

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:  
LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. KURILLA, USA TO BE  
GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL  
COMMAND

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

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1 HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:  
2 LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. KURILLA, USA TO BE GENERAL AND  
3 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
4

5 Tuesday, February 8, 2022  
6

7 U.S. Senate

8 Committee on Armed Services

9 Washington, D.C.  
10

11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in  
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,  
13 chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee members present: Senators Reed [presiding],  
15 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,  
16 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,  
17 Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan,  
18 Cramer, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.  
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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM  
2 RHODE ISLAND

3           Chairman Reed: Good morning. The committee meets  
4 today to consider the nomination of Lieutenant General  
5 Michael Kurilla for promotion to general and to be the next  
6 commander of U.S. Central Command.

7           General, your nomination is well deserved, and I thank  
8 you for your willingness to lead in this very important  
9 position.

10          We welcome your wife, Mary Paige, and daughter,  
11 Michelle, both of whom are here today, and we ought to  
12 welcome Sophie, who I am sure is glued to a television set  
13 someplace, watching her father. We thank them for their  
14 continued service to our nation.

15          You have led most recently as the Commanding General of  
16 the 18th Airborne Corps, an experience that will serve you  
17 well in this new role. Your career spans nearly 34 years  
18 with distinguished service across multiple theaters and  
19 command at every level of our nation's premier fighting  
20 forces. The country is fortunate to have leaders like  
21 yourself serving in uniform.

22          If confirmed, the range of challenges you will need to  
23 address is significant. CENTCOM's geographic area of  
24 responsibility stretches from Northeast Africa, across the  
25 Middle East, to Central and South Asia, and the security

1 challenges are similarly expansive.

2 Perhaps most pressing is Iran's malign influence in the  
3 region. The United States' latest round of indirect  
4 negotiations to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of  
5 Action, or JCPOA, has seen progress, but Iran's ongoing  
6 nuclear development threaten to derail any agreement.

7 Simultaneously, Iranian-linked groups continue to mount  
8 drone and rocket attacks in the region, including against  
9 bases in Iraq and Syria with a U.S military presence. These  
10 threats are growing, as are drone and missile attacks by  
11 Iranian-linked Houthis against the Gulf States. During  
12 today's hearing I would like to know your level of concern  
13 over rising tensions between the United States and Iran, and  
14 how you would advise responding to Iranian malign influence  
15 in the region.

16 While the death of ISIS leader al-Qurayshi in a U.S.  
17 strike last week dealt a blow to the organization, ISIS  
18 remains a threat. Last month, ISIS militants seized a  
19 prison facility in Syria where thousands of ISIS detainees  
20 are held, leading to a days-long standoff requiring U.S. and  
21 Coalition air and ground support to the Syrian Democratic  
22 Forces (STF). Press reports indicate that up to 200  
23 fighters may have escaped, and hundreds of people were  
24 killed. If you are confirmed, you will be responsible for  
25 helping ensure the STF and the Iraqi Government have the

1 capacity and support needed to address the threat from ISIS  
2 and properly detain these prisoners.

3 Of particular emphasis for this committee is a  
4 reformation of how CENTCOM and the Defense Department  
5 respond to civilian casualty incidents. It must be noted  
6 that CENTCOM's approach to this issue in recent years has  
7 not been adequate, and the DOD Inspector General and  
8 independent studies have highlighted important areas for  
9 change.

10 Our military goes to great lengths to avoid civilian  
11 casualties, but when tragic errors occur, we have an  
12 obligation to be transparent, take responsibility, and do  
13 everything we can to learn from those mistakes and prevent  
14 future mistakes. As such, General, I hope you will share  
15 what steps you would take to ensure CENTCOM improves its  
16 openness and transparency with this committee and the  
17 public.

18 Finally, turning to Afghanistan, we have transitioned  
19 to an "over the horizon" counterterrorism posture to  
20 continue to respond to threats from the region using assets  
21 based outside Afghanistan. Our 20-year mission there  
22 largely achieved the goal of significantly degrading al  
23 Qaeda and other terrorist groups, but the work is not  
24 finished.

25 During testimony to this committee last October, the

1 Under Secretary of Defense for Policy assessed that ISIS-K  
2 and al Qaeda have, in his words, the intent to conduct  
3 external operations, but neither has the ability to do so.  
4 To prevent terrorist groups from developing this ability, we  
5 must to continue to bolster our "over the horizon"  
6 capabilities. With that in mind, I would ask that you share  
7 the most important lessons learned from your time in  
8 Afghanistan, and how you would ensure CENTCOM can conduct  
9 optimal "over the horizon" activities.

10 Again, thank you, General, for your continued  
11 willingness to serve, and I look forward to your testimony.

12 Let me now recognize the ranking member, Senator  
13 Inhofe.

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

3           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4           And thank you, General Kurilla, for your willingness to  
5 continue your distinguished career.

6           General Kurilla, when confirmed, you will take command  
7 of a region where terrorist groups increasingly threaten  
8 U.S. personnel, partners, and the homeland. And due to the  
9 Biden administration's disastrous withdrawal of the U.S.  
10 troops from Afghanistan last summer, Afghanistan is now back  
11 to pre-9/11 conditions. The Taliban controls the country,  
12 and it has already killed more than 100 former Afghan  
13 officials, soldiers, and Coalition partners, according to  
14 the United Nations.

15           The Haqqanis, which are affiliated with the al Qaeda,  
16 have government positions and ISIS-K, which killed 13 U.S.  
17 servicemembers on August 26, is exploiting the vacuum that  
18 the Biden administration left behind.

19           Elsewhere, the Iran-backed Houthis have launched deadly  
20 missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United  
21 Arab Emirates, threatening U.S. forces and our partners.

22           And last month, ISIS launched a series of new attacks  
23 in Syria and in Iraq. Last week's successful operation  
24 against ISIS' leader shows that the counter-ISIS mission  
25 isn't over.

1 I am concerned that things will get even worse if  
2 President Biden re-enters the failed 2015 Iran nuclear deal,  
3 which many of us here have urged him not to do. Iran will  
4 have received substantial sanctions relief. Iran will spend  
5 that windfall on terrorist proxies. That means more arms  
6 for Hezbollah, Hamas to attack Israel, more training for the  
7 Houthis to threaten our Arab friends, and more support for  
8 the Iraqi militias that target our personnel. Rejoining the  
9 Iran nuclear deal won't prevent Iran from getting nuclear  
10 weapons capabilities. The deal's limitations expire in  
11 2026, which is not that far off.

12 So, all of these threats in the Middle East are getting  
13 worse, but we also have to prioritize threats from the  
14 Chinese Communist Party and Russia right now. And both of  
15 those adversaries are heavily invested in competition in the  
16 CENTCOM.

17 So here is what I hope you will address today: What  
18 resources do you think we will need to counter these  
19 regional threats? What roles should our partners play, and  
20 how can we improve their capabilities? And perhaps most  
21 important, what can we do to ensure that our longtime  
22 regional partners stick with us in the escalating  
23 competition with China and Russia?

24 And so, General Kurilla, you have served with great  
25 honor in this CENTCOM region; you are very familiar with it,



1 you are the right guy to do this, and we look forward to  
2 winning together.

3 Thank you again. Mr. Chairman.

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

2 General Kurilla, your remarks, please.

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1           STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. KURILLA,  
2 USA, TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL  
3 COMMAND

4           General Kurilla: Good morning.

5           Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished  
6 members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, it is an  
7 honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee  
8 to serve as the next commander of the United States Central  
9 Command.

10          Today, as always, I am humbled to serve the soldiers,  
11 sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen, and guardians,  
12 who defend our nation at home and abroad every day; they are  
13 our nation's best.

14          Young me today is my amazing wife of 27 years, Mary  
15 Paige. Throughout my career, Mary Paige has been my best  
16 friend, partner, and enthusiastic advocate for our  
17 servicemembers and their families. She is the daughter of a  
18 Vietnam veteran and has known from a very young age,  
19 firsthand, the challenges and hardships that face our  
20 military families.

21          I have two wonderful daughters. My oldest Michelle  
22 flew in late last night from Massachusetts, where she is a  
23 senior at Harvard University, double-majoring in Government  
24 and English. My youngest daughter Sophie is a sophomore at  
25 Tufts University, studying biology and at the lab at the New

1 England Aquarium this afternoon, so she is watching from her  
2 dorm.

3 My family has long understood that family readiness is  
4 a key component to operational readiness and we are grateful  
5 for the service of all of our military families.

6 I am grateful to the President, Secretary of Defense,  
7 Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs for their confidence  
8 in me and to General Frank McKenzie's lifetime of service to  
9 the nation.

10 I thank the Congress, and especially this Committee,  
11 for its unwavering support of our military.

12 This is a critical time for the 21 countries of Central  
13 Command. The United States faces a new era of strategic  
14 competition with China and Russia that is not confined to  
15 one geographical region and extends into the CENTCOM area of  
16 responsibility. The Middle East, Central and South Asia  
17 remain complex and dynamic environments. CENTCOM remains a  
18 dangerous theater with its own internal threats to American  
19 security.

20 As the United States rightfully prioritizes competition  
21 with China, we must remain engaged in the Middle East and  
22 Central and South Asia. We must be clear eyed about the  
23 fact that the United States Central Command area of  
24 responsibility remains home to America's national interests.

25 The region today presents a mixed picture. On one

1 hand, there are signs of progress, such as normalization of  
2 Arab states with Israel that defeated the physical so-called  
3 Caliphate, the ending of the Gulf rift, and the continued  
4 support by longtime partners and allies; on the other hand,  
5 there are some vexing challenges: Iran's nuclear program,  
6 ballistic missile advancements, and its continued malign  
7 influence across the region.

8 The CENTCOM theater is also burdened by civil war and  
9 humanitarian crisis. The area is home to 9 of the top-10  
10 most dangerous, violent extremist organizations, including  
11 al Qaeda and ISIS, which are both reconstituting. All of  
12 these ill trends are accelerated by water scarcity and food  
13 insecurity.

14 China has significantly increased its investment and  
15 influence in the region and Russia acts as a spoiler. If  
16 confirmed as the CENTCOM commander, I will protect American  
17 interests in the region with these challenges in mind.

18 While we are no longer in Afghanistan, we must  
19 acknowledge and honor the sacrifice of the more than 1  
20 million servicemembers, civilians, partners, and allies who  
21 answered the call and did their duty during the war, and we  
22 must never forget the ultimate sacrifice of those who gave  
23 their last full measure of devotion on the battlefield.

24 If confirmed, I will work hand-in-hand with our  
25 diplomats to ensure that diplomacy is in the lead, while

1 strengthening our relationship with military partners and  
2 allies. I will embrace technology, artificial intelligence,  
3 machine learning, and data-centric warfare to increase  
4 CENTCOM's competitive edge across all domains.

5 If confirmed, by this body, I look forward to working  
6 with this committee and Congress, the senior leadership for  
7 the Department of Defense, and our partners and allies;  
8 furthermore, I will always remain transparent and candid  
9 with both, Congress and this committee.

10 I look forward to your questions.

11 [The prepared statement of General Kurilla follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

2 As is required, there are a series of standard  
3 questions, which you may responded to appropriately.

4 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations  
5 governing conflict of interest?

6 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

7 Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or taken  
8 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the  
9 confirmation process?

10 General Kurilla: No, Senator.

11 Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and  
12 oversight responsibility makes it important that this  
13 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate  
14 committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings,  
15 reports, records, and other information from the Executive  
16 Branch on a timely basis.

17 Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify  
18 before this committee when requested?

19 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

20 Chairman Reed: Do you agree, when asked before this  
21 Committee to give your personal views, even if your views  
22 differ from the administration?

23 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

24 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,  
25 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner,

1 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or  
2 other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult  
3 with the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith  
4 delay or denial in providing such records?

5 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

6 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff  
7 complies with deadlines established by this committee for  
8 the production of reports, records, and other information,  
9 including timely responding to hearing questions for the  
10 record?

11 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

12 Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate and provide any  
13 witnesses and briefers, in response to congressional  
14 request?

15 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

16 Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be  
17 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

18 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

20 Again, let me commend you for your service to the  
21 nation and the service of your family.

22 We spoke before about the continuing crisis in  
23 Afghanistan and looking forward, the steps we have to take.  
24 There is, as you recognized, a humanitarian crisis that is  
25 becoming more and more severe, each moment. There is the



1 persistent threat of al Qaeda and ISIS-K and other terrorist  
2 groups.

3 What do you see as the challenges in Afghanistan and  
4 the surrounding region and can we cope with them "over the  
5 horizon"?

6 General Kurilla: Senator, as you identified, one of  
7 the challenges is the threat to the homeland from al Qaeda  
8 and ISIS-K. They are reconstituting. The Taliban has not  
9 renounced al Qaeda. ISIS-K, with the release of the  
10 prisoners both, from the Bagram Prison and Pul-e-Charkhi,  
11 are in the process of reconstituting. While they have  
12 aspirations to attack the homeland, they do not have the  
13 capability yet.

14 Additionally, we have the humanitarian crisis in  
15 Afghanistan. I believe there are opportunities in the  
16 future of ways that we can work with, perhaps, the World  
17 Food Programme and others in the region, to help alleviate  
18 some of that burden on the humanitarian crisis.

19 Chairman Reed: Now, in our regional response, we have  
20 to consider the position of Pakistan. They have been a very  
21 complicated partner, and sometimes not a partner.

22 Do you have any comments on that relationship and what  
23 you would like to do to improve it?

24 General Kurilla: Senator, we have not always seen eye-  
25 to-eye with Pakistan, but I do think we have a shared

1 interest in regional stability and countering violent  
2 extremist organizations. One of the most violent is Tehrik-  
3 e-Taliban Pakistani, the TTP, which directly threatens  
4 Pakistan. Also, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan,  
5 threatens the migrants to push into, and refugees, to push  
6 into Pakistan. So, I think there is potentially some shared  
7 interests that we can work with them on counter VEOs and the  
8 humanitarian crisis.

9 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you.

10 Turning to Iran, as both myself and the ranking member  
11 pointed out, it presents a very, very serious challenge.  
12 There are talks underway to try to revive the JCPOA, but it  
13 is uncertain if that will happen. Their malign activities  
14 both, directly and through proxies, like the Houthis, are  
15 causing concern, especially attacks recently against the  
16 United Arab Emirates.

17 Can you give us an idea of how you would approach this  
18 problem as you take command?

19 General Kurilla: Senator, Iran is the number one  
20 destabilizing factor in the Middle East right now with their  
21 malign behavior. I think a going through our partners and  
22 allies and strengthening those with a united front from all  
23 the partners and allies is the best way to confront them.

24 The U.S. policy of Iran cannot get a nuclear weapon, I  
25 believe that any enforceable agreement should make sure that

1 they do not get a nuclear weapon.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

3 And you also said in the advanced policy questions, and  
4 in your testimony, that we must invest in artificial  
5 intelligence and machine-learning platforms and programs to  
6 increase our ability to detect, defend, and respond to  
7 conventional Iranian military capabilities.

8 Can you sketch, very quickly, what you would attempt to  
9 do?

10 General Kurilla: So, Senator, right now in the 18th  
11 Airborne Corps, when James McConville, General McConville,  
12 the Chief of Staff of the Army, charged the 18th Corps to  
13 lead and artificial intelligence become an AI-enabled corps,  
14 we have taken a four-prong approach to that with the  
15 culture, data literacy, data governance and management, and  
16 our infrastructure; i.e., cloud computing and cloud  
17 computing on the edge. And then we take that and we do a  
18 quarterly exercise that uses artificial intelligence for  
19 target detection.

20 Every quarter, from all six services participate. The  
21 last exercise had over 40 aircraft, and to include the Navy,  
22 participating with the Maritime Operations Center. And it  
23 culminated in a Marine F-35 dropping a live, thousand-pound  
24 bomb on an artificially intelligence-derived grid that was  
25 one meter off from the surveyed grid. And we do these

1 exercises quarterly to improve the capability of the  
2 targeting ability of the Corps. I would look to take that,  
3 if confirmed, down to CENTCOM, and expound upon that.

4 Chairman Reed: And would that also help us with our  
5 issues regarding "over the horizon" sort of suppression of  
6 terrorists in Afghanistan?

7 General Kurilla: Senator, it has capabilities for  
8 both, counterterrorism, as well.

9 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much, General. I  
10 am very confident that you will be confirmed and confident  
11 that you will lead with distinction.

12 General Kurilla: Thank you, Chairman.

13 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 In the past year, Iran and its proxies have escalated  
15 their regional aggression. Hamas launched more than 4,300  
16 rockets at Israel during the May 2021 conflict. The Houthis  
17 have increased their attacks on civilian targets in Saudi  
18 Arabia. And the U.A.E. and the Iran-backed militias in  
19 Iraq, routinely target U.S. personnel, property, and  
20 partners.

21 All this happens while the Biden administration is  
22 focusing on returning to the flawed Iran deal, which could  
23 provide billions of dollars in sanctions relief for the  
24 Iranian regime.

25 Now, General Kurilla, based on what you have observed

1 of Iran in the past, would you expect Iran to spend at least  
2 some of that sanctions relief on its terrorist proxies, and  
3 if so, how would this affect the security of our forces in  
4 the CENTCOM region?

5 General Kurilla: Senator, there is a risk with  
6 sanctions relief that Iran would use some of that money to  
7 support its proxies and terrorism in the region, and if it  
8 did, it could increase risk to our forces in the region.

9 Senator Inhofe: Yeah. And, General Kurilla, I have  
10 visited for many, many times, our friend, Masoud Barzani in  
11 Erbil many times over the years. The Iraqi Kurds are among  
12 our most reliable partners in the region and I believe it is  
13 important to ensure continued and reliable support to our  
14 Kurdish friends, in coordination with the Iraqi Government.

15 Do you agree that the continued and reliable support to  
16 the Kurdish Peshmerga would enhance our partnership and  
17 advance our mutual interests in the region, and can you  
18 share some insight on the value of our partnership with the  
19 Kurds, based on your personal experience, because you had  
20 that personal experience?

21 General Kurilla: Senator, I have worked with our  
22 Kurdish partners and found them to be very reliable and very  
23 capable. I have worked with them since 2004, on my first  
24 tour in Iraq, and as recently as the counter-ISIS fight up  
25 in 2014. I have found them to be an incredibly capable and

1 reliable partner.

2 Senator Inhofe: Yeah.

3 All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

5 Senator Shaheen, please?

6 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 I didn't realize we were still going in seniority  
8 order, so I appreciate that.

9 [Laughter.]

10 Senator Shaheen: And congratulations, Lieutenant --

11 Chairman Reed: You have a cheering from the upper  
12 deck.

13 Senator Shaheen: Yes. Well, General Kurilla, thank  
14 you for being here. Congratulations to you and your family  
15 on your nomination. We very much appreciate your  
16 willingness to serve.

17 And I understand that you are actually leaving directly  
18 from this hearing to be part of the task force overseeing  
19 the deployment to reinforce our NATO allies, because of  
20 Russia's buildup on the Ukrainian and Belarusian border.

21 I wonder what you consider to be the biggest challenge  
22 of that deployment?

23 General Kurilla: So, Senator, right now, we are in the  
24 process of deploying; and yes, I will be leaving right after  
25 the hearing to fly over to be a continued part of that

1 deployment. I think the challenge is, obviously, moving  
2 transatlantic with the number of forces we have, our mission  
3 over there is to assure our NATO allies and detour Russian  
4 aggression against our NATO allies.

5 Senator Shaheen: And to what extent do you think Putin  
6 is hoping for an incident along the border to give him an  
7 excuse to go into Ukraine?

8 General Kurilla: Senator, I could not begin to speak  
9 for Putin's thoughts, but I do know I am very concerned  
10 about a Russian incursion and invasion into Ukraine.

11 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

12 I want to switch to part of will be your AOR as CENTCOM  
13 commander. And one of the things that I am very concerned  
14 about is what is happening in the ISIS detainee camps in  
15 Syria. The one at Al-Hol has 60,000 family members. It has  
16 become a hotbed for a potential radicalization of those  
17 family members there.

18 Can you talk about what the strategy ought to be to  
19 address those detainee camps? And I know, because you  
20 worked with the STF, that they have stated that they are not  
21 able to assume long-term responsibility for those detainees  
22 in those camps, so what should we be doing to address that?

23 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe that there should  
24 be a whole-of-government approach and an international  
25 effort to both, assist the STF on the repatriation of some

1 of these detainees. It is approximately 10,000 ISIS  
2 detainees at about two dozen different detention facilities.  
3 That is an ISIS army in waiting. We saw that in Hasaka,  
4 when they attacked the prison.

5 We also have, as you noted, 60,000 family members; over  
6 80 percent are children, women and children in the Al-Hol  
7 camp. My concern there is the indoctrination that is  
8 happening there, and so there must be a whole-of-government  
9 approach and an international effort to support the STF on  
10 this.

11 Senator Shaheen: And this committee, actually, as part  
12 of the Defense Authorization bill last year, passed a  
13 requirement to establish a detainee coordinator to help  
14 address how we respond in those camps and how we repatriate  
15 some of the detainees.

16 Are you aware of that position and do you think that  
17 that would be helpful?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, I do think that would be  
19 helpful.

20 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

21 Hopefully, someone is listening to your testimony.

22 I want to go to Iraq because we have seen a series of  
23 bomb and grenade attacks taking place over the last week in  
24 Baghdad and it is assumed that Iranian-backed militias are  
25 responsible for these incidents.



1           So, how can we better hold Iran accountable for these  
2 kinds of attacks and ensure that our personnel and those  
3 Iraqis defending their country are protected?

4           General Kurilla: Senator, I believe the key is that we  
5 have to make sure that we expose the Iranian malign  
6 behavior. I have found that anytime Iran's hand behind us  
7 is exposed, it is helpful.

8           Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

9           There was a recent report on a Special Operations-  
10 directed strike, targeting components of the Tabqa Dam in  
11 Syria, despite the dam being on the no-strike list. It is  
12 not clear to me how this happened; I haven't seen my reports  
13 investigating that.

14          But will you commit to investigating what happened here  
15 and to reporting the results to Congress?

16          General Kurilla: Senator, I will, if confirmed.

17          Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

18          And, finally, we have a law called the Women, Peace and  
19 Security Act that is designed to try and ensure that women  
20 are involved in our operations and, particularly, in  
21 conflict areas. So, can you talk a little bit about how you  
22 see that law working in your area of responsibility and what  
23 we should be doing and how it could be helpful to what is  
24 happening in the Central Command.

25          General Kurilla: Senator, the Women, Peace and

1 Security Act of 2017, if confirmed, that is an area I would  
2 look to see how is CENTCOM employing that law. I think  
3 anytime you have women involved in conflict resolution and  
4 helping and assisting in the delivery and relief of relief,  
5 it is a good thing. So, I think, if confirmed, I would have  
6 to take a look at how that is being implemented.

7 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. I look forward to  
8 working with you on that and being helpful in any way I can.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

11 Senator Wicker, please?

12 Senator Wicker: General, I think there is widespread  
13 agreement that you are the right man for the job. We need  
14 to get you back to your base and get your involved in that  
15 deployment. I am almost attempted to yield back my time so  
16 you can get on about that, but I am not quite convinced that  
17 I should do that.

18 Let me ask you about money. We are now spending money  
19 for the Pentagon that was decided on more than a year ago,  
20 and that is because of our failure to have a Defense  
21 appropriation bill. We are about to do another continuing  
22 resolution. People in this town, from the administration,  
23 really to DOD, to the Congress seem to sort of view this as  
24 an inconvenience and a little bit of a lapse.

25 How big of a problem is this, and I have got several

1 questions, but is this merely an inconvenience or is CENTCOM  
2 really going to take a hit because we can't do our job?

3 General Kurilla: Senator, I can't speak on behalf of  
4 CENTCOM, but I can tell you my personal experience in 18th  
5 Airborne Corps. When we have prolonged CRs, it affects  
6 readiness, it affects our ability to train, it affects our  
7 combat-training centers, our rotary wing flight hours. And  
8 I have two armored brigade combat teams in the 18th Airborne  
9 Corps; they are very expensive to operate.

10 It affects modernization. It can disrupt  
11 modernization. I have an armored brigade combat team that  
12 is in a year-long modernization window. They will emerge as  
13 the most modernized armored brigade combat team in the Army.

14 The CRs can disrupt that. I don't know the impact if  
15 it was to take it all the way out through the year and then  
16 have a second armored brigade combat team that is going in  
17 the summer.

18 And, lastly, it can affect quality of life. It stops  
19 the prevention of new starts, such as military construction  
20 for barracks, motor pools and child development centers.

21 Senator Wicker: I may be speaking to the choir about  
22 this in this room, but it seems when we bring this up, and  
23 any number of members of this committee bring it up, people  
24 nod and agree with you, and yet, we are just going to be  
25 quite relaxed next week about going to another continuing

1 resolution.

2 Let me ask you about the Stans that were formerly  
3 Soviet Republic, and I am looking at the map here, General,  
4 and I see Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and  
5 Kyrgyzstan, and then the massive geographic area of  
6 Kazakhstan, which covers five time zones.

7 Why are they important to us in the United States and  
8 what difference did it make in their leadership seeing how  
9 we left Afghanistan, in what I view as a major debacle?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, they are very important.  
11 That is an area, also, that I think we compete with Russia  
12 and China. I think with the departure from Afghanistan,  
13 there is some security interests that we share with them,  
14 and that is, in terms of those that border on Afghanistan,  
15 particularly, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, I think we have  
16 shared interests on the VEOs and areas that we could  
17 potentially partnership with them on the border security to  
18 prevent the expansion of the VEOs from coming into their  
19 area.

20 Senator Wicker: But you haven't started this job yet,  
21 but you are anticipating that you will.

22 Has the leadership of these five former Soviet  
23 Republics acting differently after seeing what happened last  
24 August in Kabul?

25 General Kurilla: Senator, I am not sure, and, if

1 confirmed, that is an area that I would take a hard look at.

2 Senator Wicker: If Russia invades Ukraine, how will  
3 that, in your judgment, affect how these five former Soviet  
4 Republics view their neighbor to the north and the United  
5 States?

6 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe they would have  
7 some concerns with Russia invading Ukraine as that would  
8 look to expand, potentially, one of their former locations.

9 Senator Wicker: Thank you.

10 Well, good luck to you, and I am going to yield you a  
11 whole 30 seconds to get back and get that deployment going.

12 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

13 Senator Wicker: I yield back.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

15 Senator Hirono, please?

16 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Thank you, General, for your service. You have a lot  
18 of experience in your AOR.

19 I start the questioning of all nominees to any  
20 positions in any of the committees I sit on, and these are  
21 the following two questions that I ask all nominees. Since  
22 you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted  
23 requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or  
24 physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

25 General Kurilla: No, Senator.

1           Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or  
2 entered into a settlement, related to this kind of conduct?

3           General Kurilla: No, Senator.

4           Senator Hirono: General, I am very concerned, along  
5 with other members of this committee, very concerned about  
6 the ongoing issue of the poor treatment of Afghan women and  
7 girls, especially since our withdrawal and the Taliban's  
8 return to power.

9           Recently, President Biden appointed Rina Amiri, as U.S.  
10 special envoy for Afghan women, girls, and human rights, to  
11 spearhead an interagency effort to advance the rights of  
12 Afghan women and girls.

13           As commander of Central Command, what do you see your  
14 role in supporting Ms. Amiri, USAID, and other agencies, in  
15 supporting the rights of Afghan women and girls?

16           General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, that is an  
17 area that I would look at to analyze how CENTCOM can be a  
18 part of a whole-of-government approach.

19           Senator Hirono: I like the fact that you have used  
20 "whole-of-government" in your response to a number of  
21 questions. And I think that is a very good idea, because  
22 "whole-of-government" means, I would say, the active  
23 involvement of the State Department and, also, any of our  
24 allies.

25           So, you know, I would be interested, if confirmed, how

1 you will proceed in this area, since the fate of Afghan  
2 women and girls is something that weighs very heavily on a  
3 number of us and our challenges and getting or rescuing many  
4 of them out of the country remains very difficult.

5 You mentioned Iran as being the number one  
6 destabilizing actor in the Middle East. And, again, with  
7 the Iran whole-of-government approach and how to contain  
8 their malign activities and you said that when Iranian  
9 malign behavior is exposed, it is helpful.

10 Can you just describe what you consider an example of  
11 Iranians malign behavior, which would be helpful to expose,  
12 and what do you mean by, it is helpful to expose such  
13 behavior?"

14 General Kurilla: Senator, when we see the Iran proxies  
15 and those Iranian-aligned militia groups that are either  
16 firing rockets at our embassy in Iraq, they are firing at  
17 our troops inside of Syria. They support the Houthis and  
18 they are providing that technology to them, to fire  
19 ballistic missiles into the U.A.E. and into Saudi Arabia.

20 When we exposed the Iranian hand behind that, it causes  
21 them to react.

22 Senator Hirono: It causes who to react?

23 General Kurilla: The Iranians to react.

24 Senator Hirono: How would they react; would they pull  
25 back their --

1           General Kurilla:  Ma'am, they try and hide their  
2 behavior and it can cause them to not take action for a  
3 period of time; that is my experience, when I was down at  
4 CENTCOM.

5           Senator Hirono:  You were asked some questions  
6 regarding the JCPOA and that President Biden joined U.S.  
7 allies, France, Germany, the U.K., and Ireland in a  
8 statement noting that a return to a JCPOA would result in  
9 both, in sanctions lifting a law for enhanced regional  
10 partnerships and a reduced risk of a nuclear crisis that  
11 would derail regional diplomacy.

12           What are your thoughts on a return to the JCPOA and  
13 would rejoining the agreement be a positive step in  
14 containing Iran's nuclear ambitions?

15           As far as I am concerned, there is no question that our  
16 membership in the JCPOA enabled us to really track what Iran  
17 was doing.  Would a return to the JCPOA really, greatly  
18 enhance efforts to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions?

19           General Kurilla:  Senator, I am not aware of the exact  
20 details of the ongoing negotiations, but I am supportive of  
21 any enforceable agreement that limits Tehran's ability to  
22 gain nuclear weapons.

23           Senator Hirono:  I think a large part of that would be  
24 to have an agreement, such as a JCPOA, and, unfortunately,  
25 that is not where we are.



1           If confirmed, how do you plan to work with partners and  
2 allies to confront the challenges presented by Iran?

3           General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, I will have to  
4 take a hard look at the partners and allies. Each one of  
5 them bring different capabilities. I think there is some  
6 opportunities in an integrated air-and-missile defense,  
7 particularly, with Israel, now under the CENTCOM area of  
8 responsibility, that they can do some partnerships in terms  
9 of increasing the capability.

10          Senator Hirono: Thank you.

11          I would say that Israel would be a major partner in  
12 that effort.

13          Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14          Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

15          Senator Fischer, please?

16          Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17          Welcome, General, to you and your family, and thank  
18 you, sir, for your many years of service to this country.

19          General, we read in the Washington Post about an Army  
20 review of the Afghanistan drawdown. The report highlights  
21 the extent to which the Biden administration's poor planning  
22 forced our servicemembers into an incredibly dangerous and  
23 an incredibly chaotic situation during that evacuation.

24          I know that you are not responsible for this report,  
25 but, if confirmed, do I have your word that if future

1 reports like this are completed, that this committee will  
2 learn about them from you and not from the morning paper?

3 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

4 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

5 I wouldn't think that members of this committee would  
6 have to make a FOIA request in order to learn information  
7 that should be brought forward in a positive way to keep us  
8 informed so we can perform our oversight responsibilities.

9 General, based on your prior experience that you have  
10 had in the region, your knowledge of the region, what do you  
11 assess to be the most significant challenges for CENTCOM to  
12 carry out an "over the horizon" counterterrorism strategy in  
13 Afghanistan?

14 General Kurilla: Senator, "over the horizon"  
15 capability is extremely difficult, but not impossible. I  
16 think the biggest challenge for Afghanistan is that it is a  
17 landlocked country. We rely on another nation for an air  
18 line of communication to be able to enter Afghanistan. The  
19 distances required to fly ISR is great. We spend  
20 approximately two-thirds of the time flying there and  
21 getting back, versus over the target. So, it is a resource-  
22 intensive to be able to do the finding, and then the fixing,  
23 and then the finishing of those targets that you are going  
24 after.

25 I think we need to reinvest in a lot of our

1 intelligence capabilities, our human-intelligence capability  
2 that was lost during the withdrawal.

3 Senator Fischer: Do you anticipate that we will have  
4 more success in the future on being able to find those  
5 partners on the ground?

6 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, I will need to  
7 make an assessment of that.

8 Senator Fischer: Do you know of any ongoing  
9 conversations about basing agreements with neighboring  
10 countries that would be helpful to us in being able to do  
11 "over the horizon" CT?

12 General Kurilla: Senator, I am not aware of any  
13 detailed discussions going on, but I know that there are  
14 discussions happening right now, that could ease the  
15 distances that are required.

16 Senator Fischer: I would hope if you do, you would  
17 contact us so that we can keep up to date on the progress,  
18 or lack thereof, in this regard, because it is so vital to  
19 our commitments that we have and in Afghanistan and the  
20 needs that we have to meet in Afghanistan.

21 I hope that you will do that review process. We heard  
22 from Secretary Kahl in October ISIS-K could generate the  
23 capability to attack our homeland by April. That is not too  
24 far away from today. And if there needs to be a change in  
25 strategy, if CENTCOM needs to be resourced differently, I

1 would hope that you would bring that to our attention, as  
2 well.

3 General Kurilla: Senator, I will.

4 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

5 When you were speaking about partners and allies and  
6 our need for partners and allies, especially in dealing with  
7 Iran and their proxies, are there specific ways that you  
8 feel we could help our partners defend themselves with  
9 regard to missile and drone attacks?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe that is probably  
11 the area with some of the greatest opportunity in terms of  
12 working towards and integrated air and missile defense. The  
13 addition of Israel to the AOR, I think, will help with that.

14 I think there are areas, also, in terms of cyber  
15 defense. We are collectively stronger together, when we  
16 work together, so there are areas there that each one brings  
17 unique capabilities in terms of that.

18 Senator Fischer: From your comments, I would imagine  
19 that you would, then, be a strong advocate for providing  
20 Israel with the defensive means that they need?

21 General Kurilla: Senator, I am.

22 Senator Fischer: Thank you very much.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

25 Now, via Webex, let me recognize Senator Gillibrand.

1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

2 In recent years, Beijing has elevated the Middle East  
3 strategic significance by building commercial ports in  
4 Pakistan. They are beginning another port project in  
5 U.A.E., which was halted by U.S. pressure.

6 We try and rely for the Persian Gulf for nearly half  
7 its energy supply. Do you view countering the expansion of  
8 China's Belt and Road Initiative in the CENTCOM area  
9 responsibility as a fundamental priority?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, I do.

11 Right now, 18 of 21 countries in the CENTCOM AOR have  
12 signed agreements, strategic agreements for Belt and Road  
13 Initiatives with China. China has increased their spending  
14 360 percent in the Middle East. So, I believe it is of  
15 great concern.

16 And what we have to do is expose their predatory  
17 practices, where they treat every country as a client or a  
18 customer; where we deal in relationships and we are partners  
19 and allies.

20 Senator Gillibrand: So, how does countering China in  
21 the region balance against some of our other  
22 counterterrorism commitments with regional partners?

23 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe we can do both.

24 Senator Gillibrand: Reports last year emerged that  
25 Saudi Arabia purchased ballistic missiles from China, while

1 also manufacturing its own ballistic weapons using Chinese  
2 technology.

3 Are you concerned that China is forging technological  
4 relationships with countries, such as Saudi Arabia, to  
5 further enhance the ballistic missile capabilities of  
6 regional actors; also, do you have a broader concern that  
7 our traditional allies in CENTCOM should be shifting towards  
8 China as we potentially focus on other regions across the  
9 global?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, I am very concerned with  
11 China's military involvement, as well as, in terms of these  
12 agreements. Three of the top purchasers of their UAVs are  
13 out of the Middle East. The technological agreements they  
14 have with Huawei; five major Middle Eastern countries have  
15 also come into agreements with them, so I am very concerned  
16 with that.

17 Senator Gillibrand: And you will give us any guidance  
18 to the extent you need additional resources or authorities  
19 to address those concerns?

20 General Kurilla: Senator, I would not hesitate to do  
21 that.

22 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

23 A recent NDAA-directed RAND study pointed out numerous  
24 shortcomings in the DOD's investigation in response to  
25 civilian casualties. It concluded a number of

1 recommendations to improve DOD's internal and external  
2 process conducting tactical strikes. One specific issue  
3 RAND highlighted is the need for the Department of Defense  
4 to better engage with non-governmental organizations to  
5 develop a better situational assessment for civilian-  
6 casualty incidents.

7       If confirmed, will you continue to prioritize effective  
8 CIVCAS response within your command and do we have your  
9 commitment that CENTCOM will improve and regulate and engage  
10 with NGOs on this issue?

11       General Kurilla: Senator, I do.

12       Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

13       My last question. As the military shifts focus to  
14 great power competition, low-intensity conflicts in the  
15 Middle East may lose significant resources.

16       Can you discuss how forced-planning concepts, like  
17 dynamic force employment, that is the ability to rapidly  
18 shift key U.S. military assets from one theater to the  
19 other, will allow the U.S. to divert resources from CENTCOM  
20 to meet the challenges faced by near-peer competitors, if  
21 necessary.

22       General Kurilla: Senator, that is going to have to be  
23 -- if confirmed, I would have to make an assessment of the  
24 impact of those DFEs. The challenge with counterterrorism  
25 efforts are that they do take time to develop the targets;

1 it is finding the targets and fixing them. Dynamic Force  
2 Employment could come in for a finish, potentially, but,  
3 really, the effort goes into the findings and the fixing.

4 Senator Gillibrand: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

5 And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 General Kurilla: Senator, thank you for your support  
7 for 10th Mountain up in Fort Drum; part of 18th Airborne  
8 Corps.

9 Senator Gillibrand: My pleasure and privilege.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

11 Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Rounds.

12 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 General Kurilla, first of all, I did enjoy our visit in  
14 my office and I can share with you that I do believe that  
15 you are the right man for the job right now, and I look  
16 forward to supporting your nomination.

17 I would like to explore a little bit along the lines  
18 that Senator Fischer began, with regard to the "over the  
19 horizon" capabilities. I think this is something that we  
20 have got to be able to explain in terms of the challenges  
21 here a little bit better.

22 One item that we talked about was literally the number  
23 of units necessary to maintain surveillance over a  
24 particular area. Would you just take a minute or so and  
25 dive in a little bit deeper with regards to the challenges



1 of "over the horizon" capabilities that we face with regard  
2 to Afghanistan.

3 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

4 So, just using an MQ-9 Reaper as an example, you have  
5 the normal ones with an extended range can go up to 30 hours  
6 of endurance. If it is taking you 10 hours to get to a  
7 target and 10 hours to fly back, to be able to keep a single  
8 sensor over that target, you are going to have to have two  
9 and a half MQ-9s; one taking off every 10 hours, to be able  
10 to be over the target for just one sensor to be able to  
11 develop that target.

12 In Afghanistan, when we were doing operations,  
13 sometimes I would have up to 12 sensors on a target to be  
14 able to follow individuals, develop the target.

15 And it is also used in civilian-casualty mitigation,  
16 because you are watching all the approaches to that target  
17 when you are taking a strike. So, it can be very resource  
18 intensive.

19 Senator Rounds: I think that is the critical part  
20 here, is when we talk about "over the horizon" capabilities,  
21 it is extremely equipment intensive and it will take a huge  
22 amount of resources in order to be successful in the  
23 Afghanistan region.

24 Your background is one of developing and moving ahead  
25 with regard to technologies. With regard to the 18th

1 Airborne Corps, would you share a little bit about the  
2 challenges that you found in terms of bringing in and using  
3 the newest technology, including the threats of  
4 cybersecurity or cyberattacks, what you found you needed to  
5 do in order to keep the team up to speed, and talk just a  
6 little bit about with regard to artificial intelligence; the  
7 fact that this is not something in the future, but rather,  
8 something that we are faced with right now.

9 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe it is the next  
10 revolution in military affairs.

11 I find the biggest challenge is actually the data  
12 literacy and the education of our current force, and  
13 particularly, with kind of the older generation of us. It  
14 is really our younger generation does get a lot of this.

15 The challenge you have is being able to, then, take  
16 this, and how do you fight with artificial intelligence.  
17 What we have discovered is that the human must be in the  
18 loop. An individual human augmented by artificial  
19 intelligence is far more effective than just artificial  
20 intelligence on its own right now.

21 We do these quarterly exercises called "Scarlet  
22 Dragon." Every quarter, we will bring in all six services  
23 and we go through the process of how can we increase the  
24 scale and scope of targeting against a near-peer in a large-  
25 scale combat operation. And we have found that we were able

1 to exponentially increase that capability to sort through  
2 hundreds of targets, to pick the right targets, to be able  
3 to strike moving at machine to machine, and directly to an  
4 aircraft.

5 Senator Rounds: Tell us how to integrate that with  
6 regard to the AOR that you are going to be responsible for.  
7 You now have Israel as a part of this AOR. They are an  
8 ally. They have significant capabilities.

9 As you move forward, do you see some real opportunities  
10 here to coordinate with Israel with regard to cybersecurity,  
11 AI, and sort of, in an integrated defense program?

12 General Kurilla: Senator, I think there are tremendous  
13 opportunities to partner with, not just Israel, but with all  
14 the partners in the region, in terms of that.

15 Senator Rounds: Can you talk a little bit about, with  
16 regard to Iran, the threats that you see with regard to  
17 cybersecurity threats emanating from Iran.

18 General Kurilla: Senator, Iran has a very capable  
19 offensive cyber capability. We see that playing out in the  
20 CENTCOM region right now. So, I think the areas that we can  
21 work on is hardening our cyber defenses of our partners in  
22 the region.

23 Senator Rounds: They talk about Iran having access to  
24 ransomware and, as such, since it is normally used by  
25 criminals, it is one way in which they can, perhaps, hide

1 some of their activities.

2 Would you agree that Iran is a threat, with regard to  
3 ransomware at this time?

4 General Kurilla: Senator, I do agree.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you.

6 Mr. Chairman, I yield back my 10 seconds.

7 Thank you, sir.

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.

9 Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator King.

10 Senator King: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

11 First, I want to compliment our colleague Senator  
12 Gillibrand; I thought her questions on China and China's  
13 growing influence in the region were very perceptive and  
14 important, and something that we often don't think much  
15 about.

16 General, it is hard to ever utter the phrase  
17 "cooperation" and "Taliban" in the same sentence, but we  
18 have a common enemy in ISIS-K. The Taliban doesn't like  
19 them. We don't like them. They are a danger to us. They  
20 are a danger to them.

21 Is there an opportunity for developing a kind of,  
22 compartmented relationship, if you will, with the Taliban,  
23 with regard to ISIS-K?

24 We are able, we have been able to use the ALoC through  
25 Pakistan for ISR, but there has been no kinetic strike yet

1 and there is some question as to what effect that would have  
2 on the relationship to the Taliban and Pakistan.

3 The short question is, is there room for some  
4 relationship with the Taliban that could help us, and help  
5 them, with the problem of ISIS-K?

6 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, that is an  
7 area that I would have to do a deep study on, but I do  
8 think, in my personal opinion, there are pragmatic instances  
9 where we could come together, going after ISIS-K, based on  
10 the threat to the homeland.

11 Senator King: Well, I would hope so, because as they  
12 say, the old saying is that the enemy of my enemy is my  
13 friend. So, there may be an opportunity there to deal with  
14 the threat of ISIS-K, which I think is very significant and  
15 growing.

16 How do we assist with the humanitarian crisis in  
17 Afghanistan, without, at the same time, assisting the  
18 Taliban? Are there avenues to provide support that we can  
19 avail ourselves of that don't shore up the Taliban regime?

20 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe the most important  
21 thing would be to make sure that it is transparent and it  
22 does not fall into the hands of the Taliban and is used as  
23 a, that they can weaponize it. I think an opportunity  
24 potentially exists with the U.N. food program. They are a  
25 very transparent and accountable organization. To be able

1 to provide funding of relief, I also think working with  
2 Pakistan, they have a shared interest in that because of the  
3 refugees coming out of Afghanistan right now into Pakistan.

4 Senator King: Moving to Iraq, there appears in recent  
5 years, or in the recent, last year or so, a decline of  
6 Iran's influence in Iraq with Sadr and with some of the  
7 militias.

8 How do you assess the situation in Iraq; is there an  
9 opportunity for us to leave there or should we have to  
10 maintain a presence in order to offset Iran's influence?

11 General Kurilla: Senator, we are in Iraq right now for  
12 the enduring defeat of ISIS and to maintain our strategic  
13 relationship with the Government of Iraq. I think that the  
14 partnership that we have with them on the enduring defeat of  
15 ISIS is very important. The Iraqi Security Forces do have a  
16 very capable force, but it is not, it can still grow and  
17 needs to develop so that it is self-sustaining for being  
18 able to go after ISIS.

19 Senator King: And as you mentioned earlier, one of our  
20 key allies there are the Iraqi Kurds, which have been  
21 reliable and capable allies throughout this entire process  
22 in the Middle East.

23 General Kurilla: Senator, I have worked a lot with the  
24 Kurds and they are a very capable and reliable partner.

25 Senator King: How do you assess the addition of

1 Israel, the moving of Israel from EUCCOM to CENTCOM in terms  
2 of your job and the ability to deal with the Middle East as  
3 a coherent entity?

4 General Kurilla: Senator, I think there is significant  
5 opportunity with the addition of Israel. It starts with the  
6 Abraham Accords, the normalization of relationships between  
7 Israel and Arab nations. We have both, Bahrain and the  
8 United Arab Emirates, and that has caused them to start  
9 talking. And when you are talking, you are lowering the  
10 temperature in the room. There is talk of security  
11 cooperation, as well, and I think that is only a good thing.

12 Senator King: Finally, in your military judgment, we  
13 have been having discussions about the JCPOA and whether to  
14 re-enter, and everybody is committed to Iran not achieving a  
15 nuclear weapon. In the absence of diplomacy or some kind of  
16 enforceable agreement, what are the military options,  
17 realistically, for eliminating Iran's nuclear capability?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, my current job, I am not  
19 aware of the current military options. My only concern  
20 would be that you can never take away the intellectual  
21 knowledge that they have on how to increase their nuclear  
22 capability and then the reaction that Iran would have of any  
23 strike on them.

24 [Pause.]

25 Chairman Reed: Senator King, we cannot hear you and

1 your time has expired. So, with your permission, let me  
2 recognize Senator Cotton. Thank you.

3 Senator Cotton: General, welcome to the committee and  
4 congratulations on your nomination. It is a very important  
5 post in the long and illustrious posts that you have held  
6 over your distinguished career. Thank you for your service  
7 to our nation.

8 We have had a lot of talk about Iran this morning in  
9 the committee, in part, because Iran is the worst country in  
10 your region. They are the world's worst sponsor for state  
11 terrorism. They are behind almost every proxy war in the  
12 region, to say nothing of what they are doing in trying to  
13 obtain nuclear weapons.

14 If it becomes clear that Iran is actively pursuing a  
15 nuclear weapon, does Central Command have the resources  
16 necessary, should the Commander in Chief, President Biden,  
17 direct a military strike against Iran?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, I would have  
19 to look at the mission and the resources required and I  
20 would come back to the chairman and the secretary if  
21 additional resources were required.

22 Senator Cotton: Can you commit that you will do that  
23 and that you will give your best professional military  
24 judgment about what resources would be needed to carry out  
25 such a mission?



1 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

2 Senator Cotton: Senator King just spoke about Iran  
3 getting a nuclear weapon and how we all think that Iran  
4 should not have a nuclear weapon, and that is what President  
5 Obama frequently said in 2015, in defending the nuclear  
6 deal, that Iran, that he would not allow Iran to obtain the  
7 bomb. I think President Biden just said something similar.

8 That leaves open the possibility that we would allow  
9 Iran to get right up to the threshold of getting a nuclear  
10 weapon; the proverbial turn of the screwdriver, if you will,  
11 the way a country like Japan is today. I mean, people worry  
12 about Japan being one step away from a nuclear weapon  
13 because Japan is not run by a bunch of crazed theocrats.

14 It may be one thing to say the United States could live  
15 with an Iran that is one turn of the screwdriver away from  
16 getting a nuclear weapon. Can a country like Israel live  
17 under those circumstances, though, or what about Saudi  
18 Arabia or the other Arab nations in the region?

19 General Kurilla: Senator, my concern would be Iran  
20 being a nuclear threshold state, that it could be very  
21 destabilizing to the region and cause others to attempt to  
22 work on their defense.

23 Senator Cotton: But even if they don't have a nuclear  
24 weapon and don't have a demonstrated capability, if they are  
25 simply a nuclear threshold state, it would embolden them

1 that much more; that is your point?

2 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

3 Senator Cotton: Yeah. I think you are right about  
4 that.

5 One incredibly emboldened action I have seen over the  
6 last couple of months is that Iran's proxies in Yemen are  
7 firing ballistic missiles and one-way drones into the  
8 Emirates and some of those are attacking bases where we have  
9 American troops.

10 What do you make of this incredibly provocative and  
11 escalatory action coming out of Iran's Yemeni proxies?

12 General Kurilla: Senator that is an example of Iranian  
13 malign behavior and aggressive behavior from their proxies  
14 in the region.

15 Senator Cotton: Why do you think, so, they have been  
16 doing that to Saudi Arabia, in Southwestern and Western  
17 Saudi Arabia for a few years, why do you think in the last  
18 couple of months, those proxies in Yemen are now firing  
19 those missiles or drones all the way into the Emirates?

20 General Kurilla: Senator, my personal opinion is part  
21 of that is because of the advances of the Giants Brigade  
22 down in Yemen took back areas like al-Shabwa Province from  
23 the Houthis, and that is their reaction back to the U.A.E.

24 But I would have to have, if confirmed, do a deeper  
25 study on that.

1           Senator Cotton: What would you do if you were sitting  
2 in Abu Dhabi and you had missiles and drones flying into  
3 your territory, just sort of hitting your bases or hitting  
4 the Burj Khalifa?

5           General Kurilla: Senator, if I am the CENTCOM  
6 commander with forces there, I would use the Patriots and  
7 THAAD Systems that we have in the theater to shoot them  
8 down.

9           Senator Cotton: Do you think we currently have enough  
10 of those systems in the region to protect, not only our  
11 allies, but in this case, again, it was our troops; our  
12 troops at bases in the Emirates?

13          General Kurilla: Senator, I think that one of the  
14 advances that we can look at doing is increasing the  
15 integrated air and missile defense in the region of our  
16 partners and allies to contribute to make sure that they are  
17 all integrated.

18          Senator Cotton: I mean, based on the threat we have  
19 seen coming out of Yemen in these last couple months, I  
20 think it is going to be one of the most urgent priorities  
21 you face; both making sure we have the resources we need,  
22 but also working with our partners to help them.

23          Because I don't think, as Iran is emboldened, I don't  
24 think this threat is going to increase; I think it is only  
25 going to increase. Again, we are just talking about it

1 coming out of Yemen, not other places, where they are  
2 supplying proxies with similar missiles or drones.

3 One final point. I kind of get irritated when I see  
4 reports about the F-22s and F-35s bombing insurgencies or,  
5 you know, in 2017, I think we bombed a drug factory with an  
6 F-22.

7 Can we do a better job about not using advanced fifth-  
8 generation aircraft to bomb low-threat first-generation  
9 targets?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, as a military person, if  
11 that is the only asset available, I would use that asset.

12 Senator Cotton: I got that. I would like to see  
13 better asset-planning, though, so those aircraft are  
14 directed towards countries like China with advanced air  
15 defenses and fifth-generation fighters, themselves, and  
16 older-generation aircraft are directed against ISIS and al  
17 Qaeda.

18 General Kurilla: Certainly.

19 Senator Cotton: One final question. There has also  
20 been a lot of talk about the "over the horizon" strike  
21 capacity in Afghanistan. I think that would be better  
22 termed "over the rainbow" strike capacity.

23 How can we possibly be striking into Afghanistan  
24 without intelligence on the ground and when we are  
25 completely beholden to Pakistan for giving access to their

1    airspace; it is a big problem, isn't it?

2           General Kurilla:   Senator, it is a challenge.

3           Senator Cotton:   All right.   Good luck trying to  
4   conquer that challenge.   We need you to.

5           General Kurilla:   Thank you, Senator.

6           Senator Cotton:   Thank you.   Congratulations, again.

7           Chairman Reed:   Thank you, Senator Cotton.

8           Now, let me recognize Senator Blumenthal.

9           Senator Blumenthal:   Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

10          General, welcome to the committee and thank you for  
11   your services.   Thanks to talking with me the other day, as  
12   we did on the phone, and answering my questions, as  
13   insightfully and forthrightly as you are doing here at the  
14   committee.   And I look forward to visiting with you during  
15   your service in CENTCOM.

16          As you and I discussed, I am very deeply concerned, in  
17   fact, frustrated and even angry about the slow pace of the  
18   evacuation of at-risk Afghanistan allies and, potentially,  
19   Americans from Afghanistan.   We have been dwelling in this  
20   committee hearing mostly on the use of American power, our  
21   military power, but our credibility and power around the  
22   world depend on our keeping our word.

23          We have given our word to the translators and  
24   interpreters and guards and drivers and all the Afghans who  
25   put their lives on the line to protect our troops and

1 diplomats during the 20 years of our engagement there in  
2 combat, and I worry about our credibility around the world  
3 and our credibility in the next struggle.

4 Two of my sons have served. One was an infantry  
5 officer, a Marine Corps officer in Afghanistan. It took him  
6 2 years to bring over his interpreter. The other was a Navy  
7 SEAL. And I just want to say how grateful I am to the  
8 veterans groups for their support in the continuing effort  
9 to enable those at-risk, Afghan allies to come to this  
10 country.

11 But I have been frustrated by, frankly, our State  
12 Department's seeming reluctance to be as engaged as it  
13 should be in this effort. And a number of us colleagues  
14 have joined, Senator Graham, Senator Ernst, myself, Senator  
15 Cardin, in a measure called "Honor Our Commitment," which  
16 would try to enable more of those at-risk, Afghan allies to  
17 come here.

18 Let me ask you, what capacity do you think CENTCOM has  
19 to facilitate the continued evacuation of the Afghan allies  
20 who remain at risk in that country?

21 I know it is winter there, as it is here. The airport  
22 has failings, but we are America; we can fly in and out of  
23 that airport. Can CENTCOM play a role in facilitating the  
24 evacuation of those at-risk, Afghan allies, if asked to do  
25 so?

1           General Kurilla:   Senator, I believe we have a moral  
2   obligation to help those at-risk Afghans to come out of  
3   Afghanistan.  If confirmed, I commit to you to look at what  
4   options are available to be able to assist in that  
5   Department of State.

6           Senator Blumenthal:  Will you commit to come back to  
7   the committee, I think it is implied in your answer, with  
8   such a plan and a description of the options and assets that  
9   could be made available?

10          General Kurilla:  Senator, I will.

11          Senator Blumenthal:  Thank you.

12          Do you think that there is, there are necessary assets  
13   in CENTCOM right now, if you know, to support that kind of  
14   plan?

15          General Kurilla:  Senator, I would have to look at the  
16   current missions, if confirmed, look at the current missions  
17   assigned to CENTCOM, the resources allocated, and identify  
18   the risks associated against all of those, if that  
19   additional mission is applied, what resources, and does that  
20   place others at risk, or go back for additional resourcing  
21   for that.

22          Senator Blumenthal:  Thank you.

23          Well, I welcome your commitment to come to us with a  
24   plan and description of the assets that could be made  
25   available, and if necessary, additional assets that would be

1 required. Thank you.

2 Let me ask you a final question. When we are talking  
3 about defending against missiles and our allies that need  
4 those defenses, the Iron Dome is one very reliable and  
5 important means of Israel defending against its adversary's  
6 missiles. Would you agree that replenishment of the Iron  
7 Dome capacities of Israel is important to the security of  
8 that country and potentially our own?

9 General Kurilla: Senator, you know, the U.S. Army just  
10 got two Iron Dome batteries that are going through testing  
11 and evaluation and I believe it has had about a 90 percent  
12 kill rate in terms of being able to knock down targets, but  
13 I do think the Iron Dome should be funded.

14 Senator Blumenthal: And that it should be funded and  
15 replenished for Israel, because, as you have absolutely  
16 correctly observed, it is a very reliable, defensive,  
17 emphasize defensive, mechanism.

18 General Kurilla: It is, Senator.

19 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you very much, General.  
20 Good luck.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator  
22 Blumenthal.

23 Senator Ernst, please?

24 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

25 General Kurilla, thank you so much for being here today



1 and for your many, many years of service.

2 And to Mary Paige, and to your daughters, as well,  
3 thank you for the love and support that you have given to  
4 General Kurilla.

5 I am coming from a unique perspective here, in that,  
6 General Kurilla, I have had the opportunity to know you  
7 better than 25 years, closer to 30, and I have had the  
8 opportunity to watch your career and I am extremely  
9 impressed with the path that you have chosen and has been  
10 chosen for you. I am very excited about your opportunity to  
11 serve as our CENTCOM commander. And while you can't assume  
12 confirmation, I absolutely can, because I will be  
13 supporting.

14 We have talked about a number of issues today, and I  
15 will associate with so many of my colleagues in the threats  
16 that we are seeing around the globe. China's influence in  
17 CENTCOM, Russia's influence in CENTCOM, certainly, Iran, and  
18 then you also have all of the violent extremist  
19 organizations on your plate, as well.

20 Senator Blumenthal's point, as far as those we have  
21 left behind in Afghanistan, that remains heavy on my heart,  
22 as well. So many of us are working to find opportunities to  
23 bring these folks out of Afghanistan and safely into,  
24 whether it is third countries or into the United States.  
25 So, I look forward to your partnership there.

1           So, we have talked through so many of those issues, but  
2 beyond being tactically proficient and sound at your craft,  
3 which you are, there are other things that commanders do  
4 need to be concerned about, and that is the health and  
5 welfare of their soldiers. And we all know and understand  
6 in the SOF community that humans are more important than  
7 hardware and you exhibited that in the 82nd Airborne with  
8 focusing on mental health and brain health and the checkup  
9 from the neck up.

10           And if you could talk a little bit about the importance  
11 of mental health and well-being of your soldiers and what  
12 you will do to continue those types of movements within  
13 CENTCOM.

14           General Kurilla: Senator, thank you.

15           Senator, one of the areas that we are trying to look at  
16 right now in terms of mental health, we know that anytime a  
17 soldier does a permanent change of station, that is a very  
18 high-stress environment, and so our medical professionals do  
19 a screening of, a full-evaluation screening of everyone  
20 coming into Fort Bragg right now, regardless of the unit,  
21 and we identify those that are either moderate or high-risk,  
22 and they are able to talk to a mental health professional  
23 that day. Sometimes we can miss the transition from someone  
24 who is coming from one installation to another.

25           And so, we start with there, and then we also make sure

1 that they have the availability of the mental health  
2 professionals. Additionally, we have an ongoing effort  
3 right now, whether you are an E1 Private or an O9 Lieutenant  
4 General, that you must go get, talk to a behavioral health  
5 specialist annually, we do it for our teeth, annually,  
6 because you never know what someone is going to say behind  
7 closed doors. They might be able to talk about some  
8 challenges and issues they have, and if that saves one life,  
9 then it is worth it. So, we are working through that right  
10 now.

11 Senator Ernst: And by having every soldier and every  
12 officer do that, do you feel that that takes away the stigma  
13 of having those conversations?

14 General Kurilla: One hundred percent, Senator. When  
15 they know that that individual has to go in behind there,  
16 you never know what someone is going to say behind closed  
17 doors. And if they know that I even have to go behind there  
18 and talk to a behavioral health specialist that can only  
19 help reduce the stigma.

20 Senator Ernst: Absolutely. I appreciate that and look  
21 forward to working with you on those efforts, as well.

22 Again, there are so many challenges that exist across  
23 the spectrum. "Over the horizon," I know, as we spoke the  
24 other day, you will go into the position, you know, you  
25 know, I am assuming confirmation for you, but going into

1 your position, you will do an assessment and I believe that  
2 you will, at some point, come back to the committee, and if  
3 you need additional resources, you will absolutely let us  
4 know; is that correct?

5 General Kurilla: Yes, it is, Senator.

6 Senator Ernst: Okay. We look forward to that  
7 discussion.

8 And, again, I am going to yield back the last 30  
9 seconds, but, General Kurilla, I know that you have the  
10 intestinal fortitude to move quickly and easily into this  
11 position. I wholly support your confirmation.

12 God bless you. Thank you so much for your service to  
13 our great United States.

14 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

16 Senator Warren, please?

17 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 And General Kurilla, welcome to you and your family,  
19 and congratulations on your nomination.

20 I would like to focus on one of the topics that you and  
21 I discussed when we met last week: civilian casualties. I  
22 think everyone in this room can agree that U.S. military  
23 operations kill far too many civilians. In the past 2  
24 decades, the United States has killed tens of thousands of  
25 innocent people, including hundreds of women and children,

1 across a half dozen countries in the Middle East in the  
2 Africa.

3 Now, we will likely never know the true numbers, given  
4 the difficulty of accurate reporting and the Pentagon's  
5 failure to fully investigate reports of civilian harm.  
6 This has been the unfortunate reality of U.S. military  
7 operations, despite congressional oversight, despite dozens  
8 of watchdog groups raising the alarm, and despite  
9 documenting the harm, and despite DOD's own efforts and  
10 attempts at reform, designed to improve how it protects  
11 civilians.

12 So, General, you have been nominated to lead the United  
13 States' military operations in an AOR that has even the  
14 lion's share of these casualties. Civilian casualties,  
15 obviously, they destroy the lives of those affected, and  
16 that alone, is reason enough for reforms.

17 But, would you also agree that these civilian  
18 casualties harm our credibility abroad and fuel the very  
19 insurgencies that we are fighting against?

20 General Kurilla: Senator, they do.

21 Senator Warren: Good, I mean, that you recognize this.

22 Do you want to say more about that?

23 General Kurilla: Senator, every civilian casualty is a  
24 tragedy. I know there is a process right now down at  
25 CENTCOM, if confirmed, I would look to see how I can improve

1 upon that process.

2 Senator Warren: Well, you know, it is clear that we do  
3 need reforms and I am glad that you want to focus on this.

4 But instead of tackling this problem head-on, the  
5 Pentagon has repeatedly weakened accountability for civilian  
6 casualties. Most recently, there was reporting from The New  
7 York Times that detailed a secretive U.S. task force that  
8 used loopholes in the law to sidestep safeguards that were  
9 designed to protect against civilian casualties. The Times  
10 also found that DOD prematurely dismissed many civilian  
11 casualty reports at the assessment phase, without doing  
12 basic due diligence, like internet searches or searches in  
13 Arabic.

14 General, do you agree that any credible reports of  
15 civilian casualties deserve the Pentagon's full attention  
16 and thorough investigation?

17 General Kurilla: Senator, I do, and I think the  
18 Secretary of Defense's new Civilian Harm Mitigation and  
19 Response Plan of action that he has asked to come back in 90  
20 days from 27 of January. If confirmed, I would look to be  
21 able to participate in that to make the process better.

22 Senator Warren: Good. Well, I am glad to hear that  
23 you are committed to a full investigation. We will see what  
24 happens with the reforms.

25 You know, it is clear that additional reforms are

1 needed. I have ideas on that front. I am sure there are  
2 others; I am not alone on this.

3 So, let me just see, I know we have a report coming  
4 out, but, General, if confirmed, will you commit to  
5 prioritizing reforms that will mitigate civilian casualties,  
6 resulting from U.S. operations and improving accountability  
7 and transparency at the Pentagon on this issue?

8 General Kurilla: Senator, I will.

9 Senator Warren: Good. I really appreciate it,  
10 General, and I want to say thank you.

11 You know, I have said it before, but it deserves  
12 repeating: the system is broken. We cannot accept the  
13 deaths of innocent civilians as just an unavoidable cost of  
14 warfare. It is long past time that DOD addresses the harms  
15 that U.S. military operations have caused and implement  
16 meaningful reforms that de-emphasize lethal force and  
17 prioritize civilian lives.

18 I have already asked President Biden to incorporate  
19 these ideals into his upcoming counterterrorism review, but,  
20 General, if confirmed, I think you are going to have an  
21 opportunity to set the standard to protecting innocent lives  
22 and actually implement some real change here.

23 So, I look forward to working with you. I hope we can  
24 make some improvements in this area. Thank you.

25 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

1 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Warren.

3 Let me recognize Senator Tillis, please.

4 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 General, thank you for being here. Congratulations on  
6 your nomination. I intend to support you, as well. I don't  
7 gamble, but I do bet from time to time, and that is when I  
8 am absolutely certain that I am going to win it. So, I have  
9 to agree with Senator Ernst; I have you will have strong  
10 support from this committee.

11 I have one, or a couple of questions. One is within  
12 your current area of responsibility, but do you believe the  
13 decision to employ elements out of Fort Bragg to Poland and  
14 to Germany was a wise decision from a reassurance  
15 standpoint?

16 General Kurilla: Senator, the mission we were given  
17 was to reassure our NATO allies and to detour Russian  
18 aggression against those NATO allies. So, we were deploying  
19 elements of the 18th Airborne Corps headquarters, the 82nd  
20 Airborne Division, and other elements of 18th Airborne Corps  
21 to Poland and Germany.

22 Senator Tillis: A question, I don't know if it has  
23 been asked before, but within your future area of  
24 responsibility, do you have any concerns at all with the  
25 continued implementation of the vaccine mandate and



1 readiness of our troops' strength?

2 General Kurilla: Senator, I don't have any concerns  
3 with that right now.

4 Senator Tillis: I did have a question related to what  
5 Senator Warren said, so just more curiosity, I don't know  
6 the answer to this, but do you have access to a body of  
7 knowledge that would say in the past years, that the United  
8 States has been responsible for the killing of tens of  
9 thousands of innocent civilians in this area of  
10 responsibility?

11 General Kurilla: Senator, I am not aware of the exact  
12 number.

13 Senator Tillis: It would seem to me that it would be  
14 far less than that. And one question that I have about it,  
15 at least in some of the after-action reports that I have  
16 seen, it appears as though ISIS, in particular, finds a way  
17 to embed itself in populations where they are putting maybe  
18 some innocent lives in harm's way, but do you agree that  
19 that tends to be a tactic of theirs and we are doing  
20 everything we can to be more surgical in our approach to  
21 taking out bad actors, but recognizing that innocent  
22 civilians are not something that our military is in the  
23 business of trying to do?

24 General Kurilla: Senator, I am, in my past  
25 experiences, I have seen these ISIS, al Qaeda, Taliban do

1 hide among the population and we do our absolute best to try  
2 and not harm civilians.

3 Senator Tillis: Well, we can always get better, and I  
4 do agree with some of Senator Warren's comment about how do  
5 we get better, but I also think that we have to recognize  
6 that we are talking about people, particularly in  
7 Afghanistan, where we are concerned with their  
8 reconstitution, either ISIS or al Qaeda, now in a breeding  
9 ground to, I think, potential attacks within that area of  
10 responsibility and within the homeland.

11 We heard public reports of 6 months to a year before we  
12 could actually have a threat on U.S. interests, either here  
13 or abroad. We have to continue to take that fight to them  
14 or they are going to take it to us.

15 Would you agree with that?

16 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

17 The timing, I would defer to the intelligence community  
18 on the exact time, because the conditions continue to  
19 change.

20 Senator Tillis: I want to talk a little bit about  
21 Iran.

22 Are you familiar with the Abraham Accords  
23 implementation?

24 General Kurilla: Senator, I am.

25 Senator Tillis: Do you think that is a footprint that

1 we should expand, and do you have any ideas on other  
2 countries that should be in the pipeline?

3 General Kurilla: Senator, I think it is a very good  
4 thing, because anytime we have countries that are talking,  
5 it is lowering the temperature in the room. It also goes to  
6 an economic growth and it creates job growth in some of  
7 these countries where you have a high large unemployment in  
8 some of these Arab countries.

9 With Bahrain and U.A.E., right now, as members of the  
10 Abraham Accords, I think that is a very good thing. I would  
11 defer to, you know, having to understand the reasonings  
12 behind other countries, why they are not coming forward  
13 right now, but I do think there are opportunities going  
14 forward.

15 Senator Tillis: You generally believe your job is  
16 going to be easier or harder if we just pass a CR, rather  
17 than appropriate authorities?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, we need timely, accurate,  
19 predictable funding.

20 Senator Tillis: What sorts of capabilities do you  
21 think you need, in addition to what you already have, for  
22 our own forces, but also for our partners in the area of  
23 responsibility?

24 General Kurilla: Senator, I can really only speak on  
25 behalf of 18th Airborne Corps, but it does affect readiness.

1 It can affect modernization and it can affect quality of  
2 life.

3 Senator Tillis: One other question, just in, or not a  
4 question, just a reinforced point that was made by Senator  
5 Blumenthal. The one thing that I hope when you move into  
6 this role that I would like to get feedback on, is the  
7 extent to which CENTCOM can play a role in prioritizing  
8 those who want to get out of Afghanistan.

9 We succeeded in getting several out, but it is only a  
10 fraction of nearly 800 cases, that in North Carolina, alone,  
11 that we are tracking. And I believe that your engagement  
12 and the interagency activities, to make sure that we are  
13 prioritizing the most at-risk and those who have had a  
14 longstanding service as partners with the United States when  
15 we were in Afghanistan, I think that that is a role that I  
16 hope you will take seriously and assert because you have  
17 insights, you have background.

18 I have a lot of servicemembers who are desperately  
19 calling our office and looking to get folks out and I hope I  
20 can get your commitment on making sure that you play an  
21 active role in that.

22 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

23 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 General Kurilla: Senator, thank you for your support

1 for Fort Bragg.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Tillis.

3 Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Manchin.

4 [Pause.]

5 Chairman Reed: Senator, you are talking, but we cannot  
6 hear you. We have a technical complication.

7 [Pause.]

8 Chairman Reed: No, we cannot hear you, Senator.

9 Do you want to recede for a moment and fix it and we  
10 will call on someone else?

11 We still cannot hear you, Senator, so let me take the  
12 prerogative of asking if we can fix that and let me call on  
13 Senator Sullivan.

14 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, can I pass for Senator  
15 Cramer?

16 Chairman Reed: Absolutely.

17 Senator Cramer, please?

18 Senator Cramer: Anything I can do to help. Thank you,  
19 Mr. Chairman.

20 Thank you, General, for your service and your  
21 willingness to step into this new role. Congratulations. I  
22 don't think you are going to have any trouble getting the  
23 job.

24 You know, we have seen reports that the Houthi rebels  
25 in Yemen are firing missiles at U.A.E. at Al-Dhafra and

1 there are some North Dakota airmen there, and these missiles  
2 that they are firing, of course, were designed and they were  
3 built in Iran.

4 Do you think the Houthis brought those missiles from  
5 Iran or did Iran donate them to the cause?

6 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe that Iran does  
7 fund the missiles that go into the Houthis --

8 Senator Cramer: So, do we consider these attacks on  
9 our airmen to be Houthi attacks or Iranian attacks and,  
10 either way, do they demand a response, do you think?

11 General Kurilla: Senator, Iran funds the Houthis. The  
12 Houthis were firing at the U.A.E. I cannot say if they  
13 definitively were firing at American servicemembers going  
14 forward. I am not aware of the intelligence behind it.

15 Senator Cramer: All right. I want to spend just a  
16 minute, because, and by the way, I associate myself with  
17 several of my colleagues who have been asking about  
18 Afghanistan prioritizing this. I appreciate Senator Tillis'  
19 request of a commitment to do everything we can to  
20 prioritize more appropriately going forward and thank you  
21 for all that.

22 So, I want to focus just for a minute or 2 on military  
23 sales and to U.A.E. The Trump administration, as you know,  
24 agreed to sell the U.A.E. some F-35s, but in May, the Biden  
25 administration, reportedly, put the sale on hold, due to

1 concerns about the U.A.E.'s relationship with China.

2 And I know these things are complicated, and to be up  
3 front, I am more curious than I am committed to a position  
4 on this, so I would really like your views and your  
5 expertise.

6 What are the benefits of selling U.A.E. some F-35s, in  
7 your view, if there are some, and then, of course, the  
8 opposite, what are the risks?

9 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe the benefits are  
10 that you have a close partner that has a, it is a very  
11 capable equipment that serves as an offset to Iran.

12 Senator Cramer: So, what is the downside and how can  
13 we mitigate any risks?

14 General Kurilla: The downside is technology transfer  
15 that could be leaked. Can they safeguard the technologies,  
16 as the F-35 is an exquisite piece of military hardware?

17 Senator Cramer: So, can we mitigate that, somehow,  
18 that concern? I share the concern, by the way.

19 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, that would be  
20 an area that I would have to make an assessment on with the  
21 State Department and others as they look at this.

22 Senator Cramer: So, maybe just elaborate a little bit,  
23 and, you know, your answers are very concise and good. I  
24 appreciate that, but do countries like the U.A.E., or U.A.E.  
25 and other countries like them, do they have many options for

1 these kinds of exquisite weapons systems and, particularly,  
2 if the U.S. refuses to sell them?

3 General Kurilla: Of the F-35, no, but there are other  
4 capabilities that I believe they have looked at in the  
5 region and from other partners.

6 Senator Cramer: Well, I appreciate, again, the  
7 efficiency of your answers. As I have said, I am curious.  
8 I am trying to gain my own perspective based on a lot of  
9 other people's perspectives, but I have to say on balance, I  
10 am concerned that we are allowing this relationship with the  
11 U.A.E. and the opportunities that it presents to slip away  
12 if we don't ask more questions of people like you.

13 And while I don't have a commitment, I certainly lean  
14 more toward trying to be the source of their exquisite  
15 weapons systems, rather than somebody else, and hopefully,  
16 we can mitigate.

17 With that, I will yield my last minute, Mr. Chairman.  
18 Thank you.

19 Thank You, General.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.

21 We have a technical issue with our colleagues who are  
22 trying to participate on Webex, so we will recognize those  
23 who are here in person.

24 Senator Sullivan, are you ready?

25 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



1           General, congratulations. Thanks for your service. I  
2 really think it has been exceptional. I fully intend to  
3 support you.

4           As you and I discussed, I have my own experience out in  
5 the CENTCOM AOR. I was recalled to active-duty at the end  
6 of 2004 and was there as a staff officer to General Abizaid  
7 until the middle of 2006; so a year and a half.

8           And have you had the opportunity to talk to General  
9 Abizaid or other CENTCOM commanders to get their advice,  
10 prior to this hearing?

11          General Kurilla: Senator, pending confirmation, I plan  
12 on talking to several of them.

13          Senator Sullivan: Good. I would strongly recommend  
14 that. General Abizaid, in my view, he is one of the most  
15 strategic thinkers we have had in our military in a long,  
16 long time.

17          One of the things that I witnessed during that year and  
18 a half, a huge concern was the proliferation of EFPs and,  
19 you know, we were in Iraq on a regular basis; General  
20 Abizaid was. I was with him during that time and we saw  
21 this proliferation starting in Basra and into Baghdad.

22          Can you describe very briefly what those were and what  
23 they did?

24          General Kurilla: Senator, an explosively formed  
25 penetrator, or an EFP, had the capability to go through any

1 of our military vehicles that we had at the time. I lost  
2 several friends and soldiers from them.

3 Senator Sullivan: So, you lost soldiers under your  
4 command to the EFPs?

5 General Kurilla: I have lost soldiers to EFPs,  
6 Senator.

7 Senator Sullivan: So, I don't think this is  
8 highlighted enough, General, but I am sorry that that  
9 happened to you. In 2007, the then-Iranian ambassador to  
10 the U.N., Ambassador Zarif, who later became foreign  
11 minister, was quoted as saying, the Iranians did not provide  
12 any EFPs to anybody, Iraqi, Shia militias, and that the U.S.  
13 was lying and fabricating evidence about that.

14 Who do we now know supplied Iraqi Shia militias, these  
15 EFPs that killed and wounded thousands of Americans?

16 General Kurilla: Senator, they came from Iran.

17 Senator Sullivan: So, Zarif was clearly lying?

18 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

19 Senator Sullivan: General, what do you think the  
20 Iranians learned during that period? What is the estimate  
21 that you have heard of how many were killed and wounded; the  
22 best and brightest, by the way, in our country, with regard  
23 to these EFPs that killed our soldiers, marines, airmen,  
24 sailors.

25 General Kurilla: Senator, I am not sure of the exact

1 number, but I believe it is around the number, somewhere  
2 around 400.

3 Senator Sullivan: Four hundred and several thousand  
4 wounded, correct?

5 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

6 Senator Sullivan: What do you think the Iranians  
7 learned during that time, as they were killing our troops?  
8 Zarif was lying to the world and, yet, there didn't seem to  
9 be any kind of retaliation from the United States.

10 General Kurilla: Senator, I am not certain what they  
11 learned from that.

12 Senator Sullivan: Do you think it was good that there  
13 was no retaliation at the time or we didn't make them pay  
14 for the deaths of Americans?

15 General Kurilla: Senator, I think we were fighting the  
16 insurgency at the time. I can't presume to understand what  
17 the Iranians were thinking at the time.

18 Senator Sullivan: Let me, I will just give you my  
19 sense. I think that they thought that they could kill  
20 Americans with impunity and not pay a price. And, to the  
21 contrary, the price that they were, they didn't pay, but  
22 they were actually rewarded with the JCPOA. Secretary of  
23 State John Kerry negotiated with Zarif; one of the many  
24 outrages, I think, under Kerry's tenure, to literally  
25 negotiate, almost become buddies with him. You saw this

1 other thing that Kerry and Zarif were talking a couple of  
2 years ago where Kerry was providing what looked like  
3 classified information; literally, the guy with American  
4 blood on his hands to get the JCPOA.

5 I talked to President Trump about this a number of  
6 times. Do you think that we were able to regain deterrence  
7 after the United States killed the Quds Force leader,  
8 Soleimani?

9 General Kurilla: Senator, I do.

10 Senator Sullivan: Did you agree with that strike?

11 General Kurilla: Senator, I don't think anyone, any  
12 adversary should be able to kill Americans with impunity.  
13 Given the intelligence, at the time, I would have taken the  
14 strike.

15 Senator Sullivan: So, if you are confirmed, and I hope  
16 you will be confirmed, will you commit to this committee to  
17 work hard to keep that deterrence that I think we have  
18 actually --

19 [Audio malfunction].

20 Senator Sullivan: More specifically, if Iran tries to,  
21 or does kill Americans, the way they have a history in the  
22 past, doing that impunity, would your advice to the  
23 President be, make sure that there is retaliation, so they  
24 pay the price?

25 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe my job is to

1 provide options.

2 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 And I will have some more questions for the record.

4 Thank you.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Sullivan.

6 And we notice --

7 [Audio malfunction].

8 Senator Peters.

9 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Use a louder voice, so we can make sure we are heard.

11 General, good to see you in person. We were have some  
12 technical difficulties, so I made a run down here to be able  
13 to ask these questions, personally, thank you for your  
14 distinguished record of service to our country.

15 General, in November, the Department of Defense stood  
16 up the U.S.-Israel Operations Technology Working Group. It  
17 was an initiative that I certainly have been championing for  
18 the last few years and I believe that it is absolutely vital  
19 that the U.S. remain on the cutting edge of defense  
20 technology and development and working with the capable  
21 allies, like Israel, is really paramount to that effort.

22 So, my question for you, sir, is, could you discuss how  
23 working in a collaborative fashion with CENTCOM allies, like  
24 Israel, on technological development, could help the United  
25 States, itself, stay at the forefront of defense innovation.

1           General Kurilla:   Senator, I believe Israel has some  
2 very unique capabilities.  They have a culture of innovation  
3 in their country, so I do believe each country has some  
4 unique capabilities and working with all of them can help  
5 the United States.

6           Senator Peters:  We have heard in the last few weeks  
7 that the United States has announced plans to reroute \$67  
8 million of security assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces  
9 to support members of the military as Lebanon grapples with  
10 a severe financial crisis.

11          Normally, the aid package will include livelihood  
12 support payments that will go directly to troops to help  
13 them weather the extreme economic conditions being faced in  
14 their country.

15          General, can you discuss what the U.S. can do to  
16 support Lebanon during this time of political turmoil and,  
17 more broadly, why support of the Lebanese Armed Forces is  
18 actually important to the U.S. nationalism?

19          General Kurilla:  Senator, if confirmed, that is an  
20 area that I would have to make an assessment, but I do know  
21 from my past experience, our relationship with the Lebanese  
22 Armed Forces, they are a multi-sect variant organizations  
23 that supports all of Lebanon and can act as a counterbalance  
24 to Hezbollah.  They are an accountable organization and any  
25 military aid that we provided during my experience in the

1 past, they were highly accountable for that.

2 Senator Peters: General, the past month, we have seen  
3 continued escalation in the conflicts in Yemen with Houthi  
4 militias directly attacking the U.A.E. and the Saudi-led  
5 Coalition, continuing to pummel the Yemeni people into  
6 submission.

7 What efforts have we been making to end this conflict  
8 and to bring a close to the world's worst humanitarian  
9 disaster that we have seen since World War II, so to this  
10 time, we have not succeeded. Moving forward, what can the  
11 U.S. and our allies do to bring about an end to the war,  
12 which is now entering its eighth year?

13 General Kurilla: Senator, I don't believe there is any  
14 military solution for Yemen. There should be a negotiated  
15 settlement. I believe in supporting the U.N. and our own  
16 special envoy for Yemen.

17 Senator Peters: Thank you for your answers.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Peters.

20 Senator Scott, please?

21 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman.

22 General, thanks for your service and thanks for being  
23 here with us.

24 What lessons would you draw from policy and continued  
25 positions leading up to the deadly withdrawal of U.S. troops

1 from Afghanistan and how would you apply them if you are  
2 confirmed to lead CENTCOM?

3 General Kurilla: So, Senator, I know, and I applaud  
4 the Congress on the war commission that they are doing to  
5 identify the big lessons learned, strategically, over the  
6 last 20 years. I believe the Secretary of Defense right now  
7 also has an after-action review ongoing.

8 If confirmed, as the CENTCOM commander, that is an area  
9 that I will go and assess those lessons learned and ensure  
10 that we apply them. Much like we have in the military since  
11 I was a second lieutenant, we, after every operation, we did  
12 an after-action review to say what can we get better, but we  
13 must learn from it.

14 Senator Scott: General, under what circumstances would  
15 you be advising to cooperate militarily with the Taliban?

16 General Kurilla: Senator, I think areas that would  
17 have to be a pragmatic approach. If there was a threat to  
18 the homeland from ISIS-K, which they are a rival, there is  
19 potentially an area there. And I also think on the  
20 humanitarian crisis that is ongoing, look at ways that we  
21 can get the humanitarian relief to the people of Afghanistan  
22 that need it, and maybe not necessarily through the Taliban,  
23 but they would have to facilitate it, perhaps, through the  
24 World Food Programme, perhaps through Pakistan or others.

25 Senator Scott: What is your view of the --



1 Voice: Your mic, please, sir.

2 Voice: It should be working.

3 Senator Scott: Is it working now?

4 Voice: Yeah.

5 Senator Scott: Ah, that is better.

6 Okay, what is your view of Israel's inclusion in  
7 CENTCOM and where do you see new opportunities to expand the  
8 cooperation between Israel and our other regional partners?

9 General Kurilla: Senator, I think there is significant  
10 opportunities with Israel's inclusion into the CENTCOM AOR.  
11 It starts with the Abraham Accords and the normalization of  
12 relationships between several of the countries in the AOR.  
13 I think there are opportunities for others, but those are  
14 individual decisions based on that.

15 There are areas of security cooperation between Israel  
16 and other countries; particularly, in air and missile  
17 defense, and other security areas.

18 Senator Scott: Thank you.

19 What do you see, what do you think China's strategy in  
20 the Middle East is and so how is that completely different  
21 than ours?

22 General Kurilla: So, Senator, China has economic  
23 interests and influence that they are looking to gain in the  
24 Middle East and the CENTCOM region. They have a Belt and  
25 Road Initiative agreements with 18 of the 21 countries in

1 CENTCOM. They have increased their spending in the Middle  
2 East by 360 percent over the last year.

3 I think what we need to do is show their predatory  
4 nature of these agreements. They treat every country as if  
5 they are a client or a customer, where we deal in  
6 relationships and we treat them as allies and partners.

7 Senator Scott: And what would you, what do you think  
8 we ought to be doing to counter that?

9 General Kurilla: I think we strengthen those  
10 partnerships and allies to show them that we are still there  
11 for them.

12 Senator Scott: Do you think that takes money?

13 General Kurilla: It think it takes money. I think it  
14 takes a presence. I think it takes engagements.

15 Senator Scott: All right. Thank you.

16 Thank you, Chairman.

17 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Scott.

19 Now, let me recognize Senator Kaine, please.

20 Senator Kaine: General Kurilla, thank you, and  
21 congratulations on your nomination. I look forward to  
22 supporting you.

23 Just to state some facts at the outset that I don't  
24 think have gotten enough attention, and this is, by the way,  
25 a thank you to the American military regarding the

1 evacuation of Afghans. The United States military, in a  
2 very difficult environment, evacuated about 125,000 Afghans;  
3 50,000 or so to third countries, mostly in the region,  
4 76,000 to the United States.

5 Of the 76,000 Afghans who had been evacuated to the  
6 United States, most came into Virginia Dulles Airport or  
7 into the Philadelphia Airport. I visited families at the  
8 Dulles Expo Center right near the airport as they were  
9 arriving, and then they were transitioned to eight military  
10 bases around the country; all of these heavily supported by  
11 the DOD. Three of the bases were in Virginia.

12 As of today, 68,000 of the 76,000 Afghans have been  
13 resettled in communities across the United States with a  
14 multi-government, multi-agency effort; DOD, DHS, now the  
15 lead agency. NGO is participating in a significant way so  
16 that Afghans can begin a new chapter of life in the United  
17 States.

18 I visited with Afghan families at each of the three  
19 bases in Virginia: Quantico, Fort Lee, and Fort Pickett.  
20 All those bases are now returned to their normal military  
21 operations and there are no more Afghans there. Last week,  
22 the DOD indicated that the remaining 8,000 Afghans would be  
23 resettled, likely by the middle part of this month.

24 It has been an incredible effort to bring 76,000  
25 Afghans here. In my visits with them, they express fear and

1 anxiety, obviously, about the future and about the fate of  
2 loved ones in Afghanistan, but also deep, deep appreciation  
3 to the United States, to the U.S. military, to the  
4 opportunity that they are being afforded here to begin a new  
5 life, that is a safer life than the one they left.

6 The burden is still on our shoulders, though, to make  
7 sure that this resettlement of Afghans in the United States  
8 is successful. Most of the Afghans in the United States are  
9 under a 2-year humanitarian parole that expires at the end  
10 of 2 years from their arrival here.

11 Mr. Chair, it is my hope that as we get into the NDA  
12 discussion, much, as in the past, the committee has grappled  
13 with SIV issues for Afghans who have worked in tandem with  
14 the U.S. military. The committee might explore what we  
15 could do with respect to the humanitarian parolees in the  
16 United States. We talked about this yesterday. These  
17 matters are in the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee,  
18 but it has been common for the Armed Services Committee to  
19 grapple with SIV issues to support our Afghan partners, and  
20 I would hope we would explore ways we could be of  
21 assistance.

22 But the scale of the effort both, on the ground in  
23 Afghanistan, tragically leading to the death of 13 troops,  
24 the injury of another four or five dozen U.S. troops, and  
25 the deaths and injuries of hundreds of Afghans, you know, I

1 don't like to say that I can improve upon scripture, but a  
2 powerful line in scripture is, greater love hath no man  
3 this, that he would lay down his life for his friends.

4 I can improve on that. It is greater love to lay down  
5 your life for someone you don't even know. And the fact  
6 that our 13 troops tragically lost their lives, but in doing  
7 so, paved the way for 125,000 people to experience freedom  
8 and more security is a powerful thing and we will never  
9 forget their sacrifice.

10 I want to ask you this question, does the United States  
11 have military forces in Iraq right now purely to assist the  
12 Iraqi Government in the ongoing mission to make sure that  
13 ISIS is defeated?

14 General Kurilla: Senator, they do.

15 Senator Kaine: And in your view, is the Government of  
16 Iraq, a strong security partner of the United States in this  
17 mission?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, the Iraqi Security Forces  
19 are a very strong partner in this. The Government of Iraq  
20 currently is forming after Muqtada al-Sadr gained the  
21 plurality of the last vote.

22 Senator Kaine: Is the United States at work with Iraq?

23 General Kurilla: No, sir.

24 Senator Kaine: I would renew my request to my  
25 colleagues that the war authorization against the Government

1 of Iraq, two of them, actually, one passed in 1991 and one  
2 passed in 2002, be repealed, since they are now a security  
3 partner and we are not at war with them.

4 The last thing I will say, General, I would just  
5 encourage along the lines that Senator Peters asked,  
6 attention to the situation in Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed  
7 Forces has been a reliable partner for the United States and  
8 that is great. I think most accounts of Lebanon suggests  
9 that it is close to being on the verge of a collapsing state  
10 and that poses such significant danger in the region to  
11 Israel, to the Lebanese population, to other neighbors. The  
12 Armed Forces may be the one institution in that country  
13 where we can be a strong partner with other aspects of the  
14 Government, in or near collapse. Attention from CENTCOM to  
15 that important historical partner is something I would urge.

16 I appreciate your service.

17 And, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

18 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kaine.

20 Did you have a comment?

21 General Kurilla: No, I was just going to thank the  
22 Senator for his support for our three bases and the 18th  
23 Airborne Corps soldiers on up in Virginia: Fort Lee, Fort  
24 Eustis, and Fort Story.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, sir.

1 Let me recognize Senator Blackburn, please.

2 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 And General, welcome. Welcome to you and your family  
4 and thank you for the time that you spent visiting with me  
5 last week; I really do appreciate that.

6 And we discussed China and how they are focused on  
7 getting customers and clients and the U.S. is focused on  
8 allies and relationships in the region. And I would like  
9 for you to expand a little bit on how you are going to push  
10 back on China, particularly, as we discussed last week, with  
11 cyber and AI, how you are going to be able to do more with  
12 less and what new capabilities are on your tick list for  
13 what you need to counter what Beijing and Moscow are doing.

14 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, again, I would  
15 have to make an assessment of each of the countries and the  
16 area and the relationships and the inroads that China has  
17 made into each one of those countries and each one, I think,  
18 would be individualized based on that.

19 Exposing the predatory nature of their lending is a big  
20 part of that. I am concerned with the inroads that Huawei  
21 has made into several of the countries as they look to do  
22 their infrastructure and we know the security concerns  
23 associated with that.

24 Senator Blackburn: I appreciate that and I appreciate  
25 your comments about the 18 of the 21 countries and CENTCOM

1 have done a BRI agreement with China.

2 And talk a little bit about where you see that belt and  
3 road ending in military fusion and how that affects the task  
4 in front of you, if confirmed.

5 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe right now, for  
6 China is the economic in the CENTCOM region, although, they  
7 do have their largest base outside of China in Djibouti,  
8 which is just across the Gulf of Aden, south of Yemen, and  
9 it is at a strategic choke point by the Bab-el-Mandeb, so  
10 that is very concerning. It allows them to do maintenance  
11 on some of their vessels while they are overseas.

12 And my concern would be any expansion of that into the  
13 CENTCOM AOR, if confirmed.

14 Senator Blackburn: And I have had the opportunity to  
15 visit our facilities and our presence in Djibouti, and it is  
16 of tremendous concern to me, as you see how China is trying  
17 to expand into that region. We have talked a good bit this  
18 morning about Afghanistan and this committee has put a good  
19 bit of attention on that.

20 And I want to come back and kind of finish off a couple  
21 of questions that have been presented to you. Are there any  
22 instances where you think we should be sharing intel with  
23 the Taliban, and if that is done, would you commit to  
24 informing us, even if it is in a classified setting, that  
25 that has occurred?



1           General Kurilla:  Senator, looking at the specific  
2 instances, I think it is a case-by-case basis, based on that  
3 with the Taliban and I will commit to sharing incidences  
4 with both, I will share it with the chairman and the  
5 oversight committees and the Secretary of Defense.

6           Senator Blackburn:  For those of us on this committee,  
7 we have continued to look at what happened in Afghanistan  
8 and for people like me that represent a major military post,  
9 and so many of our Tennesseans are with Fort Campbell or  
10 they are posted at Fort Campbell or they have served, and to  
11 see how this has, how it took place, the debacle that it  
12 became, has been of tremendous concern.

13           One other thing on that, with the Taliban takeover  
14 there in Afghanistan, how do you assess Pakistan's role in  
15 supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan and what is your  
16 assessment of how they are working to help get people that  
17 we are trying to get out of Afghanistan, how they are  
18 getting them out.

19           General Kurilla:  Well, Senator, first off, thank you  
20 for your support for the 101st Airborne Division at Fort  
21 Campbell, one of our 18th Airborne Corps units.

22           Senator, I am not aware right now of what Pakistan is  
23 doing in my current role to assist in getting out.  I think  
24 that is an area that we could potentially work with Pakistan  
25 on.  I think they are concerned about the regional stability

1 in the area and the violent extremist organizations inside  
2 of Afghanistan. The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, the TPP, is  
3 a very violent organization that has done, killed tens of  
4 thousands of Pakistanis, so they have a vested interest and  
5 a security interest with us on that, as well as the  
6 humanitarian crisis inside of Afghanistan.

7 Senator Blackburn: Thank you for your service and  
8 thank you for being here with us today to answer the  
9 questions.

10 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

11 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

13 Now, via Webex, let me recognize Senator Manchin,  
14 please.

15 Senator Manchin: Can you hear me, Mr. Chairman?

16 Chairman Reed: I can hear you, Senator.

17 Senator Manchin: Thank you very much.

18 General Kurilla, first of all, thank you for your  
19 service and thank you for your attempt to continue to  
20 service and we appreciate it very much.

21 Let me just ask you this. ISIS remains a threat in  
22 Syria, as we all know, and most of its activity is focused  
23 on re-establishing networks, assassinating and intimidating  
24 local leaders and Security Forces and extending its  
25 influences in rural areas throughout Eastern Syria and Iraq.

1           So, my question to you will be, do you assess that the  
2 February 3 killing of ISIS leader Quraishi gave a  
3 significant blow to ISIS and the region and how do you plan  
4 to capitalize on the lack of leadership, if it did, really,  
5 truly break up their network?

6           General Kurilla: Senator, anytime a leader of any  
7 terrorist organization is taken out, it causes the  
8 leadership to have to figure out who will take over. It  
9 generally, temporarily, sets them back. It depends on the  
10 capability of that leader that was in charge. But then,  
11 what it does, is also exposes that network as they  
12 communicate and try and find the next leader to replace  
13 them, and that provides opportunities.

14          Senator Manchin: So, the intel, the opportunity of  
15 intel right now is probably a premium?

16          General Kurilla: It is, Senator.

17          Senator Manchin: Let me say this. I want to also tell  
18 you, sir, I appreciate so much the efforts that you all have  
19 made to protect all civilians and we truly do. But we also  
20 know, I think Senator Tillis on both points, and Senator  
21 Warren, who is concerned, and we are all concerned, and  
22 Senator Tillis identifying that, basically, they embed  
23 themselves in. So, we know your job is difficult. We  
24 sympathize, but, also, we cannot allow these terrorist to go  
25 unchecked or undeterred, that is for sure.

1           In the past, counting violent extreme groups with al  
2    Qaeda and the Islamic State was the top national security;  
3    both of which are critical challenges to the CENTCOM area of  
4    responsibility for decades.

5           How do you assess the shift in resources, if China and  
6    Russia right now are taking the forefront in national  
7    security challenges facing the United States, that shift in  
8    resources would affect CENTCOM?

9           General Kurilla:   Senator, I will have to look at the  
10   missions; if confirmed, look at the missions assigned to  
11   CENTCOM, the resources allocated, and the risks associated  
12   with each of those missions, and look at ways to mitigate  
13   that risk.   One of the ways is partially through  
14   partnerships and allies that can make up some of that  
15   mitigation, and also through technology going forward.

16           But then I would come back to both, the chairman, and  
17   the Secretary of Defense, and inform this committee of any  
18   additional resources required.

19           Senator Manchin:   Let me ask if you have any knowledge  
20   of the validity that China's talking points of partnering  
21   with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and if so, how are we going  
22   to counter that?

23           General Kurilla:   Senator, I know that the Taliban has  
24   reached out to China.   That was an open source, but, if  
25   confirmed, that is an area that I will have to make a deep

1 assessment of.

2 Senator Manchin: And, sir, national operations with  
3 CENTCOM, in West Virginia, the National Guard already has a  
4 strong connection with Qatar through our State Partnership  
5 Program. I think it was one of the first in the Middle  
6 East, and it might still be the only one. I am not sure.

7 We also had multiple units rotate to the Middle East  
8 throughout our wars with both, Afghanistan and Iraq.  
9 Additionally, they were 50 percent of the total force of C-  
10 130s operated by Reserve component units and we have a large  
11 contingency of that also in West Virginia.

12 Can you tell me how do you think, strategically, when  
13 employed, National Guard units in your area of  
14 responsibility.

15 General Kurilla: Senator, I am observed, as the  
16 CENTCOM Chief of Staff, that our National Guard and our  
17 Reserve provide tremendous capability into the AOR and can  
18 also help offset the impact on the active-duty force, as  
19 well.

20 Senator Manchin: So, in your planning and operations  
21 and defense and things of that, and security, you are using  
22 National Guard and their abilities, as basically, with your  
23 own forces?

24 General Kurilla: Senator, we have used the National  
25 Guard in all of my experience in the Middle East.

1 Senator Manchin: Well, let me say thank you. I  
2 appreciate very much.

3 And I yield back my time.

4 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Manchin.

6 Now, let me recognize Senator Hawley, please.

7 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 General, congratulations on your nomination. Thank you  
9 for being here.

10 Let me ask you about disturbing reports in the  
11 Washington Post today. The headline is, Documents Reveal  
12 U.S. Military's Frustration With White House Diplomats Over  
13 Afghanistan Evacuation.

14 The Washington Post has been able to see a 2,000 page  
15 Army investigative report. This committee has not been able  
16 to see that report. It has not, I don't think, been made  
17 public. The Post has it. Their reporting today begins this  
18 way: senior White House and State Department officials  
19 failed to grasp the Taliban's steady advance on  
20 Afghanistan's capital and resisted efforts by U.S. military  
21 leaders to prepare the evacuation of embassy personnel and  
22 allies weeks, weeks before Kabul's fall, placing American  
23 troops ordered to carry out the withdrawal in greater  
24 danger, according to sworn testimony from multiple  
25 commanders involved in the operation.

1           General Farrell Sullivan goes on to say in his sworn  
2 testimony, in my opinion, the National Security Council to  
3 the White House was not seriously planning for an  
4 evacuation.

5           Now, this report is disturbing for all kinds of  
6 reasons, not the least of which is it seems to directly  
7 contradict testimony that this committee has heard from,  
8 among others, General Milley, who had said that there was no  
9 way to have planned for or have anticipated the fall of  
10 Kabul. There was no way to have anticipated that anything  
11 like this would happen.

12           And, in fact, what the Army report seems to say is that  
13 military commanders repeatedly and for weeks, if not months,  
14 warned the White House and other leadership that something  
15 like this was imminently foreseeable, there needed to be  
16 action taken, and the White House and the State Department  
17 did nothing.

18           Here is my question to you, I understand this morning  
19 that, now, CENTCOM and OSD have taken position of this 2,000  
20 page report. If you are confirmed, will you commit to  
21 releasing that full report to this committee?

22           General Kurilla: Senator, I would defer to the  
23 Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff on that.

24           Senator Hawley: So, that is a no?

25           General Kurilla: Senator, if it is within my authority

1 to do so, I would, if confirmed.

2 Senator Hawley: If confirmed, and if it is up to you,  
3 you would do it.

4 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe it is publicly  
5 available.

6 Senator Hawley: If confirmed, do you commit to provide  
7 to this committee in a timely manner, any other information  
8 requested about the withdrawal in Afghanistan, including  
9 intelligence reports, assessments, and other material that  
10 may be at CENTCOM?

11 General Kurilla: Senator, I will provide to the  
12 Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs and oversight  
13 committees, whatever is required.

14 Senator Hawley: The last part is the only part that I  
15 am interested in, the oversight committee.

16 You would provide to this committee, intelligence  
17 reports, assessments, other information that we request on  
18 the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

19 General Kurilla: Senator, I will come before this  
20 committee and testify on those reports.

21 Senator Hawley: That is not quite what I am asking. I  
22 am not asking about your testimony. I am asking you  
23 providing information that we directly request, that may be  
24 held at CENTCOM.

25 Would you commit to us, if you are confirmed, to



1 providing for us, information that may be held at CENTCOM,  
2 regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, intelligence  
3 reports, assessments, et cetera?

4 General Kurilla: If it is within my authority to  
5 release, I would, Senator.

6 Senator Hawley: Great. Thank you.

7 And I just want to say for the record that this  
8 committee needs to have open, public hearings on this  
9 report. We need to have open, public hearings on what we  
10 have learned about what has happened in Afghanistan, and no  
11 more closed briefings behind closed doors that shut out the  
12 American public and the cameras that we see behind us.

13 And, frankly, this committee's scarce interest in  
14 finding out what has happened in Afghanistan, I think,  
15 reflects badly on this committee and it is time for the  
16 members of this committee to get serious about it.

17 Let me ask you, General, the Secretary of Defense has  
18 designated China as the Department's pacing threat and the  
19 Indo-Pacific as its priority theater. Can I just ask you  
20 for a yes-or-no answer, do you agree with that assessment?

21 General Kurilla: I do, Senator.

22 Senator Hawley: Great. If the Indo-Pacific is the  
23 priority theater, then it would follow that other theaters  
24 are, by definition, lower priorities; not unimportant, but  
25 if they are not the priority theaters, then other theaters

1 are lower priorities, and that would include the Middle  
2 East, I would think.

3 Do you agree with that, that the Middle East would be a  
4 lower-priority theater, as compared to the Indo-Pacific?

5 General Kurilla: Per the 2018 NDS, that is accurate,  
6 Senator.

7 Senator Hawley: Okay. And do you agree with that  
8 assessment?

9 General Kurilla: I do, Senator.

10 Senator Hawley: Okay. Good. Great.

11 The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs wrote for the  
12 record, this is Admiral Grady that I am referring to, wrote  
13 for the record that DOD needs to do less in lower-priority  
14 theaters, so it can focus more of its scarce resources on  
15 deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, barring a significant  
16 increase, of course, in the Defense budget.

17 Do you agree with that assessment by the Vice Chairman?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, I do.

19 Senator Hawley: Very good.

20 Let me shift to squarely, the AOR. Recent reports show  
21 that Israel and the U.A.E. are moving quickly to improve  
22 security and intelligence cooperation. You have been asked  
23 a little bit about that, I think, in earlier parts of  
24 today's hearing. That is a great example of the  
25 opportunities created by the Abraham Accords. And I know

1 that you have testified today that you understand the  
2 possibilities there. It is an example, I think, of  
3 something that CENTCOM can support in years ahead, now that  
4 Israel is part of your AOR, the CENTCOM AOR.

5 If you are confirmed, here is my question, how would  
6 you plan to empower Israel and our Gulf partners to work  
7 together and to strengthen deterrence at the regional level  
8 against Iranian aggression?

9 And I see my time is expired, so I will let you answer  
10 that, General, and then I will return my time to the chair.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 General Kurilla: Senator, I think I would have to make  
13 an assessment of that to find the best method forward. I  
14 think it is by going to each individual country and making  
15 that assessment.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley.

17 Senator Duckworth, please?

18 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

19 I would like to begin by disagreeing with my colleague  
20 from Missouri in saying that this committee has scant  
21 commitment to looking at what happened in Afghanistan; in  
22 fact, on a bipartisan basis, this committee passed the  
23 Afghanistan War Commission Act, which was set up, an entire  
24 commission to look at the entire 20 years of the war in  
25 Afghanistan, including the evacuation. And it also

1 provision for equal representation, equal opportunity for  
2 the ranking member and the chairman of both, the majority  
3 and minority committees on SAF, on Foreign Relations, and on  
4 Intelligence, to appoint committee members, as well as the  
5 minority and majority leaders.

6 I can't, I don't think it can be any more fair than  
7 that, and the fact that it passed on a bipartisan basis, I  
8 think makes it clear that this is going to move forward and  
9 there is a commitment, overall, on a bipartisan basis to  
10 look at everything that happened in Afghanistan.

11 With that said, I would like to welcome you, General.  
12 Thank you. I want to apologize to you for cutting our call  
13 short the other day. You were very generous. It was one of  
14 those crazy days.

15 I want to return to our discussion there, talking about  
16 the fact that after decades of focusing much of our budget  
17 and capability on CENTCOM, we are now shifting, rightly,  
18 towards the Indo-Pacific region; however, I do believe that  
19 CENTCOM remains a critical part of our overall strategy to  
20 push back against great power rivals, as senators on both  
21 sides of the aisle on this committee have pointed out, given  
22 that Russian and Chinese attempts to grow their influence in  
23 the Middle East, as well as Iran's ongoing push to develop  
24 its nuclear capabilities.

25 I was really pleased to see the emphasis that you

1 placed on partnerships and coalitions in your written  
2 testimony, and we do agree that we must better integrate our  
3 partners into our operational planning and we must reinforce  
4 reviewing their capabilities, as the Coalition's  
5 capabilities. So, again, you know, go with your pacing  
6 item, so we have to look at what our partners can do.

7 Yet, as we discussed on our call last week,  
8 capabilities are more than just military equipment. This is  
9 why I truly believe that engagement in exchange programs,  
10 such as our International Military Education Training, the  
11 IMET program, is so critical to success in the region.

12 What opportunities, General, do you see for partner  
13 engagement and exchange programs, including IMET, to retain  
14 influence in the region and prevent potentially malign  
15 actors from gaining a toehold in the Middle East?

16 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe IMET is one of our  
17 more powerful capabilities we have. When we bring foreign  
18 officers to the United States and we expose them to our  
19 democratic values, they understand us and they understand  
20 our society. That is very powerful in helping, because  
21 eventually they continue on up and become senior leaders in  
22 their respective countries.

23 I think the partnership goes well beyond just military  
24 capability. It could also include intelligence. The one  
25 commodity we have a lot of is our intelligence capability

1 and our challenge is sharing with every country in the  
2 CENTCOM AOR. We would like to do intelligence sharing,  
3 while still protecting our sources and methods that we use  
4 to get that intelligence. So, think that is an area that we  
5 can look to advance, as well.

6 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

7 What reforms, if any, would help you to make these  
8 partner engagements and exchange programs more effective in  
9 Central Command?

10 General Kurilla: Senator, my attempt would be to get  
11 an assessment going into CENTCOM. I really can't give you  
12 that right now. I would have to look at that, and I would  
13 be willing to come back and provide that to you.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. Thank you.

15 We have already talked about the National Guard and the  
16 State Partnership for Peace program; although, that is not  
17 the only model. Central Command houses a unique program  
18 between the National Guard and the country of Israel. It is  
19 run at the National Guard Bureau level and the program  
20 allows Israel to tap into the Bureau's expertise across the  
21 National Guard's many missions and capabilities. It  
22 provides training opportunities for multiple National Guard  
23 units, including those from Illinois. This program was  
24 reaffirmed last year, after an initial 15 successful years  
25 and now falls under CENTCOM.

1           Could you speak to the value of this program and how it  
2 would fit into your objectives for Central Command, if you  
3 are confirmed?

4           General Kurilla:   Senator, I would have to make an  
5 assessment of that and then come back to you.

6           Senator Duckworth:   Okay.  Along with my partner across  
7 the aisle, Senator Cornyn, I fought to include a provision  
8 in last year's NDAA that pushes for a partnership between  
9 the National Guard and Taiwan.  After reviewing my  
10 legislation, the National Guard Bureau believes that  
11 partnership with Israel provides the best model for a  
12 comprehensive engagement with Taiwan.

13           If confirmed, once you have had a chance to review,  
14 would you make resources available within Central Command,  
15 either yourself or your staff and planners, to help  
16 implement a similar program between National Guard and  
17 Taiwan that is similar to the partnership with Israel, if  
18 requested?

19           General Kurilla:   Senator, I would have to make an  
20 assessment on that reference to Taiwan being in the  
21 INDOPACOM AOR.

22           Senator Duckworth:   Right.  But if they came to you and  
23 said, hey, can you tell us how it works with Israel, would  
24 you be willing to share that information with --

25           General Kurilla:   Absolutely.

1           Senator Duckworth: -- Admiral Aquilino and the folks  
2 dealing with the Taiwan version?

3           General Kurilla: Absolutely.

4           Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

5           I look forward to you being confirmed and, again, I  
6 apologize for the abruptness of our call, the abruptness of  
7 this, but I look forward to working with you in the future.

8           General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

9           Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

10          Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

11          Senator Kelly, please?

12          Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13          General Kurilla, congratulations on your nomination and  
14 thank you for being here today. You certainly have  
15 extensive experience and I know you have spent a significant  
16 amount of time in the CENTCOM AOR, so I know you understand  
17 some of the challenges that await you.

18          I noticed that your former boss, General Votel,  
19 commended your engagement on adoption of technologies like  
20 artificial intelligence, calling you an early adopter, and  
21 emphasizing their applicability for Central Command.

22          As chair of this committee's panel on emerging threats  
23 and capabilities, leveraging AI and other autonomy  
24 technologies, is something that I am very focused on. And  
25 we often discuss this in the context of great power



1 competition. But I believe these capabilities will be  
2 increasingly important in regions like the Middle East,  
3 where we no longer have the sizable military presence and  
4 advantage that we have had in recent decades.

5 So, can you elaborate on how, if confirmed, you would  
6 leverage artificial intelligence and other emerging  
7 capabilities to address current challenges that we face in  
8 the region?

9 General Kurilla: Senator, thank you for that.

10 I believe artificial intelligence, when it enables a  
11 human, can exponentially increase the capability of several  
12 of the things that we do now. Particularly, where we are  
13 focused right now in the 18th Airborne Corps is in our  
14 targeting capability, where we can take large pieces of  
15 terrain and rapidly identify hundreds of targets, prioritize  
16 them based on a high-priority target list, that determines  
17 which ones we should strike with the resources that we have,  
18 and then that, then, goes back into our firing solutions and  
19 doing that. And that happens in seconds, versus what would  
20 take hours, normally, or sometimes even days to be able to  
21 develop these targets, and it is doing it in real time at  
22 the edge, in our command post, and not being tied, just back  
23 into a garrison computing environment.

24 We do this quarterly and we do it with all six services  
25 participating, and where we share that with all of them, in

1 an attempt to make all the services better with our  
2 artificial intelligence. So, rising tides raise all boats.

3 Senator Kelly: It would be great if you could come to  
4 us with some ideas of what you would need next. If you  
5 could think about what does AI on the battlefield look like  
6 a decade from now and let's make sure that we develop the  
7 tools so that it will be available.

8 I want to move on to a couple other quick topics here.  
9 The Iraqi F-16 fighter force, they paid us \$2 billion for  
10 these airplanes. The Arizona Air National Guard 162nd  
11 Fighter Wing in Tucson plays a very critical role in  
12 training these Iraqi pilots to fly these F-16s. The 162nd  
13 is uniquely qualified to do this because of the access to  
14 ranges and unmatched flying days per year in Southern  
15 Arizona, and the squadron also has decades of experience  
16 training foreign national pilots.

17 General, what is your perspective on the value of the  
18 foreign-pilot training to our combatant commanders?

19 General Kurilla: Senator, anytime we can get a partner  
20 to do something that we would do, that is a good thing,  
21 because it reduces the requirements and resources on us.

22 Senator Kelly: And I am also concerned about, you  
23 know, reports that the F-16 fleet faces, the Iraqi F-16  
24 fleet faces some serious maintenance issues and readiness  
25 issues. So, could you report back to this committee on

1 both, the status, if confirmed, the status of the Iraqi Air  
2 Force's F-16 fleet and actions needed to remedy any  
3 deficits.

4 General Kurilla: Yes, Senator.

5 Senator Kelly: And then, finally, General, as you  
6 know, Israel, which was once the purview of the European  
7 Command is now part of Central Command and you will oversee  
8 Central Command, if confirmed.

9 While there are a number of challenges and  
10 opportunities facing Israel, one concrete action we can take  
11 is to support our ally is ensuring replenishment of the Iron  
12 Dome system, which was incredibly successful in the May  
13 2020-2021 conflict, but also has been depleted.

14 I am proud of the role that Arizona has played in  
15 developing this technology; the technology behind the Iron  
16 Dome system, and I believe it is important that we work  
17 quickly to ensure that it can remain operational, to protect  
18 Israeli civilians.

19 What is the threat to Israel if the Iron Dome system is  
20 not replenished in a timely manner?

21 General Kurilla: Senator, the Iron Dome is a very  
22 capable system. The Army currently has two batteries that  
23 is undergoing testing and evaluation.

24 Israel does face a significant threat with literally  
25 hundreds of thousands of missiles both, in Hezbollah and

1 both, in Hamas. So, what it does is it is a great defensive  
2 weapons system, so I am very supportive of the Iron Dome.

3 Senator Kelly: Okay. Well, let's make sure that we  
4 work together to ensure that we replenish and return Iron  
5 Dome to its full, operational capability.

6 General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

7 Senator Kelly: Thank you, General.

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly.

9 I have been informed that Senator Rosen is finishing up  
10 her questioning in another committee and will shortly be  
11 available by Webex. That will give me the opportunity,  
12 General, to ask one or two more questions.

13 First, Russia has a significant footprint in Syria,  
14 Russia, now, is confronting NATO in Ukraine. But coming  
15 back to Syria, how do you project their role there, together  
16 with their pretensions with respect to Ukraine?

17 General Kurilla: Senator, I believe that if Russia  
18 does invade Ukraine, they would not hesitate to be able to  
19 act as a spoiler in Syria, as well. Already, we see it as  
20 one of the most contested, electromagnetic spectrum  
21 environments that we are currently operating in. So, I  
22 believe there is, you know, they are a competitor of ours.

23 Chairman Reed: So, when you assume command of the  
24 CENTCOM, you will be very sensitive to reactions within  
25 Syria by the Russians that may be a consequence of something

1 happening in Ukraine; is that fair?

2 General Kurilla: Absolutely, Senator.

3 And, again, I don't believe that Russia wants to go to  
4 war with us and I know that we don't want to go to war with  
5 Russia, so I would be very sensitive to that.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

7 I believe that Senator Rosen is available, so now via  
8 Webex, let me recognize Senator Rosen.

9 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

10 And, of course, thank you, Ranking Member Inhofe, for  
11 holding this hearing.

12 And I would also really like to thank you, General  
13 Kurilla, for meeting with me last week, for your lifetime of  
14 service, and your willingness to continue serving and  
15 leading the men and women of our services.

16 And so, as I have noted in previous hearings, as you  
17 and I have discussed, Iranian-backed militias are  
18 increasingly targeting U.S. installations and servicemembers  
19 in Iraq and Syria, via rocket and drone attacks. Iran, the  
20 world's leading state sponsor of terrorism continues to  
21 threaten the U.S. and allied interests in the Middle East  
22 and around the world, via not only its ballistic missile  
23 program, but also its support for Hezbollah and the Islamic  
24 Republic's multitude of terrorist proxies.

25 So, General, can you discuss the threat of Iranian-

1 backed militias in the Middle East post to our U.S. troops  
2 and our allies and how do you believe the U.S. should  
3 respond to their proliferation of attacks, how are you going  
4 to take on this challenge, if confirmed, and what is our  
5 ability to target them.

6 Do you have everything you need?

7 General Kurilla: Senator, I will not be able to make  
8 an assessment, if we have everything I need, until, if  
9 confirmed, to actually make that assessment.

10 It is a big concern of the Iranian-aligned militia  
11 groups that are currently operating both, inside of Iraq and  
12 then other elements operating inside of Syria, going after  
13 our servicemembers. We should, I will always protect our  
14 people and I would take action against them if they took  
15 action against us.

16 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

17 I want to also build on a little bit as we think about  
18 Israel's transfer to CENTCOM, because now that Israel is  
19 within CENTCOM's area of responsibility, it is my sincere  
20 hope that this transfer will potentiate even greater  
21 military cooperation between the U.S. and Israel through our  
22 shared goals, as well as cooperation between our Arab and  
23 Israeli partners.

24 So, General, I want to follow-up on Senator King's  
25 question. If confirmed, how would you leverage the Abraham

1 Accords to improve defense cooperation in the region, in  
2 furtherance of U.S. interests and do you have any plans to  
3 integrate the joint exercises with Israel and Arab states  
4 who have signed on to the normalization agreements?

5 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, I will make an  
6 assessment of the best ways to increase the cooperation  
7 between Israel and our Arab partners in the region. I think  
8 only good comes out of that when they are talking. When you  
9 have countries talking, it lowers the temperature.

10 Israel brings some very unique capabilities, in terms  
11 of their military component, that they believe they can  
12 share with their Arab partners in the region to increase  
13 both, the air and missile defense is a big area, based on  
14 the threat from Iran. I am a big fan of joint exercises,  
15 because I believe, collectively, rising tides raise all  
16 boats, when you make the elements train together, they get  
17 better.

18 Senator Rosen: So, you definitely see a benefit to,  
19 and opportunities to Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM?

20 General Kurilla: One hundred percent, ma'am.

21 Senator Rosen: And you spoke a little bit about  
22 Iranian incursion. And so, what is your current assessment  
23 of CENTCOM's ability to respond to Iranian nuclear breakout  
24 and I know you are not confirmed yet, but what are the  
25 contingency plans you believe CENTCOM should be prepared to

1 execute in order to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapons, any  
2 capability?

3 General Kurilla: Senator, if confirmed, I would have  
4 to make an assessment of the current military capabilities  
5 and plans for any military action along those contingencies.

6 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

7 And, of course, lots of terrorism in the region, and so  
8 we have to think about our future counterterrorism  
9 operations in Afghanistan, and I have asked questions in  
10 previous hearings about our ability to conduct our  
11 counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, now that we no  
12 longer have a "boots on the ground" presence, and I would  
13 like to ask you a little bit about this, as well.

14 So, General, if confirmed, how do you plan to execute  
15 an enduring counterterrorism strategy that will be able to  
16 address and counter the influence of violent, extremist  
17 organizations in Afghanistan and the region?

18 General Kurilla: Senator, "over the horizon"  
19 counterterrorism is difficult; it is not impossible. I  
20 think I have to make an assessment of the actual mission and  
21 then those resources to apply against it and highlight the  
22 risks and look for ways to mitigate that risk, either  
23 through basing additional resources, intelligence, assets,  
24 technology that can then increase the effectiveness of that  
25 counterterrorism.



1           Senator Rosen: Thank you.

2           I see my time is just up, so I will submit this for the  
3 record, but I just wanted you to think about what the  
4 collapse of the Afghan Government, how it is going to affect  
5 ISIS, al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula. I  
6 will submit these questions for the record.

7           Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

8           General Kurilla: Thank you, Senator.

9           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

10          General, let me thank you and your family for a  
11 lifetime of distinguished and dedicated service to the Army  
12 and to the nation. And I think you have persuaded all of  
13 us, I suspect, that you have the character, the experience,  
14 and the judgment to lead CENTCOM. I look forward to your  
15 confirmation.

16          With that, I will adjourn the hearing.

17          General Kurilla: Thank you, Chairman.

18          [Whereupon, at 11:49 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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