

Advance Policy Questions for Robert Story Karem
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Department of Defense Reforms

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included the most sweeping reforms since the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.

Do you support these reforms?

Yes, I do. With respect to reforms that impact the portfolio of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, the establishment of a central transfer account and consolidated authorities for security cooperation should help make our assistance more efficient, more flexible, and more tailored to our national interests and defense strategies. If confirmed, I look forward to better understanding the practical impact of the reforms that fall under the portfolio of the ASD (ISA) and how best to implement them.

What other areas for defense reform do you believe might be appropriate for this Committee to address?

In the event I am confirmed, I would want to establish a baseline of experience working under the recent reforms before recommending additional areas of reform.

Duties

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs is the principal advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and the Secretary of Defense on international security strategy and policy on issues of Defense Department interest that relate to the nations and international organizations of Europe (including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russia), the Middle East, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere, their governments and defense establishments; and for oversight of security cooperation programs, including Foreign Military Sales in these regions.

What is your understanding of the duties and functions of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs under current regulations and practices?

The responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, ASD (ISA), are outlined by DoD Directive 5111.07. My role, if confirmed, would be to serve as the principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy with respect to defense policy and strategy for the Middle East, Europe, Russia, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere. Practically, the ASD (ISA) has been responsible for coordinating policies with the Joint Staff, representing the Department in interagency deliberations, helping manage the Department's defense relationships with foreign partners from the above regions, and overseeing various security cooperation and assistance programs, among other responsibilities.

If confirmed, what duties and functions do you expect that the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy would prescribe for you?

As yet, I am unaware of any specific additional guidance the Secretary of Defense or Under Secretary of Defense for Policy would prescribe for the ASD (ISA) position.

Qualifications

What background and experience do you possess that qualify you for this position?

For nearly two decades, I have been immersed in U.S. national security and defense policy. Both in government and at policy think tanks, I have worked on an array of issues relevant to the portfolio of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. I have served as a foreign policy advisor to the now Senate Majority Leader, as a Middle East policy advisor in the White House to the Vice President, and as the national security advisor to two U.S. House Majority Leaders. In these roles, I have worked closely with Defense Department officials, participated in high-level interagency deliberations, and helped to manage the national security oversight and legislative activities of the House of Representatives. These experiences have prepared me to execute the responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Major Challenges and Priorities

If confirmed, what broad priorities will you establish?

If confirmed, the specific priorities I would establish will depend in large measure on the priorities of the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense. These priorities, among others, will in all likelihood include rebuilding American military strength and readiness, bolstering our critical alliances while ensuring our allies contribute meaningfully to our shared security objectives, strengthening U.S. credibility and influence in key regions, defeating ISIS, confronting Iranian aggression, and ensuring OSD(P) plays a meaningful and constructive role within the Department's overall military policy making, among others.

In your view, what are the major challenges, if any, you would confront if confirmed as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs?

If confirmed, I believe the major challenges will be defeating ISIS and other radical Islamic terrorist groups; countering Russian and Iranian aggression; rebuilding American military strength; strengthening America's credibility, alliances, and partnerships; and rebalancing burden-sharing within those alliances.

Practically, I believe it is often a challenge amidst the daily demands and urgent crises to ensure

we are regularly reevaluating our strategies and objectives, and questioning the assumptions on which our strategies are based and the metrics by which our success is judged.

If confirmed, what management actions and timelines would you establish to address these challenges?

If confirmed, I would want to first examine the existing management structure of the organization, as well as the assumptions and timelines associated with meeting these challenges, before providing an answer. Ultimately, prioritization and timelines of confronting these challenges will depend on guidance from the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, as well as by interagency or Presidential determinations.

Relations with Congress

What are your views on the state of the relationship between the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the Senate Armed Services Committee in particular, and with Congress in general?

I am unaware of the specific, current state of the relationship between the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the Senate Armed Services Committee. I believe the new Secretary of Defense is committed to a harmonious relationship with Congress and I am optimistic the Department and the Committees of jurisdiction will establish a strong and collaborative relationship.

If confirmed, what actions would you take to sustain a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between the Congress and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs?

It would be my intention, if confirmed, to take a proactive approach to working with the Committees of jurisdiction and the Congress in confronting the many significant threats facing our country. As a former Senate and House staffer, I am particularly mindful of the critical role the Congress can and should play in matters of national security. I believe the U.S. government is stronger when the Executive and Legislative branches have a relationship of trust and when channels of communication run both ways.

Torture and Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

Do you support the standards for detainee treatment specified in the revised Army Field Manual on Interrogations, FM 2-22.3, issued in September 2006, and in DOD Directive 2310.01E, the Department of Defense Detainee Program, dated August 19, 2014, and required by section 1045 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (Public Law 114-92)?

I do, and I will uphold the law and the Department of Defense directives that govern detainee treatment.

U.S. Strategic Vital Interests

It is important to delineate between the United States' strategic vital interests and other interests. Strategic vital interests must represent those for which the United States is willing to commit the nation's blood and treasure.

What and where are the United States' strategic vital interests?

I believe American strategic vital interests begin with protecting the physical security of the homeland, safeguarding our sovereignty, preserving our democratic institutions, rule of law, freedoms, and values of our society (in short, our way of life), and promoting American economic prosperity. As a global superpower with global interests, these strategic vital national interests are closely tied to the international system of alliances, relationships, and order built and led by the United States World War II.

How do these overlay with extant and emerging threats around the globe?

Given the global reach of the American economy, security challenges in nearly every region can touch upon various elements of our strategic vital national interests. For example, instability in regions of critical economic or security interest for the United States could jeopardize vital national interests; revisionist powers might threaten key shipping lanes or critical allies; or terrorist organizations might leverage new technologies or exploit gaps in our defenses to strike asymmetrically at core national interests.

National Defense Strategy

In your view, what should the envisioned end states entail for a new National Defense Strategy?

I would not want to prejudge the end states of a new National Defense Strategy, as required by the FY 2017 NDAA. Such a strategy should clearly identify the vital national interests that such a strategy must safeguard and how all elements of national power can be utilized to do so. If confirmed, I would eagerly support my Assistant Secretary of Defense counterpart responsible for coordinating this important strategy document.

What should be the objectives and key attributes of the National Defense Strategy?

I understand the National Defense Strategy is currently being updated. I believe the review will reassess our assumptions about the global environment, clearly identify our vital national interests, establish a strategic framework to identify threats and opportunities, identify elements of national power that can be utilized to protect and promote our vital national interests, and review force structure requirements for various aspects of the strategy.

What are the key elements of strategic deterrence in the 21st century?

The key elements of strategic deterrence in the 21st century are the same as they have been for millennia. Deterrence requires having sufficient capabilities, credibility, and will to convince adversaries that challenging the United States, or allies to whom we are bound by treaty, would be prohibitively costly. Technological developments, changes in the distribution of global power, and the rise of violent non-state actors have complicated deterrence, but have not fundamentally altered how U.S. policymakers should think about deterrence strategies.

What should be the core elements of a comprehensive global defense strategy to: defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Qaeda, and other purveyors of violent extremism; stabilize Afghanistan; limit Iran's malign influence and other activities; contain North Korea; and deter war with Russia and China?

In my view, such a strategy should begin with rebuilding America's military capabilities, strengthening our credibility, bolstering our alliances and partners, and mobilizing such partners to join the United States in confronting shared threats. Recognizing that some of these challenges fall outside of the portfolio of the ASD (ISA), if confirmed I would work with my colleagues across the government to address these discrete threats with specific strategies, consistent with a comprehensive global defense strategy and our national interests.

U.S. Military Force Sufficiency

The United States will likely never afford the resources to assign all the forces each combatant commander believes they need, which leads the Defense Department to apportion forces in operations planning. As U.S. military forces are already severely challenged in terms of capacity, in certain scenarios these forces may only exist on paper when it becomes necessary to allocate them for a given contingency.

How important are the U.S. military's global power projection capabilities in ensuring we remain a global power?

It is difficult to overstate the importance of maintaining America's global power projection capabilities. Our ability to deploy and sustain forces across the world is an essential element of our deterrence and defense strategies, and many non-military benefits accrue from our global force posture and power projection capabilities.

Do you believe the United States must retain the capability to strike any global target (hold any target at risk), both in the nuclear and conventional sense?

Yes, although I am concerned that investments by sophisticated adversaries in certain technologies and systems are complicating our strike capabilities in some theatres. If confirmed, I would want to carefully review our current and projected ability to hold enemy targets at risk.

In your opinion, does power projection include our ability to deploy and sustain forces anywhere on the planet, across the full range of military operations? Do you believe this is a unique characteristic of the American way of war?

Yes. Our ability to deploy and sustain forces across the globe is a unique characteristic of the U.S. military. Our ability to maintain such capabilities may be increasingly challenged both by advances in the capabilities of our adversaries and by our own budgetary decisions. We should not take for granted that this hugely important, asymmetric power of the United States will be maintained without risk or cost.

Do you believe we must also have a sufficient strategic and operational reserve, national mobilization capability, and robust defense industrial base to provide a second echelon of follow-on forces if a contingency arises in a particular region, especially against a near peer state?

Yes. Such a capability is essential for deterring adversaries and, in the event the United States must go to war against a near peer adversary, for prevailing in such a conflict.

In light of current and future threats to the United States' strategic vital interests, do you believe the U.S. military must have the capacity to fight two wars simultaneously?

I agree with the concerns expressed by the 2014 National Defense Panel with respect to the decision to edge away from having the capacity to conduct two major wars simultaneously. The deterioration of the global security environment in recent years has increased the likelihood that the U.S. and its partners could face such an eventuality.

If you ascribe to these attributes as required of the U.S. military, in your opinion does the Fiscal Year 2017 Request for Additional Appropriations, and the Fiscal Year 2018 defense budget request previewed in the President's Budget Blueprint, sufficiently support the attainment of these attributes?

The FY 2017 Request for Additional Appropriations and FY 2018 defense budget request begin a process of digging the U.S. military out of the hole created in defense spending by the Budget Control Act. But, restoring America's military readiness, modernizing its capabilities, and fully meeting service requirements cannot be accomplished in a single budget cycle.

The defense budget is an expression of our national will, and it remains at historically low levels as a percentage of GDP.

Strategy to Defeat ISIS

On January 28, 2017, National Security Presidential Memorandum-3 was issued that states: “It is the policy of the United States that ISIS be defeated” and directs the Administration “to develop a comprehensive plan to defeat ISIS” with the Secretary of Defense as the lead of the interagency effort.

How would you define success in the defeat of ISIS?

I would define success as eliminating the ability of ISIS to control territory and promote a physical caliphate, significantly degrading its ability to conduct operations (especially against the homeland), discrediting its radical ideology, and shaping the environment so that conditions do not easily allow for other radical Islamic terrorist groups to pick up the mantle of jihad.

What goals, objectives, and indicators of success would you recommend for the strategy to defeat ISIS?

If confirmed, I would examine the definitions of success above in conjunction with the Department’s existing goals, objectives, and metrics of success to determine whether any revisions are warranted.

What types of options should be considered to accelerate the defeat of ISIS?

I understand some decisions have already been made with respect to changing the rules of engagement for U.S. forces and providing additional resources to local partners involved in the fight against ISIS. I further understand the Secretary has established a Defense Department task force aimed at integrating activities in the counter-ISIS campaign. If confirmed, I look forward to working with that task force and within the interagency process to identify additional steps the Department, other agencies, and U.S. partners can take to accelerate the defeat of ISIS.

In your opinion, what are the major lessons learned from the fight against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere over the last two-and-a-half years?

There are many lessons to be derived from our nation’s experiences in the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups, particularly beyond the two-and-a-half year window. An illustrative, partial list might include: being mindful that the risks of inaction can be as great as the risks of intervention; the fact that the need for local partners to take the lead can be complicated by the difficulties in rapidly training capable partner security forces; the importance of conducting military operations with a mind to shaping political conditions and outcomes consistent with US national interests; the impact that weakened credibility can have on America’s influence over both its partners and its adversaries; the need to periodically challenge assumptions about the strategy and the metrics used to judge its success; and so forth.

What non-military activities by the U.S. Government will be important for achieving a lasting defeat of ISIS?

A significant number of non-military factors will be essential for securing a lasting defeat of ISIS and preventing the rise of similar radical Islamic terrorist groups. Responsibility for these non-military measures will fall on other U.S. government agencies, foreign partners, and local actors. An illustrative list would include governance issues in Iraq and Syria in the wake of the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa; political comity among sectarian and ethnic communities in these and other countries in the region; security sector reform and development; economic development; credible diplomatic pressure to facilitate political resolutions to ongoing civil conflicts; efforts to discredit radical ideologies; efforts to limit the malign activities of actors such as Iran; and efforts to better confront terrorist financing and arms transfers.

After Mosul and Raqqa are liberated from ISIS control, the next major military campaign will likely occur in the Euphrates river valley.

What is your understanding of the strategy to accomplish U.S. objectives in Iraq and Syria after Mosul and Raqqa are liberated from ISIS?

I understand the current strategy is to enable and work with local partners, along with a regional and global coalition of partners, to defeat ISIS and prevent the rise of other radical Islamic terrorist groups. I have not yet been briefed on the specifics of the campaign plan for Iraq and Syria beyond the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa. If confirmed, I will work with colleagues throughout the Department and interagency to ensure the U.S. strategy shapes the outcome of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria consistent with our national interest.

What steps should be taken to prepare for the next phase in the campaign after the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa?

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Secretary of Defense and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy to understand their priorities for the strategy beyond Mosul and Raqqa. While I support the view that the Department should preserve the element of strategic surprise by not telegraphing actions prior to taking them. I believe it is in America's interest that reliable and responsible local partners have control over these liberated territories, just as it will be important to constrain malign, destabilizing activities of Iranian-backed militia and other elements of destabilizing Iranian influence.

Should we seek a political solution for the Sunni Arab peoples living between Damascus and Baghdad?

The political conditions under which Sunni Arabs will live in Syria and Iraq will have a significant impact on whether they, yet again, turn to radical Islamic terrorist groups to defend themselves against sectarian or oppressive leadership. The U.S. cannot impose a political solution, but it certainly has a stake in the political outcomes of the military campaigns in the region. If confirmed, I will work with counterparts at the Department of State to help the United

States best shape an enduring and stabilizing political solution consistent with our national interests.

Middle East

What are the greatest threats to U.S. national security interests in the Middle East and what policy objectives should we pursue to protect them?

The most significant threats to U.S. national security interests in the Middle East are radical Islamic terrorist organizations, such as ISIS and Al Qaeda; Iran's malign and destabilizing activities in the region, including the activities of Iranian proxies such as Hizballah; and a security and stability vacuum that has emboldened and enabled both radical Islamic terrorist organizations and aggressive, revisionist powers such as Iran.

To protect against these threats, the U.S. should maintain its ability to project power to deter and defeat such adversaries, successfully prosecute the war against ISIS, strengthen deterrent credibility, restore trust and confidence in our diplomatic and defense relationships with key regional partners such as Israel and the Gulf States, and encourage regional and extra-regional partners to contribute more to regional security efforts.

Syria

What are the key U.S. national security interests in Syria and how would you describe the strategy to secure them?

Radical Islamic terrorist groups, such as ISIS and al Qaeda, pose the most immediate threat to U.S. interests in Syria. Aside from the ISIS threat, Iranian and Hizballah influence has made the Assad regime in Syria a strategic arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran and Hizballah are active participants in Assad's brutal war against the Syrian people – a war that helped create the conditions for ISIS and other radical terrorist groups to thrive, and that has threatened the security of its neighbors Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon (all partners of the United States), fomented sectarian tensions, and destabilized the entire region. The confluence of the threats posed by ISIS, Iranian aggression, and the Syrian civil war have created a humanitarian catastrophe of historic proportions that has threatened the security and political order of Europe. The situation in Syria is truly a threat to international peace and security.

I believe the strategy to address these threats will entail working with partners to defeat ISIS and eliminate terrorist safe havens in Syria, counter the malign activities and influence of Iran and its terrorist proxies, support responsible local forces to defeat ISIS and establish control over territory, and foster conditions to allow for a cessation of hostilities and a negotiated solution to the Syrian civil war. Because the entire world is threatened by the tragic conflict in Syria, global pressure should be brought to bear on the principal combatants. Unfortunately, efforts to resolve the conflict have been complicated by Moscow, whose military intervention has done more to bolster Syria and Iran than to undermine ISIS or to stabilize the conflict.

How does the strategy address the residual threat from Al Qaeda in Syria and their associates?

My understanding is the strategy prioritizes targeting of ISIS as well as residual Al Qaeda in Syria terrorists and other associated terrorist organizations that pose a threat to the United States. I have not yet been briefed on the specific mechanics of how such targets are prioritized. But, if I am confirmed, I would want to ensure the strategy effectively addresses the threat posed by a range of terrorist groups.

How would the defeat of ISIS impact the civil war in Syria?

It would depend on a number of other variables, but the defeat of ISIS and other affiliated terrorist groups may serve to clarify the nature of the conflict in Syria, deny the Assad regime and its patrons the excuse of combatting ISIS in its perpetration of war crimes against innocent civilians, and facilitate negotiations toward a political resolution to the conflict.

Do you believe a political resolution to the civil war in Syria is necessary to address the underlying conditions that enable violent extremists like ISIS and Al Qaeda to take root?

Yes.

What are the key strategic interests and objectives of the Russians in Syria and how successful have they been at accomplishing them?

I am unaware of the Kremlin's internal perceptions of its interests and objectives in intervening on behalf of the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war. Moscow's intervention appears to have shored up the Assad regime, increased Russia's regional influence, bolstered its likely long-term military presence in the Middle East, allowed its military to use Syria as a test-bed for a range of weapons systems and tactics, and complicated American and allied options for shaping the trajectory of the conflict. Whether these effects are ephemeral or enduring is, as yet, unclear. In my estimation, none of these effects have served America's national interest.

Discussing the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power with reporters in March 2017, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN said: "Are we going to sit there and focus on getting him out? No...."

Has the previously stated goal of removing Bashar al-Assad from power in Syria changed, and if so, what is the new objective and what are the benefits to U.S. national security interests of changing it?

I have not been briefed on the specific objectives of U.S. policy in Syria, but multiple senior U.S. officials have publicly indicated the objective is a negotiated solution to the conflict. It is currently difficult to imagine a stable solution that leaves Assad, who has repeatedly used chemical weapons, barrel bombs, and other weapons to indiscriminately slaughter the Syrian people, in place.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been adamant that the People's Protection Units (YPG) of the Syrian Kurds should not receive U.S. and coalition support in their efforts to liberate Raqqa.

If the United States chooses not to support the YPG in operations to liberate Raqqa, what alternative forces could be used and how would their use affect the timeline and logistical support of the operation?

Although I have not been specifically briefed on the decision, recent media reporting indicates the U.S. has decided to support Syrian Kurdish forces – which include YPG fighters – as part of the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF). These forces are believed to be the force most capable of liberating Raqqa from ISIS control in the near term. Media reporting also indicates the U.S. will continue to train and equip Syrian Arab Coalition fighters, who will likely play an essential role in holding and stabilizing the traditionally Sunni Arab city.

Iraq

What are the key U.S. national security interests in Iraq and how would you describe the strategy to secure them?

It is in the U.S. national security interest in Iraq to defeat ISIS, help Iraqis stabilize their country and deny safe haven to terrorist groups, protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity, enhance our counter-terrorism cooperation with the government of Iraq, and facilitate an enduring political relationship among Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish communities that is free of Iranian and other malign interference. Through direct targeting of ISIS and supporting the government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces, the U.S. and its coalition partners are making progress in achieving these interests.

Do you believe that an enduring U.S. military presence is needed in Iraq? If so, what should be the missions and size of the enduring U.S. military presence?

I do. Such an enduring presence need not entail combat forces. But, in retrospect, such a presence in Iraq would have been valuable not merely in identifying and confronting the advance of the ISIS threat at much lower cost to the United States, but also in limiting malign Iranian influence that has had a corrosive impact on Iraqi and regional security. The U.S. and Iraq should be long-term partners in combatting terrorist organizations that will likely continue to threaten our interests even after the defeat of ISIS in Mosul.

I am not prepared to opine on the exact size or scope of a follow-on military presence. But, if confirmed, I would work closely with interagency counterparts and Iraqi government officials, while consulting closely with the Congress, to determine what size and type of presence would be in our mutual security interest.

How would you characterize Iran's influence in Iraq today and what is your recommended strategy to limit that influence in the future?

For a number of years, and especially in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, Iran has sought to increase its influence in Iraq. In doing so, it fomented sectarian tensions, corrupted Iraqi government institutions, and fostered political conditions in Iraq that helped ISIS thrive.

The strategy to limit Iranian influence in Iraq in the near term will require sustained U.S. and international engagement to help the Iraqis strengthen cross-sectarian, national institutions, such as the Iraqi security forces.

Moreover, the U.S. and its partners will need a broader strategy to confront Iran's malign influence throughout the region.

Iran

What is your assessment of U.S. national security interests associated with the growth of Iranian influence in the Middle East?

Iran, long the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism, poses a significant threat to U.S. national security interests and those of our closest allies and partners in the region. Tehran's bid for regional hegemony, destabilizing activities, efforts to undermine its neighbors, complicity in Assad's war against the Syrian people, support for terrorist proxies and insurgent movements, missile proliferation, and recurrent threats to destroy Israel threaten regional and even global peace and stability, and should be a matter of profound international concern.

How would you describe our strategy to counter Iran's malign influence and other activities throughout the Middle East, and more specifically, Iran's proxy networks?

I am aware of some elements of this strategy, but I have not been briefed on all of the activities the United States is currently pursuing to counter Iran's malign influence. Given the expansion of Iranian malign influence in recent years and the boldness with which Tehran appears to operate, however, I am not convinced the strategy is succeeding. If confirmed, I would want to review the elements of the strategy with an eye towards coordinating a more effective regional and global approach to constrain, deter, and defeat Iran's malign activities.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to limit the nuclear program of Iran was agreed in July 2015 and implemented in January 2016.

What is your assessment of the JCPOA?

I believe the JCPOA is a suboptimal agreement. The deal in the immediate term allows Iran to continue making progress on mastering the nuclear fuel cycle through continued uranium enrichment research and development activities. In the long-term, it opens an almost unfettered pathway to an industrial-scale uranium enrichment program. Moreover, there are significant questions about the access the IAEA will have to suspected nuclear sites, especially military facilities, that may complicate monitoring and enforcement of the deal. I am also concerned about the phased removal of restrictions on Iran's missile and conventional military capabilities, and the degree to which the deal – including significant sanctions relief – has complicated multilateral efforts to constrain Iran's destabilizing activities throughout the region.

In your opinion, how would Iran react to action by the United States to unilaterally withdraw from the JCPOA?

It is difficult to say without additional information regarding the context of a U.S. abrogation. It is possible Tehran would seek to remain in at least ostensible compliance with the deal in order to split the United States and its P5+1 partners and continue to benefit from certain terms of the deal. It is also possible Tehran would resume unfettered production of highly enriched uranium and weaponization activities, or take other provocative actions.

Yemen

What are the U.S. national security interests in Yemen?

The principal U.S. national security interests in Yemen are countering terrorists, primarily al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS, maintaining freedom of navigation of key international waterways, working with key economic and security partners on the Arabian peninsula like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to defend against missile threats and further destabilization, and supporting a political solution to the civil war that establishes enduring political stability while denying a safe haven for terror or increased Iranian influence.

In your opinion, should we be doing more to help the Saudi coalition in its efforts to find a solution to the conflict in Yemen, and if so, what steps would you recommend?

I have not been briefed in detail on the current situation in Yemen or the extent of U.S. involvement. If confirmed, I would want to better understand the dynamics of the conflict and examine what additional steps, if any, the U.S. could take to improve the efficacy of our partners' operations while reducing civilian casualties and facilitating an end to the conflict consistent with our national interests.

The Houthis are launching missiles deep into Saudi Arabia and conducting regular raids into Saudi Arabia's southern territory. In your estimation, do the Saudis have a choice of whether or not to continue fighting in Yemen?

Nations that have been attacked always have a choice whether or not to fight, though either decision can prove costly. Certainly, Houthi missile attacks and cross border raids pose a legitimate threat to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In your view, what conditions in Yemen need to be reached for the Houthis to be willing to negotiate? Is the Saudi-led coalition capable of creating those conditions and what is the appropriate role for the United States in support of the coalition?

Although United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 establishes the conditions for all parties to broker a political solution to the conflict, I am not sufficiently well informed about the current dynamics of the conflict in Yemen to opine on what specific conditions must be attained for the Houthis to negotiate. I would imagine that internal Houthi leadership dynamics, battlefield conditions, and levels of external support for their continued rebellion, and the specific elements of any political settlement under consideration would affect the Houthi calculus in this regard. Without additional information, I cannot say whether the Saudi-led coalition is currently capable of achieving these conditions. If confirmed, I would want to closely examine the conditions that could facilitate a negotiated end to the conflict and the steps the U.S. could take to achieve such an outcome.

In your view, is it possible for the United States to provide the Saudi-led coalition with assistance designed to reduce civilian casualties without becoming a “cobelligerent”? If so, what assistance do you believe should be provided?

I do not believe current levels of support to the Saudi-led coalition that allow our partners to defend themselves makes the United States a “cobelligerent” in the conflict, but I am not a lawyer. If I am confirmed, I would want to consult the Department of Defense’s general counsel before offering a more precise answer. That said, I would also want to examine what additional steps the United States could take to limit the tragic humanitarian costs of the conflict.

To what extent are the Houthis, supported by Iran, a threat to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea? What policy positions would you recommend for the United States to address this threat?

I have not been briefed on the Department’s insights into the threat posed by the Houthis to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, but media reporting suggests Iran has provided the Houthis with weapons, including anti-ship cruise missiles, which they have fired upon vessels operating in international waters. If true, it would be similar to Iran’s provision of sophisticated weapons to terrorist proxies such as Hizballah, and indicate a growing need for an international effort to confront Iran’s malign activities, such as its support for terrorism and illicit weapons shipments. Such cruise-missile attacks demonstrate an obvious threat to international freedom of navigation in such a narrow and important international waterway.

In your opinion, what would be the implications of the United States cutting off the sale of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners?

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appears resolutely committed to prosecuting its operations against the Houthis in Yemen, regardless of whether or not Riyadh maintains access to precision-guided munitions that could increase the efficacy of their strikes and reduce the risk of inadvertent civilian casualties. Withholding U.S. technologies and support in this specific case may reduce the influence the U.S. has with respect to our Saudi partner's activities in this conflict.

Russia

Senior U.S. military officials have said Russia is the country that poses the greatest existential threat to the United States.

What are the challenges to U.S. national security interests from Russia and what are the key principles that must underpin a successful strategy to protect our interests?

Secretary Mattis has made clear that Russia is choosing to be a strategic competitor of the U.S. and seeks to enhance its global position and influence through destabilizing and aggressive means. While the U.S. has long sought cooperation with Russia – and while there may be areas where greater cooperation would seem to be in the interests of both parties – too often Russia has chosen to challenge and undermine America's strategic position and threaten our allies.

Significant challenges to U.S. national security interests from Russia include the invasion and occupation of the sovereign territory of Ukraine; the use of hybrid war tactics and active measures to destabilize American allies and partners; the aggressive use of asymmetric capabilities and technologies; diplomatic and military support to rogue state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran and Syria; and provocative military modernization efforts and deployments that pose offensive threats to the U.S. and its allies.

As described elsewhere, a strategy to deter and defend against such threats begins with rebuilding U.S. and NATO military capabilities and strengthening our credibility. We must be prepared to counter Russian aggression and impose meaningful costs on Russia when Moscow threatens American interests. Yet, while we must be resolute in responding to Russian provocations, we should also continue to seek cooperation with Russia in pursuit of shared interests.

Should the United States condition its military engagement with Russia on certain changes in Russian behavior, and if so what conditions, if any, would you recommend?

The United States is currently prohibited from engaging in military-to-military cooperation with the Russian Federation in response to its invasion and illegal occupation of Ukraine. Section 1232 of the 2017 NDAA requires that Russia must “cease its occupation of Ukrainian territory and its aggressive activities that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and

members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization” before such restrictions can be lifted. If confirmed, I would uphold this requirement.

Do you agree with General Scaparrotti that our current force posture in Europe is “inadequate” to deter Russia? What changes to our force posture would you recommend?

Although the U.S. and NATO have taken some steps to improve the readiness and capabilities of our deterrent forces in Europe, I am personally skeptical that Russia is sufficiently deterred from engaging in a range of destabilizing and aggressive activities.

If confirmed, I will consult with the Joint Staff, U.S. European Command, NATO counterparts, and the Congress on what additional steps might be necessary to enhance U.S. and NATO readiness and capabilities in Europe.

Should the Department of Defense revisit the European Infrastructure Consolidation (EIC) initiative announced in 2015? If so, how should any such revision to our force posture in Europe take into account U.S. objectives and plans under the European Deterrence Initiative to bolster the military capabilities of our European allies?

I am not sufficiently immersed in this issue to have an immediate answer. If confirmed, I would want to examine whether the European Infrastructure Consolidation (EIC), along with the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), remain consistent with our national interest in maintaining a robust and capable deterrent force in Europe. I would want to consult with U.S. European Command to ascertain whether EIC remains an effective way to reduce cost and eliminate excess capacity without reducing our capabilities and flexibility.

Do you support continued U.S. security assistance to Ukraine, and if so, how does the provision of such assistance contribute to a broader U.S. regional security strategy?

I have long supported U.S. security assistance to Ukraine in order to help the government in Kyiv defend its own sovereign territory and territorial integrity. If confirmed, I would want to examine the impact that the Department’s existing train and equip efforts have had on the Ukrainian military’s capacity to defend its territorial integrity, and whether additional security assistance efforts might be in our national interest.

Do you support providing lethal defensive security assistance to Ukraine as in the interests of the United States?

I have been sympathetic regarding such assistance in the past, but have not been briefed in detail on the current dynamics of the conflict. If confirmed, I would want to more rigorously examine the capabilities of the Ukrainian military, the threat posed by separatists and Russian forces, and the expert views of relevant interagency and U.S. intelligence officials regarding the mechanics, risks, and benefits of such assistance.

In your view, what are the key elements of a strategy to counter Russian hybrid tactics that employ both hard and soft power and present attribution challenges?

Rebuilding American and allied military strength remains at the center of any deterrence strategy, but specifically countering Russian hybrid tactics will require NATO allies to take more seriously their obligations under Article 3 to improve national resilience – especially with respect to cybersecurity – and to maintain the political will to defend the sovereignty of Member states and counter Russian influence and information operations. To counter a false Kremlin narrative, it is also important to demonstrate to the Russian people that the U.S. and its NATO allies have an alliance that is inherently defensive and does not pose a threat to Russia’s sovereignty or legitimate national interests, and that Russia has more to gain in economic and security terms from partnership with the West than from confrontation.

What is your assessment of the Russian malign influence threat, and what recommendations, if any, would you have for the role of the U.S. Government, and the Department of Defense in particular, in countering that threat?

Russian influence operations are not a new threat, and the U.S. and its allies effectively countered Soviet influence operations and active measures throughout the Cold War. Russia is effectively using new technologies and platforms to pursue old objectives, but as indicated above, these efforts can be thwarted by renewed investment by America and its allies in national resilience. Given the degree to which Russia’s active measures and influence operations have used illicit cyber-activities, unique Department of Defense capabilities may be effective in countering some aspects of this threat. If confirmed, I would want to examine more closely the military dimensions of this threat – and our potential responses – before opining more specifically.

Russian Violation of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Russia’s deployment of a nuclear ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) in violation of the 1987 INF Treaty poses a risk to our NATO Allies and U.S. forces in Europe.

Given the unlikelihood that Russia will return to compliance with the INF Treaty, how should the United States address the military and political implications of this new nuclear ground-launched cruise missile?

As Secretary Mattis has said, Russia’s violation of the INF Treaty increases the risk to U.S. forces in Europe and to our allies. Russia should not be allowed to violate arms control agreements with impunity, and the U.S. should consider whether to best respond to Russia’s actions with diplomatic efforts, changes in our force posture, other forms of leverage and pressure, or some combination of the above. Clearly, the U.S. and its NATO allies must take Russia’s military modernization in many areas seriously as they consider their Article 3 obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty.

If Russia fails to return to compliance under the INF Treaty, should we extend the New START treaty for an additional five years, as stipulated by the treaty?

It depends on whether the New START Treaty remains itself in the U.S. interest irrespective of Russia's violations of the INF Treaty. If confirmed, I would want to confer with the Joint Staff and appropriate experts at the Department and within the interagency before coming to such a judgment. If maintaining New START levels irrespective of Russian INF violations is in the national interest, we should examine other means to induce Russia to return to compliance with the INF Treaty or to counteract the impact that Russian violations may have on U.S. and NATO security.

What military advantage, if any, has Russia gained by acting in violation of its INF obligations?

Although I have not been briefed in any detail on Russia's violation of the INF Treaty, I do not believe Russia has gained an appreciable offensive military advantage that cannot be mitigated by countervailing defensive actions of the United States and its NATO allies. Responding to Russia's military modernization, treaty violations, and aggression will not be without cost, but maintaining our deterrent and defense capabilities in Europe remains essential to the U.S. national interest and that of our closest allies.

Is there a gap in U.S. military capability that could be filled by a system comparable to the GLCM?

I understand the Administration is reviewing this issue. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee to address it.

Should we increase NATO's defenses against these new cruise missiles as well as against Russia's air and sea-launched cruise missiles?

I understand the President has ordered a Ballistic Missile Defense Review to examine whether we should strengthen U.S. missile defense capabilities, including with respect to meeting this challenge. If confirmed, I would want to examine the findings of this study before opining on what new missile defenses might be necessary.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

In your opinion, does the NATO Alliance benefit the national security interests of the United States?

I agree with Secretary Mattis that "NATO is vital to our national interest and it is vital to the security of the United States."

What are the major strategic objectives of the NATO Alliance in the coming years?

NATO must continue to deter Russian aggression; encourage and assist its Member States to become more resilient, particularly against asymmetric and “hybrid” threats; make demonstrable progress towards the Wales 2% pledge and alliance burden-sharing; and play a more active role in our common fight against terrorism and out-of-area threats.

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges for NATO and the most important capability improvements that the Alliance must make to deal with the accelerated and growing threats it faces?

Secretary Mattis has made clear a significant challenge for NATO will be to muster the political will to deter Russian aggression, resolve defense burden-sharing imbalances by meeting the 2% Wales pledge, and maintain alliance solidarity on key issues such as deterrence and countering terrorism. These challenges are exacerbated by growing political polarization within Europe, external crises and issues that will compete for the time and attention of national leaders, and NATO’s somewhat cumbersome decision-making process.

That said, the magnitude of the growing threats posed to the Alliance should serve to help capitals overcome political resistance to increasing their contributions to the alliance and rallying behind joint efforts to defeat ISIS and deter further Russian aggression. In the event I am confirmed, I look forward to working with U.S. colleagues and NATO counterparts in identifying key capabilities in which the U.S. and our NATO partners must invest in order to effectively meet these challenges.

What is your perspective on accusations that our NATO Allies do not carry their fair share of the security burden?

My perspective is that these accusations are accurate, long-standing, and bipartisan. They reflect a justifiable concern that some of our NATO allies do not take seriously their commitment to Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states that Members “separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.”

I agree with Secretary Mattis’ warning to NATO allies that “Americans cannot care more for your children’s security than you do. Disregard for military readiness demonstrates a lack of respect for ourselves, for the alliance, and for the freedoms we inherited, which are now clearly threatened.”

In your view, is there a continuing requirement for U.S. nuclear weapons to be deployed in NATO countries?

Yes. NATO allies reaffirmed at the Wales Summit that the alliance nuclear force is an essential component of NATO’s deterrent strategy. I believe the U.S. and NATO must maintain the full range of capabilities necessary to maintain this successful deterrent.

If confirmed, will you support fielding the dual capable F-35 modifications for the United States and its allies in the shortest feasible time?

I will.

Balkans

How would you describe today's threats to the security and stability of the Balkans?

Although much has improved in many respects since the significant sectarian and ethnic conflict of the 1990s, the situation in some corners of the Balkans remains tenuous. Some states have made significant progress and have been welcomed into NATO. Others face significant governance and corruption challenges at home, which have been exploited by outside actors such as Russia. Other states continue to face ethnic and sectarian tensions that could escalate into armed conflict.

U.S. defense relationships with Balkan partners will continue to be an important element of a broader U.S. effort to bolster stability, economic development, and national resilience in this important corner of Europe.

What do you see as the role of NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) and what conditions are required before that presence can be reduced or eliminated?

I concur with Secretary Mattis' judgment that KFOR remains critical to ensuring stability in the region. While the UNSC authorized KFOR remains primarily a backstop, behind the Kosovo Police and the European Union Rule of Law Mission, unfortunately, due to the lack of progress in the European Union sponsored Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and the absence of normalized ties between Serbia and Kosovo, conditions continue to justify the KFOR mission.

Latin America and the Caribbean

How do you define U.S. national security interests in Latin America and the Caribbean?

U.S. national security interests in Latin America and the Caribbean begin with protecting the security and promoting the economic prosperity of the homeland and the American people. We also have a national interest in promoting the security and prosperity of our partners across the region and strengthening our joint efforts to address common security challenges. This includes narcotrafficking, terrorism, and transnational organized crime that have contributed to violence and corruption throughout the hemisphere and in the United States.

Many of the internal security challenges in Latin America are associated with transnational criminal networks. How should the United States approach security assistance given the overlapping roles of host governments' law enforcement organizations and militaries in combating these networks?

Countering transnational criminal networks is not primarily a Defense Department mission. It is primarily a law enforcement mission, both on the part of the U.S. Government and our partners, although military forces often play important supporting roles. The U.S. approach to security assistance should be tailored to the specific circumstances of each country, promote interagency and regional cooperation and interoperability, and reinforce the importance of promoting the rule of law, the integrity of state institutions, human rights and combatting corruption.

What types of U.S. assistance are appropriate for Latin American countries given that these challenges emanate from non-state actors?

U.S. foreign assistance, to be properly aligned with our national interests, should be coordinated among relevant U.S. departments and agencies in support of an interagency strategy that addresses the range of challenges related to non-state actors from terrorists to narcotraffickers to international criminal networks. Such strategies might include capacity-building for military and civilian security forces; efforts to improve governance, strengthen the rule of law, and fight corruption; and initiatives to facilitate regional cooperation and information-sharing.

In some countries in Latin America, such as Mexico, the Department of Defense plays an important role in training, equipping, and rendering assistance to partner nation militaries. How should it coordinate efforts with security efforts in those countries led by other U.S. agencies, such as the Department of State?

The Department of Defense must coordinate closely with the Department of State and other relevant U.S. agencies, along with the partner nation, to ensure DoD assistance is part of an integrated approach. This coordination should happen both at the Country Team level, under the supervision of the U.S. Ambassador, and through the interagency process in Washington, D.C., and should include close partnership with Congress.

There is a growing concern that the counter-narcotics campaign in Central America and security assistance from the United States is "militarizing" civilian police. In your view, how should the Defense Department condition its security assistance to countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to ensure that it is training local police appropriately, and not exacerbating the violence in those countries?

The most basic condition on assistance to partner security forces is adherence to rigorous standards of respect for the rule of law and human rights. In addition, assistance must be planned in close coordination with the Department of State and Congress, and should be tailored to the specific situation in each country to ensure that Central American civilian police forces increasingly are able to handle their responsibilities for law enforcement effectively, appropriately, and free of corruption. It likely will take time for these countries to recruit, train

and build effective police forces.

Colombia

U.S. assistance to Colombia over the past several years has facilitated the marginalization of the FARC and other violent revolutionary groups.

How do you define U.S. national security interests in Colombia? What means of support are appropriate for the Colombian government given the challenges it faces?

The U.S. has invested considerable time, effort, and resources into the relationship with Colombia and that country's long-standing campaign against the FARC. The U.S. has a vested interest in supporting Colombia's peace implementation process, which includes targeting coca cultivation and cocaine trafficking, demobilizing the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, and expanding the presence and reach of the Colombian government throughout the country. A failure to adequately address growing coca cultivation and a burgeoning narco-trafficking industry would imperil the significant investments made by the U.S. in Colombia and endanger our national interests. We can protect our significant investment in Colombia's counternarcotics and counterinsurgency missions through defense institution-building efforts. These investments will continue to pay dividends as Colombia continues to emerge as a regional and global security exporter.

What conditions need to be reached for the nature of the U.S. strategy in Colombia to change?

Even though Colombia has reached a peace deal with the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN) and other organized armed groups continue to present significant security challenges, thereby threatening implementation of the peace accord with the FARC. It would be premature to change our strategy until these gains are consolidated, narco-trafficking is curtailed, and the reach of the central government extended into previously hostile areas. It is my understanding that the Colombians are very capable and willing U.S. partners. If confirmed, I would want to sustain that close partnership while we assess how to meet our common objectives in Colombia and in the region.

Provided that the Colombian government continues to make progress towards peace with the major rebel groups, what should be the United States' approach towards preventing the growth of illegally armed groups and drug trafficking organizations?

Implementing the peace accord will take a tremendous commitment of effort and resources. There are signs that the ELN and organized armed groups are taking over the FARC's narco-trafficking and other illicit activities. We must work closely with the Government of

Colombia to defeat these threats, as their persistence imperils both the peace with the FARC and the effectiveness of the Government's counternarcotics efforts.

What are the challenges that the Colombian government and military will face in implementing the recent peace deal with the FARC and how can the United States contribute to the implementation process?

Successfully implementing the peace accord will require a major commitment of Colombian effort and resources over the coming decades. Colombia's security forces will be critical in extending security and the rule of law across the country, and in the eradication and interdiction components of the counternarcotics effort. The Government of Colombia also will have to leverage its civilian institutions to address the root causes of the conflict. It is my understanding that U.S. security assistance has been effective in building the capabilities of the Colombian security forces to defeat enemy forces on the battlefield.

The Colombian military has become a security exporter throughout the region and the world due to its successes and expertise. What assistance should the United States provide to facilitate its growth as a source of stability?

Colombia has been a tremendous partner in the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan for Regional Security (USCAP), through which it trains Central American and Caribbean countries in counternarcotics and counterterrorism activities. Colombia has participated in NATO and European Union counter-piracy missions off the coast of the Horn of Africa, and has taken steps to prepare to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We should maintain our support for Colombia's regional and global security activities, which contribute to our own national security.

Continuing Use of Guantanamo as a Detention Center

Would you advise the President to transfer additional detainees to Guantanamo? What do you see as the costs and benefits of doing so?

While I do not believe detention policy or the disposition of the detention facility at Guantanamo falls under the purview of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, I do believe the United States needs an effective and sustainable policy consistent with the law of armed conflict that allows for the detention of enemy combatants captured on the battlefield. If confirmed and asked for my opinion on this controversial issue, I would want to better understand the costs, benefits, and risks of various options that have been considered across multiple administrations.

What should be the Department's long-term detention strategy?

I do not believe detention strategy falls under the purview of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and I do not think that I am adequately qualified to opine on what a long-term detention strategy should be, without consulting first with the appropriate Department of Defense policy and legal experts.

Do you think the U.S. Government should continue the Periodic Review Board Process and the process of transferring detainees to other countries, subject to the restrictions currently in law?

I would defer to the appropriate experts at the Department of Defense regarding the disposition of detainees currently held by the Department.

Defense Security Cooperation

What is the appropriate role of the Department of Defense in the conduct of security sector assistance?

Security sector assistance is an important element of the Department of Defense's relationship with partner militaries across the globe. Although other U.S. agencies have significant roles to play in assisting partners with security sector reform and building partner capacity, the Defense Department has unique capabilities to improve the capabilities of our partner militaries in line with our national interest. I understand the FY17 NDAA included some reforms that have increased the integration and flexibility of some aspects of security assistance. If I am confirmed, I would want to conduct further research to determine if additional steps could be taken to improve coordination and efficacy of U.S. security assistance efforts.

What should be the Defense Department's relationship with the Department of State in the conduct of these activities?

The Defense Department should work closely with the Department of State and other interagency partners – along with the Congress – in coordinating and overseeing security assistance to ensure such programs are effective, and efficient uses of taxpayer dollars, and remain consistent with our foreign policy goals and objectives.

What should be the strategic objectives of the Defense Department's efforts to build the capabilities of a partner nation's security forces?

Defense Department security assistance programs should strive to enhance the ability of partner nations to provide for their own internal defense and contribute more meaningfully to regional and global security, consistent with our shared national interests. Having capable and responsible partners is a force-multiplier for the U.S. military, reducing the burden on U.S. forces for responding to security threats across the world.

In your view, is the Defense Department appropriately organized and resourced to effectively conduct such activities? If not, what changes would you recommend?

I understand the FY 2017 NDAA included significant reforms of the Department's security cooperation programs. As I mentioned previously, I believe consolidating authorities and creating a central transfer account should make our assistance more efficient, flexible, and

tailored to our national interests and defense strategies. If confirmed, I would want to examine more closely these reforms and related issues before advocating for additional reforms or resources.

Congressional Oversight

In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of information.

Do you agree, if confirmed for this position, to appear before this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress?

Yes.

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear before this Committee, or designated members of this Committee, and provide information, subject to appropriate and necessary security protection, with respect to your responsibilities as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs?

Yes.

Do you agree to ensure that testimony, briefings, and other communications of information are provided to this Committee and its staff and other appropriate committees in a timely manner?

Yes.

Do you agree to provide documents, including copies of electronic forms of communication, in a timely manner when requested by a duly constituted committee, or to consult with the Committee regarding the basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such documents?

Yes.

Do you agree to answer letters and requests for information from individual Senators who are members of this Committee?

Yes.