

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
CHAIRMAN, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
Tuesday, February 8, 2022**

*To conduct a confirmation hearing on the nomination of
Lieutenant General Michael Kurilla to be General and Commander, U.S. Central
Command*

(As prepared for delivery)

REED: Good morning. The Committee meets today to consider the nomination of Lieutenant General Michael Kurilla for promotion to General and to be the next Commander of U.S. Central Command. General, your nomination is well-deserved, and I thank you for your willingness to lead in this important position. We welcome your wife, Mary Paige, and daughter, Michelle—both of whom are here today—as well as your daughter, Sophie, who I am sure is proudly watching from home. We thank them for their continued support of your service to our nation.

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

If confirmed, the range of challenges you will need to address is significant. CENTCOM’s geographic area of responsibility stretches from Northeast Africa, across the Middle East, to Central and South Asia, and the security challenges are similarly expansive.

Perhaps most pressing is Iran’s malign influence in the region. The United States’ latest round of indirect negotiations to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, has seen progress, but Iran’s ongoing nuclear development threaten to derail any agreement. Simultaneously, Iranian-linked groups continue to mount drone and rocket attacks in the region, including against bases in Iraq and Syria with a U.S military presence. These threats are growing, as are drone and missile attacks by Iranian-linked Houthis against the Gulf States. During today’s hearing I would like to know your level of concern over rising tensions between

the United States and Iran, and how you would advise responding to Iranian malign influence in the region.

While the death of ISIS leader al-Qurayshi in a U.S. strike last week dealt a blow to the organization, ISIS remains a threat. Last month, ISIS militants seized a prison facility in Syria where thousands of ISIS detainees are held, leading to a days-long standoff requiring U.S. and Coalition air and ground support to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Press reports indicate that up to 200 fighters may have escaped, and hundreds of people were killed. If you are confirmed, you will be responsible for helping ensure the SDF and the Iraqi Government have the capacity and support needed to address the threat from ISIS and properly detain these prisoners.

Of particular emphasis for this committee is a reformation of how CENTCOM and the Defense Department respond to civilian casualty incidents. It must be noted that CENTCOM's approach to this issue in recent years has not been adequate, and the DOD inspector general and independent studies have highlighted important areas for change. Our military goes to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties, but when tragic errors occur, we have an obligation to be transparent, take responsibility, and do everything we can to learn from and prevent future mistakes. As such, General, I hope you will share what steps you would take to ensure CENTCOM improves its openness and transparency with this committee and the public.

Finally, turning to Afghanistan: We have transitioned to an "over-the-horizon" counterterrorism posture to continue to respond to threats from the region using assets based outside Afghanistan. Our 20-year mission there largely achieved the goal of significantly degrading al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, but the work is not finished. During testimony to this committee last October, Under Secretary Kahl assessed that ISIS-K and al Qaeda have "the intent to conduct external operations, but neither has the ability to do so." To prevent terrorist groups from developing this ability, we must continue to bolster our over-the-horizon capabilities. With that in mind, I would ask that you share the most important lessons learned from your time in Afghanistan, and how you would ensure CENTCOM can conduct optimal over-the-horizon activities.

Thank you again, General, for your continued willingness to serve. I look forward to your testimony.

Let me now recognize Ranking Member Inhofe.