



CENTCOM



TRANSCRIPT | March 16, 2022

# Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on the Posture of United States Central Command and United States Africa Command, March 15, 2022

## WITNESSES:

**GENERAL KENNETH MCKENZIE, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL  
COMMAND**

**GENERAL STEPHEN TOWNSEND, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA  
COMMAND**

## TRANSCRIPT:

REED: I'd like to call the hearing to order. Good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony from General Kenneth McKenzie, Commander of the United States Central Command, and General Stephen Townsend, Commander of United States Africa Command. Thank you both for your service. And I'm grateful to the men and women serving under your commands.

And I understand this will likely be last appearance before this committee for both of you. And I thank you for your dedicated diligent service to the nation, and to the men and women you've led over all these years. And thanks also to your families who stood by you and sustained you throughout this distinguished career. Thank you.

Central Command remains one of our most challenging theaters. And one of its many responsibilities, CENTCOMs top priority is deterring the Iranian regime's destructive and destabilizing activities without undue provocation. This is a complicated and urgent mission. Just this weekend, Iran claimed responsibility for missile strike near the American conflict in Ebril, Iraq.

This strike comes on the heels of escalating malign behavior by Iran and its proxies who continue to mount drone and missile attacks in the region, including against military bases in Iraq and Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. On the nuclear front in the five years since then, President Trump pulled

out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA.

Iran has made key advances. It has decreased breakout time to several weeks from a year under the agreement. It has increased uranium enrichment to 60 percent instead of just under 4 percent allowed under the agreement. Iran has hardened its infrastructure and replaced damaged equipment with more advanced models. And while negotiations to return Iran to the JCPOA are in the final stages. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has introduced new complications.

General McKenzie given these current dynamics. I would like your thoughts on how best to respond to Iranian malign behavior in the region. Including collaborating with allies and partners to counter drone missile attacks, while preserving space to return to the JCPOA. Last August marked the end of our 20-year military mission in Afghanistan. Despite transitioning our forces from Afghanistan, the Biden administration has maintained its commitment to ensuring that Afghanistan cannot be used as the base for ISIS-K, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups to conduct attacks against the United States or its allies.

As such, we have assumed and Over the Horizon Posture to counter integrate such stress. And I would ask for an update on our capabilities, and whether additional regional agreements have been reached to ensure we have a robust counterterrorism architecture to address the threats from these terrorist groups. AFRICOM presents a similarly complex array of responsibilities.

The security situation in East Africa has been on a downward trajectory following the previous administration's decision to withdraw the majority of U.S. military personnel from Somalia in November 2000. Excuse me, December 2020. Since then, U.S. forces have been conducting periodic engagements to train and advise Somali partners.

However, as you note in your testimony, General Townsend, U.S. and partner efforts to disrupt and degrade the most dangerous violent extremist organizations have not achieved the success we need. The Biden administration is taking a comprehensive look at our strategy in Somalia. I hope you'll share your views on the current security situation, as well as the status of our engagement with Somali partners.

The security situation in West Africa is also increasingly fragile. Over the past two years, extremist operations have expanded across the Sahel (ph) including pushing down into the littoral (ph) states in the Gulf of Guinea. Political unrest in Chad has led to the departure of all non-essential U.S. personnel. And high-profile attacks against civilian and military targets in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have increased.

These extremist groups are not currently capable of carrying out attacks outside the region, but several have professed their intent to do so. Given these challenges, General Townsend, I would like to know what we can feasibly

challenges, General Townsend, I would like to know what we can feasibly accomplish with partner security forces. And how sustainable our posture is in such a politically fractured environment. Finally, both CENTCOM and AFRICOM play important roles in our long-term strategic competition with China and Russia.

In the Middle East and Central Asia, Russia continues to leverage hybrid warfare capabilities to expand its own influence and stymie Western security interests. China has also increased its presence in the region. Including by deepening economic and security ties with Iran. And on the African continent, both Russia and China are looking to expand their security and economic investments and may seek to leverage such access to undermining U.S. influence in critical regions.

During today's hearing, I hope we will discuss your efforts to engage with partners and the ways in which the United States can best leverage its competitive advantages to maintain key relationships. Thank you again to our witnesses. I look forward to your testimonies. As a reminder for my colleagues, there will be a closed session immediately following this hearing, and room SVC 217.

Now, let me welcome back the Ranking Member and recognize and recommend, Senator Inhofe.

INHOFE: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I join you in welcoming our witnesses and thank them for their decades of service and I think particularly with - didn't get the quarter of that. But anyway, its - appreciate the time that we've worked together and in the short time remaining for certainly some of them. I see three challenges in CENTCOM, Iran's terrorist proxies acting more aggressively, our partners increasingly doubt in America's resolve, and Russia and China trying to fill that void.

These challenges are a direct result of my opinion of the President Biden's misguided policies. He even downgraded support for - to our partners against Iran and its proxies, and he reversed it. President Trump's tariffs designation of the Houthis, and he offered Iran massive sanctions relief to rejoin the failed 2015 Iran Deal. Even as Iran increases its aggression against us. Iran is the foremost threat in the region.

Yet our partners see the administration's appeasement of Iran and ask themselves are we really on our own is America abandoning us? Last summer's disastrous draw down from the Afghanistan which culminated in the killing of 13 service members only reinforced these questions. We also face significant challenges in Africa, including the growing presence and capability of the Jihadist groups across the continent.

China and Russia are exploiting Africa to - and de-established our partners project and their military power in the expand and the influence at our expense. I've always viewed Africa as critical to our nation's security, which is why I pushed for

the creation of AFRICOM and that was back in to 2007. And it's right now more of a concern than it was at that time.

General Townsend, I'll speak more about this issue of the issue of Western Sahara during my questions. But I'm pleased the Secretary provided guidance to assess alternative locations and hosts for DOD exercises in Africa. Including the annual African Lion exercise, this will be crucial to ensuring we grow better relationships in Africa. And to help reverse the tide of our strategic competition with China in Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

Let me now recognize General McKenzie for his statement. General, thank you, sir.

MCKENZIE: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, ladies and gentlemen, the committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify for the final time regarding U.S. Central Command posture in an area of responsibility that encompasses 21 nations and 600 million people. And it's at the strategic nexus of the world's most important corridors of trade.

Much has transpired since I last delivered my annual posture testimony. Most notably the conclusion of our military campaign in Afghanistan and Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine. America's interests in the central region, and the challenges we confront there have proven remarkably resilient. CENTCOM's mission to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional stability in support of enduring U.S. interests is essentially unchanged from the day of the commands founding.

The primary threats to that security instability are also very familiar. CENTCOM was established nearly 40 years ago, to counter the malign influence of a revolutionary regime that had seized power in Tehran. And to compete with a great power that had, in spite of international condemnation, invaded the sovereign state of Afghanistan and imposed a puppet regime.

Today, Iran is no less of a threat to American interests, or the stability of the region than it was in 1979. To the contrary, the threat posed by Iran is graver than ever. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, moreover, has violently demonstrated its willful regard for international norms. Just as we have seen through Russia's actions in Syria, and elsewhere. In fact, anywhere it sees an opportunity to diminish confidence in America's leadership.

In a more measured fashion, China is also vying for increased influence at American expense in a region that appends a phone for over 40 percent of its fossil fuels. Meanwhile, violent extremist organizations or VEOs in the CENTCOM

area continue to pose a credible threat to the homeland. In some the central region remains today a vital and volatile arena for strategic competition and the decisive theater in the campaign against the VEOs.

The campaign to defeat the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has entered a new phase. As of one January, of this year, Iraq has assumed sole responsibility for counter ISIS combat operations on its own soil. In Syria, CENTCOM and its partners are degrading ISIS ability to regenerate by improving the security of facilities for detained ISIS fighters.

As well as the displaced persons camps IDP camps, where their families reside. More than half of this population comes from other countries. And addressing the threat of ISIS in northeast Syria, ultimately, will require these countries to reclaim and repatriate whatever citizens of theirs remain in these prisons in camps. Ending one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, and depriving ISIS of what currently is fertile soil for indoctrination and spreading terror.

In Afghanistan, our campaign against Al Qaeda, and ISIS Khorasan has also entered a new phase. We are now conducting this campaign from bases Over the Horizon. As I've said, this is difficult, it is not impossible. I should add today that we will be able to do this only so long as CENTCOM has the requisite resources to find, fix, and finish threats to the homeland before those threats develop the capability to conduct external operations.

I'm talking specifically about ISR assets and strike platforms. CENTCOM has the tools it needs to perform this mission, but the margins are thin. And the risk will increase should resources diminish. I'd like to specifically address our posture in the Middle East. Here Iran continues to pose the greatest threat to U.S. interests and the security of the region as a whole.

Through its proxies and clients, Iran is fomented conflict and an arc (ph). Tracing from Yemen through the Arabian Peninsula across Iraq and Syria into Lebanon into the very borders of Israel. Saudi Arabia endures regular attacks on the Houthis, who will some of the most advanced unmanned aerial systems and cruise missiles in the region, courtesy of the Iranians. Recently, the Houthis expanded these attacks to include urban centers and bases with U.S. forces in the United Arab Emirates.

Tehran also enables its allied militias in Iraq and Syria to carry on a persistent low level campaign of indirect fire and unmanned aerial system attacks against U.S. and coalition forces. Hoping to drive us from the region. Of light this campaign has been relatively constrained, but Iran only loosely controls the militias that conduct these attacks.

And as recently as 2020 Iran demonstrated his willingness to target U.S. forces directly with his highly capable ballistic missile forces. Iran's ballistic missile forces can constitute an existential threat to the security of every state in the region.

can constitute an existential threat to the security of every state in the region, among them our most important and enduring partners. They continue to look to the United States for assurance that we the historic partner choice in the region will remain a reliable one.

China and Russia are also watching closely for any sign that America's commitment to the collective security of the region is wavering, and they are poised to capitalize on whatever opportunities emerge. In closing, let me thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I'd like to thank the soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and guardians who have served and sacrificed in the CENTCOM AOR.

It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as their commander. Thank you.

REED: Thank you very much, General McKenzie.

General Townsend, please.

TOWNSEND: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee good morning. Thank you for inviting me to appear today, even as the eyes of the world are focused on Russia's lawless attack on Ukraine. An unjust war, which impacts Africa as well. For nearly three years, it's been a great privilege, the privilege of my career to represent the dedicated members of U.S. Africa Command.

Thank you for your steadfast support for them, and for our mission. I'm here this morning with my battle buddy and Command Senior Enlisted Leader Sergeant Major Richard Thresher and my friend General Frank McKenzie as we make our final appearances before you. Our joint testimony, highlights continued and pressing challenges and opportunities faced by our respective commands and our nation. Together with our interagency teammates, US AFRICOM protects and advances U.S. strategic interests, prevents strategic distraction, and preserves America's options.

All in concert with our allies and partners. As AFRICOM's fifth Commander, I have come to learn five truths about AFRICOM. First, America cannot ignore Africa. Africa's challenges, opportunities, and security interests are inseparable from our own. Weak or poor governance, conflict and climate change stressed the stability of many African nations.

Which will in turn, impact us security and prosperity. Second, our competitors clearly see Africa's rich potential. Russia and China both seek to convert soft and hard power investments into political influence, strategic access, and military advantage. China's economic and diplomatic engagements allow it to buttress autocracies and change international norms in a patient effort to claim their second continent.

Russia stokes conflict pursuing a faded aspiration to imperial power. Across the

continent, mercenaries from the Kremlin's (inaudible) group, offer a one shot stop for regime protection, resource exploitation, and horrific violence against Africans. Just as we see in Ukraine today. Third, deadly terrorism has metastasized to Africa. Al Qaeda's al-Shabab in East Africa, and ISIS and Al Qaeda groups in West Africa and elsewhere, are among the world's fastest growing, wealthiest, and deadliest terrorist groups.

And remain grave and growing threats that aspire to kill Americans, both there and in our homeland. A fourth, a battle between democracy and authoritarianism is raging across Africa. Despite a recent surge in democratic backsliding, our values, our democracy, and our willingness to work together with African partners, creates a huge demand for U.S. engagement, and partnership.

Fifth, in Africa, a few troops and a few bucks still goes a long way. Modest and predictable investments yield outsized returns for U.S. and African security interest. As an economy of force and posture limited theater, AFRICOM employs just .03 percent of DOD is operating budget, and manpower. Modest investments today can yield a continent of partners tomorrow. We are most effective when we synchronize diplomacy, development, and defense.

So, we are grateful for your continued leadership and backing to help field our whole of government leaders by confirming ambassadors and funding the State Department and USAID. Thanks to the authorities and resources you provide, and for your continued interest and support and the capabilities that Africa requires to accomplish our mission. In summary, US AFRICOM remains cheap insurance for America's security.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

REED: Well, thank you very much, General Townsend. General McKenzie, do you assess that successfully concluding a nuclear deal with Iran will provide additional stability in the region? Particularly with respect to proliferation of nuclear weapons, not just in Iran, but in other states. And also give to the United States and to the west, essentially, almost daily insights into the nuclear posture of Iran.

MCKENZIE: Chairman, a primary objective of our policy in the region is for Iran not to possess a nuclear weapon. I think the best and most effective way to get to that position is through a negotiated agreement. It's which I fully support.

And I think that's probably the best way to actually get to that and then be able to talk about other Iranian activities in the region that are equally threatening to states that are non-nuclear in character.

REED: Thank you very much, sir. General Townsend, what's your operational assessment of the removing the majority view for U.S. forces out of Somalia to Kenya and Djibouti? And what have been the impacts on our partners?



TOWNSEND: Chairman, my view is that our periodic engagement, also referred to as commuting to work, has caused new challenges and risks for our troops. I believe my assessment is that it is not effective. It's not efficient, and it puts our troops at greater risk.

REED: And General McKenzie, the MQ-9 strike on 29 on August 2021, was a complicated and difficult situation, including civilian casualties. Your - CENTCOM did a report, but that report was reviewed by the air force Inspector General, General Said. And he indicated that assigning the 15-6 to the same organization that conducted the strike, and further assigning it to the individual that conducted the civilian causality assessment report and didn't recommend a 15-6 was less than optimal.

Real conflicts of interest or simply perceptions of confidence (inaudible) were too significant. Conducting the 15-6 in four to five days, as directed, was too rushed and didn't allow sufficient time to comprehensively assess the facts. Do you believe - concur with that conclusion?

MCKENZIE: Chairman I concur with that - I concur with that conclusion.

REED: And what steps you're taking to correct the situation in terms of standard operating procedures for CENTCOM?

MCKENZIE: Chairman since that time, we've enacted 10, specific things that affect the way we conduct strike operations. The way we have oversight of strike operations. The way we investigate those strike operations. I'd - rather than go through a list of all I might just, I'll call out three very quickly.

REED: Yes, sir.

MCKENZIE: The first thing we've done is we have reinvigorated, and we institutionalize the idea of a red cell process within each strike cell. The red cell prevents the problem of confirmation bias. Which is when operators sometimes under the pressure of what they believe to be and probably is a mortal threat, seize on a course of action and don't properly evaluate all of the possibilities, other possibilities.

That's a single - that's one. At the same time, I have upped the reporting of this. So, these things are brought to senior leadership much more quickly. So, we have an opportunity to have a good view on what's going on inside the entire system. And I particularly acknowledge the issues about who's investigating who.

You cannot investigate yourself. There - even if you're doing it, right, there's still a perception here that we need to take a look at. We're taking that on directly. So a number of things within Central Command we are changing. I believe in all these cases, it's the commander at each level, who needs to be the responsible officer. And you've got to get the - you got to get your commanders directly involved in that.

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And I believe we're on the path to doing that.

REED: Thank you very much, sir. General Townsend, you indicated in your testimony that efforts in AFRICOM, like every major combatant command, have to be whole of government. But Africa seems to be even a much more significant case where without state departments support, AID support, other departments that your mission is not as effective. Can you elaborate a bit?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Chairman, I think it's not only not as effective I think it's not possible for any one arm of diplomacy, development, or defense to succeed without the other. Especially in Africa, the economic challenges that political challenges and the security challenges are so great, that we can only make headway together.

And that's particularly important because we have such modest investments. They're modest resources focused on the continent. So therefore, we've got to all row together.

REED: Thank you very much. Gentlemen, thank you for not only your testimony but for your distinguished service. Thank you. Senator Inhofe please.

INHOFE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Townsend, as I said in my opening statement, I want to talk more about the plight of the people of Western Sahara. Many of my colleagues may not be familiar with what they - they've been going through out there, but it's nothing short of a tragedy. The fate of the Saharawi people has been in limbo since Western Sahara was decolonized and the United Nations adopted the resolution calling for a referendum on self-determination in 1966.

That was 1966. More than five decades later, no referendum has been held, and their destiny has been subjected to broken promise after broken promise by the Moroccan government. Some of the administration believe Morocco is now serious about negotiating a mutually acceptable resolution in Western Sahara after blocking it for all those - these years. I couldn't disagree more. Nothing I've seen from Morocco makes me think that they're serious about the resolution.

And that's why I'm pleased that the Secretary has directed you to look at alternative locations for DOD exercises in Africa, like African Lion. And in the coming years, I have more than we want to say about Western Sahara. But we're pressed for time, so I'll submit that in writing. General Townsend, I want to turn to Somalia.

As you know, I opposed the last administration's decision to pull in nearly all of our troops out of Somalia and move them to Djibouti and Kenya. And pursue and Over the Horizon Counterterrorism Strategy. It increases risk and decreases our effectiveness where we're seeing this play out on the ground in Somalia as things

get worse and al-Shabab gains strength.

General Townsend, you've called the al-Shabab, our primary enemy in Somalia. The - your quote was, "the largest and most kinetically active al Qaeda network in the world." I have two questions General Townsend. Have you submitted a request to your chain of command to put DoD forces back in Somalia on a full-time basis?

And if the answer is yes, then when did you submit the request? And have you gotten any response yet from that request?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Ranking Member, all the characterizations you just relayed there about Somalia and the threat from al-Shabab are correct. Respectfully, Senator, I have submitted advice to my chain of command. And my chain of command is still considering that advice. And I'd like to give them space to make that decision. And I can go into it in a bit more detail and in closed session.

INHOFE: Thank you. Thank you very much. And General McKenzie, I don't really have any further questions. But I do want to comment that it's hard for me to believe that - I can see now why we're not smiling, and you are smiling. Apparently, it's only going to be I think in two more weeks that you'll be bailing out of here and wish you the best and for your retirement. All right. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Senator Gillibrand, please.

GILLIBRAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General McKenzie, thank you for your testimony. How has Israel's integration into CENTCOMs AOR improved coordination among U.S. regional partners? Particularly as it relates to countering Iran and the Middle East and supporting Over the Horizon Counterterrorism Capabilities?

MCKENZIE: Senator the entry of Israel into the AOR has given us great opportunities, particularly in the area of integrated air and missile defense. Which I think is one of the most pressing issues that all of the states in the region confront when they think about Iran.

And so, I think of Israel coming into the AOR is sort of the operational effect of normal - the other normalization of Israeli relations across the Gulf and with other states. We have great opportunities here. And I'll be prepared to talk a little bit more about it in closed session.

GILLIBRAND: As a follow-up. Have the Abraham Accords, which have allowed for economic and military integration between Israel and Arab states signatories. Enhanced our ability to counter China's influence in the Middle East through coordinated economic policy or enhanced foreign military sales?

MCKENZIE: I think it is - on the question of China's entry into the theater. Obviously, I only control a small part of the perspective on that. I would say that in terms of foreign military sales, we have an opportunity here to pursue greater integration.

And again, particularly in the domain of air defense systems, which I think is low hanging fruit, everyone's interested in it. Particularly since the key word defense is in the design, these are not offensive systems. These are systems designed to protect those nations that are there.

GILLIBRAND: And this question is for both general McKenzie and General Townsend. General McKenzie, China has extensive influence in the Middle East and Africa, both through its Belt and Road Initiative and through increasing foreign arm sales. Can you comment on China's economic influence within your command? And your concerns that our regional partners increasingly turn to China for military assistance?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I'll begin with their economic penetration into the region. They draw a significant portion of their hydrocarbons from the region. A lot of it goes to the Strait of Hormuz. We see as a result of that they are interested in pursuing close deep and economic relationships with nations that have joined the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf itself. So that they can protect that long term investment.

I believe, ultimately, that will move from economic to military-to-military component. It - they think in the long term, but I believe that's inevitable that we're going to see that. Finally, I believe that we remain the partner of choice for military systems. Our military systems are the best in the world. You get what you pay for. You get what you pay for if you buy a Chinese system.

GILLIBRAND: Thank you. General Townsend.

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. There's a handout there. Should be a handout there that depicts the question you're asking China's investments across the spectrum in Africa. And it's daunting, they are investing primarily in the economic realm, and then followed by the diplomatic realm, and then to a lesser degree, the military domain. However, they're - in military investments are playing out in Africa, they have their one overseas base there.

And they are working hard to develop other overseas bases there. And I would reiterate what General McKenzie said about we remain the partner of choice. And our equipment, and our training is second to none. However, it can sometimes take a tiny bit of long time to unfold, and that sometimes forces our African partners to reach for the bird in - go with the bird in hand.

Which is sometimes China sometimes Russia.

GILLIBRAND: General Townsend, how do you view our African partners opinion of Russia's invasion of Ukraine? Will they distance themselves from Russia on - Russia based on its unprecedented action? Or how do we hold them accountable if Russia is allowed to remain economically relevant to those markets?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I think if you saw the vote play out in the UN the other day, it's sort of covers the spectrum. So, about half of Africa voted to condemn Russia's invasion. The other half either voted to either abstained or did not vote. I think there was only one vote from the continent, Eritrea voted to support Russia.

But it was troubling to me that half of the continent either abstained or did not vote. And I think that's because there trying to see how this is going to play out. Many of them have strong economic ties to Russia and China. And I think they're bidding their time.

GILLIBRAND: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

And Senator Fischer, please.

FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to both of you, gentlemen, for your service to the people of this country. During and after the retrograde, President Biden touted Over the Horizon Counterterrorism Operations as our new strategy to deal with the terrorist threat in Afghanistan.

I expressed serious concerns with this approach, including directly to you General McKenzie for CENTCOMs - during that CENTCOM posture hearing last April. But was repeatedly told by the administration that challenges associated with this strategy could be overcome. General McKenzie, have we conducted any Over the Horizon strikes against ISIS-K targets in Afghanistan since August of last year?

MCKENZIE: Senator, we have conducted no strikes in Afghanistan.

FOSCHER: Would you agree that without sustained CT pressure terrorist groups are more able to focus on planning and preparing for external attacks?

MCKENZIE: I would agree with that statement.

FISCHER: Do we have any information on terrorist planning in Afghanistan?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I have - it's considerable information on that. And I'm prepared to brief you in great detail in the closed session that will follow.

FISCHER: I look, I look forward to hearing your brief on that. General McKenzie, in an interview with the Associated Press in December, you stated that we're probably at about one or two percent of the capabilities we once had to look into Afghanistan. Will you be telling us about that in classified as well?

MCKENZIE: I will. The brief I give you I believe will be exhaustive. In all the in all

the disciplines of intelligence. What we had, what we have now, what the difference in those are? And you'll be able to draw your own very stark and clear conclusions from that.

FISCHER: Is your conclusion about the strategy that we have in dealing with the terrorist threat that we are effective or not effective in sustaining that CT pressure on the groups?

MCKENZIE: It's going to take a little time for that to play out. I believe that, as you noted earlier, sustained CT pressure is what prevents groups from being able to grow, to train, to think about plotting beyond their immediate survival. For example, up and down the Euphrates River Valley in Iraq and Syria. ISIS is unable to think beyond surviving that night or the next night.

In places where they don't have that question of immediate personal survival, then the threat begins to grow. But I would like to talk about that in closed session if I can, ma'am.

FISCHER: OK. In October, Undersecretary Kahl told this committee that we could see ISISK generate the capability to conduct external operations, including against the United States, in somewhere between six and 12 months, and that was five months ago.

Today in your written testimony, you stated that quote, "the Department of Defense assesses ISIS-K, could establish an external attack capability against the United States and to our allies in 12 to 18 months, but possibly sooner if the group experiences an anticipated gains in Afghanistan," end quote. What has caused this intelligence estimate to shift from October when Secretary column made those comments to what you're telling us today?

MCKENZIE: Again, I'll talk a little bit more about this in a closed session. But the period I gave which is 12 to 18 months for ISIS-K represents our best whole of intelligence community thinking on this. And it does change over time as we see groups gather as we see groups fall apart. But I'll be able to give you a lot more detail on that in the closed session.

FISCHER: OK. Let me shift gears a little bit then with you. And we'll continue the CT and in closed session. We look at Iran's proxies throughout CENTCOM AOR. And they continue to pose a significant threat to our partners, and also to our own forces in the region. What more do you think can be done to deter Iran from their malign activities?

MCKENZIE: I think we've established a very clear set of red lines with Iran. And I think as a result of that, over the last several months, their attacks have tapered off. Particularly in Iraq, which I believe Iran views as the principal battleground for confronting the United States and our partners in the region.

And we've been able to do that by very - by increasingly effective counter I IAS

and we've been able to do that by very, by increasingly creative counter-CTC and other systems to defend ourselves. And at the same time, they're finding it increasingly difficult to gain any kind of political traction with the Government of Iraq. I think, for a long time, Iran frankly, tried to pursue a political solution in Iraq, that is not open to them anymore.

FISCHER: And do you believe that we have a good working relationship with our partners in the area in providing them defense against missiles and drones?

MCKENZIE: I believe that we do. You know, I worked very hard at the military-to-military channel with my peers, the chiefs of defense in each of these countries. I believe we do have a very good relationship with them.

FISCHER: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Senator King, please.

KING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, two observations. One is the important day in U.S. history that this represents 202 years ago, the state of Maine joined the Union. And I just wanted to note that. Secondly, I'm sorry that our Ranking Member has gone because there's no senator that knows more about Africa than Senator Inhofe.

And has committed more time and effort and diplomatic and outreach to that continent. And I just wanted to recognize that as this may be the last posture hearing involving Africa that he's still a member of this committee. A couple of questions to follow up on Senator Fischer's questions. General McKenzie, what's the status of the A-LoC (ph) with Pakistan?

And do we have any understanding whatsoever with regard to the A-LoC (ph) for a kinetic strike as opposed to ISR?

MCKENZIE: So right now, we are flying up the A-LoC (ph) to conduct our ISR. For further discussions on that Senator, I'd really prefer to go into the closed session. And I'll be able to answer your questions very directly in that session.

KING: OK. Can you give us - and I know we're going to talk about this in closed session. But since the - our leaving of Afghanistan it late last summer. Compare ISIS and Al Qaeda because the Taliban is hostile to ISIS not so hostile to al Qaeda. Is the Taliban maintaining pressure on ISIS?

MCKENZIE: The Taliban is attempting to maintain pressure on ISIS. They're finding it difficult to do. So, ISIS has been able to execute some high-profile attacks, even in Kabul over the last several months. We're coming out of the winter. Traditionally, this would now begin the fighting season. It is my expectation that ISIS attacks will ramp up in Afghanistan as we go into the summer. And you are correct.

You know, the Taliban is going to go after ISIS. They've done so in the past. But it's going to be a tough fight. They did not help themselves. They, being the Taliban, when they released a number of prisoners from Pul-e-Charkhi and Parwan. Over 1,000 ISIS fighters that reverted back to the group and significantly empowered the group within Afghanistan. And now they're going to reap the results of that action.

So, I think that's a problem for the Taliban. As for al-Qaeda, I think they're much less firm on the al-Qaeda issue. In terms of opposing them and being able to limit them, although they have done some things publicly that would tend to make you think they at least want to send the signals that they're doing. And I'll talk a little more about that in the closed session.

KING: Thank you. I want to return to the chairman's opening questions about Iran. A deal by definition is something where there are things on both sides' advantages or disadvantages, one side gives up something one side gained something. How do you assess - let's assume for a moment that there is a renewed JCPOA Which significantly limits Iran's nuclear capability for the foreseeable future for some period of years.

At the same time, sanctions are relieved in some way that enables them to have additional resources. Which they could put into their malign activities in the region. Would you view that as a reasonable trade off? In other words, realizing you can't have everything? Do you view that a nuclear Iran is more dangerous than an Iran with more money in their pockets?

MCKENZIE: Well, Senator, as you know, CENTCOM is the land of less than perfect solutions. So, I'm always comfortable with a less than perfect solution. It is an overriding national policy objective of the United States for Iran to not have a nuclear weapon and be able to possess a nuclear weapon. So, I think that's a very important goal. And you might have to make some tradeoffs to get to that point.

But as - at the military level, my concern is, first of all, that they not have a nuclear weapon. But I'm also very concerned about the remarkable growth in number and efficiency of their ballistic missile force, their UAV program, their long range drones, and their land attack cruise missile program.

KING: That was going to be...

MCKENZIE: All of those concern me.

KING: That was going to be my next question. What's our current assessment, if we can do this in a unclassified setting of the range of the of Iranian missiles? In other words, can they get to Paris? Can they get to London? Can they get to New York? Are they simply regional - a regional weapon?

MCKENZIE: They have over 3000 ballistic missiles of various types. Some of



which can reach Tel Aviv to give you an idea of range. None of them can reach a Europe yet. But over the last five to seven years Senator, they have invested heavily in their ballistic missile program.

Their missiles are of greater - significantly greater range and significantly enhanced accuracy. We saw that in the attack on Al Assad in January 2020, where their missiles hit within tens of meters of the targets they were intended to hit.

KING: General Townsend any buyer's remorse, or I should say, borrower's remorse in Africa with regards to the relationship of these countries to China. Are they - is there any - well, I think borrowers' remorse is the right phrase - second thoughts about these relationships?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I would say yes, we see that across the continent. So, when, as you're familiar, when China started investing heavily in Africa, this term debt trap diplomacy was born. I think...

KING: They call it debt colonialism.

TOWNSEND: That's another way of saying it as well. I think the African - our African partners, by and large, are very well aware of that. And the countries that we see still hewing to China are those that well, they're not well governed, or they're autocrats. So, I think there is a growing awareness of that. And we're seeing that.

KING: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator King.

Senator Rounds please.

ROUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, first, let me begin by saying thank you, to both of you, for your service to our country. Let me also thank your families for their participation as well. General Townsend, while Russia and China are aggressively expanding their physical footprint in Africa, I'm concerned with their even more aggressive and nefarious activity in cyberspace.

Can you discuss how Russia and China have used cyber to advance their objectives in your AOR? And how your team is combating the threat?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I'll be able to go into more detail in closed session. But I can say this about Russia. Russia, and you're familiar with the oligarch Prigozhin. He has troll farms. He invests in troll farms in Africa. And a number of those were involved in interference - election interference globally to include our country.

And that's continuing, we're seeing that continue with China. Not as much and I can probably go into more detail in closed session.

ROUNDS: Thank you, sir. Also, I think Senator Inhofe hit on this, but I would like

to re-emphasize the challenges in the Saharawi region and South Sahara regions. Where you have challenges, where I believe 40,000 people that have been displaced out of their homeland, awaiting for a UN resolution, or at least some sort of an opportunity for independence.

And most certainly, Morocco is right in the middle of it. And it seems to me that I think what Senator Inhofe is indicated is, the fear that in the future if we are not observant to the real problems that have developed there, that we're going to have a hotbed there. And it's going to be one that will not go away, and we're going to wonder why we suddenly have extremists developing in that region.

Recognizing though for the last 40 years, they have been displaced from their homeland. And the rest of the world has done nothing to try to resolve the situation. I know that it's an area that you're aware of. Do you have any comments on what's going on right now in that region?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I think primarily, this is a diplomatic, or political problem. Less military one, but for all the things that you just mentioned, I agree with. And we are watching it.

ROUNDS: If it's not fixed diplomatically, I fear that it will become a problem for the military. General McKenzie, I really think along with a lot of us here that the way that we left Afghanistan on a date certain, put our military men and women in a very precarious position. And that it was not the correct way to leave Afghanistan.

We believe that it was reckless, half-hazard and endangered the lives of our servicemen and women. Our deeds helped to reshape the current worldwide operational environment, where our adversaries have been emboldened to take greater risks and challenging our national security. We also broke faith with many Afghans who directly supported U.S. Forces. These brave Afghans are eligible for Special Immigrant Visas or SIVs, if they're trapped and have been threatened in Afghanistan.

The Washington Post has reported that Qatar Airways has been chartering, one to two U.S. government flights from Kabul every week from August to December. These flights briefly stopped, then resumed after the new year began. One of the SIV applicants who my office has assisted for the last eight months, just recently was able to get out of Kabul. In fact, just this week, but he was forced to take rather adventurous and long, roundabout way through a third country in order to get out.

Can you tell me General, who specifically has been on these weekly flights? And whether they are the Afghans who risked their lives to help our service members?

MCKENZIE: Senator, our responsibility in this matter is to support this Department of State by providing lily pads in - at Camp Al Sailiya in Qatar. When people come out of Afghanistan, we process them, we make sure they're physically fit. We do all

out of Afghanistan, we process them we make sure they're physically fit. We do all the things to move them on to their final destination, whether that's the United States or another country.

The State Department's call, not our call. But we are fully committed to assisting in that. The same thing in in UAE where there's a facility that is not really run by the United States, but rather by our UAE partners. As to your question about who's coming out? Who's on the flights that Qatar Airways has run out every, every couple of weeks?

I believe they are largely SIV applicants. But Senator, I am actually not in minute-to-minute command that information. You know, that is actually run by the Department of State, we support logistically, but those decisions fall all within the Department of State. I'll simply close by saying we have the capability to support this effort for systems and procedures in place well into the future.

ROUNDS: Thank you. And once again, thank you to both of you, for your service to our country. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

Senator Manchin, please.

MANCHIN: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you both, again, for your service. And thank you, for all the hard work you're doing here. I just have two questions, really, whoever I think probably General McKenzie might come to you. First of all, the Afghanistan situation I was reading this morning, an article that said basically the road from Kabul to Kandahar is now safe.

People are - commerce is coming back a little bit, and you're seeing different roadside things going on and this and that. And basically, for the peace in the country, do you see that basically, to where people are embracing that? And believe they have the ability to build any type of an economy whatsoever or without our assistance?

Because I read of the fam (ph) and I read of all the different hardships that are going on, they're also. The only economy they have as ours, that's gone.

MCKENZIE: I think it's - I do not believe it's a particularly safe place to be. I think you can probably drive on what we'd call the ring road.

MANCHIN: Yes.

MCKENZIE: From Kabul down to Kandahar in a way that you couldn't do it in the past. But at the same time, we know that the Taliban is actually carrying out, you know, searches for former Afghan government officials. We know that women are entering a new and repressive existence under their rule.

So, I - while it may - you may not see the kind of violence that you saw over the last 10 or 15 years there. I'm not sure it's a place where anyone would want to be.

last 10 or 15 years where there has been a place where anyone would want to go.

And I believe that continued press of people that want to leave Afghanistan is perhaps the best indicator of just what conditions are like on the ground.

MANCHIN: Us leaving Afghanistan the way we did. Does it lead us in worse shape as far as our allies?

MCKENZIE: I think, it's too soon to tell. But I think I think what our principal goal in Afghanistan was and remains to ensure that attacks against the United States are not going to be generated from there. From al Qaeda and from and from ISIS-K.

MANCHIN: And right now, you believe that's - that we have subdued that from happening...

MCKENZIE: Sir, I believe...

MANCHIN: (Inaudible) from building back up again?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I believe it is much harder to do it now than it was before. It is not impossible to do it, but I'll have considerable level of detail on that in the closed session.

MANCHIN: Putin's war on Ukraine with the energy. It's an energy war. Putin's war on Ukraine and what we're going through there, and also seeing us now, I have a little bit of a concern with the administration's position on the energy we produce in our country. And we could do a little bit more working with our Canadian and our Mexican allies.

With that being said, the Iran situation that we're talking. I think things have stalled there on the Iran deal again. But also, I'm concerned about Iran, the way we - the last deal that we made with Iran was not made on basically winning, you're - or earning your way back into a productive society. From the standpoint we were giving them too many reliefs on their sanctions up front, and then having to come through.

With Iran's situation right now, and the oil that we have in the sanctions that removed Iran (ph) back into the old business or a bigger, and also in Venezuela. What effect do you think that would have on the Iranian government for them to have that flow of cash again?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I'm probably not the best witness to answer that that part of the question, I can tell you from a military stability perspective, which I am competent to talk about. My principal interest in Iran is ensuring that they don't attack us or our partners in the region, directly or indirectly. To keep Iran to tear it from take undertaking those kinds of activities. We have had some success of doing that over the last couple of years. Not complete success.

MANCHIN: But they're still I mean, indications are still basically one of the largest proliferators of terrorist attacks in that part of the world, correct?

MCKENZIE: That is absolutely correct.

MANCHIN: And basically, with Yemen and all that they're still very much involved there, supplying them?

MCKENZIE: Iran is the principal reason that the conflict in Yemen can't be brought to a conclusion in my judgment.

MCKENZIE: General Townsend, given in the situation we have in Africa right now, what's your thoughts about that?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I didn't catch...

MCKENZIE: Basically, the situation that we have in Africa right now. What are your concerns that you have? The most concern that you do have.

TOWNSEND: Thank you. Thanks for repeating the question. Well, I think probably, number one, is ensuring that the U.S. maintains strategic access and influence. And I think, for me, that the primary concerns are China, and to a lesser - a little bit lesser degree, Russia. I can go more into detail on that in closed session, but I'm concerned about China's basing ambitions in Africa.

And then the second thing would be countering the threats of violent extremists there. Primarily al Qaeda's arm al-Shabab in East Africa.

MCKENZIE: OK. And if I can have one for the question Mr. Chairman? My further question would be this. You know, I remember back at the - I was a young person back in the Cuban Missile Crisis. And the concerns we had with nuclear war and things and all the tests we ran and everything we were prepared for.

And all the things we had to go through exercises. Today, we have so many countries with a nuclear arsenal. What's the most dangerous you think that we have? The country that you're most concerned about with a nuclear capability that could do harm.

Not just - basically up end the world approach on the world order if you will, but basically do damage to the homeland?

TOWNSEND: Senator, for me, I think I subscribe to what's laid out in our national defense strategy, which is China is the longer-term threat, the pacing threat, but today, it's Russia.

MCKENZIE: Senator, I think you have to respect capability. Russia has that capability. China aspires perhaps in the future to have that capability. But I think the acute threat right now, of course, is Russia. And I agree with General Townsend.

MANCHIN: Thank you.

REED: Thank you, Senator Manchin.

Senator Ernst, please.

ERNST: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today and to your command teams, as well. And General McKenzie, thank you so much for your commitment and your service during a very difficult time during that transition in the Middle East. We truly appreciate it. We're grateful.

General McKenzie, two weeks before the final withdrawal from Afghanistan, the on the ground commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan at that time stated in, what are now open source documents that the U.S. forces had targeted and killed over 100 Taliban members who were moving on the city of Kabul on August 14th, is that correct?

MCKENZIE: Yes, Senator, I believe that is correct.

ERNST: OK. So we know at that time, the situation was very tenuous, the Taliban was on the move. And an official DoD after action reported had clarified that the President and other senior DoD officials statements, some of which were under oath, and that both on the ground commanders and the intelligence community assess that the government of Afghanistan capacity to defend the country from being overrun by the Taliban was for six to 12 months following the U.S. withdrawal. And those statements were unequivocally false.

Were the U.S. assessments of Rear Admiral Peter Vasely and General Scott Miller, who were the last two commanders of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and yourself, were they passed on to the Office of the Secretary of Defense? Because I think there was a different assessment that came from you and the on the ground commanders. Were those assessments passed on to the office of Secretary of Defense? Are they passed on to the State Department -- were they passed on to the National Security Council?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I'm confident that my assessments, the assessments of General Miller, as well as subordinate commanders, which informed my assessment, all those were passed to the secretary, and in fact, to the highest levels of government, and I was present at some of those meetings where those recommendations were discussed.

ERNST: Were those assessments given to the President?

MCKENZIE: I believe that at the very highest level, everyone saw and knew these assessments.

ERNST: OK. Were you ever involved in a discussion with the President when dissension was voiced?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I can't -- I'm going to be able to comment on any discussions I had with the President. But I can tell you this, my position, which I've expressed before in front of this committee, was that in the fall of 2020, it was probably a

before, in front of this committee, was that in the fall of 2020, it was probably a mistake to go but below the level of 4,500. And in the spring of 2021, it was a mistake to go below the level of 2,500. If in fact, we did so, we expected the government of Afghanistan to collapse. That reflected my opinion, also the opinion of General Miller, we had an opportunity to freely express that opinion. And I'm confident I was heard. And if -- and that is really all a military commander can ever hope to have the opportunity to do. Those decisions to stay or go and what force level you're going to, you're going to put in Afghanistan are not inherently military decisions. Those are high -- there's decisions made at the highest level of the United States.

And so, I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of that discussion.

ERNST: Now, and I appreciate your clarity, as well, General McKenzie, thank you so much.

And as well, now that we are out of Afghanistan. We do see that that China and Russia are becoming more active in Afghanistan, and they're seeking to capitalize on the void that has been left in that area. What are some of the tools and capabilities that will be required by the United States to really deter our adversaries that are in Afghanistan right now?

MCKENZIE: So I think primarily its how you work with the government of Afghanistan, such as it is that yeah, there's we have not formally recognized the Taliban as the formal government. But there are levers that we can apply against that entity, economic levers, diplomatic levers, they seek diplomatic recognition, not principally from the United States, but also from other nations as well.

And so, there are things that we can I believe, and it's not a military question, really, there are things that we can do to shape their behavior. And I believe our diplomats are working very hard to that and right now.

ERNST: Very good. Whole of government.

And General Townsend, just very briefly, do we see a lot of Russian activity in Africa and the use of contractors, military contractors, other types of contractors? And what are those contractors and give us your assessment of whether that makes our job more difficult in Africa?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. We do see a lot of Russian activity. It's almost all in the form of these private military contractors that you're referring to, namely, the Wagner group and some other smaller ones. They're a malign influence. They don't follow anybody's rules. They do what they want. They buttress dictators, they violate -- they do gross violations of human rights. I think it's bad for Africa's security and prosperity in the future.

ERNST: Thank you very much. Gentlemen, again, thanks so much for your service. We truly do appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REED: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator Kaine, please.

KAINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members and two generals, McKenzie and Townsend, thank you for your service and for your frequent and always illuminating appearances before the committee.

General Townsend, I want to talk to you about a situation that's not getting a lot of attention in the media these days. And that is the humanitarian crisis and war crimes being committed by many sides in Ethiopia and the Tigray region. The ongoing battle 20 months now between the Ethiopian military and the Tigray region forces has created a huge humanitarian crisis, war crimes, famine. You know, it is important that we focus as much energy as we are focusing on the situation in Ukraine right now. But one of the things that I grieve a little bit is when we focus on one part of the world, atrocities and other parts of the world sort of go below the radar screen. And so, whether it's an Ethiopian Tigray, or whether it's persecution of the Rohingyas in Burma, or whether it's the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, some of these crises grab the world's attention, grab America's attention, and some of these crises don't. And there's many, many reasons for that. I'm not going to speculate on them now.

But in a situation like the ongoing atrocities in Ethiopia, which are internal civil strife, although there are presence of foreign actors, inciting that strife or supporting signs in that strife. What can AFRICOM do, what can the United States do to try to advance a better chapter for people of Ethiopia?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. As you stated, you know, that Civil War erupted in late 2020. And so civil war played out for over a year there on top of a humanitarian crisis there, famine, et cetera. And it started culminating there at the end of last year, it looked like the capital Addis may fall, the Ethiopian government rallied and they push the Tigrayans back into the Tigray. And today, it's sort of quiet, but we think we're maybe in a period in between conflict erupting again. I hope that's not the case. I know that there's a lot of diplomacy going on. There's a U.S. special envoy, there's a UN special envoy to work this. I think both sides right now are trying to reset themselves and gather strength. And this diplomacy includes our efforts as well. We've been involved in supporting state department diplomatic efforts in the region.

But right now, for AFRICOM, we're watching an assisting buttressing the State Department.

KAINE: I appreciate that. And I just want to again, underline this point, when there's crises and challenges in the world, people turn to the United States for help. You know, it is interesting that again, and it's worthy and important that we be paying the attention, we're paying to the Russian illegal war against Ukraine. And yet, in Ethiopia, there war crimes occurring, there's genocidal activity occurring. It



may not be an invasion of sovereignty by a neighbor, but there are neighbors and other nations that are inciting violence and supporting violence. And, you know, I hope that we may all strive to be even handed in the attention that we pay to humanitarian crises all over the world.

With that Mr. Chair, I yield back.

REED: Thank you very much Senator Kaine. And let me now recognize Senator Tuberville, please.

TUBERVILLE: Well thank you very much Mr. Chairman. Thank you guys for your service. I know you're looking forward to doing something else possibly for the next few years.

General Townsend, as you've mentioned in testimony, Russia has continued to encourage chaos in them AFRICOM AOR via the Wagner group. What has been done to counter their efforts? And what do you think needs to be continued to be done?

TOWNSEND: So the Russian efforts, as I mentioned earlier, predominately done through these private military companies like Wagner, and they're quite, they're present in Libya in number to a lesser extent in Sudan. They essentially run the Central African Republic. And they're now in Mali, and a gathering strength and Mali, over thousand Wagner operators there now.

What we're we've been doing is shining a spotlight on that with information operations and some public diplomacy. That's -- and advising our African partners to try to steer clear of these groups. I think that they're not going to help our African partners. And I think that the government and the people of Mali are going to regret inviting Wagner into their country.

TUBERVILLE: As we speak, we have one military base in Africa. In your opinion, do we need to?

TOWNSEND: In my view, I don't believe we do need any other permanent U.S. installations, our presence, and our activities there is not dependent on permanent basis in Africa.

TUBERVILLE: OK. Thank you.

General McKenzie, recently, we've seen several attempts to block weapons sales to Saudis and UAE and in Egypt, those attempts could, we all know could severely weaken, you know, influencing CENTCOM AOR. Even President Biden recognizes that and has changed his mind on some of these in the last year. One of the Saudis and the Emiratis and the Egyptians specifically requested that we haven't given them.

McKenzie: Senator, let me just begin by saying we remain the partner of choice for all these countries. Egypt. Saudi Arabia. UAE. they value their relationship with us.

...in these countries, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, they raise their relationship with us. They find it frustrating that with, in the case of UAE, they've expressed an interest in the F-35, the 5th generation fighter. And we are in a process with them right now, to see how that's going to work out. That's one example. Saudi Arabia is also interested in advanced in advanced aircraft, advanced air defense systems, which, generally speaking, we've been able to give Saudi Arabia. In the case of Egypt, I think we have good news and that we're going to provide him with F-15s, which was a long, hard slog, they felt it was too long, they took too long. And Senator, that's the basic criticism of our ability to provide weapons to our friends and partners, it takes too long to actually get them, it moves in fits and starts, and, of course, with our weapons come our values Senator.

And so, they're not going to be able to do anything they want with those weapons, they're going to have to be applied in a manner consistent with the law of armed conflict and the law of war. You don't have that caveat if you buy a Russian or Chinese system. On the other hand, the Russian the Chinese system cannot compete with the ability of an American system.

TUBERVILLE: Thank you.

General Townsend, in 2021 China unveiled its plan to complete several thorium powered nuclear reactors in Africa, though unlike uranium, cannot be used for nuclear weapons, but can provide cheap clean energy that China can export and impose on low income countries. The most concerning part, this to me is we realize this years ago, but our Department of Energy gave this technology to China. As you mentioned in your opening statement that these -- there are many reasons and resources within AOR they are tied to the U.S. transition to clean energy.

If China integrates thorium, nuclear reactors to the Belt and Road Initiative, would that pose a threat to the United States?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I don't know enough about the Chinese nuclear reactor program to see if it -- say that it proposes a threat to the United States. However, I know that Africa is a source of vast deposits of strategic minerals that America and the world needs to, for our technology in the 21st century. And China is working hard to corner the market on those resources. I'm more worried about that, I think than Chinese nuclear energy projects in Africa.

TUBERVILLE: Again, thank you, both of you for your service.

REED: Thank you very much, Senator Tuberville. Let me now recognize Senator Warren, please.

WARREN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today and for your many years of service to our nation.

The RAND Corporation, a nonpartisan research organization that studies national

security issues, recently published a report that found a number of pitfalls in the way that our military prevents, investigates and responds to reports of civilian harm, including and I want to read from the report, DoD is not adequately organized, trained or equipped to fulfill its current responsibilities for addressing civilian harm, end quote.

Now, I think that's a pretty damning finding, particularly, as this is far from a new issue for the United States. I know that Secretary Austin has asked DoD to develop an action plan. And I agree with him that protection of civilians is both a strategic and a moral imperative. So, I want to learn more about your work to prevent civilian harm and your respective commands.

General Townsend, if I can, I'll start with you on this. AFRICOM provides a quarterly report updating the public on the status of all reports of civilian casualties, and an issued one just late last week. What benefit do you see in regular reporting of civilian casualties to the public?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I believe that being transparent is probably our -- you know that it shows the difference between us. And well, for example, the Russians in Ukraine right now. So, I believe that publishing those reports publicly and regularly, on a on a routine basis is our best tool for gaining trust of the American public.

WARREN: And I agree with you, and I commend you for doing this. You know, that kind of regular transparency shows that the command is prioritizing and investigating claims of civilian harm. And I'd like to see that kind of regular reporting from all of the combatant commanders.

So General, now, let me ask you another question about this. Would you agree that there are several reputable trusted NGOs and independent observers in civil society that produce reliable reporting on civilian harm?

TOWNSEND: I think I would.

WARREN: Good. Has AFRICOM undertaken a formal process to incorporate feedback from these groups to improve how it tracks in response to civilian harm?

TOWNSEND: Yes, Senator, we take their feedback with every report they make.

WARREN: Well, that's important, and I think it -- but let me ask you, do you have a formal process for doing this? Are you just kind of integrated as you go along?

TOWNSEND: We have a portal that anyone that has access to the internet can report a civilian casualties or take exception to our evaluation of those.

WARREN: Good. I'm glad to hear this. You know, these groups can provide essential information, not only to accurately identify where you need to investigate claims of civilian harm, but also to help in prevent the killing of civilians in future strikes. RANDs report recommended that DoD engage with outside groups more and I'm glad to see you doing this

and I'm glad to see you doing this.

General McKenzie, if I can. Let me talk with you a minute here. The vast majority of the civilian casualties caused by the U.S. military operations have occurred in CENTCOM AOR. Not only that, but reporting from the New York Times found major instances of civilian harm in Syria that had been covered up. Does CENTCOM have an established process for incorporating feedback from trusted civil society groups to improve the ways that it prevents and responds to instances of civilian harm?

MCKENZIE: Senator, we did and it was not as robust straightforward a program as it should have been. In the wake of the RAND report and other reports, we've taken 10 discrete actions that are designed all to more formalize and provide additional oversight on the possibilities of being casualties.

WARREN: Good. I'm very glad to hear that General. Because, given their expertise, I think we have a lot to learn from these groups, and it can help improve processes. It's long past time, that the United States took seriously the impact of the way that it treats civilian harm. And I'm glad that Secretary Austin is addressing this. But meaningful change is going to take buy in from the two of you from your successors, and from the rest of the DoD leadership.

I'm working on legislation to address these problems. But in the meantime, I'll be paying close attention to the department's action plan and to your work implementing it in the hopes that some of the principles that we've talked about today will be implemented soon.

So thank you very much. Thank you for your work on this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Warren. Senator Tillis, please.

TILLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you for being here.

General Townsend, prior administration reduced nearly all of the 700 troops that we had in Somalia. And now you're commuting from Djibouti and Kenya for counterterrorism over the horizon operations. How is that working now? And what are we going to do to increase effectiveness and reduce risk?

TOWNSEND: Senator, in my view, we are marching in place at best, we may be backsliding into security in Somalia, the security situation. And that's for a number of reasons, not just our commuting to work. But it's also political dysfunction in Mogadishu. It's also inactivity by the Somali by the Amazon partners. Those also factor in. I just think that what we're doing is not providing sufficient pressure. And the best we can do is maintain a secure area around the bases that we return to we really can't get at the Al-Shabaab problem set.

TILLIS: General McKenzie, you had a similar challenge with the withdrawal from Afghanistan. And we haven't seen any, any strikes since our withdrawal last year. I

Afghanistan. And we haven't seen any, any strikes since our withdrawal last year. I suspect some of that information gathering a lot of logistical challenges. But what are we doing there to overcome the massive reduction in our CTE efforts in Afghanistan? And if you could give me an update on how ISIS and al-Qaeda are doing, rebuilding their, their efforts in Afghanistan?

MCKENZIE: Senator, let me preface what I'm going to say by saying in a closed session that will follow, I'm prepared to provide an exhaustive lay down of exactly what we're doing and Afghanistan at a very granular level of details. I'm prepared to do that.

TILLIS: Great. Well ...

MCKENZIE: I would tell you, we have not undertaken any strikes in Afghanistan since the first of September, we continue to watch carefully as ISIS grows, they've gone through the winter, they've been able to carry out some high profile attacks, they still aspire to attack the United States and our partners abroad. And so, we're going to watch very carefully what the Taliban is able to do and not able to do in terms of controlling ISIS. Because as we all know, Taliban actually will fight ISIS, and they have a theological dispute. And so they are in opposition.

Al-Qaeda is a little more difficult to understand because of their cultural interweaving with the Taliban, they still have an aspirational desire to attack us, it will be harder for the Taliban, I predict to ultimately control their actions.

TILLIS: That was with Haqqanis and the Taliban government how well are they doing countering the al-Qaeda threat in Afghanistan?

MCKENZIE: I think they've taken some, they've done some things that are very public in order to limit them. I think it remains to be seen if that's actually going to be translated into action.

TILLIS: Yeah. I doubt that it will.

General Townsend, when you look at these maps that you have (inaudible) about the footprint and your area of responsibility for Russia and China. Are we kind of used the words marching in place with respect to the CT (ph) threat? An answer to the prior question, are we more or less marching in place? Are we gaining any ground particularly over China's what I say is a massive investment and increasing footprint in Africa.

TOWNSEND: Senator, you're right, you just said China's massive investment. We don't have to compete with China everywhere. We have to be selective about where we compete with China. And I think we are being successful in that targeted competition.

TILLIS: On the PMCs that Russia has the four or 5,000. You mentioned that a part of what you're doing is exposing their activities, their malign activities in the area. Give me an example of one or two that are publicly known that the American

Give me an example of one or two that are publicly known that the American people should be aware of that that Russia has malign savage influence, not only in Ukraine, but down in Africa.

TOWNSEND: I think some great examples were in spring of '20 when Russia provided fighters to their mercenaries in Libya, and we were able to conduct an aerial photography, ambush and expose to the world, the provision of those fighters going to Libya that wound up in the hands of Wagner. I think the probably the best one, though, to get at the heart of the matter you're talking about there is as the fighting ended, of the civil war ended in Libya, Wagner began to withdraw from along the line of contact there, and they left behind them anti-tank mines, anti-personnel mines and booby traps, IEDs in their wake, and one of the most heinous ones was found in a teddy bear when they withdrew.

TILLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REED: Thank you very much Senator Tillis. Senator Kelly, please.

KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And General McKenzie general Townsend, thank you for being here. General McKenzie, congratulations on your upcoming retirement on the first of April.

General Townsend, I want to follow up on a question that Senator Tillis and Tuberville asked specific specifically about the Wagner Group. I know, you know that you share this committee's concern about the Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine and our allies have come together to cut off Putin support around the world and the influence that he has. And I'm really glad we've taken the strong measures necessary, we need to do more. But we also need to continue to monitor Russian backed activity around the world. So specifically with regards to the Wagner Group in Africa. You know, I find this increasing presence disturbing and affects our strategic goals in the area.

So, General specifically, how do you see the Wagner group's activity impacting our efforts to one suppress violent extremist groups and, two support a transition to democratic governance in the region?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. I think in a number of ways, first, for example, overflight permissions, so with a continent as vast as Africa, we absolutely depend on, you know, air movement for everything. And when we you see Wagner move in, they impose overflight restrictions either through the government withdrawing permissions for overflight, or in the case of Libya, Wagner importing sophisticated advanced surface to air missile systems to protect their activities there, but also deny the airspace. We can see some of this playing out in Mali, as Wagner first started arriving there. And now overflight permissions are becoming more challenging there.

Then secondly, usurping partnerships. So, as we've seen in just happen -- just

now in Mali, the Malian government has asked the French forces to depart and instead have invited in this Russian PMC. And I think that is disturbing. It's impacting our partnership with that same government as well. And I think that's not good for Mali's future.

KELLY: And what do you think these strategic goals that they might be advancing for Russian leadership would be? What's the overall? What's the overall goal here?

TOWNSEND: So for Wagner, they are guns for hire. They're a for profit organization. And they are going to be extracting natural resources out of Africa. And we see this in all the countries that are located in whether it's oil, gas, gold, diamonds, strategic minerals, that's what they're going to be going after. And that's how they're probably going to earn their remittance. But at what they're doing for the Kremlin, though, is they're usurping those partnerships. They're displacing Western influence, like France, for example, in Mali. And I think that's what they're trying to block us out. And Wagner is trying to make a profit while they do it.

KELLY: And it sounds like they're being somewhat successful. So what do we need to be doing? What kind of changes do we need to make, either alone or with our partners to counter this expanding Russian influence in the region.

TOWNSEND: Senator, despite their recent gain or success in Mali, and I think that remains to be seen whether they will be successful there or not, I predict they will not be successful in the long run. An example though, is in Libya, where they are run, they have worn out their welcome there, and the Libyans, even the Libyans who the Russians supported in the Civil War, now want them to depart.

So actually, I think that they're probably their own worst enemy.

KELLY: So the Libyan people are now against this. I don't want to call it an occupation, but this force being there and amongst the community. It seems that at Mali, they do have support general support from the public. Do you see that turning at some point?

TOWNSEND: I do. And I think it's -- we're very -- they're very early stages. They've only been arriving in the last couple of months. And they're preparing to get under operations. So I think that -- I think they will wear out their welcome. I do believe that.

KELLY: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Senator Cotton, please.

COTTON: I want to return to what Senator Kelly and earlier Senator Rounds were speaking about the Wagner group. General McKenzie, the Wagner group is a Russian paramilitary organization run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of Vladimir Putin.

MCKENZIE: Sir, I believe it is.

COTTON: All right. But I know that they're active in an Africa. There's also been reports that they've recently been deployed into Ukraine as well. I'll give this to either one of you. The Wagner group, is it fair to characterize it as essentially an arm of the Russian state?

TOWNSEND: That's my view of it.

COTTON: Yeah, that's my view of it too. Much more so than say any American security company would be linked to the United States government. Correct, General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: I would agree with that.

COTTON: General McKenzie, this is a year before your time, but I bet you remember it. Something called the Battle of Khasham in Syria. Do you want tell us a little bit about what happened in Syria in early 2018?

MCKENZIE: I believe it was in February of -- February of that year. A large group of Wagner centered fighters tried to cross the Euphrates river down around (inaudible). We brought them under fire and kill several 100 of them. It was a direct attack on us. And I think we defeated in a pretty shocking manner that was widely reported.

COTTON: Do you remember the numerical superiority that these Wagner mercenaries had against U.S. forces?

MCKENZIE: It was probably 10 to one.

COTTON: Ten to one they outnumbered U.S. forces?

MCKENZIE: Probably.

COTTON: I believe at the time, probably still do, we had a deconfliction hotline set up with Russian commanders in the region, right?

MCKENZIE: That is correct, Senator.

COTTON: And Secretary Mattis at the time testified that we use that deconfliction hotline to ensure with Russian counterparts that these were not Russian soldiers. Is that right?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I believe that's correct.

COTTON: Yeah. I think his exact testimony here was that once we confirm that Russian did not claim these soldiers as their own, I ordered that they'd be destroyed, and they were destroyed.

MCKENZIE: Sir, that's correct.

COTTON: What do you think that tells us about the quality of Wagner



mercenaries, whether they're in Syria, Africa, or now in Ukraine?

MCKENZIE: Well, I think it tells you that any mercenary force is going to have a qualitative disadvantage. It also tells you a lot about our capability, Senator.

COTTON: Yeah. And also if they're fighting against an extremely determined people, they're digging their heels within their homeland lock up Ukrainian army, that maybe we shouldn't think that they are even Russian regulars are 10 feet tall.

MCKENZIE: Sir, I couldn't agree more.

COTTON: General Townsend, I want to return to something that you mentioned to Senator Tuberville, that Africa has vast strategic minerals, which is correct. It's also the case that they're not exclusive to Africa. You can find these minerals and a lot of places around the world, it's just that we have largely declined to mine them around the world. And now it's predominantly mined in Africa. Is that right?

TOWNSEND: That's right, Senator.

COTTON: Senator Kelly, I've introduced something called the REEShore Act, with goals to shore up domestic and defense supply chains for these critical minerals. Do you think that China is targeting these minerals in its Belt and Road Initiative in Africa?

TOWNSEND: I do. There are some minerals. And I think I don't -- I didn't provide the chart now. But I can have it in closed session. There are some minerals that are, if not unique to Africa, they are predominantly found there in all of our countries to include us rely on those imports.

COTTON: Yes.

TOWNSEND: And I believe China's maneuvering to secure those.

COTTON: Probably bad idea to make ourselves dependent on China, ourselves, being the civilized world depended on China, mining these minerals in Africa, would you say?

TOWNSEND: I would agree.

COTTON: OK. General Mackenzie, I want to turn to a topic that Senator Reed and Senator King addressed as well about a nuclear deal with Iran. They both asked you kind of in the abstract, if it's better to have a nuclear deal with Iran that prevents them from getting a nuclear weapon, irrespective of their aggression in the region. In the abstract, I would agree with that. I think you did as well. But the deal actually needs to stop them from getting a nuclear weapon or becoming a threshold state to achieve that goal. Right.

MCKENZIE: Senator, I would agree. Yes.

COTTON: Yeah. And I would say just like the 2015 deal, did not achieve that

objective. Certainly the media reports about the directions of the current negotiations when achieve that objective either. What kind of message are we sending to both Iran and Russia, who's acting as Iran's lawyer in these negotiations, and to allies like the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, when Iran is itself shooting ballistic missiles into Erbil as they did over the weekend or supplies you said, their proxies in Yemen with the missiles and drones to shoot into downtown Dubai or downtown Abu Dhabi, or into Al Dhafra Base where we have soldiers. What kind of message does that send to Iran and Russia on the one hand, and our allies like.

MCKENZIE: Senator, the primary my share of the task is to deter Iran from large scale attacks. And we've had some success doing that. Our success has not been perfect. But Iran has largely been deterred from launching direct attacks on us over the past couple of years. I wouldn't speak for the future. And I would agree that they're actively fomenting malign activities across the region. Their intent is to do it at a low enough level, that it will not in their view, at least disrupt the negotiating process, again, from it is my judgment, that's a dangerous position for them to have.

COTTON: And well, that that would be the intent, usually of weaker revisionist powers throughout history to always operate right below the level of retaliation and to therefore gradually accumulate more strategic advantage, right?

MCKENZIE: Senator, it's an isometric approach that's founded in history, as you noted.

COTTON: All right. Thank you.

REED: Thanks, Senator Cotton. Senator Cramer, please.

CRAMER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for being here and for your service.

I want to drill down a little bit on where we just wrapped up General McKenzie with Senator Cotton as he ran out of time. I guess for me there a couple of things. And by the way, your characterization of CENTCOM is the land of imperfect solutions describes the United States Senate as well, and where some would do better to realize that sometimes as a body. But anyway, that that said, there are a couple of things specific to I think were Senator Cotton was going on while you're going. One is -- what are the timelines themselves, the sunsets create almost an implication of licensed to accumulate the very thing we're trying to prevent them from getting.

There's that and then there's just how to compel compliance. And maybe you could elaborate a little bit for me, a better understanding of you know, the relief of sanctions, again, get getting back to Senator King asked the relevant question in the give and take so that the sanctions relief that provides money, and then the

time that the sunsets provide, how -- are we balancing that right, maybe that's the way to ask the question.

MCKENZIE: Sir, I would defer to the Department of State and our negotiators for the details on that. But I would tell you just from where I sit, my guidance is clearly we don't want Iran to possess a nuclear weapon.

CRAMER: Yeah.

MCKENZIE: And so that, you know, the best way to get to that solution is to for them to agree not to pursue it. They may be closer than we like when we reach that level of agreement. I don't know that's a matter for the diplomats, not for me.

CRAMER: Let me ask this and do you -- in your opinion, do you think that the IRGC belongs on the Foreign Terrorist Organization list? And should that be under consideration in this negotiation?

MCKENZIE: Well, from everything that I can see from where I sit, the IRGC is a terrorist organization.

CRAMER: Well, I'd say you have a pretty good seat, a pretty good view of that. So thank you for that.

I also then want to -- none of these, by the way, were in my original, my original list of things talked about, but you in response to, I think it was Senator Tuberville, you talked about the other relationships, the allied relationships, you specifically brought up F-35 sales to UAE, for example, as an example. And you talked about the long slog, specifically to the UAE and F-35. In fact, let me back up a second. I just read a report, I can't keep track of my weeks either earlier this week or last I think it was last week, reports of leadership UAE, Saudi leadership not even taking phone calls from U.S. leadership as a result of some of this.

Do you think the F-35 sale to UAE should have gone through sooner? And should we be doing it as soon as possible? So, you know, what's the -- what are the ramifications if we don't do it in this you know, imperfect solution world you live in?

MCKENZIE: Well I think in general, anytime we undertake weapons sales to a foreign nation, you want to do it as soon as practically possible in an advanced system like the F-35. And I'm not an expert on the procurement delivery that weapon system, it's going to take some time to get there. It's not a system that you can build rapidly beyond the existing scale of production. So it's going to take some time to be there. But I think our friends sometimes find it frustrating when the bat -- you know when the timeline slips and goes on well into the future.

CRAMER: So, do you have a basic philosophy of how you have the appropriate guardrails and in our system that prevent, provides the comfort level for the overseers who have to provide a comfort level for the people we work for. And, you know, and then maintaining those relationships.

MCKENZIE: Sir, I can talk more about it in a closed session. But briefly, the answer is yes, I am comfortable with those guardrails.

CRAMER: Thank you, gentleman.

General Townsend, in my last minute, just some questions about my favorite topic. And I honestly, we all, I think, struggle with the maintenance of legacy systems and making room for modern systems, particularly in the ISR realm. So, I'm just gonna ask you a very open-ended question. Are you getting the ISR you need? Are you concerned about any gaps in ISR coverage? And do you have any thoughts or -- literally, and seriously, and sincerely any thoughts for us as we consider the balance of all of that?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. No combatant commander has the ISR they wish to have. AFRICOM does the best work we can with the ISR that was allocated. I could certainly use more ISR.

Your point about the legacy ISR systems and transitioning to more capable systems I think that's something that our nation's doing and our services are doing for the future. We have to do that because we need platforms that are more capable against the higher-end competitors. However, in theaters like mine, and even General McKenzie's, the legacy ISR systems that we have work just fine. We don't need exquisite high-end capabilities to do the work we're doing in Africa. But I do understand why your department needs those for other theaters.

CRAMER: I appreciate you both. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Cramer.

Senator Rosen, please.

ROSEN: Thank you, Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Inhofe, for holding this hearing. I'd also like to thank generals McKenzie and Townsend for testifying today and, of course, for your service to our country.

And General McKenzie, as this will be the last time before our committee, thank you for your decades of distinguished service to our nation for leading the brave men and women of our armed forces and navigating the many challenges within central command. Thank you.

And General McKenzie, I want to talk a little bit about combating Iranian aggression. As I've noted in several previous hearings, Iran and Iranian -- Iranian-backed militia groups are increasingly targeting U.S. installations and service members in both Iraq and Syria via drone and rocket attacks. We don't even have to look beyond this weekend when the IRGC claimed credit for missile attacks in the U.S. consulate in Erbil. On a regular basis around, the world's leading state

sponsor of terrorism threatens U.S. and allied interests in the Middle East and around the world via both direct attacks like the ones we've just witnessed and through its support for Hezbollah and Islamic Republic's other terrorist proxies.

So, can you discuss the threat Iranian-aligned militia groups in the Middle East pose to U.S. troops and our allies? And how do you believe the U.S. should respond? How are you addressing the threat, and does CENTCOM have the necessary authorities to target these militias, other than the ability to act in self-defense?

MCKENZIE: Senator, first of all, you're right, Iran is a foment, a particularly virulent form of anti-Americanism across the -- across the theater it is a long-term objective of Iran for the United States to be forced to exit the region. They see the principal battleground for that as being Iraq because that's where we're the most distributed. That's where we're the most vulnerable. And for the last couple of years, they've actually tried to pursue a political solution to that that has not worked out for them. The seething -- the seated government of Iraq is interested in maintaining a long-term relationship with the United States. And in fact, with NATO.

And what's that done -- what that has done is it has driven Iran and its proxies, its proxies, in particular, to seek kinetic solutions to push us out. They believe that by causing a significantly high level of pain, we're going to leave, and that actually, of course, has not proven to be the case. For one thing, over the past several months, they have attacked us; they have not been particularly successful with those attacks. And there are a number of reasons for that. First of all, commanders on the ground, our commanders on the ground, have been very, very aggressive in protecting their men and women by actions that we take when we learn -- when we learn of an impending attack. Second, our anti-drone systems are beginning to work. It's taking -- taken us a while to get to this point, but I'm gratified to see that capability coming forward. And finally, their own attacks have not always been the most artfully conceived and executed.

One point I would make is we do not believe the attack of this last weekend, the ballistic missiles were actually targeted against us, we believe it's going against other targets hit near us and could affect would have been the same, and I can talk more about in the closed session. But in order to close out your question, ma'am, I do have the authorities I need to act in U.S. central command against Iranian proxies should -- should the threat require me to do that.

ROSEN: Thank you. I want to move on a little bit to Israel. And now that Israel is within CENTCOM's area of responsibility, it is my sincere -- sincere hope that this transfer will potentiate even greater military cooperation between the U.S., Israel, and our shared goals, as well as greater cooperation between our Arab and Israeli partners.

So, Senator McKenzie, building on Senator Gillibrand's question on leveraging the Abraham accords. Are there plans to integrate joint exercises with Israel and Arab states who signed normalization agreements with Israel? And what do you see as the greatest benefits and opportunities to Israeli inclusion in CENTCOM?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I would say that bringing CENTCOM into the AOR really operationalizes the Abraham accord and sort of makes -- it puts a military component to the normal -- broad normalization that is already proceeding with Israel and many of its Arab neighbors.

Now, in terms of practical things, we can do right now. Number one is integrated air and missile defense. Everyone in the region is seized by the Iranian threat, and they want to be able to defend themselves against that threat. And that threat is primarily in the air that's remote -- with setting aside the proxies, which we talked about, is primarily Iran's ballistic missiles, their cruise missiles, and their UASes. So, that's going to -- that's a significant issue for nations in the region. Israel is going to be able to assist us in all of those areas.

Additionally, in specific answer to your question, we have been and will continue to expand Israel's participation and exercises across the region. That's an invaluable tool for getting partners to know each other, you know, and laying plans for the future.

ROSEN: Thank you.

And, Mr. Chairman, I have questions for the record for General Townsend about Chinese technology and Africa. We'll submit them for the record. Thank you both.

REED: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

Senator Blackburn, please.

BLACKBURN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to each of you for being with us today.

General McKenzie, I want to go back to this Iran deal because the threat assessment, the annual threat assessment, noted that they anticipated that Iran would continue to threaten U.S. interests U.S. individuals. I've read public reports of them threatening you.

I know that this Iran deal would unlock billions of dollars for Iran. And I'm very concerned about what they would do with that money. They've already recently, in the recent past, the past decade, \$16 billion is what we know of that they have transferred to these terrorist groups. So, the IRGC you mentioned as Senator Rosen just talked about the attack this week.

But Iran goes in to fill these power vacuums. We have seen, and we've talked a good bit about AFRICOM and Wagner and the way they're filling that. And General

Kurilla, when he was with us for his confirmation hearing, touched on the risk that sanctions relief to Iran would make to us and to our interest because of this money transfer. And do you agree with General Kurilla as we're talking about a new JCPOA or a new Iran deal and unleashing all of this money to them? Are you concerned about that, and how that would be used by these proxy groups, and the way they would benefit from that?

MCKENZIE: Senator, our primary policy objective with Iran is to prevent them from having a nuclear weapon, a weapon that they could...

BLACKBURN: And we realize that and appreciate that.

MCKENZIE: And so, I am not an expert on the negotiations that are currently going on. So, I'm not able to give you...

BLACKBURN: Is your expectation they would be more lethal? That they would move forward with...

MCKENZIE: It is. I would say that there is a risk that they could use that money in ways that we would not want them to use that money. I can certainly say that's -- that is -- that is a risk. But I think that we would have to balance that if we got a good agreement that prevented them from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

BLACKBURN: OK. All right. So, I know that the JCPOA under the terms for that they could buy weapons from Russia and China as of October 2020, and they would be able to buy advanced weaponry and ballistic missiles from Russia next year. So, what is your concern about their ability to purchase arms from Russia or China? Would they be able to purchase even more lethal weapons if they get that sanctions release? And how -- what would that do with the capabilities for the Houthis, or for any of these other terrorist organizations?

MCKENZIE: Senator, over the last four or five years, under a very significant sanctions regime, Iran has made remarkable advances in their ballistic missiles. I believe, if open to bringing in advanced weapons from other states, such as you have named, it will increase the risk in the theater considerably.

BLACKBURN: Have we provided everything to the Israeli government that they've requested in order to respond to an Iranian nuclear buildup?

MCKENZIE: Senator, at my level, at the chief of defense level, we're in complete agreement about the way ahead and about what we're giving them. I can't talk about other -- I can't talk about the whole of government, but I can talk about it...

BLACKBURN: Well, I was pleased to see the realignment of Israel from Yukon to CENTCOM. I felt like that was the right move, and I was happy to see CENTCOM's combined naval exercise involving Israel, the UAE, Bahrain; that was last November. So, how are you actively working with partner nations to integrate the IDF into the regional security architecture?

MCKENZIE: I think the low-hanging fruit is an integrated air and missile defense. All of these nations see the threat from Iran, the ballistic missile threat, the cruise missile threat, the unmanned aerial system threat, and they want to be able to defend themselves. And I think that's where we can make great headway involving Israel, but also other nations in the region. And I'll be able to talk a little bit more about that in the closed session.

BLACKBURN: Closed session. Thank you all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

Senator Peters, please.

PETERS: Thank -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Well, gentlemen, first, let me congratulate both of you on your upcoming retirements and thank you for your collective 82 years of experience between the two of you. That's a truly remarkable and outstanding service to our country. And certainly, our nation owes both of you a debt of gratitude for your sacrifice and commitment. So, thank you so much.

In the -- in the last few months, the -- the United States has announced the rerouting of \$67 million of security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces to support members of the military as Lebanon grapples with some very severe financial challenges. Notably, the aid package will include some livelihood support payments, and these will go directly to troops to help them weather the extreme economic conditions that the country is facing right now.

So, General McKenzie, my question for you, sir, is can you just discuss why supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces is a national security interest for the United States? And more broadly, what the U.S. can do to support Lebanon during this time of severe crisis there?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I support the \$67 million, and I support it more broadly as well. It's our view that the LAF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, are the sole representative of the state of Lebanon in terms of defending itself. As you know, there are competitor entities in Lebanon, LH, Lebanese Hezbollah, as an example, that have an exercise of malign influence not only inside Lebanon but indeed regionally from a Lebanon base. Our best -- our best hope to keep the lid on Lebanon is to continue to support the LAF as the representative of the state of Lebanon.

And I'll just say briefly, the financial situation in Lebanon is dire. I am not an economist, but I -- I can recognize it probably is the worst I've ever seen it. And this money is going to be critical to maintaining cohesion inside the LAF. And they have performed very well in the aftermath of the Lebanese -- the Beirut port



have performed very well in the aftermath of the Lebanese -- the Beirut port explosion. It was the LAF that did a lot of great work there. So, I think it's in all our interests for the LAF to be supported and supported appropriately. And that would include allowing its soldiers to feed their families.

PETERS: General McKenzie, my -- my next questions for you as well. According to UNICEF, at least 47 children have been killed or maimed in Yemen just in January and February of this year. In total, at least 10,000 miners have been killed or injured since the Saudi-led coalition began their bombing in 2015. And this was in the context of a conflict in which the UN estimates nearly 377,000 people have died since the conflict began. And now the World Food Programme is warning that 13 million Yemenis are facing starvation.

My question for you, general, is straightforward. What -- What leverage does the United States have to bring all the parties to the table to end this conflict? And what are we doing to make it happen?

MCKENZIE: Senator, so it's my assessment. And again, I only see a part of the problem. We have a -- we have a negotiator who works this at a higher level. I believe that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is willing to come to an agreement in -- with -- with events in Yemen. I believe that is attainable from their end.

I think it's the Houthis who are intent on continuing to prosecute this fight. And I believe they are prodded directly by their Iranian masters. And that -- that's the reason that the situation exists now, where they're firing, almost daily, weapons into Saudi Arabia. And of course, as recently as several weeks ago, began to fire ballistic missiles into UAE. In both cases, they were -- they were and are prodded to do it again by their sponsors, Iran, who has no interest actually, in this war coming to an end, no interest in solving the humanitarian dispute.

And I do not dispute the tragedy, the tremendous tragedy of children being maimed by these weapons; understand that completely. But there is a path forward. Some of the parties are willing to take that path. Unfortunately, not all of the parties are willing to take that path.

PETERS: Well, I appreciate your efforts and working to try to get to that path. Thank you for that.

General Townsend, in the spring of 2020, some of Michigan's National Guardsmen engaged with military partners in Liberia as part of AFRICOM's command advice, investigations, and coordination initiative. I'd like to hear your assessment of how effective this initiative has been in promoting effective military legal frameworks within a variety of our African partners.

TOWNSEND: Well, Senator, much like our values and our democracy, we also try to pass on our views of the rule of law whenever we engage with our African partners. So, that program that you're talking about is a part of that effort. And every training that we do has discussion about the rule of law and the law of

every training that we do has discussion about the rule of law and the law of armed conflict. And I think that program, you -- you can debate whether how effective it is, but I think we have to actually try. Every time we engage our African partners, it's important that we talk about our values and the rule of law and civilian control of the military, et cetera. So, I think it's an important program.

PETERS: Thank you, general. Again, congratulations to both of you on your retirement; it's well-deserved. Thank you for your service to our country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REED: Thank you, Senator Peters.

Senator Hawley, please.

HAWLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to both of you for being here.

General McKenzie, if I could start with you. You directed U.S. Army Central to investigate the events surrounding the Abbey Gate bombing on August 26, 2021. Is that correct?

MCKENZIE: Senator, that is correct.

HAWLEY: And they issued, in fact, a report. Is that correct?

MCKENZIE: Senator, they did.

HAWLEY: Totaling about, I think, 2000 pages. You said in a letter to the Secretary, "I have reviewed the investigation completed at my direction by U.S. Army Central, and concur with and endorse the findings," end quote; is that correct?

MCKENZIE: That is correct.

HAWLEY: And do you stand by that, general?

MCKENZIE: I do.

HAWLEY: Let's talk about some of the findings if we -- if we could. This committee has been told repeatedly was told repeatedly that the collapse of the Afghan security forces on such a rapid timetable couldn't be predicted. For example, General Milley testified to this committee. I'm going to quote him now; quote, "There was nothing I or anyone else saw," end quote that suggested the rapid collapse of Afghan security forces on the timetable that they did collapse.

The CENTCOM report that you ordered, I think, to put it gently, cast some doubt on that for example, it says General Miller, that's the commander on the ground, of course, as you know, general; General Miller was extremely worried from May 2 onward about the rapid collapse of the security forces, especially as he was seeing key districts fall. Of course, General Miller also has testified to this committee that he warned you, General Millev. and Secretary Austin. as early as

March or April, about the rapid collapse of the security forces. The report also says quote, "Rear Admiral Vasely provided assessments weeks prior to the fall of the Afghan government, that the trajectory of Afghanistan was in a downward spiral and likely not recoverable," end quote. General, can you confirm for us based on the findings in the report that the administration was, in fact, warned that Afghan security forces and the government could collapse rapidly after we left? And by we, I mean our military forces who evacuated fully in July.

MCKENZIE: Senator, I'll answer that, but first, I'd like to very briefly just talk about the Abbey Gate investigation. That was a narrowly scoped investigation to determine what happened at Abbey Gate. The quotations you're drawing from testimony inside it were not part of the formally filed findings of the investigation. That doesn't mean they're accurate or inaccurate; they're just simply not...

HAWLEY: They're in the report, though, general, correct?

MCKENZIE: There -- there are 14,000 pages in the report involving a lot of testimony from a lot of people. And I'm sure that -- I'm sure they're in the report. However, they're not the reason the report was created and that they were not in the final -- they were not in the formal final findings of the report, which was focused on the nature of the attack at Abbey Gate.

Now having said that, as early as -- and I've -- and I've testified here earlier today and in the past, I, as early as the fall of 2020, my recommendation was that if -- my -- my -- not my recommendation, but my view was that if you go we'll have 4500 in Afghanistan, that would -- that would be a mistake put us on a slope that we would not be able to recover from. And then also, in the spring of 2021, General Miller and I were both agreed that 2500 was a number that we could maintain in Afghanistan.

That's not ultimately the number that was selected. But we had the opportunity, a full and free airing of our views, which I think is all any commander can ask. Another decision was made, which is the way the process is supposed to work.

HAWLEY: Fair enough. Fair enough that you undid -- you did, in fact, it sounds like to me, and the report certainly indicates that the administration was warned and that -- and that you were ignored. This investigation contains other remarkable testimony about the State Department of the White House's disengagement. Let me just go through a little bit of that.

Multiple sources said for the record for the testimony to the State Department refused even to talk about a civilian evacuation until it was too late that they delayed efforts to start evacuating Americans. For example, Brigadier General Sullivan told investigators, and I'm going to quote him now, quote, "Trying to get the embassy to discuss noncombatant evacuation operations was like pulling teeth until early August." He goes on to say the embassy didn't fully participate in

evacuation planning until a week prior to the fall of Kabul.

Another marine said that as a result of the State Department's intransigence, quote, "We essentially planned the evacuation in about five days," end quote. General, is it fair to say the State Department's delays undermined a broader evacuation effort?

MCKENZIE: I think the Department of State always tries to find a solution to remain engaged in a country. It's alien to their nature to cut and run. They prefer to not do that. I would tell you that we were involved in a lot of -- a lot of discussions back and forth with the State Department beginning in the spring of that year. And even earlier, in fact, as we looked at possible contingencies for departure.

HAWLEY: So, yeah, you said that you were engaged in evac -- in discussions with the State Department. What the report shows is that the State Department refused, and frankly, the White House refused to engage until the very last minute. For example, this is the testimony again of Rear-Admiral Vasely; on the morning of August 14, he says, the ambassador there in Kabul finally got a call from the National Security Adviser Sullivan and Secretary Blinken, who told him, the ambassador, we needed to move. We had heard the night before that they were looking at a two-week plan to get 250 personnel, U.S. personnel, to HKIA and get them out by 31 August. I, Vasely, told him he didn't have two weeks, that he only had 24 to 48 hours. Vasely goes on; I'd like to know where this level of urgency to get these people in before August 15 was before because it didn't exist until it became a crisis.

I could go on and on here, general. There are thousands of pages here. And I want to -- I want to thank you for ordering this investigation. I think that was the right thing to do. I wish this committee would show some interest in it. My staff and I have been through all of it that is publicly available. It is astounding, frankly. So, thank you for ordering it. Thank you for what you were able to uncover. I, again, call on this committee to have hearings on this report, which is now in the public domain, much of it. And that, frankly, contains shocking information about this administration's total failure to plan for the collapse of the Afghan security forces despite being warned about it for months upon months and to withdraw American civilians in time before the tragedy at Abbey Gate, which led to the death of 13 service members.

I've got more questions for you for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

KING: Mr. Chairman, as a member of the Intelligence Committee, I can assure the senator that there were not months and months of warning of imminent collapse. That is categorically untrue, and I wish the senator would get off of this hobbyhorse.

MCKENZIE: May I...

REED: Gentlemen, gentlemen, I will now recognize...

MCKENZIE: Mr. Chairman, the senator just invoked me; has the senator read the 2000-plus pages...

REED: Senator Hawley?

(CROSSTALK)

MCKENZIE: ... Senator King, do you have any interest in it?

REED: Senator Hawley, your time's expired.

MCKENZIE: Do you doubt what I'm quoting? You're saying that I'm misquoting these -- this evidence?

Before the senator impugns my integrity in an open session, I'd like him to at least give me the courtesy of reading the material that I'm quoting and engaging with it.

KING: I'd be glad to do so.

REED: Senator Sullivan, please.

SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And gentlemen, I want to also reiterate what many have said here. Thank you for your service exceptional service to our nation. I know, facing retirement, and you're probably one of the things you're most happy about is you probably don't have to testify in front of this committee again. But we really appreciate all you've done for our nation.

I wanted to follow up on the important questions Senator Warren had asked about civilian casualties. Nobody wants civilian casualties, of course. One question that wasn't asked, though, and I think is important; we don't target civilians ever, our military, do we, General McKenzie, General Townsend?

MCKENZIE: Senator, we do not target civilians.

SULLIVAN: General Townsend, in your experience.

TOWNSEND: You're absolutely right.

SULLIVAN: So, we never...

TOWNSEND: Unlike what we see in Ukraine right now.

SULLIVAN: Right. But other countries do, correct?

MCKENZIE: I can only observe what you're seeing in Ukraine.

SULLIVAN: Ukraine, Syria, perhaps?

MCKENZIE: Many -- many other places.

MCKENZIE: many -- many other places.

SULLIVAN: ISIS, Al Qaeda. So, we don't do that. It's just important to recognize and say that for the record. And I know that's been your experience in your command.

You know, I was in like a lot of senators as part of a bipartisan delegation to the Munich Security Conference. I went on to do consultation with allies in NATO and the EU in London. And it was mostly about Ukraine, some Asia Pacific issues. I was actually quite surprised how literally in every meeting our allies raised with me the Afghanistan withdrawal and how it undermined U.S. credibility and trust, particularly as it related to NATO allies that were also in the country.

General, what -- what -- what do you recommend is our best way to regain that credibility? I was -- I didn't raise it. It was raised in literally every meeting with me. And it was quite an important experience that I had that, hey, this is still having an impact. What would you say is the best way to reestablish that kind of credibility and trust with our allies, particularly NATO allies?

MCKENZIE: Senator, so I think there's still a thirst for U.S. leadership. There's certainly a thirst for in my region where I interact with chiefs of defense daily and visited literally everyone several times since we left Afghanistan. They -- they, they're taken aback by it; they still believe that the United States remains their partner of choice and, in fact, their preferred choice.

Now, NATO is a little bit out -- out of my wheelhouse.

SULLIVAN: Yeah.

MCKENZIE: But I would tell you that I think the things that we're doing with NATO right now are things that absolutely restore some of that.

SULLIVAN: Good.

MCKENZIE: I think -- I think, from what I see from my perch on the sidelines at -- at CENTCOM, looking into what European Command is doing and NATO is doing, and this administration is doing, I think they're doing all the right things to reestablish that.

SULLIVAN: OK, good. Thank you. I noticed that in your CENTCOM priorities, deter Iran, is that listed at the top? Is that your number one priority?

MCKENZIE: Sir, that is my number one priority.

SULLIVAN: And let me -- let me talk about I'm sure you're familiar with this, the could for -- Quds Force, General Suleimani starting in about 2004-2005 supplied very sophisticated IEDs to the Iraqi Shia militias in Iraq, over 2000 American soldiers wounded in action, over 600 killed in action because of those EFPs. For years, we didn't do much to hold Soleimani, the Quds Force for, accountable for this very devastating killing of our best and brightest. I was in a hearing when the

this very devastating killing of our best and brightest. I was in a hearing when the chairman then, General Dunford, mentioned that Soleimani, in particular, may have learned the wrong lesson back then; you could attack Americans with impunity and not pay a price. Do you agree with that? I know you were very familiar with that. And this is prior to, of course, him being killed.

MCKENZIE: Well, I think -- I think he's an object lesson. And then you can't attack Americans with impunity.

SULLIVAN: So, you think that -- were we able to reestablish some of the deterrence that General Dunford had talked about by killing him when he was looking to kill more American troops?

MCKENZIE: I think that contributed to deterrence being reestablished. And I think that was a factor in their calculation. The Iranians have never doubted our capability. Occasionally, they doubt our will.

SULLIVAN: And you think that's been reestablished now?

MCKENZIE: I think, yes. But I think, as with all things with Iran, it's an extraordinarily complex subject. And I think there is a -- there is deterrence, but it's what I would call contested deterrence. They still seek -- they still seek to push us out by hurting us, and they will continue to do so.

SULLIVAN: Let me ask one final question. You were quoted in a New Yorker article in December of 2020, titled "The Looming Threat of a Nuclear Crisis with Iran," where you were quoted as saying that a more immediate threat than the nuclear program is Iran's missiles. Two very quick questions; did the Iranians target the consulate with this most recent missile attack in -- on northern Iraq? And would reentering the JCPOA positively or negatively impact Iranian ballistic missile capability? Which you, I think, have rightly called out back in December as a much more immediate threat from them. So, two questions on that. Were they targeting us?

MCKENZIE: They were not -- they were not targeting us.

SULLIVAN: So, we're sure of that.

MCKENZIE: I am sure of that.

SULLIVAN: OK. And the second question.

MCKENZIE: The second question is, I think that's a hard question. I think, you know, what you would like to do is, if you execute a JCPOA, you would want to go to limiting other elements of the Iranian portfolio. And that would be a bridge to get to where you're maybe talking about ballistic missiles; you're talking about proxy activities. So, that would give you an opportunity to try to work that diplomatically.

SULLIVAN: But should that be part of the agreement?

MCKENZIE: Senator, I don't believe that the current -- it is under the current profile that we're looking right now. I'm saying it could be if you -- if you're successful in negotiating an agreement, it might lead you to an opportunity for further successful negotiations on other issues.

SULLIVAN: No, but I'm just asking -- sorry, Mr. Chairman -- in your personal opinion, do you think that threat which you said is actually more immediate than the nuclear threat? Should that be part of any agreement that we're trying to do with them right now? In your personal opinion, I know you're not negotiating it.

MCKENZIE: Right, I would -- I would -- I do not believe it is feasible to come into -- to come to an agreement that incorporates both elements right now. I don't believe it's feasible in the world we live in; with the state of our negotiations with Iran, it's feasible to get to both those things at the same time right now.

SULLIVAN: Thank you. Thank you again, gentlemen.

REED: Thank you very much, Senator Sullivan.

Senator Scott, please.

SCOTT: I want to thank both of you for your service. And I wish you the best of luck in your retirement. I hope you move to Florida. You'll enjoy the weather and the taxes.

General McKenzie, I'm hearing that Middle East -- Eastern fighters are right now joining the Russians and attacking Ukraine. Do you have any knowledge that this is true?

MCKENZIE: We believe that out of Syria, there are perhaps small, small, very small groups of people that may be trying to make their way to Ukraine, but I've got nothing beyond that. And I can talk a little more about that in the closed session. Very small right now. It's a very small (inaudible).

SCOTT: OK. General McKenzie, the State Department, says there's about 182 citizens left in Afghanistan to evacuate. Do you know if that's accurate, and is there anything CENTCOM's doing to help them?

MCKENZIE: So, the number I'm tracking is about 153 U.S. citizens in about 2100 long -- long-term permanent residents that are there. Some of this -- some people want to come out, some people don't want to come out. It's my understanding that if someone wants to leave, and they're a U.S. citizen, they're going to be able to leave. And we have regularly scheduled flights that actually fly; CENTCOM is prepared to repatriate them when they come to what we would call a lily pad in the theater, whether that's in Qatar or in UAE, where they can be medically assessed and moved on, you know, back to the United States if they're an American citizen. And we are fully prepared to support the lead agency in this, who is the Department of State.



SCOTT: Thank you. What has central command been doing to punish ISIS-K for the killing of our military personnel at Abbey Gate? And right now, do you think ISIS-K is getting stronger under the Taliban or -- or weaker?

MCKENZIE: I think we are concerned about the developmental trajectory of ISIS-K in Afghanistan. In the closed session, I can talk a little bit more about what -- what we're looking at it when we look into Afghanistan, in particular at the -- at the ISIS elements that were associated with that attack.

SCOTT: All right. Moving on to the Iran deal. It appears, and you talked to Senator Blackburn a little bit about this, that about \$90 billion in sanctions relief might be awarded to the Iranian government, which then they'll be able to use to ferment more tourism. So, if that happens, what resources would CENTCOM have and our allies have to put up to be able to fight these proxies?

MCKENZIE: So, Senator, I gotta be honest with you I'm not -- I'm not an economist. I'm not familiar with the economic impacts of that deal. I would say this, from where I sit, the number one objective that I've been given is we don't want Iran to have a nuclear weapon. And it would seem to me that approaching that through a diplomatic solution would be the best way to get -- get to that end. I recognize there are second-order effects that might proceed from that in terms of sanctions relief. And I acknowledge that.

SCOTT: Good. You spoke a little bit earlier about more cooperation with Israel. Is there -- are there things that we need to be doing in the NDAA that would help make sure we continue to expand our opportunities with Israel?

MCKENZIE: I think right now, we're in a pretty good place in terms of cooperation with Israel, you know, as a -- as the latest member of the Central Command Area of Responsibility. I think I have all the authorities and permissions I need to move forward on that.

SCOTT: OK.

General Townsend, we've -- you look at these (inaudible), and you see Communist China's got a lot of goal -- has -- has quite a few goals in -- in Africa; one's to continue to develop military bases. So, if they're continuing to be able to develop more military bases, including the one in Equatorial Guinea, what -- what threats will that pose to the United States?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I can be more specific in closed session. I look forward to that. But suffice to say, they're not on the Atlantic coast of Africa; that's going to put them several thousand miles closer to the U.S. homeland if they get a base on the Atlantic coast of Africa.

SCOTT: So, this is a general question for both of you. You know, we've watched with the Ukraine situation, and we've been able to do sanctions against Russia,

which it sure seems like that could have a positive impact and hopefully, reduce their ability to, you know, fund their -- the war effort. How important do you think it is, when we have an adversary, whether it's Russia, or China or Iran, that we do everything we can to make sure they don't have the resources to -- to continue to develop? And we should do everything we can to make sure that our citizens are not dependent on them for any resources, such as in China's case, pharmaceuticals, things like that. Do you think this is important? It makes your -- makes your job easier if we're not dependent on other countries?

MCKENZIE: Senator, it makes my job a lot easier if we have a whole of government approach to the problems that we confront, you know, the Department of Treasury, all the economic power of the United States, all the diplomatic power of the United States is wielded in concert and preferably as a substitute for the military element of power. That's by far the most effective way to obtain our goals.

TOWNSEND: I can't say it better than that. Yeah.

SCOTT: And do you think our military power should be the last thing we use?

MCKENZIE: I think the -- yes, as a general principle, there are -- we have far more effective tools to address these problems. The military element of power should be in support of all other elements of the U.S. national power.

TOWNSEND: I agree.

SCOTT: Thank you.

REED: Thank you, Senator Scott.

At this point, I will adjourn the open hearing. The closed session will reconvene at 12:00 noon in SVC 217. Again, thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony, and we'll see you shortly.

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