

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND UNITED STATES AFRICA
COMMAND

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

Washington, D.C.

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1 HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
2 UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND
3 UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND
4 IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST
5 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019 AND
6 THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

7
8 Tuesday, March 13, 2018
9

10 U.S. Senate
11 Committee on Armed Services
12 Washington, D.C.
13

14 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:29 a.m. in
15 Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. James M.
16 Inhofe, presiding.

17 Committee Members Present: Senators Inhofe
18 [presiding], Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis,
19 Sullivan, Perdue, Graham, Scott, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill,
20 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine,
21 King, Warren, and Peters.
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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S.
2 SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Our meeting will come to order.

4 The committee today meets to receive testimonies on the
5 posture of the U.S. Central and African Commands.

6 We welcome our witnesses, General Votel and General
7 Waldhauser, and thank each one of you for your great
8 service.

9 In advance of this hearing, Chairman McCain asked that
10 I submit a statement for the record on his behalf. I will
11 quote that statement.

12 Quote: As we turn our attention to the central
13 challenge of great power competition, the National Defense
14 Strategy challenged us to think about our efforts in the
15 Middle East in new and different ways. With all of the
16 recent success in the fight against ISIS, we must work to
17 consolidate our gains and move forward with a coherent
18 regional strategy to ensure security and stability.
19 Unquote.

20 This committee looks forward to working with this
21 year's National Defense Authorization Act to provide the
22 policies and authorities needed to adjust to this new
23 approach both in the Middle East and in Africa, where the
24 threat of violent extremism is increasing dramatically.

25 For CENTCOM, over the past year, we have seen

1 remarkable progress in the fight against ISIS. Military
2 victories in Mosul and Raqqah and beyond have helped
3 dismantle the caliphate ISIS once claimed in the Middle
4 East.

5 At the same time, significant challenges remain in the
6 region. The Syrian civil war rages on. Iran continues to
7 grow its influence and fund its proxies. According to the
8 region, we face serious questions about the Kurds, many of
9 whom have fought by our side valiantly.

10 For AFRICOM, I will make one statement that I think is
11 significant for us to keep in mind for the purpose of this
12 hearing.

13 General Waldhauser, it is my understanding the
14 investigation into the October 2017 ambush in Niger by ISIS-
15 affiliated fighters that killed four U.S. soldiers is
16 completed. I understand it is now pending review by the
17 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford, and
18 the Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis. After his approval,
19 AFRICOM will immediately offer a brief to the families of
20 the four soldiers if they desire prior to any in-depth
21 briefing to Congress. Obviously, we want the families to
22 have an opportunity know what happened to their loved ones.

23 Accordingly, I understand that you are not able to
24 comment on the investigation's results during this posture
25 hearing. And at the conclusion of the briefs to the

1 families, I know you will be providing us with a thorough
2 briefing of the investigation's findings and
3 recommendations.

4 Now, we want to talk about Africa and AFRICOM. Our
5 troops have an important mission there to train and assist
6 regional partners so that they will be capable of handling
7 security threats before they become global crises. Our
8 engagements in Africa are critical not only to regional
9 stability but to our own national security, but it lacks
10 dedicated troops, resources, sufficient basing, and
11 strategic access.

12 Senator Reed?

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

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

4 And I want to thank our witnesses for appearing today,
5 for also your service and the service of the men and women
6 you command. And thank you very much and thank them,
7 please.

8 You are leading your commands in very challenging
9 times. We are in the 16th year of military engagement in
10 Afghanistan, for example. Early last year, General
11 Nicholson, Commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan, testified
12 we were facing a stalemate. Since that time, the
13 administration has announced a new South Asian strategy,
14 articulated a negotiated settlement as the desired end
15 state, moved additional forces into the theater to support
16 the military elements of the strategy, and curtailed
17 security assistance to Pakistan.

18 Despite these shifts, 2017 continued to be plagued by
19 widespread violence and instability in Afghanistan as the
20 Taliban expanded their territorial control and conducted a
21 number of large-scale attacks against military and civilian
22 targets.

23 In addition, ISIS-Khorasan remains resilient despite
24 significant pressure.

25 While the administration has clearly laid out a

1 military strategy, battlefield victories are hollow without
2 political and economic progress, both of which seem stalled
3 in Afghanistan.

4 However, the Trump administration has yet to articulate
5 the political governance or economic aspects of the
6 strategy, much less the associated staffing and resources
7 that will be required to implement it.

8 And, General Votel, I am interested in your assessment
9 of the situation in Afghanistan. I am sure all of my
10 colleagues are also.

11 In Iraq and Syria, the destruction of the so-called
12 physical caliphate previously enjoyed by ISIS is a
13 significant victory, and I commend the administration and
14 your leadership and your colleagues too for this U.S.-led
15 international coalition. And our Iraq and Syria partners on
16 the ground have done so much. However, ISIS is not defeated
17 and will remain a threat for the foreseeable future.

18 Additionally, the underlying issues that gave rise to
19 ISIS in the first place remain unaddressed. We need strong
20 U.S. diplomatic leadership to help bring about the necessary
21 political accommodations that will give Sunni communities a
22 stake in their future and to bring the international
23 community together to assist communities recovering from
24 ISIS.

25 As some experts have stated, the seeds of the next

1 insurgency are sown in the rubble of Mosul and Raqqa. In
2 Iraq alone, the cost of reconstruction is expected to be at
3 least \$88 billion, and the international community has
4 pledged less than one-third of that amount.

5 I am deeply concerned that the administration's
6 marginalization of our diplomatic corps undermines our
7 ability to stabilize the areas once held by ISIS, as well as
8 the broader region. It is notable that across the CENTCOM
9 and AFRICOM areas of responsibility, a number of
10 ambassadorial posts remain vacant, most notably in Jordan
11 and Somalia, where I recently visited, but also in Saudi
12 Arabia, Qatar, Libya, and Egypt. And this is not a question
13 of congressional inaction. No nominations have been
14 forthcoming, and I am sure our colleagues, all of them,
15 would rapidly move to consider nominees for these very
16 important positions.

17 Military power alone will not be enough to address the
18 national security challenges we face in these complicated
19 regions in any enduring way. We must have the people in
20 place to help ensure our long-term strategic objectives are
21 met.

22 On Iran, the President risks creating a foreign policy
23 crisis by threatening to withdraw from the Joint
24 Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. By all accounts,
25 the JCPOA is working as intended, and Iran is verifiably

1 meeting its commitments under the agreement. Let there be
2 no doubt. Iran continues to be a state sponsor of terror
3 and abuser of human rights. Iran continues to destabilize
4 the region through its development of ballistic missiles and
5 support for proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and
6 elsewhere. The JCPOA was not intended to address all of
7 Iran's bad behavior, just the nuclear aspect. If Iran
8 behaves this way without a nuclear weapon, imagine how much
9 worse it would be with a nuclear-armed force.

10 Withdrawing from the JCPOA would be a devastating blow
11 not only for the Middle East, but also for our efforts
12 diplomatically with North Korea and for any future
13 diplomatic efforts to constrain aggressive behavior by our
14 adversaries.

15 General Votel, I am interested in hearing if you, like
16 Secretary Mattis and General Dunford, believe that remaining
17 in the deal is in the best interest of the nation.

18 In Africa, the importance of relationships is paramount
19 as we seek to engage by, with, and through our partners in
20 the furtherance of our shared security goals. I recently
21 traveled to East Africa where I saw firsthand the ongoing
22 efforts to disrupt violent extremists and build capacity
23 with critical partners in places like Djibouti and Somalia.
24 I also saw the challenges from competitors, such as China
25 and Russia, who are actively seeking investments and

1 involvement across the continent.

2 Despite some battlefield success against groups like Al
3 Shabaab, Boko Haram, and ISIS affiliates, many governments
4 in the region have struggled to translate security gains
5 into durable outcomes.

6 As we turn our attention to the great power competition
7 articulated by the National Defense Strategy, we must be
8 mindful not to focus exclusively on these issues at the
9 expense of other threats such as terrorist organizations,
10 rogue regimes, and other non-state actors and criminal
11 organizations, issues that are unfortunately present in both
12 of your commands.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 And thank you, gentlemen, for your service.

15 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

16 We will now have opening statements by our two guests,
17 and your entire statement will be made a part of the record.
18 General Votel?

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER,
2 UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

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

8 I am pleased to be here today with my fellow combatant
9 commander and fellow Minnesotan, General Tom Waldhauser of
10 the U.S. Africa Command.

11 I come before you today on behalf of over 80,000
12 members of the command, U.S. military, civilians, and
13 coalition members from 71 nations. In the most complex area
14 of the globe, they serve and sacrifice on a daily basis, in
15 many cases for the benefit of not only American strategic
16 interests but also the world's. Our people are the very
17 best at what they do, and they and especially their families
18 deserve our admiration and gratitude. It is my sincere
19 honor to lead and be a member of such a fine team and
20 dedicated professionals.

21 Since I last appeared before the committee last year,
22 we have made considerable military progress across the
23 region. However, as we consolidate our gains in places like
24 Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, we remain clear-eyed about
25 the challenges that the region continues to present. In the

1 past year, we have achieved incredible success against ISIS
2 in both Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi Security Forces and the
3 Syrian Democratic Forces are operating at their most
4 effective levels and have liberated over 98 percent of the
5 territory previously held by ISIS. The destruction of the
6 ISIS physical caliphate is within our grasp and thousands of
7 displaced persons are returning home and beginning the long
8 task of rebuilding. Now we must consolidate gains by
9 investing in the security forces, relationships, and
10 capabilities that will hold the territory and keep ISIS from
11 returning.

12 Based upon that progress, CENTCOM is conducting an
13 operational alignment and rebalancing effort to achieve
14 three goals.

15 The first goal is to complete major combat operations
16 in Iraq and Syria to bring the Defeat ISIS campaign to a
17 responsible close. Military success in the campaign
18 presents us an opportunity to reposition forces from Iraq
19 and Syria to Afghanistan in a manner that keeps the pressure
20 on ISIS but also sets us up to break the stalemate in
21 Afghanistan. We retain sufficient capability to continue
22 our efforts against ISIS despite the increasingly complex
23 situation across Syria and especially in the northwest
24 province of Afrin. Our partners on the ground in Syria have
25 gotten us a long way in Syria toward our objectives, and we

1 must stick with them through the completion of this fight.

2 In Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces are rapidly
3 consolidating gains and preparing to support elections later
4 this spring.

5 The second goal is to prioritize the implementation of
6 the South Asia strategy in Afghanistan, reaffirming our
7 enduring commitment to Afghanistan by reinforcing the two
8 complementary military missions: the NATO-led train,
9 advise, and assist mission, and the U.S. counterterrorism
10 mission. With our support, the Afghan National Defense and
11 Security Forces are well postured to begin operations to
12 seize the initiative, to expand population control and
13 secure credible elections.

14 Part and parcel of this effort is our regionalized
15 approach to engage all countries with a stake in
16 Afghanistan's stability, especially Pakistan where we seek a
17 more productive and trustful relationship that benefits our
18 mutual objectives in the region.

19 The third goal is to ensure that we have aligned our
20 military efforts with our broader interagency and
21 international activities to neutralize, counterbalance, and
22 shape the destabilizing impact of Iran. Make no mistake.
23 Iran's malign activities across the region pose the long-
24 term threat to stability in this part of the world.

25 The recently published National Defense Strategy

1 rightly identifies the resurgence of great power competition
2 as our principal national security challenge, and we see the
3 effects of that competition throughout the region. Russia's
4 support of the Assad regime has not only propped him up but
5 has also added complexity to the Defeat ISIS campaign.
6 Moscow plays both arsonist and fire fighter, fueling
7 tensions among the Syrian regime, Iran, Turkey, the Syrian
8 Democratic Forces, the United States, and other coalition
9 partners, then serving as a supposed arbiter to resolve
10 disputes. Today, Russia's manipulative behavior has placed
11 our campaign progress at risk with activities that are not
12 focused on the defeat of ISIS, but rather preserving their
13 influence and control over the outcome of the situation.

14 China is pursuing long-term, steady economic growth in
15 the region through its One Belt, One Road policy, but it is
16 also improving military posture and force projection by
17 connecting ports such as Gwadar in Pakistan with its first
18 overseas military base in Djibouti, adjacent to the critical
19 Bab al Mandeb Strait.

20 Both China and Russia not only seek to fill in
21 perceived gaps in U.S. influence with increasing defense
22 cooperation and sales of their equipment to regional
23 partners, but they are also cultivating multi-dimensional
24 ties to Iran.

25 Against this backdrop of increasing great power

1 interaction are the enduring issues of the region: social,
2 economic, and political challenges, high unemployment,
3 falling oil prices, a youth bulge, large numbers of
4 refugees, and longstanding border conflicts. We in CENTCOM
5 stand ready with all of our partners to defend U.S.
6 interests against these and other threats. Our strategic
7 approach of preparing the environment, pursuing
8 opportunities, and prevailing wherever we can is working.
9 We are postured for purpose, proactive in pursuing
10 opportunities, and resolved to win.

11 I would like to close by sharing three dynamics that we
12 assess are essential to prevailing in this region.

13 First, in the conduct of our campaigns in Iraq, Syria,
14 Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon, and Egypt, we have adopted a
15 by, with, and through approach that places a heavy reliance
16 on indigenous partner forces. While this approach does
17 present its own challenges and can be more time consuming,
18 it importantly provides local solutions to local problems.
19 This approach is not without risk, as we are seeing unfold
20 in northern Syria today, but it is proving very effective
21 and will pay significant dividends going forward.

22 Second, successful pursuit of U.S. objectives in this
23 region comes only from an integrated approach aligned with
24 interorganizational partners. Defense of the nation is a
25 team sport. This applies not just within the command but

1 with our fellow combatant commands, the central region's 18
2 country teams, other departments, agencies, and
3 organizations of the U.S. Government and, most importantly,
4 our coalition partners who have provided unwavering support
5 for nearly 2 decades of persistent conflict. As the
6 National Defense Strategy captures clearly, strengthening
7 existing relationships and building new ones will be key to
8 our future success.

9 Finally, we could not do what we do on a daily basis
10 without the support of Congress and, by extension, the
11 American people. We sincerely appreciate this committee's
12 continued strong support for our operations, authorities,
13 and resources and especially for your support to the
14 services, SOCOM, and the other defense agencies that we rely
15 upon for our military wherewithal. Your support will remain
16 important as we contend with what potentially are
17 generational struggles to defend our homeland from the
18 threats outlined in our National Defense Strategy.

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

21 [The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]

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1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, General Votel.
2 General Waldhauser?
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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL THOMAS D. WALDHAUSER, USMC,
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Waldhauser: Senator Inhofe, Ranking Member
4 Reed, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for
5 the opportunity to update you on the efforts of the United
6 States Africa Command.

7 I am also honored to be here today with General Votel
8 and discuss many of the concerns we share between CENTCOM
9 and AFRICOM, including countering violent extremist
10 organizations.

11 I would like to begin this morning by remembering the
12 soldiers and sailor we lost on the continent during
13 operations this past year. I also want to share my respects
14 for the loss of our African partner forces who, during their
15 efforts in the fight against extremism, gave the ultimate
16 sacrifice this past year as well. We honor their
17 commitment, service, and dedication to duty, and I offer my
18 sincere condolences to the families of our fallen U.S.
19 comrades and those of our African partners.

20 Senator Inhofe, I have completed my review of the Niger
21 investigation and forwarded the report to the Secretary of
22 Defense through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
23 Once the Secretary completes his review and after the
24 families have been briefed, I intend to provide a
25 comprehensive and detailed account of the investigation to

1 you as soon as practicable.

2 This morning, I would like to talk to you about
3 AFRICOM's strategy for the continent and update you on our
4 priority regional efforts.

5 The U.S. interests in Africa are reflected in our
6 mission statement. AFRICOM with partners strengthens
7 security forces, counters transnational threats, and
8 conducts crisis response in order to advance U.S. national
9 interests and promote regional security, stability, and
10 prosperity in Africa. Our mission statement deliberately
11 highlights the importance of "with partners."

12 Following up on this point, very few, if any, of the
13 challenges on the African continent can be resolved through
14 the use of exclusive military force. Accordingly, AFRICOM's
15 first strategic tenet underscores our military activities
16 and is designed to support and enable U.S. diplomatic and
17 development efforts. We can create time and space for
18 governments to establish effective and accountable
19 governance while fostering conditions for economies to
20 develop.

21 Our second theme describes our strategic approach of
22 by, with, and through. This framework emphasizes our main
23 effort to build the capacity of African partner defense
24 forces to credibly provide for their own security. While
25 African nations have enormous potential, they are often

1 challenged by instability and exploitation stemming from the
2 disruption caused by violent extremist organizations, or
3 VEOs. These VEO groups take advantage of vast ungoverned
4 spaces and recruit from populations lacking economic
5 opportunities.

6 We approach these security threats through our third
7 strategic principle of keeping pressure on the networks of
8 VEOs, such as Al Shabaab, ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram, in
9 order to mitigate their destabilizing influence. At the
10 same time, we remain postured and ready to respond to
11 contingencies and to protect U.S. personnel and facilities
12 on the continent.

13 These strategic themes and AFRICOM's approach are
14 aligned with the national level guidance. In accordance
15 with the recently released National Defense Strategy and in
16 the context of changes in the operating environment, we are
17 updating our strategy and theater campaign plan to reflect
18 the guidance provided by the Secretary of Defense.

19 Turning now to our regional efforts, I would like to
20 describe for you some of the challenges we face each day on
21 the continent.

22 In East Africa, AFRICOM's contributions are part of an
23 international commitment to help Somalia implement their
24 recently designed national security architecture. Al
25 Shabaab remains a threat to Somalia and the region, as

1 demonstrated by their October 2017 bombing in Mogadishu that
2 killed over 500 people. The challenges facing the federal
3 government of Somalia are enormous. Nevertheless, they
4 continue to slowly make progress with a long way to go
5 before they are prepared to secure their own territory with
6 international partners and organizations, including the
7 African Union and the European Union, AFRICOM's kinetic and
8 capacity building efforts to assist the federal government
9 of Somalia with the implementation of their comprehensive
10 approach to security sector reform.

11 In North Africa, Libya remains politically and
12 militarily divided with leaders and factions vying for power
13 ahead of potential elections later this year. In close
14 cooperation with the U.S. embassy's Libyan External Office,
15 located in Tunis, and as part of the international effort,
16 AFRICOM supports diplomatic objectives for political
17 reconciliation. We will continue to work with the UN-
18 established government of national accord and maintain
19 pressure on the ISIS, Libya, and Al Qaeda networks in that
20 country.

21 The Sahel refers to the Sahara to Savannah Transition
22 Belt spanning the broadest part of Africa from the Atlantic
23 Ocean to the Red Sea. AFRICOM supports multinational
24 efforts in the western Sahel and in the nearby Lake Chad
25 basin region of West Africa. We provide training, advice,

1 and assistance to the G5 Sahel countries and the
2 multinational joint task force in order to help them contain
3 violent extremism and secure their borders.

4 In conclusion, the continued progress on the continent
5 with our partners reflects dedicated efforts by the men and
6 women of AFRICOM. I am proud to lead these professionals
7 who have built strong and trusting relationships with the
8 U.S. interagency and with our international community in
9 order to foster the security, stability, and prosperity on
10 the African continent.

11 On behalf of the service members, civilian employees,
12 and families of the United States Africa Command, thank you
13 for the opportunity to be with you this morning, and I look
14 forward to your questions.

15 [The prepared statement of General Waldhauser follows:]

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1 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, General Waldhauser.

2 Just less than a month ago, Senators Ernst, Rounds, and
3 Sullivan and I spent quite a bit of time in the South China
4 Sea seeing, witnessing firsthand what China is doing there.
5 They talk about reclaiming land. And I suggest it is not
6 reclaiming land because there is no land to reclaim. It is
7 creating land. And while they have been doing this for some
8 time, it has kind of gone unnoticed. They are up now to
9 over 3,000 acres that they have created, all staffed with
10 nothing but military staff in there. So obviously, it
11 concerns a lot of people, and a lot of people in the region.
12 In fact, a lot of our allies in the region look at China as
13 someone more significant than we are because they do not see
14 that type of thing from us.

15 Now, I know this is not your AOR, General Waldhauser.
16 But recently -- and you stated in your opening statement
17 there are requests for a presence in Djibouti. This is very
18 much of a concern. Djibouti is where we have had our
19 marines for quite some time. It is an area that has control
20 over the entrance in the Red Sea and ultimately the Suez
21 Canal. So I am very much concerned about this, and you are
22 too. You said at the House Armed Services last week -- this
23 is your quote. You said if the Chinese took over that port,
24 then the consequences could be significant. Well, if China
25 is successful in taking over the port of Djibouti, could

1 they use their control to threaten U.S. access and our
2 broader freedom to have navigation interests in that region
3 like the Red Sea and Suez Canal?

4 General Waldhauser: Senator Inhofe, thank you very
5 much for the question.

6 Although I am not an expert on port operations, I can
7 tell you a few things about Djibouti that may lend some
8 context to the question.

9 Within the confines of the Djibouti port, there are
10 five activities, two of which are run by the Chinese,
11 obviously, their Chinese naval port for the facility there,
12 and then they have control over what is called a multi-
13 purpose port, which essentially offloads containers. There
14 are three other pieces to the port, one of which is a fuel
15 pier, which an Emirati company owns. Then there is this
16 container pier, which is what has been discussed about the
17 Djiboutian takeover in the past couple of weeks. And then
18 there is what is called an old port where our ships also
19 berth in order to pick up supplies and the like.

20 The Djiboutians annulled a contract that they had with
21 the Dubai Ports World here last week, and they essentially
22 took control of that port. In discussions with our key
23 leadership in the area and with the Secretary of State, who
24 was there this past week, the Djiboutians indicated that
25 they will run that port for the next 6 months and then

1 determine where they will go in terms of sale or in terms of
2 whether they will keep control of that port.

3 The container port, as I described -- basically all of
4 the containers that come through there in Djibouti, whether
5 it is spare parts, whether it is provisions, anything that
6 comes in Djibouti comes through that port. So that port is
7 used quite a bit.

8 We also use the fuel port quite a bit. Between October
9 of 2016 and October of 2017, there were 115 ships that came
10 in there to refuel. The fuel also goes to the base in
11 Djibouti to refuel airplanes and the like.

12 Senator Inhofe: So that is a significant area there.
13 I am running out of time here, but that is what I wanted to
14 get into the record.

15 One area -- in fact, it was Admiral Harris who called
16 this to our attention. In some of the areas where we have
17 done this IMET program, which I have always been very fond
18 of and I think both of you have, they are seeing that China
19 is going after our IMET program in that area. Are you
20 seeing any of this in Africa, on the continent of Africa?
21 Because we had worked extensively on the IMET program down
22 there.

23 General Waldhauser: So it is unclear. It is difficult
24 to get data in terms of China and the IMET program in
25 Africa. On average, the National Defense University in

1 China graduates about 100 or so foreign students a year,
2 some of whom are obviously from Africa. They usually come
3 from about 70 or so countries.

4 By the way, we in the United States -- we have about
5 850 officers from China who go -- sorry -- from Africa who
6 go through various programs, National Defense University
7 seminars and the like, at a cost of about \$22 million.

8 Senator Inhofe: That is good.

9 Let me do this. For the record, because there is not
10 time to do it now, General Waldhauser, I want you to kind of
11 outline the resources because when we built AFRICOM, it was
12 done without resources, and we know who we depend on in
13 cases when we need those resources. So I would like to get
14 in writing some detail on that.

15 [The information follows:]

16 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Inhofe: General Votel, I know that you have
2 some concerns about China and the efforts that you are
3 seeing in China to project their influence in your AOR. Any
4 comments you want to make about your AOR?

5 General Votel: Senator Inhofe, the thing that I would
6 just highlight is that the activities in Djibouti are not
7 only important to AFRICOM, they are extraordinarily
8 important to CENTCOM. This is certainly one of the key
9 areas where we have strong cooperation and collaboration
10 across our geographic combatant command areas here. So I
11 certainly share General Waldhauser's concerns about what is
12 playing out in Djibouti.

13 Senator Inhofe: Yes. In your written statement, you
14 also gave some details on that. And you do make a comment,
15 while Beijing claims that both locations support
16 peacekeeping and humanitarian operations -- and you go on.
17 I do not know how many people believe that. But it is a
18 great concern to this committee.

19 Senator Reed?

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

21 General Votel, as I indicated in my opening remarks,
22 consistent with the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Mattis,
23 and General Dunford, do you believe that it is in our
24 national security interests to stay within the confines of
25 the JCPOA?

1 General Votel: I think from my perspective, the JCPOA
2 addresses one of the principal threats that we deal with
3 from Iran. So if the JCPOA goes away, then we will have to
4 have another way to deal with the nuclear weapons program.
5 So, yes, I share their position.

6 Senator Reed: Thank you.

7 With respect to Syria, it is a very complicated
8 situation, and that is an understatement. One issue
9 involves the Kurds. They fought with us very reliably in
10 the Syrian Defense Forces. Now they are moving to assist
11 fellow Kurds against the Turks in Afrin.

12 It appears that we do not have a policy as to our
13 position vis-a-vis the Kurds within Syria, the Syrian Kurds,
14 and also a longer-term policy as to what do we do. Are we
15 going to have a de facto partition of the country with the
16 SDF, Syrian Defense Forces, guarding that portion? Can you
17 give us some clarity on the policy? I just do not think we
18 have one, to be blunt.

19 General Votel: Senator, we have not operated in the
20 province of Afrin. In our interactions with the Syrian
21 Democratic Forces, they understand that this is an area in
22 which we do not operate and have no intention of operating
23 at this particular point. The concern certainly that we
24 have is that the activities up in Afrin are a distraction to
25 our Defeat ISIS activities right now. There has been an

1 impact of that. We are addressing that. I think we have
2 got very innovative people and partners on the ground that
3 are working to ensure we keep the focus on ISIS. But I am
4 concerned about the long-term aspects of this.

5 Senator Reed: There is a possibility that the Kurds
6 would gradually leave our efforts in order to protect their
7 fellow Kurdish forces in Afrin. That is a possibility. Is
8 it not?

9 General Votel: We have seen that already, Senator.

10 Senator Reed: Thank you.

11 General Waldhauser, thank you for your hospitality when
12 I was passing through AFRICOM.

13 One of the impressions that I received there is that we
14 are keeping some of these forces on their heels by special
15 operations particularly in working with AMISOM and with
16 local forces, but that the real long-term struggle is
17 building capacity in every way, shape, or form. As I
18 pointed out in my opening statement, the sheer lack of State
19 Department presence, ambassadors in Somalia, ambassadors in
20 Libya, ambassadors in Egypt -- is that impairing your
21 ability to get the job done?

22 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator Reed, and thank
23 you and your team for taking the time to come through our
24 AOR. It was very helpful and we appreciate your support and
25 concern.

1 With regard to Somalia, we do two things there
2 primarily. One is the kinetic piece, which we have
3 authorities to strike Al Shabaab targets, and we have done
4 that quite robustly here in the last few months.

5 Additionally, we have a niche in building partnership
6 capacity. But I also would say that the international
7 community plays a big part in that as well. UAE, Turkey,
8 the UK, and so forth also build this capacity. And the key
9 there is that as we talk about AMISOM transition in around
10 the 2020 to 2021 time frame, the Somalian National Security
11 Forces needs to be at a place where they can conduct their
12 own security operations.

13 With regard to the country team and the ambassador, our
14 country team there -- we are very, very tight with them.
15 They, as you know, work out of Nairobi, but now they have a
16 facility at Mogadishu, which they just have moved into here
17 in the last week or so. And we work very closely with them.
18 And the charge does a great job working with President
19 Farmajo because the bottom line is the federal government of
20 Somalia needs a lot of help, a lot of mentoring, and a lot
21 of coaching as President Farmajo moves forward.

22 Senator Reed: I concur. And we do have a good and
23 very courageous team of diplomats on the ground in
24 Mogadishu, but in order to have the impact we need in a very
25 short period of time, we are going to have to up the game

1 dramatically and I do not see that happening on the civilian
2 side. And even your resources are limited as we shift to
3 other priorities and as the National Defense Strategy moves
4 near-peer competition with Russia and China to the forefront
5 leaving both of you with maybe not an economy of force
6 operations but certainly there are different priorities.

7 But thank you all for your service, and please again
8 convey our thanks to the men and women you lead.

9 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Reed.

10 Senator Ernst?

11 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

12 And gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

13 General Votel, I will start with you. And my best to
14 Michele as well. Please send my greetings.

15 General, when I was in Afghanistan a few months ago, I
16 visited military and diplomatic leaders in Kabul, Kandahar,
17 and Baghram. And it seems as though the Taliban is now
18 transitioning from an ideologically inspired group into a
19 narco-terror group, which is using ideology as a veil. And
20 as such, the Department of Defense is focused on destroying
21 processing facilities and their yields as opposed to just
22 simply destroying the poppy fields. And the State
23 Department is very focused on enforcement in conjunction
24 with the FBI and the DEA.

25 Is this strategy different from those strategies that

1 we have used in the past? And if so, how are they
2 different?

3 General Votel: Senator, thank you.

4 They are different. We are using the authorities that
5 have been passed to us recently to ensure that we can go
6 after, as you suggested, these funding streams that are
7 fueling the Taliban right now, and they are proving
8 effective. This is a lesson learned from Iraq and Syria
9 where when we got serious about going after the funding
10 streams that supported ISIS, we started to see an immediate
11 impact. And so that is exactly the attention here.

12 And I do agree with you. They are well resourced by
13 this narco-trafficking that takes place. And so our efforts
14 are not only targeting their production and storage
15 locations but also working with regional partners to help
16 limit the flow of that product out of the region, again
17 trying to impede their ability to benefit from that.

18 Senator Ernst: So you think it is fair that we call
19 them a narco-terror group?

20 General Votel: I think they are absolutely that way,
21 and they take on many of the characteristics of a mob, mafia
22 type of group.

23 This is not a popular insurgency. I think that is an
24 important thing for people to understand. Over 90 percent
25 of the people in Afghanistan do not want the Taliban to be

1 in charge of their country. It is not a popular insurgency.

2 Senator Ernst: And as we fight and try to eradicate
3 their funding streams then, do you believe that we are
4 adequately funded to achieve success?

5 General Votel: I do. I think we have got the
6 necessary resources right now to pursue the strategy that
7 has been laid out for us.

8 Senator Ernst: And then if we are successful in
9 destroying their narcotics industry and their funding
10 sources, what development do we need to see then in
11 Afghanistan to make sure that their people are self-
12 sufficient?

13 General Votel: I think the big idea here is to force
14 the Taliban to reconciliation. And the way we do that is by
15 focusing on military pressure, by focusing on political
16 pressure working with the regional partners such as
17 Pakistan, and it is through social pressure. And this, of
18 course, is ensuring that the Government of Afghanistan
19 continues to make the necessary reforms that President Ghani
20 has already committed to and that he is moving out on as we
21 speak. This includes not only addressing endemic problems
22 with corruption, but also ensuring that fair elections are
23 conducted in the country and that they are addressing some
24 of the leadership challenges they have. And so they are
25 doing these things right now, and I think this will help

1 build confidence in the Government of Afghanistan for the
2 people.

3 Senator Ernst: And I do appreciate that.

4 I am going to focus in a little bit more on the Afghan
5 special operations units. We have had a lot of U.S. effort
6 in Afghanistan building the Afghan air force and increasing
7 the size of their Afghan special operations units. And how
8 will the creation of the Afghan air force and doubling the
9 size of their special ops units change the conditions on the
10 ground as we see them today?

11 General Votel: Well, I think a key part of our
12 operational approach here is to build on what is working in
13 Afghanistan. And certainly their Afghan special operations
14 forces and the air force have been very, very good programs.
15 And essentially what we are focused on doing by doubling the
16 Afghan special operations forces, by building out the air
17 force is to really provide the Government of Afghanistan
18 with a very good offensive capability that can really focus
19 on gaining control of the population, the areas that we need
20 to for the government to exert their writ.

21 So we look at the special operations forces and the air
22 force really as their kind of principal offensive
23 capability. And then the army plays the role as the hold
24 force, and then we are working to get the police to become
25 more competent in their policing functions that are

1 important in the urban and populated areas.

2 Senator Ernst: I appreciate that. Thank you very
3 much.

4 When I was in Afghanistan, I was able to visit with
5 some of those pilots, and they are truly excited about being
6 able to support their own country.

7 So thank you, gentlemen, very much.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

9 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

10 Senator Shaheen?

11 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 And thank you both for your service and for being here
13 today.

14 General Waldhauser, I and a number of other women
15 Senators had the opportunity last week to meet with two
16 young women who had been kidnapped by Boko Haram. They had
17 horrific stories to tell us about seeing family members
18 murdered before their eyes, about being forced into
19 marriage, about being gang raped on an ongoing basis.

20 I asked them what they would like Americans to know
21 about what is happening in Nigeria. They were both
22 Nigerian. And what one of them said to me is that people in
23 the United States should understand that this is not just
24 the Chibok girls, several hundred who, as most of us
25 remember, were kidnapped several years ago. But this is

1 happening to thousands of girls on a daily basis in Nigeria.

2 And the translator who was with them, who was with the
3 organization that brought them to the United States, said
4 that this is a strategy by Boko Haram to impregnate women,
5 to grow a whole next generation with that extremist
6 ideology.

7 So I know that in your statement, you talk about
8 Nigeria's capabilities and capacities growing. But in fact,
9 they have not really been able to address this mass
10 kidnapping of girls in Nigeria. Is that your understanding?
11 And what are we doing to try and support efforts to address
12 what Boko Haram is doing?

13 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Good
14 to see you again.

15 Obviously, Boko Haram is one of the most deplorable
16 organizations on the planet. Since 2009, they have killed,
17 depending on what you read or what statistics you look at,
18 well over 20,000 people, and they have displaced millions.
19 They are notorious for the things that you talked about.

20 With regard to the Chibok girls, you know, almost 4
21 years ago this month, in April 4 years, 276 were taken away.
22 163 have been returned, about 60 percent. In a closed
23 session, I can discuss with you what we think or where we
24 think the other 113 girls are.

25 On February 19th, this happened again in Dapchi.

1 Dapchi is a location that is about 150 miles north of where
2 Chibok is. And although no group has claimed
3 responsibility, based on the location and based on several
4 open sources, we believe it to be ISIS-West Africa. ISIS-
5 West Africa was at one time part of Boko Haram, but they
6 split for a whole host of reasons.

7 One of the things I will tell you is that we have been
8 asked to provide assistance to the Government of Nigeria to
9 try to help find these girls, and we can talk more about
10 that in a closed session. But we are providing assistance
11 in terms of intelligence support, planning, and the like
12 that they have asked us for. They are trying to find a
13 negotiated solution here. That is their desire. But as you
14 say, the security situation especially in Borno State and
15 Yobe State where this took place is very, very precarious.

16 Senator Shaheen: And when we passed the NDAA in 2017,
17 we created a new authority under section 385 that allows the
18 Secretary of Defense to transfer up to \$75 million to USAID
19 and to the Department of State to implement foreign
20 assistance programs. Are these programs that would be
21 helpful as we are looking at the challenges facing women and
22 girls in places like Nigeria where they need to be
23 reintegrated into their societies? And there are challenges
24 with doing that. And can either of you tell me if the
25 Secretary of Defense has requested any of those dollars?

1 General Waldhauser: So, thank you.

2 The 385 program, as you said, is a new one this year.

3 So we have had to work our way through several of the

4 wickets to see how we could apply it and so on.

5 We currently have two proposals that we have put

6 through OSD.

7 One of them has to do with defections inside Niger

8 where we would like to work with the State Department to

9 follow through on our activities. They would complement our

10 activities. So that one is one we put forward.

11 A second one we put forward is in Nigeria but it is in

12 the Gulf of Guinea basin where we are trying to get some of

13 the people there to court on a legal perspective, and the

14 State Department can help us there as they run illegal

15 drugs, weapons, and the like.

16 So we have got two nominations in, and we are hopeful

17 that this is something that can complement our overall

18 kinetic effort as part of the development or diplomacy piece

19 of our activities.

20 Senator Shaheen: Well, I think if this committee can

21 be helpful with that, I hope you will let us know.

22 General Votel, I have only a few seconds left. But I

23 wonder if you could tell us what happened in Syria when our

24 forces engaged with Russia pro-regime forces. It appeared

25 that those were Russian contractors. Is this a new

1 mechanism that Russia is using to engage contractors to
2 serve as mercenaries on the ground for them?

3 General Votel: Senator, thank you.

4 I cannot speculate on what Russia's intentions might
5 be. But in this particular situation, this was in my view a
6 very clear situation of U.S. coalition forces with our
7 partners on the ground defending themselves. We were
8 attacked in this particular case. My view is that our
9 forces responded properly in this case. They immediately
10 identified what was happening. They immediately got on the
11 net with the Russians and were talking with them before,
12 during, after the event and very effectively brought
13 together the right capabilities, whether it was ISR or fire
14 support, to address this. So I think our people responded
15 extraordinarily well.

16 Senator Shaheen: And I am not criticizing.

17 General Votel: I do not know if this is some kind of
18 change in their piece and how they are approaching this. I
19 would just tell you that we remain extraordinarily vigilant
20 to these types of threats and we retain the sufficient
21 capabilities to protect ourselves and our partners on the
22 ground against these types of activities.

23 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Senator.

1 Senator Graham?

2 Senator Graham: Thank you, sir.

3 General Votel, is there any credible opposition to
4 Assad left in Syria?

5 General Votel: Senator, as you know, our mission is
6 defeat of ISIS.

7 Senator Graham: That is not my question. My question
8 is, is there any credible opposition left to Assad in Syria?

9 General Votel: The only opposition that I am aware of
10 is those that are out in the vicinity of Damascus in the
11 Ghouta area and then up in the Idlib area that still
12 controls some terrain. So they do pose some kind of threat
13 to the regime.

14 Senator Graham: Who is winning in Syria -- the civil
15 war?

16 General Votel: Well, again, from a civil war
17 standpoint, it would appear that the regime is ascendant
18 here.

19 Senator Graham: Do you see any likelihood that the
20 forces you just named can topple Assad in the next year?

21 General Votel: That is not my assessment, Senator.

22 Senator Graham: Is Iran helping Assad?

23 General Votel: Iran has been a key enabler of the
24 regime for a while.

25 Senator Graham: Is Russia helping Assad?

1 General Votel: They also are a key enabler of the
2 regime.

3 Senator Graham: Is it too strong a statement to say
4 that with Russia and Iran's help, Assad has won the civil
5 war in Syria?

6 General Votel: I do not think that is too strong of a
7 statement. I think they have provided him the wherewithal
8 to be ascendant at this point.

9 Senator Graham: Is it still our policy that Assad must
10 go?

11 General Votel: I do not know that that is our
12 particular policy at this particular point. Our focus
13 remains on the defeat of ISIS.

14 Senator Graham: Well, if you do not know, I doubt if
15 anybody knows because it is your job to take care of this
16 part of the world.

17 What does it mean if Iran and Russia and Assad have won
18 in Syria? What does it mean to us and to the region?

19 General Votel: I means that we will contend with this
20 influence of Iran in this particular area and with the
21 influence of Russia.

22 Senator Graham: What does it mean to Israel?

23 General Votel: Well, certainly from an Iranian
24 standpoint, it means that Iran could be in a position where
25 they could support Lebanese Hezbollah better and then pose a

1 great threat to Israel.

2 Senator Graham: They are actually doing it. Are they
3 not? They are actually doing that as we speak -- the
4 Iranians.

5 General Votel: We have certainly seen some activities
6 that would certainly support that.

7 Senator Graham: What does it mean for Jordan?

8 General Votel: It means that, again, there are
9 unstable regimes to their north that pose threats to them as
10 well.

11 Senator Graham: Thank you for your clarity and your
12 honesty. It is not your mission in Syria to deal with the
13 Iranian-Assad-Russia problem. That is not in your things to
14 do. Right?

15 General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

16 Senator Graham: Do you think it should be?

17 General Votel: At this point, I think if that was the
18 decision that was made by the U.S.-led coalition leadership
19 here, then we would pursue that.

20 Senator Graham: Detainees. We have rolled up about
21 400 and something detainees in Syria. The Syrian Democratic
22 Forces have about 400 and some people in their charge. Is
23 that correct?

24 General Votel: Senator, I think you are referring to
25 about 400 or so foreign terrorist fighters that they have

1 within their detention.

2 Senator Graham: These are the people that did not die
3 for the cause but were captured as we liberated Raqqa and
4 other areas. Is that right?

5 General Votel: And as they attempted to escape the
6 areas in which we are operating in right now.

7 Senator Graham: Do you think we have a credible plan
8 to detain these people?

9 General Votel: We actually do have a plan to detain
10 them on the ground, and we are working with our partners in
11 the government here to work to get them back to their
12 countries so they can be prosecuted in accordance --

13 Senator Graham: If they do not go back to their
14 countries, do you think we have a credible plan to detain
15 them inside of Syria long term?

16 General Votel: We are working on improving the
17 capacity of the Syrian Democratic Forces to do that right
18 now.

19 Senator Graham: Africa, General Waldhauser. The Sahel
20 is made up of how many countries?

21 General Waldhauser: Well, five, five or so, yes.

22 Senator Graham: Of those five countries, how many
23 would you characterize as failed states?

24 General Waldhauser: I do not think there is a failed
25 state there yet, but there are certainly fragile states in

1 that area.

2 Senator Graham: If trends continue, will they become
3 failed states?

4 General Waldhauser: It is possible.

5 Senator Graham: Do we have a strategy to prevent that?

6 General Waldhauser: Our strategy is to support the G5
7 Sahel. We do that bilaterally with these countries in order
8 for them to --

9 Senator Graham: Is it working?

10 General Waldhauser: It is in the infancy stages. I
11 mean, this G5 program has just begun. You have 5,000
12 individuals covering a very large territory.

13 Senator Graham: So 5,000 people are covering five
14 countries.

15 General Waldhauser: That is correct, the border areas.

16 Senator Graham: I am not a military guy, but that does
17 not sound enough.

18 Does it matter if the Sahel becomes a region of failed
19 states to us, and if so, why?

20 General Waldhauser: It does matter because the groups
21 that are in that area, ISIS, JNIM, and the like -- some of
22 these have aspirations to conduct things regionally, as well
23 as into Europe and into our homeland. It is very important
24 that we contain or that we degrade and we work with our
25 partners because if we had a failed state and if these

1 groups took over that failed state, then you have a
2 situation where it is just vast wastelands where people can
3 plan attacks against the United States.

4 Senator Graham: One last question. Is Libya a failed
5 state, fragile state, state on the mend?

6 General Waldhauser: It is very difficult to
7 characterize Libya, but I would have to say a fragile state.
8 I mean, Salome, who is the UN representative, has got a plan
9 to try to work through a restructuring of the political
10 committees, a constitution, and potentially a vote later
11 this year. But the bottom line is unless the security is
12 there, unless a fair election can take place, and unless
13 those individuals who are part of the process will agree to
14 the outcome of the election, then it would not serve any
15 purpose at this point.

16 Senator Inhofe: Senator Warren?

17 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 And thank you, General Votel and General Waldhauser,
19 for your work.

20 For nearly 3 years, a Saudi Arabia-led coalition has
21 been bombing Yemen to counter Iranian-backed Houthi
22 militias. The United States military has been providing
23 intelligence, mid-air refueling, ammunitions to the Saudis.

24 As I understand it, refueling operations are governed
25 by something called a bilateral acquisition and cross-

1 servicing agreement. The United States has one with both
2 Saudi Arabia and the UAE. And I have read over these
3 documents, and there are a few things they do not seem to
4 cover that I want to ask you about.

5 So, General Votel, does CENTCOM track the purpose of
6 the missions that it is refueling, in other words, where a
7 U.S. refueled aircraft is going, what targets it strikes,
8 and the results of the mission?

9 General Votel: Senator, we do not.

10 Senator Warren: Reuters recently reported on a Saudi
11 coalition air strike in late February that killed five
12 civilians and wounded 14, including four children.
13 According to witnesses that were interviewed by Reuters, the
14 coalition conducted two additional air strikes that hit
15 paramedics who were trying to save civilians in the rubble.

16 General Votel, when you receive reports like this from
17 credible media organizations or outside observers, is
18 CENTCOM able to tell whether U.S. fuel or U.S. munitions
19 were used as part of that strike?

20 General Votel: Senator, I do not believe we are.

21 Senator Warren: So the reason I ask about this is the
22 Yemeni people are suffering, and this is a humanitarian
23 crisis. That is why I cosponsored the Sanders-Lee
24 resolution that directs President Trump to stop our
25 involvement in Saudi military operations in Yemen unless

1 Congress provides specific authorization. The bill would
2 allow our counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda and
3 its affiliates to continue, but it would ensure that the
4 United States is not giving the Saudis a blank check to bomb
5 Yemen and worsen the humanitarian crisis.

6 I know that Iran sanctions against Yemen are
7 destabilizing. They are making the conflict worse, and that
8 is unacceptable. But we need to be clear about this. Saudi
9 Arabia is the one receiving American weapons and American
10 support, and that means we bear some responsibility here.
11 And that means we need to hold our partners and our allies
12 accountable for how those resources are used.

13 I have one other question I would like to turn to, if I
14 can. And that is, earlier this year, Secretary of State
15 Tillerson implied that U.S. troops would stay in Syria
16 indefinitely. In addition to our forces, Hezbollah, Russian
17 forces, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and now
18 Turkish troops are also operating on the ground, and we have
19 already had several run-ins with these forces.

20 With my remaining time, I have just one question.
21 General, how is CENTCOM deconflicting between these various
22 forces that are operating on the ground, and what is your
23 strategy for de-escalation if a confrontation occurs?

24 General Votel: Senator, thank you for the question.

25 First off, the principal we are deconflicting is

1 through direct communications. As you aware, we do have
2 direct communication line with the Russian Federation forces
3 on the ground. I would characterize our conversations with
4 them as militarily professional. They take place several
5 times a day, and they have been going on for a couple of
6 years. And I do think this has been a very effective way of
7 ensuring that we can deconflict and prevent things from
8 happening in ground space and in the air space.

9 We also have the same thing with our Turkish partners
10 to the north. In areas where we are in close proximity,
11 again we have very good communications with them. We are
12 able to deconflict. We are able to ensure that people have
13 good situational awareness, they understand what we are
14 doing with our partners on the ground. And this direct
15 communication really allows us to ensure that we can
16 minimize the opportunities for escalation or for
17 miscalculation on the ground. And I think these are working
18 very, very effectively.

19 Senator Warren: So this is mostly about
20 communications.

21 I just worry, General, because the situation in Syria
22 is extraordinarily dangerous. And I am not sure that
23 throwing a small number of U.S. troops in the middle of it
24 is a sustainable, long-term solution. I believe we need a
25 clear strategy here for ending the violence and for holding

1 Assad accountable. But I appreciate your work in this area.

2 Thank you very much, General.

3 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Senator Inhofe: Senator Rounds?

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Gentlemen, let me begin by thanking you both for your
7 service to our country as well as to your families as well
8 for their sacrifice and your time away from home.

9 I would like to begin by talking a little bit about
10 AFRICOM. And, General Waldhauser, I am curious. I have had
11 the opportunity to accompany Senator Inhofe on several of
12 his most recent trips to Africa. Senator Inhofe has now
13 made over 150 different nation stops in Africa over the last
14 20-plus years. What I find interesting in each of our trips
15 has been the amount of interest that those countries and
16 those leaders in those countries have in relationships with
17 our country.

18 In the case of AFRICOM and our abilities, right now, as
19 I understand it, if you need resources -- and you do in an
20 area of the world in which things are not getting quieter,
21 they are getting more intense -- you basically borrow from
22 other operations in and around for the resources that you
23 need. Would you explain for us how AFRICOM actually
24 receives the resources that it needs right now?

25 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

1 There are two or three ways we receive forces. One of
2 them is if we are assigned forces, and we do not have
3 assigned forces but we have allocated forces. So, for
4 example, the Marine Corps special purpose MAGTF, which
5 mission has to do with protection of U.S. citizens and
6 property on the continent -- we are allocated that
7 organization.

8 Senator Rounds: How large is that force?

9 General Waldhauser: That force is company-sized units,
10 six MV-22's and some C-139's, but it has lot of ground to
11 cover on the continent.

12 Senator Rounds: An entire continent.

13 General Waldhauser: An entire continent. We have used
14 that or we have moved that around to help on the entire
15 continent.

16 We also have a force in Djibouti, an East African
17 response force from the Army. That is a company-sized unit,
18 and that is also tied to the issue of protection of U.S.
19 citizens with property.

20 We have Special Operations Command, which has a large
21 part of what we do in terms of the forces that come to do
22 the train, advise, and assist.

23 We also have episodic forces that come from the Army,
24 for example, to train units. They just trained, for
25 example, for about 6 weeks a battalion in Nigeria.

1 So although we do not have assigned forces, we are
2 allocated forces, and we compete for those through the
3 Global Force Management process, which the Joint staff runs
4 on behalf of the Secretary.

5 Senator Rounds: Is it time to take a look at actually
6 standing up AFRICOM, the same as the other combatant
7 commands are stood up?

8 General Waldhauser: Well, in that regard, I think we
9 are the same as the other combatant commands. We have a
10 COCOM staff of the same size, relatively speaking. We are
11 located, obviously, in Stuttgart, Germany. And we have
12 great interagency partners with us, as well as military
13 force. But AFRICOM staff per se is one that is like the
14 other COCOMs.

15 I think perhaps what you may be referring to is our
16 components. So our components in some cases are dual-
17 hatted. The Air Force is dual-hatted Europe and Africa.
18 The Navy is dual-hatted. The Army is separated.

19 Senator Rounds: Do you find that working in the
20 current capacity?

21 General Waldhauser: It is working. There is no doubt
22 about it, and we move assets around between the COCOMs. For
23 less than 30 days, we do not need the Secretary's approval
24 to do so. And we work with EUCOM and we work with General
25 Votel and his team all the time. If we have kinetic

1 operations, for example, in Somalia that require a little
2 bit more, we will schedule those and we will organize those
3 around a period where we can gain assets from CENTCOM, for
4 example.

5 So the continent of Africa is extremely large, and it
6 is virtually impossible to cover the whole thing all the
7 time with other priorities around the globe for the United
8 States. But we have to be smart, innovative, and we have to
9 have good relationships with our fellow combatant commanders
10 in order to make it work.

11 Senator Rounds: Are we placing the appropriate
12 emphasis on Africa? Look, right now, we know there are
13 hotspots. Long-term, this is a developing part of the
14 world, which seems to me other super powers, other nations
15 are paying a great deal of attention to, China in
16 particular. Are we doing the same?

17 General Waldhauser: Well, I think back to your
18 original point, first of all, all the countries on the
19 continent for the most part really want to be associated
20 with the United States. They want our assistance. They
21 want our leadership. But they do not really expect a lot.
22 I mean, little things can go a long way. And I think in the
23 countries that you and Senator Inhofe have visited, perhaps
24 you have seen that in spades. But we have to remain engaged
25 there for a whole host of reasons, which I think you

1 understand. And I think a little goes a long way on the
2 continent because at the end of the day, we are trying to
3 develop capacity for their security forces to take care of
4 their security problems.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you. My time has expired. I
6 thank you both, once again, for your service to our country.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Senator Inhofe: General Waldhauser, I do want to have
9 a personal discussion with you in the next few days because
10 I do not agree with you in the way this is set up. I was
11 here when we established AFRICOM, and there was a debate
12 about dedicated assets at that time. And I would like to go
13 over it to get clarification around that issue.

14 Senator Peters?

15 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 And thank you both, gentlemen, for being here today and
17 for your service.

18 General Waldhauser, I would like to talk a little bit
19 about Nigeria and add to some of the questions that my
20 colleague asked you about.

21 I had the opportunity to travel to Nigeria as part of
22 my work on this committee last year, and I was very
23 concerned about ISIS-West Africa, which you mentioned is
24 basically a splinter group from Boko Haram. And at that
25 time, it looked as if the situation was deteriorating. So

1 my question to you is, what is the status? Where are we in
2 relation to ISIS-West Africa? Is the situation getting
3 better?

4 General Waldhauser: ISIS-West Africa -- of those two
5 groups, if you divide them in half, Boko Haram and ISIS-West
6 Africa, ISIS-West Africa is the group that is of more
7 concern to us. They have ties to ISIS core. They have some
8 funding from ISIS core. They have indicated in the past
9 their desire to go outside the region to conduct activities,
10 attacks, if you will, on U.S. interests in the area. They
11 certainly are more of a concern to us at this particular
12 time.

13 Senator Peters: Are we applying adequate resources to
14 deal with the issue?

15 General Waldhauser: The strategy for ISIS-West Africa
16 is with the Lake Chad basin region where we apply our
17 assistance to the countries around there, Cameroon, Chad,
18 Niger, and Nigeria. We have made progress with Nigeria in
19 the last year or so with regard to our ability to share
20 intelligence with them, to assist them in planning, and also
21 to assist in training.

22 Senator Peters: You mentioned in your written
23 testimony that the multinational task force in that area in
24 the basin does not seem to be as interested in dealing with
25 the situation. They believe it is a Nigeria-centric

1 problem. I gather you do not agree.

2 What can we do to convince them otherwise? Based on
3 your testimony here today, it sounds as if they do want to
4 operate across a broader region.

5 General Waldhauser: Well, they do want to operate --
6 the countries that support the multinational joint task
7 force. But in most cases, these countries have significant
8 other challenges, whether it be Nigeria itself in the
9 coastal area or in the central area, whether it is a country
10 like Chad, for example, who has concerns about their border
11 with Libya. Niger has all kinds of issues throughout their
12 country. And so the ability to have large military forces
13 that can do all of these things is difficult for these
14 countries. So sometimes it appears -- let us just say over
15 a period of months, the trend line has been in a negative
16 way, if you will, on how Boko Haram has been acting, these
17 countries may decide to move their assets other places
18 because their interests and their security concerns -- Boko
19 Haram, for example, may not be on the top of the list based
20 on some internal issues that are going on within those
21 countries.

22 Senator Peters: You mentioned Chad which is in a very
23 dangerous part of the world in the region that we are
24 focused on. It has always been my understanding in some
25 briefings that I have had related to some of the operations

1 in the Sahel, that Chad has been a pretty capable and
2 productive partner for U.S. operations. Is that accurate?

3 General Waldhauser: That is accurate. But their main
4 concern I think at the moment would be the issue of foreign
5 fighters coming from Libya into their northern area.

6 Senator Peters: So having a relationship with them is
7 important because that could also have an impact to the
8 United States. And I know that yesterday Secretary
9 Tillerson -- I guess former Secretary Tillerson -- indicated
10 that the United States is considering removing Chad from the
11 travel ban.

12 Now, I have been concerned about some of the rhetoric
13 we have seen from the President in relation to Muslims and
14 African nations, including using some very disparaging
15 language in reference to African nations. I think that can
16 damage certainly our standing and working in that part of
17 the world.

18 I would kind of like your thoughts as to any impact on
19 the relations we have had with Chad as a result of them
20 being included in the travel ban and how important our
21 partnership with countries like Chad and others in dealing
22 with what could be very serious issues arising out of the
23 African continent.

24 General Waldhauser: Senator, we continue to work with
25 all the countries, Chad included, and show them our

1 commitment and demonstrate our desire to help them build
2 capacity. One example I would give to Chad. It is a small
3 example and it is very simple, but it demonstrates I think
4 AFRICOM's commitment.

5 A few months ago, there was a huge storm in Chad and
6 various aircraft hangars -- and they have a very, very small
7 air force. But a few aircraft hangars were destroyed, and
8 they simply have no way to repair them. We were able to
9 gather some funds and quickly send a team down there and
10 erect several shelters that would replace these hangars that
11 had been destroyed in the storm. And that is a small way to
12 demonstrate our commitment and AFRICOM's commitment to that
13 country to let them know that we certainly are behind them
14 and have a desire for their capacity to be built.

15 Senator Peters: Thank you.

16 Senator Inhofe: Senator Scott?

17 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Good morning to you. Thank you for being here this
19 morning.

20 General Waldhauser, the National Defense Strategy
21 describes the greatest threat to U.S. prosperity and
22 security as a reemergence of long-term strategic competition
23 by revisionist powers. These revisionists include Russia
24 and China, two countries we see more and more activity in
25 the continent of Africa. China just opened a new naval base

1 in Djibouti, mere miles from our only enduring military
2 presence in Africa while Russia has been courting leadership
3 from both sides of the conflict in Libya and announcing
4 major new investments in Zimbabwe. These Russian and
5 Chinese efforts are self-interested as these countries are
6 doing very little to counter the myriad of terrorist threats
7 across the region. Groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS-West
8 Africa, and Al Shabaab continue to operate freely.

9 What is your assessment of the Russian and Chinese
10 activities in Africa? First question. The second, as we
11 shift our National Defense Strategy to the two revisionists,
12 how are we working to make sure that the terrorist
13 activities in Africa do not find their way to our country?

14 General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator.

15 The first part, I will talk about Russia rather
16 briefly.

17 So, first of all, Russia's interest in the continent
18 has to do with intelligence exchanges with various countries
19 with arms sales and also with energy partnerships. You
20 mentioned Zimbabwe. There is a platinum mine there that
21 they have had some activities in. They have got a \$4
22 billion investment there. And they are also interested in
23 arms sales because there has not really been any arms sales
24 from the West since about the mid-2000s there. So they are
25 trying to open those type of markets any way they can to

1 show that the U.S. perhaps is not a good partner or someone
2 that is not willing to work with them.

3 My personal concern with the Russians is what they are
4 trying to do in the northern part of the country from Egypt
5 to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria. It is that part of northern
6 Africa on the Mediterranean, which is on the southern part
7 of NATO. They have got interests there. And as you said,
8 in Libya they are playing -- on one hand, they talk about
9 supporting the UN agreement, but on the other hand, the
10 support that they provide for Haftar and the HOR forces is
11 something that needs to be addressed.

12 With regard to China, they obviously have a lot of
13 investments. They are interested in the One Belt, One Road.
14 That gives them the ability to diversify economically
15 imports and exports. I think that has been very well
16 documented. So they obviously have a big part in there too.

17 But there areas where we can work with China. I mean,
18 we have a unique situation where their base in Djibouti is
19 just a mile or so from ours. And so if there are interests
20 that have to do with humanitarian, peacekeeping, safekeeping
21 with regard to air flight and range usage by their ground
22 forces there, we have to find a way to communicate that with
23 them. And so on one hand, we are certainly aware of the
24 great power competition, but we have a unique situation
25 where they are a neighbor of us in Djibouti.

1 With regard to the future and what the National Defense
2 Strategy says, really if you look at what Africa is
3 described in there, we are told to conduct a by, with, and
4 through strategy. We are told to develop relationships,
5 work with our partner forces to continue the VEO struggle
6 there. So even though a lot of it is China, Russia, Iran,
7 and North Korea, the part on Africa basically tells us to
8 continue what we have been doing to include building
9 partnership capacity to defeat the terrorist organizations.

10 Senator Scott: So, General, do you see the Chinese in
11 proximity to our basis as an opportunity for partnership, as
12 well as the Chinese being a competitor?

13 General Waldhauser: It is, and that is the unique
14 part. It is the only place on the planet where China has an
15 overseas base. It is right next to ours. And so not only
16 do you have China and the U.S. in Djibouti, there is Japan.
17 The French and the Italians are all located there as well.
18 The Chinese have started to work closely with the French in
19 terms of some of the exercises they do there. This is
20 small-level operations. But again, the unique situation is
21 what we do with China obviously has to be informed by our
22 overall global strategy, but the unique situation that we
23 have with those individuals being next door and
24 participating in peacekeeping operations and anti-piracy
25 operations, we have got to find a way to work with them as

1 well.

2 Senator Scott: Thank you.

3 General Votel, I have a few seconds left, 30 seconds.

4 As opposed to naming the conflicts and the extraordinary
5 complexity in your region, I will just ask a question.

6 As you consider the strategic environment in the Middle
7 East and competing interests among even our nominal allies
8 such as Turkey, would you provide your assessment of Russia,
9 Turkish, and Iranian goals in the Middle East and if you see
10 their goals as mutually supporting the overall conflict?

11 General Votel: Well, first off, Senator, Turkey is a
12 NATO ally. Our relationship is deeply valued. They have
13 been a key partner in the fight against ISIS here for a long
14 period of time, and we do recognize they have legitimate
15 concerns with security along their border from terrorism.
16 And of course, this has led to a little bit of a tension
17 between us at this particular point that we are working
18 through largely diplomatically but also militarily at this
19 particular point.

20 I guess what I would highlight is what I mentioned in
21 my opening remarks and that is Russia does play a role here.
22 Again, it is cute to say arsonists and firemen is kind of
23 what they try to do. They are trying to instigate tension
24 among partners in the region and then trying to play a role
25 in trying to be an arbiter in that. And so this is what

1 happens, and this is what plays out on a regular basis. And
2 so we really do have to take a look at our long-term
3 relationships and make sure that we are focused in on that
4 and staying as strong as we can on those. So I am concerned
5 about this role that Russia plays in northern Syria and how
6 it impacts all of our relationships and especially the
7 relationship between us and Turkey.

8 Senator Scott: Thank you, General. I will submit a
9 couple questions for the record as it relates to Turkey.

10 General Votel: Thank you.

11 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Senator Inhofe: Senator King?

13 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 General Votel, I want to follow up on a couple of the
15 questions that Senator Warren asked about Yemen. What would
16 be the implications and the impact if the United States
17 stopped providing the aerial refueling, the intelligence,
18 and the advice to the Saudi forces?

19 General Votel: Senator, I think right now the
20 provision of those things that you just covered right now
21 gives us placement, it gives us access, and it gives us
22 influence with Saudi Arabia. And what I would highlight to
23 you is that we have been working with them sharing our own
24 experiences.

25 Senator King: But you testified earlier that when we

1 refuel a Saudi plane, we do not have any control over the
2 mission, where it goes, what it does next. If the argument
3 is this allows us to maintain control, are we maintaining
4 some level of control?

5 General Votel: The influence that we derive with them
6 is by working with them to demonstrate how we do our
7 targeting process --

8 Senator King: Do they listen?

9 General Votel: They absolutely do.

10 Senator King: Have they ever changed a mission based
11 upon our input?

12 General Votel: They absolutely do. And in the work
13 that we have been doing with them related to the ballistic
14 missile threat, we have seen some very good progress in this
15 area. Recently Saudi Arabia has followed many of the things
16 that we have done in terms of how we stand up architectures
17 to investigate civilian casualties. These are problems that
18 we have on occasion even as good as we are.

19 Senator King: So the principal argument against this
20 move to limit or cut off that aid is if we do, the Saudi
21 conduct might be worse.

22 General Votel: Senator, from my perspective it is
23 better for us to stay engaged with them and continue to
24 influence this. They want this type of support, and they
25 want to improve their capability.

1 Senator King: You said for us. How about for the
2 people of Yemen?

3 General Votel: I think it is absolutely essential that
4 we stay engaged in this for them. And I think this does
5 give us the best opportunity to address these concerns.

6 Senator King: Thank you.

7 Turning to Iran, I understand Iran -- all the testimony
8 is Iran is abiding by the JCPOA in terms of inspections and
9 what they are doing. What would be the implications for the
10 region if the United States abruptly terminated the
11 agreement, and what would Iran do?

12 General Votel: Senator, I cannot speculate on what
13 Iran would do. You know, the implications for the region --
14 I think there would be some concern I think about how we
15 intended to address that particular threat, if it was not
16 being addressed through the JCPOA. Of course, our approach
17 here is one of assuring our partners, maintaining deterrent
18 capabilities in the region, and then of course, where we
19 can --

20 Senator King: But if the agreement were terminated,
21 would the Iranians not then be free to pursue a nuclear
22 weapon within a matter of months?

23 General Votel: Theoretically they would be able to do
24 that.

25 Senator King: And that certainly would not contribute

1 to -- if the Iranians had a nuclear weapon, we would have
2 two rogue states with nuclear weapons on our hands instead
3 of one, the other one being North Korea.

4 General Votel: Right. This could certainly be the
5 case. Again, we are speculating that that would be the
6 direction.

7 Senator King: Do you think it would be in the national
8 security interest of the country to maintain the Iran
9 agreement at least for the near term?

10 General Votel: I share the Secretary of Defense's and
11 Chairman's comments on this, that right now I think it is in
12 our interest.

13 Senator King: And there may be a different point of
14 view in 4 or 5 years when it is near the end of its term.
15 Is that correct?

16 General Votel: That could be true.

17 Senator King: Thank you.

18 Turning to Pakistan, by the way, you have one of the
19 most complicated jobs in the world I think. You can go from
20 one area to the other -- I have not even mentioned Syria.
21 Is Pakistan still supporting terrorist activity in
22 Afghanistan, and has the recent get tough with Pakistan
23 policy influenced their behavior?

24 General Votel: It has. The pressure that has been put
25 on Pakistan I think through our South Asia strategy and some

1 of our public communication I think has helped gain their
2 attention. And as I have mentioned previously, we have seen
3 some positive indicators as a result of this. I cannot tell
4 you that we have seen decisive changes in the areas in which
5 we are working, but I remain very well engaged with my
6 partner to ensure that we are moving forward on this.

7 Senator King: But there appears to be a surge of
8 attacks in Afghanistan. You do not associate those with
9 Pakistan?

10 General Votel: Well, again, having sanctuary in
11 Pakistan or having support from other actors in the region
12 certainly is an aspect of the Taliban's success here. So I
13 think we have to look at all of these to ensure we attribute
14 the causes of these attacks to where that is. We also have
15 ISIS that does have a different approach as well.

16 Senator King: Final question. Should we be even
17 tougher with Pakistan? Should we ratchet up the pressure
18 because they still are providing sanctuary? It is still
19 unclear whose side they are on in that region.

20 General Votel: Senator, I think right now the strategy
21 that we have is an appropriate one, and I think we have the
22 mechanism to continue to keep them focused on our
23 objectives, our mutual objectives here. So I do think we
24 are pursuing this in the right way, and I think some of the
25 positive indicators that we have begun to see, although it

1 has not to led to decisive changes yet, are things that we
2 have to pay attention to as we move forward.

3 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you, gentlemen.

4 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

5 Senator Sullivan?

6 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 And, gentlemen, good to see you. Thanks for your
8 service.

9 General Waldhauser, I just want to ask a very basic
10 question. I know there is an answer to it that I am sure I
11 am missing. But why is AFRICOM not located in Africa?

12 General Waldhauser: Well, as you know, this is the
13 tenth year of the Africa Command as it stood up. And there
14 have been several attempts to perhaps move it to the
15 continent.

16 Senator Sullivan: What is the roadblock? Is it
17 because they do not want us there, or is it the Congress not
18 helping you? It always seems to me a little disjointed that
19 it is in Germany.

20 General Waldhauser: Well, I think the roadblocks are,
21 first of all, there is a financial aspect of this, the cost
22 to do that. But then the second and third order effects, if
23 you move to a country in Africa, then what does that mean to
24 surrounding countries or other partners? They may view that
25 as something that is perhaps skeptical.

1 I think just to restate it, 10 years ago when the
2 command was stood up -- and Senator Inhofe is well aware of
3 this -- there was a lot of skepticism on the continent as to
4 what the intent was for a military command for that
5 particular area. And so it surfaces every once in a while,
6 but to my knowledge, there has been no effort at the moment
7 to move.

8 Senator Inhofe: If you will let me use 10 seconds of
9 your time, I would say that the reason is perceived
10 colonialism. And I was on your side back when we set this
11 up 10 years ago, and I lost that battle.

12 Senator Sullivan: Well, maybe we should relook at
13 that. It just seems to me -- anyway, it is probably a
14 longer conversation.

15 General Votel, I want to congratulate you and the men
16 and women under your command on the campaign with regard to
17 ISIS. You know, it is really remarkable what you have
18 achieved over the last year. I do not think the press has
19 done an adequate job of highlighting that, but it is quite
20 commendable. So please pass that on to your men and women
21 who are serving with you.

22 But the next question is -- so we are going to have
23 troops remaining in Syria. There seems to be a bit of a
24 disconnect regarding what that mission is. Obviously, we do
25 not want ISIS to return. So that has got to be a key

1 component. But in your testimony, there is a lot of focus
2 on Iran. Obviously, they are in Syria or their proxies.
3 And I guess former Secretary Tillerson now gave a speech not
4 too long ago at the Hoover Institution at Stanford and was
5 very focused on Iran and how our mission there in Syria
6 should be about countering the Iranian threat.

7 So I get a little bit nervous when we have troops on
8 the ground in a very kind of complicated, hostile region
9 where it is not 100 percent clear what the mission of our
10 troops are. I do not think anyone wants us to get back to
11 the situation like we had with the marines in Lebanon 3 or 4
12 decades ago where their mission was, quote/unquote,
13 presence, and obviously that did not turn out very well for
14 our troops there. What is the mission of our troops in
15 Syria, and are they focused on countering the Iranian
16 threat, which is probably the biggest threat that we have
17 there. Is it not?

18 General Votel: Senator, thank you.

19 Our mission in Syria is strictly focused on defeating
20 ISIS.

21 Senator Sullivan: Okay. But what is the biggest
22 threat in Syria right now?

23 General Votel: Well, the biggest threat in Syria right
24 now is all the other instability that is taking place that
25 is preventing the country from moving forward --

1 Senator Sullivan: And is Iran not behind it?

2 General Votel: Certainly Iran is an aspect of this,
3 but so is Russia and so is the regime itself. Our mission,
4 of course, has been focused on ISIS. And so we still have
5 ISIS that we are addressing. So that is where our
6 particular focus is.

7 I would tell you that while we do not have a specific
8 task to do something against Iran in this particular area,
9 our strong relationships with the Syrian Democratic Forces,
10 certainly our strong relationships with the Iraqi Security
11 Forces do put us in a position where we, through our strong
12 relationships, can have influence, can encourage them to
13 conduct operations and do things that are in the interest of
14 their countries, as opposed to other parties in the area.

15 Senator Sullivan: Can I just ask a final question? My
16 time is running out.

17 We know how that during the 2004, 2005, 2006 time
18 frame, that the Iranians were supplying Iraqi Shia militias
19 some of the most sophisticated, deadly IEDs on the
20 battlefield that ended up killing and maiming thousands of
21 American troops. So in my view the blood of American
22 soldiers and marines and sailors, airmen -- the Iranians had
23 that on their hands. Right? That is a fact. They, of
24 course, denied it back then, but it is a fact that we all
25 know now.

1 I just want to make sure in terms of our rules of
2 engagement, if there is any, any, any threat posed by any
3 Iranian or Iranian-backed proxies, do our troops have the
4 full authority to respond to defend themselves and kill
5 these threats, again given that they have a history of
6 killing our troops? Do they have that rule of engagement
7 authority?

8 General Votel: They do, and we have actually
9 demonstrated that most recently in the middle of the
10 Euphrates Valley. But as you will recall last year down
11 around the Top area, we did have pro-regime forces supported
12 by Iranian Shia groups that attempted to encroach on us and
13 we did use the full capabilities within our arsenal to
14 protect ourselves. So I think our people clearly understand
15 this, and they have all the authorities they need to protect
16 themselves.

17 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Senator Inhofe: Senator Blumenthal?

20 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Thank you both for your service in particular in very
22 difficult areas of the world and parts of the world that are
23 very important to the United States.

24 General Votel, talking about America's mission in Syria
25 that was just the subject of Senator Sullivan's questioning,

1 is one of our missions or one of our responsibilities in
2 Syria not to prevent war crimes?

3 General Votel: Certainly within the forces that we
4 work, certainly.

5 Senator Blumenthal: And war crimes are occurring in
6 Syria with the support and apparent encouragement of Russia.
7 Correct?

8 General Votel: I think if you look at some of the
9 activities that take place over in the Damascus area and the
10 Ghouta area, I think we certainly would think that was the
11 case.

12 Senator Blumenthal: In fact, last week UN
13 investigators linked Russia, specifically the Russian air
14 force, to possible war crimes, citing the November attack
15 near Aleppo when a Russian fighter killed at least 84 people
16 and injured more than 150. In the last 3 weeks, as you have
17 observed, more than a thousand people were killed in Eastern
18 Ghouta with Russian military support. My question is what
19 can and are we doing to deter Russia from engaging --

20 General Votel: Well, Senator, as you know, we do not
21 operate in that particular part of Syria militarily. But
22 certainly through our diplomatic channels, through our
23 ambassador in the UN, Russia has, frankly, been one of the
24 authors of this recent ceasefire. So their inability to
25 enforce it, to enforce standards on this really means one of

1 two things: one, they lack the ability to do that, or they
2 are choosing not to do that. And so I think one of the
3 things that we do have to do is hold them accountable for
4 the actions that they are taking here and for the
5 humanitarian disasters that they are perpetuating through
6 their support to the regime and through their own
7 activities.

8 Senator Blumenthal: What would you recommend to hold
9 them accountable?

10 General Votel: Well, I think certainly the best way of
11 doing this is through political and diplomatic channels, and
12 certainly if there are other things that are considered, we
13 will do what we are told. I do not recommend that at this
14 particular point, but I think holding them accountable to
15 the things that they have agreed to, particularly through
16 the offices of the United Nations or others here, I think is
17 a very important way of approaching this.

18 Senator Blumenthal: So far, they have not been
19 responding to whatever political or diplomatic steps that
20 have been taken. Correct?

21 General Votel: It does not appear that they are,
22 Senator.

23 Senator Blumenthal: So in order to have some effect,
24 the intensity of whatever we are doing diplomatically and
25 politically has to be heightened, or there need to be some

1 kind of military responses to protect people in that area
2 from the war crimes that are being perpetrated. Would you
3 agree?

4 General Votel: It certainly needs to be addressed.

5 Senator Blumenthal: And in terms of diplomacy -- I
6 think others may have raised this before me -- is the lack
7 of ambassadors in the area, the lack of sufficient
8 diplomatic capacity in this State Department not an obstacle
9 to really effectively using diplomacy?

10 General Votel: Senator, I cannot comment on the
11 broader aspects of the Department of State. That is more
12 appropriate for them.

13 But what I can comment on is in the 18 country teams
14 that we work with of the 20 countries that are in the region
15 -- we do not have a country team for Iran or for Syria -- we
16 have extraordinarily good relationships. 12 of these
17 countries do have ambassadors. Six do have charges. The
18 relationships we have with them I think are very good. We
19 get good advice. We have good coordination with them in our
20 day-to-day activities. So I think our relationships,
21 certainly from a military standpoint, remain very, very
22 strong with our diplomatic partners across the region.

23 Senator Blumenthal: So 6 out of the 18 ambassadorships
24 are vacant?

25 General Votel: Six out of 18 that have country teams

1 are being led by charges at this point.

2 Senator Blumenthal: Does that not reflect an absence
3 of leadership in the Department of State?

4 General Votel: I think that is probably a more
5 appropriate question for them than for me, Senator.

6 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, General. Thanks for
7 your very helpful and forthright answers. Thank you.

8 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

9 Senator Cotton?

10 Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen.

11 I want to add my voice to Senator Blumenthal and his
12 concerns about what is happening in Syria. I was in the
13 grocery store at home on Friday, and an old, rough and tough
14 retired marine came up to me. He was wearing a USMC hat.
15 That is how I knew it, but I would probably be able to
16 figure out even if he was not wearing the hat. And he
17 introduced himself and said he just wanted to ask me a
18 question. You know, often in settings like that, the
19 question might be about the VA and what they are doing for
20 our vets. But the question was what are we going to do
21 about Syria. How can anybody stand by and watch what is
22 happening to those little children throughout Syria?

23 I thought it was a very touching moment but also
24 indicative of how much normal Americans pay attention, not
25 just the humanitarian crisis there but to the strategic

1 disaster Syria has been for 7 years.

2 But for now, I want to turn my attention south to
3 another civil war, in which Iran is meddling. General
4 Votel, in Yemen, when this war started 3 years ago, much of
5 the fighting was confined to the mountainous terrain of
6 Yemen, and now long-range missiles are being fired at King
7 Khalid International Airport outside of Riyadh. It seems
8 like a dangerous escalation in the fighting there. Does it
9 not?

10 General Votel: I would absolutely agree, Senator.

11 Senator Cotton: Where are Houthi rebels getting long-
12 range missiles that can range the airport in Riyadh?

13 General Votel: Senator, they are getting them from
14 Iran.

15 Senator Cotton: Well, that is not very neighborly of
16 Iran with its neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

17 How are they getting those missiles into Yemen?

18 General Votel: Senator, I think Iran has a very
19 sophisticated network of doing this. They can certainly
20 move them by components. They can move them by air. They
21 can move them by maritime means. They can move them by land
22 routes to get their stuff in there and then reassemble it
23 and provide it to the Houthis.

24 Senator Cotton: Can those missiles range the United
25 Arab Emirates?

1 General Votel: I think, Senator, some of this might be
2 a discussion that is best handled in a classified setting.
3 But as you pointed here, we have seen threats that have gone
4 as far as the international airport outside of Riyadh.

5 Senator Cotton: If you were a Saudi leader or an
6 Emirati leader, you probably would not be very happy about
7 those missiles being able to range your citizens. Would
8 you?

9 General Votel: I agree. It is a dangerous threat to
10 them. It is a dangerous threat to us. We have 100,000 U.S.
11 citizens that live and work in Saudi Arabia.

12 Senator Cotton: We also have more than a few naval and
13 merchant ships going through the Bab al Mandeb. Do we not?

14 General Votel: We absolutely do.

15 Senator Cotton: Could you tell us a little bit more
16 about the nature of the intelligence and military support we
17 are providing to the coalition fighting in Yemen?

18 General Votel: Certainly. We are not parties to the
19 civil war, as you know, Senator. Our principal focus in
20 Yemen has been on the counterterrorism front against Al
21 Qaeda and now against ISIS there. But we are authorized to
22 help the Saudis defend their border. And so we have done
23 that. We are doing that through intelligence sharing,
24 through logistics support and through military advice that
25 we provided them. We are principally focused on the

1 ballistic missile threat and the maritime threat that plays
2 out in the Bab al Mandeb and in the Red Sea to the west of
3 Yemen.

4 Senator Cotton: Is it fair to characterize that as a
5 primarily defensive operation in nature?

6 General Votel: It is principally defensive. It is
7 designed to, again, protect Saudi Arabia.

8 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

9 General Waldhauser, there has been some open source
10 reporting about China's construction of the African Union
11 headquarters in 2012. That open source reporting states
12 that China installed microphones in the walls and under
13 desks, and it has also copied data from servers each night.
14 AU has since installed new servers and swept its
15 headquarters to remove these listening devices.

16 This kind of public disclosure of blatant Chinese
17 espionage, you would think, would cause many nations, but
18 especially those victimized at the AU headquarters, to think
19 twice about accepting such Chinese generosity, if you will.

20 Have you seen any kind of growing reluctance by the AU
21 or by African nations to cooperate with China or accept that
22 kind of aid given this espionage against the AU
23 headquarters?

24 General Waldhauser: I really have not seen any
25 reluctance on part of African countries individually to

1 refuse any type of aid. I mean, I think that the Chinese
2 assistance with infrastructure building and the like is
3 something that is welcomed there, but then the agreements
4 that they make, the arrangements that they make need to be
5 scrutinized.

6 I would say, however, to that point, with our base in
7 Djibouti and the Chinese base right next door, what you
8 described is a big concern to us. I mean, we have got to
9 make sure that our operational security is such that we can
10 operate freely there because it is not just AFRICOM that
11 uses Djibouti. Special Operations Command, European
12 Command, CENTCOM all use that area, and we need the ability
13 to operate freely there.

14 Senator Cotton: I agree.

15 Thank you, gentlemen, both for your service and for
16 your appearance today.

17 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

18 Senator Kaine?

19 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

20 And thank you to our witnesses for your testimony.

21 General Votel, I want to start. We had a good session
22 with General Scaparrotti about EUCOM last week, and he
23 mentioned that you and he spend a lot of time together
24 especially talking about Syria and Turkey. There have been
25 some questions about Syria. I want to really focus on the

1 Kurds in northern Syria.

2 The Kurds have been superb fighting partners of the
3 United States. Or maybe I would put it in reverse. We have
4 been superb fighting partners of theirs in trying to drive
5 ISIS back. They have helped us and we have helped them
6 significantly. But the U.S.-Kurdish relationship in
7 northern Syria has been a real tough spot with our NATO
8 ally, Turkey. Now that we, through the great work of your
9 team and our coalition partners, have made some real
10 battlefield success against ISIS in northern Syria, what do
11 you see as sort of next steps forward in the relationship of
12 the U.S. to the Kurds that can hopefully allay some of
13 Turkey's concerns and maintain their ability as a NATO ally
14 to provide us the support we need?

15 General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

16 As you know, there are ongoing diplomatic discussions
17 with Turkey led by the Department of State. I will not
18 comment on those. They certainly have our support with that
19 to work through that.

20 Our intention with Turkey -- and we do, again,
21 recognize their concerns here and have certainly kept that
22 in the forefront of our mind -- has been to try to be as
23 transparent and clear with them on the things that we are
24 doing with our partners on the ground, the Syrian Democratic
25 Forces, which is about half and half Arab and Kurd. So they

1 have proven to be, as you pointed out, very effective
2 against ISIS. And so as we move especially in the liberated
3 areas and the areas where we are now consolidating our
4 gains, we are trying to move more into the stability phase
5 here so we can root out the remainder of ISIS and we can
6 allow people to come back into their villages and back into
7 their homes. I think we have, again, got to continue to
8 work closely with Turkey and with the coalition and
9 certainly with our State Department partners here to work
10 through this. It is, as you pointed out, an extraordinarily
11 complex situation. The demographics of the area are all
12 over the place frankly in this. This is going to take a lot
13 of very close work on the ground.

14 But I think the important piece to get in place right
15 now is to make sure that we have good communication back and
16 forth, we have a mechanism to reduce tensions and certainly
17 to pass information and prevent these situations from
18 escalating into conflict. That will make it extraordinarily
19 difficult to resolve if we are instigating conflict among
20 ourselves.

21 Senator Kaine: Let me follow up focusing on Syria for
22 a minute. And if you will forgive me, I am going to read a
23 statement out of the Marine Corps' doctrinal strategy
24 publication to an Army general.

25 What matters ultimately in war is strategic success,

1 attainment of our political aims, and the protection of our
2 national interests. History shows that national leaders,
3 both political and military, who fail to understand this
4 relationship sow the seeds for ultimate failure even when
5 their armed forces achieve initial battlefield success.
6 Battlefield brilliance seldom rescues a bad strategy.

7 I am very, very puzzled about the strategy right now in
8 Syria. We have asked the administration to come up even in
9 a classified session and talk to us about strategy because
10 the battlefield success of the U.S. plus partners against
11 ISIS has been very notable, very, very notable. But we read
12 just in open source newspaper articles we need to stay in
13 Syria to not let ISIS come back. We need to stay in Syria
14 to check Iran. We did a missile strike against Syrian
15 forces after Syrian forces pushed against Syrian opposition.
16 We came in a couple of days later with a missile strike
17 against them.

18 We are seeing activity, but we are not really yet, in
19 Congress, kind of read into a strategy. And I do not know
20 that this is really the place for a discussion of that. It
21 might be better to do it in a closed session. But some of
22 us have been asking the administration to read us into the
23 full strategy. Is it just about keeping ISIS from
24 reoccurring? Is it to check Iran's presence in Syria? Is
25 it to actively push against the Syrian military, as we did

1 with the missile strikes last April and then the recent
2 missile strike that occurred last month? We are real
3 puzzled about it. Anything you want to say about that in
4 open?

5 General Votel: Senator, our mission, as you know, has
6 been strictly focused on ISIS. And so the coalition has
7 been focused on addressing this common threat that virtually
8 everybody agrees has to be dealt with. And that is what we
9 have been doing with this. And by pursuing the
10 consolidation operations, by stabilizing the areas in which
11 we are operating, what we are hoping to do is create a
12 platform, a platform upon which the international community
13 can move forward under a Geneva process and begin to also
14 address the broader underlying issues that are very apparent
15 across Syria and that really cannot be resolved through
16 fighting but have to be resolved through talking and through
17 diplomatic means under the United Nations.

18 So our focus on addressing this common threat that
19 everybody -- everybody -- agree is bad is really I think one
20 of the preliminary steps that has to take place. Certainly
21 I think continuing to keep them from rising, continuing to
22 allow these areas to become stabilized, get people back in
23 their home, reduce the refugee problem, I think contributes
24 to, hopefully, creating an environment that the
25 international community can step forward into with the

1 leadership of the United States and others here to actually
2 pursue a diplomatic solution to these problems through the
3 United Nations.

4 Senator Kaine: Thank you.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Senator Inhofe: Senator Perdue?

7 Senator Perdue: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

8 And thank you both for your decades of service.

9 I would like to echo earlier comments, General Votel,
10 for a message sent to your troops for the outstanding
11 success we have had over the last year. And it goes without
12 notice here many days, but I want you to know on record
13 those of us who pay attention, we are very, very grateful
14 for that.

15 I have a question, General Waldhauser, before I get
16 into the other question. Recently four U.S. service men
17 were killed in Niger, and one of those, Staff Sergeant
18 Dustin Wright, was a constituent of mine. So your
19 investigation is obviously very important to us. When do
20 you expect that investigation to be completed, sir?

21 General Waldhauser: Senator, thank you very much.

22 As you well know, the investigating officer did an
23 exhaustive assessment, visited all these countries, 150
24 witnesses and the like. And he gave the investigation to me
25 at the end of January. I reviewed it for about 3 weeks, and

1 I turned it over to Chairman Dunford for him to pass it to
2 Secretary Mattis. Secretary Mattis I believe now has it and
3 will review it. As soon as he is done with his review, the
4 families will be briefed. That has been our commitment all
5 along, and we want to continue to that.

6 And then as soon as practical as the families have been
7 briefed, we will come her to the committee and we will brief
8 you, myself, the two-star who investigated it, and a
9 civilian representative from OSD, and we will answer all of
10 your questions at that time.

11 Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir, and thank you for that
12 investigation.

13 I would like for both of you to address the NDS briefly
14 in your AORs. The most recent NDS obviously prioritized --
15 and I quote -- great power competition with China and Russia
16 is a primary effort of DOD and directs a more -- and I quote
17 -- resource sustainable approach -- end quote -- to
18 counterterrorism. General Votel, what does that mean in
19 your AOR?

20 And parallel to that, we are in a competition for
21 influence there. With China's One Belt, One Road issue and
22 all the money they are putting behind it and Pakistan and
23 other areas in your AOR, what does the NDS change mean to
24 your mission and AOR? And are you resourced to accomplish
25 it?

1 General Votel: Thanks, Senator.

2 So I think as we look at great power competition -- for
3 example, we look at a resurgent power like Russia -- Russia
4 is, as we know, not just a European problem. It is a global
5 problem. I mean, they have influence globally. So they are
6 certainly acting out in the area of responsibility that I
7 have.

8 So I think the first thing that the National Defense
9 Strategy and the National Military Strategy that is being
10 modified will recognize that aspect, that we have to be
11 prepared to address these threats, not just in the areas in
12 which they reside, but the areas in which they have
13 influence.

14 And so under General Dunford's leadership, we have
15 developed between all of the combatant commanders I think
16 very good plans and processes for how we will do that.

17 I think more specifically what it means for us in the
18 region here, particularly as we look to potentially shift to
19 other areas of the globe in accordance with the National
20 Defense Strategy's priorities -- what it means for us is we
21 will put a premium on the by, with, and through approach and
22 having strong relationships with the people we have always
23 had relationships with but also fostering new relationships.

24 Senator Perdue: Excuse me, General, but this does not
25 send a message to the Taliban that we are not open for

1 business in Afghanistan. Does it?

2 General Votel: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. We
3 remain very dedicated on this.

4 So we are focused on sustaining these relationships, on
5 working with our partners, on becoming more interdependent
6 with them, on becoming more mutually supporting with them
7 among ourselves. So that is what it means for me.

8 I am looking forward here in a couple weeks to meeting
9 with a number of the chiefs of defense across the region to
10 talk specifically about what the National Defense Strategy
11 means and how we are going to approach it in the CENTCOM
12 region.

13 Senator Perdue: General Waldhauser, I know you have
14 talked in the committee hearing already about China's effort
15 in Africa, but I would like for you to address the NDS shift
16 and what that means in your AOR specifically.

17 General Waldhauser: Senator, I think one of the things
18 that the NDS shift has done is it has put a spotlight on
19 China's activities on the continent, which have been ongoing
20 for quite some time. But now with this strategy and with
21 this notoriety, I think it gives an opportunity for us to
22 actually have a discussion and bring to awareness what
23 actually the Chinese are doing and how that impacts us.

24 But interestingly, on our future there, we are
25 specifically told in the NDS to continue the by, with, and

1 through approach. We are specifically told to work with
2 partners and build capacity and continue the fight against
3 counterterrorism forces.

4 So, in essence, the strategy frames the overall global
5 posture. It frames for us prioritization, but it also tells
6 us to essentially continue to build capacity on the
7 continent so the Africans can take care of problems
8 themselves and continue to degrade and disrupt the VEO fight
9 so that those problems either stay localized and do not get
10 out of the region or certainly to Europe or to our
11 continent.

12 Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir. Thank you both.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

15 Senator Hirono?

16 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 For both of you, I believe that some of my colleagues
18 have already asked you about basically what I see as a
19 hollowing out of the State Department at a time when we need
20 to maintain that capacity. So I just wanted to ask you,
21 would you acknowledge that a proposed 25 percent cut in the
22 State Department and a 12.5 percent cut to USAID funding
23 from the fiscal year 2017 would not be helpful to your
24 mission, either one of your missions?

25 General Votel: Senator, as I mentioned in my opening

1 comments, we look at this as a team sport. So we are very
2 dependent upon our intergovernmental partners. And so
3 continuing the support for their activities is, I think,
4 essential to the things that we do.

5 Senator Hirono: Well, I would think that a 25 percent
6 cut to the State Department would make it a lot harder for
7 you to work with your partners. I think that that goes
8 without saying, and I realize you have to be very tactful in
9 your responses.

10 Let me get to some other questions.

11 General Votel, the President's South Asia strategy was
12 announced nearly 7 months ago, and General Nicholson stated
13 in November that new permissions granted within the strategy
14 for Afghanistan means that the campaign is on the -- quote
15 -- path to win. Yet, the Department of Defense Inspector
16 General estimates that the Afghan Government is in control
17 of only 18 percent of the districts in the country, and we
18 are now in the 17th year of conflict in Afghanistan. And
19 the Director of National Intelligence stated that conditions
20 this year are likely to deteriorate.

21 So in your view, what exactly does winning mean in
22 Afghanistan at this point? And can the addition of troops,
23 even the much heralded security force assistance brigade,
24 really make enough of a difference to reach the level of
25 winning?

1 General Votel: Senator, I think we are on the right
2 approach. And I am aware of what you are citing there, but
3 I would also highlight that the Government of Afghanistan
4 also controls 64 percent of the population, has control and
5 is able to protect 64 percent of the population.

6 So our strategy is really this year, using the
7 additional authorities, the additional resources that we
8 have moved within CENTCOM and those that are coming from the
9 Department, to ensure that we are in a position to break the
10 stalemate, to seize the initiative, to expand that
11 population control, and to ensure that we have in this year
12 provided the right security environment to support the
13 upcoming parliamentary elections. So I do think we are on
14 the right track with this.

15 Senator Hirono: That remains to be seen because a
16 number of years ago when I went to Afghanistan and we were
17 training the Afghan troops to be able to support their own
18 military efforts and defense, that was many years ago. And
19 at that time, we were told that we were on the right track,
20 and here we are 17 years later. So it remains to be seen.

21 I want to get to what is going on in Yemen. So the
22 United Nations has called Yemen the worst humanitarian
23 crisis in the world, and the United States continues to
24 support the Saudi-led coalition. But the situation on the
25 ground continues to be a stalemate. Your testimony mentions

1 both the challenge of this crisis and the threat of Iran's
2 proxy war in Yemen growing into a regional crisis.

3 Do you see a realistic path to hostilities in Yemen
4 concluding? How long do you expect the hostilities to go
5 on? And are there ways to deal with the humanitarian crisis
6 immediately before a full cessation of hostilities?

7 General Votel: Well, Senator, to answer your question
8 directly, I think there are our diplomats and there are
9 other international parties under the UN that are trying to
10 pursue the diplomatic solution to this and get to some kind
11 of a peace process. That has been difficult to do at this
12 particular point.

13 I guess what I would highlight first off is that what
14 is happening in Yemen -- there certainly is a humanitarian
15 disaster taking place, but there is also a security disaster
16 taking place, and there is a political disaster taking
17 place. And the people that are responsible for this are the
18 Houthis, and they are the central nexus to all of this,
19 enabled by Iran. They are refusing to cooperate in the
20 political process. They are impeding humanitarian efforts
21 that are being undertaken by Saudi Arabia and others here,
22 and they are perpetuating the military situation with their
23 support from Iran, which threatens to widen the conflict.
24 So I think it is important to recognize that at the heart of
25 these problems, humanitarian, security, and political, are

1 the Houthis, enabled by Iran.

2 I would also say --

3 Senator Hirono: I agree with you. I acknowledge that.
4 What is the opportunity for any kind of U.S. leadership?
5 Because we are enabling the Saudis to continue their battle
6 there.

7 General Votel: Well, we are not parties to this
8 conflict.

9 Senator Hirono: But we are enabling the Saudis.

10 General Votel: But what we can do is we can help them,
11 we can advise them, we can share our lessons learned on how
12 to more effectively apply their capabilities, how more
13 effectively to apply their partnerships that they have in
14 conjunction with this.

15 I would also add, Senator, during my last visit to
16 Saudi Arabia, one of the things I had an opportunity to do
17 was to talk with them about how they are helping with the
18 humanitarian aid or the humanitarian disaster situation.
19 And what I would share with you is what I learned is that
20 they have a much more aggressive program in this area than
21 even I had realized. They are not only going into the Port
22 of Hodeidah, they are exploring other ports. They are
23 bringing aid into airports in the central part of the
24 country, and they are using their own ground routes across
25 the border to do this. In many ways, they are pushing a lot

1 of effort in this. It is not perfect. The situation is
2 extraordinarily challenging here, but they recognize this
3 and I do believe they are trying to take efforts to support
4 this wherever they can with their coalition partners.

5 Senator Hirono: I still do not know what the U.S. role
6 there should be and is because we are very much a part of
7 what the Saudis are doing.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

10 Senator Gillibrand?

11 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 General Votel, I am deeply troubled by an incident that
13 happened in Afghanistan on June 9th, 2014, in which five
14 American troops and an Afghan soldier were killed by our own
15 aircraft. This friendly fire incident was explored in a "60
16 Minutes" segment last November that highlighted deeply
17 concerning elements about the event, including the
18 assignment of a JTAC who had been demoted and kicked out of
19 an Air Force special operations unit for poor performance
20 and then assigned to these Green Berets, and the lack of
21 understanding by the B-1 crew and the unit on the ground
22 about what the crew could see. Are you familiar with this
23 incident, and if so, what can you tell me about how
24 something like this can actually happen?

25 General Votel: Senator, I am familiar with the

1 incident, although I will tell you I do not recall all the
2 specific details of it right here today.

3 What I can tell you is that in all of these instances
4 -- and I know this from my own experience -- that we do
5 exhaustive reviews, exhaustive investigations to determine
6 the cause of what happens. If people are to be held
7 accountable, they are held accountable. And then we make
8 efforts to try to apply the lessons learned out of this to
9 limit this.

10 The unfortunate aspect of this business is that our
11 people are operating oftentimes in confusing situations,
12 making decisions in very dynamic environments, and
13 unfortunately, things like this do occur. And so our goal
14 has been to minimize that by ensuring that we have the right
15 people, they have the right training, and we have the right
16 capabilities.

17 Senator Gillibrand: Do you think that B-1's are
18 appropriate airframes for close air support?

19 General Votel: I think the B-1's have been very
20 effective in that role as they played it in Afghanistan and
21 other places.

22 Senator Gillibrand: Do they have the technology
23 available to be able to see the strobe lights that are
24 placed on the helmets of our troops?

25 General Votel: I believe they do.

1 Senator Gillibrand: Were any changes made as a result
2 of this incident?

3 General Votel: Senator, again, I would take that
4 question for the record, and we will go back and look and I
5 will provide you a more thorough response to all the actions
6 that we did take as a result of this.

7 Senator Gillibrand: Specifically infrared strobes. I
8 have asked the Pentagon for the investigation of this
9 incident and have not yet received it. Can I please have
10 your commitment that you will help me get this information?

11 General Votel: You have my commitment, Senator.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

13 In early February, Israel intercepted an Iranian drone
14 in its airspace resulting in an Israeli response striking
15 what it described as the command center from which Iran had
16 launched the drone. An Israeli F-16 fighter jet involved in
17 the offensive was downed by a Syrian antiaircraft fighter
18 which prompted the Israeli military to respond against eight
19 Syrian targets, including three aerial defense batteries and
20 four Iranian positions that it described as part of Iran's
21 military entrenchment in Syria.

22 What is your assessment of Iran's actions in Syria?
23 And is it entrenching itself in the country?

24 General Votel: Well, Senator, I am extraordinarily
25 concerned about Iran's role. I think they are trying to

1 perpetuate their influence and certainly they are trying to
2 create an access so that they can continue to support
3 Lebanese Hezbollah and use that relationship to threaten
4 Israel. So I am extraordinarily concerned about that.

5 Senator Gillibrand: And do you feel that this incident
6 reflected a change in the Iranian rules of engagement in
7 Syria?

8 General Votel: I cannot speak for what the Iranian
9 rules of engagement are. Certainly it was brazen and
10 foolhardy for them to do this given the capabilities that
11 Israel has.

12 Senator Gillibrand: General Waldhauser, I took a CODEL
13 with a number of Senators to Africa a few years ago to
14 assess where we were with regard to the growth of terrorism
15 because, as you know, the precursors to 9/11 came out of
16 Africa, whether it was the bombing of the embassy in Kenya
17 or other terrorist attacks.

18 I am very concerned about what is happening in Africa.
19 Not only your previous answers today but even the front page
20 of the "New York Times" yesterday a story that more than
21 650,000 children under the age of 5 are severely
22 malnourished in northern Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia and
23 that famine throughout Africa is causing 12 million people
24 to rely on food aid. You combine that with the effects of
25 global climate change specifically on the ability of many

1 countries within Africa to grow their own food and provide
2 for food. It is creating crime. It is creating more
3 terrorism. And you add to that what is happening with the
4 Boko Haram efforts to steal children, to have trafficking of
5 females, and to destroy whole communities. I am really
6 concerned about the direction of terrorism and its growth
7 throughout Africa.

8 Can you give me guidance on how these changes are
9 impacting our mission and our posture in the area of your
10 operations?

11 General Waldhauser: Senator, some of the numbers that
12 you stated are certainly overwhelming. And when it comes to
13 the African continent, unfortunately those numbers are
14 sometimes the order of the day. Last year, for example,
15 inside Somalia, there were over 6 million people who were
16 food insecure. This year it is going to be around 5
17 million. And that is just in that region.

18 I would say from the climate perspective, we have seen
19 the Sahel, the grasslands of the Sahel, recede and become
20 desert almost a mile per year in the last decade or so.
21 This has a significant impact on the herders who have to
22 fight, if you will, for grassland, waterholes, and the like.
23 So these environmental challenges put pressure on these
24 different organizations. Some are VEO. Some are criminal.
25 But it puts pressure on these organizations just for their

1 own livelihood.

2 So consequently in areas like northern Mali, ISIS-West
3 Africa in the northern part of Niger, these are areas that
4 are very concerning to us, and this is why we are trying to
5 work so closely with those countries there so that they can
6 maintain security, that they can at a minimum keep these
7 challenges inside those particular boundaries. But there
8 are some significant challenges, and the numbers sometimes
9 in Africa can overwhelm you.

10 Senator Gillibrand: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Senator Inhofe: Thank you.

12 We do not have any more members, and hopefully we will
13 not have any more members.

14 But let me -- just for clarification, first of all, I
15 did not want to be discourteous in that one interruption
16 that I had during the course. But I think it is important
17 because this is something that can be changed.

18 I think what Senator Rounds is getting to is that we
19 are all aware that prior to 10 years ago, the continent of
20 Africa was divided into three different commands, PACOM,
21 EUCOM, and CENTCOM. It completely surrounds Africa.

22 Now, when we decided to have AFRICOM, still under its
23 construction, we had both allocated and assigned troops in
24 PACOM, allocated and assigned troops in EUCOM, allocated and
25 assigned troops in CENTCOM, but only allocated troops in

1 AFRICOM. Now, that is the difference.

2 And I would still think that should be open to
3 discussion because we have seen a lot of things. LRA, for
4 example. When we had problems, we had to bring in troops
5 from other places.

6 And so it is my intention and I am sure it is Senator
7 Rounds' intention to put that in the focus to see if we have
8 the right blend there or if, in fact, we should have
9 assigned troops in AFRICOM.

10 Now, do you have any comment to make on that?

11 General Waldhauser: Senator, I think to a large degree
12 we are saying the same thing. I mean, the technicality of
13 assigned and allocated to those who do not do this on a
14 daily basis may not seem like a big deal, but allocated is
15 something that you might be able to count on all the time
16 but you may not. Assigned forces, obviously, you can count
17 on.

18 Senator Inhofe: Exactly. And I am sure that is what
19 he was getting to. So I think we are in total agreement on
20 that.

21 Any other thoughts?

22 Senator Reed: No, thank you.

23 Senator Inhofe: We are adjourned.

24 [Whereupon, at 11:31 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

25