we are trying to do that
16 so we can help them with the foreign fighter flow if
17 movement should occur.

18 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine?

20 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

21 And thanks to the witnesses.

22 The Marine Corps doctrinal publication entitled
23 "Strategy" has this phrase in it. What matters ultimately
24 in war is strategic success, attainment of our political
25 aims, and the protection of our national interests. History

1 shows that national leaders, both political and military,
2 have failed to understand this relationship, sow the seeds
3 for ultimate failure, even when their armed forces achieve
4 initial battlefield success. Battlefield brilliance seldom
5 rescues a bad strategy.

6 I have been heartened by the American military's
7 performance on the battlefield. Very heartened with our
8 partners against ISIL in Iraq and now Syria. And although
9 we would not want to predict anything about timing, I think
10 that we are going to continue to have battlefield success.

11 What is our political strategy, say, following the fall
12 of Raqqa that would lead us to have a belief that there is
13 going to be a better next chapter to follow in Syria
14 especially?

15 General Votel: Senator, I am not sure I can comment on
16 what the political strategy is. I do believe this is a key
17 aspect of what Secretary Mattis and the administration are
18 discussing right now with respect to what this looks like
19 long-term.

20 Senator Kaine: And, General Votel, I think that is a
21 good answer. You are not commenting because the political
22 strategy is really for the political leadership not the
23 military leadership. The administration and Congress. You
24 understand that Congress has a role in this as well, not
25 just the administration.

1 General Votel: I do, Senator.

2 Senator Kaine: We are pursuing a war now based on an
3 authorization that was passed in September of 2001. It is
4 now nearly 16 years old. Do you think it would be helpful
5 in terms of articulating a political strategy that would put
6 the military mission into a context and to find an end
7 result and a potential desired future state if Congress were
8 to grapple with the question of the authorities and this
9 desired end political strategy?

10 General Votel: Senator, I think the current AUMF has
11 provided what we needed, but I do believe an updated
12 authorization certainly would send a stronger commitment to
13 uniformed military of our commitment and desire to support
14 them.

15 Senator Kaine: In the CENTCOM space, if the military
16 mission succeeds and Raqqa were to fall, do you still
17 believe that the American mission against ISIL and al Qaeda
18 will take a long time?

19 General Votel: I do. This is a very savvy enemy, and
20 they are adapting. Like we are adapting on the battlefield,
21 they are adapting on the battlefield.

22 Senator Kaine: Just like the ISIL attack --

23 General Votel: Right.

24 Senator Kaine: -- in Afghanistan dressed as doctors
25 attacking the hospital. This is a threat that is not going

1 to go away just because Raqqa were to fall. Correct?

2 General Votel: That is right. They will begin to
3 adopt other forms, and we will need to be persistent against
4 that and we will need to work with our partners to address
5 that in both Iraq and Syria.

6 Senator Kaine: Well, my colleagues know because I have
7 said it a lot and others view it the same way, that this
8 question of authorities -- I do think it is past time for
9 Congress to address it. Whether you think the 9-14-01 AUMF
10 legally covers the battle against ISIL or not, I think there
11 are prudent reasons at a minimum and I think legal reasons
12 as well that we should tackle it.

13 On the question of legal authorities, traditionally you
14 need two kinds of legal authorities to be engaged in a
15 military mission. You need a domestic legal authority and
16 you need an international legal justification as well. The
17 most common international legal justification for military
18 action in somebody else's territory is that they invited
19 you. We are conducting military actions in Iraq with the
20 request and support of the Iraqi Government. We are
21 conducting military operations in Afghanistan with the
22 support and request of the Afghan Government. We just
23 conducted a DOD ground operation for the first time in Yemen
24 with the request and support of the Yemeni Government.

25 Are we deploying marines in Syria at the request or

1 with the permission of the Syrian Government?

2 General Votel: We are not, Senator.

3 Senator Kaine: What is the international legal
4 justification for the U.S. taking military action in another
5 country without the request of that country? We have
6 criticized nations such as Russia, for example, for
7 undertaking military actions in the Ukraine or Crimea
8 without the request of the government.

9 General Votel: Thank you, Senator. I think we
10 certainly make a judgment about the ability of the
11 government to make a decision. In that case I think what we
12 are doing in Syria, we are looking at that as an extension
13 of the authority to operate from Iraq.

14 Senator Kaine: Iraq has had us in and we are
15 cooperating with Iraq. We are there in Iraq at their
16 request. But I guess the bottom line is there is no such
17 request from Syria. We do not judge that government capable
18 of making such a request, and we do not really recognize the
19 legitimacy of Bashar al Assad's government. But you are
20 saying that the international legal justification for
21 American military action in a country that has not asked us
22 is the fact that we are engaged in a military action in a
23 country next door that has asked us?

24 General Votel: I believe we are being extended that
25 authority by our leadership to conduct those operations

1 principally because we are operating against an enemy that
2 operates on both sides of that border.

3 Senator Kaine: If I might, one last question with
4 respect to Yemen. We have had hearings in this committee
5 about the ground operation in Yemen, which to my knowledge
6 was the first ground operation by DOD forces in Yemen.
7 There were a number of questions raised by that. I do not
8 want to go into the classified briefing we had, but
9 questions about was the mission compromised in some way in
10 the advance. What intel was gained? There was some after-
11 the-fact justification of the mission using video that
12 actually had been taken in another mission. Is the DOD
13 conducting an ongoing investigation of that mission to
14 determine all lessons learned, what worked, what did not,
15 and what we can do better?

16 General Votel: Senator, thank you, and let me answer
17 this a little more comprehensively.

18 First and foremost, I am responsible for this mission.
19 I am the CENTCOM Commander and I am responsible for what is
20 done in my region and what is not done in my region. So I
21 accept the responsibility for this. We lost a lot on this
22 operation. We lost a valued operator. We had people
23 wounded. We caused civilian casualties. We lost an
24 expensive aircraft.

25 We did gain some valuable information that will be

1 helpful for us. Our intention here was to improve our
2 knowledge against this threat, a threat that poses a direct
3 threat to us here in the homeland. And that was what we
4 were focused on.

5 There have been a number of investigations that have
6 been initiated. Most of these are regulatory or statutory
7 in terms of things that we normally do.

8 When we lose an aircraft, there is both a safety
9 investigation to ensure that we disseminate lessons learned
10 for the broader fleet, and there is also a collateral
11 investigation that tries to determine the specific reason
12 why that happened and establishes accountability over that.

13 We have done an investigation into the civilian
14 casualties. That has been completed. The helicopter
15 investigations are ongoing. The civilian casualty aspect
16 has been completed, and we have made a determination based
17 on our best information available that we did cause
18 casualties, somewhere between 4 and 12 casualties that we
19 accept -- I accept responsibility for.

20 We have done a line of duty investigation, again a
21 statutory investigation, on the death of Senior Chief Owens
22 that determined that he was in the line of investigation.

23 The key mechanism that I have, Senator, is the after-
24 action review, and this is something we do with every
25 operation we do. And the intention here is to review the

1 operation in great detail to understand exactly what
2 happened. And it is done with the chain of command in
3 place. And we have done that and I have presided over that.
4 Based on my experience, nearly 37 years of service, I have
5 certainly appointed a lot of investigations and I have been
6 through a lot of these after-action reviews. When I go
7 through these things, there are some specific things that I
8 am looking for. I am looking for information gaps where we
9 cannot explain what happened in a particular situation or we
10 have conflicting information between members of the
11 organization. I am looking for indicators of incompetence
12 or poor decision-making or bad judgment throughout all of
13 this.

14 So what I can tell you is that we did an exhaustive
15 after-action review on this. I presided over that. It went
16 down to a level that included people who were on the
17 specific objective. As a result of that, I was satisfied
18 that none of those indicators that I identified to you were
19 present. I think we had a good understanding of exactly
20 what happened on this objective, and we have been able to
21 pull lessons learned out of that that we will apply in
22 future operations. And as a result, I made the
23 determination that there was no need for an additional
24 investigation into this particular operation.

25 Senator Kaine: So the only investigation that

1 continues is the investigation -- or the loss of the
2 helicopters is still not complete.

3 General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

4 Senator Kaine: Thank you.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Chairman McCain: Just to follow up, General, there has
7 been a lot of conversation about this particular mission and
8 the point that some of us are trying to make that the
9 heroism and sacrifice of those who served has nothing to do
10 with the mission itself. In other words, we honor their
11 sacrifice no matter what happened in the mission.

12 And when you have women and children killed, as you
13 pointed out, the loss of a \$70 million aircraft, you did not
14 capture anyone as was part of the mission, that mission is
15 not a success. But that happens in war. There is a thing
16 called the fog of war. They did the best they could under
17 very difficult circumstances. And I hope in the process of
18 your investigation, when heavy fire was encountered why the
19 decision was made to continue the mission -- I still do not
20 think this committee has an answer to that question. But it
21 does not question the loyalty and sacrifice and bravery when
22 we question the mission.

23 And unless we tell the American people the truth, the
24 absolute truth, then we are going to revisit another war a
25 long time ago where we did tell the American people the

1 truth and we paid a very heavy price for it. There are
2 55,000 names engraved in black granite not far from here,
3 and the American people were not told the truth about
4 whether we were succeeding or failing in that war. And then
5 because of that, it all collapsed. So I hope that we will
6 not forget that lesson, and in no way does it detract from
7 the heroism and professionalism and sacrifice of the brave
8 men and women who serve under your command.

9 Senator McCaskill?

10 Senator McCaskill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just
11 want to underline the comments you just made, and I do think
12 it is important that we get answers to the questions about
13 what happened at that moment in very difficult
14 circumstances, admittedly, that heavy fire occurred and the
15 decision was made to continue. And I am also anxious to
16 have the questions answered about the real value of the
17 intelligence that was gathered. I think there have been
18 some mixed signals about the value of the intelligence that
19 was gathered.

20 I want to talk to you today. I have spent an awful lot
21 of time working on contracting in contingencies. And I
22 remember my very first trip to Iraq included a stop in
23 Kuwait to look at contracting. And I had an encounter with
24 a general there that I will never forget. I will always
25 admire him for being so honest with me because I was

1 pointing out all of these massive problems with contracting,
2 especially Log Cap 1, Log Cap 2 and all of those associated
3 contracts. And he looked at me and he said, Senator, I
4 wanted three kinds of ice cream in the mess yesterday, and I
5 do not care how much it costs.

6 Now, while I admired him for his honesty, it kind of
7 underscored for me that contracting oversight was not a core
8 capability many times within commands within contingencies.
9 If it were, we would not have this long trail of mistakes
10 made going all the way back to Kosovo on contracting.

11 So I was upset yesterday when I saw the DOD IG report
12 coming out of Kuwait where they said that ineffective
13 monitoring of contractor performance for the Kuwait base
14 operations -- a particular concern that the contracting
15 officer representatives, which we have worked very hard -- I
16 mean, at the point in time I was over there, it was the
17 worst guy in the unit got handed the clipboard, had no idea
18 what he was supposed to do in terms of contracting oversight
19 and did not do much. We have done a lot of work on this,
20 training, and making sure people understand and with the
21 standing up the Contracting Command.

22 So the fact that there is no consistent surveillance of
23 these contracts in Kuwait, no assurance that the contract
24 requirements have been met, and the entire \$13 million
25 performance bonus was paid even though it is not clear that

1 it was earned, and maybe most worrisome, this environmental
2 and health hazard that has been allowed to languish. It is
3 fairly clear from reading this report that a stagnant
4 wastewater lagoon went unresolved, that it was probably
5 never constructed correctly, and it is really impacting the
6 health and safety of some of our men and women that are
7 stationed there.

8 So I need you to reassure me that we have not taken our
9 eye off the importance of contracting oversight. And this
10 is not just you. This is also the ACC and the 408th
11 Contracting Support Brigade.

12 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

13 I absolutely agree with you, and I recognize my
14 responsibility as the CENTCOM Commander and as a senior
15 leader in the Department of Defense to ensure that the
16 expenditure of our national treasure and our resources is
17 done in an effective and efficient manner. And I look
18 forward to an opportunity to talk with you specifically
19 about this situation in Kuwait.

20 Senator McCaskill: I would like that very much, and we
21 will look forward to hearing from you directly. The thing
22 that was the most frustrating about the contracting through
23 much of the Iraq conflict before we did the contracting
24 reforms that the Wartime Contracting Commission set out --
25 and we codified all of those, most of them in this committee

1 -- the amount of money that was wasted was astounding. And
2 we just cannot afford it. We just cannot afford it.

3 Let me briefly, in the time I have remaining -- I know
4 that they have covered Russia as it relates to what has been
5 going on in Afghanistan. I am not sure that it has been
6 touched on, what is going on in Nigeria, and would love you
7 to speak to that, General Waldhauser, about the fact that we
8 refused to sell them the Cobra attack helicopters because of
9 the history of human rights problems. And undeterred by
10 that history, of course, Russia stepped up and now sold them
11 attack helicopters. They are now training the Nigerian
12 military, including the special forces, instead of the
13 United States.

14 Could you give us any assessment of the impact of that,
15 that Russia has stepped in where our better judgment said it
16 was not a good idea and is now taking on that primary role
17 with the Nigerian special forces?

18 General Waldhauser: Senator, not only Nigeria but
19 other countries on the continent. If there are easier ways
20 to get to military sales, if countries come in, China,
21 Russia, North Korea, for example -- if they come in and do
22 not have a lot of strings attached, then sometimes it is
23 easier for those countries to purchase weapon systems from
24 others than the U.S.

25 So we try to accommodate certain financial situations.

1 I know the DSCA people that work for OSD try hard to
2 accommodate that. And when you look closely at the
3 absorption capabilities of these countries -- but again in
4 many occasions, human rights is not an issue when it comes
5 to weapon sales from countries other than the United States.

6 Senator McCaskill: Well, I think it is something we
7 need to worry about because it is, obviously, a powerful way
8 to spread the influence and power of Russia. And I think we
9 all, no matter what our party is, have figured out in the
10 last 6 months that this is a real threat to our country and
11 to our national security.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham?

14 Senator Graham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 I think you have been asked about soft power and the
16 need for it. Both of you said it is an important tool in
17 the toolbox to win the war. Is that correct?

18 General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

19 General Waldhauser: Yes, Senator. Yes.

20 Senator Graham: And you are warfighters
21 extraordinaire. So I appreciate you putting a plug in for
22 soft power.

23 Let me dig in with it. Can you win the war without it?

24 General Waldhauser: I do not believe you can, Senator.
25 Everything comes from security. Once you have a secure

1 environment, development needs to take place, and that is
2 where soft power kicks in.

3 General Votel: I agree with, General Waldhauser.

4 Senator Graham: So really, this war is about a
5 glorious death being offered by the terrorists and a hopeful
6 life by the rest of the world. Is that a pretty good
7 description of what we are trying to do is offer a hopeful
8 life to compete with a glorious death?

9 General Votel: I think in very general terms, I think
10 it is about that. It is about offering alternatives to
11 people to the situations that they find themselves in.

12 Senator Graham: And the good news is that most people
13 over there do not want what ISIL is selling. There is not a
14 big demand for that product. Is that a fair statement?

15 General Waldhauser: Certainly on the African continent
16 that is true, very true.

17 General Votel: I would agree with that, Senator.

18 Senator Graham: Very few fathers and mothers want to
19 turn their daughters over to ISIL if they do not have to.
20 Is that a fair statement?

21 General Votel: It is, Senator.

22 General Waldhauser: Yes, Senator, it is fair.

23 Senator Graham: Is it a fair statement we are not
24 going to win this war without partners in the faith? The
25 only way you can win this war is to have fellow Muslims

1 fighting with us against ISIL.

2 General Votel: It is my view that we have to have
3 local forces engaged in this.

4 General Waldhauser: That is what by, with, and through
5 is all about, Senator.

6 Senator Graham: And is it fair to say that most people
7 in the faith reject this hateful ideology?

8 General Votel: That is true, Senator.

9 General Waldhauser: I agree.

10 Senator Graham: So I want the committee to understand
11 that any budget we pass that guts the State Department's
12 budget, you will never win this war. As a matter of fact,
13 ISIL will be celebrating.

14 What is Russia trying to do in Libya, General
15 Waldhauser?

16 General Waldhauser: Senator, Russia is trying to exert
17 influence on the ultimate decision of who becomes and what
18 entity becomes in charge of the government inside Libya.
19 They are working to influence that decision.

20 Senator Graham: They are trying to do in Libya what
21 they have been doing in Syria?

22 General Waldhauser: Yes. That is a good way to
23 characterize it.

24 Senator Graham: It is not in our national interest to
25 let that happen. Is it?

1 General Waldhauser: It is not.

2 Senator Graham: The political situation in Libya is
3 pretty fractured?

4 General Waldhauser: It is very fractured, Senator.

5 Senator Graham: So the commander of their military is
6 at odds with the political leader supported by the U.N. Is
7 that fair?

8 General Waldhauser: That is fair, yes.

9 Senator Graham: And if we do not fix that, it is going
10 to be tough moving forward?

11 General Waldhauser: We have got to get the entities,
12 specifically Haftar and the government of national accord,
13 together to make an accommodation in order to get any
14 government moving forward.

15 Senator Graham: Would you say that Secretary Tillerson
16 is very important in this regard?

17 General Waldhauser: Very important, Senator.

18 Senator Graham: So we need to put that on his radar
19 screen.

20 General Waldhauser: Yes, we do.

21 Senator Graham: Syria. The Kurds that we are
22 training, General Votel, are they mostly in line with the
23 YPG? Are they YPG Kurds?

24 General Votel: They are, Senator.

25 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that in the eyes of

1 the Turks, the YPG Kurds are not much better, if any better,
2 than the PKK?

3 General Votel: Senator, that is the view of the Turks.

4 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that the YPG Kurds
5 have sort of a communist/Marxist view of governing? That is
6 what their manifesto says anyway.

7 General Votel: Senator, I think it is fair to say that
8 there is some affinity back towards that.

9 Senator Graham: So is it fair to say that we have got
10 to be careful about over-utilizing the YPG Kurds? Not only
11 will it create problems for Turkey, other Kurds in the
12 region do not buy into their agenda also.

13 General Votel: I think it is important. And that is
14 why as we look to a place like Raqqa, we are attempting to
15 do that with majority Arab forces.

16 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that how we take
17 Raqqa can determine the outcome of Geneva in terms of a
18 political settlement?

19 General Votel: It is certainly a key operation. We
20 will support that.

21 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that the balance of
22 power on the ground in terms of Assad's regime that he is in
23 a good spot?

24 General Votel: He is in a better position than he was
25 a year ago.

1 Senator Graham: That the opposition has basically
2 melted away because Russia, Iran, and Assad have gone after
3 them full throated.

4 General Votel: The support that has been provided by
5 Russia and Iran has certainly enabled the regime.

6 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that most Syrians
7 want two things: to get rid of ISIL but also to get rid of
8 Assad because he slaughtered their families?

9 General Votel: The Syrians that I have talked to I
10 think would agree with that.

11 Senator Graham: Is it fair to say it is in our
12 national security interests for Damascus not to be handed
13 over to Assad, a proxy for Iran, in any final settlement,
14 that you cannot have Iran dominating Damascus?

15 General Votel: Senator, I think that is certainly a
16 decision for our political leadership to make, but I think
17 there is a strong consensus.

18 Senator Graham: Final thought. How we take Raqqa will
19 determine if we can get a political settlement in Geneva if
20 we do not change the balance of military power on the
21 ground, go outside of this Kurdish construct, reassure the
22 Arabs that we are a better partner than we have been in the
23 past, we are going to give Damascus to the Iranians, if we
24 help those Syrian Arabs who want to fight and take their
25 country back from Assad and his brutal dictatorship, I think

1 we can change the balance of power on the ground and get a
2 better deal in Geneva. So if the Trump administration is
3 listening, how you take Raqqa will determine how successful
4 we are in neutralizing Iranian influence and Russian
5 influence.

6 Mr. Chairman, you have been terrific on this issue. I
7 want to thank you for your leadership.

8 Chairman McCain: I thank you.

9 I thank you, Generals, for your appearance here this
10 morning. It has been very helpful to the committee and to
11 the United States Senate. I know it is not your favorite
12 pastime, but I think it is very important that we hear
13 directly from you. Thank you for your leadership, and we do
14 want you to be assured that we will do everything we can to
15 support you as we go through what is a very complicated and
16 difficult challenge.

17 Senator Reed?

18 Senator Reed: I simply want to thank you, gentlemen,
19 for your service and for your testimony today. And please
20 relay our thanks to the men and women who serve so well with
21 you. Thank you very much.

22 Chairman McCain: This hearing is adjourned.

23 [Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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