

Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., USMC
Nominee for Commander, United States Central Command

Defense Reforms

In recent years, the Senate Armed Services Committee has conducted an intensive review of the organization of the Department of Defense—both military and civilian, including the elements created by the Goldwater Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Department of Defense to execute the National Defense Strategy and the National Military Strategy.

Based on your experiences as a senior officer, what challenges have you observed with the current organizational structure, with particular focus on warfighting capabilities, and what modifications, if any, do you think are necessary to the current organizational structure including any Goldwater Nichols Act provisions?

From my perspective, our current organizational structure is appropriate for both peacetime and combat operations. We do not require any form of legislative relief. Combatant commands remain absolutely vital in the planning and execution of military operations. While it is true that joint task forces (JTFs) are often used to direct combat operations, commanding full spectrum operations across the continuum of engagement necessitates combatant commands, as they are uniquely structured to prevent wars, and if necessary, coordinate between numerous, simultaneous campaigns that cross combatant command (COCOM) boundaries. We should always seek efficiencies, leverage technology, streamline, simplify, and reduce duplication of effort at all levels. At the same time, geographic combatant commands no longer have the luxury of being unaware of events that transcend their AORs. In today's complex environment, there are no purely regional problems.

In your view, what modifications to the Unified Command Plan (UCP), if any, would enhance the warfighting effectiveness of the Department of Defense?

I am satisfied that COCOM involvement in the Unified Command Plan (UCP) working groups has captured key recommendations. U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) was involved in the 2015 UCP review process. Working together with the services and other combatant commands, USCENTCOM provided a comprehensive list of recommended changes to the UCP aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the Department of Defense. These recommendations have been codified in the approved 3 November 2017 Unified Command Plan. USCENTCOM is currently fully engaged in the review process to develop the 2019 UCP.

Relationships

Section 162(b) of title 10, United States Code, provides that the chain of command

runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense, and from the Secretary of Defense to the combatant commands. Other sections of law and traditional practice, however, establish important relationships outside the chain of command. Please describe your understanding of the relationship of the Commander, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), to the following officials:

The Secretary of Defense

Subject to direction from the President, the Commander, U.S. Central Command performs duties under the authority, direction and control of the Secretary of Defense. In addition, the Commander, U.S. Central Command is responsible to the Secretary of Defense for the preparedness of the command to carry out its missions. It is worth emphasizing that this is the chain of command that directs action.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Chairman is the principal military advisor to the President, National Security Council, and Secretary of Defense. Section 163 of Title 10, U.S. Code, allows communication between the President or the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders to flow through the Chairman. As is custom and traditional practice, and as instructed by the Unified Command Plan, if confirmed, I would communicate with the Secretary through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vice Chairman in his absence. I anticipate a close dialogue with the Chairman and Vice Chairman on all significant matters. These officers are not in the chain of command.

The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs

The secretaries of the military departments are responsible for the administration and support of forces assigned to the combatant commands. Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) coordinates closely with the secretaries to ensure that requirements to organize, train, and equip U.S. forces for USCENTCOM are met. Commander, U.S. Central Command communicates and exchanges information with the service chiefs to support their responsibility for organizing, training, and equipping U.S. forces. Successful execution of the U.S. Central Command mission responsibilities requires close coordination with the service chiefs. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with the service chiefs to understand the capabilities of their services, to clearly communicate to them USCENTCOM theater requirements, and to ensure effective employment of the services' capabilities in the joint and coalition execution of the U.S. Central Command mission.

Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command

Commander, U.S. Central Command maintains close relationship with all other combatant commanders—functional and geographic. These relationships are critical to the execution of the *National Defense Strategy* and the *National Military Strategy*, and

are characterized by mutual support, frequent contact, and productive exchanges of information on key issues. This is especially true of Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, with whom I will have daily coordination because of concurrent operations within U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility (AOR), if confirmed.

Commander, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Resolute Support, Afghanistan / Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A)

Commander, U.S. Central Command maintains close cooperation with Commander, NATO Resolute Support, Afghanistan/Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan to support and resource efforts to achieve the goals of the NATO mandate in Afghanistan. The dual-hatted nature of this Commander also means as Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, General Miller formally reports to Commander, U.S. Central Command. I have known General Miller for many years. He is a superb soldier and leader. If confirmed, I expect our relationship will be best characterized as having a strong spirit of collaboration and coordination.

The respective U.S. Chiefs of Mission within the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR)

If confirmed, I would necessarily have close working relationships with the respective U.S. chiefs of mission within the USCENTCOM AOR in order to ensure unity of effort between U.S. military and all other U.S. government activities in those respective countries and across the USCENTCOM AOR. Meeting and engaging the respective chiefs of mission will be a high priority for me, if confirmed.

The respective U.S. Senior Defense Officials/Defense Attachés (SDO/DATT)

If confirmed, I would necessarily have a close working relationship with the respective U.S. senior defense officials/defense attachés (SDO/DATT) within the USCENTCOM AOR in order to maintain the SDO/DATT's role as principal military advisor to the respective chief of mission. This also facilitates the SDO/DATT's role as primary conduit between U.S. Central Command and the chief of mission. This is particularly important in the majority of AOR countries where USCENTCOM does not have a sizeable military presence.

In their report to Congress, the National Defense Strategy Commission says that "...civilian voices have been relatively muted on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy, undermining the concept of civilian control." Do you agree with this assessment?

I do not agree with this assessment. Civilian leaders have a central and final voice on issues at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy. Civilian control of the military is clearly established by the Constitution of the United States, the National Security Act of 1947, and Title 10 U.S. Code. The idea of military subordination to civilian leadership is faithfully upheld by the men and women of the U.S. military who,

on a daily basis, support and defend those foundational ideas and documents. This is our first and foremost responsibility as members of the armed forces of the United States.

The National Defense Strategy Commission report also says that “...allocating priority—and allocating forces—across theaters of warfare is not solely a military matter. It is an inherently political-military task, decision authority for which is the proper competency and responsibility of America’s civilian leaders.” What organizations and civilian positions, in your opinion, should participate in decisions regarding allocating priority and forces across theaters of warfare?

Allocating priorities and forces across combatant commands is solely the responsibility of the President of the United States in his role as Commander in Chief. The Secretary of Defense is the principal assistant to the President in all matters related to the Department of Defense and exercises authority, direction, and control over the Department. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff supports the decision authority of the President and the Secretary of Defense by providing military advice on matters related to the Chairman’s functions as prescribed in 10 USC § 153. Among these functions is advising the Secretary on the allocation and transfer of forces among the combatant commands to address threats to the United States. The Joint Staff supports the Chairman in this role by providing options on priorities and force management for civilian leadership consideration consistent with defense strategy and policy guidance. The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)) is the key component in this process. All final decisions on priorities and force management are made by civilians.

The National Defense Strategy Commission concludes “It is critical that DoD and Congress---reverse the unhealthy trend in which decision-making is drifting away from civilian leaders on issues of national importance.” What are your recommendations on how to stop the drift of decision-making away from civilian leaders on issues of national importance?

Civilian leaders have a central and final voice on issues and decisions at the center of U.S. defense and national security policy. Civilian control of the military is a bedrock principle of our Nation that is faithfully upheld by the men and women of the U.S. military; it is our first and foremost responsibility as members of the armed forces of the United States.

In the Department of Defense, all decisions are vetted by senior civilian leaders, and the ultimate decisions are always made by the civilian leadership.

Based on this, I do not share the NDS Commission’s sense that decision-making is shifting away from civilian leaders on issues of national importance and, lacking greater specificity by the commission, can offer no recommendations to rectify their perception. If confirmed, I will ensure that USCENTCOM activities receive full civilian supervision as laid out in the UCP. The President, and under him, the Secretary of Defense, are in charge of the U.S. military.

Major Challenges and Opportunities

In your view, what are the major challenges and opportunities that would confront you if you are confirmed as the next Commander of CENTCOM?

The USCENTCOM AOR poses a number of challenges and offers a number of opportunities. I think there are two overarching challenges and several ancillary ones: Over the long term, Iran will continue to challenge for hegemonic supremacy, and barring a change in ideology and leadership, it will continue to use proxy forces and asymmetric warfare to spread its influence and undermine U.S. interests in the region and beyond. Another challenge remains countering violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to deny them the space to plan and execute attacks on the U.S. homeland, our interests and citizens abroad, and those of our allies and partners.

USCENTCOM has an opportunity to develop, with our Gulf partners, a collaborative framework that motivates these important countries into working together again. This is achievable and necessary, given the challenges facing the region. In Iraq and Syria, USCENTCOM, as part of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition, is on the verge of destroying the ISIS physical caliphate, but we must be postured to help defeat the clandestine network that ISIS has rebuilt as it has lost control of territory. Another opportunity awaits our efforts in Afghanistan through the implementation of the South Asia Strategy. AMB Khalilzad is seeking reconciliation with the Taliban as USFOR-A assists the Afghan military in pressuring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

The National Defense Strategy Commission assesses that “regional military balances have deteriorated” and “America is losing its advantage in key warfighting areas.” What warfighting areas are you most concerned about in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR)?

As China and Russia reemerge as great powers and states like Iran and North Korea develop capabilities due to cheapening technologies, the military edge we once enjoyed is shrinking. Relatively inexpensive advances in cyber, space, missile, unmanned aerial systems, and nuclear technologies have aided potential competitors—to include non-state actors—in challenging the relative peace that has prevailed since the Cold War. In no AOR is that more apparent than in the Central Region.

Is there a CENTCOM long-term force posture review underway right now? If so, what is the objective, and when do you expect it to be completed?

USCENTCOM continually reviews force presence requirements and basing requirements (posture) and works within established DOD-directed processes to submit both force and basing requirements for DOD review. The annual submissions to inform FY20 resourcing have been submitted. Additionally, in August 2018, USCENTCOM submitted a response to a Joint Staff tasking addressing the National Defense Strategy guidance to “Recalibrate

Middle East Presence.” All of the information provided in these submissions is being used to inform PBR20. Finally, force presence and basing requirements are continually reviewed and amended within these processes as Operations INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) and FREEDOM’S SENTINEL (OFS) evolve. Ensuring USCENTCOM’s operational commanders have the people, resources, and authorities necessary to execute assigned missions is essential.

What is your assessment of the impact of potential reductions in the Defense budget – including the Office of Management and Budget directed target of \$700 billion instead of the assumed \$733 billion – on CENTCOM’s operational planning, requests for forces, and operating budgets? If confirmed, how would you prioritize the use of available funds?

USCENTCOM’s first priority must always be to protect the homeland. Over the long term, I see that threat emanating from Iran requiring continual deterrence, while in the near term, the command must consolidate hard wins and defeat terrorist groups that possess the will and capability to attack the homeland, U.S. forces, or allies. An element of this priority is finding more economic, yet effective ways to successfully prosecute the missions in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to keep the pressure on the malign actors and support international efforts to seek political solutions. If confirmed, those will be my priorities. My next priority will be continuing to develop our critical relationships in the region among our allies and partners. This is done through engagement and security cooperation. My concern is that a reduced budget would directly impact this latter priority, and that would have a corresponding long-term negative effect on USCENTCOM’s first priority to protect the homeland.

What is your assessment of the level of risk to the U.S. national security objectives in the CENTCOM AOR if requirements identified in the Future Years Defense Program are not fully funded?

Continuous underfunding over the FYDP will impact the consolidated gains we have made in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as straining our relationships with other partners in the region. Without the appropriate funding, USCENTCOM faces increased risk resulting from reduced posture and presence during a period characterized by intensified sectarianism, civil wars, conflict spillover, increasing adversary capabilities and engagement, and humanitarian crises. The complex and dynamic nature of the Central Region demands consistent, credible U.S. posture and presence in order to accomplish our national security goals. The ability to foster a stable and secure region that denies safe havens for malign state and non-state actors will be degraded if current and future funding is insufficient in the coming years.

National Defense Strategy

The 2018 National Defense Strategy prioritizes long-term strategic competition with Russia and China above other military activities such as countering violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and containing Iran.

What impact, if any, do you anticipate this new strategy will have on the operations and activities of CENTCOM?

Great power competition is a global activity. It is present in competitive spaces such as the South Asia and Middle East regions which comprise the USCENTCOM AOR. As the return of great power competition, combined with the threat of terrorism and the activities of states such as Iran persists, the region will grow even more complex and demanding.

The NDS highlights the need to promote regional stability and security by defeating terrorist threats to the United States and ensuring freedom of access to common domains, while emphasizing the need to identify ways to address counterterrorism through a more resource-sustainable approach, including by strengthening the capabilities of our regional partners and allies. Specifically relevant to USCENTCOM is the need to develop enduring coalitions and work by, with, and through allies and partners to consolidate the gains made in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere; support the lasting defeat of terrorists as their sources of strength are severed; and provide a deterring counterbalance to Iran.

In what ways do you expect the 2018 National Defense Strategy will shape U.S. force posture in the Middle East?

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) will reduce U.S. force posture in the Central Region and realign resources to goals with higher priority in the NDS. The shift of U.S. resources away from USCENTCOM presents a challenge to the command's ability to provide deterrence with forward stationed combat credible forces. This will require USCENTCOM to develop new concepts and strengthen its relationships with regional partners and allies. Additionally, reduced U.S. presence provides an opportunity for competitors to potentially increase their influence with our partners. As stated earlier, this creates increased risk if USCENTCOM also loses funding which will likely be taken from engagement and security cooperation programs necessary to offset our re-posturing—both real and perceived.

Given the hierarchy of prioritization on great power competition clearly laid out in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, in what ways can CENTCOM counter Russia's growing influence in the Middle East?

The key to countering Russia's growing influence in the Central Region rests in developing and sustaining enduring coalitions and working by, with, and through allies and partners. USCENTCOM has laid a foundation for this approach in its current named operations. Moreover, the command must refine its country security cooperation (SC) plans to focus operations, engagements, and investments to counter Russian military, political, and economic influence. In addition to strong relationships and security cooperation, we need to continue to expose malign Russian activities and highlight the risks and hidden costs our partners will encounter if they pursue false Russian promises.

Readiness of Forces

What is your assessment of the readiness of U.S. forces that have been deployed to Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Inherent Resolve, and other operations in the CENTCOM area of responsibilities?

USCENTCOM continues to receive ready forces deployed to the AOR, prepared to execute complex and diverse missions at a very high level of precision. I cannot say enough about the professionalism of the service members and DOD civilians serving in the region. The environment is extremely complex and the men and women deployed to it are achieving results on a daily basis, consistently moving our campaigns forward.

Readiness underpins the lethality of our forces as well as our combat competitive advantage. What can CENTCOM do to ensure that deployments to the Middle East generate rather than consume readiness?

While any deployed force consumes some aspect of readiness, I am cognizant of the need to harbor our scarce resources and utilize only what is necessary to accomplish the mission. Forces deployed in the AOR, when not employed for operational requirements, support other missions that increase readiness such as bilateral and multilateral exercises. These exercises throughout the AOR include trans-regional, all-domain, multifunctional threats with emphasis on counterterrorism, Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD), and maritime security, as articulated in the NDS.

South Asia Strategy

Former USFOR-A Commander General Nicholson testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2017 that "we are in a stalemate in Afghanistan." Since then, the President announced a new strategy for South Asia, authorized an increase of roughly 4,000 additional U.S. advisors and enablers, and adjusted the train, advise, and assist mission to enable advising at the tactical level for specific missions within the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

What is your understanding of U.S. vital interests and strategic objectives in Afghanistan?

The United States has a single vital national interest in Afghanistan: to prevent terrorist groups from planning and executing attacks against the U.S. homeland, U.S. citizens, and our interests and allies abroad. Working with our Resolute Support allies and partners, we are doing this by defeating threats posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), supporting the ANDSF, and by providing the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed and stand on their own. Under the leadership of the Department of State, our ultimate goal in Afghanistan is a negotiated political settlement between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and the Taliban.

What is your understanding of U.S. strategy to achieve these objectives?

To achieve U.S. objectives and to build upon the gains of the last 17 years, USFOR-A conducts two well-defined and complementary missions. First, through OFS, U.S. forces continue the CT mission against al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and their associates in Afghanistan to prevent their resurgence and any external attacks. Second, in partnership with NATO allies and partners in the Resolute Support (RS) mission, U.S. forces advise and assist the ANDSF. The United States supports the institutionalization of ANDSF gains by conducting functionally based security force assistance (SFA) as part of the NATO-led RS mission.

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Afghanistan?

Afghan security forces continue to face a Taliban-led insurgency focused on re-establishing an Islamic emirate. The Taliban remains a resilient enemy as they continue to access Pakistan sanctuary and maintains sufficient resources to sustain current levels of activity. Estimates are that the Taliban currently has up to 60,000 fighters available for operations across Afghanistan. Taliban leadership follows a dual-track strategy of actively fighting GIRoA and RS forces while exploring the feasibility of negotiating the departure of foreign forces from Afghanistan. ISIS-K is a civil and force protection threat to GIRoA and a competitor to the Taliban. They are focused on attacking GIRoA and RS forces, but often target civilian populations through indiscriminate suicide attacks. U.S. special operations forces and the Afghan government have been attacking ISIS-K with unrelenting force for the past three years and have prevented them from growing into a larger threat. Al-Qaeda is attempting to maintain a small presence in Afghanistan but has been severely injured by U.S. operations. Overall, Afghan security force progress is uneven, but the ANDSF remains capable of responding to insurgent attacks with support from the international community.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has stated that the objective of the South Asia Strategy is to bring 80 percent of the population under the Afghan government's control by the end of 2019. Current estimates are that the government controls about 65 percent.

Do you think that goal is achievable? If so what indicators lead you to your conclusion? If not, what sort of re-scope of objectives would you recommend?

I support the objective of the Government of Afghanistan, as laid out by President Ghani in his four-year roadmap, to expand government control to approximately 80 percent of the population. The overarching goal that needs to be stressed is the initiation of peace talks. The military is in support of that political objective and the Department of State's diplomatic effort.

The ANDSF has fought hard against the Taliban during the 2018 fighting season. The latest *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction and Pentagon Lead Inspector General* reports provided RS data demonstrates that neither GIRoA nor the

Taliban made significant gains in 2018 over 2017. This stalemate supports the other elements of our plan in Afghanistan, most importantly AMB Khalilzad's reconciliation efforts. As GEN Miller institutes greater advise and assist contact at the tactical and operational levels of the ANDSF and the Afghan Air Force becomes more capable and proficient, I think we will see an increase to the government's control of territory, districts, and the overall population.

How have the nature, size, and scope of the insurgency and the terrorist threats changed since February 2017?

The Taliban's size and scope remain largely unchanged since February 2017, but they continue to transition to more selective targeting of GIRoA representatives including politicians and the military with less attacks on the population. ISIS-K and al-Qaeda have suffered losses since early 2017, but both still harbor the intent to attack the homeland and U.S. interests abroad.

What is your understanding of the main military lines of effort to support the South Asia Strategy? What modifications, if any, would you recommend?

The conditions-based approach to achieving our strategic objectives in Afghanistan outlined in the South Asia Strategy provided authorities to support the ANDSF, while force level adjustments by both the U.S. and NATO presented new opportunities to apply multi-dimensional pressure on the Taliban. The operational approach employed by U.S. and RS forces is designed to help compel the Taliban to recognize the benefit of entering peace negotiations. This is a whole of government effort. Military pressure alone will not bring lasting success.

The President authorized the expansion of the train, advise, and assist (TAA) mission for conventional ANDSF below the corps level, performed primarily by the 1st Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) that arrived in Afghanistan in March 2018. I understand those efforts were successful and set the foundation for continued TAA support going forward. U.S. and RS forces also conducted TAA missions with the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) at the tactical level, underscoring the importance of those two critical capabilities.

Taliban Reconciliation and the Negotiations Process

What is your assessment of the status of negotiations between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan?

The President recently appointed Ambassador Khalilzad to act as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR). His team has been making progress in initial meetings. As I noted earlier, the U.S. military operates in support of this effort. My own assessment has been that these negotiations present the most promising way ahead.

What is your understanding of the primary diplomatic lines of effort?

My understanding is that the SRAR is implementing the South Asia Strategy and working with allies and regional states to build the framework for a political settlement. Talks with regional actors and the Taliban are designed to set the conditions for talks between the GIRoA and the Taliban.

Please describe your understanding of the integration of the military lines of effort and the diplomatic lines of effort?

U.S. forces support the diplomatic efforts by working with the Afghanistan security institutions and applying direct pressure on terrorist organizations in Afghanistan through our counterterrorism actions in order to provide the space for diplomacy. State Department personnel are already partnered with our advisory teams down to the lower echelons of the ANDSF in anticipation for when the Taliban decide to stop fighting and reconcile with the GIRoA.

How have the military lines of effort been calibrated to support the political end state identified?

U.S forces assist Afghan security institutions in providing security for the people of Afghanistan in preparation for when the Taliban realize that the path for peace is through political settlement and not continued violence. Our TAA mission is focused on ensuring the ANDSF are in the best possible military position to be successful on the battlefield in order to put sufficient pressure on the Taliban to bring them into talks with the Government of Afghanistan. It is important to emphasize that we are not directly doing the fighting in this campaign – this burden is being shouldered by our Afghan partners.

In your assessment are there additional interagency efforts or resources that should be applied in Afghanistan or the broader region to facilitate progress toward reconciliation?

Within Afghanistan, our interagency partners are constrained by the lack of security. Without a permissive environment, there can be no guarantee of the effectiveness of the additional support. If confirmed, I will consult with AMB Khalilzad, AMB Bass, GEN Miller, and GIRoA officials to assess what, if any, additional interagency resources are necessary as progress is made on the South Asia Strategy. If I can assist by requesting those resources, I will.

Building and Sustaining the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

The ANDSF has consistently reported manning numbers below their authorized end-strength of 352,000. Critical specialties such as special operations, aviation maintenance, and pilots are chronically undermanned. Additionally, each successive

fighting season for the past few years has seen an increase in ANDSF casualties with 2018 marking the highest level of civilian casualties on record.

In your view, does the ANDSF have the right size, force mix, and capabilities to address the current security situation on the ground in Afghanistan?

I believe the current numbers are appropriate given the existing conditions on the ground. The Afghan security institutions are progressing toward an optimal mix of offensive capability and sustainable hold forces. The Afghan Security Roadmap developed in 2017 will help them continue to mature in both capacity and capability, but as of now, they are not at a level in which they can fight, train, and sustain their own force without our support and advising. Once periodic assessments indicate performance is more consistent throughout the ANDSF and with commensurate improvements in security conditions, I will consult with GEN Scaparrotti and GEN Miller to re-examine the size of the force and make any recommended changes to the Secretary and Chairman. I anticipate that capability gaps will require continued TAA focus for the coming years. In some cases, such as aviation resourcing, equipment will not be fully fielded until 2019 or beyond.

What in your view are the greatest challenges to building and sustaining the capabilities of the ANDSF?

Currently the ANDSF are suffering significant casualties in combat against a seasoned and determined enemy. They are facing challenges in recruiting and retaining adequate numbers. The overall cost of the ANDSF must, over time, come into line with the GIRoA's ability to generate the revenue to field and sustain the force. Economic growth is not keeping pace with this requirement, and is not forecasted to do so in the foreseeable future. While ANDSF is showing improvement in planning and executing operations, there is still a gap in their capabilities when RS enablers and support are not present.

If confirmed, what would be your priorities for building the capabilities of the ANDSF, including the key enablers that the ANDSF need to develop and maintain?

If confirmed, I will work with GEN Scaparrotti and GEN Miller to assess and reprioritize assets and resources in support of building ANDSF capabilities, if necessary.

In your view, does Afghanistan have the ability to generate the human capital necessary to continue to grow a cadre of technically and intellectually skilled service personnel?

In my experiences in Afghanistan, I learned that the Afghans are an innovative and indefatigable people. They are capable of continuing to grow—and will grow, in my opinion—a cadre of skilled service personnel.

How can the Resolute Support mission assist the government of Afghanistan to ensure that the ANDSF is able to recruit and sustain its capabilities with the right personnel in the right positions?

Some of this has been addressed by President Ghani's enactment of Inherent Law and efforts to fight corruption. This will be an ongoing project. Resolute Support forces must continue to help the Afghan security institutions professionalize their force and operational employment.

Train, Advise, and Assist (TAA) Mission in Afghanistan

What is your understanding of the role that U.S. and coalition trainers and advisers will play in building the capabilities of the ANDSF in 2019 and in future years?

Our TAA efforts enable our Afghan partners to plan and execute multi-corps offensive operations to prevent the Taliban from achieving their objectives. The Taliban have failed to take and hold any provincial centers since 2015 and when the Taliban have succeeded in attacking a district center, they were retaken by the ANDSF within hours or days. The deployment of additional U.S. advisors to Afghanistan allows us to focus advising at the point of need.

What is your understanding of the timelines that will be required to develop critical ANDSF capabilities including: intelligence, logistics, aviation, command and control?

The ANDSF Unified Training System (UTS) aims to support leadership development and ANSDF capability development through coordinated, structured training and education. As a central part of the UTS, the nascent Unified Training and Education Command (UTEDC) unifies all efforts related to institutional training and education, as well as efforts in support of training fielded forces. The schools with advisor presence maintain a combined course capacity of 6,405 trainees, but have a training utilization rate of under 10 percent due to a lack of Afghan National Army (ANA) enforcement of professional military education at the ministerial and corps levels. Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is considering a variety of refinements and reforms to the institutional training arena to ensure adequate advanced training while meeting the operational needs of the ANA. I do not consider this a satisfactory state of affairs, and, if confirmed, this will be an early focus area for me.

What is your assessment of the risks involved with the TAA effort, particularly in light of the effort to advise at the tactical level, and what steps should be taken to mitigate those risks?

Afghanistan continues to remain a dangerous place for the Coalition, Afghan officials, non-governmental organizations, and the forces conducting the TAA mission. In order to develop a capable ANDSF at all levels that can function with minimal coalition direct support, RS forces must continue TAA at the lowest levels possible for the near term. Currently, the best way to accomplish this task is by maintaining a continuous presence with ANDSF units; these units, however, are

continuously fighting and cannot be pulled off the line to reconstitute and train without jeopardizing overall security. To reduce the immediate risk to our personnel, RS forces have taken steps to vet the partner units/organizations, provide security teams to over-watch key engagements, and provide specific guidance to the forces conducting operations with the ANDSF. In the long-term, by having a more capable ANDSF, RS forces mitigate risk to personnel on the ground.

What is your assessment of the measures that have been taken by RSM and Afghan leaders to address threats posed by so-called “green-on-blue” insider attacks? If confirmed, what additional steps, if any, would you recommend to address such attacks?

USCENTCOM and Resolute Support Mission leaders continually review all policy and procedures to proactively address the insider threat. Pre-deployment training, vetting procedures and enhanced protection capabilities through the Guardian Angels Program have been instituted to mitigate threats. Pre-deployment training requirements specify that all deployed personnel will train on identifying insider threats and mitigation factors, as well as receiving a general overview of the history, political, military, cultural, religious, and economic conditions of Afghanistan. Counterintelligence (CI) assets conduct screening, debriefing, media exploitation, and all-source analysis to identify priority persons-of-interest for in-depth and comprehensive evaluations. These targeted screenings aid in identifying insider threats, threat networks, and connections to foreign intelligence entities (FIE) and terrorist groups attempting to penetrate U.S. installations. In addition to the CI efforts, commanders develop screening and vetting procedures (to include biometric screening and registration) based on the local threat and higher headquarters directives. To ensure a holistic approach to this problem USCENTCOM and Resolute Support leadership have ongoing key leader engagements with GIRoA leadership.

As with all programs that address our forces’ safety and security, if confirmed, I will continue to evaluate policy and procedures based on the local threat and conditions in consultation with GEN Miller.

Prevention of civilian casualties continues to be an issue of great importance within the Afghan government and across the TAA effort. U.S. and coalition advisors work closely with the Afghan Government to reduce civilian casualties including via TAA efforts at the tactical level. Reporting suggests that casualties from ground operations have seen a significant decrease in 2018, however casualties from aerial and search operations have reached unprecedented records.

What is your understanding of current Afghan capabilities to track civilian casualties, investigate allegations related to ANDSF operations, and provide assistance to victims?

The GIRoA is progressing on their capabilities to track civilian harm, investigate allegations related to ANDSF operations, and provide assistance to victims of harm. They have made a marked improvement over the past 18 months. Since

January 2017, RS receives a daily report of civilian casualties (CIVCAS) from the Presidential Information Coordination Center (PICC), which includes insurgent, GIRoA, and RS force incidents and allegations. This feeds into the RS CIVCAS tracker and comprises over 60% RS data on CIVCAS incidents. There is, however, room for improvement on their investigation report writing, record keeping, and information sharing. Additionally, as a whole, the GIRoA tends to only investigate high profile cases.

Do you believe there are adjustments that should be made to TAA efforts to ensure proper mitigation efforts are fully incorporated into ANDSF operations and doctrine?

It is my understanding that adjustments are already being made. The ANDSF are improving, incorporating CIVCAS mitigation measures, taking lessons learned, and incorporating them into their tactics, techniques, and procedures. If confirmed, I will consult with GEN Miller to assess if adjustments need to be made. I recognize the critical importance of this effort.

What is your understanding of the role of the Resolute Support Civilian Casualties Mitigation Team (CCMT)? In your understanding is the CCMT appropriately sized and resourced for their tasks?

RS CCMT tracks all CIVCAS incidents in the country. When there is an RS allegation from a unit-self report, PICC, UNAMA / ICRC, or victim self-report, the team works with all stakeholders and gathers information surrounding the allegation. They then convene a Civilian Casualty Creditability Assessment Review Board (CCARB) and provide the command the board findings. The team also does periodic de-confliction with UNAMA/ ICRC for RS allegations. To date RS has received 148 allegations. CCMT provides enduring TAA to the PICC to ensure GIRoA continuously develops their CIVCAS mitigation capability. Additionally, the CCMT has been conducting an ongoing GIRoA CIVCAS mitigation "train-the-trainer" program resulting in 521 trainers being trained at this point. In turn, those trained personnel expand the training at all levels of ANDSF.

The CCMT is currently staffed at 4 people. While the scope of the team has drastically increased especially with the increased operational tempo and air strikes the current manning is adequate. As previously stated, I believe this is a critical task. If confirmed and GEN Miller requests additional personnel to support increased activity, I will support resourcing additional personnel.

Pakistan

What is your assessment of the strategic relationship between the United States and Pakistan? What would you consider to be areas of shared strategic interest between the two countries?

The U.S. and Pakistan military to military relationship is strong. We share an important strategic relationship given that Pakistan is a nuclear power that sits at the nexus of Russian, Chinese, Indian and, American geopolitical interests. However, Pakistan's action or inaction as it relates to stability in Afghanistan has often led to frustration between our governments and militaries. Stability in the South Asia region remains the most important mutual strategic interest for both the U.S. and Pakistan, and I think we must continue to engage with Pakistani leadership to realize how we can achieve this mutual interest.

What do you consider to be the major challenges in the U.S.-Pakistan strategic relationship?

Despite Pakistan's positive rhetoric in support of the South Asia Strategy, violent extremist organizations (VEOs) operate along its border with Afghanistan. While Pakistan has conducted some operations against VEOs in Pakistan, they must continue to expand these operations and remain aggressively engaged. Taking concrete steps that deny VEO safe havens in Pakistan, as well as VEO freedom of movement from Pakistan to Afghanistan, remains an important ask that Pakistan needs to fulfill. Pakistan must leverage their influence over Taliban leadership to help compel them to come to the table for reconciliation negotiations.

It is important to remember that we are asking Pakistan to focus a significant fraction of their national power away from what they perceive to be an existential threat. Yet, Pakistan has national interests it wants addressed in any future political settlement in the region, including a politically stable Afghanistan. USCENTCOM will continue to support our colleagues at the Department of State as they work towards a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Afghanistan which includes ensuring that Islamabad's equities are acknowledged in any future agreement.

If confirmed, what changes, if any, would you recommend to enhance U.S. relations with Pakistan, particularly in terms of military-to-military relations?

USCENTCOM continues to support the President's South Asia Strategy and remains committed to holding Pakistan accountable for the commitments they have made to support U.S. efforts in finding a negotiated settlement to the Afghanistan conflict. As far as any policy changes, USCENTCOM will continue to provide coordinating support and military advice to the President and the Secretaries of Defense and State for any changes they are considering regarding U.S. – Pakistan military-to-military relations.

Since 2001, the United States has provided significant security assistance to Pakistan including funds to reimburse Pakistan for the costs associated with military operations conducted by Pakistan along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. If confirmed, I will make Pakistan a priority engagement.

What do you see as Pakistan's role in helping to reconcile the Taliban and the Government

of Afghanistan?

Pakistan is an essential element in long term stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan could play a key role in facilitating talks between the Taliban and GIRoA, and I would welcome that development. At this time, however, Pakistan does not appear to be using the full extent of its influence to encourage the Taliban to come to the table. We continue to see the Taliban being utilized as a hedge against India rather than as part of a stable, reconciled Afghanistan. If confirmed, I will fully support Ambassador Khalilzad's efforts as the SRAR to move this effort forward.

Combating Terrorism

Within the CENTCOM AOR, what do you consider to be the highest counterterrorism priorities?

Countering threats to the Homeland remains USCENTCOM's highest CT priority. Experienced foreign fighters fleeing the Iraq-Syria theater, potentially to their home countries or elsewhere, are a significant concern. AQ remains a persistent threat, and I assess that, even after the liberation of ISIS-controlled territory, ISIS probably is still more capable than al-Qaeda in Iraq at its peak, suggesting it is well positioned to reemerge if pressure on the group is relieved. Despite significant gains achieved over the last 12 months, VEOs operating in, or emanating from, the USCENTCOM AOR remain the most likely, proximate terrorist threat to the security of U.S. and allied interests.

With recent successes on the battlefield, we need to be postured to counter the threat emanating from the outflow of foreign fighters and their families to their home country or potential future battlefields. While disrupting the foreign fighter flow into and out of the AOR remains a priority, it is also a challenging task as returning experienced foreign fighter numbers and motivations are difficult to accurately track.

I also remain concerned about Iranian proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen given their intent and capability to conduct attacks against U.S. and allied interests and forces.

What is your assessment of the threat posed by ISIS, al Qaeda, and their associated forces to the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests overseas?

ISIS and AQ remain a threat to the U.S. Homeland and U.S. interests overseas. ISIS continues to encourage its networks, branches, and supporters to inspire, enable, or direct attacks worldwide. ISIS will use its media capability to preserve its global brand appeal despite territorial losses. ISIS is very likely exercising patience, adapting to its restrained operational environment to pursue its strategic goal of establishing a global caliphate. Inspired attacks likely are the principal method ISIS is projecting power globally as CT pressure in the region and plot disruption in Western countries likely have temporarily limited its ability to resource external networks.

Convinced the U.S. is directly and maliciously responsible for actors, policies, and practices AQ believes are repressing Sunni Muslims around the world, AQ remains avowedly hostile to the U.S. and its allies. Across the Central Region, AQ consists of disparate groups with uneven centralized control. In Syria, AQ affiliated al-Nusra Front retains the capability to target the West but currently focuses on fighting the Syrian regime, and thus lacks intent to pursue Western attacks. The AQ veterans who defected from al-Nusra Front retain the AQ intent to target the West; however, they currently lack the capability to operate outside of Idlib province.

What is your understanding of the Department's role in the U.S. strategy to combat terrorism in the CENTCOM AOR?

The Department sets the policy for and oversees a critical component of national power to defeat our enemies and protect our interests and citizens. Based on that hierarchy, if confirmed, I will direct and manage the counterterrorism strategy in the AOR in close consultation with the Secretary, Chairman, and Commander, USSOCOM.

The Department is an integral component in implementing the 2018 *U.S. National Strategy for Counterterrorism*. USCENTCOM directly supports several of the strategy's six lines of effort including: 1) pursuing terrorist threats to their source; 2) isolating terrorists from financial material, and logistical sources of support; 5) countering terrorist radicalization and recruitment; and 6) strengthening the counterterrorism abilities of international partners. The desired end state of the strategy is to eliminate the terrorist threat to the United States, secure all of our borders and ports of entry against terrorist threats, prevent terrorists and their ideologies from undermining our way of life, and enable foreign partners to address terrorist threats so that these threats do not jeopardize the collective interests of the United States and our partners.

Given your current knowledge of CENTCOM operations and activities, do you believe the Command's resources are aligned in a manner consistent with counterterrorism priorities?

Yes. Defeating terrorists and preventing their ability to plan and execute from the USCENTCOM AOR is the number one CT mission. USCENTCOM will continue to employ the appropriate resources and personnel to wage this fight in consultation with USSOCOM. USCENTCOM's current operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria will also receive the resources and personnel—many of which are also focused on the counterterrorism fight—necessary to provide our diplomats with the space to seek political resolution in each conflict. As previously stated, if confirmed, my concern with re-posturing and the potential cut to USCENTCOM operational and security assistance funds is that the command may come up short over the long term in the critical realm of engagement and security cooperation with our allies and partners. In turn, this will have a negative effect on our ability to marshal our allies and partners to defeat the terrorist threat and rely on them for necessary access, basing, and overflight.

How do you believe the National Defense Strategy’s focus on a more “resource-sustainable” approach to counterterrorism will impact CENTCOM’s operations, activities, and force structure?

A more resource sustainable approach to counterterrorism will impact USCENTCOM’s activities with reduced capacity and flexibility if we lose key force structure and associated capabilities. If confirmed, I expect there will be adjustments to resources and personnel in the USCENTCOM AOR. However, I will ensure the counterterrorism mission and the ongoing operations continue to receive the necessary resources and personnel. New concepts that leverage ways and means differently will help compensate for likely resource shifts.

Do you foresee any counterterrorism efforts in the CENTCOM AOR that may be constrained due to the 2018 National Defense Strategy prioritization of long-term strategic competition with Russia and China over countering VEOs?

No. USCENTCOM’s efforts will not be constrained, but every resourcing decision has some impact on capacity, flexibility, and responsiveness. This is not unexpected and is something the command plans for in all operations. USCENTCOM has various contingency planning capabilities that enable the command to remain agile in addressing these threats. In the short term, USCENTCOM’s focus on by, with, and through, and burden sharing, coupled with an existing strong security cooperation program, will help reduce the threat and mitigate risk. However, I am concerned about the medium to long term effects of reduced engagement and security cooperation plans as I would need to make difficult resource trades, if confirmed. I look forward to your continued support as we discuss and address these issues together.

Syria

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Syria?

In Syria, Assad remains in power and Pro-regime Forces (PRF) are postured to clear Idlib Province, the last opposition stronghold. PRF have a nearly insurmountable advantage over the remaining opposition forces, most of which are currently under temporary Turkish protection in Syria’s northwest region. The Syrian regime’s success in ending the civil war appears as a near certainty, although the regime is not addressing underlying causes of the civil war such as political disenfranchisement, poverty, water availability, and access to economic stability. The Assad regime also lacks the ability to reconstruct and the will to reconcile to prevent an eventual resurgence of insurgent and extremist activity. While Russia, Iran, and even China may assist the regime in these efforts, it is likely their competing interests with the regime and between themselves will hamstring any meaningful plan that brings peace and prosperity to the Syrian people. Our military efforts have hastened the territorial defeat of ISIS, and today the Coalition-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have nearly destroyed the remnants of the ISIS physical caliphate. ISIS is fighting to maintain control over its last pocket of territory while it shifts in other areas to underground and insurgency attacks. Without substantial

international assistance to local governance institutions, ISIS likely will further take advantage of ethno-sectarian tensions and inadequate basic services to foment instability. Other state actors competing to advance their respective agendas further complicate the security environment. Turkey desires to create a buffer zone along Syria's northern border. Some of Ankara's actions are having a destabilizing effect in the areas the Coalition and SDF cleared from ISIS, and the pursuit of its anti-YPG objective is enticing Turkey to work with Russia and Iran in some aspects that undermine the Defeat-ISIS (D-ISIS) mission. Iran remains entrenched in and fully committed to staying in Syria, which Israel views as an existential threat. Russia is currently the regime's most supportive partner and has no plans on leaving Syria as it has secured a warm water port and airfields. Russia and Iran seek a removal of all U.S. forces in Syria and remain a threat to the U.S. presence in at-Tanf.

What is your understanding of the current U.S. strategy and objectives in Syria? What modifications, if any, would you recommend?

The United States is pursuing three mutually supporting strategic objectives in Syria. The military's specific mission in Syria is to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. The United States is also using a whole-of-government approach to achieve other strategic objectives in Syria, such as countering Iran and achieving a lasting political solution in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

In your view, what is the proper role of the United States military in the conflict in Syria?

The role of the U.S. military in Syria is to defeat ISIS principally by, with, and through our partners and facilitate a political solution in accordance with UNSCR 2254.

What is your assessment of the support the United States has provided to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)?

I consider the SDF a success story. There were hiccups and flaws, but our by, with, and through support to the SDF enabled them to significantly degrade ISIS in a relatively short period of time. ISIS territorial control is now limited to small pockets in the eastern half of Syria from the Euphrates River to the Iraqi border, but they have evolved into a clandestine network that the Coalition should continue to help the SDF identify and defeat. It is unfortunate that Turkey views the SDF as a threat, but we continue to accommodate our ally's concerns in attempting to ensure the SDF transitions to internal security forces (InSF) under local civilian control in order to prevent ISIS or any other VEO from resurging.

What role, if any, do you believe U.S. military advisors should play in transitioning SDF to conduct local security vice offensive operations to clear territory held by ISIS?

U.S. military advisors play a unique and critical role in assisting the SDF's transition to the InSF. These advisors serve as trusted agents to ensure InSF personnel are aligned

with local leadership and represent the ethnic composition of the populace. Until areas are fully secured against the threat from ISIS and able to defend themselves, our military advisors are a key, but temporary ingredient to long term success during this transition phase.

Do you believe that SDF tasked with local security should be responsive to civilian authorities? What are the risks to overall stability if such local security forces are not responsive to civilian authorities?

SDF providing local security must be responsive to civilian authorities. The principal challenge is that civilian leadership still varies considerably in SDF-liberated parts of Syria. Some civil councils are more capable and have assumed direction over the InSF. Others are less developed and have not yet established the intended relationship, though the goal remains to have all InSF responsive to their respective civil councils. With respect to risk to overall stability, over time the local populace will suffer if the civil councils do not have a responsive security force to address local concerns.

What additional military steps, if any, should the United States be taking to advance the process for a political solution in Syria?

As major combat operations come to a close, it is critical that USCENTCOM and Combined Task Force-Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) continue to support our partner forces as they provide local military security that provides the time and space for the reestablishment of local governance and security structures.

In your view, what are the interests and objectives of Russia, Iran, and Turkey in Syria?

Russia's interests in Syria revolve around power projection in the Middle East, demonstrating great power status and a viable alternative to U.S. leadership. Syria provides Russia a platform to demonstrate military capabilities as a CT partner and diplomatic proficiency as a key facilitator in ending the civil war through international peace forums. Moscow's desired end state is a stable Syria that enables Russia to gain economic benefits from reconstruction and access to hydrocarbon resources, and retain unfettered long-term access to a warm water port on the Mediterranean Sea.

Iran's efforts in Syria advance Tehran's regional interests in the Middle East, particularly efforts against Israel and in protecting Shia populations while supporting the Assad regime, a longtime ally. Syria provides Iran a conduit to resupply Lebanese Hezbollah, its proxy. Iran expects to gain increased international recognition as a legitimate regional power. Iran expended considerable funds in aiding Syria during the course of the conflict and may look for financial benefits through preferential access to natural resource extraction, security assistance to the Syrian regime, and commercial ventures involved in post-conflict reconstruction.

Turkey is focused on internal security and alleviating the internal strain from supporting 3.5 million Syrian refugees. Ankara views the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK), and by

extension, the Kurdish Peoples Production (YPG) units as an existential threat from Syria and is undertaking activities along the border and within Syria to eliminate this threat. Turkey's desire for a buffer zone within Syrian territory may also facilitate the return of refugees from Turkey to Syria before it is safe for them to do so and presents an opportunity to alter the border region demographics to a pro-Turkey Arab majority. Strategically, Turkey views Syria as a platform to compete for regional influence opposite Saudi Arabia and Iran by appearing to be a guarantor of Syria in the international peace negotiations.

Do you expect the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria in the near-term? If so, how will U.S. objectives and force presence change following the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria?

Conditions allowing, I expect to see a territorial defeat of ISIS in the near-term, yet more work remains to ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS given their shift to a clandestine posture. The D-ISIS Coalition is still assisting local Syrians east of the Euphrates in establishing civilian councils and developing the InSF. If confirmed, I will consult with AMB Jeffrey and Special Envoy McGurk to assess how our objectives and force presence should evolve and make recommendations to the Secretary and the Chairman.

Iraq

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Iraq?

The Government of Iraq (GoI) has retaken all areas from ISIS although Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) continue to conduct small-scale clearing operations in an effort to prevent ISIS from reestablishing its networks. Iraq must rebuild its security forces exhausted by four years of operations against ISIS, therefore, a continued Coalition security assistance mission is vital to Iraqi success. Over the near term, the ISF will continue efforts to secure the Syrian border from the remaining ISIS strongholds in the MERV and focus on CT missions in Ninewa, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din provinces against resurgent ISIS networks. The GoI will struggle to remain independent from Iranian aligned actors, particularly within some of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Much needed reforms, anti-corruption programs, and rebuilding efforts remain stalled and popular discontent with the gridlocked government could fuel future instability. ISIS' return to an insurgent force posture will remove the greatest unifying factor among Iraq's competing factions. Elections in May 2018 resulted in the formation of a new, generally representative government. Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi vowed to improve public services and prioritize reconstruction of areas devastated by the conflict with ISIS likely to be difficult, enduring challenges, balancing reconstruction efforts in Sunni majority areas with unrest over poor infrastructure in the Shia-dominated south. PM Abd al-Mahdi has yet to name his security ministers and faces difficulty integrating or downsizing the Iran-backed elements of the PMF. Tensions between the Kurdish regional government in the north and Baghdad eased, but challenges with revenue sharing, disputed territory, and control of oil resources remain problematic and divisive.

What is your understanding of the current U.S. strategy and objectives in Iraq? What modifications, if any, would you recommend?

The current United States strategy in Iraq is to assist in the development of a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant country. Primary U.S. interests in Iraq are to protect against threats to the homeland, ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, and promote a long-term military, economic, and diplomatic relationship. The United States is committed to assisting Iraq in counterterrorism, the development of its security forces and institutions, and enabling it to secure its own borders.

In consultation with AMB Silliman and LTG LaCamera, if confirmed, I will review the scale of the U.S. military presence with a view toward attaining an enduring security relationship through a normalized military-to-military relationship at the completion of the current named operation. Such a review would be conditions-based, focusing on the immediate mission to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS.

What do you believe are the major lessons learned from the Iraq invasion and the follow-on efforts to stabilize the country through 2011?

Major combat operations in Iraq in 2003 validated US ability to effectively conduct such operations rapidly and surgically. However, we also learned the importance of being prepared and resourced to transition to stability operations following major combat operations. There were assumptions made which led to poor policy decisions that helped foment an insurgency (e.g. de-Bathification and disbanding the existing security apparatus). The transition from major combat operations to stability and counterinsurgency operations required relearning tactics, techniques and practices for a different type of fight delaying our ability to quell the insurgency and develop Iraq's security institutions.

What is your assessment of the biggest challenges associated with working with the Government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces?

The contrast between a demoralized and disorganized ISF in the summer of 2014 after ISIS' advance into the heart of Iraq, and the strong and proud ISF of today is profound. As the MARCENT commander and Joint Staff J5 during much of that time, I was impressed with their ability to root out ISIS from Iraq with only our advisors and enablers in support. Tactically, and to a certain extent, operationally, the ISF is a competent force. However, I note five challenges with the ISF, its institutions, and its political and strategic leadership: First, the force is tired and remains overcommitted across the country in efforts to target remaining ISIS cells, quell public unrest, participate in reconstruction efforts, and secure the border. The elite Counterterrorism Service (CTS) suffered 40% losses in spearheading the ISF's defeat of ISIS, but has yet to receive a break to recover and reconstitute. Second, corruption and ethno-sectarian infighting still plague the GoI's security institutions such as the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. This dilemma undermines the tactical formations in the field with poor oversight, neglect, and misappropriated resources. Third, the Iraqi security enterprise

suffers from a lack of unity of effort and command—essential elements for any military to survive long-term. This is most notably evident in two hybrid security structures in Iraq nominally under GoI control, but in reality, are not. The first is the Kurdish Peshmerga which remains a separate militia controlled from Irbil and with some input from as-Sulaimaniah but not Baghdad. The other are Shia Militant Groups (SMGs) on the right end of the spectrum of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs). Militias such as Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) do not take their commands from the GoI and publicly maintain relations with Tehran. Next is the lack of border security on Iraq's border with Syria. Iraq has a designated Border Guard Force as part of the ISF, but it was decimated following the ISIS invasion and remains undermanned and poorly equipped. CJTF-OIR has prioritized resources and training for this force, but it will take at least two years to reach full capability. Finally, low oil prices continue to hurt the Iraqi economy, translating to the GoI's inability to cover all of its ISF costs. From our perspective, this means that the GoI cannot pay for the required maintenance to sustain all of the U.S.-origin equipment purchased and provided over the past decade. To date, various security assistance programs have sustained these weapon systems, but those funds are in jeopardy starting in FY20.

How should the U.S. structure its long term assistance to Iraq? Should it continue to utilize the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq or transition to a more traditional security cooperation relationship under State Department leadership?

In coordination with OSD and the Joint Staff, USCENTCOM is conducting long-range planning for the future U.S. military role in Iraq. In the near term, after major combat operations are complete in Iraq and Syria, OIR will transition to Phase IV of the operation. Phase IV sets the conditions for the lasting defeat of ISIS by training indigenous forces to contain residual ISIS threats with minimal coalition assistance affording the GoI to focus on reconstruction with the assistance of international support. Once realized, this will permit USCENTCOM to normalize its security cooperation relationship with the GoI.

Independent of OIR, USCENTCOM, in coordination with OSD and Joint Staff, is developing a plan to transition the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I) to a traditional security cooperation construct, headed by an SDO/DATT. If confirmed, I will consult with the Secretary, the Chairman, and AMB Silliman on the appropriate timing and rollout of this plan.

Iran

What is your assessment of the military threat posed by Iran?

Iran's rapidly expanding military capabilities and capacity enable it to immediately and directly threaten international trade and regional stability throughout the Gulf and beyond. USCENTCOM has seen the rapid production and distribution of advanced military equipment that threatens the free flow of commerce through the Strait of Hormuz

and is intended to maintain Iranian regional power and threaten regional adversaries including the U.S. Expected improvements in Iranian ballistic and naval cruise missile technologies will strengthen Iranian Anti-Access Area Denial efforts and increase Iran's ability to threaten its neighbors with greater speed, precision and lethality. Iran repeatedly demonstrates its willingness to share advanced conventional weapons with Shia militant proxies and partners throughout the Central Region, to hold the U.S. and our allies at greater risk and extend Tehran's influence throughout the USCENTCOM AOR.

Iran has a large conventional military, composed of approximately 700,000 personnel divided into two separate militaries--the Islamic Republic of Iran Forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC). The IRGC has an additional estimated 600,000-strong militarized Basij (para-military) Resistance Force for immediate mobilization in a crisis. Iran postures its forces and supports proxies to threaten strategic locations like the Bab al Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, and oil platforms. With little warning, Iran could effectively close the Strait of Hormuz using stockpiles of naval mines and disrupt other key maritime chokepoints throughout the region. Iran is unlikely to block critical navigation paths unless regime stability is directly threatened due to broad geopolitical and financial repercussions from such an act.

Tehran's primary conventional power projection means are ballistic missiles and its expanding unconventional navy. Its missile inventory is the largest in the Middle East and includes both medium and short-range ballistic missiles; with improving accuracy and ranges up to 1,200 miles it can hold most key regional targets at risk. Tehran is increasingly willing to use Iranian-based ballistic missiles to strike ISIS in Syria and Kurdish targets in Iraq. Iranian surface to air missiles (SAMs) along its littoral pose a significant threat to U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets operating in international airspace. Iran's capabilities improved with the receipt of the advanced Russian S-300 air defense system in 2016.

What role should the U.S. military have in constraining the growth of Iranian malign influence in the Middle East? How should U.S. military efforts be integrated with other non-military elements of our strategy?

The U.S. military serves a supporting role to the whole-of-government approach in constraining the growth of Iranian malign influence. With increased diplomatic and economic pressure the military role is to (1) accentuate those impacts through robust messaging, through information operations campaigns, key leader engagements, and other means; and (2) provide a credible deterrent. The military provides deterrence and response capability and is the ultimate backstop to any potential Iranian military response to the ongoing pressure campaign.

What is your understanding of the role of CENTCOM in implementing U.S. policy with respect to Iran?

Commander, USCENTCOM is the DoD coordinating authority for the Iran problem set, as specified in the Chairman's Joint Strategic Campaign Plan (JSCP). Inherent in this role

is leading implementation of DoD's Iran Policy within the USCENTCOM AOR, while ensuring that our military activities contribute to the achievement of USG goals in a coherent and meaningful way. This involves aligning and balancing resource requirements for Iran against other global priorities and making key recommendations for adjustments over time. USCENTCOM operates within a whole of government approach. USCENTCOM is executing presence and partner enablement operations, throughout the theater, to deter, and when possible, counter Iran's malign, hegemonic policy. Beside the command's responsibility to maintain viable contingency plans, a critical component of its effort is effective cooperation and alignment with and among our regional partners to build capacity to counter and mitigate challenges posed by Iran's military (ballistic missiles, anti-access capacity, unmanned aerial systems, small boats, submarines, and mines, as well as cyber and unconventional warfare). A balance of forward presence, key leader engagement, combined training, and exercises supported by the command's security cooperation programs contribute to interoperability and partner capacity to counter Iran.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force and support to surrogates like Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), are at the forefront of Iran's destabilizing activities that oppose U.S. national interests in the Central Region. In Syria, Iran is providing weapons and advisors to the Assad regime. Meanwhile, inside Iraq, Iran continues to support SMGs that work daily to subvert the GoI. Over the past year, Iranian support to the Houthis in Yemen is putting the region at risk under missile and armed UAS attacks against both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Finally, Iranian elements in Syria have used that country as a base of operations to launch attacks on Israel.

What actions, if any, do you believe the United States and the international community could undertake to counter Iran's increasing conventional military capabilities?

The United States and the international community share a collective desire to ensure a commitment to the free flow of international commerce in the Central Region, an international norm that Iran threatens through its nefarious actions. USCENTCOM forces are postured and ready to respond to Iranian destabilizing influence and actions. DoD maintains the ability to dynamically and rapidly flow forces to the USCENTCOM AOR to meet any challenge to commerce and global stability. To ensure a united front, USCENTCOM can enhance our interoperability with our allies and partners to deter, and defeat, if necessary, Iranian conventional military capability across multiple domains. The United States and the international community share a desire for peace, but we must continue to prepare for conflict in order to prevail, if directed by the President. As part of this effort, we must continue to reassure and support our partners in the region.

In your view, what risks, if any, are associated with reducing U.S. military presence in the Middle East with respect to the threat posed by Iran?

USCENTCOM continues to work hard to sustain enduring military, security, and intelligence ties with our regional partners. Its current posture provides sufficient

assurance to our partners of our resolve and capacity to secure our enduring interests. However, any response to crises or conflicts in the region requires access, basing, and overflight authorities. Further reductions of U.S. force presence could jeopardize that assurance, resulting in decreased access to host nation facilities. The command must sustain our posture to reduce the risk of miscalculation and to deter Iran from conducting conventional and unconventional acts of aggression, as well as to preserve our ability to provide the President and the Secretary with a full range of options in the event of an action requiring a military response. New concepts, like dynamic force employment, will further bolster deterrence by demonstrating our ability to quickly reinforce a theater in crisis or conflict.

What is your assessment of the purpose of and threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile program? To what extent is the U.S. and our partners in the region postured to counter the Iranian ballistic missile threat?

Iran's ballistic missiles are a key component of regime survival and provide power projection capable of threatening the entire region. The missile programs are also viewed as a deterrent against more capable conventional adversaries and a means of imposing costs on regional adversaries. Tehran uses its expanding missile capabilities to advance its regional objectives by providing enhanced capabilities to proxy and partner forces including Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Shia militant groups for actual or potential use against Iran's regional rivals. Iran's missile inventory is the largest in the Middle East and includes both medium and short-range ballistic missiles; with improving accuracy and ranges up to 1,200 miles, it can hold most key regional targets at risk. Tehran also demonstrated an increasing willingness to use Iranian-based ballistic missiles to strike ISIS in Syria and is sharing its technologies with the Houthis in Yemen.

The U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) inventory in the region includes both land- and sea-based interceptors. The United States currently maintains Aegis BMD-capable ships and Patriot batteries in the Arabian Gulf region for the defense of U.S. core interests in the region. The United States, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia each deploy lower-tier systems capable of point defense of high priority critical assets. Qatar has begun fielding their own lower-tier systems and United Arab Emirates has deployed upper-tier systems that can provide limited area defense. Currently, these capabilities, in conjunction with U.S. deployed systems, are actively contributing to deterring the Iranian threat and, in some cases, defeating the ballistic missile threat from rogue actors. However, our ability to pace the threat (in both capability and capacity) continues to be a challenge, while improving Iranian cyber capability exacerbates the threat.

In your view, what role, if any, should CENTCOM play in countering Iran's support of international terrorism and proxy forces throughout the CENTCOM AOR?

Countering Iran's support of international terrorism and proxy forces requires a whole of government approach. The Iranian regime uses the IRGC-Qods Force to manage proxies who drive instability and chaos in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon through the

proliferation of advanced weapons technology and destabilizing actions. Iranian-backed Houthis threaten international maritime commerce through the Bab al Mandeb and attacked both a Turkish-flagged bulk cargo carrier and a Saudi-flagged tanker in the last year. Iran is capitalizing on Syrian instability to transfer weapons from Tehran to Lebanon, in order to threaten Israel. Lastly, Iran's meddling in Iraqi politics and its support to Shite militias is threatening the hard-earned gains achieved by the defeat-ISIS coalition.

What is the impact of the strife between Saudi Arabia and Qatar on the ability to counter Iranian malign influence and aggressive behavior in the Middle East?

Currently, the rift has had negligible impact on USCENTCOM's ability to counter Iranian malign influence and aggressive behavior in the Middle East. However, the rift is a significant obstacle to forward progress on some key long-term initiatives. Over time, a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Qatar will be important in countering Iran's regional ambitions. If confirmed, I will work with our State colleagues to repair this relationship.

Egypt

What is your assessment of the security situation in Egypt, including the Sinai Peninsula?

The security situation in Egypt, specifically the Sinai, remains challenging for the Egyptian government. ISIS-Sinai is likely to remain the most dangerous security threat in Egypt. ISIS-Sinai maintains the intent, capabilities, resources, and organizational planning to conduct attacks against Egyptian military/government targets, Christians and Sufi Muslim targets, and Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) personnel. Since Operation SINAI 2018 commenced in February 2018, the concentration of ISIS-Sinai attacks were against Egyptian military and security forces. ISIS-Sinai's weapons inventory historically includes small arms, man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), rocket propelled grenades, and anti-tank guided missiles. ISIS-Sinai often uses small arms and improvised explosive devices to conduct ambush style attacks against convoys, checkpoints/roadblocks, and military outposts within the northern Sinai.

What is your assessment of the U.S.-Egypt security relationship?

The U.S.-Egypt security relationship is resilient and has been a key pillar of the U.S.-Egypt partnership for the past 30 years. Egypt continues to support our overflight requests, provide Suez Canal transit courtesies, and deploy peacekeeping troops worldwide. During the past several years Egypt has struggled with a terrorism threat in the northern Sinai. More recently, with U.S. assistance, the Egyptian Armed Forces have contained most of the violence in the northeastern Sinai Peninsula and have begun to address the societal and economic reforms needed to implement a whole of government strategy to defeat ISIS-Sinai and prevent their spread to the Nile Valley. The cornerstone of this relationship is the military-to-military partnership forged through decades of close coordination, bilateral exercises, and capacity building.

What is your assessment of the role Egypt plays with respect to regional stability?

Egypt plays an active and important role in regional stability. Egypt is working to mend the rift between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, and is also working with the international community to find a political solution to the continuing conflict in Libya. Egypt contributes to peacekeeping initiatives throughout Africa, and is a partner in efforts to contain Iran and counter violent extremism in the Middle East and North Africa.

What is your assessment of Egypt's counterterrorism operations?

As Egypt continues to struggle with the effects of a weak economy and instability derived from years of political upheaval and violence, Egyptians believe that political Islam is bound tightly to the VEO activity in the Sinai and across mainland Egypt and into Libya. In particular, they see Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) and IS-Sinai as growing threats, capable of conducting attacks in the region. Although nascent Egyptian CT forces are willing to conduct operations, these operations are characterized by limited duration and effectiveness. Egypt remains cautious in partnering with the U.S. military to combat these threats, and will remain significantly constrained by both capability and capacity to challenge these groups in the near-term. Additionally, internecine disputes between the Egyptian Ministries of Defense and Interior pose considerable challenges to unity of effort.

Yemen

What is your assessment of the threat posed by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS-Yemen to the United States?

Currently, the greatest threat posed by AQAP to the United States involves the influence it has on lone actors or inspired individuals compelled to carry out high-profile attacks on behalf of the group. While AQAP maintains an intent and historical capability to directly threaten the U.S. homeland, they do not currently have the capability to execute an attack due to continued counterterrorism operations by the U.S. and partners in the region. Thus, prioritizing propaganda efforts through its media platforms has provided an alternative to any temporary disruption of direct involvement in external operations. Over the last year, U.S. air strikes and Coalition ground offensives significantly degraded AQAP's leadership ranks, finances, media campaign, and recruitment diminishing their ability to conduct external attacks. AQAP prioritizes restoring domestic operational capabilities, but retains the intent to strike the U.S. homeland.

What is your assessment of the current U.S. strategy to counter AQAP and ISIS-Yemen?

The U.S. strategy to counter AQAP and ISIS-Yemen has been effective in suppressing the ability of both VEOs to conduct external attacks. We have achieved this with sustained counterterrorism operations. In concert with USSOCOM, USCENTCOM

counterterrorism activities include counter messaging and counter threat finance operations. As we gain additional intelligence, we continue to make progress towards reducing the effectiveness of their information campaigns. While their call to arms still resonates among disgruntled Sunni populations, our operations are having a positive impact on limiting AQAP and ISIS-Yemen from achieving their strategic goal of attacking the U.S. homeland.

What is your assessment of the efforts of the Saudi-led coalition to restore control of Yemen to the internationally recognized government?

The Saudi-led Coalition (SLC) supports the internationally recognized government of Yemen. Saudi Arabia is currently hosting the Yemeni government-in-exile in Riyadh. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and UAE have provided essential financial support to the Central Bank of Yemen to enable the government to pay civil servants and support to the Yemeni rial.

The U.S. government is working closely with the UN Special Representative (UNSR) to support the ongoing efforts to bring this conflict to a negotiated end. It is widely recognized that the SLC likely will neither defeat the Houthis nor resolve the ongoing conflict in Yemen through a military solution. Since the commencement of the conflict in 2015, the Houthis have continued to elevate threats against the coalition with attacks into Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and international shipping lanes. The prolonged conflict has contributed to a significant and worsening humanitarian crisis with approximately 80% of the population requiring urgent humanitarian assistance. Continued military operations risk further exacerbating instability in Yemen and the region.

In your view, what is the appropriate role of the U.S. military in providing support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and how does the provision of such support serve U.S. national security interests?

U.S. military efforts with partner security forces are focused on enabling them to defeat VEOs, to secure their sovereign territory, and to respond to threats in order to provide a safe and secure environment that facilitates a stable and prosperous region. We are also engaged in ongoing efforts to advise our partners on ways to avoid collateral damage and mitigate civilian casualties (CIVCAS).

What is your assessment of efforts by the Saudi-led coalition to avoid civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure caused by coalition military operations?

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia instituted multiple training and procedural measures to limit the potential for civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. The SLC incorporates training on the Law of Armed Conflict into their professional military education systems and attempt to ensure compliance. Despite these efforts, the risk of civilian casualties remains due to wartime uncertainties and Houthi co-location with the civilian population. We remain actively engaged in this effort at the very highest levels,

and I believe both countries recognize the importance of protecting civilians and are taking active steps to improve targeting in order to mitigate the possibility of civilian casualties.

What are the potential positive and negative consequences of conditioning continued U.S. military assistance to the Saudi-led coalition on factors such as improvement in avoiding civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid?

It is important that we continue to engage Saudi Arabia and the UAE to improve our visibility over their operations and improve their tactics, techniques, and procedures. It is likely that any such conditioning of security assistance to Saudi Arabia will jeopardize our access to their operations and diminish the perception of our reliability across the region. I think before we take such a measure, we need to give peace negotiations a chance, as called for by Secretary Mattis and Secretary Pompeo.

What is the assessment of the Iranian-backed Houthi ballistic missile, unmanned aerial vehicle, and other threats emanating from Yemen to U.S. regional partners, U.S. interests, and freedom of navigation?

The Houthis significantly increased their ability to threaten U.S. regional partners, U.S. interests, and freedom of navigation since gaining control of Sanaa in 2015. After acquiring legacy systems, the Houthis increased the range of their ballistic missiles with Iran's assistance and received new systems that provide the capability to strike targets at a distance of over 500 miles from Houthi-controlled territory. The Houthis have already targeted military and economic sites in Saudi Arabia and the UAE with missiles and armed UASs. The Houthi development and acquisition of UASs increases their ability to monitor U.S. regional partners, and increases Houthi awareness in the southern Red Sea. Additionally, these systems can be configured to deliver lethal payloads and are inherently difficult to identify and destroy due to their smaller signature. In the maritime domain, the Houthis demonstrated the intent and capability to target vessels in the southern Red Sea through a range of lethal methods. They also conducted attacks against SLC military and civilian vessels in the southern Red Sea using small explosive boat attacks.

U.S. forces and civilians are present in the thousands at a number of locations within the ranges of Houthi missile and UAS systems. The risk to U.S. personnel, citizens, partners, and interests remains substantial. Houthi use of ballistic missiles against major urban areas, including Riyadh, highlights their willingness to indiscriminately attack civilians and inflict collateral damage. The threat of escalation from miscalculation is high.

Central Asian States

What is your understanding of the role Russia and China are seeking to play in the Central Asian states?

Russia desires a Central Asia devoid of Western influences that is stable enough to act as a buffer for Russian territory. Moscow views Central Asia as its sphere of influence and is wary of any external influences, including the U.S., Europe, and China. China superseded Russia as the region's most important economic partner, but Russia retains its role as the regional security guarantor and maintains strong levers of influence due to established intelligence networks, economic dependences, social and historical ties, and military engagement. The Kremlin reinforces its role through a series of Eurasian integration policies that span the elements of national power—the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States—and extensive bilateral engagement with all five Central Asian states.

Beijing desires access to Central Asian natural resources to meet Chinese industrial demands, to expand the use of Central Asian transportation infrastructure, and to counter security threats from Uighur extremists. China has invested throughout the Central Asian region, especially in the hydrocarbon industries. Since 2016, China increased security engagement with the region bilaterally and through China-dominated security structures, exemplified by the Quadrilateral Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism that allows China to jointly patrol the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-China border region. But Beijing does not want to be a regional security guarantor, focusing on threats that directly affect China, and capitalizing on Russia's hard-power approach to perceived threats across the region.

Do you consider Central Asia as a place where the United States is in long-term strategic competition with Russia and China? If so, what can CENTCOM do to tip the regional balance in favor of the United States?

Yes. Great power competition is global—it occurs not only on the boundaries of the great powers themselves but also on the periphery in competitive spaces such as Central Asia. Complicating competitor calculus in Central Asia would require more planning and increased and sustained investment in our partners which remains subject to overall NDS priorities. Regardless, USCENTCOM will continue to fortify the relationships required to sustain the access, basing, and overflight needed to compete with Russia and China, and support counterterrorism missions.

What are the potential consequences for U.S. access and interests in the region?

Russia's aggressive foreign policy and overt attempts to diminish U.S. influence restricts our ability to respond to regional threats and tensions. China's growing economic and focused military presence further complicate regional security dynamics. An erosion of the U.S.'s role as the primary partner in the region constrains U.S. flexibility and emboldens regional adversaries. It is critical that USCENTCOM remains engaged in Central Asia through the use of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) and security cooperation. Without such engagement, it is not difficult to envision a region without U.S. influence. This will cede this critical terrain to the Russians and Chinese, and limit our operations in Afghanistan.

Lebanon

What is your assessment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), including their ability to act as the sole guarantor of Lebanon’s security and sovereignty?

With continuing successful counter-VEO operations, the Lebanese people realize that the LAF, their country’s most trusted and respected institution, is increasingly capable of protecting them from internal and external threats. The United States is the LAF’s top security assistance partner as manifest by our contribution of more than \$1.8 billion in security assistance over the past decade. This support has successfully modernized and strengthened the LAF as a respected fighting force. U.S. military and civilian personnel have forged a strong relationship with the LAF and enhanced their capabilities, making them a capable partner in our regional counterterrorism campaign. All of this allows the LAF to maintain a counterbalance to LH while assuaging Israeli concerns regarding their competence, professionalism, and accountability.

In your view, what is the appropriate role for the U.S. military in Lebanon?

Our continued military support to Lebanon curtails the influence of LH, successfully thwarts Russia’s attempts to expand their influence, and provides a counter to Iran’s “Shia Crescent.”

What is your assessment of the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance provided to the LAF in recent years, including the ability of the LAF to appropriately utilize and maintain accountability of U.S.-provided equipment?

The LAF is a proven and effective partner, and it is willing to counter violent extremism and maintain stability within Lebanon. The LAF maximizes the U.S. assistance it receives and converts it immediately into positive, measurable security results. Lebanon’s security forces routinely demonstrate the capability and willingness to protect technology associated with aircraft, communications, night-vision, weapons and munitions. Lebanon maintains an exemplary Golden Sentry record.

Building Partner Capacity and Security Assistance

In the past few years, Congress has provided DOD a number of authorities to provide security assistance to partner nations.

In your view, what should be our strategic objectives in building the capacities of partner nations in the CENTCOM AOR?

Building partner capacity through security cooperation programs is designed to directly support our partner nation requirements to develop and maintain a sustainable and interoperable security force capabilities that are consistent with U.S. strategy and the USCENTCOM Theater Campaign Plan (TCP). Our strategic objectives are designed to develop partner nation capabilities; optimize our U.S. influence, access, and freedom of action; and build a network of capable partners who will work together in stabilizing the

region. All planning, resourcing, employment, and prioritization of activities and programs are designed to support these efforts and build these capabilities. Ultimately, we want partner nations who are capable of internal security, contribute to regional stability, and have the ability to effectively partner with U.S. forces and allies. Security cooperation is essential to conducting our counterterrorism mission and completing our named operations in the USCENTCOM AOR.

Strategic Communications and Information Operations

Over the past decade, DOD has funded an increasing number of military information support operations and influence programs.

What are your assessment of DOD's military information support operations, influence programs, and other information warfare efforts in the CENTCOM AOR?

USCENTCOM develops information operations (IO) strategies at the theater/strategic, operational, and tactical levels in a multi-layered, broadly-scoped effort supporting several ongoing major operations and multiple national strategies. Moreover, USCENTCOM maintains an IO posture to prevent and, on-order, rapidly respond to crisis and contingency operations. Since adversary propaganda and misinformation efforts are not limited by domain or geographic area, the command develops, synchronizes, and coordinates influence operations, actions, and activities (OAAs) designed to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of very specific audiences. These influence campaigns address U.S. and theater counter-terrorism goals: degrade VEO abilities to inspire violence or recruit; advance regional cooperation and partnerships; increase constructive inter-sectarian relations; and promote regional stability. The end-state for USCENTCOM's influence efforts is to achieve a lasting defeat of designated VEOs and reduce their trans-regional network capabilities, including fanatical facilitators and transnational criminal organizations, to prevent the emergence or expansion of VEOs and protect the homeland and U.S. interests abroad.

In Iraq and Syria, USCENTCOM's non-lethal efforts have been very effective in countering false propaganda and in disrupting ISIS activities, degrading ISIS fighter morale, and bolstering support for the GoI and ISF. Influence activities conducted within the command combat propaganda and disinformation through online activities, the Senior Military Engagement Program, and multimedia products disseminated through multiple platforms to counter VEO narratives. Finally, USCENTCOM is working collaboratively with regional partners who are increasingly using their IO capabilities to combat violent extremist messaging.

Do you believe CENTCOM and other agencies within the U.S. Government are appropriately organized to respond effectively to the messaging and influence efforts of ISIS, al Qaeda, and other violent extremist groups?

Yes, I believe USCENTCOM is appropriately organized and postured to effectively

counter ISIS, AQ, and other VEO messaging and disinformation efforts throughout the region. The command is linked at the operational and strategic levels with other departments and agencies conducting similar efforts. IO and associated messaging cannot exist apart from other military mission sets and must work in concert with other USG efforts. USCENTCOM's operational approach integrates interagency partners at the onset of planning, synchronizes the execution of activities across all information-related capabilities, and results in IO effects that are integral to all military operations.

Given that long-term strategic competition with Russia is a top-tier National Defense Strategy priority, what is CENTCOM doing to counter the Russian strategic narrative across the AOR?

To counter Russian narratives across the AOR, USCENTCOM conducts integrated actions in the physical domains and information environment to support our allies and partners, and demonstrate our commitment to the region. However, as needs arise, the command will respond to acts of political, economic, and military aggression and deters Russia's growing influence and false narratives. Through public affairs announcements, key leader engagements, civil affairs, military information support operations (MISO) activities, and other activities, USCENTCOM informs and educates regional audiences on how Russia supports the growth of economic and military subservience.

Interagency Collaboration

The collaboration between U.S. Special Operations Forces, general purpose forces, and other U.S. Government departments and agencies has played a significant role in the success of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in recent years. However, much of this collaboration has been ad hoc in nature.

What do you believe are the most important lessons learned from the collaborative interagency efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere?

Proactive communication and coordination among U.S. forces and other departments and agencies in the theater are paramount to successful operations. During my previous assignments in the USCENTCOM AOR and on the Joint Staff, I have witnessed increased direct coordination and collaboration between the Intelligence Community (IC), DoS, USAID, and military units at all levels. While I agree that much of this coordination was ad hoc in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s, it has become fundamental in Operations INHERENT RESOLVE and FREEDOM'S SENTINEL and in all of our counterterrorism missions.

Prevention of and Response to Sexual Assaults

What is your assessment of the problem of sexual assaults in CENTCOM?

A single instance of sexual assault is a problem and is not acceptable. USCENTCOM's continuing efforts to encourage victims to step forward, and to protect them once they do, have helped the command to create an environment where we are more likely to receive reports. This is a small but positive step in exposing and correcting this blight. The command's efforts have led to an estimated increase in reporting for USCENTCOM over the past 4 years. Reported assaults relative to the average population increased from .08% (FY13) to .16% (FY17). This assessment aligns with overall DOD statistics which continue to trend toward increases in victim reporting of sexual assault. The increase in reporting seems to indicate greater confidence from victims that they will get the support they need and deserve from commanders and the services, and that these issues will be fully and fairly addressed by the military justice system when reported. There is a positive trend by command climate survey respondents which indicate they feel leadership is firmly committed to preventing sexual assault and, if it occurs, will hold perpetrators accountable. If confirmed, I will continue to support the actions resulting in these positive trends, and I will nurture a fair and compassionate command climate.

What is your assessment of CENTCOM's sexual assault prevention and response program?

I assess that USCENTCOM has a positive and proactive approach towards sexual assault prevention and response programs. Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) continues to receive USCENTCOM leaders' highest level of attention. Leaders at all levels aggressively execute the Department's five lines of effort (LOEs), which include: 1) prevention, 2) investigation, 3) accountability, 4) advocacy/victim assistance, and 5) assessment. Throughout the AOR, USCENTCOM units implement specific and wide-ranging service-specific initiatives while adhering to the Commander's clearly-stated policy of zero tolerance for sexual harassment and discrimination. Fundamentally, sexual assault is a safety and readiness issue, and it will continue to receive my direct attention, if confirmed.

What is your view of the provision for restricted and unrestricted reporting of sexual assaults?

I strongly support the current provisions for restricted and unrestricted reporting of sexual assaults. Having these two reporting options will allow the command to emphasize a commitment to victim care, while also supporting the victim's desires for privacy. Restricted reporting permits victims of sexual assault to report the crime to specific individuals, allowing them to receive a wide range of care (medical, mental health, legal advice, etc.) without notifying command or law enforcement officials. The ability to change to an unrestricted report at any point enables an official investigation to move forward and provides the victims of sexual assault choices and options during a deeply personal and life-changing time.

What is your view about the role of the chain of command in providing necessary support to victims of sexual assault?

Fundamental to leadership is taking care of your people. It is job one. I remain committed to providing all necessary support to the victims of sexual assault. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure that USCENTCOM's aim is to reduce—with the ultimate goal of eliminating--the crime of sexual assault at the headquarters and across the AOR. My strategic approach to sexual assault is prevention first, but when necessary, focused and unwavering commitment to a victim's care. USCENTCOM's chain of command will continue to take deliberate and meaningful actions to prevent sexual assaults, empower victims, facilitate recovery when incidents do occur, and sustain our commitment to holding offenders fully accountable for their actions.

What is your view of the adequacy of resources and programs in CENTCOM to provide victims of sexual assault the medical, psychological, and legal help they need?

I believe that the Department of Defense is providing commanders with the necessary resources and programs essential to care for our personnel and their families. We continue to learn and seek ways to incorporate the most useful tools in our arsenal so we can ensure we are doing all we can to support victims with quality medical, psychological and legal help. I understand USCENTCOM provides victims resources through robust advocacy and provides victim assistance through advertisement and ease of access to resources. The services provided to victims include educational information via written and electronic methods, resource centers in the AOR, legal/victim counsel, medical providers, victim advocates, and mental health assistance. If confirmed, I will ensure commanders and leaders at all levels within USCENTCOM are not only aware of the resources but actively inform their subordinates of them.

What is your view of CENTCOM initiatives to prevent additional sexual assaults?

USCENTCOM has effective initiatives and programs in place to continue to develop a strong and unified culture that will not tolerate and actively works to prevent sexual assaults. The Headquarters and the Components have initiated several effective training methods, including SAPR Stand-downs, team building events, values-based training, bystander intervention, and leadership training. I believe the training initiatives and continued leadership involvement has been effective, and, if confirmed, I will evaluate and assess all areas with an eye towards continuous improvement immediately upon taking command.

What is your view of the adequacy of the training and resources available to CENTCOM to investigate and prosecute allegations of sexual assault?

I believe that the amount of training and resources in those areas where we have high concentrations of soldiers (e.g. service component headquarters, joint task force headquarters, etc.) is adequate. However, I do have concerns with on hand local resources at satellite and remote locations. For these locations we must remain vigilant and ensure leaders and members feel connected and supported. The emphasis is to mitigate shortages

in those locations by focusing on partnership and collaboration with the service component headquarters in the AOR. In the event a sexual assault is committed, commanders have the responsibility to hold service members accountable, and I will be committed to bringing to bear all resources required at these locations to ensure thorough and complete investigations are conducted.

What is your view about the role of the chain of command in changing the military culture in which these sexual assaults occur?

Leaders at every level are responsible for the culture of an organization. It starts at the top and I embrace the responsibility of continuing to ensure our military culture reflects our core values and ethos. We are a values-based organization where everyone is expected to do what is right by treating all persons as they should be treated—with dignity and respect—at all times. It is an absolute responsibility for commanders at every level to promote an environment that respects every member and does not tolerate behaviors that are fundamentally in opposition to our values, whether behaviors that may bring about, or behaviors that condone, sexual assault. We must demand service members understand and embody the military core values and demonstrate the courage to act on these types of issues.

Surveys report that up to 62 percent of victims who report a sexual assault perceive professional or social retaliation for reporting.

If confirmed, what will you do to address the issue of retaliation for reporting a sexual assault?

I will continue to encourage those that have been sexually assaulted to report in a manner of their choosing and fully support them after they report. I will not tolerate retaliation against victims. Retaliation in any form for those who report or are considering reporting a sexual assault is unacceptable. I know victims often will look to experiences of other survivors as an indication of how they may be treated. Victims must know that they will not be retaliated against or blamed for the illegal actions of others. If a member of USCENTCOM is alleged to have retaliated against a victim, it will be thoroughly investigated, and if appropriate held accountable. If a member is found to have committed retaliation, they could face adverse administrative or disciplinary action under the UCMJ. They will be held accountable for their actions. I will continue GEN Votel's zero tolerance policy for any type of sexual assault, harassment, or retaliation.

Sexual assault is a significantly underreported crime in our society and in the military. If confirmed, what will you do to increase reporting of sexual assaults by military victims?

I agree. In order to encourage more reporting, I will continue USCENTCOM's policy of zero tolerance for any type of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination. We will continue to provide strong support to victims of sexual assault. We will ensure all allegations of sexual assault are fully and fairly investigated. To support this we will

continue to ensure that the prevention of sexual assault is leadership priority. These efforts are reinforced by processes that require notification reports to general officers or flag officers when an unrestricted sexual assault is reported. USCENTCOM fully understands that underreporting of sexual assaults affects USCENTCOM's ability to provide services to the victim, as well as hinders the ability to take action against an alleged offender. Military victims must feel they are protected, treated with dignity and respect, and are provided the highest quality of support, advocacy, and care. Members of USCENTCOM must continue be trained about the resources available, ways to protect their privacy, and leaders must remain supportive. Training will continue to be mandatory for both military members and civilians, and will include all ranks. As noted earlier – it is about developing a strong culture where all members are working as a team to protect each other at all times. Members of USCENTCOM will be periodically educated in the process and leaders will work to maintain their trust and confidence. Only then will victims feel more comfortable in reporting. We will also continue to hold perpetrators accountable. Ensuring personnel command-wide know that reports are taken seriously and justice will be pursued. While we will protect the innocent victims' identities, case outcomes will be well-publicized. The message will be sent that perpetrators of sexual assault are held accountable.

In your view, what would be the impact of requiring a judge advocate outside the chain of command, instead of a military commander in the grade of O-6 or above as is currently the Department's policy, to determine whether allegations of sexual assault should be prosecuted?

I believe the Department's current policy is appropriate and properly places the responsibility for making these decisions in our most experienced leaders. Senior Commanders regularly make difficult decisions on military justice matters and rely upon military legal experts to advise them on the merits and options in all cases. Commanders are explicitly charged with maintaining good order and discipline and in my view are fully capable and the proper authority to make that determination.

What additional steps would you take, if confirmed, to address the problem of sexual assaults in CENTCOM?

While there is always more work to do and ways to improve, USCENTCOM has established a solid foundation for education, advocacy, and accountability. Reporting of sexual assaults has increased and recent USCENTCOM climate surveys reflect growing confidence in the system. The systems in place will be evaluated and improved upon using experience and lessons learned. Most importantly, I will ensure we provide any assistance necessary to survivors of sexual assault.

What is your assessment of the effect, if any, of recent legislation concerning sexual assault on the capability of CENTCOM commanders to prosecute sexual assault cases?

Our senior commanders are fully capable of making difficult decisions with complex

facts. They are supported by well-trained advisors, working together to aggressively attack the blight of sexual assault. If confirmed, I will continue to support existing policy and adapt to changes as they occur. Our organization is strengthened by providing our military leaders with both the responsibility and authority necessary to ensure that all of our outstanding men and women, our sons and daughters are protected from sexual assault.

Suicide Prevention

What is your assessment of the suicide prevention programs in the CENTCOM AOR?

The suicide prevention programs in the AOR are effective and necessary. Suicide impacts far too many military members and is heartbreaking for all involved including family and friends back home. Suicide prevention remains a top priority across all levels of leadership in the USCENTCOM AOR. The command is fully committed to ensuring members recognize the signs of suicide and have access to all available suicide prevention resources. USCENTCOM continues to partner with the service force providers to educate leaders at all levels regarding behavioral health, the myriad resources, both in theater and out, and the ongoing efforts to decrease stigma associated with seeking treatment. The prevention mission requires education, training, and willingness to intervene prior to a service member's decision to act on suicidal ideation. Commanders are responsible for regular unit resiliency training and leveraging Combat Operational Stress Control personnel and resources. Organic unit behavioral health capabilities for prevention and education are also available. Deployed service members have access to a 24/7 crisis hotline for immediate assistance and to ensure their safety. A range of additional resiliency and treatment resources actively educate and support our troops throughout their deployment. All efforts retain the singular focus that the loss of even a single service member from suicide is one too many.

In your view, are the mental health resources in CENTCOM sufficient to care for service members in the AOR?

USCENTCOM meets the mental health needs of service members within the AOR with a range of personnel and resources, from organic and embedded medical personnel providing front-line care, to Combat Operational Stress Control detachments and in-theater tele-medical support that projects out to remote areas. These efforts are assisted by the proactive engagement of service leaders at every level to recognize mental health issues early in their course and seek assistance before they escalate. The command is also assisted by service efforts to screen deploying personnel prior to their deployment, in order to ensure those service members with concerning mental health challenges are not deployed without an opportunity to adequately heal. Proof of this is that evacuation rates have remained stable over the past four years.

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, if confirmed

Do you agree, when asked, to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the Administration in power?

Yes, if confirmed

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?

Yes, if confirmed

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, if confirmed

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, if confirmed

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

Yes, if confirmed

If confirmed, do you agree to provide to this Committee relevant information within the jurisdictional oversight of the Committee when requested by the Committee, even in the absence of the formality of a letter from the Chairman?

Yes, if confirmed