

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION
OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR
2015 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE
PROGRAM**

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2014

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND AND U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:35 a.m. in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Reed, Manchin, Donnelly, Kaine, King, Inhofe, McCain, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, and Lee.

Committee staff members present: Peter K. Levine, staff director; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; Jason W. Maroney, counsel; Mariah K. McNamara, special assistant to the staff director; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Roy F. Phillips, professional staff member; and William K. Sutey, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: John A. Bonsell, minority staff director; Daniel C. Adams, minority associate counsel; Adam J. Barker, professional staff member; Samantha L. Clark, minority associate counsel; Anthony J. Lazarski, professional staff member; Natalie M. Nicolas, minority research assistant; and Robert M. Soofer, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Lauren M. Gillis, Daniel J. Harder, and Alexandra M. Hathaway.

Committee members' assistants present: Carolyn A. Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; David J. LaPorte, assistant to Senator Manchin; David J. Park, assistant to Senator Donnelly; Christian D. Brose and Paul C. Hutton IV, assistants to Senator McCain; Lenwood A. Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions; Bradley L. Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte; Peter W. Schirtzinger, assistant to Senator Fischer; Craig R. Abele, assistant to Senator Graham; and Robert C. Moore, assistant to Senator Lee.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. The committee meets this morning to receive testimony on the President's fiscal

year 2015 budget proposal from General Lloyd Austin, the Commander of U.S. Central Command, and General David Rodriguez, Commander, U.S. Africa Command.

And, gentlemen, we thank you for your testimony and, even much more important, for your service to our country. And please convey to all of those with whom you work this committee's thanks for their service and sacrifice, as well as our thanks to your families.

The geographic commands that you lead present our Nation with significant ongoing diplomatic, political, and security challenges, but our entire military faces a more fundamental challenge, and that is significant budget reductions, with the looming possibility of renewed and damaging sequestration. And we need to hear from our witnesses today about the impact of budget pressures on their commands and their people, an impact that we know is significant.

General Austin, President Obama recently took an important step on Afghanistan, informing President Karzai that, although the United States remains committed to an ongoing partnership with Afghanistan after this year, that President Karzai's refusal to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement that he had already agreed to means that we must begin planning for the full withdrawal of U.S. troops that would be necessary in the absence of such an agreement. I continue to believe that it is in our interest to continue supporting Afghanistan's security forces beyond 2014 in order to secure the hard-won and impressive gains of the past decade. I also believe that we should give up on President Karzai, who has proven himself to be an unreliable partner, and, instead, we should await his successor's decision on whether to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement.

Another significant challenge is the situation in Syria, a crisis not just for the people of Syria, but for our friends and allies coping with serious tragedy and serious instability. And, General Austin, we hope to hear your thoughts on the conflict's impact, in Syria and beyond, on Syria's compliance, or lack of compliance, with its commitments regarding chemical weapons, and on options for U.S. policy, going forward.

Instability in Syria has had significant consequences for Iraq, where the flow of extremist elements from Syria, combined with the Maliki Government's own misguided pursuit of narrow sectarian goals, have contributed to a violent and a disturbing conflict. And so, General Austin, we'll ask you about how the United States can help bring about an end to the conflict, what role we can play in supporting Iraqi security forces, and how we might encourage the Maliki Government to govern more inclusively.

Al Qaeda and its affiliates remain a persistent threat for CENTCOM and AFRICOM, and we'd appreciate an update from both of you on U.S. efforts to confront this threat, both through U.S.-led counterterrorism operations and through support to our friends and allies, including our efforts to help partners build their own capacities to protect their people from the threat of transnational terrorists.

A particular area of focus for the committee this year is intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, given the Department's decision to reduce its planned capacity for around-the-clock

unmanned combat air patrol. We will seek input from our combatant commanders on this issue, from all of them. Our witnesses today will be especially important to our work, given the importance of ISR capabilities in their AOR.

General Rodriguez, in addition to the threats posed by violent extremists, there are a multitude of other security challenges in your area of responsibility, your AOR, including responding to requests from the State Department for additional security forces and evacuation support, training African peacekeepers for their deployments to the many multilateral peacekeeping operations across the continent, assisting in the training and equipping of dozens of militaries on the continent, and enabling and supporting the multilateral effort to remove the leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army from the battlefield, and also supporting the French military in their operations against extremists in Mali and operations to halt further atrocities in the Central African Republic. So, we're interested in any targeted funding or authorities that may be needed for carrying out those missions that are in your responsibility.

Both of your testimonies this morning is important to our consideration of these and other issues. We thank you for joining us today, for your service.

And I will turn now to Senator Inhofe.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The—we've spent a lot of time recently talking about the growing threats in the U.S. national security around the world. Nowhere are these threats more significant than in the two areas that are before us today. The men and women of AFRICOM and CENTCOM are tasked with confronting some of the most vexing threats our Nation faces. However, massive cuts in the National security budget are making their jobs even more difficult.

This is certainly true in AFRICOM. General Rodriguez, we spent a lot of time talking about this, and they—your area of responsibility encompasses, now, 54 countries, if my count is right, since the South Sudan came in, and spans over 12 million square miles. These countries are confronted with a wide array of challenges, ranging from a growing al Qaeda threat to feeble governments and rising violence. Despite a surplus of challenges across the continent, AFRICOM suffers from persistent resource shortfalls, as no assigned forces lack sufficient ISR and mobility support, and relies on manpower from other combatant commanders. Additionally, a lack of basing and strategic access to the continent continues to hamper your ability to engage with partners and respond to the crises and contingencies in a timely manner.

And, General Austin, the challenges you face are no less daunting. Iran continues to pose one of the greatest threats in the—to our Nation. I have often said this is something that we've known for a long time. It seems like the public is—and a lot of the media come along, and they're surprised. But, we've known—our intelligence has told us the coming capability by 2015 of delivery-system end, as well as a weapon. So, additionally, Iran is developing a more complex anti-access and area-denial weapons, and

current nuclear negotiations have done nothing to halt the pursuit of the ICBM and nuclear weapons capability.

And the rest having to do with Karzai, I'd just—let me—I'd just—I agree with the Chairman.

So, that'll be the end of my statement.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much—thank you, Senator Inhofe.

And let me, first, say that we have three votes, starting at 11:20 today, so we'll try to make a guess as to how many Senators are able to get here, and then we'll figure out what the length of time for the first round will be at that point.

Let me start with you, General Austin.

**STATEMENT OF GEN LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA, COMMANDER,
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General AUSTIN. Good morning. Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss the current posture and state of readiness of U.S. Central Command.

I appreciate your continued and strong support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and I look forward to talking about them and about the exceptional contributions that they are making on behalf of this command and our Nation.

I'm pleased to be here alongside my good friend, General David Rodriguez. I'll join him in making a few brief opening comments, and then I'll be prepared to answer your questions.

I've been in command of CENTCOM for about a year now, and it has been an incredibly busy and productive period. We dealt with a number of significant challenges, to include the revolution in Egypt, the civil war in Syria that is severely impacting neighboring countries, Iranian aggression and malign activity, the perennial fight against al Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations, and, of course, our top priority, which is the operation in Afghanistan.

The central region is an area fraught with turmoil, political instability, social upheaval, and economic stagnation. And, while some may view it as a perpetual trouble spot, I don't believe that to be the case. When I look around the region, I do see great potential for lasting improvement. But, progress requires a clear understanding of the challenges and the particular circumstances.

Much of what is occurring in the CENTCOM AOR is a manifestation of the underlying currents at play in that strategically important part of the world, and foremost among them are the growing ethnosectarian divide, the struggle between moderates and extremists, the rejection of corruption and oppressive governments, and an expanding youth bulge comprised of young, educated, unemployed, and often disenfranchised individuals. By understanding these currents, which are the root causes of the disruptive and destructive behaviors in the region, we and others are able to help mitigate the effects. We're also able to identify and pursue the many opportunities that are present amidst the challenges. And that has been, and will remain, our focus at CENTCOM.

What occurs in the central region has shown to have significant and lasting impact on the global economy and on our vital interests

and those of our partner nations. Thus, is it—it is critical that we continue to do what is necessary to maintain our influence and access, and to contribute to strengthening the regional security and stability. We're also focused on building the capacity and capability of our allies while further improving our military-to-military relationships.

I've traveled extensively over the past year throughout the Middle East and South and Central Asia, and I've talked at great length with senior government and military officials about the challenges, any opportunities present in the region, and I can assure you that the opinion and the support of the United States is still widely sought and highly valued. Our regional partners have seen what we're able to accomplish, and they respect and appreciate our leadership. Our military relationships are as strong as they've ever been, and they are, indeed, the foundation of America's strategic partnerships with almost every country in our area of responsibility.

The year ahead provides significant opportunities for the United States, together with our partners and allies, both in the region and beyond, opportunities to achieve diplomatic and military successes that will further contribute to improved security and stability in our area of responsibility.

And certainly, while we remain pragmatic, we're also hopeful that the opportunity provided by the P5+1 and the Joint Plan of Action, for example, will have a positive outcome and one that could fundamentally change the region for the better. We are likewise encouraged by the tremendous progress made by the Afghans and the opportunity that exists to establish a lasting partnership with the people of that country. It is a partnership that we want to have, going forward. And the people of Afghanistan have made it clear that they want the same thing. And these are just two examples. The reality is that there are a number of opportunities present in the region, and the CENTCOM team stands postured and ready to do our part to pursue them while also addressing the various challenges that exist in that complex and most important part of the world.

Ours is a very challenging mission, and it is made even more difficult by the realities of the fiscal environment. But, given the enormity of the stakes, we will do what is required, and we will continue to work closely with, and support the efforts of, our colleagues across the interagency to ensure a whole-of-government approach that provides for a lasting and positive outcome.

Ladies and gentlemen, America's soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coastguardsmen, and their families, have worked exceptionally hard over the past 13 years. I have had the great honor of serving beside them in combat, and I've been privileged to lead them as they did difficult work under some of the most difficult conditions in the world. And I have been humbled by their acts of absolute selflessness as they made enormous sacrifices on almost a daily basis in support of the mission and in support of one another. And I am incredibly proud of them, and I know that you are, as well.

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, members of the committee, thank you for continuing to provide the capabilities, au-

thorities, and resources that we need to effectively execute our mission in the strategic environment that I have described. And, most important, again, thank you for the strong support that you've consistently showed to the servicemen and -women and their families, particularly those associated with United States Central Command. And I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, General Austin. General Rodriguez.

**STATEMENT OF GEN DAVID M. RODRIGUEZ, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND**

General RODRIGUEZ. Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the efforts of U.S. Africa Command.

I'm honored to be testifying with my good friend and fellow soldier, General Austin, today; and, in light of the growing connections between our areas of responsibility, I think it's fitting that we're appearing before this committee together.

Africa Command is adapting our strategy and approach to address growing opportunities and threats to U.S. national interests in Africa. In the near term, we are working with multinational and interagency partners to address the immediate challenges of violent extremism and regional instability, including threats to U.S. personnel and facilities.

In the past year, we have seen progress in regional and multinational cooperation in counterterrorism, peacekeeping, maritime security, and countering the Lord's Resistance Army. The activities of the African Union mission in Somalia, French, African Union, and United Nations activities in Mali, and the African Union's Regional Task Force Against the Lord's Resistance Army are examples of this progress.

Despite this progress, al-Shabaab remains a persistent threat in East Africa and is conducting more lethal and complex attacks, as demonstrated by the Westgate Mall attacks in Nairobi last September and an attack on the Somali presidential palace last month.

Terrorist groups in North and West Africa are more actively sharing resources and planning attacks; and, while piracy rates are stable after a steep decline in East Africa, they remain at concerning rates in West Africa in the Gulf of Guinea.

Our tailored contributions to building capacity and enabling partners are critical to mitigating immediate threats in countries like Somalia and Mali. By supporting the gradual development of effective and democratic African security institutions and professional forces that respect civilian authority, our shaping activities also reduce the likelihood of U.S. involvement in future interventions in Africa.

Our expanding security challenges in Africa and their associated opportunity costs make it vitally important that we align resources with priorities across the globe, strengthen and leverage partnerships, and increase our operational flexibility. Sharpening our prioritization and deepening partnerships will help to mitigate risks and increase our effectiveness in the dynamic security environment we face.

Now, our Nation is going to face tough decisions about risks and tradeoffs in the future, and Africa Command will continue to work collaboratively with other combatant commands and the joint staff to provide our best military advice to inform decisions about managing risk in our area of responsibility and beyond.

I thank this committee for your continued support to our mission and the men and women of Africa Command. I am also grateful for your support to their families, whose quiet service and sacrifice enable their loved ones to work hard every day to make a difference for our Nation.

Thank you, and I'm prepared to take your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Rodriguez follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, General Rodriguez.

Let's—I think we can get a 7-minute round in before 11:20, so let's try that.

General Austin, relative to Afghanistan, last month President Obama informed President Karzai that, because of his refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement, that President Obama was ordering our military to begin prudent planning for a full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, should such a drawdown be required by the end of this year.

First of all, do you agree, General, that the legal protections that are provided by the Bilateral Security Agreement are essential if we're going to have a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan after 2014?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I do. It's important to have the adequate protections and immunities for our troops if they're going to continue to operate in theater.

Chairman LEVIN. And, General, as you plan for that possible total drawdown of U.S. military forces, when is the latest date by which the bilateral security agreement could be signed without causing significant disruptions or risks to our ability to carry out a total-withdrawal option?

General AUSTIN. Sir, as we go into the summer months, I would say in midsummer, we will experience moderate risk. As we go beyond that timeframe—July-August timeframe—the risk increases substantially.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay, thank you.

Now, General, a number of us on this committee have been concerned about proposals to reduce the size of the Afghan National Security Forces. And in—a recent study by the Center for Naval Analysis concluded that proceeding with a drawdown of the African—excuse me, the Afghanistan National Security Forces, as announced at the Chicago Summit, would put our policy goals for Afghanistan at risk. And so, this recent study of the Center for Naval Analysis recommends that, based on the likely security conditions in Afghanistan after 2014, that the Afghan security forces should be maintained near their current size of around 374,000, which includes army, national police, and Afghan local police, at least through 2018.

Now, would you agree that, given the current conditions on the ground in Afghanistan, that a cut in the size of the Afghan security forces could put at risk our policy goals in Afghanistan and the significant progress that has been made over the last decade?

General AUSTIN. I do agree, sir. I think it's prudent to maintain the current size for a period going forward, as I have indicated to you before. And again, the—our planning factor was 352,000 Afghan National Security Forces, plus the addition of a number of local police, as you have indicated, added to that, brings you up to that number of 372.

Chairman LEVIN. And, General Austin, relative to recent events—or, apparently, rhetoric at least—about the Pakistan army being prepared to move into North Waziristan in Pakistan to take on the safe havens which violent extremists have taken—put in place in that part of Pakistan, has the Pakistan military indicated any willingness, to you, to—or, as far as you know, have they indicated, to people that you have confidence in, that they are willing to go after those extremists, including the Haqqani Network?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. I was just recently in Pakistan and met with the new Chief of Staff of the Army and the Chairman of their Joint Chiefs of Staff, and also Secretary of Defense. And the leadership indicated that there is a willingness to conduct operations in North Waziristan if they can't resolve things through negotiations. And the Haqqani Network would clearly be a part of that. They have indicated that they would work with us to counter the actions of the Haqqani Network. And so, I'm encouraged by the new leadership that's on board there.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, I hope it's true. It's long overdue.

My final question for you, General Austin, is whether or not—in order to change the momentum on the battlefield in Syria so that Assad is under greater pressure, should we train more vetted elements of the Syrian opposition to be capable of changing the balance of power on the battlefield?

General AUSTIN. As you know, sir, that is a policy decision to—whether or not to do that. From my perspective as a military man, I think that our addition—our helping to train and equip additional opposition forces would be value added and would indeed put more pressure on Assad.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

General Rodriguez, you've got a significant requirement, I believe, for ISR in your area of responsibility. And I'm wondering what percentage, if you can tell us, of your intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance needs or requirements are currently being met.

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, last year it was 7 percent. It's up 11 percent now. But, I'd also like to take that for the record, to give you a broader context of some of the other things that we're doing to mitigate that, that will help put that in better context.

Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. But, is the bottom line, even with a better context, that you could use some significantly—significant additional ISR?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, absolutely.

Chairman LEVIN. All right.

And, General Rodriguez, what do you see as the major impediments to AFRICOM working with the Somali National Army? Are

there legal obstacles there? What is—what are the impediments? Why isn't that happening?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, for the first time in many years, we have put our first people on the ground in Somalia, so we have three people there working with AMISOM. The challenges in building the Somali National Army is one of, one, the incoherence of the international effort. They have troop-contributing nations from AMISOM, they have Turkey, they have a European Union training mission, and it's not as coherent as it needs to be. So, we are—recommend that we continue to coordinate those efforts in a better manner. And, for that, we'll—we're looking to have a few more people on the ground to support that effort.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much.

Senator Inhofe.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies, do you want to bring up that chart, on both sides?

First of all, let me ask both generals, Do you think that—does it look to you like al Qaeda is on the run?

General AUSTIN. Sir, we're—we've been able to apply pressure against the al Qaeda network. I think their activity has decreased. We've had good effects. Where we've not had constant pressure, we've seen their activity increase in places in my region, like Syria, in—recently, in Iraq, and in other places around the corridor.

Senator INHOFE. Okay, that's fine.

General Rodriguez, you see chart, which I showed you in my office, and I think you agree that's an accurate chart.

We break down the various terrorist organizations and place them on that chart. I think it's one that all of the members up here should look at.

Is that accurate?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. There's—just for a little bit more precision, over in eastern Libya we have two groups of Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Darna, and that's the fastest growing area for—

Senator INHOFE. Yes.

General RODRIGUEZ.—that type of—

Senator INHOFE. Yes. See, and this is the problem in Africa, because you can have an accurate chart and, 2 days later, it changes. And that's—

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator INHOFE.—what's happening in Africa now. And we've known for a long time, as the pressure takes place in the Middle East, that the squeeze is there, and terrorism goes down through the Horn of Africa and Djibouti, and starts spreading out. And that's a problem you have.

When I look at Africa, and I look at how long it takes to get from one place to the other, you—I've considered—first of all, I'm very glad that we have AFRICOM. It used to be parts of three different commands. But, now that it is there, I just don't—I've never thought of it as adequately resourced. You're a dependent upon CENTCOM and EUCOM for a lot of your ability to confront these problems. And it seems to me that every time something comes up where we have a solution—look at the LRA situation. I first became acquainted with that up in Gulu. And it looks like, hopefully,

we're going to draw that to a close. But, when South Sudan's erupted, you had to pull a lot of the resources out of one area to go to another area. In fact, when I was there, they said—if I can find it—in January, at the AFRICOM headquarters, I was briefed that only 12 percent of the AFRICOM requests for ISR are being met, due to the resource shortfalls. Now, that's pretty troubling to me. Is that troubling to you?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, it is. And it also, you know, limits the flexibility. So, when South Sudan erupted, we had to take the effort away from the Lord's Resistance Army, as well as some counterterrorist efforts in East Africa, to support those efforts.

Senator INHOFE. Yes. And the distances. This is another problem. You talk about one country and moving to another problem area. You're not talking about next door. You're talking about, you know, hundreds and hundreds of miles between these things. And so, I think that's really a—where do you think your biggest intelligence gaps are?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, our biggest intelligence gaps are out in northwest Africa that really stretches from northern Mali to eastern Libya.

Senator INHOFE. Yes. And which types of ISR assets would be—are the ones that are troubling you the most of the—in terms of shortfalls?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, the shortfalls range from wide-area surveillance, that the JSTARS provides to that platform, to the long-range remotely piloted vehicles that we need to be able to cover that vast range.

Senator INHOFE. Okay.

You know, when they talk about having another round—a BRAC round, here, it seems like the easy thing, of course, because it doesn't have to come to anyone's particular State or district, is to do it in western Europe or in some of the European facilities. One of them that bothers me quite a bit is Vicenza, because I understand that could be scheduled for closing. Now, I know, General Austin, that is not in Central, that's right on the edge, though, in EUCOM. Do you share my concern over our ability—I can remember when, going into northern Iraq, we were not able to go through Turkey with our people. We had to drop them in from Vicenza. And they've come to the rescue many times before. Do you have any thoughts about that particular installation in—what a potential loss that could be to your capabilities in your commands?

General AUSTIN. Well, sir, I think that, you know, we have—as you have indicated, we have called upon the European capability to augment what we're doing in our—the Central Command area, on a number of occasions. That includes our operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout. So, any loss of capability there, I think, we would all be concerned about.

Senator INHOFE. Do you agree with that?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, I absolutely agree. As you know, we depend on all those bases, all that support from our European allies. It also helps us with our partners working together so that—I think that support's critical to the mission that we have in AFRICOM.

Senator INHOFE. Yes. And right down the road from there, from Vicenza, we spent a lot of money in getting—fixing up that deployment area, and we watch that on a regular basis. And now we have that, and, even though it's not located in Vicenza, it's there to serve Vicenza, in the event that we should—they should be called on again, as they were before, to northern Iraq.

General Austin, I was, just 2—about a month ago, I guess, in Afghanistan. And when you look—the story isn't told the way it should be told, in my opinion. I see all the great things that are going on there that weren't there before. And I know people don't like to—this is not nation-building, but when you stop and realize that about 10 million Afghans are in school now, 42 percent of them are women. I mean, that—there were none before. You have 17 universities now. There were only two under the Taliban. As we went through Kabul with our military aircraft, there wasn't one gate open. And I can remember, there were no commercial airlines there before. And so—12,000 miles of roads and all of that stuff. Do you agree that just—it's been much more successful there than a lot of people—and the polling looks good. The polling actually is 80 percent supporting of the Afghan National Army. What's your opinion of that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I absolutely agree. I think if you—to your point, as you look at the city of Kabul now—and the first time you went there was probably, what 500,000 people or so, and now it's millions of people. The infrastructure has improved, businesses are growing, the economy is expanding. You know, I was there when we stood up the second battalion of army in Afghanistan, and now if you—as you fast-forward, a combined Afghan security force of 340,000-plus that are well equipped and well trained. And so, it is an impressive story, and I think that story is not being told adequately.

Senator INHOFE. Yes, I agree with that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your service and to the service of your commands.

General Austin, with respect to Syria, we have, over the last several years, tried to organize a very senior-level response to the Assad regime. And that has had various and decidedly mixed results. Is the emphasis now, or should the emphasis now, be looking sort of at smaller units, smaller—commanders on the ground, and then trying to build sort of a more capable, coherent resistance that way—i.e., abandoning the top-down strategy and then going to a more bottom-up strategy?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I think you actually have to do both. I think you—certainly, you cannot be successful without a coherent effort at the lower level. But, going beyond that, I think you have to have unity of command, unity of effort that links these elements together.

Senator REED. Well, I agree, but I think, you know, that has been a very difficult goal to achieve, and I think, frankly, we haven't seen that coherence yet, at either the level outside the—

you know, the structures we've been dealing with explicitly and publicly, and, also most especially, on the ground. Part of that, I think, is vetting people in an area in which you're not going to find a lot of secular moderates who are also capable, you know, commanders—just an impression, at least. So, how do we organize this coherent counterforce to Assad, and at what level? And I agree, nice to have top-to-bottom, but, you know, I think we're looking for a way to improve the coherence. Let me stop there.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. I think, to your point, you do—really do have to have vetted, trained, and equipped—well-equipped forces at the bottom level. And so—as you know, I have not—my forces have not been a part of that effort, but I think that more energy applied there, I think, would create more capacity, going forward.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, General.

General Rodriguez, you have a wide geographic area of command. You have rising sort of groups that are radicalized, et cetera. Can you generally characterize the focus of these groups? Is it local, is it regional? Are you—I'm sure you are—paying careful attention to any groups that have sort of transnational or international objectives? Can you give an idea of your focus on these issues?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. It's—we'll start over in the east, sir. Al-Shabaab obviously has transnational intentions. The continuing efforts of the AMISOM partners has at least stymied that, despite the fact that they continue the asymmetric attacks, but they also are—have aspirations to attack Western interests.

As you head around to the northwestern region, where we have the—about five of the terrorist organizations, they're from AQIM in the west to Ansar al-Sharia, in Darna, in the east. Most of those are regional.

The concern for our European partners is the immigration of movement from the—from those areas into southern Europe and then down, as you work in—the Nigerian area of Boko Haram, is mainly locally against Nigeria. It is spreading out a little bit, to two or three countries out on the edge of that, mostly for support, but that's really a local effort. And then, the Lord's Resistance Army is really just about that local effort also, sir.

Senator REED. Thank you very much. And I think you—you remind us that one of the issues that we have to deal with is the exfiltration of individual fighters, et cetera, and that's something that is a diplomatic challenge more than, at this point, a military challenge.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, it is. And we're working with our partners across SOCOM and CENTCOM to understand what goes on, because those foreign fighters, at this point in time, many of them moved to Syria, and we're concerned, obviously, that they harden their skills and their tactics, techniques, and procedures, then move back out to their home countries, which is—also is a concern for us.

Senator REED. Thank you.

And General Austin, again, I return, again to your area of operation, and that is—you've spoken, I think, already about the critical issues that are facing us in time lines in Afghanistan. Can you

take a—regional perspectives and give us some insights about the present, sort of, view of Pakistan? My sense was, years ago they were awaiting our departure; in fact, saw it as an opportunity for them to—and my impression lately is that they might have changed their perspective, given the radicalization of TTP and the—you know, the—sort of, the blending of the terrorist groups that they're facing.

General AUSTIN. Thanks, sir. Certainly, I think that the threat that the TTP has presented certainly has changed their thinking in a number of areas, and they do consider that to be a significant threat.

I am very encouraged by the new leadership in Pakistan, the new military leadership. I recently met with the Chief of the Army, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And, again, I think they want a relationship, going forward, that's more than transactional. I think they want a long-term, good relationship. At least that's—from the military side of the house, that's what I get. And I think they're sincere about it. And so, I'm very encouraged about—by what I'm listening to and some of what I'm seeing.

Now, the jury's still out. We have a long way to go, but I think our relationship is trending positive in a number of areas.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Reed.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the witnesses for their wonderful service to the country. And they're great leaders, and we're very proud of their outstanding work.

General Austin, in a hearing last week before this committee, the Director of National Intelligence, General Clapper, said, "President Assad remains unwilling to negotiate himself out of power." Do you agree with that statement?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir. I don't think he sees—I think he seems himself in a position of advantage right now.

Senator MCCAIN. In other words, the situation will probably endure unless the momentum on the battlefield changes more significantly against Bashar Assad. Would you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

So, under the current circumstances, do you see any reason to believe that this change in momentum will occur?

General AUSTIN. I don't see that in the near term, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you. So, there really isn't a diplomatic solution.

General Austin, do we know where they're assembling—do we have intelligence that shows us where they're assembling these horrible barrel bombs that they're dropping on people?

General AUSTIN. We have a general idea of where they would be assembling them, sir. I will tell you that, because of a number of reasons, specific and detailed intelligence about what's going on inside of Syria is lacking, in my view.

Senator MCCAIN. I guess it—the reason I asked that question is pretty obvious. It seems to me that if we could have a way of tak-

ing out, in a surgical effort, those places where they're putting—being put together, it certainly would prevent a lot of horrible things that are being done to innocent civilians.

Do you believe that the best course of action now, as far as Afghanistan is concerned, is—and the remaining troop strength—is just to wait until the elections? I mean, would you agree it's pretty obvious that further negotiations with Karzai is a waste of time?

General AUSTIN. Sir, it's very doubtful, in my view, that President Karzai will sign an agreement. And so, I think the best course of action is to continue to look beyond and be prepared to negotiate with the next administration.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you. Would you agree—would you—have you made a recommendation as to the size—troop strength and mission of any residual force we would leave behind, in an agreement with Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I have. And, as you know, our leadership—or, the President is in the process of making a decision. And, you know, I would ask not to reveal what my specific recommendation has—or, was. But, General Dunford and I have been consistent in saying that we think that a force the size of 8- to 12,000, plus special operations forces, would be about the right size to conduct the type of things that we think ought to be conducted, going forward.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you have any idea why the administration wouldn't just convey that to the Congress and the American people?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I—the President has a lot more things to consider than I do, and I don't—won't—

Senator MCCAIN. I see. I think that's a legitimate comment.

General Rodriguez, is al Qaeda a growing or receding threat in the AFRICOM area?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, in the AFRICOM AOR, it continues to grow in the northwest. It is in a—in about a treading-water effort in East Africa. So, it's, overall, continuing to move out.

Senator MCCAIN. General Austin, is al Qaeda a growing or receding threat in the CENTCOM area?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. In those places where we've maintained pressure on the networks, I think we've retarded their growth, but you've seen, in Syria, in Iraq, in a couple of other places, that the—their efforts have actually expanded, they've grown.

Senator MCCAIN. Must be very personally painful to you, as it is to me, to see the black flags of al Qaeda flying over the city of Fallujah, where we made such enormous sacrifice.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, it is. And we would hope that the Iraqis do the right things to reestablish control over their sovereign territory. They've got to get after this. As you know, al Qaeda is a common enemy for both of us, and, if we can help them in any way, then I think we should.

Senator MCCAIN. And the Syria-Iraq border has become a haven for, and transit point for, al Qaeda, isn't that correct?

General AUSTIN. It is, sir. And one of the things that—you know, I just recently met, by VTC, with the Iraqi general officer—senior general officer leadership, and one of the things I continue to hammer home with them is, they've got to control the flow of foreign

fighters across the border. Otherwise, the threat in Iraq will continue to grow.

Senator MCCAIN. You know, that's—that was my next comment about foreign fighters, for both you and General Rodriguez, because they're coming from all over. Surprisingly, a lot of them are coming from Tunisia, which I don't quite understand. But, let's see, General Clapper testified, 7,500 foreign fighters, and they're literally from all over the world. What's the long-term—well, short term, I think, General Austin, we would agree that there is some rejection of these foreign fighters by certain elements and people within Syria, so there is—if there's such a thing as digging for the pony, that is a little bit of good news. But, doesn't this really pose a significant long-term threat, when these foreign fighters—someday this conflict in Syria will end. I have no idea when. But, then they go home. And they're better fighters, they're more indoctrinated, they are—they have established a network. Isn't this a really serious—and I'm interested in General Rodriguez's comments, too, because a lot of them came from areas under his operational command—isn't this really something that's—should be very concerning to us, long term? Could I ask both generals to answer?

General AUSTIN. It should be, and is, sir. And it's not only concerning to us, as you've indicated, it's concerning to the leadership in the region. In a—on two occasions, I've pulled together the chiefs of Defense to discuss this issue and other issues in the region, and I can tell you firsthand that they are very concerned about the—what capability these foreign fighters bring back to their countries of origin. And they want to work together to increase the amount of—or, do some intelligence-sharing, increase situational awareness, and do what we can to retard the growth of this element inside of Syria. I think that's a good first step, if we can get folks knitted a bit closer together and working on this.

And the SOCOM commander is—has joined in with me and is helping to lead this effort. And so, I'm hopeful, again, that it—it won't solve the problem inside of Syria, but, if we can retard the growth a bit, I think it would be value added.

General RODRIGUEZ. And, yes, sir, we have a—estimates are, a couple thousand have headed to Syria from across just North Africa itself. And the countries are concerned. We have worked with a couple of them. Some of them have prevented people from leaving. And—but, the challenge is with—the porous borders are going to continue in North Africa, and it's a concern for each and every one of them.

Senator MCCAIN. My time is expired, but have they prevented them from coming back?

General RODRIGUEZ. The challenge with preventing them of coming back is—not been met very well because of the porous borders in eastern Libya. So, it's not going well.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Senator Donnelly.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, General Austin, General Rodriguez, thank you for your extraordinary leadership for our country. We're incredibly grateful to you.

General Rodriguez, in regards to al Qaeda, when you look at their presence in the Middle East and those areas, and you look at their presence in AFRICOM, are they—is it simply a growing presence in AFRICOM? Is there any zero-sum situation here, or do you see it growing in AFRICOM as well as the same are growing in the Middle Eastern region?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, if—I've said in the—the challenges right now with the insecurity in Libya is where the al Qaeda adherents and affiliates are growing fastest. And that extends across northwest Africa toward northern Mali, because of the vast ungoverned spaces out there. In eastern Africa, where the continued pressure is on AMISOM, that has not grown like it has in northwest Africa.

Senator DONNELLY. In regards to China and weapon sales there, in August 2012 the Washington Post stated, "Africa is quite an important market for the Chinese arms industry, and weapons from China have surfaced in a number of areas in AFRICOM." And I was wondering how China's arms sales affect your mission, and whether we are trying to coordinate with them or discussing with them how to stop this.

General RODRIGUEZ. To date, we have not coordinated with China how to change the equation on the counterterrorism front. Most of their efforts—they do support some of the U.N. missions with security forces in Africa, and most of the effort from China that we see is economic effort to, you know, extract the minerals.

Senator DONNELLY. General Austin, if we wind up not having a BSA signed, how will a zero option affect RC-East and RC-South in Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think it would be problematic. It would be bad for the country of Afghanistan, as a whole. I think that, without our fiscal support, and certainly without our mentorship, we would see, immediately, a much less effective Afghan National Security Force. Over the long term, we could possibly see a fracturing of that force.

I would go further to say that it would be problematic for the region. I think that what we would see over time and very quickly is hedging activity as each of the countries in the—in that sub-region really move to protect their interests. And that would be somewhat destabilizing for the region, as a whole.

Senator DONNELLY. That was actually going to be my next question is, In particular with one country, with Pakistan, what do you think the difference between a zero option and a residual force would mean to Pakistan? And what do you think the leaders of that country—how they would view the two different options?

General AUSTIN. Well, I can tell you what the leadership tells me, sir, when I talk to them, is that they are concerned about having a well-equipped force on their border that is losing control, losing oversight, losing leadership. And so, the—what the future of that could possibly bring is very troubling for them. And so, you would expect that they would begin to hedge a bit more to protect themselves along their borders.

Senator DONNELLY. And I had asked this yesterday, but wanted to check with you, sir. In regards to a timeframe as we head toward December, if we are in August and the elections are still not squared away at that point—there's runoffs or whatever—and we still don't have a BSA, is there a time where you look up and you go, "Come September 15th, we will not be able to implement our plan to transition to a residual force by the end of December," or, "Come October 1st, it makes it even more difficult"? The time situation has to be starting to be something that you look at and go, "How do we make this work?"

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, and it's a question of risk and how much risk leadership is willing to accept. As you have indicated, as you go beyond August into the fall, the risk increases. And so, you know, my job is to continue to convey that level of risk—the level of risk, to the leadership. And it—you know, as we move down that road, it'll be up to the leadership to make that decision.

Senator DONNELLY. And in Iraq and—with Maliki, how, if any, does CENTCOM mitigate the Iranian influence over Maliki, over his government? You know, we just saw stories that Iraq was purchasing weapons from Iran. And it seems, instead of trying to bring it—bring the groups together, they just seem to be getting further apart, which causes more fracture. Is there anything CENTCOM can do to try to mitigate that Iranian influence?

General AUSTIN. Well, what we want to do, sir, is have a good relationship with Iraq, moving forward. We also want for Iraq to be—to take it—to take a leadership position one day in the region. It has the capability to do that.

Iraq will have a relationship with Iran, because, as you know, it shares a border with them. And I think just having known Prime Minister Maliki for a long time, I think he understands that he has to have a relationship with them, but he also clearly understands and wants a—he understands that he needs to have, and wants, a relationship with the United States. And I think he's constantly trying to strike a balance there.

Senator DONNELLY. If I could—just as a final question—when you look—and the army's now composed—90-percent-plus Shia—is Maliki capable of making the tough choices that need to be made to try to keep the country together?

General AUSTIN. Well, we certainly would hope so, sir. And certainly our Ambassador, our assistant Secretary of State, Brett McGurk, is also—both of them continuously provide him advice and counsel that, you know, we need to move forward and embrace the Sunnis a bit more. We—most recently, we've seen him commit to training a couple of battalions of Sawa, or what we used to call Sons of Iraq—

Senator DONNELLY. Sure.

General AUSTIN.—tribal elements—and—in the hope of incorporating those elements into the police and into the army. We've encouraged them to move out smartly with that, because I think that will convey some good intent, goodwill. And, most recently, we've seen the startup of a training effort in Habbaniyah that's focused on training some of those tribal elements. So—

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you so much, to both of you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Donnelly.

Senator FISCHER, I believe, is next.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, first of all, I'd like to thank both you and General Rodriguez for your service to our country, and also for the men and women who serve under you. We so appreciate the sacrifices they make, as well as their families make. So, please convey to them our thanks and our gratitude.

General, can you tell me what the status is with Syria's delivery of chemical weapons?

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am. To date, we're about—they're about 36-percent complete with the effort. They're behind the original projection, but I think there are many that would admit that we are probably further along than many would have thought that we'd be while we're doing this in the midst of a civil war.

Senator FISCHER. You don't anticipate that they'll meet that June 30th deadline, then? Or do you?

General AUSTIN. I think it's hard to say, ma'am. I'm certainly hopeful that they will. I think it will be difficult. But, I think the important thing is for us to continue to emphasize the importance of getting this done. I think if we can get it done—certainly, it won't solve all the problems in Syria, but it will make a very complex set of problems one problem set less complex. So—

Senator FISCHER. Are the Syrians forthcoming in working on this problem and challenge that we're facing right now with the weapons, or do you feel they are holding back in any way?

General AUSTIN. Well, I would defer to the intel community to provide you an assessment there.

I think that they have been, for the most part, forthcoming. To what degree, again, I think that that's a question better answered by the intel community.

Senator FISCHER. And once the stockpile is removed, what's going to happen to those facilities?

General AUSTIN. I think that a part of the—as a part of the agreement, the facilities are supposed to be disabled or destroyed.

Senator FISCHER. Okay.

The CIA Director, John Brennan, he had testimony here earlier this year, and he indicated that al Qaeda-affiliated groups have safe havens in Syria and Iraq, where they train. DNI Clapper stated that the Intelligence Community believes that these groups have aspirations to attack the United States. Do you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. I certainly would say, ma'am, that, with respect to the ungoverned space that's—that currently exists in Syria, if that continues—and we know that there are al Qaeda elements there—if that continues, we would certainly expect that, over time, there would be elements that would want to export terror to the region, to western Europe, and to our homeland.

Senator FISCHER. Can you put a timeline on that, at all, when you feel this would become a definite threat to our homeland?

General AUSTIN. No—

Senator FISCHER. And what suggestions you would have in countering that?

General AUSTIN. No, ma'am. I can't make a prediction. I would—anytime I see that number of extremists in one location, I'm concerned about the immediate time, going forward. And certainly, I can't predict when they're—when a threat would materialize, but I would say, if you just kind of look at the growth of the—of these elements inside of Syria over the past year, they've grown at an exponential rate. And unless we do something to retard that rate of it, and prepare ourselves to counter this threat, going forward, then I think we're going to have a significant issue.

Senator FISCHER. How do you characterize the level of Iranian and Russian support for the Assad regime?

General AUSTIN. I think the Iranians have been—are really doing a lot with the Quds Force elements to enable the regime. I think, also, we've seen Hezbollah openly declare that they're in support of Assad. We know that the Iranians are supportive of Hezbollah. So, I would say that support is substantial.

Senator FISCHER. Have you seen any increase in the level of support in the—say, in the last year?

General AUSTIN. I think—we have. I think that, you know, as the opposition has grown in capability a bit, the reaction to that is an increase in proxy activity by Iran. And so, they've kind of doubled down, so to speak, on their level of effort.

Senator FISCHER. Okay, thank you, sir.

General RODRIGUEZ, how would you characterize al Qaeda's network and coordination throughout Africa?

General RODRIGUEZ. They continue to deepen their coordination and their transfer of resources, as well as skills, throughout Africa.

Senator FISCHER. Do you think there's this—a free flow of arms and terrorists—

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, that's—

Senator FISCHER.—across many areas?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes. The biggest challenge we have is all the arms, ammunition, and explosives from Libya that continue to move throughout the region in northwest Africa, ma'am.

Senator FISCHER. And that flow of arms in and out of Libya, is that impacting the strength of al Qaeda throughout the continent?

General RODRIGUEZ. It is. It continues to support them throughout northwest Africa.

Senator FISCHER. How much support are they receiving from the drug trade? And how do you counter that?

General RODRIGUEZ. Ma'am, we work with our interagency partners, as well as the Nations, to try to stem that flow. That drug network has actually gotten a little bit worse recently, because it used to be really from South Africa—or, I'm sorry, from South America up through western Africa; now from southeast Asia, it also comes east to west. So, that network continues to grow apace.

As far as how much that contributes to the resourcing, I think that more of the resourcing, quite frankly, is done locally from ransom, from criminal activities that—some of that are drug, but it's not the primary thing that the al Qaeda or the terrorist network is fueled by.

Senator FISCHER. Okay.

General RODRIGUEZ. Thank you.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Senator KING.

Senator KING. Perhaps you gentlemen could discuss which was the superior class of West Point, 1975 or 1976. I notice that you share that experience.

A lot of discussion of al Qaeda and the—Senator Inhofe's map, which I think has—is quite important for us to review.

Given the growth of al Qaeda, the growth of al Qaeda or like groups, what's our long-term strategy? The strategy of decapitating the organization in the last 7 or 8 years succeeded for a while, but clearly this group—this phenomenon is metastasizing. Are we going to be able to defeat this threat by simply killing more people, or do we need some alternative strategy?

General Rodriguez, you're in the middle of that situation in North Africa. I want—

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator KING.—I want some larger thinking than just military drone strikes and other options of that nature.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir. Sir, it's going to take a comprehensive approach from all the interagency and the multinational efforts there to do it. It's going to be a long effort, because you have to build the capacity, long term, for law enforcement to handle this. So, we're working hard to do that. But, I think the long-term way ahead is to build that capacity in those host nations to mitigate that threat.

In the interim, you know, we have to continue to support the efforts to keep the pressure on them, because when the pressure's on them, they're not able to increase their capacity at the rate and speed that they have in a couple of places where—were in a very, very free-flowing well-resourced, and ungoverned space.

Senator KING. But, do we have any analysis of why people are joining these organizations, why young people are joining them, why they're getting people? Obviously, they have skilled people in bomb-making and those kinds of technologies. What's driving this? What's underneath it? Is it all religion? Is it poverty? What—how do we cut off the recruiting end of it?

General RODRIGUEZ. It's a combination of those things. Obviously, the ideology is a large part of it, but it's also the disenfranchised people who don't see a—opportunities for themselves or their families in the future.

Senator KING. A related question, General Austin. Well, I would suggest, gentlemen, that we all need to collectively be thinking about this, because a—if you kill one, and two come back, we're—that's a—that's an endless task.

General Austin—and I think you touched on this in answers to Senator Donnelly's questions—how do we get it through to Maliki that he's got to stop suppressing the Sunnis or he, in fact, is creating an al Qaeda opportunity in places like Fallujah?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think that's becoming ever more clear to the Prime Minister as each day goes by. And I think that, you know, the—that he is making—is taking some steps to reach out to the Sunni population a bit more and incorporate more Sunnis into the police and the army. But, again, he's got to do it faster.

So, I mean, there's a lot of work to be done here. I think he realizes that this work has to be done. And we're just hopeful that he'll move quicker.

Senator KING. Generals, I'm on the Intelligence Committee, I have to be a little careful here, but, as you know, there's a difference in intelligence analysis about the future of Afghanistan. Are you confident that, if we maintain that 8- to 12,000 troop, with some financial support, that Afghanistan is not going to return to the Taliban in—within a—the foreseeable future?

General AUSTIN. Well, I think if the Afghan Security Forces continue to progress—I don't think the Taliban can defeat the Afghan Security Forces. I don't think that there's anybody, sir—

Senator KING. That's a big "if." You started the sentence with "If the security forces continue to progress." Do you think that's likely?

General AUSTIN. I think, if—I think it is likely if we continue to do the right things.

I would also say that probably nobody can guarantee that they're going to continue to move forward and things are going to get better, but certainly this approach, or an approach that allows us to remain with them and to continue to train and mentor them, gives us our best chance at being successful. And I think that, you know, what we hope would happen here is that they would be able to provide the security for the country that would allow the political institution to mature. And if that can happen and they can go after the corruption a bit more, I think things begin to fall into place. And so, we're hopeful that they will.

Senator KING. Well, I'm hopeful, as well, and I hope you're—certainly hope you're right.

Question to both you gentlemen. I presume your day starts with some kind of intelligence briefing about what's going on in your region. Does that briefing include material from the CIA, the NSA, the civilian intelligence agencies?

General Rodriguez?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, it does. We have a full complement of the Intelligence Community representatives in the headquarters, and it goes through the full range of the Intelligence Community capabilities from the—

Senator KING. So, you—

General RODRIGUEZ.—NSA, DNI, everybody.

Senator KING. So, you feel you're getting—there's good coordination. When I—what worried me is the breadth of our intelligence activities, it's very costly. I want to be sure that the data's getting to you and you don't just see military intelligence, for example.

General RODRIGUEZ. No, sir, we see all of it.

Senator KING. That's very reassuring.

General Austin, I know Israel is not within your command, but the question I'm going to ask relates, to some extent, to that. For many years, an irritant in the region—I think "irritant" is a minor—too minor a word—has been the situation with the Israelis and the Palestinians. To what extent do you believe that a settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians would diminish tension in the Middle East, generally?

General AUSTIN. I think that it would be a significant accomplishment, sir, and I think it would diminish tensions throughout.

It won't solve all the problems, but every leader that I talk to in the region really believe that—really believes that if we can move forward on this, it's a—it would be significant, it would be a clear sign of progress, a promotion of goodwill. And I think, clearly, it would be much, much value added. Again, it won't solve every problem in the Middle East, but I think it would be very helpful.

Senator KING. Thank you. That's important testimony. I appreciate it, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator King.

Senator GRAHAM.

General GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Austin, you've stated previously that we have a really difficult time understanding what's going on, on the ground in Syria. I think that's a fair statement. It's not a very transparent place, there's a civil war going on. Do you have a high, low, or medium confidence as to whether or not Assad is keeping some chemical weapon stockpiles out of our reach?

General AUSTIN. I have a low confidence level, sir, because I just don't—again, that would be a question, as you know—

Senator GRAHAM. Well, given his behavior, it's likely he would try.

General AUSTIN. That would be my next statement, sir, that he was the person that's responsible for the death of—

Senator GRAHAM. Yes.

General AUSTIN.—140,000 people, so—

Senator GRAHAM. It's not much of a stretch, he may cheat on an—

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, sir—

Senator GRAHAM.—agreement.

General AUSTIN.—bona fide bad guy.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, okay, good answer.

The Sunni Arab states are in your jurisdiction, is that correct, in your theater of operation?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. What's the likelihood, based on your understanding of the region, that the Sunni Arab states would respond to any agreement with the Iranians that allowed an enrichment capability, even if it were under the guise of commercial peaceful purposes? If the Iranians were given the right to enrich by the international community, do you fear that one of the consequences would be that the Sunni Arab states would claim an equal right?

General AUSTIN. I do think that we could—we would probably see that, sir. I think that there is a level that certainly they would be much more comfortable with. I think this—the way that this proceeds will all depend upon how transparent we are with them and how much we engage them up front, in terms of what we're trying to accomplish.

Senator GRAHAM. One of the fears I have—and I think that's a very good answer—I was in Munich Security Conference several weeks ago, back in January I guess, or February, and I asked the Sunni Arab leaders, "If the Iranians are given the right to enrich, would you claim an equal right?" They all told me yes. And my concern is, the North Korean model did not work so well. Giving them

capability in trying to contain it is a very difficult enterprise in countries like North Korea and Iran. Do you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. So, seems to me that we need to understand that any agreement with the Iranians that allows them to enrich uranium is probably going to lead to proliferation of enrichment in the Mid-East, which I think would be clearly a disaster. That's just my personal view.

Detainees in Afghanistan. I want to compliment you, General Dempsey, Secretary Hagel for standing by General Dunford's side, having his back. The 65 detainees that were released by Karzai recently, do you agree with the estimation by General Dunford they represent a real threat to our security in Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe it would be helpful if the Congress spoke loudly and clearly about this issue, reinforcing the command's position?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir. And let me go one step further and thank you and the other Members of Congress for what you have already done. It clearly has been value added, in terms of conveying the message to the leadership in the region.

Senator GRAHAM. I think—well, you know, you had some really good questions coming from my colleagues on the Democratic side. The idea of a Afghanistan without a residual force, do you think we would have an Iraq in the making if we just basically left no one behind?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I think that conditions would change very rapidly in the region. I think, again, what I worry about is hedging activity from the other states in the region that would create regional instability. I worry about a new government, new leadership in a newly elected government here, trying to get their feet up under them, with a security apparatus that's unsure about where it's going and doesn't have the resources to—so, there are a number of elements that could come together to cause concern.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe, given the track we're on with the Afghan security forces, an adequate residual force would embolden their confidence, would deter the Taliban's future plans, and would create momentum at a time we need it in Afghanistan?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. All right.

Now, you gave some testimony, in response to Senator Fischer, that I thought was accurate and compelling. The Director of National Intelligence has told this committee, and the country as a whole, that there are up to 26,000 al Qaeda fighters enjoying safe haven inside of Syria, and that the likelihood that a—an attack on our allies in western Europe, our interests the region, and even the homeland, is growing with the more numbers and the larger the sanctuary. And you agree with that. Is that correct?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. So, I want every member of the Senate to understand that we're being told by our military leaders and our Intelligence Community that there is a threat to the homeland building, and our allies and our interests in the region, from 26,000 al Qaeda fighters enjoying safe haven in Syria.

Very quickly, how do we get them out of there without somebody confronting them?

General AUSTIN. Sir, they don't come out unless someone does something about it. The best solution is for, you know, some form of government to be established in Syria that will reestablish control over the sovereign territory of Syria. And—

Senator GRAHAM. Right. The Syrian military, whatever new military they have after this political transition, would have very little capability. You agree with that? At least in the early years?

General AUSTIN. I think they will be challenged, yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. I don't think we need boots on the ground in Syria at all, quite frankly. But, I do believe we have capabilities that could be deployed against al Qaeda, in conjunction with people in the region, that could diminish the threat we face from al Qaeda. Do you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. I do, sir, and I think the—your point to the fact that this is a regional issue is—

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

General AUSTIN.—is, I think, really important. And the more that we can get help from the regional partners there—

Senator GRAHAM. Yes.

General AUSTIN.—I think the better outcome—

Senator GRAHAM. An al Qaeda presence in Syria is not good news for many people in the region, so they have an interest, along with ours. So, I've always believed you sort of look at al Qaeda as Germany first and Assad as Japan, because we've got two real problems inside of Syria. And the one that presents the most direct threat to me is the al Qaeda presence. And I hope we'll deal with it.

Thank you for your service.

General Rodriguez, if sequestration fully goes into effect over the next 10 years, what kind of effect would it have on your command in AFRICOM to be relevant and to have an American presence to secure our interests? And what are those interests?

General RODRIGUEZ. Senator, the—if sequestration goes through, I think everybody has talked about the incredible impact it would have on readiness of the forces to deploy. And for the region in Africa, we would be hugely impacted by the air and the mobility assets that help us range the issues that we have in Africa. So, I would worry about that, mostly, and—if that continued in—at the sequestration levels.

On—for Africa, what interests the United States have is, you know, the—6 of the 10 fastest growing economies are in Africa. It's a huge economic impact on both the people in Europe as well as the people in the Far East. And then, the other thing is that the huge increase in personnel and people growth will create a powerhouse of opportunity for development in the future.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Graham.

Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks again, to both of you, for your service and—outstanding service to our country.

General Austin, probably starting with you and—President Karzai insisted the U.S. must jumpstart peace talks with the

Taliban insurgency and end raids and strikes before he signs the Bilateral Security Agreement. Pakistan, I think, tried to hold peace talks with the Taliban. We see how bad that had gone. The Taliban seemed to use false pretense in order to stall the negotiations, hoping that they can wait out until we withdraw. I'm hoping that maybe you could give me an insight into what President Karzai thinks that he might accomplish by negotiating with the Taliban and if he must know there's no room for him or for democracy if the Taliban have their way. I mean, for him to go down this path so many years with us and take the turn that he's taken now, you know, you can understand why those of us—some of us, maybe, sitting here—have seen this to be a futility, the, "Why do we still fool with that place or that man or anybody that comes after him?"

General AUSTIN. Well, sir, I wish that I could give you some insight into what the President of Afghanistan is thinking, but, unfortunately, I can't. And I agree with you that, you know, this—the effort to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban will be a very challenging effort that will take some degree of time.

Again, there is reason to be hopeful, to your question about, you know, why we should be hopeful. I think that, based upon the things that we've done and what we see in Afghanistan right now, in terms of the progress, I think we can all be hopeful. But, you know, again, I think we should look beyond and really begin to focus on trying to work with the next administration.

Senator MANCHIN. Maybe you can also give me an update on the—and I know we've talked about it some with Iran—the negotiations with Iran, for us to go in there and have unfettered access. Are we getting unfettered access to seeing their centrifuges and what they're doing, the capabilities? Are they destroying any of their large—or, their highly enriched uranium? And have we been as successful in that?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I defer to the—to our representatives that are in that negotiation process currently to provide you with an accurate assessment of how we're doing and what we're doing. But, from the reporting that I'm seeing, I think that we have every indication to believe that they are being cooperative, they're doing what the agreement—initial agreement called for them to do in the early stages, in terms of the down-blending of enriched uranium and access by the inspectors. But, again, they're in the middle of a negotiation. Probably imprudent for me to—

Senator MANCHIN. No, I mean, you—I noticed you answered, concerning on Syria, what success we might be having, if any, or to what degree, on securing the chemical weapons and disposing of them. And I know someone in—one of our colleagues was very hopeful that that is on a time track to be successful. And, if not, how far behind are we?

So, if we're looking at Syria with chemicals, we're looking at Iran with nuclear, and what would that proliferate the region if we allow Iran to have this? I mean, it's going to be, I would think, a proliferation for the whole—that whole part of the world.

General AUSTIN. Absolutely, sir. An Iran with a nuclear weapon is a very dangerous situation, not only for the region, but also for the world. And certainly—you know, I have every reason to believe that, you know—I mean, our leadership's been clear about what

our policy is—I have every reason to believe that we’re going to stand by that policy, going forward.

Senator MANCHIN. I want to ask the question about Ukraine. Are we prepared to move, militarily, into Ukraine for the support of that government that we have acknowledged?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I’d be out of my lane, there, to answer a question about Ukraine. I’d really—

Senator MANCHIN. Well, I think you know your strength—

General AUSTIN.—ask Phil Breedlove to probably—

Senator MANCHIN. I think both of you all know the strength of our Defense Department, with having the ability to go in that direction, if need be. Or do they—have they already calculated—has the Russians already calculated we won’t go that—down that route?

General AUSTIN. I—well, I think our leadership’s been clear, early on, that they’re looking for other options to deal—

Senator MANCHIN. Sure.

General AUSTIN.—with this problem, other than the military options. And certainly, we have great capacity in our military, but I think, from their perspective, from what I’ve seen and heard reported, that there are better tools to use in the—in this endeavor.

Senator MANCHIN. Okay.

And then, General Rodriguez, is—as you know, South Sudan has seen thousands killed in fighting between government troops and rebel forces, and the U.S. has been active in supporting South Sudan’s independence, but it’s a very dangerous situation for the South Sudan’s citizens, especially since peace talks between the rebels and the government seem to be on hold right now. What engagement does Africa Command have in this situation? And what do you think the United States could do to assist?

General RODRIGUEZ. Sir, we continue to engage the SPLA on a military-to-military level to continue to have them take into, you know, account their people and their forces, because part of the SPLA, of course, has splintered off to split with the rebels, so that we continue to encourage them to get together, just like the diplomatic corps is working to get the opponents and the leadership together there.

The best thing that we can do, militarily, is to continue to coordinate with our partners in the region to ensure that they do not do anything that will upset or make it worse. So, the Ugandans, who have forces in there, we’re working with them to ensure that they don’t do anything to have a negative impact on—

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you.

And one final question, sir, to either one. I think, on Syria, do we—have we been able to identify any of the rebels that we would consider to be now friendly, or ones we should engage with or arm or work with?

General AUSTIN. This has been a challenge throughout, sir, but I would say that—and again, I am not—I don’t—my portfolio does not include—

Senator MANCHIN. We see all those stars there; we just think you have all the answers.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. But, I—yes, we—to be short, yes, there are elements in Syria that we can work with, going forward.

Senator MANCHIN. But, what I—I know, I’ll finish up—I know that, in Syria, at first—some of my colleagues said, “If we would have gotten involved first, we could have identified who would have been more of an ally for us to fight Assad’s regime.” Since that didn’t materialize, and as it’s splintered apart, I’m concerned now—and the only thing I’ve heard said among people of knowledge, that if we start disbursing weapons, we can be assured of one thing: all sides will have American weapons.

General AUSTIN. Certainly, you have to be prudent about what you do and how you do it, sir, and I think the vetting of folks that you want to support is critical to this overall effort.

I would also say that it requires a team—it requires teamwork, not only on our part, but on the part of all the folks that are in the region, all the countries that are in the region. And I think if there’s better unity there, in terms of who to support and how to support them, I think that this gets better in a hurry.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you both very much.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Manchin.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank both of you for your distinguished service to our country, and your leadership, particularly with the challenges we’ve heard about today, for our country.

I wanted to ask you, General Austin—the Wartime Commission—Commission on Wartime Contracting found in—it was in a report issued in 2011—that as much as \$60 billion of U.S. Government contracting funds had been wasted or misspent in Iraq and Afghanistan and was actually provided as the second largest source of income for insurgents, was actual U.S. contracting dollars. As a result of that, I think you know I worked with then-Senator Brown to introduce what’s called “no contacting with the enemy” language to give DOD the authority to cut through the red tape to be able to terminate contractors that were colluding with insurgents much sooner in a much more efficient fashion.

Can you—and then, this year we’ve also updated that authority in work done in this committee. I worked with Senator Blumenthal to expand this authority to other combatant commands, so—because, we—as you know, we’ve already saved money doing this. Can you give me an update on where we’ve—where we are with terminating contracts, keeping money—taxpayer dollars—out of the hands of our enemies with respect to this authority?

General AUSTIN. Yes, ma’am. To date, we’ve terminated 11 contracts, totaling about \$31 million. There are others that are in the process right now that we continue to review. This is a comprehensive review that requires the input of a number of different elements.

I would say an important part of this process, though, is the prescreening that now goes on before we enter into the contract negotiation. And I think that has been instrumental in slowing down or eliminating a number of opportunities that the enemy would have had to bleed off more money.

Senator AYOTTE. Let me ask you—one concern that—I’m hoping to visit Afghanistan soon, and one of the concerns I have is that Task Force 210 has now been moved out of Afghanistan, and I’m

concerned that, as I understand it, with the transition of many of our forces leaving, that we will actually, in some instances, be relying more heavily on contractors. Therefore, the screening process becomes very important, as you identified, but also the ability to terminate contracts if there is a mistake made on screening.

So, what's your view on—what's the thought process of taking Task Force 210 out of Afghanistan, where I think there will be even more contractors that we really need to make sure that we're not allowing taxpayer dollars to get in the wrong hands?

General AUSTIN. Well, I think it's certainly—you know, as we go forward and we are required to shrink our footprint, there are decisions that we have to make about what we must keep and what we can't keep and what we can do from other locations. What we have to do is be more prudent about our policies and procedures, in terms of entering into the contracts at the front end. And I think, again, this is helpful in also screening the contractors.

Certainly, it makes it more challenging if they're not in theater, but we're going to have to rely on our leadership a bit more to help out in this endeavor.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I would say this. You know, in terms of the work done by Task Force 2010, I think it's really important that this—this is a core function, because—if we're going to ask taxpayers to provide any more money there, just to make sure that it's getting in the right hands. So, I hope that, as we look at the footprint, this may be something that we're considering, of having them on the ground to make sure that our dollars are used wisely.

I wanted to ask you, General Rodriguez—certainly, just hearing both of your testimony today about the growing presence and threat of al Qaeda is very chilling. And you are serving during very challenging times. In your written statement, General Rodriguez, you said that al Qaeda affiliates and adherents operating in North Africa include Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Ansar al-Sharia in Darna. So, these groups obviously are associated with al Qaeda. Is that true?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes.

Senator AYOTTE. And recently, as I understand it, in January, the State Department designated Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Ansar al-Sharia in Darna as foreign terrorist organizations. Is that true?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. The recent January Bipartisan Senate Intel Committee report, that was issued on a bipartisan basis about the attacks on our consulate on September 11, 2012, that obviously killed four brave Americans, that said, in that report, that individuals affiliated with Ansar al-Sharia participated in the attacks on our Consulate. There have also been press reports of members of Ansar al-Sharia quite openly operating within Libya, including, I guess, having coffee in cafes and things like that.

So, I guess my question to you, General Rodriguez is—certainly, now based on the designation of Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi as a foreign terrorist organization, as well as Ansar al-Sharia in Darna—to the extent that we have intelligence that these individuals participated in the attacks on our consulate on September 11, 2012, my question is, How come—do we have the legal authority

to make a targeted strike, as we've done, for example, in places like Yemen, against these individuals, who are clearly affiliated with al Qaeda, have participated in an attack that obviously killed four brave Americans in a terrorist attack? So, I'd like to know from you—as I look at this, foreign terrorist organizations, designated such, have killed Americans, and why haven't we taken a targeted attack? Is—and how come we haven't taken greater action there?

General RODRIGUEZ. Ma'am, the lead Federal agency for that is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We continue to support them with all the collection that we do and we can do. And, I mean, I've got to tell you, it's a tough area to operate in, because of the distance and the support.

The rest of the question, ma'am, I'd like to take for the record and I'll talk to you offline or—

Senator AYOTTE. Or in a classified setting?

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator AYOTTE. I appreciate it. Thank you. I think this is an important issue, particularly now that we've clearly designated them a foreign terrorist—

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE.—organization.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, ma'am.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you.

General RODRIGUEZ. You're welcome.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Ayotte.

Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks, to both of our witnesses, for your helpful testimony today and your service.

General Austin, I think I'm right on this, my memory from our earlier discussions, you were the Commander of U.S. Forces in Iraq at the time of the completion of U.S. withdrawal in December 2011, correct?

General AUSTIN. I was, sir.

Senator KAINE. And I know, from talking with Iraqi Government leadership, how well your service there was regarded. The U.S. Government and military was in negotiation with Iraq at the time about whether the United States would maintain some residual force in Iraq past December 2011. But, because we could not reach an agreement with the Iraqi Government that satisfied even sort of minimal criteria on our side, basically they really didn't want us to stay. We ended up doing that full withdrawal in December 2011. Do I have the facts basically correct?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Senator KAINE. So, you must have a little bit of a feeling now, as the head of CENTCOM, that you've seen this movie before, with respect to the discussion in Afghanistan about a Bilateral Security Agreement and the maintenance of some post-withdrawal residual force.

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir. There is a difference, though. And—if I may—

Senator KAINE. Please.

Senator KAINE.—and the difference is that the—whereas, the Iraqi people were not really excited about us staying there—the people weren't; the leadership, to include the Prime Minister, weren't excited about it, either—the difference is that, in Afghanistan, the people want this. We've seen that, you know, by the vote of a loya jirga. The leadership that we talk to, you know, that's around the President, you know, the senior military, all of them think that this is a good idea. We've even seen some of our adversaries in the region say it's a good idea, for the sake of the stability of the region. And certainly, there are other regional leaders throughout the region that really think that, in order to stabilize Afghanistan, going forward, and the region, this is a—this is something that we ought to do.

Senator KAINE. And, in fact, General Austin, not only is there relatively strong support in Afghan civil society for us remaining, there are some signs that Iraqi leadership has regrets about their decisions at the end of that period in 2011. You and I were together in Bahrain at a security council, the Manama Security Dialogue in December 2013, and Iraqi Foreign Minister Zabari testified—or was part of a panel and commented very openly, “Afghanistan should not make the mistake that Iraq made, that we made, in dealing with the Americans and in trying to find a way to have a post-, sort of, combat operation residual presence. We didn't want it, and the U.S. withdrew, and we regret it now because of what's going on there.” And Foreign Minister Zabari has said this publicly, and has even indicated that he's made these same statements to President Karzai. And you understand that, as well.

General AUSTIN. I've not heard that, specifically, until just now, sir, but it—there are indications that—you know, there are folks now that see the value—the tremendous value of having a good, strong relationship with us. I think, if you talked to the Prime Minister today, he would say that, you know, “We have a relationship, we have a Strategic Framework Agreement that we've not fully exploited, and we ought to take a serious look at that.” I mean, and that can be kind of the foundation to build upon, going forward, for other things.

Senator KAINE. Well, I hope that the Afghan public, the military, the other leadership, loya jirga, et cetera—I do think their will is very strong that we continue in this residual presence. I think your answers to Senator McCain about, “It may not be productive to have additional discussions with President Karzai, but those discussions do need to continue with the new government”—I strongly support it.

General Austin, you have indicated, I believe, that you think Syria is one of the most complicated situations you've seen during your entire military career. DNI Clapper has testified recently before hearings in the Senate, and he indicated that he viewed the battlefield situation in Syria as a stalemate. Some of your earlier testimony was, you think the—Assad's team thinks they're winning. But, do you basically look at the situation, as you understand it in Syria now—do you think either side can win in the foreseeable future? Assad may gain ground or lose ground. Or, do you tend to think that it is a—in kind of a long-term stalemate mode?

General AUSTIN. I think operationally, sir, it is a stalemate, and I think that it will remain a stalemate for some time to come. It will wax and wane, in terms of activity, but, I think, by and large, for the foreseeable future, I expect that it will be a stalemate.

It's dynamic, however. Whereas, you know, operationally, one side will have temporary upper hand, another side—it'll go back and forth. The humanitarian situation on the ground will continue to atrophy. I think that, if left unchecked, then we could expect to see foreign fighter—the foreign fighter population continue to grow in that area. And again, the refugee situation will continue to put pressure on the neighboring states: Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

General Rodriguez, in responding to Senator King's question, sort of, about the bigger picture, "What is the way to defeat this, you know, proliferation of al Qaeda-connected groups?"—you said, ultimately, you needed a multipronged strategy to deal with disenfranchised people, people who don't feel like they have hope. They live in countries where the systems of government or the economies don't leave—don't lead them to believe that they have a path to success. And that is the beginning of some of this recruiting effort.

AFRICOM is different than the other commands, in that you organize, in a very kind of multipronged way, with other partners, whether it's USAID, intelligence agencies, trade agencies. Talk a little bit about how, in your work in AFRICOM, that form of organization where these multipronged agencies are engaged is helpful to the work that you do.

General RODRIGUEZ. Yes, sir, thank you.

The—that interagency feature of AFRICOM is a huge help, and we're—because of the people from all of those agencies, whether it be USAID or the DNI, as you mentioned, we're able to do a good job of coordinating the efforts and reaching out to leverage all the capabilities of the U.S. Government and to help to communicate and coordinate across those boundaries that we all have.

Senator KAINE. Great. Thank you.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

Senator Inhofe.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just one follow-up, because I've already had my turn, but I—on a subject, General Austin, that's completely—it has not been talked about yet. I think we all agree that Israel is our best friend in the region, and we all understand that, back in 1979, when they had the Accords, that was—there hasn't been a problem between the countries of Egypt and Israel during that entire time. And currently, the Egyptian military appears to be engaged in a tough counterterrorism fight in the Sinai. And I'd ask you, first, would you agree that the Egyptians have significantly increased their efforts in the Sinai, and that the fight against extremists there is important to the security of both Egypt and Israel?

General AUSTIN. Sir, I would agree that they have intensified their efforts. I would also agree that this fight's important, not only for the country of Egypt, but potentially for the region as a whole.

Senator INHOFE. Okay. And I appreciate that, and I agree with that. And there's a lot of misunderstanding, back when we had the argument about the Apache helicopters. And I feel that—but, I'll ask you. From the military perspective, would you—would the resumption of the delivery of the Apache helicopters assist the Egyptians in their efforts to fight terrorism?

General AUSTIN. First, sir, I'll say that I support the President's policy. But, from a military perspective, just looking at what the Egyptians have done in the Sinai and the equipment that they're using, the Apache has been very instrumental in their efforts there.

Senator INHOFE. Is that "yes"?

General AUSTIN. That's a yes, sir.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Any additional questions? Senator King? Senator Kaine?

Senator KING. One.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator King.

Senator KING. One additional question.

General Austin, you heard my exchange with General Rodriguez about, How do we deal with the larger question of the expansion of al Qaeda? I just wondered if you had thoughts on that, since you've been fighting this battle off and on for some time. How do we develop a long-term winning strategy?

General AUSTIN. I certainly agree with my colleague, here, Dave Rodriguez. We've been fighting together for a long time, as you know. And I think we see things about alike.

This is a—it's a whole-of-government approach by many governments. And so, I think, you know, this—what's going on—this is an idea that we have to counter over time; and, in order to defeat an idea, you need a better idea. And so, I think we've got to work together, as a government, with other governments to really get after this. And I also think we have to get after the causes that allow that—those ideas to flourish. And, in conjunction to what Dave said earlier, you have to continue to put pressure on the networks, you have to be faster and more agile than they are, you have to be lethal, where required. But, again, that will only solve a part of the problem. It requires a much more comprehensive approach, and I think that, going forward, we need to do better at that.

Senator KING. A similar but somewhat unrelated question. It seems to me that the rise of the Sunni jihadists in Syria create a geopolitical opportunity for us, in the sense that it aligns our interests with Iran and Russia. All three of us are threatened by al Qaeda-like and al-Nusra-like institutions. And, to the extent that the civil war in Syria continues and the radicalization of the opposition continues, that's in nobody's—that's in none of those three major countries' interests. Do you see an opportunity there that perhaps Iran and Russia, who are Assad's principal patrons, might, at some point in the reasonably near future, say, "Hey, we're for Assad, but we see this as a breeding ground for terrorists that are going to come back and bite us in Chechnya or in Iran"? Do you see what I'm driving at, that there may be some—that this may be an area where we can do some negotiation to solve this problem in Syria because of the commonality of interests?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I would say that—you know, I wouldn't go so far as to say that we have—we currently have common interests with Iran, as—with respect to Syria.

Senator KING. I realize that term is sort of weird to hear, but I—you know, they—we do have a common enemy, in this case.

General AUSTIN. I would agree that there is a—there is an opportunity here, sir, that, you know, if we can solve this problem, then it'll solve—it will begin to facilitate the solution of a number of other problems in the region. But, it will require the cooperation of Syria and other countries in the region in order to get the—correction, the cooperation of Russia, I'm sorry, and other countries in the region to get this done.

Senator KING. Well, and you've just made the point, I think, that the Assad regime is almost wholly dependent, is it not, on the support of Russia and Iran?

General AUSTIN. They are very dependent, yes, sir.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

I wonder if you, just briefly, would agree with me that, in addition to the problem of the al Qaeda, their leadership, their ideology, that it's not just—part of the problem is the support they get from some very well-heeled elements. Those madrassas in Pakistan that produced the extremists that attacked us and provided—or helped to provide a safe haven in Pakistan, those madrassas are funded by some very well-heeled, wealthy elements that have an extreme ideology. So, it's not just sort of disenfranchised folks, here, that—it's not just poverty that is a problem, here, it's also an element in that ideology that is a problem, as well, and we need to deal—in terms of a more comprehensive picture, we'd better understand that, and then also try to figure out ways to deal with that. Would you agree with that?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir, I would. You know, this activity requires money, to your point, and lots of money. And, to better understand the activity, you have to be able to follow the money. And so, it therefore requires a whole-of-government approach.

I am encouraged by what I am hearing and seeing, that there is an interest on the part of the Pakistani government to have better control over what's being taught in the madrassas. And I think that is a positive step, going forward, that'll help to get after this.

Chairman LEVIN. There's a lot of Gulf money that's coming into those madrassas, as well, wasn't there? And isn't there?

General AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay.

Generals, both, thank you. We really appreciate your service and your testimony.

We'll stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:24 a.m., the committee adjourned.]