

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF:
LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRYAN P. FENTON, USA TO BE
GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL
OPERATIONS COMMAND; AND
LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. LANGLEY, USMC
TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA
COMMAND

Thursday, July 21, 2022

Washington, D.C.

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2 LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRYAN P. FENTON, USA TO BE GENERAL AND
3 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND; AND
4 LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL E. LANGLEY, USMC TO BE GENERAL

5 AND

6 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

7
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9
10 U.S. Senate

11 Committee on Armed Services

12 Washington, D.C.

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

17 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
18 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren,
19 Peters, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Cotton,
20 Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Blackburn,
21 Hawley, and Tuberville.

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 nominations of Lieutenant General
5 Bryan Fenton to be the next Commander of U.S. Special
6 Operations Command and Lieutenant General Michael Langley to
7 be the next Commander of U.S. Africa Command. Thank you
8 both for your willingness to lead in these important
9 positions.

10 General Fenton, we welcome your wife, Dawn, daughters,
11 Nora and Cecilia, and parents, John and Kathleen. General
12 Langley, we welcome your father, Willie, and thank him for
13 his 25 years of service in the Air Force. We welcome your
14 mother, Ola, and thank her for her career of service as a
15 postal worker. And we also welcome your sisters, Cheryl and
16 Shannon. We are grateful to each of your families for their
17 continued support of your service to the nation.

18 General Fenton, if confirmed, you will take command of
19 U.S. Special Operations Command, or SOCOM, during an
20 important period of change and transformation. Because of
21 the efforts and sacrifice of the Special Operations
22 community, and efforts of the Special Operations community
23 over the past two decades, the threat from ISIS, al Qaeda,
24 and other violent extremist groups has been greatly
25 diminished.

1 However, U.S. national security interests are
2 increasingly challenged by Chinese aggression, Russia's
3 illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine, and the
4 destabilizing activities of both Iran and North Korea. The
5 persistent engagement of our Special Operations Forces with
6 their Ukrainian counterparts since 2014, and especially in
7 the last few months has yielded important lessons for how
8 our Special Operations personnel can be employed to support
9 our partners and U.S. national security objectives in the
10 years to come.

11 In particular, many of these lessons apply to our
12 efforts to engage partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific
13 region to counter Chinese aggression. If confirmed,
14 General, I expect your experience commanding both
15 conventional and Special Operations Forces in the Indo-
16 Pacific region will serve you well as we address this pacing
17 threat for the Defense Department. I hope you will share
18 how you would plan to lead the Special Operations community
19 to meet this challenge.

20 Finally, as a combatant command with service-like
21 responsibilities, SOCOM needs and deserves a senior civilian
22 to provide service secretary-like oversight and advocacy for
23 our Special Operations Forces. Congress has sought to
24 empower the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special
25 Operations and Low Intensity Conflict to fulfill that

1 mandate. General Fenton, if confirmed, I ask for your
2 support as the Department continues to work to fully
3 implement those reforms.

4 General Langley, if confirmed, you would lead U.S.
5 Africa Command, or AFRICOM, at a very critical time. The
6 security situation in East Africa has been on a downward
7 trajectory following the previous administration's decision
8 to withdraw the majority of U.S. military personnel from
9 Somalia in December 2020. Since then, U.S. forces have been
10 conducting periodic engagements to train and advise Somali
11 partners, but U.S. and partner efforts to disrupt and
12 degrade al-Shabaab have not achieved the success we need. I
13 hope you will share your views on the current security
14 situation and the best possible approach to reestablish
15 persistent U.S. military presence with our Somali partners.

16 The situation in West Africa is also increasingly
17 fragile. Over the past 2 years, extremist operations have
18 expanded across the region. While the intelligence
19 community assesses these regional extremist groups are not
20 currently capable of carrying out attacks outside the
21 region, several have professed their intent to do so. Given
22 these challenges, General Langley, I would like to know your
23 views on what can feasibly be accomplished with partner
24 security forces and how we should seek to engage as part of
25 a whole-of-government effort.

1 Both SOCOM and AFRICOM will play important roles in our
2 long-term strategic competition with China and Russia. In
3 the Middle East and Central Asia, Russia continues to
4 leverage hybrid warfare capabilities to expand its own
5 influence and stymie Western security interests, and China
6 has deepened its economic and security ties with Iran. And
7 on the African continent both Russia and China are looking
8 to expand their security and economic investments, and may
9 seek to leverage such access to undermine U.S. influence in
10 critical regions. During today's hearing, I hope you will
11 both discuss your plans to engage with partners and how we
12 can best leverage our competitive advantages to maintain key
13 relationships.

14 Finally, issues related to civilian harm have been a
15 focus for the Armed Services Committee for several years.
16 The U.S. military goes to great lengths to avoid civilian
17 casualties. When tragic errors occur on the battlefield,
18 the United States has an obligation to be transparent, take
19 responsibility, and do everything we can to learn from and
20 prevent future mistakes. I am encouraged by Secretary
21 Austin's personal involvement in these issues and the
22 priority he has placed on them for the Department, but more
23 must be done. I look forward to the forthcoming
24 comprehensive Defense Department policy on assessing,
25 investigating, and responding to allegations of civilian

1 casualties and expect, if confirmed, that each of you will
2 make these issues a priority for your respective commands.

3 Thank you again for your service and willingness to
4 lead in this very challenging time, and I certainly look
5 forward to your testimonies.

6 And for the benefit of my colleagues, we would like to
7 move these nominations as quickly as possible so we will
8 expedite the questions for the record. As you all realize,
9 we are scheduled to adjourn next week for a lengthy period
10 of time, and we would like to get both of these commands in
11 place.

12 With that let me now recognize the Ranking Member,
13 Senator Inhofe.

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

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to
4 the nominees for being with us today. They have been
5 nominated to oversee commands that are critical to
6 implementing our National Defense Strategy. Once again they
7 are coming out.

8 I have always viewed Africa as critical to our national
9 security, which is why I pushed for the creation of AFRICOM.
10 I did start the AFRICOM. We did not have -- Africa was a
11 part of three different commands at one time, and we changed
12 that, gave them their own command. The only thing we did
13 not do right was we did not get the resources in there that
14 they needed. So despite this, the AFRICOM has never been
15 given the resources that they intended to receive.

16 Our adversaries are not making the same mistake that we
17 are. I have seen it first-hand during my 168 country visits
18 in the African continent.

19 I understand that DoD is considering plans that would
20 further diminish support to the command, including merging
21 AFRICOM Special Operations component with EUCOM and cutting
22 manpower at the Army's component focus. Now I do not know
23 that this is true, but I have heard from four different
24 sources, unrelated, that these plans to downgrade are out
25 there, and it is very important that we understand this and

1 that we get to the bottom as to why, what needs to be done
2 there.

3 So, let me be clear. I would strongly oppose any such
4 efforts. I would urge my colleagues to do the same. Given
5 the growing strategic importance of Africa to the national
6 security, this would be short-sighted and would be making
7 implementing the NDS in Africa much harder.

8 Now, I look to our nominees to describe to us and the
9 American people why it is important the United States stay
10 meaningfully engaged on the continent, and back it up with
11 necessary resources. It is long overdue right now.

12 So, General Langley, once you assume your role, I want
13 you to keep in mind the legacy of AFRICOM, what it is and
14 how far we have come and how much more work needs to be
15 done.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. For the
18 record I am informed that there are 2 weeks until our
19 recess, but we are still going to expedite this process. I
20 think my summer passions have aroused prematurely. Forgive
21 me.

22 With that let me recognize General Fenton for your
23 testimony.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRYAN FENTON TO BE
2 GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS
3 COMMAND

4 General Fenton: Thank you, Chairman. Good morning,
5 Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members
6 of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you today
7 as the nominee for the next Commander of the United States
8 Special Operations Command. I am very grateful to the
9 President, Secretary Austin, and Chairman Milley for their
10 trust and confidence in me for this nomination.

11 I would like to recognize and thank the current SOCOM
12 command team, General Rich Clarke and Chief Greg Smith, and
13 their wives, Suzanne and Tina, for their leadership of the
14 SOCOM force and families these past 3 years.

15 I am privileged today to be alongside Lieutenant
16 General Mike Langley, an exceptional Marine, officer,
17 leader, and friend. If we are confirmed I look forward to
18 working closely with him and his future team.

19 I am also joined today by several people who have been
20 a source of strength and inspiration for me. My wife, Dawn,
21 my best friend for 31 years, and every assignment we have
22 had she has always been a fierce advocate for the men and
23 women of the Joint Force and their families. As the
24 daughter of a World War II veteran she represents, for me,
25 all the incredible military families who are the strength of

1 SOCOM and the Joint Force.

2 Our daughters, Nora and Cecilia. Nora is a consultant
3 here in D.C. and a second lieutenant in the United States
4 Army Reserves. Cecilia just finished her sophomore year in
5 college, is enrolled in Army ROTC, and is currently
6 interning with the FBI. I am extremely proud of them as
7 they create their own paths of service to this great nation.

8 My parents, John and Kathleen, from Knoxville,
9 Tennessee. They taught me and my brother, Christopher, a
10 life of service. Mom was a teacher and a principal for 30
11 years, and Dad had a long career at the Tennessee Valley
12 Authority.

13 Finally, from Hawaii, my longtime teammate and mentor,
14 Retired Command Sergeant Major Joaquin J.C. Cruz.
15 Noncommissioned officers like CSM Cruz and CSM Craig Bishop,
16 my current senior enlisted advisor, represent the center of
17 gravity for the Joint Force and SOCOM. In my estimation,
18 are noncommissioned officers make us the envy of militaries
19 around the world.

20 Serving this nation for 35 years has been the greatest
21 privilege of my life, much of that service, alongside the
22 exceptional men and women, military and civilian, of your
23 Special Operations Forces. Selfless, quiet professionals
24 who work tirelessly here and abroad to keep our nation safe.
25 These men and women truly are SOF's competitive and

1 comparative advantage. They play a pivotal role supporting
2 our combatant commanders and providing this nation with
3 unique, asymmetric capabilities, capabilities needed in this
4 contested world to confront challenges presented by
5 strategic competitors such as China and Russia, to counter
6 persistent threats from terrorist organizations and other
7 malign actors, and if required, provide a range of options
8 for high-end conflict as part of the Joint Force.

9 Special operations forces do this as part of an
10 incredible interagency team, an invaluable network of
11 partners and allies. As a small percentage of the
12 Department's personnel and budget, they provide unequal
13 return on investment for the nation's defense.

14 SOCOM exists because of this Congress' resolve to
15 ensure the United States has unmatched special operations
16 forces, and you do. And if confirmed, I will work closely
17 with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special
18 Operations Low-Intensity Conflict, the Chairman, the
19 Secretary of Defense, and this committee to continue
20 recruiting, training, equipping, and caring for these
21 unrivaled SOF professionals and their families. In doing
22 so, I will always provide the President and the Secretary of
23 Defense with candid military advice while being open and
24 transparent with this Congress.

25 I thank this committee once again for your time today,

1 for what you do for our military, SOCOM, and our nation, and
2 I look forward to answering your questions.

3 [The prepared statement of General Fenton follows:]

4 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General Fenton.

2 Since a quorum is now present I ask the Committee to
3 consider the list of 3,032 pending military nominations.
4 All of these nominations have been before the committee the
5 required length of time.

6 Is there a motion to favorably report this list of
7 3,032 pending military nominations to the Senate?

8 Senator Inhofe: So moved.

9 Chairman Reed: Is there a second?

10 Senator Fischer: Second.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you. All in favor, say aye.

12 [Chorus of ayes.]

13 Chairman Reed: The motion carries.

14 General Langley, please, your statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL LANGLEY TO BE
2 GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

3 General Langley: Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking
4 Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of this committee.
5 Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

6 It is a great honor to be the President's nominee to
7 lead USAFRICOM. I am grateful to the trust and confidence
8 extended by him, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of
9 the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Commandant of the Marine
10 Corps. I would also like to recognize the current
11 commander, General Townsend, and his wife, Melissa, for
12 their decades of selfless service to our nation.

13 As many nominees have said in testimony before me,
14 military families form the bedrock upon which our Joint
15 Force readiness stands. My family is no different. Joining
16 me today, from Fort Worth, Texas, are my father, Retired
17 U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Willie C. Langley, and my
18 stepmother, Ola Langley, who I affectionally refer to as
19 Two-Momma. My father dedicated 25 years to the defense of
20 our nation and my stepmother is a retired frontline
21 supervisor at our U.S. Post Office.

22 I am also accompanied by my sister, Sharon, from
23 Poughkeepsie, New York, and my sister, Cheryl, from Keller,
24 Texas.

25 My family is a personal example and continual

1 encouragement, have been a constant source of strength for
2 me. Without their support I would not be here today.

3 I would also like to take a moment to recognize my
4 colleague, Lieutenant Bryan Fenton and his wife, Dawn.
5 Simply put, there is no better choice to lead the
6 servicemembers and families of U.S. Special Operations
7 Command. If confirmed, I look forward to working with a
8 professional of his caliber to address the challenges and
9 opportunities in Africa.

10 Now the global security environment we are witnessing
11 today is the most challenging I have seen throughout my 37
12 years. The 53 nations within USAFRICOM area of
13 responsibility are not immune from the systemic effects of
14 ongoing global tensions, and there are many additional
15 transregional struggles unique to the continent. These
16 challenges cannot be solved by military power alone. They
17 require an integration of diplomatic efforts from Department
18 of State, development endeavors from USAID, and
19 comprehensive strategies from other allies and partners
20 operating in Africa. If confirmed, I will work with these
21 stakeholders in pursuit of common goals.

22 The command will continue to address the dual
23 challenges of strategic competition and violent extremism.
24 The People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation
25 continue to expand their access and influence across the

1 continent. Simultaneously, organizations such as al-
2 Shabaab, ISIS, al Qaeda, and JNIM expand their reach and
3 threaten American citizens and our interests. If confirmed,
4 I will campaign to address these issues and work with fellow
5 combatant commanders to ensure our plans are integrated
6 across the globe.

7 I pledge to be forthright with this committee in regard
8 to resourcing our strategies and articulate to you the
9 attendant risks. I am enthusiastic to engage across the
10 whole government to faithfully execute the policies and
11 orders of the President and the Secretary of Defense while
12 being transparent with timely, to this body and other
13 oversight committees, regarding the resources and posture
14 required to do so.

15 Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished
16 members of this committee, it is an honor to sit before you
17 today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

18 [The prepared statement of General Langley follows:]

19 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General Langley
2 and General Fenton.

3 Before we begin the questioning I have a series of
4 standard questions which nominees must address. You may
5 respond in unison.

6 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations
7 governing conflicts of interest?

8 General Fenton: I have.

9 General Langley: Yes.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Have you assumed any duties
11 or taken any actions that would appear to presume the
12 outcome of the confirmation process?

13 General Fenton: No, Senator.

14 General Langley: No, sir.

15 Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and
16 oversight responsibilities makes it important that this
17 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate
18 committees of the Congress receive testimonies, briefings,
19 reports, records, and other information from the Executive
20 branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to
21 appear and testify before this committee, when requested?

22 General Fenton: I will, Senator.

23 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Do you agree, when asked
25 before this committee, to give your personal views, even if

1 your views differ from the Administration?

2 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

3 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

4 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,
5 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
6 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
7 other appropriate committees of Congress and to consult with
8 the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith delay
9 or denial in providing such records?

10 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

11 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

12 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff
13 complies the deadlines established by this committee for the
14 production of reports, records, and other information,
15 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
16 record?

17 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

18 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

19 Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate in providing
20 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional request?

21 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

22 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

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

25 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

1 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Now let me
3 proceed to my questions.

4 First of all, General Langley, let me thank you for
5 your thoughtful opening statement, and we all concur, along
6 with General Fenton, that your families are probably the
7 reason you are here and the reason you will do a superb job
8 in place.

9 Lieutenant General Langley, you have experience in
10 Somalia in various periods of your career. As a tactical
11 level as young captain you deployed in support of the
12 peacekeeping forces in 1992, and at the operations and
13 strategic level as the Commander of Marine Forces Africa.
14 As we start reintroducing our forces into Somalia and
15 rebuild our advisory relationships can you give us an idea
16 of how your experience will help inform your views?

17 General Langley: Yes, Senator. I know what is most
18 effective, just from my experience, whether in Afghanistan
19 or in capacity with the ANDSF or, as you said, Senator, all
20 the way back to 1992, when we went for Restore Hope and we
21 had to engage with multiple countries that came in to assist
22 Somalia at that time. It takes a whole-government approach,
23 but at the tactical level, to build partnership capacity
24 resonates. There were assurance actions that happened by
25 our military forces and our allies, we built capital, and it

1 is the best thing that will thwart the great power
2 competition that is coming with these false value
3 propositions and offerings across the continent of Africa.

4 I think we get it, by, with, and through, we get it
5 with a whole-government approach, and within the Department
6 of Defense we have a lot of mechanisms in which to build on
7 that capital, whether it be through the State Partnership
8 Program or whether it be through USAID doing development, or
9 IMET programs for educational and training of those that
10 have like-minded and the same values that we have here in
11 the United States. That is effective, Chairman, and I think
12 it is effective today.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General Langley.

14 General Fenton, as I mentioned in my opening statement
15 we have, over the last several years, been trying to
16 establish a relationship where the ASD SO/LIC is the
17 service-like Secretary for SOCOM. We think SOCOM needs a
18 civilian voice the same way other elements in the Defense
19 Department do.

20 What is your thought about this, and are you prepared
21 to work closely with the SO/LIC to accomplish this
22 objective?

23 General Fenton: Senator, I am prepared to work closely
24 with ASD SO/LIC, if confirmed in this role. The civilian
25 oversight and advocacy that ASD SO/LIC, in this case

1 Secretary Maier provides is critical, in the service-like
2 Secretary role a voice for, as I understand it, from my
3 perspective but I have seen it, for the man training and
4 equipment pieces of SOCOM that are so vitally important. I
5 will also have an opportunity to be an advocate into the
6 Department and to this Congress on behalf of SOCOM. It
7 makes us a better team, and I am committed to that
8 relationship.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

10 General Langley, one of the areas you outlined in your
11 testimony was the Gulf of Guinea, incidents of piracy and
12 illegal, unregulated fishing. AFRICOM has been working
13 closely with the Coast Guard to build maritime security
14 awareness. What are your thoughts about the maritime
15 security challenges in Africa?

16 General Langley: Chairman, there are many, but a lot
17 of these issues were addressed this week. Chairman, when I
18 had MARFORAF in 2020 and 2021, most of my efforts from that
19 position was to get the Naval Infantry Leaders Conference
20 going. Of course, we were covered with COVID so we had to
21 do it virtually. But I engaged with Admiral Wade out of
22 Senegal, and we had to push it off, but yesterday -- excuse
23 me, two weeks ago -- they made it a reality. We had many
24 countries there. We had 17 African countries -- excuse me,
25 Chairman, 27. Brazil was there and also, as we were there,

1 we had 7 European countries.

2 So maritime domain, as we see China trying to encroach
3 upon Equatorial Guinea and all across that channel writ
4 large, these countries stated a vision. The Maritime
5 Exclusion Zone, a lot of African countries do not have the
6 propensity to go out that far, but I think working with
7 other countries I think we set the bar, and that is going to
8 be the biggest deterrent or assurance actions, as I
9 mentioned, that is going to deter China from trying to take
10 over the west coast of the African continent.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Thank you for
12 your foresight as the Marine Corps Commander in Africa. I
13 appreciate that very much.

14 Just quickly, General Fenton, I mentioned in my opening
15 remarks the issue of casualties. This has a particular
16 impact in terms of special forces operations because many
17 times your operators have to make instantaneous decisions
18 with limited information. Any sense that you have of what
19 you can do to improve the transparency reporting to the
20 Department of Defense?

21 General Fenton: Chairman, thank you for that. First I
22 would start with it is a moral and strategic imperative, for
23 your special ops forces and for our military, to avoid
24 civilian casualties. Currently, having incorporated the
25 Secretary's guidance, refined our tactics, techniques, and

1 procedures, Secretary Austin's guidance, we are now aligned
2 with and in concert with the effort inside the Department on
3 the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan, and
4 certainly as that goes forward adding our intellectual
5 energy and expertise to that.

6 I would just end with we take it as a moral and
7 strategic obligation, Senator, to avoid civilian casualties
8 and do all that we can, even in the friction and fog of war.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Senator Inhofe,
10 please.

11 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I
12 mentioned in my opening statement, and to both of you in my
13 office, I understand DoD is considering plans that would
14 downgrade support to AFRICOM. And they are still kind of
15 pursuing this and seeing the nature of this downgrade that
16 is rumored.

17 Let me say again that I would strongly oppose this.
18 AFRICOM needs more resources, not less. So I ask both of
19 you to respond, if confirmed, will you both commit to assess
20 DoD's resourcing plans for AFRICOM and make sure that it has
21 the support that it needs?

22 General Fenton: Senator, I will.

23 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

24 Senator Inhofe: And will you report back to this
25 committee on those efforts?

1 General Fenton: Senator, I will.

2 General Langley: Yes.

3 Senator Inhofe: In Western Sahara, General Langley, as
4 I mentioned in my office, I am deeply concerned about the
5 plight of the people of Western Sahara. For more than five
6 decades the Sahrawi people have been subjected to repeated
7 broken promises and vicious attacks by the Moroccan
8 government. Morocco has done nothing to repair the damage
9 that they have done to the Sahrawi people after all these
10 years, and they have done nothing to show they are serious
11 about resolving the crisis. Instead, this have misled
12 multiple American administrations on their willingness to
13 negotiate, or I would say unwillingness to negotiate, a
14 mutually agreeable outcome to that issue.

15 And that is why I have spoken to Senator Rounds and
16 other members of this committee on this issue and why I have
17 pushed DoD to look at the alternative locations for the
18 annual African Lion military exercise that has been hosted
19 in Morocco previously. And I am pleased that Secretary
20 Austin is in agreement with me on this issue. And so I
21 would ask each one of you to respond as to whether or not
22 you are also in agreement.

23 General Fenton: Yes, Senator.

24 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

25 Senator Inhofe: Okay. Thank you very much.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

2 Now let me recognize Senator King, please.

3 Senator King: General Langley, thank you very much. I
4 am going to begin my questioning with an unconventional
5 suggestion. I would suggest that you plan before deploying,
6 assuming you are confirmed, to spend several hours with
7 Senator Inhofe. There is no member of the United States
8 Congress who knows as much about the people and politics of
9 Africa as Senator Inhofe does, and he is a wealth of
10 knowledge and information, and I think it would be very
11 profitable for you to partake of his wisdom and experience.
12 I hope you will do so.

13 General Langley: Yes, Senator.

14 Senator King: General Langley, I am concerned that in
15 the current world situation we are taking our eye off the
16 terrorist threat, and it is certainly extremely serious in
17 Africa -- Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, al Qaeda. Please share
18 with me your thoughts on that, because it is so easy in the
19 time of Ukraine and the China challenge to sort of move the
20 focus away from terrorism. But these people are still
21 there, they are still hostile to this country, and I think
22 they are still a threat to this country.

23 General Langley: Senator, I fully concur with that
24 assessment. As MARFORAF, leaving there in late 2021, it was
25 already a concern. The atmosphere on the ground, as you

1 look in the east, Al-Shabaab was really starting to take
2 control, and Hassan was incapable of holding. As a matter
3 of fact, they regressed.

4 But the most focus we should put on is the
5 metastasizing of the spread across the Sahel and also into
6 the Lake Chad region. Other elements, Boko Haram was taken
7 by some of the ISIS units that spring down from North
8 Africa, and then we have JNIM as well.

9 So it is more of a problem today. That is my
10 assessment, but I am privy to this because in my current
11 job, force generation of these units, whether it be FAST
12 teams or whether it be the MEUs that are generated out of
13 the east coast, we have to address this and we have to train
14 to those standards of combat and violent extremist
15 organizations.

16 So, sir, it is a concern, Senator, and we need to be
17 able to address it through a whole-government approach but
18 also a whole-allies approach and a partnership in these
19 various regions.

20 Senator King: I think part of your role is going to be
21 to continue to sound the alarm, to not allow the focus of
22 the Defense Department or the Administration to completely
23 ignore this threat. And you are going to be on the front
24 lines of confronting it and understanding it. So I hope you
25 will be noisy about the threat that you see.

1 Mali is an example where the military coup has sort of
2 opened the way for the Russians, also to some extent to
3 terrorist organizations. I was aware of the Chinese efforts
4 in various parts of Africa, but Russia is taking a very
5 active role as well. Isn't that correct?

6 General Langley: Sir, that is correct. The Wagner
7 Group, they have ill intentions. Their methods are more a
8 political military, but issuing weapons or selling of
9 weapons, it just brings on fragility, especially across
10 fragile countries.

11 So that is why we still, all the capital, we are still
12 the partner of choice. So if confirmed, we will re-engage.
13 We will reset, as General Townsend is already relooking at
14 West Africa at this time.

15 Senator King: Finally, my impression from working with
16 prior AFRICOM commanders is that the AFRICOM commander has
17 an important de facto diplomatic role in terms of dealing
18 with these countries, representing the United States, not in
19 substitution for the Department of State but in addition to.
20 And on that line I believe one of our most valuable programs
21 in terms of return on investment is the military training
22 program, the program whereby we bring officers from other
23 countries here and also do training abroad. It enables us
24 to inculcate our values, to some extent, but also the skills
25 and knowledge that we have to work with these younger

1 officers who may well turn out to be the leaders of their
2 countries.

3 General Langley: Absolutely, sir. I concur. I mean,
4 across my 37 years in the Marine Corps, and going to various
5 schools, from TBS to Amphibious Warfare School, all the way
6 to the Army War College and the Navy War College, we had our
7 partners there from various countries. And a lot of them,
8 if you do statistics, a number of them went to U.S. schools
9 and ended up being Chiefs of Defense or Ministries of
10 Defense.

11 Senator King: Thank you, General, and General Fenton.
12 I look forward to working with both of you. Congratulations
13 on your appointments. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

15 Let me recognize Senator Fisher, please.

16 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,
17 gentlemen, for being here with us today.

18 General Fenton, what do you think are the most
19 significant challenges to carry out counterterrorism
20 missions in Afghanistan and how do you think SOCOM can best
21 approach those challenges?

22 General Fenton: Senator, first of all thank you for
23 the session the other day. I appreciated your time.

24 I think the challenge, as has been discussed previously
25 with General Kurilla in his testimony is the access into

1 Afghanistan. My perspective, as I shared with you, Senator,
2 earlier, is that is a challenge and it is harder but it is
3 absolutely doable there. And if we think about greater
4 issues of over-the-horizon counterterrorism ops it is
5 absolutely doable for the SOCOM team.

6 The challenges could be based on environment, could be
7 based on distance, and in many ways are addressed via the
8 number of intelligence disciplines, partners, and allies,
9 and the interagency team. The SOF team is one part of
10 addressing that challenge, certainly along with the CENTCOM
11 team, as we address sensing, illuminating, and making sure
12 that the ISIS threat in Afghanistan does not present a
13 challenge to the homeland.

14 Senator Fischer: Would you agree with the current
15 SOCOM Commander, General Clarke, that without sustained CT
16 pressure, which I do not believe we are seeing currently, we
17 are going to continue to see terrorist groups that are more
18 able to focus on planning and preparing for external
19 attacks?

20 General Fenton: Senator, I would agree with that.
21 Aligned with the National Defense Strategy, that as China is
22 the pacing challenge and Russia is the acute threat, it
23 tells us to still account for persistent threats of
24 counterterrorism, VEOs, and other malign actors, Iran and
25 North Korea.

1 So my perspective is absolutely we have to keep the
2 pressure on, account for that -- that is a threat to the
3 homeland -- and do it via all the means we have available,
4 should I be confirmed, in SOCOM, with interagency partners,
5 our whole-of-government, and partners and allies that we
6 have developed during our last 20 years, and certainly will
7 carry forward.

8 Senator Fischer: In light of the priorities that are
9 laid out in the NDS, how is SOCOM balancing its investments
10 to operate against near-peer competitors like China and
11 Russia with efforts to fulfill its global counterterrorism
12 requirements, and just how much risk are you willing to
13 accept?

14 General Fenton: Senator, in my current position I am
15 not sure I have the fullest insights of how SOCOM is doing
16 that accountability, and if confirmed, I certainly would
17 have that discussion with the SOCOM team, the combatant
18 commands, the interagency.

19 But I can tell you from previous experience, my time in
20 INDOPACOM as Special Operations Command, Pacific Commander,
21 I was competing in that theater with the Chinese in terms of
22 relationships, military engagements, and a point we were the
23 point, and we are, as I still understand it, the force of
24 choice. The SOF team is the force of choice out there --

25 Senator Fischer: Right.

1 General Fenton: -- while the CT fight was going on in
2 Syria. So I think that we must account for CT, as I
3 mentioned, per the NDS, and we can with a whole-of-
4 interagency and partners and allies team, while addressing
5 the China-Russia challenge through the COCOMs, with
6 asymmetric options and multiple dilemmas for China and
7 Russia.

8 Senator Fischer: With your experience in INDOPACOM I
9 think you would be a good resource to answer this question.
10 Do you anticipate the need to realign or rebalance special
11 operation forces to better support that region?

12 General Fenton: Senator, if confirmed, I would like to
13 take a deeper look into that through the SOCOM enterprise.
14 My recognition, from time in INDOPACOM, 5 1/2 years, is that
15 we were competing then while we did counterterrorism
16 mission, there and globally. But my sense is I would have
17 to look at that through the SOCOM lens.

18 Senator Fischer: Okay. And what capability areas do
19 you believe should SOCOM be able to focus its investments
20 over the next 3 years so that we really can increase its
21 relevance but also its effectiveness when we look at these
22 near-peer competitors, when we look at being in Indo-Pacific
23 and increasing our presence there while also being able to
24 maintain the needs we have for SOCOM across many areas,
25 especially now with the focus on Russia again?

1 General Fenton: Senator, I would start with
2 capabilities that will enable us and advantage us in
3 contested environments, that I sense and I see right now
4 will be part of the environment as we go forward. They may
5 look like manned and unmanned systems, artificial
6 intelligence, and certainly leveraging technology to give us
7 an advantage. But if confirmed, I would like to look at
8 that more fully through the SOCOM team.

9 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir.

10 General Fenton: Thank you, Senator.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

13 Senator Shaheen, please.

14 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Congratulations to both
15 of you and your families on your nominations, and thank you
16 for your willingness to continue to serve this country.

17 I want to start with a question for both of you because
18 as we have seen in Ukraine information warfare has become
19 more and more an aspect of modern conflict, and I think we
20 are not doing as good a job as we need to do in order to
21 compete with Russia and China in this new world.

22 So can you talk about what could be done to make it
23 easier on the ground for Special Operations Forces, for
24 forces in Africa, to be part of that information warfare and
25 how you see policymakers and the State Department, other

1 actors in the information warfare space being able to better
2 coordinate with you all as commanders to respond to the
3 challenges that we are seeing?

4 General Fenton, do you want to go first?

5 General Fenton: Senator, thank you. Yes. Information
6 operations is a domain that we absolutely have to be a part
7 of. It is extremely key in terms of understanding an
8 environment, shaping an environment, amplifying voices in an
9 environment, and certainly taking on misinformation and
10 disinformation. From my experience and in my current
11 position, that has been key terrain for us to be a part of.

12 My sense, as I have experienced this through many
13 years, is the speed of relevance continues to be a
14 challenge. Getting it in a timely manner to the proper
15 audiences, to have certainly the intended outcomes, that
16 would come first of mind for me.

17 But having limited visibility in the entirety of the
18 SOCOM team I would like to take that and certainly have a
19 discussion with the SOCOM interagency teammates and come
20 back to you through the Department, Senator.

21 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. I look forward to that.
22 General Langley?

23 General Langley: Senator, I agree with my esteemed
24 colleague. Information, in today's characterization of
25 competition or even conflict, information is ubiquitous.

1 Given that, our adversaries are putting out malign and
2 disinformation, and they do that at what General Fenton
3 said, they do it at the speed of relevance.

4 Across our department we are looking at ways how we can
5 speed that up so commanders can have on-the-ground
6 information and be able to respond. When I was in CENTCOM,
7 the CENTCOM commander always pushed me, as a J-5 that had
8 some of the MISO, or the information across the networks at
9 our disposal to counter what the adversaries were trying to
10 do to us, and we had to operate at the speed of relevance.
11 So we had to engage the Department of Defense in trying to
12 increase our authorities for, as you say, Senator, the
13 serviceman and woman on the ground that needs that
14 information.

15 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. And General Langley,
16 Senator King talked about how often the head of AFRICOM is
17 also a diplomat in Africa, and especially as we look at
18 China's expansionist efforts across the continent of Africa
19 where they are making investments that are really a threat
20 to our assets and security there.

21 Can you talk about how you see AFRICOM being able to
22 work to use soft power to help influence what happens on the
23 ground in Africa, things like humanitarian relief and
24 support for our regional partners?

25 General Langley: Yes, Senator. As MARFORAF, as I

1 worked with the J-5 at AFRICOM, because General Townsend
2 tasked all the components to get together and come up with a
3 theater campaign plan, that put together all the efforts of
4 the whole-of-government approach. As USAID, as we look at
5 the Fragility Act of 2019 and start to implement that, as we
6 look at Prosper Africa, where that program, with already 17
7 departments and agencies across the U.S. government are
8 willing to help, and also to thwart some of the Belt and
9 Road Initiatives of the Digital 3. So all, collectively, in
10 aggregation, those programs will be enough to counter great
11 power competition.

12 Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.
13 Chairman.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

15 Senator Cotton, please.

16 Senator Cotton: Gentlemen, thank you for your career
17 of service and thank you for answering the call of duty once
18 more. Thank you to your families for their support over
19 these many years.

20 General Fenton, what do you see as the Special
21 Operations Forces' role in countering China?

22 General Fenton: Senator, from my perspective of 5 1/2
23 in INDOPACOM, seeing it through the eyes of the Army
24 component, Special Ops component, and as they Deputy
25 Commander component, I would start with the role is, in

1 concert with the COCOMs, developing asymmetric, scalable
2 options for the COCOMs via our special operators' placement,
3 access, and influence, presenting multiple dilemmas to the
4 Chinese, in this case, in INDOPACOM, and also developing and
5 strengthening the partner and ally piece that is a
6 comparative and competitive advantage for this nation.

7 Senator Cotton: Okay. I think probably most
8 Americans, if they are not familiar with the military or
9 have not served in it, and those who do, they think of
10 Special Operations Forces and what they saw in movies like
11 Black Hawk Down or Zero Dark Thirty. I assume that is not
12 what it would look like, or Special Operations' roles
13 countering a major nation state like China would not look
14 like those kinds of missions. Is that correct?

15 General Fenton: Senator, they would look like small
16 teams in countries throughout the region, in concert,
17 certainly, with the INDOPACOM commander's direction and in
18 concert with Special Operations Command Pacific that speak
19 the language, are culturally attuned, have been aligned
20 against that region for many years, and actually in many
21 ways have grown up in the formations of those partner
22 nations, developing, train, advise, and assist plans,
23 training, advising, and assisting, presenting options both
24 to the country and to the INDOPACOM commander, and dilemmas
25 for China, all the while also being ready to present options

1 in the event that the Joint Force required them, full range,
2 if there was conflict.

3 Senator Cotton: Right now we have a war going on
4 between two nation states, Russia and Ukraine. What lessons
5 do you think we can take away about the role of Special
6 Operations from that conflict?

7 General Fenton: Senator, from my current position
8 these are the roles I certainly have taken away. I think
9 first is the investment early. In 2014, in Ukraine, the
10 training with the Special Operations element in concert with
11 the EUCOM commander's direction, train, advise, and assist,
12 training on resistance, training on unconventional warfare,
13 investments in technology that I think are now being seen in
14 the asymmetric, atypical way Ukraine is blunting the Russian
15 invasion.

16 The second would be the power of partners and allies.
17 What we see with NATO, the galvanizing of that and others
18 that have come in a very close way to provide, whether it be
19 military assistance, train, advise, and assistance, and
20 entirety in the world show an aggressor what the
21 international rules-based order will not tolerate.

22 Invest early, the partner of power and allies, and then
23 I would close, Senator, with what a combat-credible force
24 looks like. These forces that are there have seen combat,
25 the forces we have trained as SOF that are actually in

1 Ukraine now, other nations, they have had combat. And I
2 think it is easy for some nations to look and just train and
3 believe that they know what it is to be in combat. It is
4 one thing to practice; it is another thing to have been in
5 the game. And the U.S. and partners have been in the game.

6 Senator Cotton: All right. Thank you. I want to ask
7 you a question about recruiting. I know it is not exactly
8 in your lane, but obviously you just talked about the health
9 and credibility of the force. I am very concerned about the
10 recruiting shortfalls in the military, in particular in the
11 Army, and the lowering of standards for new potential
12 recruits.

13 Can you commit to within your power in this new role to
14 not lowering recruiting and accession standards for our
15 Special Operations Forces?

16 General Fenton: Senator, the Special Operations
17 community comes into Special Operations for those standards.
18 They, in many ways, exceed and push us on those. That force
19 has shown incredible outcomes over the last 20 years and
20 well before. I can commit to you to maintain those
21 standards, for sure, to keep the force that has done this
22 great work, not only 20 years but before, ready for the
23 challenges ahead.

24 Senator Cotton: Good. Thank you. I think this
25 committee is going to need to look into this matter. I

1 think some of the decisions, for example, the Army has made,
2 you know, about temporarily saying they were going to
3 suspend the GED requirement or letting people with face and
4 neck tattoos come in the Army when they are not letting
5 Captain America, who is the quarterback of his football
6 team, that got a concussion or got his knee torn up, but
7 went on to play two All-State seasons, is just absurd, and
8 it deserves some real oversight here.

9 One question for you, General Langley. Djibouti, we
10 have a very important base there, not just for
11 counterterrorism purposes but it sits at the mouth of the
12 Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. It is one of the key chokepoints of
13 the world. Lo and behold, the Chinese just opened up a base
14 down the street. What is your understanding of their
15 current capabilities at that base and why they have it
16 there?

17 General Langley: Senator, they have it there because
18 probably in the future they want to have the ability to be
19 able to effect the free flow of commerce that affects our
20 global economy. That is a strategic chokepoint that needs
21 to be remain free for freedom of navigation of commerce.
22 That is a strategic point that we need to be really
23 concerned about.

24 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

1 Senator Blumenthal, please.

2 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank
3 you both for your service to our country and thank you to
4 your families as well.

5 I recently visited with President Zelensky in Ukraine
6 just about 2 weeks ago to the day, as well as his top
7 military leadership. I came back convinced that Ukraine can
8 win this fight, and when I say "win" I mean push back the
9 Russians in their brutal, inhumane assault on the people of
10 Ukraine. Their fighters are fierce, relentless, and driven
11 to win this fight, even in taking back some of the occupied
12 territory. To do so they are going to have to mount an
13 insurgency campaign involving special operations, and their
14 fighters really need the kind of training that our special
15 operators can provide. Would you agree with me, Lieutenant
16 General Fenton, that our special operators have a role to
17 play in training the Ukrainian military in that kind of
18 insurgent, special operations that can be done behind the
19 lines against the Russians?

20 General Fenton: Senator, I would agree that that type
21 of training is the hallmark of your special operations team.
22 We were, in the 1950s, born for this type of work and have
23 carried it forward even during the VEO fight of the last 20
24 years. Unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense
25 missions like that are the hallmark of training that your

1 special ops team knows very well. It has also, since 2014
2 and before the invasion, been able to deal with the
3 Ukrainians in a very robust way, and is doing outside now,
4 and as we still continue to train along with certainly the
5 greater EUCOM team.

6 Senator Blumenthal: I think that training is very
7 important and it is being done outside the country, as you
8 point out quite correctly and importantly, not within
9 Ukraine, which is important to keep the boundaries on our
10 involvement and the risks that we incur there. But I hope
11 that our role will be increasingly robust in training those
12 Ukrainian fighters who can do that kind of unconventional
13 warfare against the Russians, because I think in the long
14 term it will be critical, along with our additional military
15 aid, whether it is artillery or air defense, and
16 humanitarian assistance and stronger economic sanctions.

17 I would like to ask you both about the Wagner Group and
18 other private military companies which pose a threat in
19 Ukraine as well as elsewhere. As you know, they are often
20 funded by Russian oligarchs, principally Yvgeney Prigozhin,
21 I think has been identified as one of them. They are
22 responsible for some of the atrocities that have been
23 committed in Ukraine, perhaps in Africa as well.

24 Perhaps beginning with you, General Fenton, could you
25 comment on the threat that these private military companies

1 like the Wagner Group pose to American interests?

2 General Fenton: Senator, the Wagner Group and groups
3 like that, that receive certainly Russian money and
4 oversight and direction, proxies of the Russians, they
5 spread Russian aggression. They are ill-disciplined. They
6 go into countries, in my experience, as I have seen them,
7 and actually do them harm. As the Russians they are acute
8 threats, as we have seen them in Africa and certainly in
9 Ukraine, ill-trained, ill-disciplined, and frankly, in many
10 ways, a picture of what the Russians would like to use in
11 their way of warfare that, as proxies, usually ends up
12 extremely hurtful to a country that I have seen them in and,
13 in many ways, an effort by the Russians to expand their
14 influence, that is in need of us sensing, illuminating, and
15 ensuring we keep our eye on.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Pretty vicious and brutal.

17 General Fenton: Vicious and brutal.

18 Senator Blumenthal: General Langley?

19 General Langley: Senator, the Wagner Group, they
20 exacerbate instability, especially with developing
21 countries, and they stoke conflict, and on the continent of
22 Africa, from my professional viewpoint, that just spells
23 trouble for the overall stability and security across the
24 continent.

25 Senator Blumenthal: My time has expired. I thank you

1 both for your very informative answers. I look forward to
2 supporting you strongly. Thank you.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

4 Senator Rounds, please.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you
6 to both of you for your service to our country, and to your
7 families for their solid support as well.

8 General Fenton, thank you for meeting with me
9 yesterday. I would like to echo Senator Inhofe's concerns
10 regarding the potential combination of EUCOM and AFRICOM
11 TSOCs. I do believe that this would result in a situation
12 where, once again, AFRICOM would come up short at a time in
13 which our near-peer adversaries will be putting more assets
14 in, and we are going to find ourselves in a very
15 uncomfortable position. And thank you for your commitment
16 to follow up on that and to let us know what your thoughts
17 are.

18 General Langley, thank you also for meeting with me and
19 once again for your recognition of the concerns about the
20 lack of assets sometimes within AFRICOM and the fact that we
21 cannot take our eyes off an entire continent simply because
22 we have refocused on near-peer competition elsewhere in the
23 world. So I thank you for that conversation, and I do look
24 forward to working with both of you.

25 General Langley, like Senator Inhofe I would also like

1 to highlight my concern for the people of the Western
2 Sahara, in the absence of a mutually acceptable resolution
3 to this issue after all of these years. While it will take
4 a whole-of-government approach to address the issue, AFRICOM
5 has an important role, particularly with regard to our
6 military relationships in the region. I look forward to
7 your assessment of this issue and continued dialogue with
8 you.

9 This could be a powder keg, and with other outside
10 interests priming the pump, should we not get this issue
11 resolved, it could be another one of those hotspots that
12 simply does not go away, and a little bit of attention right
13 now may go a long way, sir.

14 And I know that we talked about it in the office but I
15 would like your thoughts and commitment that you will follow
16 up with regard to the Western Sahara situation.

17 General Langley: Senator, I will follow up on this
18 serious issue. I know that the Department of Defense is
19 looking at it. I think it is time to see if Morocco has
20 made any progress.

21 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir.

22 General Fenton, I also share Senator King's concerns
23 about making sure that we retain the right balance of forces
24 in order to execute counterterrorism operations. We cannot
25 assume the risk of doing so via over-the-horizon

1 capabilities only. What are your thoughts on this issue and
2 the fair balance or recognition that the over-the-horizon
3 capabilities, while great, they are not a replacement for
4 other types that we currently have in place?

5 General Fenton: Senator, with regard to the balance of
6 counterterrorism activities and the pacing challenge of
7 China and the acute threat of Russia, I start with the
8 National Defense Strategy and the guides from the
9 Department. The focus is China is the pacing challenge
10 based on its growing military capability, its economic
11 capability, and its desires to displace the U.S. in the
12 international rules-based order as the focus, followed by
13 Russia as the acute threat.

14 In that sense, the counterterrorism mission and VEOs
15 that still threaten the homeland we address a number of
16 ways. The Special Operations team is currently very focused
17 on that mission while it is also competing with China and
18 Russia. We are part of an interagency team and whole-of-
19 government team that does the counterterrorism mission. And
20 I think when we add the partners and allies in there,
21 Senator, my sense is as we go forward to the future we will
22 work to an enduring, sustainable counterterrorism posture
23 that is sensing, illuminating, and preventing threats to the
24 homeland as we address China and Russia as the primary
25 focuses for the department.

1 On the over-the-horizon CT question, it is challenging,
2 depending on the location and geographic environment, but it
3 is absolutely doable. Secretary Austin has said we can
4 sense, illuminate, and take action -- it could be a kinetic
5 strike. It could be a raid -- anywhere in the world.

6 We also have, over the years, developed fusion cells
7 and partners that look at this effort and take action -- law
8 enforcement action, fiscal action -- to degrade and disrupt
9 these terror networks.

10 So my sense is, Senator, on the balance question,
11 again, we have done it, we can do it, and we must do it as
12 we go forward in the future, CT, like the pacing challenge
13 of China and the acute threat of Russia.

14 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir, and thank you to both
15 of you for your service. And once again, I do look forward
16 to supporting both of you and your nominations. Thank you.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.
18 Senator Kaine, please.

19 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to both of
20 our nominees my best to you. You are wonderful public
21 servants. You will do good work in these roles. I
22 appreciate your sacrifice, the sacrifice of your families.

23 General Fenton, I want to follow up on an item that
24 Senator Cotton was talking about, which was sort of
25 recruitment. We have had a lot of testimony in this

1 committee, most recently in May from General McConville,
2 about the recruiting challenges faced by each of our
3 services. There are about 32 million Americans, age 17 to
4 24, today. Nine million of those meet initial entry
5 requirements, but less than 500,000 also meet the academic
6 and lifestyle criteria. So even after these reductions the
7 potential recruiting pool is one where the military has got
8 to compete with private sector and other institutions,
9 companies that are really hungry for good talent.

10 The Special Operations community has its own set of
11 standards. Senator Cotton was trying to get your assurance
12 that those would not be degraded. But I was actually more
13 interested in what is the current kind of recruiting issues
14 on the Special Operations side. Are we doing pretty well or
15 do we have challenges? Talk a little bit about that with
16 the committee if you would.

17 General Fenton: Thank you, Senator. Thank you for
18 that. I will start, certainly, with the understanding that
19 as you have outlined our services are having a recruiting
20 challenge. Numbers of factors play into that, that I am
21 sure here you are all familiar with. If confirmed, SOCOM is
22 a recipient of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine teammates, a
23 grateful recipient, as they come into our pipelines. What I
24 would like to do is, if confirmed, examine with the SOCOM
25 team first how are we doing in recruiting. From my current

1 position, Senator, and I certainly have a very mature force,
2 we are not having some of the challenges that I hear about.
3 But at the greater SOCOM level my sense is I need to
4 understand if we are, and frankly, if we have best business
5 practices, things that we have inside the formation that can
6 assist the services, that we could trade back and forth, as
7 they have best business practices as well, for all of us to
8 help in this challenge.

9 And we would want young men and women who want to serve
10 and meet the standards, either in initial recruitment and
11 certainly in the Special Ops community, to be here with us.
12 And if there are things in the SOCOM enterprise, again, I am
13 not fully informed on all of those, and if confirmed, I
14 would look into it, that we are doing well, I would like to
15 share those. And if there are things the services are doing
16 well I certainly would like to absorb those.

17 This is a team sport, about bringing in the national
18 treasure, the men and women of this country that want to
19 serve and can meet our standards to be part of our
20 formation.

21 Senator Kaine: General Fenton, one thing I will
22 encourage you on is that SOCOM has traditionally been
23 significantly less diverse than the military as a whole, and
24 that may speak to recruiting issues in communities that have
25 not necessarily been connected with SOCOM, are not really

1 aware of opportunities in SOCOM. So there may be
2 affirmative ways to get information out to communities that
3 have not traditionally been represented that will drum up
4 more interest and excitement about serving in this
5 particular branch of the military, and I would encourage you
6 in that way.

7 General Langley, I want to circle back to questions
8 that have been asked about sort of Russia in Africa. One of
9 my colleagues asked about the Wagner Group. The French are
10 pulling their military out of Mali, and that is going to
11 leave a vacuum now. Some of the French forces that are
12 coming out of Mali will go into Niger, where they will be
13 able to work in tandem with the U.S., so that is not all bad
14 for U.S. forces. But when vacuums are left and bad actors
15 fill the vacuums, and we are seeing that in Mali.

16 I am also on the Foreign Relations Committee and have
17 been doing a lot of work in the diplomacy surrounding
18 Russia's war in Ukraine. And one of the things that we
19 notice is recently, June 3rd, the African Union president,
20 who is also the president of Senegal, met with Vladimir
21 Putin and then came out of the meeting criticizing U.S.
22 sanctions for creating hunger issues in Africa. It is not
23 U.S. sanctions that are creating hunger issues. It is an
24 illegal war against a country that has been a breadbasket
25 for African countries.

1 So when we see African nations adopting the Russian
2 disinformation line and we see groups like the Wagner Group
3 coming in to fill vacuums left by others it causes some
4 significant concern. I think it was Senator King that
5 pointed out that the AFRICOM commander is also a bit of a
6 diplomat. And so I think there is significant work to be
7 done in telling the right story about this illegal invasion
8 of Ukraine and sharing how that is creating real misery and
9 hunger in Africa, and it pains to me African leaders sort of
10 accepting Russian disinformation about what is causing this
11 kind of epidemic of hunger in Africa rather than recognizing
12 that this illegal invasion is.

13 So, if you would, in my last -- actually, I am already
14 over time. Maybe I should just say I would love it if you
15 would just really commit to being that kind of diplomat that
16 might help the U.S. do a better job in winning the narrative
17 war. We do not have to spin anybody. It is just a matter
18 of, you know, making the truth more persuasive than
19 disinformation.

20 General Langley: Senator, I concur, and if confirmed,
21 that will be my top priority, sir.

22 Senator Kaine: Excellent. Thank you. Thanks, Mr.
23 Chair.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine.

25 Senator Ernst, please.

1 Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. General
2 Fenton and General Langley, thank you very much for your
3 service and for the service and support of your family
4 members as well. And as they are closing out their time in
5 command, my best wishes as well to General and Suzanne
6 Clarke and General and Melissa Townsend.

7 I look forward to having a good discussion with you
8 this morning. We have heard a lot of interesting comments
9 and thoughts coming from both of you. General Langley, I
10 will start with you, please, sir.

11 Violent extremist organizations like al Qaeda and ISIS
12 and their offshoots are really spreading through the
13 continent of Africa and really making their presence known
14 with the region. General Townsend had said a while back
15 that al-Shabaab is, quote, "the largest and most kinetically
16 active al Qaeda network in the world," end quote.

17 So what would be your policy towards countering and
18 containing these various VEO groups, and how do we protect,
19 then, our U.S. interests in the region?

20 General Langley: Senator, that is going to be my top
21 priority, addressing this. I concur that al-Shabaab has
22 increased capacity, and this is the first ranking as far as
23 affecting U.S. interests and U.S. people. They have
24 aspirations for external operations, transnational
25 operations, so that is going to be a segue into, if

1 confirmed, I will need, as General Townsend asked, more ISR.

2 ISR is an active deterrent. ISR is the commander's
3 sense to make sense, and it underpins all activities. So,
4 Senator, that is just some of the assets and collectively
5 that we will need to be able to deter and keep al-Shabaab
6 from metastasizing anymore.

7 Senator Ernst: Thank you, sir, and I hope as a
8 committee we are able to support those needs with those
9 resources as well.

10 One other area I am interested in is the substantial
11 amount of strategic and critical mineral reserves that are
12 found in the continent. How can the United States leverage
13 our military alliances as well as whole-of-government in the
14 region to access these minerals?

15 General Langley: Senator, I am apprised of that, of
16 what our competitors are trying to do, their coercive
17 tactics of coming in and encroaching upon the continent of
18 Africa for minerals or rare earth minerals such as cobalt.
19 That is probably going to be the oil of the future. They
20 recognize that, but their predatory means of getting it is
21 going to take a whole-government approach. It is going to
22 have to take a whole-alliance approach to illuminate them,
23 and talk to our partners, engage with our partners to assure
24 that we are the partner of choice and that they are being
25 clearly exploited.

1 Senator Ernst: Thank you. Absolutely. We want to be
2 that partner of choice.

3 And General Fenton, as well, something that we have
4 discussed and I have discussed with many former commanders
5 of SOCOM is the Preservation of the Force and Family, and I
6 know that you are a firm supporter of this as well. That
7 first SOF truth, that humans are more important than
8 hardware, is very important to all of us.

9 Sir, how will you continue to ensure the growth of the
10 POTFF program?

11 General Fenton: Senator, to start, thank you for the
12 meeting the other day. I really appreciated the opportunity
13 to chat, and chat about this. I will also add thank you for
14 your support of this program, this committee's support of
15 this program. The POTFF program is an extremely important
16 part of the SOCOM fabric, this ability to look at our
17 servicemembers and their families through the physical, the
18 psychological, the cognitive, and the spiritual domains, and
19 address not only the challenges in the profession that we
20 are in but the personal and also the life challenges that
21 come to each and every one of us every day.

22 If confirmed, I would want to take what General Clarke
23 and the team have done, those 3 years, even further,
24 certainly through ensuring that folks in our formation
25 understand it is there, look at challenges that may exist

1 with regard to access, and maybe even understanding the
2 metrics and the data behind the program.

3 But I will offer, Senator, it is critical to this
4 formation. In a performance-based organization, this
5 program is a performance-based program that when added to
6 the service programs and others that wrap around it address
7 the whole dimension of the person. And as you mentioned,
8 human is more important than hardware, and in my current
9 position the history is indicative of where I may go, if
10 confirmed, in SOCOM. People are the number one priority,
11 our competitive and comparative advantage, and that hits
12 right at the heart of that. Thank you, Senator.

13 Senator Ernst: Absolutely, and gentlemen, thank you so
14 very much for your time and your continuing service to our
15 great United States of America, and I look forward to
16 supporting both of you in your confirmation process.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Ernst.
18 Senator Peters, are you prepared?

19 Senator Peters: I am, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Senator Peters, please.

21 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and great to
22 see the two of you here. Thank you for your service to our
23 country.

24 General Fenton, other combatant commanders have shared
25 with me their concerns that training opportunities with

1 partner nations can suffer due to a lack of host nation
2 training space or high-range usage at some of our major U.S.
3 installations. SOCOM is fundamentally integrated with our
4 partners, requires a wide range of training capabilities,
5 and often operates in clandestine environments.

6 My question for you is, do you think increasing SOCOM's
7 use of National Guard Training Centers, many of which are
8 well equipped yet are currently underutilized, can improve
9 mission readiness for the Special Operations community as
10 well as our foreign partners?

11 General Fenton: Senator, thank you for that question,
12 and I will start with thanking the National Guard and the
13 National Guard teams I have been associated with for many
14 years. My first Special Forces deployment was with 20th
15 Special Forces Group National Guard, and I have been
16 associated with 19th and 20th Groups in the Special Ops
17 community really ever since. I have been with them on
18 missions, watched the incredible work that they do, and we
19 are very grateful.

20 I would also add that during my time in INDOPACOM, in
21 many positions but certainly as the deputy commander, I saw
22 the power of the National Guard relationships in countries
23 throughout the region through the lens of the State
24 Partnership Program, extremely impactful as we watched our
25 National Guard teammates not only have a very strong

1 relationship but grow up with many of those forces, and in a
2 way that strengthens the bonds of partners and allies. So I
3 am very grateful to the entire National Guard team and to
4 what I saw in action.

5 Senator, to your training area question, if confirmed,
6 I would like to take a deeper look into that from the SOCOM
7 side, to ensure that I have most fulsome answer and I am not
8 missing any details. But I would like to take a look at
9 that, if confirmed.

10 Senator Peters: Great. Well, I would appreciate that,
11 General.

12 General, I have another question for you. India is
13 certainly a very vital partner for us in maintaining a free
14 and open Indo-Pacific. I think it is absolutely essential
15 that democracies like India and the United States work
16 together to combat the global spread of authoritarianism
17 emanating from countries like China.

18 My question for you is, assuming you share this world
19 view, which I believe you do, how will that philosophy guide
20 your efforts to bolster SOCOM's relationship with the Indian
21 military?

22 General Fenton: Senator, I do share the view that
23 India is an important partner. My time in INDOPACOM, under
24 Admiral Harris and Admiral Davidson, it was their focus, a
25 partnership, strengthening of bonds, not only for my time in

1 the Special Ops community there in Indo-Pacific but across
2 all the components. I had four to five visits to India and
3 many visits with Indian counterparts in Hawaii and
4 throughout the region. I think it is a critical
5 partnership, from what I knew then, and my sense is it still
6 is now.

7 If confirmed, I would want to consult with Admiral
8 Aquilino, the INDOPACOM commander, and the current Special
9 Ops Command Pacific commander to give you a more fulsome
10 answer to how we go forward as the SOCOM team. But I share
11 your view that India is a critical partner.

12 Senator Peters: Great. Thank you, General.

13 General Langley, in your written response to the
14 committee you identified, quote, "backsliding democracies
15 and weak regimes" as some of the most difficult challenges
16 facing AFRICOM. However, you also indicated that AFRICOM
17 campaign plan provides a sound construct to address these
18 challenges and that you would thoroughly assess that plan,
19 if confirmed.

20 So while I understand you have not completed that
21 assessment -- I am sure that is in process right now -- I am
22 curious as to your initial thoughts on how the United States
23 can counter or respond to increases in both Chinese and
24 Russian investment and activity in Africa to promote both
25 peace and stability.

1 General Langley: Senator, the revelation of the
2 efforts of these two competitors probably will not be
3 revealed for a few years. So, in parallel, we just still
4 need to engage with countries to stop this democratic
5 backsliding and also authoritative regimes going towards the
6 autocratic side, by still engaging with these countries,
7 still engage to show that our assurance actions outweigh
8 theirs. Our value proposition is real. Their value
9 proposition is a farce.

10 So it will take a couple of years for that to show,
11 because you see the bright, shining objectives. That is
12 China, in their Belt and Road Initiatives. But in the end
13 they just look globally where it is failing.

14 I know over 40 countries across the continent of Africa
15 that have already signed some type of Memorandum of
16 Agreement, but we need to continue to engage.

17 Senator Peters: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr.
18 Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Peters.
20 Let me recognize Senator Scott, please.

21 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chair Reed. First off, I
22 thank both of you for your willingness to serve.
23 Congratulations on your nominations and thank you for your
24 prior service.

25 General Fenton, Florida is proud to be home to SOCOM.

1 Do you think SOCOM is adequately funded and do you think it
2 has sufficient personnel to take on our adversaries across
3 the globe wherever they are threatening or could threaten
4 American interests?

5 General Fenton: Senator, in my current position I do
6 not know that I know the entirety of SOCOM in terms of
7 resource challenges, funding challenges, and I would want to
8 take that, if confirmed, and examine it fully with the SOCOM
9 team. I can comment that right now they are, around the
10 globe, addressing the challenge of China, Russia as the
11 acute threat, and certainly the persistent threats that are
12 counterterrorism and VEOs in Iran and North Korea.

13 So I know they are arrayed and as part of that team I
14 have experience of doing that myself. But the understanding
15 of enterprise-level SOCOM's resourcing challenges and
16 manning challenges, to the fullest extent, Senator, if
17 confirmed, I would like to take that and examine it more
18 fully with the team.

19 Senator Scott: If you feel like SOCOM is not
20 adequately funded, does not have the sufficient personnel to
21 take on our adversaries, will you come back to this
22 committee? Will you be direct and tell us exactly what you
23 believe?

24 General Fenton: Senator, I will come back and tell the
25 committee directly and transparently and openly what I

1 believe. And as I examine it, if confirmed, with the SOCOM
2 team, I will take a look and I will absolutely report to the
3 Secretary and the Chairman if I saw resources or challenge
4 gaps, and report to the committee through the Department.

5 Senator Scott: What do our adversaries think of our
6 abilities in SOCOM, and do you think they fear what the U.S.
7 can do to them if they threaten our interests around the
8 globe?

9 General Fenton: Senator, I would not want to put
10 myself in the mind of any of those adversaries and proffer
11 for them, but I will start with putting myself in the space
12 of relationships with partners and allies that I have been
13 around for many, many years. In my INDOPACOM experience and
14 in my time in Africa and certainly in the Middle East, we
15 are, as your SOF team, the partner of choice. We are combat
16 credible. We build partners and allies, and we make friends
17 versus China makes clients and customers. So from partners
18 and allies we are the force of choice, the SOF team, and by
19 extension, that I saw in INDOPACOM, the entire U.S. team --
20 Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines.

21 My sense is that, combined with our combat credibility
22 -- and again, I do not want to put myself in the minds of
23 the adversaries, but it should cause them to pause and to
24 know that this team has been tested, the U.S. military and
25 SOF team, and think very carefully about any moves that they

1 would make against our forces.

2 But I know what our partners and allies think, and I
3 know our force knows it to be a credible, disciplined,
4 reliable, and outcome force. And as seen in action,
5 disrupting terror for 20 years, capturing or killing iconic
6 leaders, competing with the Chinese and with the Russians,
7 the SOF team has done a wide remit that my sense is the
8 adversaries are certainly taking note of.

9 Senator Scott: Thank you. What lessons can SOCOM
10 learn from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and apply to a
11 potential invasion of Taiwan by Communist China?

12 General Fenton: Senator, I do not know if those
13 lessons are instantly transferrable from Ukraine to Taiwan,
14 but my sense is that what we are learning from the Ukraine
15 experience, and from my perspective, my optic, is that the
16 powers of partners and allies, investing in relationships,
17 strengthening relationships, and then the galvanizing of
18 what comes together as a many-of-manys, vice the unprovoked
19 invasion and the horrible activities of Russia inside of
20 Ukraine.

21 I think the other takeaway is asymmetric, atypical, the
22 use of open-source allied imagery and modern technology,
23 small UASs, is blunting, and has denied Putin, in many ways,
24 his desired objectives. I think that is an important
25 takeaway.

1 Then I would add the information operations, being in
2 the info sphere and messaging and certainly being present to
3 amplify voices for good and certainly to address what Russia
4 is doing in that country.

5 Those are, I think, very important takeaways, from my
6 perspective, Senator, that, as I watch this that I certainly
7 note.

8 Senator Scott: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott.

10 Senator Tillis, please.

11 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen,
12 thank you and your families for decades of service, and also
13 thank you for the time you spent with me in my office this
14 week. It was, I think, very helpful. And I should say from
15 the onset, as I did earlier this week, I intend to support
16 your confirmation.

17 General Fenton, let's start with you. In the context
18 of the recent National Defense Strategy and our current
19 security environment, give me an idea of what your top
20 priorities are going to be, once confirmed?

21 General Fenton: Senator, thank you for that, and thank
22 you for the meeting this week, and thank you for your
23 support of all our military in your great state and
24 certainly at Fort Bragg. Thank you.

25 Senator, I would start with, in my current position my

1 priorities are people, compete and win and transform, and I
2 think specific to it, if confirmed, what I would look at in
3 SOCOM is human is more important than hardware, people are
4 our number one priority, they are our comparative and
5 competitive advantage. How they think in the SOF community
6 about problems, how they address them, and how they develop
7 asymmetric, atypical options is key. And that, if
8 confirmed, has been my priority now and might be the first
9 priority -- compete and win, being ready, SOCOM ready for
10 the nation, for whatever is needed. That spans the China-
11 Russia challenge, the counterterrorism challenge, and
12 certainly the persistent threats of Iran and North Korea.

13 And then transformation. These are the priorities of
14 my current position, transforming first our personnel, how
15 would we think for a contested, congested environment going
16 forward. Then along with the technology, what type of
17 technology, and then, at the end, what type of organization
18 is needed to support the nation as we go forward in this new
19 environment, and with the NDS in mind.

20 So I take my lead from the NDS, and in my current
21 position people, when transformed, are my priorities, and if
22 confirmed, Senator, I certainly would like to consult with
23 the SOCOM team, but those, I would offer, might be the
24 starting place.

25 Senator Tillis: Thank you. General Langley, the prior

1 administration moved nearly 700 personnel out of Somalia and
2 redeployed them to Djibouti and Kenya. Now they rotate in
3 on a limited basis. It would just seem to me, you are the
4 military expert, but it just seems to me, one, have we
5 increased risk and effectiveness by doing that, by not being
6 on the ground at the level that we were prior to the
7 redeployment?

8 General Langley: Senator, my professional opinion, I
9 think we have, and I say that with just one qualifier. Back
10 in 2014, when we went to Tranche Two out of Helmand
11 Province, when the Marines pulled out and we said we were
12 going to fly-to-advise, and 215th Corps was left to their
13 own devices, Senator, they regressed. Their excellence on
14 the battlefield regressed within a couple of months.

15 So I know that is just an anecdotal assessment, but
16 fly-to-advise or, as General Townsend says, commute to work,
17 is ineffective because partnership capacity will erode over
18 time.

19 Senator Tillis: I agree. I think we need to be there.

20 So I guess the next question is, when we are competing
21 globally for ISR and things to remediate that, what should
22 our priorities be? What should Congress be focused on,
23 moving forward to help you be successful with your
24 assignment?

25 General Langley: Sir, if confirmed, I would do a risk

1 mission, risk-to-force calculus, one, protecting the force,
2 and then as my esteemed colleague said, assessing the health
3 of the force, or taking care of our service men and women on
4 the ground. Then matching up with our mission and seeing
5 that we have all the capability and capacity necessary to do
6 that -- personal recovery, medevac recovery, and be able to
7 effect rapid response forces that can go the tyranny or
8 distance across the continent to complete the mission.

9 Senator Tillis: Thank you. I guess the final question
10 I would have in the time remaining, I also wonder, with 700
11 personnel coming out of Somalia, do we have any evidence
12 that that is actually, as we have exited, that malign
13 influences from other nations, great power nations or
14 terrorist organizations, have kind of taken advantage to
15 create their presence and capacity in Somalia?

16 General Langley: Sir, I do not have a purview on that
17 right now, but my assumptions are that they will probably be
18 doing something to fill that void, just like they did in
19 Mali.

20 Senator Tillis: I think so too. Well, gentlemen,
21 again, congratulations to you and your family. I look
22 forward to a speedy confirmation. Thank you.

23 General Langley: Thank you, Senator.

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

25 Senator Rosen is presiding and she is on her way over,

1 and there may be some other colleagues who join, which would
2 give me the opportunity to ask an additional question.

3 General Fenton, you have been asked several times about
4 what lessons we learned from Ukraine. I think one lessons
5 is the willingness of a country to fight, and that goes from
6 the top leadership down to the individual citizens, and
7 also, as you mentioned before, the capability of their armed
8 forces, but most significantly, the cadre of noncommissioned
9 officers that are available. Is that an assessment that you
10 are prepared to ask yourself special operators in each
11 country of potential conflict to make and evaluate and
12 inform you?

13 General Fenton: Senator, it would be. I would, if
14 confirmed, be prepared to ask for that assessment. And I
15 will add that I echo your assessment on a country's
16 willingness to fight. My sense is the investment that
17 started in the SOF arena, I can speak to, and certainly
18 throughout the whole of EUCOM and EUCOM teams, in 2014, took
19 a military that may have been less mature with an
20 understanding of noncommissioned officers intent of a
21 commander, the ability to move and understand intent vice
22 point-to-point orders or objectives, came as a result of
23 U.S. SOF and U.S. military connection with the Ukrainian
24 forces.

25 My sense is, as well, from my perspective, Senator, is

1 that that starts to go through the ranks, as you know very
2 well, empowering and emboldening the military but also the
3 population with an even stronger will to fight. And I
4 agree, that is one of the lessons learned, that investment
5 early, a relationship with U.S. forces, that is now
6 exponentially being carried on by other forces who have been
7 trained by us in that region as well, has been a part of
8 that fabric.

9 Chairman Reed: I think you are absolutely right. I
10 recall I first met General Cavoli in Lviv as we were touring
11 the Special Operations training of Ukrainian forces, and
12 back in 2014, I did not realize the incredible impact it
13 would make on the situation today. So thank you very much.

14 We have been joined by Senator Sullivan, and if he is
15 ready I am prepared to recognize him.

16 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen,
17 congratulations.

18 You know, I do want to say for the committee, for the
19 record, there are a lot of issues I have with the Biden
20 administration's national security, the President putting
21 forward weak defense budgets, unilaterally disarming one of
22 our great comparative advantages against Russia and China,
23 which is American energy. But I will compliment the
24 President and his team. They have consistently put forward
25 exceptional officers to serve at the highest levels of our

1 combatant commands, and you two gentlemen are the
2 continuation of that. I certainly plan on supporting your
3 confirmations. I want to thank you and your families for
4 your years of dedicated service. So again, I commend the
5 White House on that. And it very important, and we keep
6 getting really strong nominees for these very important
7 positions.

8 General Fenton, I wanted to talk a little bit about the
9 Arctic, as you can imagine. The Army just stood up the 11th
10 Airborne Division, so we now have two airborne divisions in
11 the U.S. Army. One is in Alaska. But I will also say that
12 when you look at great power competition, future sources of
13 conflict, China, Russia, North Korea, one thing they all
14 have in common is the potential for serious combat in
15 serious extreme cold weather, Arctic, mountainous
16 environments. And I think our military has kind of lost
17 that capability over the years, whether it is the Navy or
18 the Army or the Marines, including Special Forces.

19 I talked to a number of our SOF components and they say
20 when training with foreign partners like the Finns or the
21 Swedes, in these environments we look like kind of the JV
22 team relative to them. And as you know, you cannot just
23 take a unit and say, "Hey, go operate in 30 below." It
24 takes year of training.

25 So can you talk to me about this issue, preparedness,

1 as it relates to great power competition, but SOF operating
2 in the Arctic, in mountainous terrain, in severe cold
3 weather? You know, my state has great training for that. I
4 think we need to do more of it, and I think our forces need
5 to be ready for it, and I do not think we are, across the
6 board. What do you think, General?

7 General Fenton: Senator, first I appreciate the
8 discussion we had in your office the other day about this
9 very issue, and it made me reflect on the time I had at
10 INDOPACOM where we were beginning, as a team, in the Army
11 and certainly at the INDOPACOM greater level, to focus and
12 to examine the Arctic from its strategic importance, but
13 more as you have just pointed out, what does it mean to
14 resource, man, train, and equip for that?

15 In my current position -- and I have been away from
16 INDOPACOM and that team for some time -- I do not have all
17 the visibility in where they have made great strides, but I
18 knew what was on their minds, in terms of mobility,
19 survivability, and certainly conduct of missions in that
20 very harsh environment.

21 And I remember we used to talk about that environment
22 compared to the ones we might see in Europe, and our phrase
23 was, "If you have seen one Arctic, you have seen one
24 Arctic." And the understanding of each of those, it is a
25 very tactile feel, I think similar to what we have seen in

1 our experience in deserts and jungles.

2 Senator, so if confirmed, I would like to examine that
3 through the lens of the entire SOCOM team. This challenge
4 of China, Russia, global, CT, Arctic all demand a
5 resourcing, equipping, training, and frankly, expeditionary
6 strategy that would address that. But I do not know that I
7 am fully informed, Senator, to comment on whether we are
8 doing it well right now. If we are not, my sense is we can
9 always get better. I will put it that way.

10 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you.

11 General Langley, I am going to be introducing some
12 legislation with Senator Whitehouse of Rhode Island here in
13 the next week on a very strong bill that relates to IUU
14 fishing. Now I know that does not sound like a core
15 competency of the Marine Corps or AFRICOM, but as you know,
16 in that region, in your AOR for AFRICOM, this issue of
17 maritime law enforcement program has been something we
18 partnered with the countries in that region. And as you
19 know, once again it China going all around the world, not
20 abiding by the law, going to the coasts of Africa, the
21 coasts of Latin America, and just ravaging their fishing
22 fleets. We are going to have legislation that is going to
23 really focus on pushing back on that, but we are going to
24 need the cooperation of the Coast Guard, the Navy, AFRICOM,
25 and others.

1 So can I get your commitment to work with me and
2 others, not just on this committee but through the Senate,
3 on this important issue, that the military does play an
4 important role on?

5 General Langley: Absolutely, Senator. That was a big
6 issue at the Naval Infantry Symposium in Senegal. Maritime
7 Exclusion Zones for the African countries are at risk
8 because usually they cannot cover all of that. So working
9 with our Coast Guard and working with Brazil they have, in
10 fact, their Blue Amazon Concept that was ratified by the
11 U.N. years ago. It is time to put it in action.

12 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
13 Chairman.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Sullivan.
15 Senator Rosen, please.

16 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Reed, and thank you
17 for being here today, for your service to our country, and
18 your willingness to continue to serve.

19 I am really concerned about us preventing our captured
20 ISIS fighters from returning to the battlefield. So,
21 General Fenton, as we wait another possible Turkish military
22 incursion into northern Syria, we know that the Syrian
23 Democratic Forces guarding prisons will likely need to leave
24 their posts for the border in order to defend their
25 territory. This is going to open the door to the possible

1 escape of captured ISIS fighters, just as we saw play out in
2 2019.

3 So, General, given our partnership with the SDF and in
4 the Defeat ISIS campaign, including security training, what
5 plans do U.S. Special Operations Forces in Syria have to
6 shore up SDF-run prisons, and if confirmed, how will you
7 ensure that captured ISIS fighters do not ever, ever return
8 to the battlefield?

9 General Fenton: Senator, thank you for that, and we
10 share your concern, as those fighters and the prisons and
11 the radicalization, all of that, when aggregated, is part of
12 the CT threat that comes with this nation.

13 On your question about the prisons and going forward,
14 security in the event of other actions by actors like
15 Turkey, I would defer to CENTCOM and to certainly the State
16 Department on that, as in my current position I do not have
17 the visibility certainly on their actions, nor would I want
18 to comment on them inappropriately.

19 On the SOCOM going forward, if confirmed, Senator, I
20 would like to get with the SOCOM team to examine it, to
21 understand it fully, get a sense of the challenges that are
22 in concert with General Kurilla and the CENTCOM team, and
23 then certainly address it in a way that I am much more
24 informed and certainly ready to do.

25 Senator Rosen: Could you give me your opinion about

1 last week's strike targeting ISIS Wali of Syria and their
2 ability to plan and carry out an attack? Does that make it
3 less likely?

4 General Fenton: Senator, keeping the pressure on
5 networks that have a demonstrated capability in the past
6 still have the willingness, and to defuse and disrupt their
7 capability is a key part of a counterterrorism strategy.
8 That, in line with the National Defense Strategy, is what we
9 need to be doing going forward.

10 So my sense is anywhere we can keep the pressure on
11 ISIS, al Qaeda, on concert with AFRICOM, al-Shabaab, we need
12 to, to continue to keep a capability from growing inside of
13 organizations that have demonstrated, and certainly have the
14 willingness, to attack this homeland.

15 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I would like to move on to
16 security deteriorations in CENTCOM and AFRICOM AORs or areas
17 of responsibilities. So, Generals, based on your own
18 experiences, the lessons that we have learned in Afghanistan
19 over the last 20 years and in the lead-up to its collapse, I
20 would really like both of your assessments on possible
21 security deteriorations elsewhere in CENTCOM AOR and the
22 AFRICOM AOR, where corruption, dependence on U.S. security
23 assistance, political fragmentation, malign foreign
24 influences such, as we know, Iran, Russia, China, they
25 threaten our security cooperation efforts. And if

1 confirmed, what would you each do to address the challenges?
2 General Langley, we can start with you and move on to
3 General Fenton, please.

4 General Langley: Senator, just looking at AFRICOM,
5 just that AOR, and seeing how the population growth and new
6 ideology is starting to take root as it comes out of North
7 Africa, and now before you know it Boko Haram is kind of
8 degraded, but up pops JNIM, up pops ISIS Sahara. So it is
9 growing at a rapid rate. We have to be able to measure it,
10 resources to readiness, resources to capabilities, and if
11 confirmed, I would have to go back to the DoD and ask the
12 Secretary, and have a proof of concept and proof of
13 principle how to attack it. But it is going to be a whole-
14 government approach. We know that; we are in a support
15 role. But there are some intrinsic type capabilities that
16 we must maintain -- ISR, personal recovery, medevac, and all
17 the other programs, with our joint exercise program, to be
18 able to thwart the VEOs.

19 Senator Rosen: Thank you. General Fenton, please.

20 General Fenton: Senator, if confirmed, I would start
21 by consulting with the current CENTCOM and current AFRICOM
22 commanders, but I would offer that in both those regions,
23 violent extremist organizations are present. China is
24 present. Russia is present. Other malign actors are
25 present as well. And when put together they do contribute

1 to the instability in those regions. My sense is that the
2 CENTCOM command team in the Central Command area and the
3 AFRICOM command team are addressing it as part of, as
4 General Langley said, whole-of-government efforts, and in
5 many ways in concert with partners and allies.

6 Senator Rosen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

8 Senator Hawley, please.

9 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to
10 both of you for your service. Thank you for being here.

11 General Fenton, if I could start with you. It was good
12 to see you the other day. I enjoyed our conversation. One
13 of the things we talked about was that after 20 years of a
14 focus on CT, counterterrorism, SOF's number one priority now
15 has to shift to deterring China. Am I remembering that
16 correctly? Does that sound right to you?

17 General Fenton: Senator, you are remembering correctly
18 that my perspective to you was aligned with the NDS, China
19 is a pacing challenge. The rest of the acute threat and the
20 persistent threats of CT, and Iran and North Korea are the
21 focus.

22 Senator Hawley: Very good. Let me ask you about the
23 pacing challenge and also our pacing scenario and our pacing
24 theater, the pacing scenario being China's threat to Taiwan.
25 You and I talked some about this. Admiral Davidson

1 testified to this committee back in March of 2021. I am
2 going to quote him. "I think the threat is manifest during
3 this decade, in fact, in the next years," and he is talking
4 about the Chinese threat to Taiwan. And other officials who
5 have come before the committee since then, including Admiral
6 Aquilino, Under Secretary Kaul, Deputy Under Secretary
7 Baker, have all agreed with that assessment.

8 Do you agree with that assessment, General?

9 General Fenton: Senator, as we discussed, in my
10 INDOPACOM experience, 5 1/2 years, I was presented with a
11 number of timelines, but they had a consistent theme. They
12 all grew closer, starting about 2035, 2037, and they
13 continue to grow closer based on China's military
14 acceleration, its economic and diplomatic acceleration, and
15 the ways that they do.

16 So my sense is that plus a directive from President Xi
17 Jinping to military to have a capability by this decade, it
18 is in this decade.

19 Senator Hawley: Very good. Very good. We need to be
20 concerned with this decade, of course, and beyond, but with
21 this decade. Thanks for that.

22 Given that, what are some of the unique capabilities,
23 in your view, including warfighting capabilities, that SOCOM
24 can bring to that pacing challenge, that is the Taiwan
25 challenge? Walk us through your thinking on that.

1 General Fenton: Senator, my sense is in the INDOPACOM
2 region, and I speak from my time there, and I will defer to
3 Admiral Aquilino, if confirmed, and get a holistic
4 assessment, but my time there I saw a number of capabilities
5 that SOF brought. First and foremost was placement, access,
6 and influence, the ability to be in a number of countries
7 throughout that region, training, advising, and assisting,
8 being partnered, real partners, partners and allies and
9 friends with nations in that region, that then turned into a
10 partner and ally, many-of-manys capability that has shown,
11 certainly in Ukraine, to be extremely powerful for not only
12 the U.S. but the Ukrainians, and frankly for the world, as
13 it fights that type of aggression.

14 The next thing I saw was that the exercises and the
15 training in that region consistently, with all the forces --
16 Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines -- brought a confidence
17 to that region and also a competence in terms of what they
18 learned as we trained with them, stayed with them, ate, had
19 many discussions, and we were just part of the fabric. All
20 of that developed multiple options for the COCOM team, and
21 again I defer, and if confirmed, I would like to check with
22 Admiral Aquilino and the Special Ops team, multiple options
23 that were helpful to the INDOPACOM team and multiple
24 dilemmas for China.

25 I would also add that China, with its global presence,

1 that, if confirmed at SOCOM, I would like to consult with
2 all COCOMs to see if that is the same recipe across the
3 globe.

4 Senator Hawley: Let me just pick up on that, your last
5 comment there about options. If you are confirmed, General,
6 would you prioritize developing warfighting capabilities for
7 a Taiwan scenario so that the President has multiple options
8 in order to deter China in that pacing scenario?

9 General Fenton: Senator, what commit to today is the
10 SOCOM team I know is ready, with ranges of options for the
11 COCOM commanders, at all times. I will commit that if
12 confirmed, I will certainly be with the SOCOM team, examine
13 it closely. But my experience is the SOCOM team is ready
14 and will remain ready, competing, contesting, and developing
15 a range of options, if needed, for the Joint Force, and
16 high-end conflict. And it does it every day.

17 Senator Hawley: Let me ask you this. You have been
18 asked a couple of times already today about balancing the
19 continuing counterterrorism threat and our needs there with
20 the need to deter China in our pacing theater. The 2018 NDS
21 spoke about the need for a resource-sustainable approach to
22 counterterrorism. The 2022 NDS echoes that.

23 Just give us a sense of, if you are confirmed, how you
24 will seek to develop and implement a resource-sustainable
25 approach to counterterrorism. And my time is expired so I

1 will yield back for you to answer and then I will yield, Mr.
2 Chairman.

3 General Fenton: Senator, if confirmed, I would start
4 by bringing to the SOCOM team my mindset, and the mindset is
5 that Special Operations Forces are really born for where we
6 are right now in this point in history. The origins of
7 Special Operations, from the '50s, to compete, contest, and
8 campaign, at that time against the USSR and communism, with
9 language, cultural attuneness, sped through the '60s, the
10 '70s, the '80s, and '90s. We only got better. The Army,
11 Navy, Air Force, and Marines were all added to the SOF
12 component, and we learned how to be a valuable and integral
13 part of our Joint Force team at our various training
14 centers. My sense is that still holds.

15 When you take the 20 years of combat, sustained combat,
16 credible forces, ours, across the entire military but I
17 speak in my experience for SOF, that are fluent in
18 technology, understand networks -- China and Russia have
19 networks -- how to attack them, how to dismantle them -- and
20 the partners and allies that have been on that journey, when
21 you bring that all together as we go forward in the future,
22 I think I start there, that SOF, in many ways, was born for
23 this. It has the ability to account, as part of the whole-
24 of-government team and interagency team, for the
25 counterterrorism mission while addressing the challenge of

1 China and Russia, competing, contesting, campaigning. In
2 many ways, Senator, we never left.

3 In my INDOPACOM experience, I was doing compete-contest
4 with Chinese in 2016, while my teammates and partners and
5 all of our military were at the height of an ISIS fight in
6 Syria, and SOF was there as well.

7 So we have this in our DNA, to account for the CT,
8 bring value in that to the nation in an enduring,
9 sustainable way, but also to be a very integral play for
10 COCOMs and for the Department and the whole-of-government in
11 the campaign against China and Russia.

12 Thank you, sir.

13 Chairman Reed: Senator Hawley, thank you. Senator
14 Gillibrand is here. We appreciate her presence. But I
15 believe that you have no questions?

16 Senator Gillibrand: No questions.

17 Chairman Reed: Senator Sullivan is recognized for one
18 terse, penetrating, and insightful question.

19 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is
20 typically the way in which I ask questions.

21 Chairman Reed: Typical, yes, I know.

22 Senator Sullivan: But not always.

23 General Fenton, I want to dig in a little deeper on
24 what Senator Hawley just discussed and you and I discussed
25 in my office, because I think it is important to talk about

1 it a little bit more in depth and in public.

2 Again, I think your background, significant background
3 in the INDOPACOM theater makes you very, very qualified for
4 this position. You mentioned, and I think we are all
5 recognizing the incredible role, exceptional role that SOCOM
6 has played post-9/11 -- 20 years, CT, sustained combat, as
7 you mentioned. But culturally there is obviously going to
8 be a shift -- less kinetic, more strategic shaping.

9 How do you think the force and morale and the entire
10 SOCOM enterprise is going to be ready for that? Because it
11 does seem to me a very different approach that is likely
12 going to be with you as a key component of your command,
13 particularly in the INDOPACOM theater, recognizing China as
14 the pacing threat, than the way the forces have operated
15 primarily in the Middle East, in a much more kinetic
16 fashion. Is SOCOM ready for that, and how do you prepare
17 the force to do that?

18 General Fenton: Senator, from my perspective -- and I
19 certainly, if confirmed, would want to check in with the
20 entirety of the SOCOM team -- but I do get to see a portion
21 of the SOCOM enterprise and have been in many portions of
22 the SOCOM enterprise. But in my experience, it is a
23 combination of back to our origins, what we were born to do
24 as a SOF enterprise. It is in our DNA, and we, in some
25 ways, probably had to tailor ourselves to do the exquisite

1 CT work we have done for 20 years. I do not think that
2 leaves the force.

3 We will, through aligning with the NDS, account for a
4 counterterrorism mission, but we will have to continue to
5 address that. My sense is that that will be with us for
6 some time. Folks who wish to attack, who have demonstrated
7 intent, we need to keep them from having that capability,
8 and that will be addressed, and portions of the SOCOM
9 formation may certainly have as a primary agreement.

10 On top of that, the form factor of CT and CT train,
11 advise, and assist, is also an ability to compete and to
12 contest, with military relationships and partners and
13 allies, building them and building that trust, showing the
14 Special Ops force as a force of choice, along with the U.S.
15 military as a force of choice. And that, in and of itself,
16 is also an opportunity to compete and contest.

17 I do know, in my own experience, much of what I was
18 doing at the 2016, 2017 time in INDOPACOM was competing,
19 contesting, and the forces arrayed that brought in
20 incredible combat experience and understanding and were also
21 eager to compete and contest in that way against China.

22 So, Senator, I would end with my sense is that the
23 force that has been built for this has it in its DNA, will
24 be able to account for, in formations, understanding that,
25 the China-Russia challenge and the CT threat, and in many

1 ways I will say, personally, as a Special Operations member
2 for 30-plus years, we welcome that challenge.

3 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

5 Generals, thank you for your excellent testimony. I
6 think you appreciate the confidence that this committee has
7 in you, and as I indicated previously, we are going to do
8 our best to expedite the confirmation process so that you
9 can make a smooth transition into your new commands. And
10 again, thank you all. Thank your families for joining you.

11 With that I will adjourn this hearing.

12 General Fenton: Thank you, Chairman.

13 General Langley: Thank you, Chairman.

14 [Whereupon, at 11:33 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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