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**U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE
MIDDLE EAST**

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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U.S. POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, June 17, 2015.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. William M. “Mac” Thornberry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM M. “MAC” THORNBERRY, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Before we proceed, I want to make clear up front that the committee will not tolerate disturbances in these proceedings, including verbal disruptions, photography, standing, or holding signs. And I want to thank all our guests at the outset for your cooperation.

This committee meets today to hear from the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on U.S. policy and strategy in the Middle East.

I think we should acknowledge at the outset that this region is not subject to easy or simple solutions and has bedeviled statesmen of many countries for generations. Yet there is also a sense that we are at a particularly perilous time and that the U.S. policy and strategy is inadequate.

Dr. Kissinger testified earlier this year before the Senate that in the Middle East multiple upheavals are unfolding simultaneously. There is a struggle for power within states, a contest between states, a conflict between ethnic and sectarian groups, and an assault on the international state system.

He further argued that, especially in a time of global upheaval, the consequences of American disengagement is greater turmoil. It seems to me that that is what we are in fact witnessing.

While President Obama admitted recently that there is not a complete strategy for dealing with ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], others argue that there may well be a strategy at work here, one of retrenchment and accommodation so that the U.S. plays a lesser role in the Middle East and elsewhere.

U.S. military personnel are the most capable in the world, but I know of no one who thinks that 450 more in Iraq under current constraints will turn the tide against ISIS. Very concerning to me are recent press reports that, in the midst of negotiations to remove sanctions related to its nuclear program, Iran is continuing to pay and equip the Taliban in Afghanistan as part of its regional efforts to sow instability and harm U.S. interests.

When one factors in the chaos in Yemen and Syria, the uncertainty about the future direction of Turkey, the doubts about us from traditional allies such as Egypt and the Gulf nations, as well as continuing threats to our ally Israel, the plain, hard facts show that the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated substantially in the last 6 years. What is worse, there seems to be nothing coming from the White House to change that trajectory.

We cannot expect our distinguished witnesses today to answer for all the failures of the administration's approach to the Middle East over the last 6 years. We can and should expect, however, to hear the military component of a strategy to reverse this deteriorating trend and to protect American interests.

My view is that there is no substitute for American leadership in the Middle East or anywhere else. That does not mean it is up to us to solve age-old disputes, but it does mean we cannot afford, for our own sake, to simply stand back. We must be strong, especially militarily strong, and we must be credible.

I yield to the ranking member.

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs for joining us today and for their great work for our country.

And I think the chairman in his first of couple sentences there adequately described the depth of the problem, with the number of failed states and, gosh, just the, oh, different battles that are going on there. It is an overwhelming problem that is creating a huge humanitarian crisis and a threat not just to the region but to the globe.

I will, however, disagree with the notion that a U.S. presence will solve the problem. I would hope that we would have learned over the course of the last 14 years of having a substantial U.S. presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan that the West showing up in the Muslim world and saying, "We're here to solve your problems" isn't going to get it done.

And as far as the strategy is concerned, I believe we do have a strategy. I think what people are frustrated by is that that strategy, that U.S. strategy, does not simply solve the problem. And I have had a number of people complain to me about our lack of a strategy. I have asked every single one of them, okay, what should we do? Have not gotten an answer as to what we should do that would solve the complex problems that the chairman described.

So, as we approach this, I hope that we are cautious about our confidence that U.S. military might can solve this problem, because I think that would make it worse and at great cost to us. What we have to do is tactically use the U.S. military to help the right people and move things in the right direction, not think that the more U.S. military we use, somehow the better the situation gets. I think that would be a very, very dangerous mistake.

As far as the broader strategy, it is really simple on its face. We need to find Sunnis who are willing and able to fight ISIS and

build a better alternative. And it is not just ISIS. I mean, if ISIS went away tomorrow, there would be, you know, another ideologically extremist, violent group, just like, you know, Al Qaeda still is, but now ISIS has seemingly eclipsed Al Qaeda. It is not just a matter of defeating one group; it is a matter of defeating an ideology.

Now, the one thing I will quibble with and that I do want to hear from our two witnesses about our strategy is, in getting those Sunnis that would be willing to fight ISIS and present a more reasonable alternative in Iraq and Syria certainly but elsewhere, as well, for the people over there, we are still relying on the Baghdad government. It is still our hope that there will be an Iraqi Government that is sufficiently inclusive so that Sunnis will be willing to fight for it. I just don't see that happening.

Starting with al Maliki, they set up a very sectarian, separatist government that did everything to shove the Sunnis into the arms of ISIS. Now, I have not met Abadi, but I have heard that he has a desire to change that. The trouble is the people below him have no desire to change that, and he does not have the power simply to make them—the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Interior, the various Shia militias, Iran—change their minds. So, as we continue to try and do that, I fear that strategy won't work.

Now, I know why we do it, because what is the alternative? How do we offer the Sunnis, you know, a reasonable place to be if they don't have some support from Baghdad? But I think we need to start thinking about it. I think we need to put a lot of pressure on our Gulf allies, like Saudi Arabia, like the UAE [United Arab Emirates], to say, "Look, these are your people. The Baghdad government has abandoned them. You don't want ISIS to be the alternative. What can you do to encourage the tribes in Syria and in Iraq to turn on ISIS?" It is not easy.

And, again, I will just close by saying, you know, we could drop 200,000 U.S. troops in the middle of this; it wouldn't solve the problem. And I sincerely hope we have learned that lesson and that we don't go deeper and deeper into that, you know, costing more lives and more treasure while only making the problem worse.

Because the bottom line is, for all of their faults and failings, the one dependable argument that groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS have with the Muslim world is to stand up and say, "We are defending the Muslim world against Western aggression." That is a message that has widespread support, far more support, certainly, than the violent, psychopathic groups that espouse it. We cannot contribute to that.

We have to find a way to build partnerships. This has to be locally driven—locally driven by Sunnis in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere to eject ISIS, to eject that ideology, and build a better future for their people. And that is no easy task, I understand.

But I do look forward to the testimony and the questions, and, hopefully, we can learn more about how to go about being part of that solution.

With that, I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith can be found in the Appendix on page 53.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Without objection, your complete written statements will be made part of the record. Again, thank you both for being here.

Mr. Secretary, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF HON. ASHTON B. CARTER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary CARTER. Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, all members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today. Thank you also for keeping a wide-ranging and long-term perspective on the challenges and opportunities for America and its leadership around the world.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was in Singapore, Vietnam, and India. And next week I will be in Germany, Estonia, and Belgium for a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] ministerial. I understand that your focus in this hearing is current developments in the Middle East, but I would be happy to answer questions about anything else.

The Middle East, as the chairman noted, is undergoing a period of great social and political turmoil, with a number and variety of crosscutting geopolitical developments. Our strategy in the region, America's strategy, is grounded in America's core national interests. That is the foundation, tailored to address specific circumstances in specific and various places: Iraq, Syria, Iran, and so forth. And it leverages American leadership with the efforts of a coalition of allies and partners.

Our core interests, for example, drive our actions to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Similarly, they dictate that we not let up until we have destroyed ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant]—and Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists throughout the region that pose dangers to—

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair notes there is a disturbance in the committee's proceedings. The committee will be in order.

Pardon the interruption, Mr. Secretary. Please proceed.

Secretary CARTER. Similarly, our core interests dictate that we not let up until we have destroyed ISIL- and Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists throughout the region that pose dangers to the homeland, to friends, and to allies.

The past few weeks serve as a reminder to terrorists bent on harming the United States and our interests, whether they are in Libya, Syria, or Yemen, that we have the capability to reach out and strike them.

Meanwhile, the security of Israel will always be one of my top priorities. And the Chairman just returned from Israel this past weekend. And we will continue to hone important security relationships with our partners in the Gulf, bolster their security, and ensure freedom of navigation there.

The pursuit of our Nation's core interests in the region is a strategy based on tireless diplomacy backed by formidable military power and dedicated capacity-building to buttress and leverage the contributions of others and especially, as noted, those in the region themselves.

That is why we have 35,000 forces postured throughout the region, enabling us to strike ISIL and Al Qaeda terrorists and check Iranian malign influence. That is why we are assuring Israel's con-

tinued qualitative military edge and why we are working with our Gulf partners to make them more capable of defending themselves against external aggression. That is why we are supporting Saudi Arabia and protecting its territory and people from Houthi attacks and supporting international efforts to prevent uranium shipments of lethal equipment from reaching Houthi- and Saleh-affiliated forces in Yemen. And that is why the United States is supporting efforts to pursue political settlements to crises throughout the region, from Yemen to Libya to Syria.

While I am prepared for a range of questions related to DOD's [Department of Defense's] role in the Middle East, I would like to focus on the immediate issue that I understand the committee is interested in, namely, the U.S.-led coalition's strategy to defeat ISIL.

ISIL presents a grave threat to our friends and allies in the Middle East; elsewhere around the world, from Africa and Europe to parts of Asia, because of its steady metastasis; and to our homeland because of its avowed intentions to strike and recruit in this country. ISIL must be and will be dealt a lasting defeat.

The strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL constructed by President Obama draws upon all the national security agencies of the U.S. Government: intelligence, law enforcement, diplomacy, and others. The strategy and its associated military campaign also involve a global coalition, reflecting both the worldwide consensus on the need to counter this threat and the practical requirement for others to do their part. And the counter-ISIL strategy has nine—nine so-called lines of effort, reflecting the breadth of this challenge and the tools needed to combat it.

The first and most critical line of effort is the political one, which is led by the State Department. In Iraq, this involves building more effective, inclusive, and multisectarian governance. Each of the other lines of effort requires success in this line because it is the only way to create support among local forces and local people, that support being necessary to make progress against extremism stick.

The next two lines of effort are interconnected: to deny ISIL safe haven and to build partnership capacity in Iraq and Syria. Both are led by the Department of Defense, which, alongside coalition partners, is conducting a bombing campaign from the air, advising and assisting Iraqi security forces on the ground, and training and equipping trusted local forces.

I will address our military's current execution of these two lines of effort in a moment, but I want to underscore a crucial point about our campaign in Iraq and also Syria: It requires capable, motivated, legitimate, local ground forces to seize, clear, and hold terrain. That is the only way to ensure a truly lasting, enduring defeat of this movement.

The fourth line of effort is enhancing intelligence collection on ISIL, which is led by the National Counterterrorism Center [NCTC].

The fifth line of effort, which is disrupting ISIL's finances, a vital task, is co-led by Treasury and State.

Lines of effort six and seven, both co-led by State and the National Counterterrorism Center, are to counter ISIL's messaging

and to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters to and from ISIL, both of which are critical in today's connected and networked world.

The eighth line of effort, providing humanitarian support to those displaced by or vulnerable to ISIL, is led by State.

And, finally, the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] are working together to protect the homeland, the nine—ninth so-called line of effort, by disrupting terrorist threats here.

The effective execution of all nine of these lines of effort by the United States and its coalition partners is plainly necessary to ensure overall success.

Let me turn to the execution of DOD's two lines of effort, beginning with the U.S.-led campaign of airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. This effort has produced some clear results in limiting ISIL's freedom of movement, constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters, and impeding its command and control. It has enabled some key achievements for local forces, including the very recent success of anti-ISIL forces who took the key town of Tal Abyad.

The strikes are also buying critical time and space to carry out DOD's second line of effort, which is developing the capacity and capabilities of legitimate local forces. The ground campaign is a work in progress. The Iraqi security forces were severely degraded after Mosul fell last June, when four divisions dissolved. The combination of disunity, deserters, and so-called ghost soldiers, who are paid on the books but don't show up or don't exist, had greatly diminished their capacity.

However, understanding these challenges does not change reality. ISIL's lasting defeat still requires local forces to fight and prevail on the ground. We can and will continue to develop and enable such local forces, because we know from experience that putting U.S. combat troops on the ground as a substitute for local forces will not produce enduring results. That is why DOD seeks to bolster Iraq's security forces to be capable of winning back and then defending and holding the ISIL-controlled portions of the Iraqi state.

What we saw in Ramadi last month was deeply disappointing and illustrated the importance of a capable and motivated Iraqi ground force. In the days that followed, all of us on the President's national security team, at his direction, took another hard look at our campaign across all nine lines of effort. At DOD, I convened my team before, during, and after my trip to the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region to examine our execution of DOD's lines of effort and prepare options for the President if his approval was required for any enhancements we identified.

In our meetings at both the White House and the Pentagon, we determined that, while we have the right strategic framework, execution of the campaign can and should be strengthened, especially on the ground. We determined that our training efforts could be enhanced, and thus are now focusing on increasing participation in and throughput of our training efforts, working closely with the Iraqi Government and stressing the focus on drawing in Sunni forces, which, as noted, are underrepresented in the Iraqi security forces [ISF] today.

We also determined that our equipping of the Iraqi security forces had proceeded too slowly. This process was earlier sometimes delayed by bureaucracy in Baghdad but also in Washington. That is why we are now expediting delivery of essential equipment and materiel, like anti-tank capabilities and counter-IED [improvised explosive device] equipment, to the Iraqi security forces, including Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces.

We also determined that we could enable Iraqi security forces with more tailored advice and assistance, including with critical outreach to Sunni communities. That is why, on advice from Chairman Dempsey and General Austin, and at my recommendation, last week President Obama authorized the deployment of 450 personnel to Iraq's Taqaddum military base in Anbar province, to establish an additional site where we could advise and assist the Iraqi security forces.

Situated between Ramadi and Fallujah, Taqaddum is a key location for engaging Sunni tribes. And Prime Minister Abadi, Iraqi military officials, and Sunni leaders have all committed to using Taqaddum to reinvigorate and expedite the recruitment of Sunni fighters.

Our forces will also provide much-needed operational advice and planning support to the Iraqi security forces' Anbar Operations Center, which is also located at Taqaddum. We expect that this move will open a new dimension in our and Iraq's efforts to recruit Sunnis into the fight and to help the Iraqis coordinate and plan the critical effort to roll back ISIL in Anbar province.

And Secretary Kerry and I have agreed to begin a process of continually assessing the execution of our campaign, starting with improving coordination across our respective lines of effort.

Execution, however, is a two-way street, and our training efforts in Iraq have thus far been slowed by a lack of trainees. We simply haven't received enough recruits. Of the 24,000 Iraqi security forces we had originally envisioned training at our 4 sites by this fall, we have only received enough recruits to be able to train about 7,000, in addition to 2,000 Counter Terrorism [CT] Service personnel.

As I have told Iraqi leaders, while the United States is open to supporting Iraq more than we already are, we must see a greater commitment from all parts of the Iraqi Government.

There are positive sides. I have met with Prime Minister Abadi, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional President Barzani, and just last week with Speaker Jabouri of Iraq's parliament. They all fully understand the need to empower more localized, multisectarian Iraqi security forces and address persistent organization and leadership failures.

And because a sovereign, multisectarian Iraq is more likely to ensure a lasting defeat of ISIL, the United States must continue working with and through the Iraqi Government in all our actions, including our support for Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces. Our efforts need to reinforce inclusivity and multisectarianism, not fuel a reversal to sectarianism, which would make the lasting defeat of ISIL harder, not easier.

The situation in Syria is even more complex because of the lack of a legitimate government partner and many competing forces there. Regardless, we will continue striking ISIL in Syria with the

long reach of our airstrikes and operators. We will continue working with Syria's neighbors to impede the flow of foreign fighters into and out of Syria and Iraq. Our train-and-equip mission in Syria has been challenging, but the requirement for a capable and motivated counter-ISIL ground force there also means we must persist in our efforts.

In conclusion, I believe that success in this campaign can and must be assured. It will take time and require consistent effort on everyone's part—the entire U.S. Government, our entire international coalition, and, most importantly, the Iraqi and Syrian peoples. Together, and with your support, including your support for America's troops and their families, for which I and they are ever grateful, we will achieve ISIL's lasting defeat.

I would be happy to address your questions.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Carter can be found in the Appendix on page 56.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

General Dempsey, you have already had a number of interactions with this committee in the first 6 months of this year, for which we are very grateful. And that is the reason, as I told you before the hearing, I am not going to say goodbye to you, even though the date of your retirement approaches.

So thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF GEN MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA, CHAIRMAN,
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

General DEMPSEY. Thank you, Chairman. It is good to be back, in particular to talk about a subject of this importance.

And, Ranking Member Smith, it is good to see you back in the fight personally. I know you have been in the fight from a distance.

And, other members of the committee, I really do appreciate the opportunity to be here this morning to discuss the increasing disorder and the military component of our strategy in the Middle East.

The Middle East is unpredictable, unstable, and increasingly complex, but our goals are quite straightforward. We seek a region that is inhospitable to our enemies and that promotes and protects our core national interests.

I characterize the current environment in the Middle East in terms of three converging sets of complexity.

First, several governments are struggling for political legitimacy because they are not sufficiently pluralistic or they are not sufficiently accountable to their citizens. Iraq, for example, is still working toward a national unity government.

Second, the centuries-old Sunni-Shia rivalry has come to the fore. Weak states are less able to assert independence amid the tug of war between sectarian regional powers.

And, third, internal to Islam, we see rising competition between moderate elements and radical elements, and into that space fits ISIL and others.

These three challenges, as they intersect, make for an environment that will test the resolve of the region's security forces. Enduring stability cannot be imposed from the outside in. Stability must be cultivated from the inside out, and importantly, owned by

regional stakeholders. Positive transformation of the region will be achieved over time by, with, and through our regional partners.

Within this context, the role the United States military is taking against the transregional threat of ISIL represents, in my judgment, an appropriate level of effort.

I would underscore, as Secretary Carter also emphasized, that the military is one component of a much broader strategy. Military power alone will not solve this. I don't think anybody in here would disagree with that. We own two lines of effort of nine.

Of our two lines of effort, one is kinetic, the combination of airstrikes and ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] to enable Iraqi security forces; and the other, which is actually the centerpiece of our military strategy, is the train-and-equip mission.

The nine lines of effort should be considered in the aggregate. This campaign focuses on building partners who are taking responsibility for their own security. As I have said before, this is an Iraq-first strategy enabled by the coalition but not an Iraq-only one and, again, certainly not a military-only one. We continue to pressure ISIL in Syria and to actively reinforce and harden our partners in the region.

I would also like to emphasize that we are at the beginning of a complex—at the beginning of a complex, nonlinear campaign that will require a sustained level of effort over an extended period of time to promote durable, regional stability over the long term. We are constantly evaluating our approach and making sure we are resourcing it appropriately, balanced with our many other global commitments.

Let me again thank this committee for what you do every day to support our men and women in uniform and their families who are serving around the world. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Secretary, let me just follow up on what General Dempsey said. A primary line of effort of the Department is this train-and-equip mission. Is it your judgment that 450 more folks, not all of whom will be trainers—some are security and so forth. But are these 450 more folks going to tip the balance to make that train-and-equip mission successful?

Secretary CARTER. The move in Taqaddum, the numbers are not as significant as the location. It is in the heart of Sunni territory, and I think it will make a big difference in the performance of the train-and-equip program as regards recruiting Sunni fighters. We are actually seeing that in the days since we established that presence there.

Also, the Anbar Operations Center of the Iraqi security forces is located at Al Taqaddum. And another function of those people being there—doesn't take a lot of people but is highly leveraged—is to be in the Anbar Operations Center with the Iraqi forces so that we can help them with their command and control, planning, and discipline.

So those are the purposes, those are the benefits of the move to Taqaddum. It is necessary—it is not sufficient, but it is necessary to get Sunni forces into the fight in a way so that they are motivated as well as trained and equipped. And that is its purpose, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. So what is the reasonable time period for us to check back and see whether this is working as we hope?

Secretary CARTER. I honestly think it is reasonable for you to ask in weeks, because we are already getting an inflow of Sunni fighters. We will put them through the training program. We have the capacity to do that.

As I mentioned in my testimony, we have had unused capacity in our train-and-equip sites in parts of Iraq over the last several months because the Iraqi Government hasn't furnished us with paid recruits. Now that is turning around. It has to stay turned around for us to have success in Anbar and elsewhere in Sunni parts of Iraq.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me ask one other question. As you mentioned, I think a lot of members will have questions about the ISIS fight. I want to ask about the strategy to deal with Iranian influence outside the nuclear talks. So we will set the nuclear talks aside.

I mentioned in my opening statement these press reports about the Iranians equipping and paying the Taliban, who are fighting us and our allies in Afghanistan. We know that they are providing tremendous support to the Houthis in the civil war or whatever one wants to call it that is going on in Yemen. They are the primary force propping up Assad in Syria. They continue to have a presence in Lebanon, which is not good.

What is the administration's strategy for dealing with Iranian influence other than the nuclear talks?

Secretary CARTER. Well, thank you.

And Iranian malign influence in the region is the other major challenge in—to our strategy in the Middle East besides ISIL. So those two stand above others.

And I think—I would go back to the foundation there, which is the checking that malign influence. And defending our ally Israel and keeping our security commitments to our Gulf partners, who were here in town a few weeks ago, is the reason why there are 35,000 U.S. forces based in the Middle East. It is to provide that foundation of security for our friends and allies and to check Iranian malign influence, which, as you indicated, one sees them seeking—Iraq we have just been talking about, but it is not just in Iraq. It is elsewhere around the region.

So it is another very significant challenge for us, and it really is the reason why we are postured in the way we are in the Middle East.

The Chairman just got back from Israel, by the way, and he has been working with our Israeli partners on exactly those kinds of checks.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I appreciate the fact we have folks over there. I still haven't heard quite an approach, because it seems to me like their influence is expanding, and I am not sure we are dealing with it.

I will yield to Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The chairman and I met last week with the Sunni leader of the Iraqi Parliament. And one of the things he said during our meeting that surprised me a little bit—as we were talking about, you know,

the difficulty of getting broader support from the Baghdad government and, sort of, shifting focus to where could the Sunnis, in that path between, sort of, Anbar and up into Syria, where ISIL is, you know, most dominant, and he expressed disappointment, frankly, that the other Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, UAE, or even Turkey, to go up north—did not seem to really be willing to provide much support—even Jordan, as well—for the Sunnis in that area.

Number one is, do you agree with that assessment? I tend to take this guy at his word.

And, number two, why? It would seem to me that, you know, defeating ISIL is something that would be very, very important to Saudi Arabia amongst the others there. Why aren't they doing more to help those groups that want to resist ISIS in that part of Iraq and Syria?

Secretary CARTER. That is a critical question, and it goes back to something you said in your opening statement about other Sunni and Arab forces countering ISIL.

And I, too, met with Mr. Jabouri last week, who said the same thing. And I think he was speaking on behalf of a number of the Sunni forces, political forces, in western Iraq who would like to see more support and recognize, as I think you noted and the chairman noted in their opening statement, that Americans and Westerners are—can lead and enable, but if they get too high a profile, that becomes a problem in its own right.

Mr. SMITH. Exactly.

Secretary CARTER. Therefore, all the more reason to get others—Sunnis involved in the fight.

Now, one thing I will note is the heads of state of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] were here in Washington, and we went to Camp David about 3 weeks ago. And I would say that this was one of the major themes of our conversations with them, the other one being, to get back to what the chairman said, checking Iranian malign influence, which they are also concerned about.

Their concern about ISIL is genuine, but their actions, I think, can be greatly strengthened. And that was one of the principal things we talked about, getting them—

Mr. SMITH. But, again—

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. In the train-and-equip program—sorry?

Mr. SMITH. Yeah, I got all that. But why? Why isn't—I mean, in your opinion, having worked with these people, why isn't it happening?

Secretary CARTER. Well, one reason is that they simply lack the capacity. And so we talked a lot about building special operations forces that had counter—as opposed to air forces. We have enough air forces; we are looking for ground forces. And capable ground forces is one that are skilled in counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and so forth.

In general—

Mr. SMITH. And that is one of the key questions. Sorry to interrupt. But that is where we have to go, and that is where—you know, we have this fight, we had this fight in the Senate and also on the House side, over whether or not to directly arm the Kurds, to basically skip the Baghdad government and just get the forces—

the people who are actually fighting, and in some cases fighting successfully.

You know, shouldn't we be shifting a lot of our focus to that and basically saying to Baghdad, time's up? You know, you have your relationship with Iran, with the Shia militias; doesn't seem to be much we can do about that. You continually push the Sunnis out. We got to shift our resources to people. I mean, you mentioned it. You expected 24,000 Iraqis. You got 7,000. I mean, at what point do we shift the strategy?

And believe me, I understand the implications of that. You know, the concern is about the fracturing of Iraq. But, as I have said many times before, that cow has left the barn. Iraq is fractured. You can make a pretty powerful argument, in fact, that Iraq is no more.

So when do we shift that strategy and start building the capabilities of other partners who will fight?

Secretary CARTER. Well, sectarianism in Iraq is the principal factor that brought us to where Iraq is—

Mr. SMITH. Exactly.

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. In ISIL. It was Prime Minister Maliki and his relentlessly partisan or sectarian manner of governance.

Now, we have in Prime Minister Abadi, with whom I have met and the chairman may have met also but certainly mentioned, someone who I believe is genuinely committed to behaving in a decentralized, federalized, if you like, but multisectarian single state. Personally, he is dedicated to that.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Secretary CARTER. I think the chairman asked the question, does his writ run throughout Iraq. And that is what we are waiting to see.

In the meantime, we are arming the Kurds, we are arming the Sunnis. We do it in coordination with the Iraqi Government but in a way that doesn't delay, as it was a few months ago, that assistance to them. But we are still doing it through the Government of Iraq [GOI] because we are still trying to support the Prime Minister in maintaining a decentralized but single, unitary Iraqi state.

Mr. SMITH. And just a quick thing on Iran. And, obviously, I mean, if we just had these extremist Sunni groups to fight, I mean, that would be enough to really challenge us. But then when you throw in Iranian influence and how it, you know, stirs up the region, it definitely creates a higher-level problem.

But I do just want to make the observation, as awful as Iran is, number one, this isn't really necessarily helping them, to have to fight multiple wars outside of their own borders, to have to fight in Syria, to fight in Iraq, to fight in Yemen. That can be draining, as we well know. So that has a negative influence on them, as well.

And whatever one may say about Iran, the difference between them and ISIL, ISIL wants to kill as—they wake up every morning, you know, anxious to kill as many Americans as possible.

So, as we are balancing this, it is a very difficult balance to make—you know, defeating ISIL, I think, should be at the top of that list of concerns. That is just an observation.

As bad as Iran is—and trying to figure out some way to get them to stop having that malign influence, all for it. But I think we really need to have our number one focus not just, again, on ISIL but on that broader ideology that motivates people to attack us.

Final quick question. There have been some reports that, you know, the Assad government is weakening. Where do you assess the chances that they might just fall, that Assad might, you know, he is unable to replace many of the troops that he is losing now. Is it possible that Assad just up and leaves because of how bad things are going? And then what?

Secretary CARTER. Two observations on that, and then the Chairman may want to comment on that, as well.

I mean, first of all, we would like to see a transition in which Assad disappeared from the scene so that his regime as another source of fuel for extremism is eliminated. That is possible because his forces are much weakened, and they have taken great losses. They are having trouble—their forces and their reserves are depleted, and they are increasingly isolated in the Damascus area and in the Alawite areas of northwestern Syria.

I think the last thing I would say, Congressman Smith, is that the best way for the Syrian people for this to go would be for him to remove himself from the scene and there to be created, difficult as that will be, a new government of Syria based on the moderate opposition that we have been trying to build and support and then helping them strengthen themselves to retake all of Syrian territory. That would be a desirable path if he was removed from the scene or removed himself from the scene.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

General DEMPSEY. Thanks, Ranking Member Smith.

That was my purpose to my trip to the region, actually, was to discuss with regional partners a scenario in which the regime would either collapse or Assad would depart for one reason or another.

And it is generally the consensus there that, in the near term, it is probably more likely that the regime would go over to the defensive and limit its protection of the Alawite Shia and some of the minority groups, leaving the rest of Syria essentially ungoverned or governed in ways that wouldn't be positive for the region in the near term. And so we are working with our partners on the near term.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Forbes.

Mr. FORBES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, the country owes you a great deal of gratitude, but I only have 5 minutes, so I am just going to say thank you for all that you have done for us.

And, Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here today.

We are talking about policy and strategy in the Middle East. And one thing that I find a little disconcerting from people I talk to is when we find individuals who have held your job in the past as Secretary of Defense who indicate, rightly or wrongly, that the President's heart may not always be in some of our military oper-

ations. It is also disconcerting when we hear the President, rightly or wrongly, suggest that we may have no winning strategy in the Middle East.

But it is also disconcerting as a committee, we are not always in the policy and strategy business, but we are in the resourcing and capability business here. And we look at just some of the gaps we have. We know that we are going to have a gap this year for our carriers, where we will have certain regions of the world that will not have a carrier presence for weeks, when we perhaps need one or two. We also know that, in 2007, the Navy was able to meet 90 percent of our COCOM [combatant command] validated requirements. This year, we will only meet 44 percent. We have had testimony from the Air Force that they currently have the oldest and the smallest Air Force since the history of the Air Force and that less than 50 percent of their combat squadrons are fully combat capable.

So this committee, on a very bipartisan basis, has worked very, very hard to try to close some of those gaps, to reach some of the numbers that you need. We voted out an NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] bill 269 to 151; this committee voted it out 60 to 2. We have passed a defense appropriations bill 278 to 149. By all likelihood, it looks like a conference report will come out and those bills will be before the President in September of this year.

You probably know we have 12 appropriations bills. The first one up before the President will probably be the defense bills, and the President will have 11 days to sign them.

Now, you were kind enough, on an unsolicited basis, the last time you were here, to suggest to us what your recommendation would be to the President about vetoing bills. Now that you actually have a real bill to look at and to analyze, which helps fill some of those gaps, can you tell us whether or not you would recommend that the President veto that bill if it is substantially the same bill that has passed on a bipartisan basis out of the House, both on the NDAA and the approps [Appropriations Committee] bill?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Congressman.

And let me just second what you said about the Chairman. He has been my battle buddy now for a number of years as I had various jobs and he was Chairman and, before that, Chief of Staff of the Army. I am very much going to miss him; he has been terrific.

You are absolutely right about resources. We cannot continue to be the world's finest fighting force if we don't get a budget picture and horizon in front of us.

I haven't changed my view from last time I saw you. I really, fervently hope, and this isn't something I am skilled in, and I won't be part of the deliberations within the Congress, but I fervently hope that everybody can come together, both parties obviously—

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Secretary, I don't want to cut you off. I just have a minute and some left.

Here is my point. We don't always get to pick the bills we hope that we can have. I am saying, if a bill comes substantially the same as the NDAA bill and the defense approps bill that passed the House, would you recommended to the President that he sign that bill or that he veto that bill?

Secretary CARTER. The President has already said that he is going to veto the bill—

Mr. FORBES. No, I am asking your recommendation because you gave us a recommendation—

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. And I support that.

Mr. FORBES. So you would recommend that he veto those bills?

Secretary CARTER. He has already determined that he is going to veto the bill, and I support—

Mr. FORBES. But you would recommend that?

Secretary CARTER. I want to—

Mr. FORBES. Now, let me ask you this. Have you done an analysis of the risk that would put to national defense? Because the result of that would be that you would get at least \$25 billion less.

Secretary CARTER. Let me describe the risk going 1 year at a time in budgeting.

Mr. FORBES. No, no. I am just asking the difference between—

Secretary CARTER. Well, I know what you are asking, but I would like to—

Mr. FORBES. So you are not prepared to—

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. Address what the, sort of, herky-jerky approach to our budget is. It is managerially harmful to do things—

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Secretary, you will have \$25 billion short if that bill fails, but you would still take that risk and, by the way, that risk would put us, according to General Dempsey, at a place where we would be below the minimum edge of what we need for our national security.

And let me just end up, Mr. Chairman, by saying this. I think it is unimaginable that we would send 450 troops into harm's way and still look their families in the eye and tell them and their families we would veto a bill that would get them the resources they need.

And, with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank—

Secretary CARTER. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to reiterate that I haven't changed my view. We need a multiyear defense budget. We have a strategy that is a long-term strategy. We have people, the very people that Congressman Forbes just referred to, who have careers, who want to know what their future is going to be.

And this business where we have a budget 1 year at a time—and I am not blaming anybody for it. I realize it is a collective thing, where our country needs to rise up and get it together in this area. I am just telling you, it is very damaging to the institution that I feel responsible for and am responsible for.

And the other thing I would say is I travel around the world, and this is—this looks terrible. It gives the appearance that we are diminishing ourselves because we can't come together behind a budget year in and year out.

And so I continue to hope and believe that we can come together behind an agreed budget that has a multiyear horizon and allows

us to plan and execute programs and recruit and retain people in the way that I think we need to do.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, I don't disagree with anything you just said. When we vote, it is yes or no. And I think that is the point on the veto; it's a yes or no. And so that is the thing that I think is concerning to me.

Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for being here.

And, of course, General Dempsey, I greatly appreciate your service and all you have contributed.

And I think, you know, there is obviously controversy and concern about your response. I appreciate the fact that it is a direct response and that we would like everyone, actually, to get to "yes" on this one. And we have to work harder on it. So thank you very much.

I wanted to first just ask about what you talked about as the first critical line of effort, really here, which, as you say, is a political one. And my concern is that, with limited security that we have, I am not sure that the State Department, even if they had the resources—and I think we could—you know, that is obviously a very great concern if they are really able to do their job in Iraq. So I would like you to respond to that.

And along with that really does go the fourth line, which is how we communicate and whether we were doing that effectively. Those are two important things.

And the third thing I just wanted to ask you about briefly is, you know, the issue about resources. And you mentioned the fact that we need to expedite delivery of equipment, that we weren't doing a good job with that.

I think my question is, why did that take so long? There are issues around, certainly, Baghdad, as you mentioned, but within our own policies, as well. What are we learning from that so that that really doesn't happen in the future?

Thank you, sir.

Thank you, General.

Secretary CARTER. Thank you.

On the political front, which really means trying to support Prime Minister Abadi and the Government of Iraq to govern in a way that it can collect in support from Sunnis, collect in support from Kurds, and collect in support from Shiites who are not affiliated with or directly supported by Iran, and create an Iraqi security forces that can defeat ISIL and turn Iraq into a place where people can live in a decent way, that is an essential task.

And we need to align that very closely with the military line, which is why I mentioned that Secretary Kerry, who has just come back into town, and I are meeting and our teams are meeting specifically to make sure that those lines of effort, our two and his, are synchronized.

Messaging: I would only make one note about messaging, which is an area where I think we are unnecessarily hobbling ourselves.

We, for example, had a Web site; CENTCOM [Central Command] had a Web site, which simply described the facts of our campaign

and what was going on. It was tuned for an audience in the region so that they could come to a Web site and learn about what we were doing, telling the truth. But we were denied the authority to operate that and told that that was not an appropriate thing for the Department of Defense to be doing. I would like to be able to have that authority.

With respect to——

Mrs. DAVIS. And, sir, I am sorry. Denied the authority from?

Secretary CARTER. By Congress.

Mrs. DAVIS. Okay. Thank you.

Secretary CARTER. With respect to training and equipping, this is one of these situations where there is plenty of responsibility to pass around, and I wouldn't put it all on the Iraqis, and I wouldn't put it all on us, and I wouldn't put it all on Congress and all on the Pentagon, but let me just tell you what happened.

You passed the money for 2015, the appropriations bill, in December. The money came out in January, went through whatever OMB [Office of Management and Budget] process. And then there was, in your bill, the requirement that we only spend 25 percent of it until we report on the last 75 percent. We met that requirement.

That really, I can't say, was the limiting step. The limiting step for us to expend that money was building the training sites.

What we did do in the meantime, while we were waiting for that money, is reach into all kinds of other pots we have—excess defense articles and so forth. And so we tried to fill the gap.

Now, the gap is closed now, and that money is flowing. But it wasn't all on the Iraqi side, although they were an impediment. Particularly when it came to arming Sunnis and Kurds, the government in Baghdad didn't want us to do that.

But, anyway, we are back on our feet now, but I am not going to try to excuse something that took longer than it should have.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

And just quickly, with the 2 seconds left I have, on the resources that Secretary Kerry and the State Department are going to have and the backup security, I just want to be sure that we get a full answer on that.

Thank you.

Secretary CARTER. I would be happy to provide that.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 65.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, both Mr. Smith and I would be very interested to know, or to have you follow up, who denied CENTCOM the ability to put up a Web site with the facts and on what basis they denied it.

He and I have worked for some years to update some of the outdated restrictions on these sorts of issues, and we are very interested in fixing this problem if part of the problem is with this branch of government.

Secretary CARTER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. So if you would ask your lawyers to do that——

Secretary CARTER. Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN [continuing]. It is very important.

Secretary CARTER. Thank you very much.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 65.]

The CHAIRMAN. Chairman Kline.

Mr. KLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

I was looking at the preparation sheet here for today's hearing, and it says—this is a reference—quote, “United States Policy and Strategy in the Middle East.” And I think we have concluded that we don't have a strategy. In fact, the Commander in Chief said we didn't really have a strategy. So I am a little bit mystified about exactly what we are doing here since we don't have a strategy.

And I am looking at the situation in Iraq. I was over there, just in Baghdad, a couple of months ago around Easter timeframe and talking to some of our troops there. We have over 3,000 troops on the ground—boots on the ground. They are a little frustrated because I don't think they understand—and how could they?—what the strategy is if we haven't clearly articulated that. And now we are going to send 450 more people over there and, again, to execute the strategy that we don't know yet.

So, as I look at Iraq—and, as you know, Chairman Dempsey, I, like a lot of members here, have been there over and over and over again, and I have watched the situation change. And there was one point where we looked like we were doing really well after the surge, and then we saw ISIS or ISIL or Daesh [Arabic acronym for ISIL] come pouring across the border and cities start to fall and Baghdad reportedly being threatened.

And so I guess my question is where are we in Iraq today? Are we winning? Are we losing? Is it a stalemate? Is it a quagmire? What is Iraq today?

Either one.

Yes, sir. General, we will start with you.

General DEMPSEY. I never volunteer. I mean—

Mr. KLINE. I am helping you.

General DEMPSEY [continuing]. If you call on me, I will answer, but—

Mr. KLINE. I am helping you, General. You are up.

General DEMPSEY. I have been in the Army for a long time. You don't volunteer for things.

Mr. KLINE. We volunteer in the Marines all the time.

General DEMPSEY. Yeah, I know. I know.

Mr. KLINE. It is hard for me to understand that.

General DEMPSEY. And then you call the Army to actually do the logistics for you. I got it.

Mr. KLINE. Yeah. We will fight to the last soldier, so—

General DEMPSEY. Now, where were we? Where are we in Iraq?

Mr. KLINE. Are we in a quagmire there? Is it a stalemate? Are we winning? What is going on?

General DEMPSEY. I got it.

And, by the way, let's talk about the personal pronoun “we.” This has to be them, right? So if you are asking, is the United States winning, that is the wrong question.

Mr. KLINE. No, I am sorry, that is the question I am asking.

General DEMPSEY. Well—

Mr. KLINE. We have soldiers there. We have a commitment—

General DEMPSEY. Sure.

Mr. KLINE [continuing]. There. We are flying strikes there. Are we, the United States, free world, Western allies, our allies there, are we winning or losing?

General DEMPSEY. Our military—our, the United States military's campaign in support of a 60-nation coalition and the Iraqi Government, we are on path to deliver that which we have committed to delivering, which is security forces, not just the ISF but also the Peshmerga and now the Sunni tribes. We are on path to deliver to them the capability to confront ISIL inside of their sovereign territory.

This is a far different approach than if we were to decide ourselves that it was our responsibility to defeat ISIL inside of Iraq. As the Secretary said, it is my military judgment that an enduring victory over ISIL can only be accomplished by those nations and stakeholders in the region who have as much and actually more to gain or lose than we do.

Mr. KLINE. So—So, I guess that—does that—that wouldn't put it stalemate, that doesn't make it quagmire. That makes it sort of winning? Or—

General DEMPSEY. No, here is what it makes. You famously heard Stan McChrystal, when he was still on Active Duty, talk about confronting Al Qaeda. And he talked about the fact that Al Qaeda is a network and that, to defeat a network, we have to be a network. And Stan went off and built a very exquisite network of allies and partners to confront Al Qaeda. That is what we are trying to do against ISIL in Iraq.

I used the lily pad example on why we are going to Taqaddum. Now, most of you probably know that, on the surface, literally, it looks as though lily pads are free-floating, but they are not. They are tethered to a network of vegetation underneath. They are a network.

We are trying to build a network that will enable the regional stakeholders to confront this threat. Because, frankly, that is the only way it will be resolved.

Mr. KLINE. Okay. I will accept that answer, except it underscores where we started this thing. We really don't have a strategy. You have articulated a piece of what would be sort of a strategy. The strategy is to build a network that is not exactly clear what that is. I think we need to clearly articulate a strategy of what we the United States are going to do in cooperation with, in alliance with, or whatever that is going to be, of friends and allies.

When I was over there, the Arab states are now increasingly engaged, as you know, they are flying strikes there, but we also hear reports that strikes are going without success in many cases, without even bombs being dropped. We have got some work to do there, and I think we ought to start with that strategy.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary and Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your testimony and both of you for your service.

And, Mr. Chairman, especially with you, you obviously, with all the expertise and experience you will take with you when that time

comes, you will leave very big shoes to fill and I again want to thank you for all you have accomplished and for all of your service.

Mr. Secretary, can you convince me and the American people that our strategy in Iraq right now in trying to hold that country together is the right one, given the fact that it doesn't seem like the Iraqi people are willing to fight for their own country, evidenced by the fact that the soldiers that we helped to train when ISIL came in, they basically took their uniforms off and ran? And it doesn't seem to me that—you mentioned the sectarian violence and the sectarianism that exists. Are we trying to artificially hold together an Iraq that doesn't want to be held together?

And are we asking our men and women in uniform to go into a situation and put themselves in harm's way for an artificial effort to hold that country together? Would we be better off focusing on another strategy that had a more realistic look at what the local people there want and pursue a strategy that will then allow us to focus on we, once and for all defeating ISIL.

Beyond that, with the President's decision last week to send 400 additional—450 additional advisors to Iraq, I would like to know how this outwardly reactive move is coupled to a strategy and how it addresses bottlenecks in terms of the results that we would like to see from our efforts and those of our allies and partners. And the ranking member mentioned how the leader of the Iraqi parliament was disappointed that we don't have more buy-in from nations in the region.

I want to ensure that, as I am sure my colleagues here do as well, that we aren't asking our men and women in uniform to risk their lives for actions that are disconnected from a larger strategic effort.

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Congressman. And some of the parts of your question echo the questions that Mr. Kline was putting. I mean, the—I will start with one thing, which is he, and he is not—I can't thank him, but we very much appreciate it when you do visit our people. And, it is important that they have an explanation of what our strategy is even as it is important that you as our oversight committee have an explanation of what our strategy is.

And with respect to Iraq, the critical ingredient of the strategy is strengthening local forces. We believe that is possible. It will take some time. And the American role in that is to train, equip, enable, and assist those forces once they are built, and that is not—and that is the American role in a coalition. So that is the approach to defeating ISIL on the ground in Iraq, recognizing that only their defeat on the ground can be a lasting defeat, a sustained defeat. And so that is the approach we are taking on the ground in Iraq and Syria.

As we discussed earlier, there are other parts of the counter-ISIL strategy that are also very vital, they don't happen to be our responsibility, but on the intelligence side, which is very challenging with this group, on the counter-messaging side, finances, foreign fighter flows, these guys who come in and potentially come out, including to this country. So there are a lot of different dimensions to combating this—

Mr. LANGEVIN. Before my time expires—

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. But the strategy on the ground in Iraq is as I described and as the Chairman described.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Are we trying to artificially hold together an Iraq that doesn't want to be held together?

Secretary CARTER. I believe that there are some indications that there can be a decentralized but multisectarian, unitarian Iraq. That is the path that Prime Minister Abadi says he is on, that other leaders like Mr. Jabouri, who was here last week, says he is on. I think we ought to give them a chance, because that is the best outcome. Sectarianism is not a good outcome there. We have been to that movie.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you both for your service and what you are doing to protect our country, but I have a question building on some previous questions about why we are not targeting known ISIS assets? For instance, everyone knows where the headquarters of ISIS is in Raqqa, Syria, I believe, a large, multi-story building.

We know that there are convoys of oil, crude oil, being taken to Turkey, sold to raise money for ISIS, that that is a kind of a lifeline for money, as far as I look at it. And I can't imagine that it is a military decision to not take out known military assets, so there must be a political reason.

So, Mr. Carter, what is the political reason, or why are we not targeting known ISIS assets, if the intention is to degrade and destroy ISIS, as the President has said?

Secretary CARTER. Congressman, the target types that you described are authorized: leadership targets, indeed; fuel, which is partly used to finance this movement, legitimate target. We do strike those targets.

I think the only limitation, and I will let the Chairman elaborate on this, that the people managing the coalition air campaign have, and this is a coalition judgment, not just a U.S. judgment, is to try to avoid civilian casualties, and that is for obvious humanitarian reasons and also because it is not going to help what we are ultimately trying to do, which is get ISIL expelled from these territories.

Mr. LAMBORN. So you are saying—you are saying no targets are hands-off?

Secretary CARTER. No. The categories you named are absolutely hands-on, and we have struck targets like—we need to strike targets like that. That is definitely part of the air campaign.

Let me ask the Chairman if he has anything to add.

General DEMPSEY. I will tell you sir. The commander of CENTCOM, who holds the authority for strike decisions and the establishment of collateral damage estimates within the ROE [rules of engagement], he has the authority. Nothing is—nothing that happens in Washington, DC, is limiting him from the use of the, by the way, 397 strike aircraft and 1,600 pilots who are flying these missions over Iraq and Syria every day.

It is really a matter of ensuring that the targets we hit are the targets we intend, because to do otherwise would actually further

complicate this and make it an almost impossible situation to sort out.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. And if I can switch gears to Iran, they come into our discussion, I know it is the Middle East we are talking about, but Iran is part of this. Recently Olli Heinonen of the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] spoke to some Congressmen and said—and he knows more about Iran and nuclear negotiations than anyone in the world. He said you have to have two things for a deal to work, or Iran will get a nuclear weapon: that there be able to be unannounced inspections, you know, by us or our designee, and that those have to be able to go anyplace, including military installations. Without those two elements, a deal is simply not going to work.

Would you two agree with his assessment or not?

Secretary CARTER. I certainly think that a good deal, and I will go back to what the President said, which is absolutely true, which is no deal is better than a bad deal, but a good deal has to be verifiable. I want to add that with respect to Iran, you raised the question, and as I said, Iran is up with ISIL, are the two big challenges to the stability of the Middle East and to U.S. interests associated with the Middle East.

And our role in the nuclear negotiations, as we are not part of the negotiations per se, we don't sit at the table, I have the responsibility to make sure that the military option is real. And believe me, we work on that, and that—to make that real. Second, we have the responsibility to have the posture in the region that we do to check Iranian influence. And then last, we are very committed to the defense of Israel. So we have a big role in this picture in defense. It is not part of the negotiation, but it is a very, very big role and we take it very seriously.

General DEMPSEY. The only thing I would add, Congressman, is as I have had these discussions with regional partners and most recently my Israeli counterpart, if there is a deal, I have got work to do with them, and if there is not a deal, I have got work to do with them, and we are committed to doing that work.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you both.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Tsongas.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank both of you for being here today. It is great to have you here. And I think it is particularly important for us on this committee and in this body to hear from both of you this week, as the House will today consider a resolution regarding ongoing U.S. operations in Iraq and Syria. I imagine you are aware of it.

It has been nearly 1 year since the President outlined his plan to counter the threat posed by ISIL, a war he is waging based on authorities that have not been debated by Congress in 13 years. And since the President announced his plan to defeat ISIL, the United States has spent nearly \$9 million a day or nearly \$3 billion overall, and at this rate, it will continue.

Meanwhile, regional partners are pursuing efforts in Iraq and Syria that may or may not be in concert with those of the United States. And all of this has happened without a robust debate in Congress about the U.S. strategy, although we are starting to have that here today, the cost, which we have not yet addressed, and the

end state in Iraq and the greater region. And I believe it is a debate that is long overdue, but I appreciate very much that you are here today.

And, General Dempsey, we will miss you. I have always appreciated how forthright, how very thoughtful you have been in our discussions about not just what we are doing in the Middle East, but more broadly across the globe.

So I have a question for you that really—I would ask you to think back a bit, because 10 years ago this fall, you assumed responsibility for a time for training, equipping, and sustaining the Iraqi security forces. But after over a decade of training, as we know, most of the Iraqi army remains a hollow force, and we are still challenged with that. With 450 new American advisors being sent to Iraq and with your unique perspective in mind, how is today's American train-and-equip strategy adapting to make sure that we are not again standing up a force that will fold in the face of stiff resistance?

Is it just enough that we are going to now seek to recruit Sunnis into it? I think it is much more complicated than that. So what are the lessons learned that give you confidence that these efforts will prove successful as you leave your very unique place in the American military effort?

General DEMPSEY. Thank you, Congresswoman. I have a couple of thoughts; one is in terms of the strategy in general. I think our strategy is match—it matches the complexity with which we are dealing. If you don't remember anything else I said today, I think you should remember that the strategy matches the complexity. This is not a simple environment in any sense of the word.

And to Ranking Member Smith's point earlier about where—it would seem inconceivable to us that the Sunni wouldn't coalesce around the fight against ISIL, the reality is that some of our Sunni partners both outside Iraq and in are more worried about the Shia and Iranian hegemony than they are about ISIL. And so that is the environment, first.

Second, I mentioned earlier we were trying to build a network, and that network, which will include all the stakeholders I described earlier, will be somewhat fungible from plan A to plan B if necessary. And I think that is an important point to remember as well.

So reaching out to the Sunni tribes is a very prudent—and, by the way, we are doing it at the request of Prime Minister Abadi. It was his demand signal. Incidentally, there was some discussion that this was a knee-jerk reaction to the fall of Ramadi. We have been planning this for months. And we are looking at other locations as well where we can continue to build this network, which will be applicable to plan A and in support of plan A, but also accessible to us if plan B becomes necessary.

Ms. TSONGAS. You have mentioned in the past that this is a generational fight, that you don't see this being resolved very quickly. Any words of advice, again, as you are leaving as to how we adapt over time to the fungible, changing environment? Any thoughts?

General DEMPSEY. Well, that is the thought, actually, you articulated it, which is that I think increasingly—we have got, as I men-

tioned in our session where we talked about risk, for the first time in my 41 years, we have got states whose capabilities, I don't know about their intent, but I know that they have capabilities that could threaten us, and we have to deal with that.

And we have non-state actors who their intent is clear, their capabilities are less clear, and we better find a way forward and, by the way, some of that includes budget certainty so we can build ourselves a military that can deal with both kind of threats and then be adaptive when we get it wrong. And the key to adapting is actually leader development, and nobody does that better on the planet than we do.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you. I wish you the best of luck.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Franks.

Mr. FRANKS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Secretary Carter and Chairman Dempsey. I want to add my personal gratitude on behalf of my children for your noble and lifelong commitment to the cause of human freedom and the future of it.

Secretary Carter, you know, it has been observed and highlighted in several different mediums recently that the Kurdish strategy seems to be the one that is working, in almost anyone's minds. It seems to be very effective. Yesterday afternoon I had the privilege of hosting Sherkoh Abbas, the President of Kurdistan, National Assembly of Syria in my office, and he was very open and honest about the strength of the Kurdish people, around 40 to 50 million spread throughout Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. And he estimated that approximately 150,000 Kurdish fighters could be ready once called, but he emphasized that their greatest limitation was not the number of fighters, but their equipment, their ammunition, the things that they need just in terms of hard support.

And I guess my first question to you is I would like to know if the reports are true that the administration lobbied against an effort in the Senate NDAA to directly arm the Kurdish Peshmerga, and if so, why? And, what is the Defense Department doing to ensure the funds and equipment and weapons that we have to send will actually make it into the very committed, capable, and effective hands of the Peshmerga?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you, Congressman. And you're right. Committed, capable, the Kurdish forces are what we aspire to with respect to the Iraqi security forces in general. They show the will to fight. They show the capability to fight. I pointed earlier to their seizing just in past days one of the critical lifelines of supply to ISIL. So they are effective not only in protecting and defending their own region, but in the larger campaign to defeat ISIL.

So we are supporting them from the air, we are supporting them with equipment, to get to your point. And I met with Mr. Barzani a few weeks ago. We went through the various categories of weapons, and it is very substantial, that we are providing. I should note that we are not the only ones. In fact, some of the ones—the systems that the Kurds have gotten that they have valued most actually have come from our European allies. And that is good; that shows everybody's in the fight. But we are committed to supporting the Kurdish forces.

The reason to do the angle shot, so to speak, through the Government of Iraq gets back to trying to foster and support a single

multisectarian Iraqi state. We have all discussed the challenges of that. The Chairman just alluded to that. But that is the policy, and what we have said is let's do that, but then we have turned to the—to Baghdad and said, well, you can't slow this down. And in the earlier days they were slowing it down, and now it is getting directly to the Kurds, not only our stuff but some of the stuff that is coming from Europe and elsewhere, which is very valuable, because these guys really do fight.

Mr. FRANKS. Well I appreciate that, and I understand the policy bank shot as you called it, but I am concerned that maybe we are not putting enough English on it. So I hope we will continue to work in that direction.

The deadline, General Dempsey, for the P5+1 [United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany] nuclear negotiations with Iran is weeks away, and the perception is that the U.S. is entering into a deal with Iran that has already, in my judgment and many others, kind of had a great effect on China and Russia as they watch our superpower, in their minds, capitulate to a lesser power. And I am afraid that Saudi Arabia, you know, is considering, you know, its nuclear future, and that the U.S. appears weaker with every step forward that ISIS takes.

And I know that these are policy decisions on the administrative level and not at your level, but a near-term decision like this could have much greater implications across the Middle East, as you know better than anyone, than any of us could almost imagine.

How is the administration and the Department ensuring that we balance both the near-term ISIS threat with the long-term Iranian threat? And what effects on the ground do you foresee this injection of the Iranian economy with billions of dollars, that they might continue sponsorship of terrorism, or what effect is that going to have? And are we really doing what we need to do here?

General DEMPSEY. That is not a 10-second question, Congressman, but I will give you a 10-second—or now a 6—a 5-second answer.

It is what I alluded to earlier where we have state threats and we have non-state actors. ISIL's strategy is the subset of a global strategy that actually I would be happy to lay out for you.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman is expired.

With this many members, we have to try to hold to the 5-minute rule.

Ms. Duckworth.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, General Dempsey. Again, congratulations General Dempsey on your upcoming retirement. I just retired myself. The water's fine, jump on in. I don't have anywhere near your years of service, though.

I do want to address the fact that I continue to have some real reservations about our mission to train and equip the Syrian opposition forces, specifically the vetting process, our ability to differentiate between the numerous factions, to properly oversee the mission, and to know whether those that we are training and equipping are actually working in support of U.S. goals and our mission long-term.

I understand that after some delay, the training of the first cohort has officially begun. My reservations remain, namely our abil-

ity to effectively identify those who can be trusted, who can be counted on, who will work towards achieving our goals. And now that the training is underway, I am concerned about a range of other issues, like what happens to the U.S.-trained rebels when they come under attack from ISIS fighters or from forces loyal to Assad.

Could you please elaborate on the process for vetting and supplying the rebels and what kind of support they will receive? Also, what is our long-term commitment here? If they are armed with U.S.-caliber weapons, for example, have we committed us to long-term supply of NATO-caliber bullets? They are not using AK-47s, so who is providing those NATO-caliber rounds, .556, 7.62 and the like? I just want to make sure that we know how such a small group of rebels won't be able to tip the—you know, what their objectives would be, how do we measure success, et cetera.

Mr. Secretary, could you start?

Secretary CARTER. Sure. And that is a very excellent question. And the Syria train-and-equip program is even more challenging than the Iraq train-and-equip program, for the reasons you cited namely.

We are trying to recruit and identify people that, as you put it, can be counted on, that is, to fight, to have the right mind-set and ideology, not be aligned with groups like ISIL on the one hand, and on the other hand, as you put it, work towards our goals, our goal being for them to fight ISIL in the first instance. It turns out to be very hard to identify people who meet both of those criteria. General Nagata is trying very hard to identify such people.

And then you raise yet another question, which is when we equip them and set them loose, what responsibility do we have for them thereafter? I believe we have some obligation to support them and protect them, including supply them, but then there will be questions raised, I am sure, including by members of this committee, where, did any of the stuff we give them get diverted? And that is always hard—you know, if we are dealing with Iraqi security forces, we are dealing with the government's security forces. We have a little more experience keeping control over their equipment and so forth. But with respect to these people we are trying to recruit in Syria, it is going to be much—it is much trickier.

So these constraints that we put on ourselves, which are perfectly understandable, do progressively limit the number of inductees into the program, and that is proving the thing that limits the growth of the program. We have enough training sites and so forth to run them. For now, we don't have enough trainees to fill them.

Let me ask the Chairman if he wants to add anything.

General DEMPSEY. Thanks, Congressman. And thanks for your service. You know, whenever I talk to veterans, they consider themselves fortunate to have you here, so thank you.

I share your reservations. You know, this is very—this is challenging. This is, as the Secretary said, more challenging even than Iraq, but it is—it is the necessary step to try to have some credible ground partner. We have got some experience supporting the YPG [Kurdish "People's Protection Units"] and their efforts around Kobane and elsewhere on the Syrian-Turkish border.

The kind of support that is under consideration is command and control, logistics, intelligence, and close air support. No decisions made, because we haven't reached the point where we are about to deploy them. We have had some challenges recruiting and retaining. We are trying to work through those. And as I said, we have a template that we have applied elsewhere that we think is applicable, and particularly if you want to keep them in the fight, and those decisions will be made here sometime within the next couple of months.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. So at what point is there diminished returns? I mean, if you can have so few recruits that can meet all these criteria and the commitment is so great, is it worth it to continue this policy of training and equipping the Syrian rebels?

General DEMPSEY. Well, I think for now we are just literally at the first iteration or tranche of this, so it is a little too soon to give up on it. The alternative, by the way, is to try to find groups within Syria, which is itself a challenge to partner with, but we have got to partner with somebody.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Wittman.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Carter, Chairman Dempsey, thank you so much for your service.

I want to go to your comment that you have made about the lack of success, overall success with Iraqi forces against ISIS, and you talked about some of the shortcomings of the Iraqi forces, whether it is their command and control, their capability, their will to fight.

Let me ask this. There has been some suggestions that there are more things that we can do with our forces from an operational perspective, from additional enablers, things like flying more air cover, special operations forces [SOF] in targeted areas, more forward air controllers, better ISR, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, training and advising at the battalion level, and even the assertion that it may be better for us to put in certain ways more of our troops on the ground in addition to other Arab nations that have interests along with us, countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, in a greater combined force on the ground.

Give me your perspective. We have heard from you about where the shortcomings of the Iraqi forces are. Give us your perspective on the current strategy. Is there more than that we can do from an operational and support aspect with our efforts?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you. To get to the first part of your question, how have the ISF performed? The honest truth is it is mixed. Some units, like their counterterrorism forces, have fought admirably and relentlessly, almost to the point of exhaustion over the past months. Others have dissolved and collapsed, as I indicated. It is a very mixed story.

And furthermore, the Iraqi security forces have increasingly become a Shia force rather than a Sunni force, which is precisely why the people of the Sunni part of Iraq didn't feel like they were protecting them, and that it was their army. And they need to come back into that feeling if we are going to have, as we have said, the multisectarian state.

To get to your question, when we have capable Iraqi ground forces, like the kinds we are trying to build at Taqaddum, your

question is what kind of support would we provide them. We are certainly committed to providing intelligence support and advice and assist support.

With respect to introducing more forces on the ground with them, that is something that we will, I think, need to revisit as those forces are actually produced. Once we have a capable, motivated force, what can we do to enable and support it. I like your idea of involving not just us in that, but our role is to be an enabler, a motivator, the Chairman used the word “leadership,” and not a substitute for a capable ground force, but an enabler of a ground force and that is where we would like to get to.

Mr. WITTMAN. Chairman Dempsey.

General DEMPSEY. Thanks, Congressman. The words to keep in mind are that we are—our strategy, besides matching the—our matched to the complexity is also trans-regional. We are talking today mostly about Iraq and Syria, but as you know, ISIL has tentacles out in other places. And it has got to be sustainable over time, and that is, I think, the point to carry away here.

So let’s take ISR, for example. We have got about 50 percent, almost 50 percent of the global resources in ISR, unmanned, committed into the Iraq-Syria sector. That is a heavy lift, so to suggest—and by the way, the rest of it is reacting to European security, to issues related to Iranian aggressiveness in the Strait and over in Yemen to issues in the Pacific, and so—and in Afghanistan, of course, where we have—still have 10,000 troops committed. So we are trying to find a way to make this a sustainable effort, which means by, with, and through partners.

We are trying to provide our unique capabilities. But to your—meaning that which no one else can provide. But we, of course, are looking at points, discrete moments for limited objectives, for offensive operations where we might provide an additional boost to the Iraqi security forces. But I would be very reluctant—that is probably not the right word, I get accused of being reluctant often. I would be—my military judgment would be that introduction of those resources should not be done on a habitual basis, because we really want them to understand that this is their fight, but rather for moments where it would be strategically significant, potentially, for example, an assault on Mosul.

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

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Mr. O’Rourke.

Mr. O’ROURKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, in the nine lines of effort that comprise our strategy, the first one that you cited is political, and you said that every other line of effort follows from that, we must be successful politically if we are going to be successful at all in the other lines of strategy and if we are going to achieve our goals in the region.

You gave as an example in your opening testimony building governance. Can you tell us where we have built governance in that region successfully? And the follow-up question to that is how long will that take, since everything follows the success of that first line of effort?

Secretary CARTER. That is a very good question. It is a very complicated task. And in Iraq, it will mean when—helping the Iraqis, helping them when they recover territory from ISIL, to build a sys-

tem of governance that the people who live there support and are willing to support and defend in the long-term.

You say, "where have we had success?" My own view is we have had considerable success in Afghanistan. I was just speaking to President Ghani yesterday morning; he was reporting the results of the campaign there. Again, the Afghan security forces, which we are enabling, which we trained and equipped and are enabling, the National Unity Government of President Ghani and CEO [Chief Executive Officer] Abdullah Abdullah, which is a multisectarian government holding together. This in Afghanistan, which I think if you can go back 15 years, would say a very unlikely place for that to be done. So, now, we have assisted and enabled that.

Our people are very good at that. We are not at that stage yet in Iraq, but when we get to that stage, I think that we will participate in an international effort to help these places that are tragically demolished to rebuild themselves and govern themselves.

Mr. O'ROURKE. So 15 years in Afghanistan to get to a successful example of building governance in this region. And, including the fact that we have been in Iraq in one form or another since 2003, invested tens of billions of dollars to assist in building governance, trained and equipped an army that melted in the face of the enemy, I have some serious reservations about the potential to achieve success on this first line of effort.

The third line of effort that you mentioned is helping to produce a capable, committed local ground force. You admitted that we had budgeted to train and equip 24,000, have only been able to recruit 7,000. You add to that that the only ground forces apart from the Iraqi army are the Shia militias funded and led and armed by Iran. Is this a serious proposal? Is this a serious line of effort that we can seriously expect to succeed, given the most recent failures and your admission that the Iraqi National Army lacks the will to fight?

Secretary CARTER. Well, it is a serious effort, but it hinges upon Sunni fighters coming into the Iraqi security forces, being trained and equipped by us and the coalition, enabled by us, but fighting for their homeland. That is the essential ingredient. That was absent last—starting last summer. It was quite clearly absent; not everywhere, because I—earlier we talked about the Peshmerga. I mentioned the CTS [Counter Terrorism Service] and other units of the Iraqi security forces that did fight. And as you indicate, there are Shia militias which we don't support. We only support those that fall under the Government of Iraq as part of our overall strategy of supporting a multisectarian government there. So that is the strategy. It is difficult.

I think the gap between 7,000 and 24,000, the whole point of Taqaddum is to try to close that gap, because we are trying to close that with Sunni fighters. That is the essential ingredient. And I think we need—we are going to get on track to close that gap, and that is important.

Mr. O'ROURKE. In an exchange earlier, one of my colleagues and you had agreed that one of our primary missions is to support soldiers and families. I can think of no greater way of supporting them than ensuring that we have a strategy that can succeed when we are going to place them in harm's way and acknowledge that

many of them will lose their lives or have their lives changed irrevocably upon return. So I hope there is a plan B from the administration.

With that, I yield back.

Secretary CARTER. Amen to that. That is yet another reason why they deserve, as you deserve, a clear explanation of what we are trying to accomplish.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Fleming.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, gentlemen, for your service. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, thank you for your service to our beloved Nation.

I do have some questions about what is happening in Iraq. Your nine points or nine lines that you talked about, Secretary Ash—Secretary Carter, rather.

Most of them are non-kinetic, such things as intel and messaging, counter-messaging, and that sort of thing. But, General Dempsey, you said the other day that with regard to Ramadi, that the city itself is not symbolic in any way.

So the question is, what factors on the ground would change? And this is a question for both of you. You can volunteer each other on this. But what would change on the ground in Iraq that would change our strategy, particularly in a more kinetic way?

Secretary CARTER. There is in one's thinking a—the question, what if a multisectarian Iraq turns out not to be possible? I think the Chairman addressed that. I just agree with what he said earlier. It was in response to what Congressman Smith asked. That is an important part of our strategy now on the ground.

If that fails, then if that government can't do what it is supposed to do, then we will still try to enable local ground forces, if they are willing to partner with us, to keep stability, but there will not be a single state of Iraq. And at the same time we are doing that, I think the other nine lines of effort are—signify that we, while we are working on this challenging situation on the ground in Iraq, we are trying to protect ourselves and kind of maintain the threat.

Dr. FLEMING. But to be more specific in my limited time, let's say that the capital, Baghdad, itself is in danger of falling; the entire government could be toppled. Would that change our on-the-ground strategy? Would it change the extent to which we use kinetic activity?

Secretary CARTER. I will ask the Chairman to comment on this as well. I don't see that, that particular scenario change on the ground as very likely, for the reason that Prime Minister Abadi, one of the steps he has taken is to surround Baghdad with much of their remaining Iraqi security forces.

And secondly, many of them, as I have noted, are Shia in sectarian orientation, and therefore likely to fight fiercely for that part of Iraq. Therefore, I think that is unlikely, but I am going to ask the Chairman for his military judgment.

General DEMPSEY. Thanks, Mr. Secretary.

That is why we are there right now. I mean, the threat to Erbil was what drew us into the kinetic portion of this fight as well as the threat to Baghdad and the fact that we have our diplomatic presence there in the form of our embassy and thousands of American citizens. So, look, we will always protect our national interests

unilaterally, and, in fact, some of the recent special operations strikes and some of the other kinetic strikes that you have seen us conduct, both manned and unmanned.

And let's not forget that in terms of our kinetic action, these 1,650 pilots that are flying in and out of Iraq and Syria know how very dangerous it is should they ever find themselves with an engine failure, not least a shot from an air defense weapon. So we are very active kinetically. The question I think you have is: "Would something cause us to be more kinetic?" Obviously, it would be a threat—credible intel of a threat to the homeland or credible intel of a threat to our facilities and persons. But for the day-to-day ISIL fight, we are relying upon coalition partners.

Dr. FLEMING. Well, in my limited time, I think you have segued into my next question, and that is, what if the homeland is hit hard such as 9/11? Would that change our strategy in Iraq, and in what way?

General DEMPSEY. I suspect so, actually, but the fundamental strategy today is to prevent that from happening and to have an enduring outcome. If you are suggesting that could we go in and do a better job ourselves against ISIL, absolutely, but we will be back there 2 years from now.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Takai.

Mr. TAKAI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, General Dempsey and Secretary Carter for coming today and also for your service to our country.

In February, the President submitted an AUMF [authorization for the use of military force] to Congress that we never put to a vote. I believe that we must have a full and open debate on the ongoing operations in the Middle East. Given the ever-changing situation, has there been any thoughts to updates or changes to the AUMF measure since it was submitted? For example, is there more clarity on the phrase "enduring offensive ground combat operations"?

Secretary CARTER. Thank you. I will answer that. The very question that the Chairman and I asked ourselves about the AUMF now several months ago, and I actually testified about the AUMF, asked ourselves two questions: one was, did this give us the needed flexibility and authority to conduct the campaign that is necessary?

And the second is: did it—would its passage clearly signify to our people that—"our people" meaning our men and women in uniform and the other members of the Department of Defense—that the country is behind them in this fight? Those are the two things that are important about the AUMF to me.

The features that—the first question is affirmative for me in the version that the President submitted, because it was flexible or broad in its definition of ISIL and the enemy, so to speak, because it was not geographically limited, because we know ISIL is geographically limited.

It had the 3-year piece in it, which is not anything to do with the military campaign. I can't tell you that in 3 years the campaign against ISIL is going to be over. The 3 years in the AUMF is a recognition of our constitutional system, the fact that there will be a new President and that Congress and the new President ought to

be able to revisit the strategy seems reasonable to me, but it is not really a military thing.

The only restriction within it is about long-term, large-scale offensive combat operations, which we judge, for all the reasons we have been describing earlier today, are not part of our strategy and we don't think are going to be needed to combat ISIL. Therefore, I am okay with that provision in the AUMF the President has submitted.

So those are the questions we asked ourselves, and on both of those grounds, I hope that it will pass. I can't say whether it is legally necessary in any sense, but I think it would show support for the troops, and in that sense is a good thing.

Mr. TAKAI. All right. For Secretary Carter again, last week an additional 450 troops were deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. However, you have said personally that, and I quote, "nothing that we can substitute for the Iraqi force's will to fight." And following the fall of Ramadi, you also made similar comments. I think you made comments as well today.

I think many of us here in Congress are gravely concerned that the administration is considering committing a substantial American ground force to the ongoing efforts to combat ISIS, as it has been 10 months and we have slowly seen a ramp-up of U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria. Are options being considered to redeploy a substantial ground combat force to the region to combat ISIS? If not, at what number would the line be drawn for American forces in Iraq? I think we all want to know how does this end and where do we draw the line on American involvement in this conflict?

Secretary CARTER. The essence of the strategy is not to have U.S. forces substitute for capable and motivated local forces, but to have U.S. and coalition forces enable those forces. And the reason for that is that that is the only way to get a lasting result. American forces, outside forces can combat, but then it comes time for them to sustain the victory, and that can only be done by local forces. That is the reason why our strategy is not to put in 100,000 American troops. It is to put in smaller and carefully selected groups that can have unusual leverage.

That is the point about Taqaddum. It is not about the number of people that are there, it is the leverage they are going to have there right in the middle of Sunni recruiting territory, and we want Sunnis, and it is right in the middle of where the Anbar Operations Center is that we can help the Iraqi armed forces.

Mr. TAKAI. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Coffman.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, General Dempsey, I want to thank you so much for your decades of dedicated service to this country, and although I certainly feel that you have earned that retirement, we will miss you. I think this country will miss your service to our country.

The—there is a—I guess, a position of this government of no boots on the ground. And I just want to drill down to what that means, because I agree that we shouldn't have U.S. military personnel back in Iraq as the ground component, maneuver element, taking the fight away from the indigenous forces there, Iraqi security forces.

But I also have a concern about that definition in terms I do feel that there ought to be some U.S. military personnel forward with Iraqi forces, forward air controllers to make sure that we have effective close air support, advisors, not simply behind the wire, but with the Iraqi units.

I served in Iraq with the Marine Corps, and what I noticed in going out in joint patrols in the Western Euphrates River Valley was that it really emboldened the confidence of those Iraqi soldiers.

And so what is the position of the administration right now, because I have heard critics complain about the effectiveness of our close air support in terms of the number of missions and the effectiveness of those missions, the number of sorties and the effectiveness of those sorties? General Dempsey.

General DEMPSEY. Thanks, Congressman. On this boots-on-the-ground issue, I don't know what the administration's position is long-term. I can give you my military judgment here today, and that is that I would not be—I would not recommend that we put U.S. forces in harm's way simply to stiffen the spine of local forces. If their spine is not stiffened by the threat of ISIL on their way of life, nothing we do is going to stiffen their spine.

On the other hand, when they become offensive, and as a military man, you understand the distinction between defense and offense, when they go on the offensive and if there is a strategic target and we want to ensure that they succeed in achieving that strategic target, it could be a major city, it could be oil refinery, I would certainly take General Austin's advice and go to the Secretary of Defense and have that conversation about how we could—how we could make the chances of success better, but not just to stiffen their spine.

In terms of the success of the airpower, the airpower's limitation is not about forward air controllers or JTACs [Joint Terminal Attack Controllers] or U.S. service men or women forward, it is about the intermingling of a significant number of groups. So in any particular place, let's take Ramadi, you will have the intermingling of the Iraqi security forces, conventional, maybe their counterterror forces, which are special operators, some elements of the Shia militia, some of which are actually working on behalf of the country of Iraq, some of which we are very concerned about, and tribes.

And so we are very precise and very deliberate about the use of airpower so that we don't actually undermine our own campaign of trying to focus this effort on ISIL.

Secretary CARTER. Can I just—because you asked about the administration, I don't want to put the Chairman in that position, I agree with everything the Chairman has said and am open to that judgment in the future. What we need, however, is an Iraqi ground force, and then we can provide the leverage for them, again, not just to stiffen their spine, not to substitute for them, but to leverage them.

And the last thing I will say is there are boots on the ground in Iraq. We think about them every day. I appreciate any of you that visits them. They are not just in Baghdad, they are around the country, but the job they are doing is to build this capable and motivated ground force that, yes, as you say, we can then leverage.

And we will revisit or visit that question when we have the ground force to enable and—

Mr. COFFMAN. Well, let me make sure I understand both of your positions, and that is we are—if Iraqi, forward Iraqi forces are in contact with ISIS or enemy elements, then—and close air support would be effective in terms of change—of influencing that battle, influencing the battlefield, shaping the battlefield, then in fact you would support U.S. military personnel forward with Iraqi units in the form of, say, forward air controllers?

General DEMPSEY. We will take that one for the record, Congressman.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 66.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you both for your service and for being here.

General Dempsey, when I walked into your office in Baghdad as a lieutenant and you tried to figure out how a lieutenant was supposed to report to a three-star [general], you proved to me that you are not only a great national leader as you have demonstrated for the entire country, but you are also a very good boss, and I am grateful for being able to serve with you as well as have you lead our country in so many important ways. So thank you very much.

When you say, Mr. Secretary, that putting U.S. combat troops on the ground is no substitute for local forces, because only local forces will produce enduring results, my concern is that the plan that we are really executing now as far as training local forces does not look materially different than what we were doing some time ago; we just—it is a much smaller scale. I think that the missing component here is really an enduring political plan to ensure that the Iraqi Government can hold itself together, because ultimately it is really a political failure in Iraq today, and I think we all agree on that.

So talking about how important this first line of effort is, building a more effective, inclusive, multisectarian governance in Iraq, I am concerned by my experience on the ground there when I visited in February, because I didn't see a single American commander on the military side who knew anything about a political plan. When I talked to the U.S. Ambassador at Baghdad, his position was essentially that it is up to the Iraqis, it is not for us to influence. But it is not about us influencing it or a sovereign Iraq state, it is about us either us influencing Iraqi politics or Iran influencing Iraqi politics.

And it concerns me as well, frankly, Mr. Chairman, when you say that you don't know what the administration's long-term plan is, because if we don't know what the long-term plan is, then I am not sure it is worth putting these troops at risk in Iraq today.

At a personal level, the most frustrating part of going back to Iraq in February was seeing so much of what we had fought for and achieved during the surge really gone to waste. And I want to make sure that we do have a long-term, enduring political plan so that whatever effort is made by these 450 and others on the ground in Iraq today, it doesn't go to waste and we don't find ourselves sending troops back again 5 years from now.

General DEMPSEY. Can I just start, sir? I just want to make sure, because I didn't intend to imply that I don't know what the administration's plan is. I think we have tried to lay that out.

What I meant to suggest was that as this military campaign has evolved, when we have approached the administration for additional resources within the context of the strategy, they have taken our advice in every case. I just haven't gone forward yet with any further recommendations.

Secretary CARTER. I want to just second that, and that is kind of the answer to Mr. Coffman's excellent question as well.

With respect to your also excellent question, is that reinforces that the first line of effort is essential, the first line of effort being an Iraqi Government that will not behave the way Maliki's government did. And that is something we can influence, we don't directly control, but we can influence, and that is why the first line of effort and the second and third, why I am so intent, and I know the Chairman is, on aligning the political with what we are trying to do.

Mr. MOULTON. So, Mr. Secretary, what are we doing to influence it? And I can—just to drill down to a specific, what are we doing specifically to counter Iranian political influence on the ground in Iraq today?

Secretary CARTER. Well, we have made it clear to Prime Minister Abadi and all the parties there, and they have supported the point of view that we are not going to support militias or Shia forces supported by Iran or otherwise constituted that are not under the control of the Iraqi Government. So the ones that we are going to support and the ones that we are going to enable, and therefore the ones that we intend to be successful as part of our strategy, will be under the control of the Government of Iraq, and they will be the successful forces.

Mr. MOULTON. And are they responding to that leverage? Because I spoke to the Iraqi Ambassador last week, and he said the difference between America's support and Iran's is they have a house on fire: America comes with these conditions, get fire insurance and we will support you; Iran just shows up with a fire extinguisher, and his view is they are being much more effective at leveraging Iraqi politics today.

Secretary CARTER. Well, we have spoken to Prime Minister Abadi and the members of his government about precisely this point. And he is asking for our help. Now, does he speak for everybody in Baghdad? No. But he is asking for our help. He says he prefers our support.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you both.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Hunter.

Mr. HUNTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General, Mr. Secretary, thanks for being here.

I guess what—I don't know, they have been asking about ISIS pretty hot and heavy here, so we will keep it in the Middle East. You are familiar with about 2 years ago I asked Secretary Hagel to institute a hostage policy review. I asked him to appoint a hostage point person for DOD. It ended up being Mike Lumpkin, who is now ASD [SO/LIC] [Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Op-

erations/Low-Intensity Warfare)], and Secretary Hagel did that, appointed Mike Lumpkin. The White House instituted a hostage policy review. All of this came about because things were brought to my attention by a Lieutenant Colonel Amerine, Special Forces soldier, fought in Afghanistan, was working in a section of DOD working on hostage policy and hostage recovery for DOD.

He is now being investigated. He is being basically drummed out of the Army. You would not have a hostage policy review, unless Secretary Hagel started it on his own, without my request. I would not have requested it, you would not have had a hostage point person in Mike Lumpkin, if it were not for Lieutenant Colonel Amerine.

Secretary—Senator Johnson wrote you a letter I think a few days ago asking you to look into Secretary McHugh, his, let's say, investigatory policies within the Army, possible abuse by CID [Criminal Investigation Command] within the Army, and the case of Lieutenant Colonel Amerine in particular.

So I would just ask you right now, I would just like your commitment that you would look into this, because none of this would have happened if it weren't for Amerine, who has now has to claim whistleblower status because he helped the United States fix its botched hostage recovery policy, of which we had none. I mean, we have talked about this.

You had FBI, State, DOD and other—the intelligence communities all in their own—own lanes doing their own things for hostages. That is going to change now. You are going to have your own hostage policy now that that review's underway. And the House and Senate, our NDAA was passed, that had a—the parameters for your—for the administration's new hostage recovery policy set up in it. That is going to pass the Senate. So you are going to have that now. That would not have come about without the guy who is under investigation for making it all possible. Right?

Secretary CARTER. Congressman, I am familiar with the case. You have my commitment. It is under investigation now by the inspector general. So, I am familiar with the case. I can't comment on it because it is under investigation, but you have my commitment that I will keep in touch with that investigation as appropriate.

And you also have—I can't speak for the history, of course, but you certainly have my commitment with respect to a reasonable conclusion of a hostage policy review.

And since the Chairman may have been present at the creation of that review, if you would like to comment, Chairman.

General DEMPSEY. Yeah, I don't—obviously, Congressman, we can't comment on the investigation. We are both aware of it, and we are certainly enthusiastic to move ahead with the hostage rescue issue and make it more coherent across government.

Mr. HUNTER. Thank you.

And I would just stress, I mean, one of the reasons the Army puts things under investigation is so you can't comment on it. I understand that. That has happened to me in the past.

Number two, I would just ask that you—that this, I think, is bigger than one particular service. I think that when you look at this case in particular and Jason Amerine and what he has done, he

was in service to the entire country and to the Constitution, and he was doing his duty.

And I think, if you don't conduct some oversight on the investigation itself, the investigation of the investigation, I think we are not going to have the outcome that we should have, which is Amerine being cleared and not excoriated anymore but being praised as someone who actually got something done within the system even though they had to go outside of the system to us.

And I would hope that every single one of those gentlemen sitting behind you all in uniform knows that if they can't work within the system that they can come to Congress. I mean, that is what we are here for. Because when you are in the box, you can't always fix yourself. That is what we are here to do.

So, with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Gabbard.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for your service and for being here with us today.

You know, we have heard a lot of discussion about this first line of effort that you outlined in your opening remarks to address the political and sectarian situation in Iraq. And I think it is important, as we look at this question of what is our strategy to defeat ISIS, it is important that we operate in the world that actually exists, not the one that we hope or we wish could exist or would exist in the future. It is important to recognize that, while these ideals are good to have, we are operating in the world that exists today.

So, even as we look at this administration's policy, the previous administration's policy, the billions of dollars and thousands of lives that have been spent in holding onto this unified central government policy, even as we hear rhetoric from Prime Minister Abadi, the reality is that experts, both who wear the uniform and those who have studied the Middle East for a very long time, all say for practical purposes you have three regions in Iraq. It is a fractured country, with the Kurds in the north, the Shias have their stronghold in Baghdad essentially, and you have the Sunni territories largely to the west.

So, when you look at this question and you look at, Mr. Secretary, your answer to Mr. O'Rourke's question with regards to give us an example of how there has been a plan or there is a plan in place to allow for this and support governance and the ability, for example, the Sunni tribes to secure themselves—and you talked about how this would happen in the future, help the Iraqi Government put a plan in place for governance as territory is recovered.

But my question goes to Tikrit. This is an offensive that took place not that long ago. I questioned before this occurred to members of the administration what was the plan, and there was no plan at that time. And we saw, as a result, once Tikrit was taken, Sunni families were terrorized by Shia militia, homes were burned down, businesses were looted. And, as a result, you continue to see why these Sunni people have no motivation to go and fight for this so-called Iraqi security force, this Iraqi Government that shuts down bridges when they are trying to run away from ISIS.

So as you say it is essential Sunni fighters are brought into the fold, I think we all recognize that the Sunni people need to be empowered, but this is why there is no faith by many in Congress and the Sunni tribes, most importantly, that there is a plan in place to empower them.

Secretary CARTER. I very much respect your expertise and your perspective on this. And one of my favorite sayings is, "Hope is not a strategy."

And this is a strategy—the particular part of the strategy which has to do with the integrity of the Iraqi state is a challenging one, no question about it, for all the reasons you describe. If it can be achieved better than sectarianism in—for the Iraqi people and for what we want, which is ISIL's lasting defeat. Is it difficult to achieve? Yes. Does it involve as an essential ingredient empowering the Sunnis and giving them the will to participate? Absolutely.

Is Tikrit a good example of what we are trying to achieve? No, it wasn't. That is the whole point. That was not an ordered operation under the exclusive control of the Iraqi Government. And it had the kind of aftermath that exactly incentivizes us to be trying to get Sunnis into the fight. Because if you put Shias into the Sunni fight, you know how that ends. That is not lasting defeat. So that is why we are trying to get the Sunnis into the fight.

I think you are asking exactly the right question. I think it is more than hope. I think there is a prospect that we can do this. We are determined to do it. There are plenty of Iraqis who say that they will support that strategy and that we can make it succeed.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I would just continue to urge the administration to consider changing its policy on supporting this government in Baghdad. You mentioned sectarianism is the problem. I would argue that this government in Baghdad is further adding fuel to the fire of sectarianism by allowing these Shia militia, by allowing this sectarian persecution and oppression to continue, which only allows further oxygen for ISIS to continue to exist and to continue to grow in Sunni territories.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Bridenstine.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the Secretary and the Chairman for coming and testifying today. I think I would like to follow up on the line of questioning that we were just going down.

You know, you mentioned earlier, General Dempsey, about General McChrystal and you have to defeat a network with a network and his commitment to that. Certainly, he was also very committed to the counterinsurgency strategy that was deployed in Afghanistan.

You were the deputy commander of CENTCOM when we employed counterinsurgency in Iraq, and I think you eventually became the acting commander of CENTCOM under the counterinsurgency policy. And my understanding is we employ that kind of strategy so that we can come to the diplomatic and political solutions that she was just talking about. The idea is that we have

some space to maneuver so that parties can come together and we can come to a governing solution that is reasonable for all involved.

Can you share with us your time there? Why was it successful? Why was the counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq successful?

General DEMPSEY. Well, you know, I think that the counterinsurgency strategy is effective when the lines of effort that the Secretary outlined at the beginning are applied, not just the military instrument. And, as you know, in those years, when there was not much else going on in the world, actually, we invested enormous resources into that effort.

I don't think you are suggesting—I guess I should probably ask if you are suggesting whether we should make that kind of commitment again. Rather, it seems to me that we are trying to accomplish the objectives of a counterinsurgency but adapting based on what we have learned to ensure that most of that lifting is done by regional partners and by the Government of Iraq itself.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. I am not suggesting that we return to counterinsurgency in Iraq. What does concern me, though, is we heard over and over again from this administration that we had to end the gains of the counterinsurgency because we didn't have a status of forces agreement.

And the reason we didn't have the status of forces agreement, according to the administration, is that they couldn't get it ratified by the Iraqi Parliament. We have heard that over and over again. Now, somehow, even though we had to leave because we didn't have a status of forces, now all of a sudden we are putting thousands of troops back.

Can you tell me today, do we have a status of forces agreement?

General DEMPSEY. No, we do not, but we have diplomatic notes that guarantee the immunities and protections. And, by the way, we have 3,500 service men and women on the ground, so it is a much different order of magnitude.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. So, originally, then, when we did the counterinsurgency, since there wasn't an Iraqi Parliament, we didn't have a status of forces agreement? Or was that just an exchange of diplomatic notes as well?

General DEMPSEY. I don't know the answer to that. I can take that for the record. You are talking about back in 2011?

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 66.]

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. Right.

My point is, if we can have an exchange of diplomatic notes and sustain the gains that we had from the counterinsurgency—I think it was Mr. Moulton that talked about the blood-bought gains. I mean, this is very difficult for us as a Nation. If we can do that with an exchange of diplomatic letters, then why wouldn't we do that with an exchange of diplomatic letters instead of, you know, just saying, well, the Iraqi Parliament won't ratify it, therefore we have to leave immediately? And then, all of a sudden, everything that we fought to achieve, including me, including you, it seems to all be for naught.

This is a lesson—we can't go back and unwind what has already happened, but we have to be cognizant of this as we go forward because these kind of conflicts are going to happen again. And the

Commander in Chief needs to make a decision that he doesn't get to change the policy that came before him. We have to make decisions that we inherit the policy from our predecessor. We have to make decisions in the best interest of our country, regardless of whether or not it was his war to begin with.

That is my point in all this.

General DEMPSEY. Yeah. The only thing I would add is that you would have to concede we have a much different partner in Prime Minister Abadi than we did in Prime Minister Maliki.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. That is correct. It was also true that Prime Minister Maliki would have wanted us to be there had we had the opportunity to do it with an exchange of diplomatic letters, which he wanted us to do. And, instead, we chose to reject that.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Bordallo.

Ms. BORDALLO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Carter and General Dempsey, you certainly have tremendous challenges on your shoulders, and I thank you for your service.

This question that I am going to ask I think both of you may have comments on.

As we have announced additional deployments of service members back to the Middle East to enhance the train and the equip mission, I have become really troubled about the effects it will have on the readiness of our total force. Instead of sending complete units, it appears that we are deploying piecemeal components and a disproportionate contingent of senior personnel.

So I am concerned that the portion of the unit that remains at home station or in training will be relegated to preparing only for small-unit operations instead of being able to train for full operations.

Now, how will we mitigate this and ensure our reconstituting units will get the training they need to recover their readiness? That is the first part of the question.

And, secondly, also, will we consider changing the model for how we generate forces for small-scale operations?

Secretary CARTER. Excellent questions, Congresswoman. Thank you. And I will start and then ask the Chairman to—pitch it his way.

You are absolutely right. When we send in an enabling force, we tend to take certain elements, including the command element, out of a larger unit—a brigade or a division even, headquarters—and deploy it forward, because that is the only part of the force that we need, and the rest stays behind. That is a readiness dilemma for, in this case, the Army. And I know the Army works very hard on that, but it is as you say.

And so the second part of your question is, are we thinking of ways of—I forget how you put it, but systemizing and dealing with the readiness—

Ms. BORDALLO. Yes.

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. Issues associated with it. Absolutely, we are. I know that Secretary McHugh and General Odierno are. I have discussed that with them.

The Chairman, in addition to being the Chairman, was also the Chief of Staff of the Army, and perhaps he would comment as well.

Ms. BORDALLO. Thank you.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, Congresswoman. We are adapting our global force management process to account for the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, for the first time in a very long time, we have both the issue of dealing with potential threats from state actors and from non-state actors.

So, though it is always our instinct to apply coherent units—that is to say, units that have been organized, trained, and equipped and had a long relationship with each other—we are going to have to find ways to account for our global challenges with a hybrid solution to global force management.

But, you know, frankly, we are a much different Army, I will use, in 2015 than we were in 2003 when this all began. And we can figure it out. But we would be happy to describe for you how we intend to approach that.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 65.]

Ms. BORDALLO. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Dr. Wenstrup.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, both for being here.

You know, as I sit here and we go through all this, I just can't help but reflect, as one of the couple hundred thousand who served in Iraq and saw us go on to victory, to just have my stomach turn when I think of my friends that were killed in certain areas that are now under control of ISIL. And it is very difficult to sit and watch what is taking place today.

Today, we have also a possibility of a resolution being brought forward that asks for the removal of all U.S. troops from Iraq or Syria. What do you think the Middle East would look like if we did that, and what effect would it have on our national security?

General DEMPSEY. That would be a mistake, Congressman, for obvious reasons. We have United States national security interests within Iraq, and we also have United States national security interest in maintaining credible, safe, and reliable allies in the region. And our withdrawal from this issue would challenge and put us at greater risk over time, no question about it.

Dr. WENSTRUP. I would agree with you on that note.

I have another question concerning our counter-messaging and our humanitarian efforts. Obviously, I think those are key components to whatever military mission we are engaged in.

Is it helping with the recruitment on the local level for our allies in this fight? Is our counter-messaging having an effect? You know, we talk all the time about the messaging of ISIL and the social media, et cetera, et cetera. Is our counter-messaging helping recruit those that will be in the fight with us?

Secretary CARTER. The honest truth is that, at the moment, our counter-messaging is the truth. We don't have particular ways of getting on social media and propagandizing the way ISIL does, and I don't think you are suggesting that we should do that.

Dr. WENSTRUP. No, I am asking you—

Secretary CARTER. But we do—

Dr. WENSTRUP. You mentioned counter-messaging earlier. I am just asking you what that looks like.

Secretary CARTER. Exactly. And I understand the drift of your question.

And the critical form of counter-messaging by America gets back to the word the Chairman started with, which is “leadership.” When we step up and indicate that we are in the game, we are not substituting for the game but we are in the game, whether it be here or anywhere else—I was just in Southeast Asia last week—there is a hunger for American leadership. We have played that role for decades in many parts of the world. Same thing is true in Europe. And I think that the best message we can give against all of these threats to our friends and allies is one of resolve and steadiness.

You made an earlier reference to continuity over time. I think that is important, as well. The steadiness of American leadership. And it gets back to all the things—we had a conversation about the budget earlier. I believe we need steadiness there, as well. And that is the best kind of—for heartening our friends and getting them to do more, that is the best kind of counter-message we can have.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And what about the humanitarian side that was mentioned as well? I mean, I look at how we really turned the tide in Iraq before, and part of that was our humanitarian efforts, where I saw the people of Iraq began to trust us more than their own government because of the way we lived with them and we endured what they endured and we offered medical relief and things like that.

Are we doing things like that? Is that part of our humanitarian effort that wins over the hearts and minds of people that we need if we are going to be successful?

Secretary CARTER. It is. I don’t think we have had the full opportunity to deploy that. When we begin to take back territory, I think the gist of your question is, we need to help the Iraqis who do that to restore services, make sure people are getting food, power, all these things that just make up normal life.

That has to be the sequel to a military defeat of ISIL. Otherwise, the tide will just turn back again. And that is essentially—again, now, we are not going to try to do that all by ourselves, but I think that we will, as we enable the fight, we need to enable the aftermath, as well.

And to get back to your part about partners and—many of the partners and allies are very willing to do that, and they have some experience in doing that, including in Afghanistan. Some of our European friends and allies, for example, would be very willing. It is not like the United States has to bear the whole burden there.

Dr. WENSTRUP. No, I agree. And I hope that we do deploy those measures, which can be helpful to us.

Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Ashford.

Mr. ASHFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, General Dempsey and Mr. Secretary.

A little on topic and probably has been asked and answered a couple of times, but when I was in Iraq with Congressman Moulton, he asked a question that he asked today several times, and it is a compelling question.

There was quite a bit of optimism when we were there in February. It had to do primarily with the fact that in June there would be an operation in Mosul and so forth and so on. One of the factors that was—but much has changed since then, obviously, and you have addressed that.

One of the—for me, and what I reported back to Nebraskans was that I saw the emergence of, to some degree, leaders in the Arab countries who were ready to stand up and try to unify these groups in a less sectarian manner. And King Abdullah of Jordan was one of those. And it was very, to me, at least, someone who is new to this, it was a very optimistic kind of a report. He talked about his idea of bringing Sunni leaders together, I think, in that time in April or so.

But, since that time, obviously, the Jordanians have been impacted by significant challenges, not the least of which are the refugees and some of the Al Qaeda issues for them.

Number one, I guess, my question, Mr. Secretary, would be, how are things going with Jordan? And do you see that sort of exceptionalist kind of approach that he was taking being able to move forward?

And I apologize if this has been asked before, but—

Secretary CARTER. No, it is a key question that was alluded to before, but you are hitting the nail on the head, which is: Where are the other, particularly Sunni-aligned powers in the region in this fight which is essentially for a big swath of Sunni territory by a group where religion is the center of their political ideology?

And, in the case of Jordan, there is no question about that. The level of insight and commitment by the King and the tremendous support he has in Jordan, in part because of the tragic burning of his pilot—

Mr. ASHFORD. Right.

Secretary CARTER [continuing]. He is all in and a very committed partner. And we are doing everything we can to work with him. The refugees are a challenge to a small country like Jordan, so definitely a worry.

When we had the GCC countries here in Washington about a month ago, they were raising issues in their region, including Iran, which they are very concerned about. So we were talking about Iran as well, but we were also saying, hey, it is not just Iran, there is ISIL as well, and you are uniquely positioned to play a greater role in this campaign.

Mr. ASHFORD. Right.

Secretary CARTER. And they indicated some willingness to do so. I think, at the moment, we are trying to help them build the capacity to do so, because most of them don't have the ground forces that could participate, in principle, in the campaign in Iraq and may be more acceptable than outsiders.

Mr. ASHFORD. And, obviously, at that time, we were talking about the training mission which is being undertaken, and you have talked about that, and you are doing more of that.

To me, it seemed then and does now, as well, listening, that you can—obviously, there is a military objective, and that has to be followed through with. But it isn't—maybe I am wrong, but it isn't so much that we have to wait until the military objective is absolutely done, that there is also a parallel course of bringing these other leaders together to try to find a more political solution.

It seemed to me, when I left, that was what I was hearing. It has to be parallel. You can't just go from one to the other. It has to be sort of a parallel thing.

There is only a few seconds, but if you could comment on—

Secretary CARTER. I completely agree with that. Another way of saying it is, all the lines of effort of the strategy have to be synchronized. And the political and the military, in particular, need to be synchronized.

Mr. ASHFORD. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. McSally.

Ms. MCSALLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for sustaining for the long haul here today.

I do want to say that I do have serious concerns about what appears to be an incoherence in our regional strategy related to Iran specifically, where we are marching towards a nuclear agreement with them yet we are supporting Saudi Arabia, their striking, their influence, and the Houthis in Yemen, yet Qasem Soleimani is leading the ground offensive to take back Tikrit while we are providing the air force. No wonder why our Sunni partners, you know, are concerned about the incoherence there.

So I know a lot of that is you are participants but you are not fully responsible for, but I just want to, you know, say on the record that I think that incoherent strategy is impacting some of the lack of commitment of our allies in a political nature, specifically in Iraq.

But I want to focus my questions on specifically the targeting and the air campaign in Iraq. I just led a CODEL [congressional delegation] over to the region, met with the air component commander, met with the JTF [Joint Task Force] leadership. They felt like ISIS was on the defensive, and then a couple weeks later, obviously, Ramadi fell. And I have been involved in the targeting process at the COCOM level down to the pilot, and so I am concerned.

And I know you mentioned we are hitting all the targets we have except for when collateral damage is a factor, General Dempsey. And I want to quote General Deptula's—who is the smartest guy in airpower, I think, in our generation—op-ed in The Washington Post—and I will do it quickly—a couple weeks ago:

“The fastest way to end the inhumanity of war is to eliminate its source—in this case, the Islamic State—as quickly as possible. Gradualism doomed the effectiveness of air power in the ‘Rolling Thunder’ air campaign [during the] Vietnam [War]. The current gradualist approach is worsening the suffering and increasing the loss of innocent life. While unintended casualties of war are regrettable, those associated with airstrikes pale in comparison with the savage acts being carried out by the Islamic State. What is the logic of a policy that restricts the use of air power to avoid the pos-

sibility of collateral damage while allowing the certainty of Islamic State crimes against humanity,” is the question he poses.

I think it is a very valid line of argument. If we are trying to avoid one civilian casualty, yet in not hitting a legitimate target we are allowing the Islamic State to continue to commit atrocities and murder against the people on the ground, how do we balance that?

So my question is—and you may need to answer this in a, you know, classified manner. What percentage of the strike sorties are coming back with their munitions on board, as just an indication of kind of our limitations?

And how many targets have we actually identified? We have gone through the PID [positive identification]; we have a valid target. But we actually haven’t struck them specifically because of the collateral damage limitations that are much tighter than the law of armed conflict requires or because the approval process takes so long we just are unable to hit it. So, you know, what is that number? How many are we not hitting that are legitimate targets because of this extreme constraint that we are putting on for collateral damage?

General DEMPSEY. First, for the record, let me tell you, I couldn’t disagree more with retired General Deptula. And I would say that both as General Dempsey, as Chairman Dempsey, and, at some point in the future, Citizen Dempsey.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay.

General DEMPSEY. Okay?

Secondly, the targeting that we do is based on intelligence, and we fuse, as you know very well, we fuse HUMINT [human intelligence], we fuse SIGINT [signals intelligence], and we—

Ms. MCSALLY. Yep. So I am saying we have the PID. We have the PID, but now we don’t strike because of the CDE [collateral damage estimate].

General DEMPSEY. Right. That is right. And that decision is made by the commander on the ground. And—

Ms. MCSALLY. So do we have a number, though? You know, it is 80 percent or 20 percent don’t get hit because of CDE, not because of PID.

General DEMPSEY. I would like to answer you in a classified version—

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay.

General DEMPSEY [continuing]. Because I think we don’t want to signal our enemies on how they might avoid being struck.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 66.]

Ms. MCSALLY. Well, it just gets to the indication of whether this is the thing that is really allowing us to not achieve our objectives.

General DEMPSEY. I do not—in my judgment, this is not the limiting factor.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay. Fair enough.

The next question I want to follow up—we talked about it earlier. As you mentioned, we have over 1,600 pilots flying every day, could have an engine issue. And then we have a potential pilot being captured, with the potential fate of the Jordanian pilot.

As I was visiting the theater, visited some of our combat search and rescue forces there, but they remain outside Iraq, primarily be-

cause of limitations of boots on the ground. And responsiveness is really important for combat search and rescue to be able to scoop them up right away.

So we are allowing 450 more advisors to go in Iraq, but we are not allowing our combat search and rescue forces to go in Iraq. Have you advised the administration to move them there and they are not taking your advice? Or are you comfortable with them being so far away with that increased responsiveness?

General DEMPSEY. That is a great question. At this point, they are operating from locations outside of Iraq, and they can, and they can loiter, and we are not taking any more risk at that point.

If we go into the point where we were going to accompany the Iraqi security forces that will require not just—that is why it is important—you know this, but it is important to understand, this is not just about putting three JTACs forward. It is about putting a medevac [medical evacuation] capability and a combat search and rescue, a personnel recovery capability, and a QRF [quick reaction force]. And so 15 people might require 150.

Ms. MCSALLY. Right. But one F-16 pilot deep into Syria needs that same responsiveness, so—

General DEMPSEY. Right. But we have PR [personnel recovery] in hand right now. If we expand this at some point, we will have to address it.

Ms. MCSALLY. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good questions.

Mr. Norcross.

Mr. NORCROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And somebody has to be last. And certainly appreciate your service.

I just want to follow up—right where you are sitting, we had King Abdullah here. Actually, it was the day after they released the video of his pilot being burned to death. You can imagine his attitude. But he made a couple points that resonated with me through today.

One is that this is our fight, indicating that it is not going to be Christian or Muslim that they had to fight. Certainly, they want our help, and we are doing that. But something that really stuck with me to this day is “I have been fighting this fight for 1,400 years”—1,400 years.

So it sort of reminds me, what we are following the steps here is, if anybody has been to an old arcade, it is called Whac-A-Mole. You hit them here, they come up over here.

This is the question I am going to: What is considered a win? Much of the discussion today has been around Iraq, but those lines are simply lines on a map. This is about the Middle East. What do you see as a win? Is it geographically based? And is it short-term? Where are we in 5 to 10 years? What is a win when we are discussing the Middle East and in particular with ISIL?

Secretary CARTER. Well, I think that—and this gets back to the previous question about how complex and varied are the problems of the Middle East. The way we ground ourselves in our strategy is in American national interests. And so, in these different circumstances, we are trying to pursue our interests.

Our interests in the particular fight against ISIL are to stop this movement from becoming something that endangers friends and allies and therefore our interests in the region or that is capable of striking the homeland.

So success in the campaign would be eliminating not every mole, to use your metaphor, but every mole hole and make it such that there is no safe haven for the kind of savagery that ISIL represents and from which it can continue to destabilize places like Jordan or even further afield.

I think that is what we are trying to accomplish. And it is difficult, it will take some time, but that is what the strategy is about in that particular region for that particular problem.

But this is a varied region, and there are other problems as well. We have talked about Iran as a challenge. So this is one but not the only one.

Mr. NORCROSS. General, just to follow up on that, from a strategic planning perspective, we can take out the hole, as you mentioned, but don't we have to look at this long-term? And we want to make sure you have the tools that are needed.

But this is long-term, ongoing. Because if we defeat them in one area, they are going to regather and come up in another area, thus the 1,400-year fight that the King was reflecting on.

Do you see this as an ongoing?

General DEMPSEY. Congressman, I absolutely do and have said so at every opportunity. And that is why we need to put ourselves on a sustainable footing across this challenge that runs from Afghanistan and, we could certainly argue, all the way over to Nigeria—a sustainable footing that allows us to keep pressure on this network, to build partners to keep pressure on the network, and to make regional stakeholders, who have a lot more to gain or lose than we do, in the lead of it. And that is the path we are on.

Mr. NORCROSS. So predictability from America—

General DEMPSEY. Budget predictability—

Mr. NORCROSS [continuing]. That your friends are going to be there and continue to be there, not—

General DEMPSEY. Absolutely. And, by the way, I don't want to turn it into a budget hearing, but predictability in a budget would help us accomplish that.

Mr. NORCROSS. When we were over in the UAE, that is what we were hearing, is they are seeing that America potentially could walk away from their commitment or their friends in the area. And that is the last thing we want to see. So predictability is the single most stabilizing force; would you agree with that?

General DEMPSEY. I would say predictability and perseverance.

Mr. NORCROSS. Thank you.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Gentlemen, I appreciate it.

Mr. Secretary, the thing I wrote down that I kept thinking about throughout today was, "Hope is not a strategy."

And so I hope we have thousands of Sunnis who flood into the training that we are going to do, that get energized to go fight ISIL, but we have a—there are concerns about whether they are going to do that and trust the central government.

We have a provision in our bill that says, unless you can certify that Iraq is an inclusive government, then we can directly arm the Sunni tribes and the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Again, hope is not a strategy, and hoping for an inclusive Iraq with Sunnis joining the fight, you know, I hope it happens, but if it doesn't happen pretty quick, obviously, we can't have ISIS continue to grow.

And then, on a similar note, I would hope we would have defense budgets grow at a predictable 5 to 7 percent every year for the next 10 years, and not only that you all but the industrial base could plan on that, and it would be a much better, more efficient system.

On the other hand, we are not in that world right now. And if the President chooses to veto two defense bills, an authorization and an appropriation bill, that provide exactly as much money as he asks for, because he doesn't like the label on some of the money or because he wants to put more money—or leverage it for more money for the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] or the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], that is going to have serious consequences for our military, because that will mean we are at a CR [continuing resolution] for the rest of the year.

And so I hope that not only you two who have to deal with the real world but the President, as well, can use hope not as a strategy but look at the real-world consequences of some of these decisions. Because as we have affirmed several times today, this is a very complex, long historical background of problems in this part of the world. We have to deal with it as we find it, not as we hope it would be.

You all are welcome to comment. You don't need to. But that is just my parting thoughts after having been here.

Let me ask all—

Secretary CARTER. I would only say, Chairman, because it is my favorite phrase, that I think in this, as in every other part of the world, we need to be practical and, where practical, turn hope into reality. But practical, that is the meaning of that slogan. And I think I am just echoing what you just said.

The CHAIRMAN. No, it is a great point. And how do you get from a hope to reality? It is a strategy. And that is why we had this hearing today, to talk about how we get from what we hope it will be from where we are today. And it looks like a long, winding, very difficult road in the Middle East.

Let me ask all our guests to remain seated so that the Secretary and the Chairman and their party can make their way out. We have held you longer than we intended. And so, if everybody will stay seated for just a moment while our witnesses depart.

Again, thank you all for being here. We will look forward to other engagements.

With that, this hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:43 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JUNE 17, 2015

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JUNE 17, 2015

Statement of Ranking Member Adam Smith

HEARING ON

U.S. Policy and Strategy in the Middle East

June 17, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to join you in thanking our witnesses for appearing here today. Secretary Carter, General Dempsey, it is always good to have you here. Let me begin by congratulating you both and your partners across the government in your recent successful efforts to further combat al Qaeda and eliminate its leadership. Nasser al-Wuhayshi and Mokhtar Belmokhtar were both responsible for attacks and attempted attacks on Americans and presented an ongoing threat against American citizens. Thank you both for your ongoing efforts to eliminate al Qaeda.

Today, the United States and our allies are faced with a high level of chaos in the Middle East. Traditionally stable states have sunk into civil war, sectarian strife is spreading, and the institutions of many central governments are increasingly weak and incapable of coping. These factors have allowed for the spread of violent extremist ideologies, particularly among some parts of the Sunni world, and opened up opportunities for the spread of Iranian influence among many of the Shi'a. The complexity of these interwoven conflicts has caused many to conclude that there is no short-term solution to this strife, and that we must be prepared to engage in an increasingly destabilized Middle East to protect our interests and allies for years to come.

ISIL is a symptom and consumer of the dysfunction in the Middle East, but it's not a root cause. As others have noted, ISIL is either version two or version three of Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda in Iraq depending on how you count it. Simply driving the organization from the territory it now controls is not enough to secure our interests in the long run—we have to have allies who can hold that territory and govern it in a way that will prevent the return of ISIL or whatever extremist organization comes next.

Unfortunately, there are no obvious choices to take on the task of holding the terrain and preventing the emergence of more extremists. Shi'a parties, many of which have close links to Iran, dominate the central government of Iraq. Despite the good intentions of Prime Minister Abadi, those parties have consistently been unwilling to allow meaningful participation by Sunnis in the government. That government has also been unwilling to deploy additional forces to defend Sunni areas from ISIL or to even support the forces that were actually fighting ISIL in Ramadi. And they have certainly expressed no interest in seriously arming the Sunnis so that they can defend themselves. While some of

this is due to a lack of capability, the biggest problem is will—the Shi'a majority is focused on defending the Shi'a areas of Iraq and seems to have no interest in defending, much less reconciling with, the Sunni minority.

For their part, it is not hard to understand why many Sunnis choose to keep their heads down. They are faced with a Shi'a-dominated central government that does not support them and has employed Iranian-backed militias who have engaged in ethnic cleansing in the past. Without getting Sunni support in the fight against ISIL, I don't see how we can win in Iraq. And unfortunately, I don't see the government of Iraq helping in that effort in any meaningful way.

Syria is worse. The Assad regime has engaged in numerous war crimes and attacks on civilians and spends far more of its time fighting the more moderate opposition and not fighting ISIL. The opposition in Syria is splintered and while there are some moderate opposition groups, the strongest groups in the opposition are often far too extremist for anyone to be comfortable.

Iran, for its part, is backing extremist Shi'a militias in Iraq and the Assad regime and Hezbollah in Syria. No doubt, some of Iran's effort is designed to defend Shi'a in the region—ISIL has often called for the murder of Shi'a and its predecessor organization was responsible for the murder of thousands, if not tens of thousands of Shi'a in Iraq. But Iran also seems to be attempting to expand its influence in the region in ways not only inimical to our interests, but in ways that often make the sectarian conflict worse.

Without central governments willing to help fight ISIL, reconcile with their ethnic and sectarian minorities, and govern fairly and effectively, this fight will be much more difficult than anyone of us might wish. In this situation, we will have to be prepared to arm, train, equip, and help groups who we can count on, government or not. The National Defense Authorization Act contains a provision that would allow for the direct arming of the Sunni and Kurdish elements in Iraq if the central government does not make progress in reconciliation. There are those who have suggested that arming those groups directly would cause the state to fracture. My concern is that if the Iraqis aren't willing to make real progress in reconciliation, it will show that the state has already fractured and that there is little prospect of putting it back together.

Going forward, we will have to seriously engage with our Sunni partners in the region, the Saudis, UAE, Qataris, Turks, and others, to find ways to support the Sunnis of Iraq and Syria. We will have to work closely with Turkey to help address their fears of the Kurds growing too strong—so far in Syria and Iraq, the Kurds have been the groups most successful in retaking territory controlled by ISIL and we cannot walk away from them. We will have to work seriously with others to see if there is any sort of meaningful political moderate opposition to work with Syrians we train and equip and those other groups for whom we provide

backing. Finally, we will certainly have to continue strikes against ISIL leadership and other targets. The successes of the Syrian Kurds in taking Tal Abyad from ISIL control and in defending Kobani show that with a competent and motivated ground force, we can have tactical success against ISIL even without Americans on the ground directly engaged.

We must find ways to increase assistance, both military assistance and help in dealing with refugees, for partners in the region—in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Jordan is almost overwhelmed under the strain of refugees. Lebanon has been stable in the face of challenges that many of us assumed would send it quickly back into civil war. We have to help them both and work to strengthen the institutions essential to maintaining their stability. We cannot deal with the threat of ISIL alone, so we will have to work closely with our partners to combat ISIL militarily, to stem the flow of foreign fighters, to combat their ideology, and to govern the territory taken from them over time.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time

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**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER
OPENING STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY AND COUNTER-ISIL
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 2015**

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me here today. Thank you also for keeping a wide-ranging and long-term perspective on the challenges and opportunities for America and its leadership throughout the world. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was in Singapore, Vietnam, and India; next week I will be in Germany, Estonia, and Belgium. I understand that your focus in this hearing is current developments in the Middle East.

Broader Middle East Strategy

The Middle East is undergoing a period of great social and political turmoil with a number and variety of cross-cutting geopolitical developments. Our strategy in the region is grounded in America's core national interests, and it's tailored to address specific circumstances in various places like Iraq, Syria and Iran. And it leverages American leadership with efforts of coalition of allies and partners.

Our core interests, for example, drive our actions to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Similarly, they dictate that we not let up until we have destroyed ISIL and al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists throughout the region that pose dangers to the homeland, friends, and allies. The past few weeks serve as a reminder to terrorists bent on harming the United States and our interests, whether they are in Syria, Libya, or Yemen – we have the capability to reach out and strike them. Meanwhile, the security of Israel will always be one of my top priorities. And we will continue to hone important security relationships with our partners in the Gulf, bolster their security, and ensure freedom of navigation.

The pursuit of our nation's core interests in the region is a strategy based on tireless diplomacy backed by formidable military power and dedicated capacity building to buttress and leverage the contributions of others – and especially those in the region themselves.

That's why we have 35,000 forces postured throughout the region, enabling us to strike ISIL and al-Qaeda terrorists and check Iranian malign influence.

That's why we're assuring Israel's continued qualitative military edge, and why we're working with our Gulf partners to make them more capable of defending themselves against external aggression.

That's why we're supporting Saudi Arabia in protecting its territory and people from Houthi attacks, and supporting international efforts to prevent Iranian shipments of lethal equipment from reaching Houthi and Saleh-affiliated forces in Yemen.

And that's why the United States is supporting efforts to pursue political settlements to crises throughout the region, from Yemen to Libya to Syria.

Counter-ISIL

While I'm prepared for a range of questions related to DoD's role in the Middle East, I'd like to focus on the immediate issue that I understand the Committee is interested in – the U.S.-led coalition's strategy to defeat ISIL.

ISIL presents a grave threat to our friends and allies in the Middle East; elsewhere around the world from Africa and Europe to parts of Asia because of its steady metastasis; and to our

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homeland because of its avowed intentions to strike and recruit in this country. ISIL must be – and will be – dealt a lasting defeat.

The strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL constructed by President Obama draws upon all the national security agencies of the U.S. government: intelligence, law enforcement, diplomacy, and others. The strategy and its associated military campaign involve a global coalition, reflecting both the world-wide consensus on the need to counter this threat and the practical requirement for others to do their part. And the counter-ISIL strategy has nine so-called lines of effort, reflecting the breadth of this challenge and the tools needed to combat it.

The first and most critical line of effort is the political one, led by the State Department. In Iraq, this involves building more effective, inclusive, multi-sectarian governance. Each of the other lines of effort requires success in this line because it's the only way to create support among local forces – and local people – that is necessary to make progress against extremism stick.

The next two lines of effort are interconnected – to deny ISIL safe haven, and to build partner capacity in Iraq and Syria. Both are led by DoD, which, alongside coalition partners, is conducting a bombing campaign from the air, advising and assisting Iraqi security forces on the ground, and training and equipping trusted local forces.

I will address our military's current execution of these two lines of effort in a minute, but I want to underscore a crucial point about our campaign in Iraq and also Syria: it requires capable, motivated, legitimate, local ground forces to seize, clear, and hold terrain – this is the only way to ensure a truly lasting, enduring defeat of this movement.

The fourth line of effort is enhancing intelligence collection on ISIL, led by the National Counterterrorism Center. The fifth line of effort, disrupting ISIL's finances, is co-led by Treasury and State. Lines of effort six and seven, both co-led by State and the NCTC, are to counter ISIL's messaging and disrupt the flow of foreign fighters to and from ISIL, both of which are critical in today's connected and networked world. The eighth line of effort, providing humanitarian support to those displaced by or vulnerable to ISIL, is led by State. Finally, the Department of Homeland Security and FBI are working together to protect the homeland – the ninth line of effort – by disrupting terrorist threats. The effective execution of all nine of these lines of effort by the United States and its coalition partners is plainly necessary to ensure overall success.

Execution of DoD's Lines of Effort

Let me turn to the execution of DoD's two lines of effort, beginning with the U.S.-led campaign of air strikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. This effort has produced some clear results in limiting ISIL's freedom of movement, constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters, and impeding command and control. It's enabled key achievements for local forces – including the very recent success of anti-ISIL forces who took the key town of Tal Abyad. The airstrikes are also buying critical time and space required to carry out DoD's second line of effort – developing the capacity and capabilities of legitimate local ground forces.

The ground campaign is a work in progress. The Iraqi Security Forces were severely degraded after Mosul fell last June, when four divisions dissolved. The combination of disunity, deserters, and so-called ghost soldiers – who are paid on the books but don't show up or don't exist – has greatly diminished their capacity.

However, understanding these challenges does not change reality – ISIL's lasting defeat still requires local forces to fight and prevail on the ground. We can and will continue to develop

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and enable local forces, because we know from experience that putting U.S. combat troops on the ground as a substitute for local forces will not produce enduring results. That's why DoD seeks to bolster Iraq's security forces to be capable of winning back – and then defending and holding – the ISIL-controlled portions of the Iraqi state.

Strengthening Execution

What we saw in Ramadi last month was deeply disappointing – and illustrated the importance of a capable and motivated Iraqi ground force. In the days that followed, all of us on the President's national security team, at his direction, took another hard look at our campaign across all the lines of effort. At DoD, I convened my team before, during, and after my trip to the Asia-Pacific to examine our execution of DoD's lines of effort, and to prepare options for the President if his approval was required for any enhancements we identified.

In our meetings at both the Pentagon and the White House, we determined that while we have the right strategic framework, execution of the campaign can and should be strengthened...especially on the ground.

We determined that our training efforts could be enhanced and thus are now focusing on increasing participation in and throughput of our training efforts, working closely with the Iraqi government and stressing the focus on drawing in Sunni forces, which are underrepresented in the Iraqi Security Forces.

We also determined that our equipping of the Iraqi Security Forces had proceeded too slowly. This process was earlier sometimes delayed by bureaucracy in Baghdad, but occasionally also in Washington. That is why we are now expediting delivery of essential equipment and materiel, like anti-tank capabilities and counter-IED equipment, to the Iraqi security forces – including Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces.

We also determined that we could enable Iraqi Security Forces with more tailored advice and assistance, including with critical outreach to local Sunni communities.

That is why on advice from Chairman Dempsey and General Austin, and at my recommendation, last week President Obama authorized the deployment of 450 personnel to Iraq's Taqqadum military base in Anbar Province to establish an additional site where we could advise and assist the Iraqi security forces. Situated between Ramadi and Fallujah, Taqqadum is a key location for engaging Sunni tribes, and Prime Minister Abadi, Iraqi military officials, and Sunni leaders have all committed to using Taqqadum to reinvigorate and expedite the recruitment of Sunni fighters.

Our forces will also provide much-needed operational advice and planning support to the Iraqi Security Forces' Anbar Operations Center located there. We expect that this move will open a new dimension in our and Iraq's efforts to recruit Sunnis into the fight and to help the Iraqis coordinate and plan the critical effort to roll back ISIL in Anbar province.

And Secretary Kerry and I have agreed to begin a process to continually assess execution of our campaign – starting with improving coordination across our respective lines of effort.

Observations

Execution, however, is a two-way street, and our training efforts in Iraq have thus far been slowed by a lack of trainees – we simply haven't received enough recruits. Of the 24,000 Iraqi Security Forces we had originally envisioned training at our four sites by this fall, we've only received enough recruits to be able to train about 7,000, in addition to about 2,000 Counterterrorism Service personnel. As I've told Iraqi leaders, while the United States is open to

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supporting Iraq more than we already are, we must see a greater commitment from all parts of the Iraqi government.

There are positive signs. I've met with Prime Minister Abadi, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional President Barzani, and just last week with Speaker Jabouri of Iraq's parliament. They all fully understand the need to empower more localized, multi-sectarian Iraqi security forces and address persistent organizational and leadership failures.

And because a sovereign, multi-sectarian Iraq is more likely to ensure a lasting defeat of ISIL, the United States must continue working with and through the Iraqi government in all our actions – including our support for Kurdish and Sunni tribal forces. Our efforts need to reinforce inclusivity and multi-sectarianism, not fuel a reversal to sectarianism which would make the lasting defeat of ISIL harder, not easier.

The situation in Syria is even more complex, because of the lack of a legitimate government partner and the many competing forces there. Regardless, we will continue striking ISIL in Syria with the long reach of our airstrikes and operators. And we will continue working with Syria's neighbors to impede the flow of foreign fighters into and out of Syria and Iraq. Our train-and-equip mission in Syria has been challenging, but the requirement for a capable and motivated counter-ISIL ground force there also means we must persist in our efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that success in this campaign can and must be assured. It will take time, and require consistent effort on everyone's part – the entire U.S. government, our entire international coalition, and, most important, the Iraqi and Syrian peoples. Together, and with your support – including your support for America's troops and their families, for which I, and they, are ever grateful – we will achieve ISIL's lasting defeat.

I would be happy to address your questions.

Thank you.

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Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense

Secretary Carter has spent more than three decades leveraging his knowledge of science and technology, global strategy and policy as well as his deep dedication to the men and women of the Department of Defense to make our nation and the world a safer place. He has done so in direct and indirect service of eleven secretaries of defense in both Democratic and Republican Administrations. Whether in government, academia, or the private sector, Secretary Carter has been guided by pragmatism and his belief in the boundless opportunities of the United States and has worked tirelessly to contribute to the ideas, policies, and innovations that assure our global leadership.

Secretary Carter was Deputy Secretary of Defense from 2011 to 2013, serving as DoD's chief operating officer, overseeing the department's annual budget and its over three million civilian and military personnel, steering strategy and budget through the turmoil of sequester and ensuring the future of the force and institutional best practices. From 2009 to 2011, he was Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics (ATL) with responsibility for DoD's procurement reform and innovation agenda and successful completion of key procurements like the KC-46 tanker. In this capacity, Secretary Carter also led the development and production of thousands of mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles and other rapid acquisitions that saved countless service members' lives. Determined to get the most for both the warfighters and the taxpayer, Secretary Carter instituted "Better Buying Power" for the first time guiding the department acquisition workforce to smarter and leaner purchasing. And from 1993-1996, he served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, where he was responsible for – among other issues – strategic affairs, nuclear weapons policy, and the Nunn-Lugar program that removed nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Secretary Carter also served on the Defense Policy Board, the Defense Science Board, and the Secretary of State's International Security Advisory Board.

Outside of his government service, Secretary Carter was most recently a distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and a lecturer at Stanford's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. He also was a Senior Executive at the Markle Foundation, helping its Economic Future Initiative advance technology strategies to enable Americans to flourish in a networked global economy. Previously Secretary Carter served as a Senior Partner of Global Technology Partners focused on advising major investment firms in technology, and an advisor on global affairs to Goldman Sachs. At Harvard's Kennedy School, he was Professor of Science and International Affairs and Chair of the International & Global Affairs faculty. He served on the boards of the MITRE Corporation, Mitretek Systems, and Lincoln Laboratories at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) and as a member of the Draper Laboratory Corporation. He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Aspen Strategy Group. Secretary Carter earned his bachelor's degrees in physics and in medieval history, *summa cum laude*, at Yale University, where he was also awarded Phi Beta Kappa; and he received his doctorate in theoretical physics from Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He was a physics instructor at Oxford, a postdoctoral fellow at Rockefeller University and M.I.T., and an experimental research associate at Brookhaven and Fermilab National Laboratories.

For his government service, Secretary Carter has been awarded the Department of Defense Distinguished Service Medal, DoD's highest, on five separate occasions. He received the Defense Intelligence Medal for his contributions to intelligence and the Joint Distinguished Service Medal from the Chairman and Joint Chiefs of Staff. Secretary Carter is author or co-author of 11 books and more than 100 articles on physics, technology, national security, and management. A native of Philadelphia, he is married to Stephanie Carter and has two grown children.

**General Martin E. Dempsey, USA
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff**

General Martin E. Dempsey becomes the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff after serving most recently as the Army's 37th Chief of Staff from 11 April 2011 through 7 September 2011.

Past assignments have taken him and his family across the globe during both peace and war from Platoon Leader to Combatant Commander. He is a 1974 graduate of the United States Military Academy and a career armor officer.

As a company grade officer, he served with the 2nd Cavalry in United States Army Europe and with the 10th Cavalry at Fort Carson. Following troop command he earned his Masters of Arts in English from Duke University and was assigned to the English Department at West Point. In 1991, GEN Dempsey deployed with the Third Armored Division in support of OPERATION DESERT STORM. Following DESERT STORM, he commanded 4th Battalion 67th Armor (Bandits) in Germany for two years and then departed to become Armor Branch Chief in US Army Personnel Command. From 1996-1998 he served as the 67th Colonel of the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment. Following this assignment as the Army's "senior scout" he served on the Joint Staff as an Assistant Deputy Director in J-5 and as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. From September 2001 to June 2003, General Dempsey served in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia training and advising the Saudi Arabian National Guard. In June of 2003, General Dempsey took command of the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad, Iraq. After 14 months in Iraq, General Dempsey redeployed the division to Germany and completed his command tour in July of 2005. He then returned to Iraq for two years in August of 2005 to train and equip the Iraqi Security Forces as Commanding General of MNSTC-I. From August 2007 through October 2008, GEN Dempsey served as the Deputy Commander and then Acting Commander of U.S. Central Command. Before becoming Chief of Staff of the Army, he commanded US Army Training and Doctrine Command from December 2008-March 2011.

General Dempsey's awards and decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Distinguished Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Bronze Star with "V" Device and Oak Leaf Cluster, the Combat Action Badge, and the Parachutist Badge. In addition to his Masters' Degree in English, he holds Masters' Degrees in Military Art and in National Security Studies.

General Dempsey and his high school sweetheart Deanie have three children: Chris, Megan, and Caitlin. Each has served in the United States Army. Chris remains on active duty. They have five wonderful grandchildren: Kayla and Mackenna by Chris and daughter-in-law Julie, Luke by Caitlin and son-in-law Shane, and Alexander and Hunter by Megan and son-in-law Kory. Chris and Julie are expecting their third child this fall.

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

JUNE 17, 2015

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. THORNBERRY

Secretary CARTER. Section 344 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 placed a limitation on the availability of funds for U.S. Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) Trans Regional Web Initiative (TRWI), which maintained several regional influence websites directed at countering violent extremist propaganda, decreasing recruitment, and mitigating other malign adversary online activities. This section allowed funding solely to terminate the program or transition it to another department or agency. In response, the Department proposed to reprogram some of its operation and maintenance funds to enable each command to operate regional websites, rather than having TRWI as a centrally managed USSOCOM program. The House Appropriations Committee, in response to this reprogramming request, objected to reprogramming except for the limited purposes of transitioning to a non-DOD agency or terminating the activity. Therefore, the Department terminated this program in April 2015. [See page 18.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MRS. DAVIS

Secretary CARTER. The safety and security of U.S. Embassy personnel in Baghdad is of the utmost importance to the President and the Departments of State and Defense. The Embassy staff is performing vital work under difficult circumstances, and their efforts are necessary to assist the Government of Iraq in making progress on reconciliation, which will turn Sunni communities away from ISIL. I refer you to the State Department for additional updates on the work that the Embassy is undertaking.

The Department of Defense, along with the Department of State, continues to review the mission and the resources required to ensure that U.S. Embassy staff in Baghdad remain safe and secure. An example of this vigilance occurred last summer when we balanced drawing the Embassy down to mission-critical personnel against adding additional forces to ensure adequate security for the Embassy. During that time, the Ambassador and other Embassy personnel on the ground in Baghdad were vital in supporting Iraq as it formed a new government in Baghdad in record time. [See page 17.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. BORDALLO

General DEMPSEY. Our forces today continue to be engaged globally and the future will likely not provide any respite. Better management of our force is essential in order to avoid assuming unacceptable risk. Based on the increasing proliferation of state and non-state actors, the resource and demand imbalance the Department of Defense faces, the decreasing size of military forces, and the readiness challenges we continue to wrestle with I directed that we adapt our approaches to global force management (GFM). I directed the establishment of readiness thresholds to inform force availability decisions, the development of options that would allow the Department to be more agile in the employment of forces, the more frequent updating of our force availability data, and an assessment of how we posture forces forward to ensure best mitigation of risk.

Significant improvements in the way the Department's global force management approaches include the following:

- Re-establishing resource-informed readiness thresholds that allow the services to build and sustain the future readiness.
- Informing Combatant Commands of the forces they can count on during Phase 0, day-to-day, as the Department consistently addresses its highest priorities.
- Improving the Department's visibility of force generation capacity in order to make better recommendations to the President.
- Updating the criteria and processes we utilize to identify and adjudicate the posturing of forces forward. In each of these areas we have made great strides in reforming the Department's approaches to global force management and these improvements will be codified in the Department's force implementation guidance later this summer. Once this guidance document is complete the changes to the global force management process should place the Department on a sustainable path. [See page 41.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. COFFMAN

General DEMPSEY. First, let me note that we provide close air support to Iraqi forces on a daily basis with our advisors in Iraqi operations centers. In terms of supporting Iraqi offensive operations, I would recommend the use of U.S. ground forces when engaging strategic targets in order to accomplish strategic effects in support of the Iraqi ground forces. Employing Forward Air Controllers could be effective, but are not our only means to provide close air support to ground forces. However, I do not recommend putting U.S. forces in harm's way simply to stiffen the spine of local Iraqi forces. [See page 34.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. BRIDENSTINE

General DEMPSEY. In 2011, U.S. Forces did not have a Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq. U.S. military personnel were protected by an exchange of diplomatic notes codifying the 2008 Security Agreement on the Withdrawal of U.S. Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq. [See page 39.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. McSALLY

General DEMPSEY. U.S. sorties are flown to conduct both deliberate strikes with pre-planned targets and dynamic strikes where the aircraft engages targets only if they are presented. From the commencement of airstrikes on 8 Aug 14 to 1 Jul 15, only 7% of aircraft flying deliberate strike sorties returned without expending their ordnance. Approximately 63% of aircraft flying dynamic strike missions returned without expending munitions. This percentage has stayed relatively constant since combat operations commenced. Of note, during a comparable timeframe in Afghanistan, 83% of aircraft flying dynamic strike missions returned with their munitions.

Targeting and dynamic engagements are by nature fluid processes. Aircraft conducting dynamic targeting missions are present to deliver ordnance on targets should the opportunity arise—targets are not programmed prior to the mission so employment of ordnance is not guaranteed. Beyond the type of mission flown, other factors reduce the number of munitions employed, such as adverse weather, lack of positive identifications, not having the right type of weapons for the target type and the ever present collateral damage concerns.

Strike aircraft can and do support ground forces even without dropping ordnance. Aircraft are able to conduct should of presence missions and provide valuable armed over watch in support of ground forces. Aircraft flying dynamic targeting mission are often able to achieve desired outcomes without dropping ordnance. [See page 45.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

JUNE 17, 2015

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. TURNER

Mr. TURNER. In July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri was second in command of Al Qaeda, second only to Osama bin Laden, when he sent a lengthy letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This letter proposed a four phase plan for Iraq that al-Zarqawi's organization was to carry out. That plan was prepared as follows:

1. Expel the Americans from Iraq. 2. Establish an Islamic Emirate in Iraq. 3. Extend the Jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq. 4. The clash with Israel, because Israel was established only to challenge any new Islamic entity.

The United States learned of this letter's existence by October of that same year, and Zarqawi was killed the following summer. As we know though, his organization has survived and morphed into what we know today as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Their actions over the past year; indiscriminate killing of dissenters, destruction of historical artifacts, and land grabs in the same regions AQI attempted to control a decade ago show that their plan has not changed.

When the Administration rushed to depart Iraq in order to maintain a campaign promise rather than properly assess the security situation, we helped them accomplish phase one.

Mr. Secretary, we have known ISIL's plan for at least a decade, how have we not developed a coherent strategy to thwart the advances of this Islamic terror organization?

Secretary CARTER. I believe we have the right strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. It will take time to achieve all the goals articulated in the strategy. As the President recently noted, the best way to achieve a lasting victory against ISIL is to work with an effective partner on the ground. The Department's role is to enable, not replace, capable and motivated ground forces to defeat ISIL.

Mr. TURNER. While I know that roughly 3,500 U.S. military personnel is not sufficient "to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant]," I am concerned that this arbitrary cap set by the President restricts your ability to sufficiently support those on the ground.

Even before the President announced an additional 450 personnel, I was concerned that the "tooth-to-tail" ratio along with arbitrary troop caps was either inhibiting our ability to properly deploy support capabilities such as combat search and rescue or preventing us from accomplishing advise and assist objectives.

In your "best military advice" are roughly 3,500 troops on the ground in Iraq enough to carry out current missions and provide for necessary support activities? Where are we taking on additional levels of risk?

General DEMPSEY. The current Iraq force management level (FML) of 3550 is sufficient to support the military campaign within our current strategy in Iraq in the near term, appropriately mitigates risk, and reflects my recommendation to the President. We maintain the ability to provide needed support to U.S. service members through our forces both in Iraq and throughout the region.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SHUSTER

Mr. SHUSTER. Do you believe the President has been too narrowly focused on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant given unfinished efforts to defeat Al Qaeda and the Taliban? How do you intend to ensure that any gains against a terrorist threat aren't countered through the augmentation or strengthening of another extremist organization?

Secretary CARTER. Although the President has directed the Department to focus its energies toward countering ISIL's threat, the Department continues to devote the resources necessary to maintain operations aimed at defeating al Qaeda throughout the world, enabling our Afghan partners to combat the Taliban-led insurgency and other armed opposition groups to reduce violence in their country. I remain committed to the objective of ensuring that neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan becomes a safe haven from which violent extremists can launch attacks against the United States or its allies or partners.

Mr. SHUSTER. Since the fall of Ramadi, Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi has since called for Shia militias to join the fight to take back Sunni-dominated Ramadi. Iran has supported many of these Shia militias. Do you believe this has the potential to

further destabilize the region, and how would this contribute to the growth of Iranian power?

Secretary CARTER. The decision to use the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Ramadi was made by the Government of Iraq in consultation with local leaders in Anbar Province, not at the direction of Iran. This was also requested by a conference of senior Anbar tribal leaders immediately following the fall of Ramadi. The decision received the full support of the Iraqi Cabinet. It is clear that the decision to use the PMF in Anbar is one for the Government of Iraq to make in conjunction with local Anbari leaders, and that is what happened in the Ramadi case.

While there are some Iranian backed militias within the PMF, some are patriotic Shia who answered the call to duty last summer at the behest of Iraqi Ayatollah Sistani. There are concerns about the sectarian nature of Iran's approach to Iraq, and I believe this could become increasingly problematic as ISIL is pushed back. More broadly, I am concerned about Iranian malign activity in the region and have been clear that the Department will hold Iran accountable regardless of the nuclear agreement.

As counter-offensive operations continue, the Department can support the operations of various types of anti-ISIL forces, but, as I have repeatedly said, there must be clear Iraq Security Forces (ISF) command and control, sound planning, and coordination wherever possible with local leaders.

Mr. SHUSTER. What do you believe are Iran's long-term objectives in the Middle East? Do you believe that if the administration were to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran it would reduce stability in the region?

Secretary CARTER. Iran probably seeks to maintain its system of government while expanding its influence in the Middle East and minimizing the West's influence. I believe that the nuclear agreement with Iran would increase stability in the Middle East by verifiably shutting off all paths to an Iranian acquisition of a nuclear weapon. Blocking proliferation of nuclear weapons technology is a cornerstone of our national security and it will be advanced by reaching an agreement that peacefully impedes Iran's development of a nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, the Department of Defense will continue diligently to maintain the plans, posture, and preparations for any Iran contingencies that should arise.

Mr. SHUSTER. A number of friendly nations in the Middle East continue to acquire and maintain American weapons technology to help offset the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. How can we better leverage our industrial base in this manner to support our Middle Eastern allies in their fight against ISIL?

General DEMPSEY. The Department of Defense is working with U.S. commercial companies to develop strategies to offer our coalition partners opportunities to acquire life cycle sustainment support for material purchased via Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Fund, Presidential Directive, etc. This serves to provide the necessary support to our coalition partners' efforts to support friendly nations in the Middle East while enabling the industrial base to be better postured for current and future global requirements.

Mr. SHUSTER. General Dempsey, do you feel that your options for taking military action against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and other extremist groups are limited by any current policies in place? What authorities or flexibility are you lacking that would better allow you to pursue the war against ISIL?

General DEMPSEY. No. Current authorities and policies are sufficient to implement the military campaign as designed. In offering my best military advice, I will seek necessary authority and policy guidance as required.

Mr. SHUSTER. How do we measure and define success in the campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant? What metrics are you using to delineate success versus failure; how does that influence our strategy?

General DEMPSEY. Success in the campaign will be seen as effective local anti-ISIL forces grow in capability in Iraq and Syria and populations reject ISIL's extremist views. We have learned from past experience that this is the only way to achieve a lasting defeat of ISIL. Progress is being made. However, we must continue to exercise patience during this campaign, and understand that our efforts cannot exceed those of our partnered ground forces in Iraq and Syria. Local anti-ISIL forces must own this fight. We continually assess the execution of the military campaign and look to strengthen and adjust its implementation based on changing conditions on the ground. We are focused on increasing the participation throughout of our training and equipping programs as well as the effectiveness of our efforts to directly degrade ISIL capabilities. In Iraq, we are attentive to the GOI's [Government of Iraq] initiatives to increase outreach to Sunni tribes. Political reform within the GOI is also a necessary component of our strategy. Prime Minister Abadi has taken steps to demonstrate his commitment to reconciliation and inclusive governance, but I refer you to the State Department for more detail on the political metrics.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. SPEIER

Ms. SPEIER. What threats do our troops currently face, aside from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)? Shia militants have publicly stated they will target additional U.S. forces. Is there a possibility of either Shia or Sunni militants attacking U.S. forces and distracting from the fight against ISIL? Do we believe Prime Minister Abadi, who is heavily reliant on Shia militants for the preservation of his state, would be able to rein them in?

Secretary CARTER. [The information referred to is classified and retained in the committee files.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. COFFMAN

Mr. COFFMAN. Are there potential or existing gaps in coverage related to Trauma-Surgical-Critical Care and Medical Evacuation of authorized American personnel (uniformed or civilian) as we commit more uniformed personnel to Iraq? How does this apply to Department of Defense civilians and those working on a Department of Defense contract in Iraq? Also, how does this apply in areas where Department of Defense does not have a robust footprint or the same level of trauma centers that were available previous to 2011?

General DEMPSEY. All major operating locations within Iraq are supported by Role 1 primary care and Role 2 damage control surgery. Theater preventive medicine assets have also conducted site visits to accomplish required occupational and environmental health surveillance assessments. Medevac rings have been established to provide coverage for all major U.S. and Coalition operating locations within Iraq. Additionally, theater tilt- and fixed-wing assets are used for onward movement to other U.S. military medical facilities outside of Iraq. Coordinating activities have been established between these various nodes to ensure seamless, safe, and responsive patient movement. In the event of any future changes to the size of the U.S. force, or the scope of the mission, further adjustments will be made to the accompanying Health Service Support. Medical leadership is pro-actively engaged in planning efforts at all levels of command to anticipate and posture for such developments.

Immediate Life/Limb/Eyesight medical care is available to all of the above personnel. Evacuation support is available to all DOD personnel, including civilians, as well as to Coalition service members. As is true throughout the theater, contractor personnel without a Secretarial Designation waiver can only be evacuated from the theater on a non-interference basis. Employers are responsible for arranging for the evacuation from theater for their employees.

Standard medevac crews have the ability to provide blood transfusion while enroute and are augmented with some of the same enroute critical care teams that were first used with much success in Afghanistan. In addition to our own U.S. military capabilities, we are fully imbedded partners within the Department of State run Role 2 facility in Baghdad and are also partnered with Australian and Germany field surgical teams co-located with U.S. Personnel elsewhere in Iraq. A medical Common Operating Picture of all patient care and evacuation assets is updated and published weekly with all U.S. and Coalition medical forces, in addition to a weekly Medical Coordination Working Group among all parties involved in Health Service Support for Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.

Mr. COFFMAN. What resources are available in Iraq to facilitate Medical Evacuation of injured patients who are members of the U.S. Armed Forces? Are authorized Governmental Civilian Personnel or contracted personnel serving alongside them provided the same level of medical-evacuation (medevac) care?

General DEMPSEY. Medevac rings have been established to provide coverage for all major U.S. and Coalition operating location within Iraq. Standard medevac crews have the ability to provide blood transfusion while enroute and are augmented with some of the same enroute critical care teams that were first used with much success in Afghanistan. Additionally, theater tilt- and fixed-wing assets are used for onward movement to other U.S. military medical facilities outside of Iraq. Coordinating activities have been established between these various nodes to ensure seamless, safe, and responsive patient movement. Evacuation support is available to all DOD personnel, including civilians, as well as to Coalition service members. As is true throughout the theater, contractor personnel without a Secretarial Designation waiver can only be evacuated from the theater on a non-interference basis. Employers are responsible for arranging for the evacuation from theater for their employees.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WALZ

Mr. WALZ. What are the risks of the United States not engaging in the Middle East? Furthermore, what should the role of the United States military be within the overall U.S. strategy in the region?

Secretary CARTER. The 2015 National Security Strategy, highlights the four principal guiding interests in the Middle East for the United States:

(1) dismantling terrorist networks that threaten the United States, (2) confronting external aggression against allies and partners, (3) ensuring the free flow of energy from the region, and (4) preventing the development, proliferation, or use of weapons of mass destruction.

If the United States limited its engagement with the Middle East, all four interests would be put at risk. Further, a United States withdrawal from the Middle East would provide opportunities for both state- and non-state destabilizing actors to engage in conflicts and spread violent ideology that would adversely affect U.S. global interests.

The U.S. military provides credibility, leverage, and enforcement mechanisms in support of U.S. national security interests, as well coordination and collaboration with regional partners' militaries. United States engagement in the Middle East happens at many levels, and through many channels. The U.S. military reassures allies, builds stability through security partnerships, and when authorized deters or destroys adversaries.

The Middle East is in period of unprecedented conflict that flourishes in ungoverned and under-governed spaces. Iranian malign influence, the rise of ISIL, and increase sectarian violence all threaten overall stability of the region in different ways. If we were to disengage entirely, the result would be increased volatility, the potential for all-out Sunni-Shia war, and massive humanitarian crisis. Our Gulf partners, along with Jordan, Egypt, and especially Israel—each depend on U.S. presence and partnership to counter what are existential threats to their nations. The military is only one piece of the overall U.S. strategy that involves diplomatic, economic, and information elements. The military plays an important role in providing security, and more importantly in training local forces to do so for themselves. However, without the essential necessities of good government and economic development, military power cannot bring and keep peace as a sole instrument of power. All parts of the DIME must be present for lasting success.

Mr. WALZ. Given that there are nations in the region, such as the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, who appear to be supporting United States interests, how should the United States support and organize these partners in the region to serve as potentially moderating influences within the greater Middle East? Contrarily, how do Qatar and Turkey perceive their interests in Syria? Both are partners in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, while at the same time, both nations have taken actions that work against U.S. policy and strategy. How should policymakers improve this dynamic?

Secretary CARTER. We enjoy strong military-to-military relationships with our partners in the Middle East. As our Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs supply them with U.S. equipment and train them how to use it, they become capable partners and are assuming more of a leadership role in dealing with regional issues. These partners continually look to the United States for advice and assistance in developing their militaries. However, they do express frustration that our FMS system can be slow to meet their needs. Although we cannot direct these countries what to do, our FMS programs give us much access and a real opportunity to guide their modernization efforts.

Qatar and Turkey have different countries with different goals and interests. We can improve the dynamic with Qatar by responding positively to their FMS requests for F-15 aircraft and developing a stronger, more long-term military-to-military relationship.

Turkey, on the other hand, is already a member of NATO and enjoys much U.S. support and equipment. We continue to cooperate with Turkey on a broad range of national security concerns, including through mutual efforts in support of the counter ISIL coalition. Sustained support to these efforts, as well as continued bilateral dialogue on means to enhance our cooperation in confronting the myriad threats emanating from Syria, are critical to regional security.

Mr. WALZ. What are the risks of the United States not engaging in the Middle East? Furthermore, what should the role of the United States military be within the overall U.S. strategy in the region?

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The Department of Defense remains committed to supporting the sovereignty and security of our Middle East partners. That is why the Department provides nations such as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates—two of our most capable partners—the support they need to ensure they are well-trained and equipped to meet regional threats. The recent U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Camp David Summit reinforced this commitment, and the initiatives put forward at the Summit demonstrated more specifically how the United States seeks to support and organize its regional partners, including through increased coordination and collaboration on shared interests such as counterterrorism, maritime security, cyber security, and ballistic missile defense. The Department of Defense will continue to work toward establishing mechanisms and processes for more productive and collaborative engagements with all of our Middle East partners to more successfully address these shared interests.

The Department continues to cooperate closely with both Qatar and Turkey in areas of mutual concern, including through the counter-ISIL coalition. Development of increasingly collaborative U.S.-Middle East partnerships provides channels of opportunity through which the United States can better leverage shared regional interests and influence our partners' efforts. These partnerships serve as a moderating influence in the countries and across the region. Turkey and Qatar share the United States' interest in defeating ISIL, seeing a political transition in Syria, and bringing stability to Iraq. The United States' relationship and alliance with these two countries remains strong. The Department maintains a close and constructive dialogue with both countries on how to increase mutual efforts towards these goals.