

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Thursday, December 14, 2017

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING
1155 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N.W.
SUITE 200
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
(202) 289-2260
www.aldersonreporting.com

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Thursday, December 14, 2017

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James Inhofe presiding.

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

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: The hearing will come to order.

4 The committee meets today to receive testimony on the
5 U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East.

6 First of all and foremost, I want to submit for the
7 record the statement by Chairman McCain, who is not here
8 today.

9 [The prepared statement of Senator McCain follows:]

10 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Senator Inhofe: We are joined this morning by a group
2 that we all know well. You have all been before this
3 committee. As I mentioned to you a minute ago, I think most
4 of the members of this committee have seen you in action in
5 the field.

6 Ambassador Crocker, you are a Diplomat-in-Residence
7 with the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International
8 Affairs at Princeton University. You have been all over the
9 map in the last couple of decades.

10 Ambassador Eric Edelman, Counselor, Center for
11 Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. By my account, this is
12 your ninth appearance before this committee. Does that
13 sound right to you? Yes.

14 Ambassador Jeffrey, the Philip Solondz Distinguished
15 Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. I
16 remember being with you in Turkey and other places.

17 And, of course, Ambassador Stuart Jones, Vice President
18 of The Cohen Group. Your presence was appreciated by, I
19 think, every member here in both Jordan and Iraq.

20 So, it is great to have all of you here.

21 Much of our nation's attention over the last two
22 decades has gone toward the Middle East in terms of military
23 operations, and that's appropriately so. We faced very real
24 and dangerous threats originating from the Middle East, and
25 we've seen that the problems there are extremely complex.

1 For example, we formed and led an international coalition to
2 defeat ISIS, and with our local partners on the ground in
3 Iraq and Syria we have largely done that. Just last
4 Saturday, Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS
5 in Iraq.

6 So it's long past time for us to turn our attention to
7 the broader strategy and the national objectives in that
8 region, as our competitors are already doing, Iran and
9 Russia.

10 I'm very encouraged that under the leadership of
11 President Trump, America is beginning to reclaim some of its
12 worldwide leadership that has waned for the past eight
13 years. In October, the Administration released an outline
14 detailing a strategy to counter Iranian malign influence.
15 The President also declined to certify the sanctions relief
16 as a part of the Iran nuclear deal. That was something a
17 lot of people didn't realize, that the President has to, on
18 a periodic basis, keep that alive. So we have started a
19 process now, and I think it was the right decision.

20 The President also was encouraged by the recent
21 activity that has taken place -- by the way, some of us were
22 with Netanyahu when that decision was made, and I've never
23 seen a happier guy. At the same time, of course, he was
24 very encouraged by the recent decision to move the U.S.
25 Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in concert with current

1 law and broad bipartisan support. This is something that we
2 decided to do 20 years ago, and finally we're doing it. So
3 that's good news.

4 We have great witnesses. I look forward to the
5 testimony.

6 Senator Reed?

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

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

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

4 I want to commend Senator McCain for scheduling this
5 hearing and thank Chairman Inhofe for leading it today.
6 It's very important.

7 Also, let me thank the witnesses. I've had the
8 privilege and pleasure of working with you. You have made
9 invaluable contributions to the national security of the
10 United States in so many different capacities. When
11 Chairman Inhofe mentioned that Ambassador Edelman had been
12 nine times here, I think you're all recidivists, in a very
13 positive way. So, thank you very much. We are indeed
14 fortunate to have you here today. I'm very confident you're
15 going to provide valuable insights for a very challenging
16 area of the world, the Middle East.

17 Working with our partners on the ground, we have made
18 great progress in our efforts to dismantle the so-called
19 ISIS caliphate. According to the U.S. Central Command, in
20 the last three years the coalition has liberated more than
21 4.5 million people and 52,000 square kilometers of territory
22 from ISIS control. This is a significant achievement for
23 the coalition and our Iraqi and Syrian partners.

24 It is also important to recognize that ISIS, al Qaeda,
25 and other violent extremists are not yet defeated and remain

1 intent on attacking the United States and our interests,
2 while taking advantage of opportunities afforded by
3 destabilization in the Middle East. Despite our operational
4 success since ISIS, we have not achieved similar success in
5 addressing the political and social challenges in the Middle
6 East that gave rise to ISIS in the first place. Our efforts
7 to deal with ISIS, al Qaeda and others, to deal them a
8 lasting defeat must not rest with the Department of Defense
9 alone. Sustainable solutions will require significant
10 contributions from the State Department, USAID, and others.

11 Unfortunately, our ability to achieve such a whole-of-
12 government approach is hampered by massive proposed cuts to
13 the State Department's budget and the fact that our current
14 diplomats are leaving government service at an alarming
15 rate.

16 Each of you has deep experience in utilizing the non-
17 military tools of our national power, and I hope you will
18 provide the committee with your views on how such tools can
19 be more effectively leveraged.

20 Violent extremism is not the only national security
21 challenge facing the United States in the Middle East: the
22 success of the Iranian nuclear deal in putting a halt to the
23 greatest threat facing the United States and our allies in
24 the region, namely a nuclear-armed Iran; the Quds forces and
25 its proxies continue their campaign of malign and

1 destabilizing activities across the region, most notably in
2 Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Coupled with an increasingly
3 assertive foreign policy exhibited by Saudi Arabia, it is
4 hard to imagine the geo-political landscape in the Middle
5 East being more complicated than it is today.

6 If we are to successfully navigate these challenges, we
7 need to be clear in communicating our values and objectives.
8 From the re-tweeting of anti-Muslim rhetoric to last week's
9 announcement concerning the U.S. Embassy in Israel, the
10 President has repeatedly made it more difficult for our
11 national security and diplomatic professionals to do their
12 jobs. The risk of failed U.S. policy in the Middle East is
13 significant, and we can't afford any unforced errors.

14 I again want to thank our witnesses not only for being
15 here today but for their significant contribution to our
16 country through their decades of work in the Foreign
17 Service. I look forward to your testimony. Thank you very
18 much.

19 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

20 We'll start with you, Ambassador Crocker.

21 All of you know that we try to keep our comments down
22 to about 5 minutes and give our well-attended meeting here
23 time to ask questions.

24 Ambassador Crocker?

25

1 STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, DIPLOMAT-IN-
2 RESIDENCE, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL
3 AFFAIRS, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

4 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking
5 Member Reed, members of the committee. It's a privilege to
6 be here today.

7 The timing, I think, is fortuitous. We are at, in my
8 view, a strategic inflection point with the military defeat
9 of Islamic State to try to answer the "now what?" question.
10 As you both said, the military defeat is necessary but, I
11 would suggest, not sufficient. I think it is helpful to
12 remember what happened when I was in Iraq, 2009 through the
13 surge. We just pounded Islamic State's predecessor, al
14 Qaeda in Iraq, but we could never quite eliminate them.
15 They would find little crevices in Mosul and up the
16 Euphrates River Valley.

17 Why did they find them? It's important to remember,
18 then as now, that al Qaeda in Iraq and Islamic State are
19 not, in and of themselves, the problem. They are the
20 symptom of the problem. The problem has been -- and this
21 goes throughout the region -- the failure to establish good
22 governance, the failure to establish rule of law and
23 institutions where all citizens in Iraq, and now in Syria,
24 feel safe. That has not happened.

25 And to take, again, the 30,000-foot view, if one looks

1 at the modern Middle East, which is roughly 100 years old --
2 it grew out of World War I and the Versailles Treaty of 1919
3 -- if there is one single consistent point of failure, it is
4 governance. We have seen "isms" come and "isms" go --
5 imperialism and colonialism under the British and the
6 French; monarchism in some of the central countries like
7 Egypt and Iraq; Arab nationalism personified by Nassar;
8 undiluted military authoritarianism, again in Iraq; Arab
9 socialism in Iraq and Syria; communism in South Yemen. Now
10 we deal with Islamism.

11 The good news is that it, too, is failing. The bad
12 news is that the underlying issues of governance which led
13 to the failure of every other "ism" are still untreated, and
14 if we are unable to help our friends in the area get to a
15 better place on these issues, you're going to see a
16 successor to Islamic State. I don't know who. I do know
17 that it will not be good news for us.

18 There is a second inflection point that I'd hope we
19 would have a chance to address today. The United States
20 designed and led the post-World War II international order.
21 That leadership changed, or that attitude to leadership
22 changed over the last eight years. President Obama spoke of
23 not being able to do everything. That's certainly true.
24 Too often I think that became an excuse for not doing much
25 of anything.

1 Sadly, I think we're seeing some continuity between the
2 administrations, from President Obama to President Trump, on
3 this issue. Are we going to lead? If not, who will? If
4 not, what might the consequences be?

5 So I would urge, before we back out of that
6 international order from post-World War II that we
7 established and led, we need to think about the
8 consequences.

9 I would say, finally, it's hard to do any of this if
10 you don't have the people to do it. The budget cuts
11 suggested by the Administration will do severe damage to
12 both our diplomacy and our development. These things count.
13 I would applaud the Congress, which has reacted to these
14 proposed cuts. I think it's very important that they not go
15 forward or you're going to see a weakened Foreign Service
16 far into the future with some very significant consequences.

17 Lastly, truth in advertising here. I sit on the board
18 of Mercy Corps International. We are heavily engaged on a
19 number of issues. The one I'd like to highlight would be
20 Syrian refugees. Mercy Corps doesn't do resettlement. We
21 focus on keeping refugees as close to their home country as
22 we can. So we're extremely active in Jordan, and in Lebanon
23 in particular.

24 Why? That could be the long-term ultimate danger of
25 this Syrian problem. We saw what happened with Palestinian

1 refugees, where a spirit of hopelessness in refugee camps
2 bred an entire generation of terrorism. We are working out
3 there to try to get the resources and the programs that will
4 get young Syrian refugees a sense that they do have a
5 future. If that funding is cut, as has been proposed,
6 humanitarian aid by 40 percent, ESF by almost 45 percent, we
7 may be fueling the next wave years down the line of terror.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Crocker follows:]

10 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Ambassador Crocker.
2 Ambassador Edelman?
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1 STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR ERIC S. EDELMAN, COUNSELOR,
2 CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY ASSESSMENTS

3 Ambassador Edelman: Thank you, Chairman Inhofe and
4 Senator Reed, and members of the committee. It's a
5 privilege to be here. While I don't normally want to speak
6 for my Foreign Service colleagues on this panel, I think I
7 do speak for all of us saying that I think all of us are
8 thinking about Senator McCain today and wishing him very
9 well in his recovery.

10 I agree with my colleague, Ryan Crocker, that we are at
11 an important inflection point in the Middle East, and I
12 think for that reason it is particularly important that the
13 committee has scheduled this hearing, and I cannot tell you
14 how proud I am to sit here in this company because I have
15 enormous respect for my colleagues on this panel.

16 What I thought I would do is just talk about three
17 things, really: why I think the region remains
18 strategically important to the United States; the two large
19 strategic challenges I think the United States faces in the
20 region; and maybe some thoughts about what we might do about
21 those.

22 First, I think there is a disposition in Washington
23 that people talk about the Middle East today after a decade-
24 and-a-half of difficult and seemingly inconclusive counter-
25 insurgency operations in the region and growing U.S. energy,

1 if not independence, at least self-sufficiency, to want to
2 look at the region as something we ought to disengage from
3 and try and limit our liability in the region.

4 But I would argue that, picking up a theme that
5 Ambassador Crocker touched on, that as tempting as
6 disengagement might be, I think it's important to bear in
7 mind that it would reverse a strong bipartisan consensus
8 over the past 60 years that the maintenance of a stable
9 regional balance of power in the Middle East and the
10 prevention of any external or regional power from dominating
11 this area of the world is vital to the nation's security.

12 I think that's the case because, first of all, the
13 energy resources of the region remain important to our
14 allies in Europe and Asia, but also because global energy
15 prices can affect our own economy. So even with our own
16 self-sufficiency, were large segments of Middle Eastern oil
17 to go offline because of a crisis in the region, the
18 economic impact on the United States would be considerable.

19 But moreover, I think the problem is that, what Ken
20 Pollack at AEI says, what happens in the Middle East does
21 not stay in the Middle East. This region is a cauldron of
22 poor governance and disaffection and, as a result, a petri
23 dish for extremism that frequently manifests itself in
24 terrorist attacks against our allies in the region, our
25 allies in Europe, and ultimately the homeland here in the

1 United States itself.

2 Since 2009, I think the United States has largely
3 pursued a policy of retrenchment and limited liability which
4 I think has had the unfortunate consequence of raising
5 concerns about the U.S. role as a security guarantor in the
6 region. I think that's been exacerbated by some of the
7 consequences of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action which
8 has freed up resources for Tehran to use for its own
9 purposes, both to procure weaponry for itself, but also to
10 support its proxies in the region, pursuing an agenda of
11 malign activity.

12 I agree with my colleague that there's been more
13 continuity than at least I would like in the policies of the
14 Trump Administration, which are couched in very different
15 rhetoric but have broadly continued the previous
16 administration's policies, perhaps reflecting the views that
17 President Trump expressed during the campaign that the whole
18 region, as he put it, was one big fat quagmire. But I do
19 think it's something that requires some renewed attention
20 and a new strategy.

21 I mentioned the twin challenges, and those I think were
22 touched on by my colleagues, and it won't come as any
23 surprise that the two challenges are Iran's quest for
24 regional hegemony, and very much intertwined with that is
25 the threat, the persistent threat of Sunni Islamic

1 extremism, even after the demise of the Islamic State's
2 physical caliphate. These two threats, I would stress,
3 drive the region's many crises, and they also drive one
4 another. So Iranian expansionism and activity and support
5 for Shia militias and proxies in Iraq and Syria also fuel
6 Sunni extremism, and vice-versa.

7 I think the most urgent thing that the United States
8 needs to do is to develop a strategy and a plan and a policy
9 that reflect the new realities on the ground in Syria, where
10 Iran is currently at its most vulnerable and potentially
11 over-extended, and where the potential for renewed Sunni
12 extremism is perhaps highest. ISIS has lost its self-
13 declared caliphate, as Senator Reed noted, but the presence
14 of Russian forces, Iranian forces, Iranian-sponsored Shia
15 militias, Hezbollah, et cetera, have allowed Tehran and
16 Moscow to emerge for the moment as the arbiters of post-war
17 Syria and have allowed Iran to consolidate at least the
18 perception that they have a land bridge that links Tehran
19 directly to Lebanon and to right on the Israeli and
20 Jordanian borders.

21 Although there are few really appealing options at this
22 point in Syria, I think we can and should exploit Iranian
23 over-extension there. I welcome Secretary Mattis' recent
24 statement that U.S. troops will remain in Syria to prevent
25 the reemergence of ISIS. I think that's a necessary first

1 step. But I think that will only be possible if we can help
2 our Syrian allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces, hold
3 strategic territory that's been liberated from ISIS control.
4 I think that will help provide leverage for the United
5 States in determining Syria's post-war fate, and also pose
6 some obstacles and impose some costs on Iran.

7 I think in general we need to develop more leverage
8 with Iran so we can impose costs more effectively, and I
9 would make a few suggestions about what we might do in that
10 regard. First, I think we ought to have public discussion
11 about dusting off and updating our contingency plans for
12 neutralizing Iran's nuclear facilities should Iran
13 materially breach or withdraw from the JCPOA in response
14 either to sanctions that this body chooses to impose or
15 because of more vigorous U.S. enforcement of the agreement
16 itself.

17 Just as it appears to be doing with North Korea, I
18 think the Pentagon ought to be putting in place the
19 capabilities to potentially shoot down future Iranian
20 ballistic missile tests. Iran is developing a very large,
21 very variegated ballistic missile capability. No country
22 that has done that on the scale that Iran has done it has
23 ever not ultimately become a nuclear weapons state.

24 I think it's equally important for the United States to
25 cooperate very closely with our regional allies, and I'll

1 defer any further discussion of that because I believe all
2 of my colleagues agree with that and will want to talk about
3 it.

4 I think we have to recognize that Russia has been so
5 far an obstacle, not a partner, in building security in this
6 region, and I think we would do well not to allow ourselves
7 to be deluded into thinking that we can somehow easily split
8 Russia and Iran from each other. For a lot of reasons that
9 we could go into, I don't think that's likely to happen.

10 I think we also need to increase the internal pressures
11 on the Iranian regime. This remains a very deeply unpopular
12 regime. I fear that the JCPOA has actually mostly
13 benefitted the hardliners in Iran because they're the ones
14 who control the economic sectors that stand most to benefit
15 from the sanctions relief. But it's also made them more
16 dependent on a narrowing band of loyalists to maintain
17 stability, as everyday Iranians feel very little benefit
18 from the sanctions relief.

19 I think we can exploit all of this. A more aggressive
20 political information campaign can amplify international
21 investors' wariness of the Iranian market by highlighting
22 the complexities of sanctions compliance, as well as the
23 elites' corrupt business dealings and systematic human
24 rights abuses.

25 Finally, I think we need to enforce the JCPOA to

1 address Iran's serial under-compliance, which is what I
2 would call it, with the agreement. I think this has begun
3 to eat away at our credibility with Iran and raises the
4 risks of continuing nibbling at the edges of this agreement,
5 which when it expires will put Iran at the cusp of having a
6 nuclear capability, as President Obama admitted at the time
7 of the JCPOA's negotiation.

8 Through these steps, a lot of these are difficult steps
9 to take, but I think we need to start taking them now
10 because otherwise I'm afraid we will see further erosion in
11 the U.S. position in the region.

12 And with that, let me stop, and I look forward to your
13 questions.

14 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Edelman follows:]

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you for a very good statement,
2 Ambassador Edelman.

3 We have a quorum right now, so we're going to go and
4 make sure to take care of some business that must be taken
5 care of.

6 Since a quorum is now present, I ask the committee to
7 consider a list of 137 pending military nominations. All of
8 these nominations have been before the committee the
9 required length of time.

10 Is there a motion in favor of the report, this list of
11 137 pending military nominations?

12 Senator Reed: So moved.

13 Senator Inhofe: Is there a second?

14 Senator Fischer: Second.

15 Senator Inhofe: All in favor, say aye?

16 [Chorus of ayes.]

17 Senator Inhofe: The motion carries.

18 Ambassador Jeffrey?

19 We do business pretty fast when we have to.

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR JAMES F. JEFFREY, PHILIP
2 SOLONDZ DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR
3 EAST POLICY

4 Ambassador Jeffrey: That was impressive, Senator.

5 Mr. Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, members of
6 the committee, I thank you for having us here. It's a
7 particular honor to have a panel of fellow Foreign Service
8 officers appearing before the Senate Armed Services
9 Committee. Thank you for honoring the service of all of our
10 corps around the world.

11 I also want to associate with Ambassador Edelman's
12 comments about Senator McCain.

13 It's a problem when one is a witness before this
14 committee on this subject when you're the third person to go
15 given that there is a great deal of agreement on the broad
16 problem and to some degree the broad elements of a strategy.

17 As you've already heard, we're dealing with a dual
18 threat. Right now, I think for several reasons, Iran is the
19 bigger of those dual threats, and I think this
20 Administration in its October 13th statement has agreed with
21 that.

22 The reason is partially because, for the moment, the
23 biggest threat emanating from the Sunni Islamic extremism,
24 ISIS, has been at least conventionally defeated. But
25 secondly, there is a real relationship between Iran's

1 activities and Sunni Islamic extremism.

2 When I left Iraq in June of 2012, what became ISIS, al
3 Qaeda in Iraq under al Baghdadi, was little more than a
4 terrorist band in West Mosul. Two years later, it was
5 controlling a third of Syria and Iraq, 9 million people,
6 with an army of 35,000 -- not entirely, because governance
7 is always, as Ryan Crocker said, a huge issue. But bad
8 governance was promulgated, encouraged, and exacerbated by
9 Iran's decisions and the decisions of people who were being
10 advised and supported by Iran, Maliki in Iraq and, of
11 course, Assad in Syria. And this back and forth -- there
12 are 20 to 25 million Sunni Arabs between Baghdad and
13 Damascus. Currently, they're not being ruled by Sunni Arab
14 leaders. They're being ruled by people who, in the case of
15 Syria, take orders from Iran, in the case of Iraq may or may
16 not fall under Iran's influence. And if those people are
17 not protected by the international system that we've talked
18 about here, they're going to turn again to terrorist forces,
19 and we'll have this same problem all over again.

20 Given the general, I think, consensus on this, then the
21 question is, including why it is important that Ambassador
22 Edelman talked about, what to do about it. But before we
23 get to what to do about it, or at least my view is, let's
24 take a look at why haven't we figured this out.

25 While I have a lot of problems with the Obama

1 Administration's actions on Iran, I certainly don't think he
2 wanted to turn the region over to Iran, yet Iran has been
3 advancing. While this Administration has a very tough
4 rhetorical position against Iran, it has done very little on
5 the ground in the first nine or ten months to stop further
6 Iranian successes, and we've got a series of them in the
7 last several months, largely in reaction to mistakes by our
8 allies.

9 So why is it so hard? Several reasons. First of all,
10 look at how Iran operates. It doesn't challenge
11 conventionally like Saddam Hussein did, but rather it
12 infiltrates other countries, playing off of bad governance,
13 failed states, ungoverned areas, terrorist groups either
14 they support or they use as an excuse to go in. They have
15 people who know the region very well. They have a long-term
16 strategy. It is all organized and supports each other --
17 Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, tomorrow Bahrain and
18 Afghanistan.

19 This requires a comprehensive response throughout the
20 region with both us and our allies, because we're not going
21 to do this with hundreds of thousands of troops. And that
22 gets to the problems with our allies, as we've seen in the
23 last few months with the Turks -- pick the subject --
24 Massoud Barzani and the independence announcement; the
25 Saudis -- again, pick the issue -- Yemen, Hariri, or Qatar.

1 They're all trying to contain Iran and deal with the
2 terrorist threat in the region, but they're all doing it in
3 an uncoordinated way that, more likely than not, advances
4 Iran's objectives rather than contains them.

5 We need to get hold of this, and we won't do so until
6 we have a comprehensive plan to deal with Iran and we've
7 convinced them that we are in the lead and we know what
8 we're doing. We're not there yet.

9 Secondly, anything we do to contain Iran, to push back,
10 will bring with it great risks to us and to people in the
11 region. Look at the 1980s and early 1990s when we faced
12 four threats, from Soviets in Afghanistan, Iranians in
13 Southern Iraq, Iranians in the Gulf, and Saddam in Kuwait.
14 The kind of decisions we had to take and the chaos we
15 deliberately created for the good end of containing these
16 people was quite significant, and we have to be prepared.

17 There's nothing easy about this. If this was easy, the
18 U.S. Government in the last 15 years would have done better.
19 It's very hard. We clearly cannot ignore the area. That's
20 the lesson of 9/11. We clearly can't go in with hundreds of
21 thousands of troops for a long time. That's the lesson of
22 Iraq and Afghanistan. So we have to do economy-of-force,
23 light-footprint operations with our allies.

24 That will produce new Benghazis and new Nigers. I hate
25 to say it. We've all been out there in the field. We know

1 that sooner or later people make mistakes. We have to be
2 able to move on and not melt down when these things happen
3 because this is the right way to approach it.

4 Finally, on Iran, again, I agree with Ambassador
5 Edelman. Syria and also Iraq and our presence in these
6 areas is very, very important. That is the central front in
7 stopping Iran. That will be very difficult because it
8 requires keeping our troops on and dealing with what will be
9 unquestionably deliberate Iranian threats to our people.
10 How will we respond? In the past, we have not responded in
11 a way that deters Iran from going after us, in part because
12 we have kept the Iranian homeland free from any retaliatory
13 threats or action.

14 On the JCPOA, as one who supported essentially the
15 President's position publicly before he took it on
16 decertifying, I would have to say cast it in doubt, do
17 attrition warfare against the bad things in it, but if you
18 want to contain Iran in the area, do not walk away from that
19 thing. It's the best thing from an Iran standpoint that we
20 could do to break up the coalition against it.

21 I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and turn it over to my
22 colleague and friend, Stu Jones.

23 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Jeffrey follows:]

24

25

1 Senator Inhofe: Very good, Ambassador Jeffrey. Thank
2 you.

3 Ambassador Jones?

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR STUART E. JONES, VICE
2 PRESIDENT, THE COHEN GROUP

3 Ambassador Jones: Thank you.

4 Senator Inhofe: Use your mic, please.

5 Ambassador Jones: Thank you, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking
6 Member Reed. It's an honor to be here before you, and it's
7 a distinct honor to be here with such distinguished
8 colleagues.

9 I'm also thinking of Chairman McCain today and wishing
10 him a speedy recovery.

11 Chairman Inhofe, as you said, last week Prime Minister
12 Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq, and I had the
13 privilege to work closely with Prime Minister Abadi during
14 my time in Iraq, and he's been tireless in his service to
15 his nation and a reliable partner for the United States. He
16 deserves our commendation for leading Iraq through a
17 difficult three-year struggle and for reaching this
18 watershed moment.

19 The fight against ISIS has been the organizing
20 principle for our Middle East policy for the past three
21 years, and we've known that the day would come when ISIS
22 would be defeated, at least as a military opponent, and we
23 would need to reassess policy priorities to build on this
24 success.

25 Today, Iraq enjoys unprecedented low levels of

1 violence, and Prime Minister Abadi is seen by Sunni and Shia
2 alike as a unifying force. Continued oil production growth
3 and improvements in the oil export infrastructure,
4 stabilization of oil prices, and support from the World Bank
5 and the IMF have enabled the Iraqis to contemplate a
6 prosperous economic future. Iraq will, of course, however,
7 continue to face significant challenges.

8 As my colleagues have said, I think one of the main
9 challenges will be the malign interference of Iran, its
10 neighbor with a 1,400-kilometer border. While ISIS'
11 terrorist ground forces are defeated, we know that
12 extremists will go underground and continue to terrorize
13 Iraq's innocent civilians, especially in urban areas such as
14 Baghdad. The Iraqi security forces will need our continued
15 assistance to combat this threat, and the government of Iraq
16 has invited a limited number of U.S. forces to remain to
17 provide training and other support to assist them in their
18 efforts to combat extremism. Helping Iraq's counter-
19 terrorism service reconstitute to face this new challenge is
20 a mission that U.S. forces are uniquely positioned to
21 accomplish.

22 So as I said, with the ISIS threat destroyed, malign
23 Iranian interference is now the primary security challenge
24 facing the region. Iran's activities threaten the security
25 of our strongest ally in the region, Israel, but also

1 threaten Jordan, a crucial partner, where I had the
2 privilege to serve, as well as our Gulf partners.

3 Iranian interference has posed a challenge to Iraqi
4 stability for some time, and it is now at its highest
5 levels. Prime Minister Abadi has committed to integrating
6 the popular mobilization forces, some with close ties to the
7 Iran Quds Force, into the national security forces, with the
8 requirement that they leave their political baggage behind
9 them. This will be a huge task, and he will need our
10 support for this.

11 The U.S. Administration is developing a strategy to
12 push back and contain Iran throughout the entire region.
13 This pushback needs to be a whole-of-government approach.
14 In Iraq in particular, we need to go beyond the security
15 support and remind the Iraqi public of the full benefit of
16 the strategic framework agreement with the United States,
17 which two of my co-panelists played an instrumental role in
18 drafting.

19 Iraq has a large youth population, and from my time
20 there I can say that Iraqi youth yearn for U.S. technology,
21 U.S. investment, U.S. training and education. General
22 Electric Power Up program, which was initiated during my
23 time in Iraq, has provided thousands of megawatts of needed
24 electricity but also introduced cutting-edge technology,
25 created hundreds of high-paying jobs, and afforded training

1 that will transform those young workers' lives.

2 Likewise at this moment, U.S. energy firms are
3 developing proposals to assist Iraq in capturing flared gas.
4 The comprehensive solution to this problem, which Prime
5 Minister Abadi has prioritized for 2018, would not only
6 address an environmental calamity but also restore billions
7 of dollars to the Iraqi economy in a short period of time.

8 For these measures to succeed, however, we must ensure
9 that U.S. export promotion agencies are fully operational
10 and targeted at the problem set in the Middle East, much as
11 they were in the Bush Administration.

12 To his credit, Prime Minister Abadi has also launched a
13 war on corruption. The public response to this announcement
14 has been positive, and a war on corruption will be a
15 blessing for U.S.-Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement
16 because the intrinsic value of the U.S. partnership becomes
17 clearer on a fair and transparent playing field.

18 In our pushback against Iran, we should also continue
19 to foster Iraq's ties to its other neighbors. Saudi
20 Arabia's Foreign Minister Jubeir's visit to Baghdad in
21 February, encouraged by Secretary Tillerson, was a game
22 changer. Since then we have seen numerous high-level visits
23 back and forth, and road and air links opened, the latter
24 for the first time since 1990. The next step should be to
25 encourage further progress on expanding and securing the

1 highway between Amman and Baghdad.

2 Finally, the September referendum on Kurdish
3 independence has had disastrous consequences for the Kurds
4 and for the cooperation that had emerged between Baghdad and
5 Erbil during the Mosul campaign. Although we opposed the
6 referendum, we should now support restored cooperation
7 between Erbil and Baghdad. It is often said that the Kurds
8 provide the essential third leg to the Iraqi stool.
9 Following the referendum, Prime Minister Abadi did what was
10 needed, but now he's in a position to work towards
11 reconciliation, and this rift needs to be repaired ahead of
12 the 2018 elections in May so that the Kurds will participate
13 fully in national politics.

14 So again, thank you for allowing me to join this
15 distinguished group and to be before you today.

16 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Jones follows:]

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you very much, Ambassador Jones,
2 for that statement.

3 I was thinking, Ambassador Crocker -- we'll go with 5-
4 minute rounds. Is that all right with you? And try to get
5 as many people. It's a well-attended meeting here.

6 When you made the statement, we agree with you on some
7 of the cuts that are going to be necessary. But on this
8 committee, we sit and we look at a situation where only a
9 third of our Army ground brigades can fight, we see only a
10 fourth of our Army air brigades. We're very sensitive, and
11 we've heard over and over again that the Marines use the F-
12 18, and the F-18s right now, 62 percent of them won't fly,
13 so we have to do things.

14 When there's a drawback on Armed Services, this
15 happens, it's real. So somewhere, it has to give. I want
16 to ask for a response, but that's one of the things that
17 concerns all of us here.

18 Let me just put this in context. We're all alarmed to
19 see how Iranian influence has grown in Iraq since our
20 premature withdrawal in 2011. Despite losing more than
21 4,500 American lives and spending more than \$1 trillion in
22 Iraq since 2003, our hasty, I felt, ill-thought-out troop
23 withdrawal opened the door to Iran to accomplish its
24 strategic objectives in Iraq. Iran has been remarkably
25 successful in pursuing those objectives.

1 It's not like we didn't see this coming. I and a lot
2 of members of this committee warned for years that the hasty
3 withdrawal from Iraq would lead to an increase of Iranian
4 influence there. I had one of my own quotes down here. It
5 was August of 2010 when I made the statement, "Obama's rush
6 for an expedited withdrawal of troops from Iraq would
7 endanger Israel and the entire Middle East and would empower
8 Iran."

9 So what I'd like to do is kind of -- you've all touched
10 on this, but a response from all four of you. Many people
11 are unaware of the extent of the influence of Iran that it
12 now holds in Iraq. Can each of you broadly lay out Iran's
13 strategic objectives there and discuss how Iran has advanced
14 them since the U.S. withdrawal?

15 Let's start with you, Ambassador Crocker.

16 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Nature abhors a vacuum, and the Middle East abhors it
18 even more. When I left in 2009, violence in Iraq was at an
19 absolute minimum. The Iranians were on their back feet.
20 Prime Minister al Maliki had moved against one of their
21 clients, principal clients in Iraq, the Sadr movement,
22 engaged them militarily from Basra all the way up to Sadr
23 City, and with significant help from us, he beat them back.

24 However, you do not end a war by withdrawing your
25 troops from the battlefield. You simply cede the space to

1 adversaries who have more commitment and more patience, and
2 that's exactly what we've seen, I think, in Iraq with the
3 presence now of a number of Shia militia backed by Iran,
4 well-armed, looking for a new mission after Islamic State.
5 They take their orders from Tehran, not from Baghdad.

6 A fundamental understanding we should all have is
7 Iran's history and its geopolitical assessments. The Shah
8 of Iran projected force beyond his borders with conventional
9 forces. It was the Shah's Iran that seized the three
10 islands from United Arab Emirates. It was the Shah's Iran
11 that sent basically a mechanized infantry brigade into Oman
12 to help the Sultan put down a rebellion.

13 The Islamic Republic is doing the same thing with
14 different means, using militias rather than regular forces
15 under the command of Qasem Soleimani, and we now see a
16 resurgent Iran in the region. The only way I can see us
17 gaining back some of that ground is not by confronting Iran
18 directly in Iraq. Sadly, they have more instruments there
19 than we do. But it would be by a sustained engagement with
20 the Iraqi government, with Prime Minister Abadi, to do
21 everything we can to build up a stronger central authority.
22 It will be a long-term commitment. It does not take forces.
23 It does take consistent, focused, White House-led political
24 engagement. I hope we see that.

25 Senator Inhofe: Ambassador Edelman, any comments on

1 this?

2 Ambassador Edelman: Yes. I would speak, Chairman
3 Inhofe, with some trepidation sitting here on a panel of
4 three former ambassadors to Iraq about Iranian strategic
5 goals there. So let me, if you'll permit me, to kind of
6 open the aperture a little more broadly and speak more
7 broadly about it.

8 One of the things I think we neglect at our peril is to
9 recognize that Iran remains a revolutionary regime committed
10 to the spread of its particular ideology and emerging as a
11 leader in the Muslim world despite the fact that it
12 represents a minority, a current minority sect inside world
13 Islam, and that I think explains a lot of its behavior. I
14 mean, for years, since the revolution in 1979, a lot of us
15 have been waiting for the Thermidorian reaction that would
16 allow Iran to pursue a Shia political ideology in one
17 country, to make an analogy from the history of the Russian
18 revolution, and it hasn't happened.

19 It remains committed, at least the leadership and the
20 regime remains committed, if not the public, to this
21 particular ideology, and that drives them to use these proxy
22 forces that they started using in the early '80s, almost
23 immediately after the revolution, in Lebanon and now in Iraq
24 and Syria and elsewhere, to extend their influence to allow
25 them to become the dominant force in the region.

1 Senator Inhofe: Okay. Well, thank you. My time has
2 expired, but if we do a second round, I'd like to have you
3 both, Ambassador Jeffrey and Ambassador Jones, to be
4 thinking about this.

5 Senator Reed?

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

7 Just a quick follow-on. Ambassador Crocker, you were
8 there on the ground in 2008, I believe, when President Bush
9 signed an agreement with Maliki to withdraw all our forces
10 in 2011. Was your advice to do that, or is that just -- why
11 did we do that? I mean, we agreed to take all our troops
12 out; correct?

13 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Yes, I
14 was the senior negotiator for that agreement, as well as its
15 accompanying security agreement. We pushed hard for more
16 open-ended language. Prime Minister Maliki told me an
17 important point. He said, "Look, we're going to need you
18 here for years, if not decades, but that has to work in an
19 Iraqi context. And Iraqis, including those opposed to the
20 Prime Minister, need to hear, at that particular point, that
21 there would be a finite limit on how long the U.S. would
22 stay. Put the emotions aside, then let's get working on
23 negotiating the longer-term agreement."

24 That didn't happen, and I would suggest that it didn't
25 happen because, again, President Obama had run on, in part,

1 a position to end the wars of the previous administration.
2 Again, as I said and as we've seen, you don't end wars just
3 by withdrawing your forces. There was a clear understanding
4 at the time that our presence would be enduring.

5 Senator Reed: But there has always been a question
6 about whether Maliki was entirely sincere about his wishes
7 or his ability to deliver it, given the Iranian influence.
8 That was a factor, I think, all through that period.

9 Ambassador Jeffrey: Senator Reed, could I add
10 something to that?

11 Senator Reed: Please.

12 Ambassador Jeffrey: I was, unfortunately, the guy who
13 lost the American troop presence, as you all know, in 2011.

14 Senator Reed: Right.

15 Ambassador Jeffrey: First of all, it's very difficult
16 to keep American ground troops in any Middle Eastern country
17 -- the only place where we have a significant number is
18 Kuwait; think of Kuwait and why that's so -- over time when
19 there isn't an emergency situation. Also, we needed a
20 status of forces agreement. Maliki was willing in 2011 to
21 sign a piece of paper. He or his foreign minister, I guess,
22 signed it in 2014 when we came back in because it was an
23 emergency situation and we didn't worry too much about that.
24 But in a peacetime situation, it's very hard to put troops
25 on the ground in a place like that without the guarantees.

1 But the relevance of that experience in 2011 for what
2 we're doing now in Syria, in Iraq and elsewhere, I would say
3 is as follows. We had -- and Stu Jones was my deputy as we
4 prepared for this, so I'll share the blame with you. We had
5 a Plan B that we were going to cheat, with Maliki's
6 acknowledgement, on all of the keeping troops out. We had
7 Black SOF, White SOF, we had drones, we had all kinds of
8 things. I don't want to get into them in great detail. It
9 was a very big package, including a \$14 billion FMS program.
10 We had bases all over the country that were disguised bases
11 that the U.S. military was running.

12 What happened was the Obama Administration -- not just
13 the President, who knew about this plan, but the entire
14 bureaucracy -- loses interest in that kind of deployment
15 because you don't have a four-star General Petraeus, General
16 Austin to talk to the Secretary of Defense and directly to
17 the President. You don't have the focus of the American
18 people once they're gone. Maliki kept coming back and
19 asking for this little military asset or that little
20 military asset. We were his security blanket. We left, so
21 he had to turn to the Iranians.

22 The second big mistake was in 2014, when we responded
23 to the fall of Mosul by taking a decision to send at least
24 some troops back in and support the effort, but we did not
25 do air strikes for three months, until finally in the north

1 we had the problem with the Kurds in Sinjar Mountain and the
2 folks up there. We did that for, I think, good reason. We
3 were trying to squeeze Maliki out.

4 But the fact that the Iranians did come to the aid of
5 the Iraqis and we did not played a huge role in the position
6 they're in today.

7 So again, they take advantage, as you've heard from my
8 colleagues, of mistakes that we or our local allies make.

9 Senator Reed: My time is running out. This is a topic
10 of not just Iraq but of other areas. So I hope if there's a
11 second round we can shift focus to Syria and you can explain
12 to me our policy there. Thank you.

13 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

14 Senator Fischer?

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Ambassador Crocker, this week Putin claimed victory in
17 Syria. He announced the supposed withdrawal of Russian
18 troops from the country. He presided over the signing of a
19 \$21 billion plan to build a nuclear power plant in Egypt,
20 and he condemned U.S. efforts in the region as
21 destabilizing. I think it's pretty clear that the Russians
22 are working to increase their role in the Middle East and
23 undermine U.S. interests.

24 But looking outside of Syria, where do you think their
25 next targets in this effort are going to be?

1 Ambassador Crocker: That's a great question, Senator.
2 I am not an expert on Russian affairs, but that won't stop
3 me from pontificating.

4 [Laughter.]

5 Ambassador Crocker: My colleagues who are will
6 straighten that out, I'm sure, for the record.

7 The Russians under Putin played a bad hand brilliantly.
8 The Russians intervened in Syria not because they saw an
9 opportunity but because they saw a very real threat that
10 they were going to lose basically their only asset in the
11 region, Bashar al Assad. They teamed up with the Iranians,
12 and we see where they got. And, incidentally, at the same
13 time he declared victory and said he was bringing the troops
14 home, he also announced that there would be a permanent
15 Russian presence both in Tartus, the navy base, and at an
16 air base in Syria, so they're not going away. They will
17 continue to use Syria as a point of leverage for their
18 broader strategies in the region.

19 I don't know if they have a next move planned in the
20 region. I think it's entirely possible that for the time
21 being, they're going to sit where they are because it's a
22 good place.

23 Senator Fischer: Do you think -- I'm going to
24 interrupt you for a minute. Do you think they're just
25 looking for opportunities, then, that there is no

1 comprehensive plan?

2 Ambassador Crocker: Well, what I believe is that,
3 again, like Iran, you need to know the history and how the
4 world looks from that other capital. In the case of Russia,
5 no, it's not a return to the Soviet Union, clearly, but it
6 looks a little bit like the return of the Russian Empire. I
7 think that is the motivating spirit for President Putin, and
8 I would expect to see their next move not in the Middle
9 East, probably in Europe.

10 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

11 Yes?

12 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Fischer, if I might,
13 because I think I'm the only one up here who had a misspent
14 youth in Soviet affairs, I think you touched on the right
15 thing. I think President Putin is actually a tactical
16 virtuoso, but I don't think he has a real strategic plan
17 here.

18 But what I think you see in Syria is the Russians
19 taking advantage of a long-time client relationship. They
20 look for opportunities. I think the fact that they're
21 looking at Egypt, another place where they've had a long-
22 term relationship, suggests they may be looking for
23 opportunities there, and they're certainly looking for
24 opportunities in Turkey, where Ambassador Jeffrey and I both
25 served, which is not a place that they've traditionally had

1 strong relations but where they see the worsening U.S.-
2 Turkish relationship as opening an opportunity for them.

3 Senator Fischer: Any other comments?

4 [No response.]

5 Senator Fischer: I would ask all four of you what do
6 you believe the United States' response should be?

7 Ambassador Jones?

8 Ambassador Jones: Thank you. I would just say that in
9 Syria we do have to cooperate with the Russians. I think
10 that the de-confliction zones that have been established in
11 southwestern Syria are having an effect, and I think they
12 create a positive model for future cooperation. I also
13 think that this holds the Russians to a certain standard of
14 behavior and also highlights their responsibility to deliver
15 the performance of their Iranian and Hezbollah partners
16 inside of Syria. I think we need to also hold them to their
17 commitment to the Geneva process in Syria.

18 So by taking this leadership role in Syria, I think the
19 Russians have obligated themselves, and we need to hold them
20 to those obligations in a very public fashion.

21 I think in the rest of the region, I think we need to
22 continue to show the value proposition of the U.S.
23 partnership. Russia doesn't bring anything to Egypt that
24 Egypt really needs. Russia doesn't bring anything to Libya
25 that Libya really needs. And we will expect Putin to seek

1 opportunities there for domestic fulfillment, but I think we
2 need to show steadily our strategic partnership to these
3 countries and show that we can offer solutions.

4 Senator Fischer: And how do we hold Russia to
5 obligations when they violate arms treaties?

6 My time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Senator Inhofe: That's a good question.

8 Senator King?

9 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Mr. Edelman, a question for the record. You made a
11 couple of assertions that are inconsistent with the
12 information I've had as a member of this committee and the
13 Intelligence Committee, and I'd like you to supply the
14 evidence. One is that the JCPOA is "freeing up resources
15 for other malign activities." My understanding is that may
16 be true in a very minor way, but if you have evidence on
17 that, I would appreciate having it. This is for the record,
18 you don't need to respond now.

19 The second is you cited serial violations by the
20 Iranians. That is also inconsistent with the information
21 that I have. So I would like whatever data or evidence you
22 have of that.

23 And finally on this point, I would ask if you believe
24 that a nuclear armed Iran, in virtually the identical
25 situation of North Korea today, would be a positive for the

1 stability and strategic balance in the Middle East. That's
2 a yes or no question.

3 Ambassador Edelman: No, I don't think it would be
4 positive.

5 Senator King: Thank you.

6 I'm astonished that none of the four of you mentioned
7 in your discussions, which is a hearing on the Middle East,
8 the President's recent decision about recognizing Jerusalem
9 as the capital of Israel and moving our embassy. I don't
10 see how you can ignore one of the most significant decisions
11 in terms of the Middle East, and I wondered -- I guess I'll
12 start with you, Mr. Jones, Ambassador Jones. Given the fact
13 that apparently we got nothing for that in terms of
14 concessions by the Israelis on settlements or anything else,
15 do you think that was a positive move in terms of stability
16 in the Middle East?

17 Ambassador Jones: No, Senator, I don't. What I'm
18 concerned about now, I think we've seen initial reactions to
19 this. Frankly, the reaction has been a little bit more
20 muted than many experts expected. But we'll also now start
21 to see second- and third-order consequences, and this is
22 going to have negative effects on governance inside of
23 Jordan and Lebanon and other places which have large
24 Palestinian populations. So I am concerned about King
25 Abdullah in Jordan, who has made very clear his opposition

1 to this, who I had the honor to serve with very closely.

2 The Jordanians are concerned.

3 Senator King: My understanding is that just this
4 morning Turkey has announced the establishment of an embassy
5 in the West Bank, recognizing the Palestinian state. I
6 guess any of you -- Mr. Jeffrey, is a two-state solution an
7 important part of the peace process in the Middle East?

8 Ambassador Jeffrey: The two-state solution is a very
9 important part of the situation between Israel and the
10 Palestinians, and everybody who has looked at this, almost
11 everybody who has looked at this has not been able to come
12 up with an alternative given Israel's commitment to a
13 democratic political system, given the demographics.

14 In terms of the President's decision, again, as I
15 mentioned with the JCPOA, any action taken that makes Iran
16 happy in the region is a mistake, and this made Iran happy,
17 thus it's a mistake. If this is the biggest mistake this
18 administration makes in the Middle East, it will be okay
19 because I don't think the ramifications of it are all that
20 strong because right now the region is focused primarily on
21 Iran, and that includes most Arab states, and secondarily on
22 the terrorist threat, where Israel is extraordinarily
23 effective with both Egypt and Jordan.

24 Senator King: Isn't it more difficult, though, to
25 achieve a two-state solution?

1 Ambassador Jeffrey: I think the two-state solution at
2 the moment is moribund both from the standpoint of the
3 Palestinians and from the standpoint of the current Israeli
4 government. So I don't think we stopped something that
5 otherwise would have given us a major win in the region. I
6 mean, I've been through this, as have my colleagues, with
7 the Annapolis Process in the Bush Administration, obviously
8 with Obama's effort in the first term, Kerry's effort in the
9 second term. We can go back to Clinton and Camp David, and
10 again and again, we haven't gotten there. The region and
11 our influence in it has continued.

12 Senator King: I agree with your statement that we
13 haven't gotten there, but nobody has come up with an
14 alternative for solving this problem that would maintain
15 Israel as a democratic Jewish state.

16 Ambassador Jeffrey: Exactly. And thus, it's on my
17 list of to-do things, but it's not at the top of it.

18 Senator King: Other thoughts on the issue of moving
19 the capital? Ambassador Crocker?

20 Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I think it's too early to
21 tell what the significance is. The immediate reaction that
22 we focused on, as Ambassador Jones said, was it's going to
23 create an explosion of violence in the region. It didn't.
24 The climate is not really right for that right now, for a
25 lot of complex reasons. That doesn't mean it isn't going to

1 have a long-term impact. I think it will, I just don't know
2 what that will be. There are now voices in the Arab world
3 saying, right, no more two-state solution, so let's push for
4 a one-state solution in which all of the citizens of that
5 state have equal rights under law, including the right to
6 serve in the military.

7 Again, I don't know where this is going, but it's going
8 to play out over a longer term and I fear not in any
9 positive way.

10 Senator King: Thank you.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Senator Inhofe: Senator Cotton?

13 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen, for your
14 appearance on this incredibly distinguished panel. I
15 respect and thank you all for your service to our country
16 abroad and in many places that don't appear on top tourist
17 destinations.

18 I'll follow up on both points that Senator King made.
19 Ambassador Edelman, I'll give you a yes-or-no question as
20 well. Would it be a positive development for the Middle
21 East for Iran to develop nuclear weapons in 8 to 13 years
22 when the key provisions of the JCPOA expire, when its
23 economy has grown stronger because sanctions are lifted,
24 when its conventional military is stronger because the
25 conventional arms embargo is lifted in 2020? That can also

1 be a yes-or-no question.

2 Ambassador Edelman: No, it would not be positive.

3 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

4 On the point about Jerusalem being the capital of
5 Israel, was it an irresponsible and rash decision of this
6 Senate to vote in July, 90 to nothing, that Jerusalem is the
7 capital of Israel? Anyone can take it.

8 Ambassador Jones: Senator Cotton, I think it's just a
9 recognition of fact. I'm a frequent critic of the Trump
10 Administration, but the President was acting in conformance
11 with the law that he was asked to implement. My one
12 criticism would be I think the step would have been more
13 usefully made in the context of a broader plan or proposal
14 as opposed to a one-off. But otherwise --

15 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

16 I want to turn now to Syria, and I'll start with
17 Ambassador Crocker, since I believe you are the only member
18 of the panel who served in Damascus, although everybody
19 obviously has been impacted by their service, and then we
20 can get other reactions after Ambassador Crocker responds.

21 What are the best steps the United States could take at
22 this point, not looking retroactively and assigning blame or
23 credit for any action anyone took in 2011 to this point, to
24 reduce Iranian influence inside of Syria? And I'd like your
25 advice in terms of best practical steps. I don't think

1 anyone believes the American people will support a large-
2 scale conventional military deployment to Syria, but what
3 are the best practical steps that we could take that could
4 have the durable support of the American people to minimize
5 Iranian influence inside of Syria?

6 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator, and thank you
7 for your service.

8 There are several things. The most critical thing in
9 my view is pull together a policy. What we're seeing now
10 with the Syrian Democratic Forces that were so closely
11 allied with us in the campaign against ISIS, they don't know
12 what we're going to do next, so they're in touch with
13 everybody. I mean, they're talking to the Assad regime,
14 they're talking to Tehran, they're talking to Hezbollah,
15 because they know we haven't set a policy, and they've got
16 to live there.

17 So we're into a period now, I think, that's pretty
18 dangerous, where all the actors are going to posture and
19 take positions as though we're not there because we may not
20 be. So that's one.

21 Second, we need to be present diplomatically and
22 politically. The Turks, the Iranians, and the Russians
23 started this Astana process as a counterpoint to Geneva; we
24 weren't even in the room. Now I guess we're there as an
25 observer. We're the United States of America. If we're

1 part of a process, we don't stand on the sidelines and
2 watch. So I would hope that we would get a grip on the
3 political processes that are in play, Astana and Geneva, and
4 use those as a forum to start serious thinking on the way
5 ahead, which is going to be complicated and messy, but also
6 to assert that the United States is there for a reason.
7 These are our security interests, and we are going to be
8 very much a part of that process. We are not going to leave
9 it to our adversaries, such as Iran.

10 Senator Cotton: Gentlemen, any other thoughts on that
11 one?

12 Ambassador Jeffrey: Very quickly, Senator, we have a
13 lot of assets in Syria even though it doesn't look that way.
14 We and the Turks between us hold about a third of the
15 country and have a lot of local allies even though we're not
16 coordinated with the Turks, but that's a question of
17 diplomacy. The Israelis operate militarily throughout Syria
18 in the air. That's another factor. We have a diplomatic
19 entree with U.N. Resolution 2254, which means it's all of
20 our business how Syria is organized. And we can leverage
21 the possibility of reconstruction as a means to try to force
22 a wedge between the Russians, as Ambassador Jones was
23 talking about, and the Syrians and the Iranians, because
24 ultimately their interests are different. But we have to
25 keep not just diplomacy but a military presence there, and

1 that means working with Turkey, the Kurds in Iraq, and the
2 Iraqi government so that we can physically get in and out,
3 because we need entree to that region.

4 Senator Cotton: Well, my time is expired, but thank
5 you again for your appearances here. I know some of you
6 have already failed at retirement. To the extent you ever
7 fail again and want to come back into government service, I
8 bet there are a bunch of senators on this committee and
9 elsewhere in the building that would be happy to vote to
10 confirm you to another position in the United States
11 Government.

12 Senator Inhofe: Senator Warren?

13 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you
14 to our witnesses for being here today.

15 As we've been talking about over the past few months,
16 local forces trained and supported by the U.S.-led coalition
17 have retaken former ISIS strongholds in Mosul and Raqqa, and
18 I want to follow up on Senator Cotton's question, but I want
19 to broaden the inquiry just a little bit to ask more about
20 what happens after we defeat ISIS on the battlefield.

21 It seems like right now we have challenges both with
22 Russia and Iranian forces and their proxies, and that
23 they're moving very quickly to take advantage of conditions
24 on the ground in order to reach their own regional
25 objectives.

1 So, let me just start with you, Ambassador Jones. What
2 can the United States do to push back against Russian and
3 Iranian assertiveness and try to set the conditions for a
4 political settlement that is in our interests and in the
5 interests of the Syrian people?

6 Ambassador Jones: Thank you, Senator Warren. I think
7 most importantly what all of us have touched on is the need
8 for a regional approach to containing and pushing back on
9 Iranian malign interference throughout the region, and this
10 is, of course, going on in Syria, but it's going on in Iraq
11 and Yemen and Bahrain and in, of course, Lebanon. So I
12 think we need an overall regional strategy to help to
13 contain Iran, and then I think that will bring into higher
14 relief the malign interference that it's carrying out inside
15 of Syria.

16 I think it's going to be very difficult given our
17 limited tools to affect Iranian conduct in Syria without
18 weakening its other activities.

19 I'd also say that, in regards to Russia, as I mentioned
20 earlier, there's nothing very attractive about Russian
21 involvement in Syria. The Russians saved the Bashar regime
22 in 2015. They haven't really known what to do with it
23 since, as Ambassador Crocker said. This was to preserve
24 their own status. But they are interested in cooperating
25 with the United States for a variety of reasons. So

1 reaching agreement on the de-confliction zone in
2 southwestern Syria I think does represent a positive model
3 for cooperation with the Russians, and also for holding the
4 Russians accountable.

5 Senator Fischer asked how do you hold them accountable.
6 Well, I think we have to hold them accountable by
7 highlighting when they don't meet their commitments, such as
8 if they are not able to facilitate or to force the
9 withdrawal of Hezbollah and Iranian forces from some of
10 those areas in southwestern Syria, then that should be
11 highlighted and that should be called out.

12 And then finally, I think we need to continue to press
13 for the Geneva process, as Ambassador Crocker said. We need
14 to be engaged diplomatically, using all of our international
15 tools.

16 Sorry to go on for so long.

17 Senator Warren: No, no, I appreciate it, and I
18 appreciate the focus on Russia. It's been Russian support
19 for Assad that's prolonged this crisis. Of course, the
20 Iranians continue to destabilize Syria. It seems to me the
21 Trump Administration needs a clear strategy for ending the
22 violence, for holding Assad accountable, and for making sure
23 that the other actors on the ground don't take advantage of
24 what happens in this post-ISIS world.

25 There's one other thing I'd like to ask about before

1 I'm out of time this morning, and that is about the ongoing
2 Saudi military operation against the Houthis in Yemen and
3 the resulting humanitarian crisis there. The situation on
4 the ground in Yemen continues to deteriorate. Outside
5 experts estimate that more than 10,000 Yemenis have been
6 killed in the fighting and millions more are at risk from
7 famine and disease.

8 In June, 47 senators voted to disapprove the sale of
9 U.S. precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia, an
10 expression of deep concern that many of us have had about
11 this humanitarian crisis.

12 So let me just ask here how the United States can use
13 our leverage with the Saudis to limit civilian casualties
14 and to ensure that Yemeni civilians receive food and
15 medicine and other basic human necessities.

16 Ambassador Jones, Ambassador Crocker, who would like to
17 answer this one? Go ahead.

18 Ambassador Jones: Very quickly, I will say that I
19 think that we should be concerned about humanitarian
20 conditions and civilian casualties in Yemen. I think the
21 Saudis can do better. I think the solution is to work more
22 closely with the Saudis. I think that conditioning
23 assistance will be counterproductive and risks extending the
24 conflict there. I think we're at a crucial moment now with
25 the new schism between the Houthis and the General People's

1 Congress, the party of Ali Abdullah Salah, the recently
2 killed former president.

3 I think this is a time to push for a political
4 resolution. But to do that, the Houthis have to see a very
5 credible military threat, and they should not see any
6 uncertainty from us in our support for the Saudi coalition.

7 Senator Warren: I hear your point on this. I just
8 want to push a little bit. I think this conflict and
9 humanitarian crisis in Yemen is breeding more extremism in
10 the region and continues to put us more at risk, and there's
11 no doubt that Iran should stop making this conflict worse.
12 But let's not forget that Saudi Arabia is the one receiving
13 weapons from us and receiving support from us, and I think
14 we need to hold our partners to a higher standard here. We
15 have a crisis on our hands that's getting out of control.

16 I'm out of time, so I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman. But
17 I think we've really got to raise the bar on this one.
18 Thank you.

19 Senator Inhofe: Senator Ernst?

20 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you,
21 gentlemen, as well, for your committed service to the great
22 United States of America.

23 Ambassador Edelman, I'm going to start with you in
24 regards to Turkey, and then if anybody else would like to
25 hop in as well, I'd appreciate that.

1 Sir, you once served as the ambassador to Turkey.
2 Thank you for doing that. But I think you would agree with
3 me that our relationship with Turkey has changed drastically
4 since your time in service in that country. Erdogan
5 continues to consolidate power, he suppresses his
6 opposition, and he has really cozied up to Russia. This
7 complicates our security cooperation as it pertains to NATO
8 and our collaborative efforts within the Syrian Democratic
9 Forces to defeat ISIS in Syria.

10 If you could, Ambassador, just simply, are you
11 optimistic about the direction of U.S.-Turkey relations?

12 Ambassador Edelman: I'm not, and I invite my
13 colleague, Jim Jeffrey, who served multiple tours in Turkey,
14 including as ambassador, to add and subtract from what I
15 say. But I'm not optimistic. I think the relationship is
16 likely to get a little bit worse before it gets better. I
17 think that's largely driven by President Erdogan's domestic
18 calculations about what he needs to do to consolidate the
19 personalistic presidential regime that he is trying to
20 impose on Turkey in which he now has to face the electorate
21 one more time for the presidency when his term comes up, and
22 I think that's driving almost everything, and a lot of those
23 calculations drive him to do things that make the
24 relationship worse.

25 I also think that to some degree, while I obviously

1 think it's a huge mistake for Turkey to procure S-400s and
2 to cozy up to the Russians as they have, to be fair, some of
3 that is a reflection of the vacuum that we have created
4 which my colleagues have been talking about. I mean, we
5 have let Russia and Iran become the arbiters of Syria's
6 future. Syria sits right on Turkey's border. They're
7 housing 3 million Syrian refugees on their territory, which
8 has imposed enormous costs on Turkish society.

9 So, I mean, we bear a little bit of the blame here for
10 this deterioration in relations, going back a number of
11 years to the outbreak of the civil war in Syria back in
12 2011, Senator Ernst. But I don't think we can tolerate some
13 of the behavior that our Turkish allies are showing, and in
14 particular the use of American citizens and American Foreign
15 Service national employees, in essence, as hostages to the
16 desires of the Turkish government, their attempt to put
17 bounties on the heads of former U.S. Government officials
18 like Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller and Michael Rubin,
19 people who they are accusing of being coup plotters, an
20 outlandish charge. I mean, we really have to draw the line
21 here and push back very hard on this.

22 Senator Ernst: Right. And with that aspect,
23 Ambassador, and Ambassador Jeffrey, I would appreciate your
24 opinion as well, or your thoughts on this matter, then what
25 can we do as the United States to work with and change the

1 current trajectory of Turkey?

2 Why don't we start with you, Ambassador Jeffrey?

3 Ambassador Jeffrey: Yes. I knew this question would
4 come up, Senator, and because none of us want to be an
5 apologist for Turkey because the things they do are toxic,
6 but let me make a couple of general points.

7 We've talked about how we're going to deal with this
8 region, and as Senator Cotton said, we don't want to put
9 lots of ground troops in there. That means we have to rely
10 on five countries -- Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan,
11 and Egypt. We've already talked today about the problems
12 with many of these countries. We wouldn't pick these allies
13 if we were coming up with a different Middle East, but we
14 have to deal with the Middle East we have.

15 They're crucial, and we can't even get to this region
16 without them. This is from yesterday's Military Times:
17 "Deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, the 74th Fighter
18 Squadron has dealt punishing blows to ISIS fighters in
19 support of U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters known as the Syrian
20 Democratic Forces." That was yesterday. Those Syrian
21 Democratic Forces are commanded and controlled by a PKK
22 offshoot, as Ash Carter told this committee two years ago,
23 that is dedicated to overthrowing Turkey. We're supporting
24 that group because we need it against ISIS. Turkey
25 complains, screams, does all these things against us, and

1 every day those planes fly. That's the Middle East we have
2 to deal with today. It's unpleasant, it's transactional,
3 it's ugly, but we and Turkey have very similar strategic
4 goals. Russia and Iran and, to some degree, Syria want to
5 change the mix of the Middle East. We do not, Turkey does
6 not, and at the end of the day we just have to push back, as
7 Ambassador Edelman said, but don't cut off this
8 relationship. It is crucial to us.

9 Senator Ernst: Very good. I appreciate it, gentlemen.
10 My time has expired.

11 Senator Inhofe: Senator Shaheen?

12 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank
13 you all very much both for your service at the State
14 Department, as well as for being here today.

15 Ambassador Crocker, you talked about the fact that
16 we're not even at the table in the discussions in Syria
17 right now, and I would argue that part of the problem there
18 is that we have a State Department that is not functioning
19 in the way that we would like it to because we have an
20 administration that doesn't recognize the importance of
21 diplomacy and the role of the State Department in foreign
22 policy. I'm not even sure how much it recognizes the
23 importance of foreign policy.

24 But I wonder, I'm going to ask you, Ambassador Jones,
25 because you were most recently the State Department's top

1 diplomat for the Middle East, I wonder if you could talk
2 about what we could be doing to better enhance endeavors
3 with our allies and partners in the Middle East through
4 traditional diplomatic channels.

5 Ambassador Jones: I think that this administration
6 actually has taken significant steps to improve relations
7 with key partners in the Middle East. I do think that the
8 Riyadh summit in June was a watershed moment when President
9 Trump was able to convene the Islamic world and make a very
10 strong declaration both of respect for Islam and also a
11 rejection of extremism. I think these kind of measures are
12 significant and should be continued.

13 As I said in my remarks too, we have to make sure that
14 we actuate these gestures that are being done at the very
15 senior levels at the working levels, and we need to use all
16 of our soft power tools in places like Iraq and Saudi and in
17 the Gulf and in other parts of the Middle East, in Egypt
18 certainly, to make clear the value proposition of the U.S.
19 relationship, and that means business, that means
20 technology, investment, and --

21 Senator Shaheen: Well, that certainly makes sense.
22 I'm sorry to interrupt, and I appreciate what you're saying
23 about the message that that sent to other Middle Eastern
24 countries about how we view our relationship with Saudi
25 Arabia and with Sunni countries. But I don't know,

1 Ambassador Edelman, I think it may have been you who talked
2 about the disconnect between our policy objectives and what
3 we're seeing from some of our allies in the Middle East, and
4 I wonder if you would connect what Ambassador Jones is
5 saying to what we could do to be influencing Saudi Arabia's
6 behavior so that it doesn't try and manipulate Lebanon, for
7 example, so that it doesn't help create a famine in Yemen in
8 a way that is not in anyone's interest. How can we
9 encourage them to be on the same page in terms of strategic
10 objectives?

11 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Shaheen, it's nice to see
12 you again.

13 Senator Shaheen: Nice to see you.

14 Ambassador Edelman: I think it's important to go back
15 to what I was saying in response to Senator Ernst's question
16 about Turkey. A lot of the things that we see Turkey doing
17 that we don't like are a function of their reaction to
18 having to fend for themselves rather than rely on the
19 security guarantees they get through NATO and from their
20 traditional strong bilateral relationship with the United
21 States.

22 In my opening statement I talked about some of the
23 challenges that have been created in the region by the
24 appearance that the United States was receding from the
25 region and giving up its role in the region. I think when

1 you create that kind of vacuum, I think what happens is
2 people try to do it on their own. In the case of the
3 Saudis, I think they're doing it on their own without a lot
4 of experience of having done this. So it's not altogether
5 surprising that they will do things in a way that we think
6 makes things worse rather than better.

7 I think the most important thing we can do, and I think
8 Ambassador Jones talked about this a little bit in his
9 response to Senator Warren's question, is to make our allies
10 understand that we are there for the long term, that we have
11 their back, that we are going to be with them, but that we
12 think maybe they want to adjust what they're doing a little
13 bit. You get much more receptiveness to that kind of
14 guidance, which Ryan Crocker excelled at in multiple posts
15 in the region, if you've got a strong alliance basis on
16 which to base it.

17 Senator Shaheen: And doesn't that speak, then, to a
18 very robust diplomatic effort in the region?

19 Ambassador Edelman: Of course.

20 Senator Shaheen: And while I appreciate the singular
21 event in Saudi Arabia, the fact is we don't have an ongoing
22 strategic response that connects what we're doing militarily
23 and what we're doing diplomatically, that I can see, and
24 that that, I think as all of you have laid out, is one of
25 our challenges there. We don't have a long-term, consistent

1 strategy for what we're doing in the region.

2 Ambassador Jeffrey: Very quickly, Iranian missiles and
3 rockets in southern Lebanon and in northern Yemen are
4 strategic existential threats to two of our key allies,
5 Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Ten thousand more dead civilians
6 in the Middle East, in a region that's seen 1 million in the
7 last 30 years, by my count, or a stable coalition government
8 in Beirut are not going to deter the Saudis and the Israelis
9 from acting against this threat. How they act against it,
10 as Ambassador Edelman said, is where we should be more
11 active.

12 Senator Shaheen: Well, I certainly agree with that.
13 That's one of the reasons I've been a sponsor with other
14 members of this committee of Hezbollah sanctions, so that we
15 can put more pressure on them. But as you point out, it's
16 got to be consistent.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Senator Inhofe: Senator Perdue?

19 Senator Perdue: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to echo
20 other comments today about the august group we have here.
21 I've learned so much just sitting here the last hour from
22 you gentlemen after spending a couple of years on Foreign
23 Relations, so I hope you take this show on the road over
24 there as often as you get asked.

25 Ambassador Jeffrey, I want to move this a little bit.

1 I think not only is this a pivotal point in time, it seems
2 to me we've got a couple of pivot points in the region
3 geographically. The GCC is having a crisis right now, and
4 Qatar is right in the middle of that, and two of our allies
5 really are creating a destabilizing influence I think right
6 now when we need to be showing force against the Iran-Russia
7 influence over there. We've got about 10,000 troops,
8 including Central Command and our air assets, plus a full
9 deployment of a full brigade's worth of armor sitting there.
10 So it's a pivot point for Afghanistan and other points in
11 the region.

12 Can you speak to us just briefly about your perception
13 of what's this really about between Saudi Arabia and Qatar,
14 and what should we be doing to influence two allies to cut
15 it out and let's see if there's alignment that we can find
16 here?

17 Ambassador Jeffrey: I first had to do an inventory of
18 whether any of my colleagues had served in Qatar, in Saudi
19 Arabia, so I could kick the thing. I think those are the
20 only two places where Ryan Crocker hasn't served, but he
21 probably has a view because he did well on Russia.

22 But anyway, it gets back to what all of us, but I think
23 most eloquently Ambassador Edelman, has said. Our allies,
24 left alone to deal with the Iranian threat, and secondarily
25 the threat of Islamic extremism, because there's a Muslim

1 Brotherhood element between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and the
2 Emirates as well, flail around and do things that are
3 uncoordinated. They don't check with us enough in advance,
4 and we wind up with a mess.

5 I think this administration, despite a couple of
6 initial comments by President Trump, has taken a good
7 position. I saw this at the security conference this last
8 weekend out in the Gulf. They basically are, all in all,
9 supporting Qatar. I would say it's 55/45, because we have
10 great interests with the Saudis and the Emiratis. But they
11 clearly made a mistake. Qatar is objectionable in many
12 ways, just like, as I said and as we discussed at length,
13 Turkey and Saudi Arabia and other places. But we can't be
14 going at each other, scratching each other because of these
15 secondary sins when the real sinning in the region is done
16 by Islamic terrorists and Iran. So we have to get a better
17 hold of our allies.

18 Senator Perdue: And what should we be doing with Qatar
19 specifically in Saudi Arabia to keep Qatar from leaning back
20 toward Iran, which it certainly looks like they are in a
21 position to do?

22 Ambassador Jeffrey: They will to some degree because
23 it starts with the Paz gas field. I mean, they're going to
24 have a strong relationship with Iran because they share that
25 critical gas field. The more we can get the Saudis and the

1 Emiratis to roll back, the more the Qataris presumably will
2 eventually find that they don't have to keep turning to the
3 Iranians, the Russians, Turkey and others, and this feud
4 eventually blows over. There was an earlier feud, I think
5 2014 or 2013, and it did blow over. This one looks uglier.

6 Senator Perdue: Ambassador?

7 Ambassador Edelman: Might I just add something to my
8 colleague's comments? This is more in the nature of a
9 problem in search of a solution than a solution, but one of
10 the problems I think we have with both Turkey and with Qatar
11 is that they house very important U.S. military facilities.
12 And as a result of that, both of those governments have, I
13 think, concluded that there is a limit to how much we will
14 push them on certain things we don't like because of the
15 desire to keep those facilities, which are very important
16 facilities, available.

17 I think we need to look at more diversified and
18 resilient basing in the region so we don't become hostage to
19 this kind of behavior and we can push back a little bit more
20 effectively when the Qataris do things we don't like. I
21 have a certain amount of sympathy for the Saudi and Emirati
22 position about the Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood
23 in the region. They did a lot in the early days of the
24 Syrian civil war to make things infinitely worse than they
25 had to be.

1 So we have to figure out a solution to this ourselves
2 so that we don't find ourselves being held back from pushing
3 back on some of the things our allies do that we think are
4 wrong.

5 Senator Perdue: You bring up an interesting point from
6 a strictly military point of view. We talked about it in
7 here. After 17 years of war over there, I'm shocked at our
8 support footprint. Incirlik is at risk. I just got back
9 from a trip earlier this year to Pakistan and Afghanistan to
10 see how we resupply that and what we have to do to do that.
11 I mean, this is a very precarious footprint we have over
12 there, and now Russia is at Lodaki and Tartus, moving down
13 in the Horn of Africa. China is in there now. So this is a
14 key, key topic, I think, to support not only the diplomatic
15 effort but also the military support for that too. It's a
16 great point. Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 Senator Inhofe: Senator Peters?

19 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank
20 you to each of our very distinguished witnesses. It's been
21 a fascinating discussion, and I appreciate your service and
22 your willingness to impart some of your knowledge with us
23 here today.

24 In Michigan, I'm very proud to represent a very large
25 Arab-American, Muslim-American community that focuses on

1 these issues quite a bit, given that that is their homeland.
2 In addition to that, I have a very large and thriving
3 population of religious minorities from the Middle East as
4 well, particularly Chaldeans and Yazidis, and ISIS has been
5 absolutely devastating. Their actions have been devastating
6 to these ethnic communities and have really showed, I think,
7 a unique brutality toward them and their historical
8 homeland.

9 I supported legislation that declared the atrocities
10 committed by ISIS against Christians, Yazidis, and other
11 religious and ethnic minorities as war crimes, crimes
12 against humanity and genocide. In March of 2016, then-
13 Secretary of State Kerry declared ISIS was responsible for
14 genocide against these groups in areas under their control.

15 As Ambassador Jones mentioned in his written testimony,
16 ISIS can be expected to go underground and to continue to
17 attempt to terrorize Iraqis in the months and years ahead.
18 So I'm concerned that despite the military successes that we
19 have seen against ISIS, members of these communities are
20 still going to face violence and persecution. But I'd like
21 to hear from each of you, based on your experience, if you
22 could provide an update as to how you view this situation
23 and your recommendations as to what we should be doing and
24 should the United States be doing more.

25 I'll start at this end.

1 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator. This is with
2 respect to the religious minorities?

3 Senator Peters: Religious minorities, correct.

4 Ambassador Crocker: One of the lessons I learned a
5 long time ago is beware of unintended consequences of major
6 actions, and there is no action more major than a military
7 intervention in someone else's country. You are setting in
8 motion not third- and fourth-order consequences but 30th-
9 and 40th-order consequences, as we are seeing to this day in
10 both Iraq and Afghanistan.

11 With respect to the minorities, they were doing okay
12 under Saddam because they posed no threat to him. I mean,
13 he was an equal opportunity dictator and murderer, but by
14 and large the minorities could live in Iraq. I frankly
15 question how much longer we're going to see a significant
16 Christian presence, particularly on the Plains of Nineveh.

17 I had a conversation a year ago that I will never
18 forget with one of the patriarchs, and I won't go further in
19 identifying him, who met with me in Europe with a prominent
20 lay representative. The lay representative spoke first and
21 said support us, make a clear declaration you will defend
22 us, train us, arm us, so we can look after our local
23 security, be an ally. The patriarch then said, please do
24 none of those things. All you will do is paint a big bulls-
25 eye on our backs to give the religious extremists grounds to

1 say clients of America, and it will get even worse. So just
2 don't do anything.

3 That was a very sad moment for me, because I think we
4 are looking at literally an existential threat to the
5 minority communities in Iraq, and also in Syria for those
6 who didn't get out. I don't have an answer for that except
7 to say be careful what you get into.

8 Senator Peters: I appreciate that. Anyone else have a
9 comment?

10 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Peters, I'd just say,
11 first of all, I think we are witnessing an enormous tragedy
12 in the region, which is in many places a likely loss of the
13 various Christian and other heterodox minority communities,
14 which is a shame for the region.

15 I would just point out that in the Turkish context
16 there are significant minority issues as well with the Olavi
17 population, and we have one issue in Turkey where Pastor
18 Andrew Brunson, a Protestant missionary, is being held by
19 the government on very preposterous charges of being a coup
20 plotter. So this is very broad throughout the region. In
21 that case you're dealing with a NATO ally, not even a
22 country that's outside the ambit of our normal alliances.

23 Senator Peters: But in terms of the Nineveh Plain, is
24 there anything specifically we should be doing? We have two
25 more ambassadors within the remaining time, which is

1 limited.

2 Ambassador Jones: Thanks, Senator Peters. I think
3 that we can be proud of our record on stabilization
4 throughout Iraq, and I think continuing to invest in
5 stabilization, which is an immediate, fast-action, low-cost
6 process of restoring electricity, water, education to
7 communities so that people return to their homes. That's
8 probably the best thing that we can do for them.

9 I want to associate myself with all of Ambassador
10 Crocker's remarks and also add that when we meet with these
11 Christian leaders in Iraq, they say please don't make it so
12 easy for our people to leave Iraq, because we're losing our
13 communities here, and the more we lose our communities, the
14 weaker we become. So we have to think, as Ambassador
15 Crocker said, through second-, third-, and fourth-order
16 consequences.

17 But the best thing we can do, I think, is help people
18 return to their homes and help build up institutions in Iraq
19 that will protect the rights of these individuals.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you.

21 Senator Inhofe: Senator Rounds?

22 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 Gentlemen, first of all, let me just say thank you for
24 your service to our country. What you do goes unnoticed in
25 many cases, and yet it is so critical to our long-term

1 successes in international diplomacy, which is much more
2 desirable than international intervention with military
3 force.

4 Let me go back to the JCPOA for just a moment. I want
5 to just walk through the logic of where we're at today. The
6 reality is, it's in place. The reality is that we have up-
7 fronted with resources that were committed by the United
8 States to Iran. Those have been received by them. Now the
9 obligation to execute their portion of the contract, the
10 JCPOA, is in place, and they have certain obligations that
11 they have to respond to.

12 I question whether or not there is built into the JCPOA
13 the appropriate penalties involved for their failure to do
14 so, and I'd like to challenge, if I could, the thought
15 process that I'm laying in front of you that this is really
16 a one-sided obligation forward. This is up to them as to
17 whether or not they respond, and yet at the same time, since
18 there is nothing more that we have to do with this in terms
19 of any other obligation that we're committed to if they
20 behave, if they behave, then the JCPOA has simply delayed
21 the time period in which they will have nuclear
22 capabilities.

23 On the other hand, if they do not, then simply the
24 JCPOA has not worked, other than the fact that we have other
25 allies who have supported this effort and who are also part

1 of the international community who may or may not feel some
2 obligation to condemn Iran when they do or if they do fail.

3 Would you, if I could ask each of you briefly, could
4 you either correct my assumptions involved in the discussion
5 or reaffirm what I'm suggesting?

6 Ambassador Jeffrey: Let me start, Senator. I was
7 involved, as was Ambassador Edelman, in the Bush
8 Administration, which took the basic decision not to use
9 unilateral means, which is a euphemism for war, to deal with
10 the Iranian problem, but to go to the P5+1. That was formed
11 during the Bush Administration to negotiate internationally.
12 When you go down that route with the IAEA and the non-
13 proliferation treaty and the U.N. Security Council, you're
14 going to get a marginal product because that's the nature of
15 international affairs.

16 What we got was a marginal product. It also does the
17 job for 10 years of keeping them a year away from having a
18 nuclear capability if they adhere to it.

19 Your specific question was do we have tools if they
20 don't adhere to it. The answer is absolutely. Article 36
21 allows any member, including Iran, by the way, if the others
22 are not living up to their actions, to stop all or a part of
23 the commitments made under the agreement. That would
24 include our sanctions. That's Article 36. There's a
25 process you have to go through for about three months to try

1 to convince the others and try to resolve it. But at the
2 end of the day, you can unilaterally within the agreement
3 stop doing things that you were supposed to do in it. And
4 again, Iran can retaliate.

5 The second thing is you have the snap-back provisions
6 of Article 37 at the end of that process. We, as a state
7 that has the veto in the U.N., it leads to a U.N. resolution
8 essentially saying continue this agreement, and if you veto
9 it, the agreement basically dies, or the U.N. aspects of it
10 die, which is tantamount to killing it.

11 So there are very powerful tools that we do have within
12 this 10-year period. But at the end of the 10 years, as
13 President Obama admitted, it's a different ball game, and
14 we're going to have to figure out what we're going to do
15 with that then.

16 Senator Rounds: Other thoughts?

17 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Rounds, I largely agree
18 with you, and let me make just three points, some of which
19 goes back to Senator King's question.

20 First, I think the JCPOA was inadequate in dealing with
21 the past military dimensions of Iran's activity. The IAEA
22 ended up closing the file on that without really getting to
23 the bottom of all the issues that had been raised in the
24 2011, the November 2011 IAEA report, NXK I think it was,
25 that outlined all the different problems that more than 10

1 countries' intelligence services had provided evidence to
2 the IAEA about with regard to military activities. Without
3 that as a baseline, it becomes very difficult to verify the
4 agreement.

5 Secondly, the provisions of the JCPOA itself for
6 inspections were far from the anytime/anyplace that was
7 originally promised and which, for instance, were a very
8 important part of verifying South Africa's abandonment of
9 its nuclear program.

10 And then the third element is, I think, what I call the
11 under-compliance which we've seen, which is the nibbling
12 around the edges, which are activities Iran is engaged in
13 which were then "solved" by side deals after the fact. So
14 twice Iran -- and this is in answer to Senator King's
15 question -- twice Iran exceeded the amount of heavy water it
16 was allowed to produce. Once we solved it by buying it,
17 once we allowed them to switch it out for Russian uranium.
18 They missed other deadlines for amounts of low enriched
19 uranium above certain percentages and certain amounts, which
20 we then solved by, again, these side deals.

21 So there hasn't been a major violation. The IAEA has
22 said that repeatedly. But there has been this pattern of
23 nibbling around the edges, which I think is very dangerous
24 because over time it conditions the Iranians to believe that
25 they can engage in bigger violations and perhaps get away

1 with it.

2 Senator Rounds: Thank you, and I apologize. My time
3 has expired, but I most certainly appreciate all of your
4 service, and thank you very much for your responses today.
5 Thank you.

6 Senator Inhofe: Senator Blumenthal?

7 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 You are probably aware that on Monday, Turkey will meet
9 with Russia to finalize a deal to purchase the Russian S-400
10 surface-to-air missile system. Saudi Arabia has also
11 expressed an interest in this system. I'm concerned that
12 this trend or that this kind of action may be part of a
13 trend, a very troubling trend of our allies in the region
14 turning toward Russia to invest in this kind of system.
15 Among its other distinctions, it is incapable of
16 integration, or at least not readily so, in the United
17 States or NATO defenses.

18 My question to all of you -- and I really appreciate
19 your being here. Your insight and expertise is enormously
20 valuable to us, as it has been while you were in service.
21 What should we be doing to address this issue? If these
22 systems are purchased and installed, what are the
23 implications for our military and our diplomacy around the
24 world?

25 Ambassador Crocker: Well, as the person who knows

1 least about Turkey, let me start. It's an important
2 question, Senator, without doubt. I think, as you
3 suggested, there are some real issues of the effect this
4 will have on Turkey's defense capabilities. As you know,
5 it's a Russian system. It's not compatible with Turkey's
6 systems, which are our systems, and have been for the last
7 70-odd years.

8 But I do think we need to take a deep breath on this
9 one. Turkey was a founding member of NATO precisely because
10 of the Soviet Union. They have a history going back through
11 the Ottoman Empire of confrontations between two great
12 empires, theirs and the Russian Empire. So I think there
13 are some natural limitations here.

14 I would say with respect to what we should do,
15 obviously Turkey is doing a lot of things we don't like.
16 They are a NATO partner in a region where we don't have a
17 choice between democracy and autocracy. That's not on the
18 table. It's the forces of order versus the forces of
19 disorder. Turkey has always been a force of order. I think
20 we, again, need to engage, if we could just get a few
21 assistant secretaries confirmed, and ambassadors, and start
22 going through the relationship, as happened under Ambassador
23 Jeffrey and Ambassador Edelman. We need to get back to that
24 point where, indeed, Turkey is a NATO ally.

25 Finally, I would just say one of the reasons we are

1 where we are was the consistent refusal of the European
2 Union to seriously entertain Turkey's bid for membership,
3 good enough to fight and die for NATO but not good enough to
4 join the gentleman's club of the EU. The Turks are a proud
5 people. They were embarrassed, I think, by that, and
6 Erdogan seized on it.

7 So everybody needs to take a deep breath here. I think
8 this is salvageable, but we kind of need to get on with it.

9 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

10 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Blumenthal, I agree
11 largely with what Ambassador Crocker said. First, again, a
12 little bit of historical context to be fair to our Turkish
13 allies. On a couple of occasions over the past decade and a
14 half, when the issue of defending Turkey from ballistic
15 missile threats came up, it was tough to get the NATO assets
16 down to Turkey because of reluctance on the part of some of
17 our allies who dispose of the assets and debates inside of
18 NATO, and I think that's opened a question mark in Turkish
19 minds about whether NATO will actually, at the end of the
20 day, be there to defend them, to be fair to them.

21 Having said that, it's very clear that the S-400 is not
22 compatible with NATO systems, as Ambassador Crocker said,
23 and that was also true of a Chinese system that they were
24 thinking about buying before the S-400 became available to
25 them.

1 We do need, I think, to engage with them and remind
2 them of what that actually means, both for broader NATO
3 defense but also for Turkey's defense, because it means
4 there are going to be a lot of early-warning assets that
5 won't be available to them that will put them at some risk,
6 and that does require an ambassador in place. We do have an
7 Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, which is a good
8 thing, a very capable one, as a matter of fact, but we need
9 to get them engaged in this now rather than wait until it's
10 too late.

11 I mean, one of my concerns about the lack of staffing
12 in the Administration has been that, if we go back to
13 something we discussed earlier in this hearing, which was
14 the miscalculation of Massoud Barzani about the referendum
15 in Kurdistan, I think the United States Government was very
16 late to publicly get out there and express its opposition to
17 this. Back in the good old days when giants walked the
18 earth, and I'm talking about my colleagues to the left and
19 right, we would have been engaged in this at a much earlier
20 point in time and have had more time to manage the problem,
21 I believe.

22 Ambassador Jeffrey: The entire NATO missile defense
23 system focused on Iran that the Obama Administration put in
24 following the Bush Administration is based on NATO radars
25 that then-Prime Minister Erdogan personally agreed to in

1 2009 or 2010.

2 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. My time has expired,
3 so I apologize. I have a lot more questions on this, but
4 whether or not giants ever walked the earth, I think we
5 would settle for a few ordinary experienced human beings in
6 those ambassadorships today. Men of your caliber would be
7 even better, men and women of your caliber would be even
8 better, but there is no ambassador to Turkey right now.
9 There are no ambassadors in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt,
10 Jordan, Somalia, certainly very critical roles that have to
11 be filled, and the connection between our military strength
12 and our diplomatic strength is inextricable, as you know,
13 and unfortunately it's been ignored by this administration.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Senator Inhofe: Senator Kaine?

16 Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all
17 of you. I just would recommend to my colleagues -- I
18 apologize for being late today, but the Foreign Relations
19 Committee had a closed briefing on the Administration's new
20 counter-terrorism guideline proposal, which is the proposal
21 for changing the Obama doctrine about the use of drones, and
22 I think some on the committee have received that briefing.
23 But I would encourage -- because it really bears on this
24 topic today, I would encourage everybody to try to get that
25 briefing.

1 I had been following a little bit when I wasn't here
2 the questions that were asked and, Ambassador Jones, you
3 talked about the Kurdish referendum in your opening
4 statement. But I would really like to have all of you
5 address this issue, not just the referendum but working down
6 the road with us on the Kurds. They have been wonderful
7 partners. Their independence aspirations creates real
8 challenges down the road for a unified Iraq.

9 They have been wonderful partners in Syria, but our
10 work with the Kurds in Syria has been one of these agitation
11 points, among others, with our relationship with Turkey as
12 an ally.

13 What do you think the long-term policy of the United
14 States should be vis-a-vis the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria?

15 Ambassador Jones: Well, I think in the first instance,
16 as we agreed, the referendum has had negative effects for
17 the Kurds. So we should focus our efforts now on
18 reconciling between Erbil and Baghdad. I think many of us
19 here are close and warm friends with Massoud Barzani. I
20 still think that he is an outstanding leader in Kurdistan.
21 But now the Kurds and Prime Minister Abadi need to find ways
22 to return to the level of cooperation that they enjoyed in
23 the lead-up to the Mosul campaign.

24 I'm frankly more troubled by the situation in
25 northeastern Syria, although I think it was absolutely

1 necessary to carry out the military cooperation we have. I
2 think now we do need to take seriously the Turks' concerns
3 about the rise of the YPG there, and we need to make sure
4 that our military presence there does not create a political
5 monopoly for a political organization that is really hostile
6 to U.S. values and ideology.

7 So I think my concern about the referendum in Iraq was
8 that it wasn't well prepared, it wasn't coordinated with us,
9 it wasn't coordinated with the Iranians, who do have a role,
10 and it wasn't coordinated with the Turks and with Baghdad.
11 So I think that's the lesson, that if the Kurds want to move
12 forward on this agenda, there needs to be much more
13 deliberation and understanding between all of the parties in
14 the region on how this should go forward.

15 Senator Kaine. Other comments?

16 Ambassador Jeffrey: The region, and that begins with
17 Turkey, can -- as I said, the Turks are allowing us to
18 support the PKK offshoot Kurds in Syria every day --
19 reluctantly, with a lot of bitching, but they do it.

20 The region, and Turkey in particular, can support
21 autonomous Kurdish entities to one or another degree -- and
22 it varies because these are very different kinds of Kurds in
23 the two countries, in Syria and Iraq -- as long as it fits,
24 as long as we're there, the Turks know why we're there, and
25 the Turks' interests are taken care of, and these are not

1 violations of the unity of those countries involved. In
2 Syria, I'm less concerned. But with Iraq, Senator, that's 5
3 million barrels of oil produced on a good day. They don't
4 have many good days with the OPEC quota and such, but they
5 can do that today if they needed to, and they can go up soon
6 to 7 or 8. That's getting into the Saudi Arabia category.
7 That's a very important trump card, so to speak, in the
8 Middle East, and we don't want to just break it up.

9 The timing was wrong, the idea was wrong, and what it
10 has done is it has set the Kurds back terribly in terms of
11 their ability to survive, because much of the oil they were
12 exporting now is in central government hands. The Turks are
13 still allowing them to export their own oil, but that's
14 about half of what they were exporting before, 650,000
15 barrels.

16 So there is major political, security, and economic
17 aspects of this, and they have gone in three months from one
18 of the best good-news stories in the region to another
19 basket case.

20 Senator Kaine. Mr. Chairman, my time is running out,
21 but I know you're interested in this question too. Could I
22 let the other two witnesses answer the question as well?
23 Please? Thank you.

24 Ambassador Edelman: Senator Kaine, I'm not sure how
25 much to add to what Ambassador Jones and Ambassador Jeffrey

1 just said. We're wrestling here with a problem that is
2 really, in a way, the last remnant of the Ottoman Empire,
3 because the Kurds are the largest nationality in the world
4 without a state, spread among four different states.

5 I think all of us who have wrestled with this have, by
6 and large, believed that if you could get decently organized
7 societies that took into account minority rights, they would
8 be better off as citizens of a pluralistic Syria, Iraq,
9 Iran, and Turkey. In some sense, Turkey might have been the
10 best case for that, and the opening that President Erdogan,
11 back when he was prime minister, did to the Kurds I think
12 was one of the most promising and constructive things he's
13 done in his time in office, and that now, unfortunately, has
14 fallen by the wayside.

15 I think at the end of the day that's still the right
16 answer, but right now things are so much in flux in the
17 region that we may have to revisit this whole question about
18 what the status of the Kurds is depending on how well these
19 other states hold together over time.

20 Senator Kaine. Mr. Ambassador?

21 Ambassador Crocker: Great question, Senator. We have,
22 of course, a long history with the Kurds of that region, and
23 it isn't very pretty, particularly for them. I think above
24 all what we need to do now is not, even with the best
25 intentions, get them into a position where they are crossing

1 red lines inside these states or across state boundaries,
2 because we're probably not going to be around to back them
3 up when the going gets rough. It's the same as, sadly, with
4 the Christian communities.

5 We are seen, broadly speaking, as a great power that
6 comes and then goes, and there's just a lot to support that
7 in the broader region. So I think the first thing we need
8 to do is see if we can turn the referendum and its failure
9 into the beginning of a discussion of now what for them. I
10 think all of us here feel this way. Sadly, there are more
11 nationalisms than there are nations, and the one thing that
12 Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria before 2011 all agreed on was
13 no Kurdish state. Until that shifts, I think it would be
14 the height of folly and of danger to encourage these
15 aspirations on the part of the Kurds.

16 Senator Kaine. Mr. Chair, thank you.

17 Senator Inhofe: I thank you very much for bringing
18 that up. We had both expressed a lot of concern back during
19 the referendum time, and also one of the things that you may
20 not be as aware of as we are, that Barzani has had a very
21 close relationship with a lot of us over a lot of years, and
22 it's been good.

23 We had decided, Senator Reed and I, that we would not
24 have a second round. However, if either one of you want to
25 pursue anything further, we can do that.

1 Let me just thank very much the panel. This has been a
2 great panel. I kind of agree with what was stated by one of
3 the members here, that you need to be appearing before one
4 other committee that's out there.

5 And I want to thank you, Ambassador Crocker, for
6 bringing out our deficiencies in confirmations. That needs
7 to be said.

8 Thank you very much for being here.

9 [Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25