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**EVALUATION OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE'S  
COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACH**

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC, Wednesday, February 6, 2019.*

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Adam Smith (chairman of the committee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

The CHAIRMAN. I call the meeting—I call the hearing to order. Welcome, everybody. As a starting point, we are going to, after this, move into a classified setting. It is my goal, objective, hope, that we can start that at noon, which means we may not have enough time to do everybody for 5 minutes. But we will have another opportunity to ask more questions in the classified setting. If it drifts a little past noon, that is fine. But as we move from one to the next, don't want to keep these gentlemen for 3 or 4 hours. So just for everyone's information, we will do this, and then we will go into a classified setting and there will be an opportunity to ask further questions at that point.

With that, I welcome everybody to the hearing. We have two witnesses this morning: the Honorable Owen West, who is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy, Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; and Major General James Hecker, who is on the Joint Staff, and Vice Director for Operations, J3. Welcome gentlemen. I look forward to your testimony.

We are looking to get a greater idea of where we are at in combating international and transnational terrorist groups. And on this committee and at the Pentagon, I know we have a pretty good idea when we look out at the threat environment. And obviously, there are a lot of issues, but there are five that we are all focused on: Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and the subject of today's discussion, which is transnational terrorists. And this has been, obviously, going on for some time, even before 9/11. But after 9/11, we reorganized significant portions of our national security apparatus to try to combat that threat. So that effort has been going on over 17 years now. What we want to learn today is where is it at? What are our priorities? What is working? What is not working? And what do you see the future of this effort?

To begin with, I think our response was fairly effective. And I remember General McChrystal talking about it, that basically when

we had a full understanding of what al-Qaida was, he said, “It takes a network to beat a network.”

So we systemically did a whole-of-government approach building up our network to counter that terrorist threat. Now it has morphed and metastasized in the years since then. Originally, obviously, the focus was in Afghanistan and then shifted to Pakistan, and then we faced threats out of Yemen. And now you have a very extensive list of transnational terrorist groups. We are all familiar with al-Qaida and ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] as the two at the top. But there are dozens of others in different places throughout the world, primarily in Africa and the Middle East and South Asia.

So when we are combating those threats, how do we prioritize? Obviously, the number one biggest concern is when these organizations threaten the U.S. directly, or our Western allies. We want to try to stop those groups first. That is what took us to Yemen a long time ago when AQAP [al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula] started planning attacks against the U.S. and was behind the attempted bombing in Detroit, and also the attempted bombing using the package airlines. That shifted our focus there, so that is part of it.

But also, if we are ultimately going to be able to defeat transnational terrorist groups, we need to stop them from being able to have safe havens where they can grow. Now, a lot of these groups aren’t necessarily focused initially on targeting Western interests. They are sort of like criminal organizations. They are involved in drugs and human trafficking, and all manner of different crimes to fund their operations. But as we look at how we deal with the scarce resources that we have, I really want to learn more today about how we prioritize. What are the groups that we are most concerned about? What is our effort now to contain them?

And then there is just two other points that I want to raise in my opening statement before turning it over to the ranking member. Number one, since the Trump administration, there has been a significant increase in kinetic strikes, bombings, but also raids against targets in a variety of places. Certainly in Afghanistan, there has been a significant increase in the tempo, but also in Somalia, and even in places like Libya and West Africa. Why? And what has it accomplished? And also what is the downside? I’ve seen various reports, primarily from nongovernment organizations, talking about an increase in civilian casualties. What impact does that have on our broader effort to defeat the ideology? Because again, to go back to General McChrystal and some of the things I heard him say, he said when you are combating a terrorist group, it is not a simple numbers game. It is not a matter of there is 100 terrorists, and if you kill 50, you only have 50 left. If you kill 50, but you wind up upsetting 20 of their relatives, then you actually wind up with an increase. So how are we dealing with the backlash from those increased civilian casualties and unintended consequences? And what is being accomplished by that increase in tempo?

And lastly, I know a report is due shortly, one of the most dominant aspects of this effort to combat transnational terrorist groups has been the significant increase in the use of our special operations forces. Their numbers, I believe, have more than doubled since 9/11. Certainly their OPTEMPO [operating tempo] is high.

They have been doing very dangerous missions for a very long time. A question that this committee has asked, and I know Mr. Langevin's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats has asked as well: Are we asking too much of them? Has it strained the force to the point where it is causing problems? Are there things that we can do to mitigate that? How do we handle the fact that so much is now being asked of our special operations forces in light of the post-9/11 world?

I look forward to your testimony, and I yield to the ranking member for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith can be found in the Appendix on page 41.]

**STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM M. "MAC" THORBERRY, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

Mr. THORBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me join in thanking our witnesses for being here today. It seems to me it is absolutely appropriate for us to take a global look at terrorism today. It was true with bin Laden and Zawahiri that they moved around from different places before 9/11. It is more true than ever today.

I note that Bruce Hoffman and Seth Jones, two witnesses who have testified a number of times before our committee over the years, have pointed out of the more than roughly 40,000 foreign fighters who arrived in Iraq and Syria, most of them are still on the loose. Today, there are nearly four times as many Sunni extremists around the world as on 9/11.

So we have challenges, not only with a greater number than before, but it is harder to define them in a particular locality than it was before. And that is part of the reason that in the fiscal year 2014 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], we set up additional mechanisms for this committee to have oversight of special operations and other forces so that we could monitor, under our constitutional responsibility, what our military was doing in a variety of locations around the world, not just in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I also think it is appropriate to sit back and see where we have been, to have things in perspective. As one of the few members left on this committee who was here on 9/11, I never would have expected us to go, let's see, 18 years nearly, and not have a repeat of that sort of incident. We have definitely had terrorist attacks here and abroad. But I also think it is important that we pay tribute to our military, intelligence community, and law enforcement for the remarkable success that they have had in the years since 9/11, because the enemy continues to be motivated to attack us without question.

I am concerned that with these terrorists who are freer to roam about than ever before, that it is more important than ever before to keep the pressure on them. And it is my view, as others have written, that the number one lesson of the last 18 years, if you let up the pressure they are going to spring back and they will spring back quickly. And that is true whether we are talking Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, or Yemen.

Mr. Chairman, I want to finish with just one other thing. On Saturday, my wife and I had the opportunity to attend a memorial service for the most recent member of our military who was a casualty in this war against terrorists. Army Ranger Sergeant Cameron Meddock was killed a couple of weeks ago in Afghanistan on a very important mission. And I bring that up for two reasons. Number one, we can never forget the human sacrifice, the human cost that goes into keeping us safe and free, and some members of this committee have participated in that effort. Sergeant Meddock was one who gave everything he had.

And secondly, it is important because we can't really talk about the mission he was on and so forth, but it was very important, not for Afghanistan, but for us. Because that mission was designed to make sure that known terrorists were not able to enter the battlefield against our troops and against our homeland. And so, I think a lot of the questions you outline, Mr. Chairman, are exactly the appropriate questions we should always ask. I also think it is very important that we never do anything to diminish the importance of the mission that Sergeant Meddock and others have given their life for over the last 18 years, because what they have achieved is remarkable, and what they are doing today is remarkable as well.

Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. West.

**STATEMENT OF HON. OWEN WEST, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS/LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thornberry, and members of the committee so dedicated to this issue over the years, for the privilege of testifying before you today. The counterterrorism fight continues to evolve. I want to take this opportunity to highlight where we have been and where I think we are headed.

I will start with our counter-ISIS campaign. Our coalition has almost destroyed the so-called the physical caliphate. By this, I mean ISIS no longer governs a pseudo-state in Syria that at its height attracted tens of thousands of recruits from around the world who easily slipped across the border, took up arms, and lived off of ISIS illicit revenue streams that at one time topped \$250 million per month. The human toll was, of course, much higher.

The so-called physical caliphate has been systemically destroyed in one of the most lethal, offensive surrogate operations in history. In Syria, U.S. special forces partnered with and mentored the Syrian Democratic Forces [SDF], which grew from a few hundred to tens of thousands of Kurds and Arabs, all supported by the U.S. Marines, Army, Air Force, and international partners. The SDF, fighting for its homeland, suffered thousands of casualties. ISIS has suffered the most. This achievement should not be discounted and its model should remain an enduring lesson in this long war. I say "long war" because the end of the so-called physical caliphate ushers in a new phase of fighting. ISIS has morphed into a global ideological network as deadly and evil as al-Qaida at its height.



Stepping back, terrorism remains a persistent condition driven by political, religious, and socioeconomic trends. So we must simultaneously acknowledge that while we are close to a tremendous battlefield victory, we still face a resilient threat. In the last 2 weeks, individual ISIS terrorists bombed a church in the Philippines, while its West African affiliate overran military bases in Nigeria.

To defeat the global terror networks requires a coalition of allies applying relentless pressure at the local level. This means we must make cost-informed decisions on the future CT, or counterterror, operations. A disciplined approach to this long fight will also enable our Department's pivot toward great power competition with near-peer adversaries in line with the National Defense Strategy, and the renewed importance of irregular warfare in this space.

To be clear, this does not mean raising the risk for every resource optimized. Rather, it means we must be deliberate in operations against prioritized threats for the long haul, remaining agile as the enemy.

Operation Inherent Resolve provides an excellent template for such future operations, because it stressed local and international partnerships with a modest U.S. footprint. The Department of Defense will continue to execute counterterror operations globally to prevent attack on America and our interests. Congress has been a stalwart partner in helping to ensure we have the necessary resources and authorities to achieve this overriding goal. I value our relationship. I look forward to continuing dialogue. And I look forward to your questions today.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. General Hecker.

**STATEMENT OF MAJ GEN JAMES B. HECKER, USAF, VICE  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, J3, JOINT STAFF**

General HECKER. Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, first of all, thank you for honoring Sergeant Meddock with your presence at his funeral, as well as here at the House. I am sure his family members certainly appreciate that, so thank you.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today concerning DOD's global counterterrorism campaign.

In our current operational environment, we assess that ISIS and al-Qaida are degraded, but still viable global network organizations that is well-positioned to generate capability if the pressure is reduced. Over the past year, there have been two strategic inflections related to the defeat of ISIS fight, and to a broader campaign against violent extremist organizations [VEOs]. First, ISIS lost its physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria, and evolved into a trans-regional networked insurgency, making it vulnerable to kinetic attack.

Second, our Nation shifted priority focus from countering VEOs to great power competition as reflected in the National Defense Strategy and evolving strategic guidance on Syria and Afghanistan. Going forward, these inflection points will fundamentally change the way that we conduct our CT operations. We must continue to evolve our way of doing business in the counterterrorism space,

placing more focus on enabling our coalition partners and inter-agencies, increasing nonmilitary and non-kinetic effects, and enhancing local partner capacity and capability to contain this threat.

This evolving counterterrorism operation construct will place even greater emphasis on successful programs, such as the 127 Echo [127e] program, which provides us viable surrogate forces designed to achieve U.S. CT objectives at relatively low costs in terms of resources and especially risks to our personnel.

The small footprint approach inherent in 127 Echo, in addition to lessening the need for large-scale U.S. troop deployments, fosters an environment where local forces take ownership of the problem. Greater reliance on our coalition partners will also be a key facet of our sustainable and global CT construct. We are already seeing this in places like Mali and Niger, where French forces have taken the lead in conducting counterterrorism operations against JNIM [Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin] and ISIS Greater Sahara, with us providing key enabling support in such areas of intelligence and logistics. This willingness by our partners to shoulder more of the load, offers our formations the opportunity to rebuild a more sustainable level of readiness after 17 years of continuous operations.

Hard-won experience over the last decade and a half has taught us that sharing information with our partners is absolutely critical in staying ahead of the global network VEOs. We must build on our current information and intelligence-sharing constructs, and also encourage our partners to undertake similar yet more regionally focused ventures on their own.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to speak today and we look forward to your questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Secretary West and General Hecker can be found in the Appendix on page 43.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, gentlemen.

The starting point, when we look at where the transnational threat is at right now, and we know there are disrupted terrorist groups in a number of different of countries throughout Africa, Middle East, South Asia. What are the areas that you are most concerned about in terms of groups that are able right now to plot and plan attacks that could be carried out against Western targets either in Europe or in the United States? And how do you assess that threat level at this point?

General HECKER. I think first and foremost, when we prioritize what we are looking at and who we are most concerned about, I think we would all agree what we are most concerned about is a repeat of 9/11. So we look at terrorist organizations that want to harm of U.S. For the most part, you know, in their stated reasoning, and what they are all about, al-Qaida still has the intent to harm the United States and other countries in the West and Europe. So al-Qaida is one that we really look for.

The CHAIRMAN. I am thinking more geographically, where in the world? Because obviously, al-Qaida is spread out in a bunch of different places as well as is ISIS. Where in the world are we most vulnerable to them being able to organize that type of attack?

General HECKER. Well, there is a couple of different places. I think, right now, we sit in a decent spot because we have main-

tained the pressure on a lot of the folks, al-Qaida, ISIS in particular. And we have been able to make sure that they don't have the capabilities to attack the U.S. So those are the areas that we look at. And as we now adjust with our National Defense Strategy to taking some resources that used to be in those areas and now using those resources for global competition against China and Russia, we need to make sure that we find a way to keep the pressure on these other areas in the world that contains these terrorists.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Doesn't quite answer the question. We can talk about it in a classified setting, if that is more comfortable.

The only other question I have is you talk about partnerships, and I think that is incredibly important, because part of being able to defeat these terrorist groups is to have as low a U.S. presence as possible and to make it more about developing domestically. So whether you are talking about Somalia, West Africa, Afghanistan, you know, if the countries themselves and the countries in their region can be partners to stop terrorism and build a more sustainable government, obviously, I know the limitations of that, but that is where we want to go. In Syria and Afghanistan, as we discuss drawing down in both of those places, and I am not unsympathetic to the idea. I just want the idea that there is a plan behind it.

Who are our partners in Syria, if we pull out completely, as the President has suggested? We have been working with the Syrian Democratic Forces, we have been working with the Kurds. If we pull out, how are we going to be able to work with people in that region to continue to contain the ISIS threat? And same question for Afghanistan.

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In Syria specifically, the SDF remains our best partner. What they have done in this fight is astonishing. We will continue to support them. We should remember that the D-ISIS [Defeat ISIS] coalition makes up 79 different countries.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could be more pointed to the question and quickly, so I can move on to other people. Are these forces we are talking about going to have sufficient support to continue doing what you just described, or I think we all acknowledge, if we pull our forces out? What is the strategic rationale for looking at Syria right now and saying, we can pull our troops out and yes, the other part, they will be fine. What was the strategic thinking that went into that decision that said that we can do that?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I do not know the strategic thinking that went into it. I know that we have been issued an order to deliberately withdraw. But I do believe that if we look at the outset of ISIS, we were doing remote advise [and] assist. We do not need to be co-located to keep the pressure on the enemy.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Mr. Thornberry.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Gentlemen, in response to the chairman, you said that we are in a pretty decent place because of the pressure that we have applied. Be specific. What kind of pressure are you talking about?

General HECKER. It is really what this whole committee is all about, or this hearing is all about, the counterterrorism pressure that we have been able to apply. If you look at the area in Afghanistan and Syria back in 2014, there was a large area that was con-

trolled by ISIS. We were able to apply pressure primarily through partner nations, as well as partners. So we weren't doing a lot of the fighting ourselves, we are teaching and training, and working by, with, and through our partners in Iraq and our partners in Syria.

Mr. THORNBERRY. But the chairman noticed that there has been an increase of air strikes in recent years. Is that part of the pressure too?

General HECKER. Yes. There has been a significant increase in air strikes in both Syria, Iraq, and in Afghanistan. So we have increased the efforts to decrease the physical caliphate. And I think we have been relatively successful. As you have seen, there is roughly only about 1 percent of the physical caliphate left and that is in Syria in the Middle Euphrates Valley. We are rapidly working to try to finish that off and we think we will be there quite soon.

Mr. THORNBERRY. You agree with my earlier statement that one of the lessons, primary lessons, of the last 18 years is if we let up that pressure, then terrorist groups have a way of springing back to life in a rather rapid fashion?

General HECKER. Yes, sir. I agree with that.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Let me ask one other question right quick. As you know, Yemen has been a controversial location, because it is a complicated, difficult situation. You said that one of our primary objectives is to prevent another 9/11. At one point, the primary terrorist or threat to our homeland emanated from Yemen and the al-Qaida branch there, print cartridge plot, as well as a bomb maker who was burying bombs inside human bodies and a whole variety of things. Are there still al-Qaida remnants in Yemen today, or have they been extinguished?

General HECKER. No, they are still there today. And there is a significant number that are there as well. And we can get into the specific numbers in the closed session. But there is also ISIS there as well, not quite as many as al-Qaida. But that is one of our CT efforts that we have is going against both of those entities that are in southern Yemen.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to both of you, we appreciate you being here. I want to follow up a little bit on what has just been said.

We would love to be able to rely on our partners, and also the men and women of the country that were in Afghanistan, obviously, is a good example of that. We have been hoping that they would be in a better place today than they are. But where then—if these partners are not there, where do we go? How do we work within our own intelligence agencies, within the State Department? What is it that has to be different if we are to remove our troops, at least in numbers that are very different from today?

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Congresswoman.

First of all, I would say that local partnerships are absolutely key to our long-term counterterror strategy. Over the last 15 years, though, we have developed capabilities in terms of fusing intelligence with operations. And that intelligence can come from a variety of sources. Although it is excellent to get human intelligence at

the local level, I can explain in a closed session just how we operate in countries like Yemen and are able to differentiate between AQAP and ISIS, and the current civil war.

Mrs. DAVIS. And the State Department?

Secretary WEST. The State Department—and by the way, many other agencies are key components. And I think this is another enduring lesson of this war, in terms of having a whole-of-government approach. There is—in most of these countries, if not all, there is a diplomatic effort that is simultaneous with our military counterterrorism effort.

Mrs. DAVIS. General Hecker, you mentioned sharing of information sort of as in talking about this. And one of the things that I think we all were setback a little bit with our forces in Niger in 2017, a sense that we didn't know where our forces were. How do we balance the secrecy important to the mission, and at the same time, providing information to the public and to our partners in the area?

General HECKER. Yes, Congresswoman. A very important question, because, you know, we don't want to give information up that may put our folks at risk. But at the same time, we need to make sure that our civilian leadership knows what is going on and has a say in what we are doing. And quite honestly, I think Niger was a good lesson for us in the military. And I know we have had several discussions, with your committee and others, to make sure that we continue to share information with one another, so you can exercise the appropriate oversight that you deserve.

Secretary WEST. Congresswoman, if I can follow up. This committee was the driving force behind our counterterrorism monthly briefings, which will give you an absolutely accurate laydown each month of precisely where our special operations forces and other counterterrorism troops are.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. And I think the public is still questioning whether or not having unlimited authorization is the best way to go to try and make certain that we are as open and transparent as possible, given the circumstances that our troops are in. Can you speak to that? Where do we go from here?

Secretary WEST. Congresswoman, we are absolutely committed to transparency with our oversight committees. Right now, we are working with your staffers, and we are very close to distributing our ex [execute] orders. This is new policy for us, but I think that will help the transparency. Further, over the last year, we have also improved our reporting requirements to make sure that you are armed after a strike, for example, with information within the 48-hour requirement that this body helped impart a few years ago, and then a follow-up that makes clear the action within 7 days.

Mrs. DAVIS. General, any comments—did you want to make?

General HECKER. We are in sync on that one, ma'am.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank both of you for being here today.

I recently received a brief at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling on the materiel, weapons, and technology which the Iranian regime sup-

plies to the Houthis in Yemen. It was really shocking to see how clear it was, the relationship of providing weapons to the Houthis by the Iranians. It made it pretty simple, because some of the materiel there, the weapons were very clear, in English, made in Iran. And with this, the Iranian regime is the world's largest state sponsor for terrorism, and use Houthis as a proxy.

And for Secretary West, how does our counterterrorism strategy and CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] area of responsibility address the Iranian influence and sponsorship of terror?

Secretary WEST. Sir, our national strategy in both Yemen and Syria is stable areas, free of Iranian and terror influence.

Mr. WILSON. And additionally, I appreciate that you have had multiple deployments to Iraq. And you had firsthand experience working with Iraqis. Can you speak on the importance of maintaining a counterterrorism strategy in the region if the United States and partner forces withdraw forces as has been proposed in Syria? How would the terrorist organizations proliferate or increase in the region?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, the President has stated that we will have a long-term military presence in Iraq. This partnership still evolves, but the Iraqis are our partners. I believe it is critical to have a regional counterterror footprint that spans the globe. And I think this is, again, one of lessons that we learned over the 15-odd years of this war.

Mr. WILSON. And I appreciate very much your response to that.

Additionally, while ISIS has lost significant territory recently, social media still serves to accelerate the group's ideology and network of influence. Again, Mr. Secretary, what are the counterterrorism efforts to combat the proliferation of ISIS ideology through social media?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, that is an excellent question, because the ideology is very much alive and their will to fight is very much alive through different media. I would like to get to the specifics of that in the closed session. I think I can answer that question with much more fidelity. Suffice it to say that that has our utmost attention, but this is not just a DOD problem. I think stepping back when we look at information warfare and messaging against the ideology, we have got work to do.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

And General Hecker, I am concerned about the reductions of military personnel in Afghanistan, and the potential of terrorists to regain safe havens as they did prior to 9/11. Recently, in December of 2018, the administration announced a reduction of forces. How does this policy impact our counterterrorism activities?

General HECKER. Well, as you know, there is a lot of ongoing diplomatic conversations that is going on between Khalilzad, Ambassador Khalilzad and the Taliban as we go forward here.

As the President mentioned last night in the State of the Union address, it is going to depend on the success of those negotiations on when and if, and how many U.S. forces are pulled out of Afghanistan. So as we move forward, we will watch closely with what our diplomatic efforts are, and then, we will adjust accordingly based on how those efforts end up.

Mr. WILSON. And General also, recently, the Pentagon announced a reduction in counterterrorism troops in Africa over the next 3 years as part of a force optimization. What is being done to maintain counterterrorism capability in the region? How can we mitigate adverse impacts and prioritize the constrained resources?

General HECKER. So because of the National Defense Strategy, which is going to concentrate on peer power competition, we have to get the assets from somewhere. So what we started with is we started with Africa. And we went with this Africa optimization model. Where can we pull troops where we don't think the U.S. interest of an attack may come from, and where we can do that? So we have done that with Africa. Now we are going to do that throughout the rest of the world and realize as we pull troops, we are going to use partner forces, as well as the 127 Echo programs that we talked about to try to maintain pressure on the enemy. My hunch is we will miss some of these. We will pull some and we will go, hey, we are not getting the pressure that we desire to make sure that our country stays safe. So this is something, this optimization, that we will continue to revisit monthly, basically, to make sure that we have the pressure needed to keep the U.S. and Western interests safe.

Mr. WILSON. I thank both of you for your testimony today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Mr. Larsen.

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So thanks for coming, gentlemen. Mr. Secretary and General, thanks for your comments on 127e. That is, as I understand it, I guess the grandchild of the 1206 and the 1208 programs that we created in the mid 2000s. I think I got that right. And then we codified those into 127e. So these programs have been around for at least—the authorities have been around for at least 10 years. And with this focus on great power competition, have you at all considered how using the 127e authorities, or other authorities for partnership capacity, are going to be any less or more successful than they were in the mid 2000s, given the fact that we are going to be focused more on the great power competition and less on CT? What is going to be different?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, you are right, the 127e started as a modest fiscal authority of \$10 million. It has grown to \$100 million per annum, thereabouts. There is a new authority called 1202, which is purpose-built to get after the problem you are talking about, it's irregular warfare. You are going to start to see some of the CONOPS [concept of operations] and proposals coming up to you soon, if you haven't already. And I think this new authority going forward should be grown in a similar way where we have to demonstrate its value proposition to you, our board. But ultimately, I think this should be as large as 127e.

Mr. LARSEN. Well, it is going to have to be a little different because if we were asking these questions in the mid 2000s, and we are asking them 10 to 12 years later and not getting—and getting the same answers, it seems to me that maybe we ought to be doing something different. Or it might not be totally our fault. It might be the challenges that our partners present as well. And because it may just be harder to get them to change—some of the countries that we work with maybe don't have our history, our culture, our

commitment to civil rights, human rights. And that causes a big problem for us when we are trying to create these partners.

But on 127e, I want to go back to your answer from—to Mrs. Davis, because despite repeated requests by this committee and by the Senate Armed Services Committee, these execute orders relating to operations haven't been provided on a consistent basis. And to my understanding, we have been asking for at least a year. So you said it was kind of new for us to ask. I don't think a year makes it new. It gives us the impression that you are holding back, and that you only provide these ex orders when it is necessary to provide them because we are putting holds on programs. So I guess I would really want to push on you and get a commitment from you that you are going to be sharing with this committee the ex orders that are governing the Department's counterterrorism operations, and doing it before we threaten you withholding money from other programs, and rather just doing it in the interest of transparency. Can we get that commitment today?

Secretary WEST. Sir, we are committed to agreeing to an MOU [memorandum of understanding] to get the ex orders delivered to you on a read-and-return basis.

Mr. LARSEN. It sounds like a lot of process. I would just like a "yes" answer.

Secretary WEST. Sir, it has been a long process. And I understand your frustration. We are committed to working this as quickly as possible.

Mr. LARSEN. The title 10, section 130(f) also requires—

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. I will give you more time. But what does "as quickly as possible" mean? Can you ballpark it for us? It has been a year, so weeks?

That looks like a no.

Secretary WEST. We have had to run this, because it is a new DOD policy, through review after review, but we are very close in this negotiation.

The CHAIRMAN. That doesn't mean anything. Nothing you have said in response to Mr. Larsen's question means anything. Okay? So I would almost rather have you say, I have no idea, we are working on it, who the hell knows? I mean, days, weeks, months?

Secretary WEST. Sir, if you will permit me, I will get you that, an answer with granularity in the coming days.

The CHAIRMAN. We will anxiously await that. I apologize, Mr. Larsen, go ahead.

Mr. LARSEN. Yeah, thank you.

Mr. Secretary, would you say you are doing more aggressive review of this decision than the Syria withdrawal decision?

Secretary WEST. I am sorry, sir. Could you repeat the question.

Mr. LARSEN. I think I made my point with it. I think you are probably giving this more review than the review about withdrawing from Syria from the Department's perspective. On title 10 section 130(f), it requires notification within 48 hours. You mentioned that in response to Mrs. Davis' question. And although notification, timing, and information is slowly improving, it seems the administration hasn't complied consistently with that requirement. So again, will you commit to continuing to improve this process and



these procedures for the notification of these sensitive military operations to Congress, as required by law?

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir.

Mr. LARSEN. That wasn't so hard. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this hearing. Thank you both for what you do for our country.

I would like to ask a little bit about the forces in Iraq that possibly have connections to Iran. We have seen evidence that in the past Iranian-linked militias were able to access resources, including even advanced defense weapon systems through our train-and-equip mission that we provide the Iraqis. And Iran is now lobbying hard for the Iraqi leader of the Popular Mobilization Forces to become the next Minister of the Interior. And then the Minister of the Interior oversees those forces and all of Iraq's internal security, and we give them \$1.6 billion a year for their 20,000-person security forces. So what are we doing to make sure that we are not ultimately bankrolling Iranian-backed militias or politicians in Iraq? Mr. West.

Secretary WEST. Sir, thank you. I am here in a counterterror capacity, but I will say that we are absolutely committed to the Iraqis as our partners, but this ultimately—part of your question is ultimately up to the Iraqis. We partner with them to protect and defend their sovereignty, but I think this partnership, over the years, has continued to grow and we will have a long-term presence in Iraq, which gets to the heart of your questions.

Mr. LAMBORN. General Hecker, do you have anything to add to that?

General HECKER. I think the big thing for us, when we look at this from a military perspective, is to make sure our military members are able to be—the force protection is there for them. We saw this with—we had to close the consul in Mosul, because we had some what we thought were Shia kind of militia groups that were throwing some IDFs [indirect fires] that way. We have looked at the construction around the bases that we are at to make sure that our troops will be safe from any of these groups. But this is an Iraqi issue that we, with State, need to work with them to make sure that they look at this issue and take it seriously, because we need to make sure that Iran doesn't have the influence. And we have a lot of forces in the area to try to deter Iranian malign influence in the area.

Mr. LAMBORN. Ok, thank you both.

Changing gears, we know that title 10 military forces have been deployed to bolster Homeland Security on the southern border. In fact, we had a hearing about that here in this committee recently.

So Mr. West, one of the six strategic objectives of the national counterterrorism strategy is, quote, "Americans are prepared and protected from terrorist attacks in the homeland, including through more exacting border security and law enforcement actions," unquote.

So what kind of resources are we going to be able to give to Homeland Security from title 10 forces or other assets that will help accomplish that particular strategic objective, especially as it pertains to southern border? I know there is all kinds of Homeland

Security ways of accessing—terrorists can access our country. But I want to concentrate on the southern border right now in particular.

Secretary WEST. Congressman, I will let General Hecker talk about the details of the border deployment, which he has. But I will say that in my judgment over the last 15 years, the inter-agency partnership, and at the heart of your question, it is, how do we work together to fuse intelligence with operations to prevent penetration of the homeland, is really, really good.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

General HECKER. And so far as upcoming deployments, we have roughly 3,750 title 10 forces that will be coming to the southern border over the next 30 days. We have 2,500 that will go along the southern border and they will all be laying in the 167.5 miles of concertina wire. In addition to that, we have roughly 1,100 forces that will be deploying to man the—to do basically a surveillance kind of mission we call it the MSC mission, mobile surveillance cameras, and they'll be looking at that.

In addition, and this is new as of basically yesterday, there is 20—or 49 buses that are coming up to the southern border, just to the south of Del Rio in Texas. Based on that threat, CBP [U.S. Customs and Border Protection] requested us to help them at one specific point of—port of entry where these roughly 2,000 people are on their way to. So over the—2 days ago, I think is—no, it was actually yesterday morning is when we made the decision to call what we call a “crisis reaction force.” So this is a force that can come and help out at that one specific—

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. The gentleman's time has expired. I should have explained that at the front to the witnesses, when we get down to 5 minutes, we do try to move on.

We will just note for the record that as we talked and the chairman noted we had the attack on 9/11. We have not had an attack like that since. We have had other attacks, groups affiliated with ISIS and other terrorist groups hit us in the U.S. and exactly none of those people have come across our southern border. So while we are talking about counterterrorism here and throughout today's hearing, it is very difficult to see any link between the southern border and the terrorism attacks that we are talking about here, that is not where they are coming in from. I just want to make sure the record reflects that. And I yield to Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. It would be very useful to have a full report immediately on the deployment of these troops to the border, and a clear understanding of not only what they intend to do there, but what they were doing before they were deployed to the border. In other words, what ongoing task has been degraded as a result of the deployment of the troops to the border. Could you please develop that and get that to us immediately?

And I would remind you that at the last hearing last week, I asked for some specific information along that line. It has just not yet been delivered. So thank you.

General HECKER. Congressman—

Mr. GARAMENDI. Going back to the issue of Syria, and the pullout of Syria, and the reality that there really was no strategic strategy behind the pullout tweet, we do know that the major cities along

the river valley have been destroyed, literally leveled, beginning with Raqqa, Iraq, and then moving on into Syria. I think your testimony, if I recall it correctly, indicated that there is a significant potential for a resurgence of ISIS in that area. Is that a result of the destruction of the communities, the economy and the societies, or is there some other reason that you anticipate a resurgence of ISIS in those areas?

General HECKER. Congressman, are you addressing that question to me?

Mr. GARAMENDI. I am sorry?

General HECKER. Is that question for me, sir?

Mr. GARAMENDI. Well, for both of you. You seem to want to take a shot at it, go for it.

General HECKER. Sure, I will give it a shot, sir. I don't remember saying that there is going to be a significant resurgence of ISIS in the area. But I think there is a serious risk if we do not keep the pressure on in both Syria and Iraq. And I realize the concern is if we move our forces out of Syria, that that may take some pressure off of the ISIS forces in Syria. So our mission is to try to figure out how we can continue to keep the pressure on in Syria without any boots on the ground.

Mr. GARAMENDI. And how are you doing in that effort trying to figure out?

General HECKER. So what we are doing is detailed military planning, and our objectives are to safely remove our troops. We have an objective to make sure that we finish up the last little bit of the fight that is left there in the Middle Euphrates Valley. And then we need to also make sure that the security concerns of both the Turks and the security concerns of the people that we just fought with, the SDF, are taken care of.

Now I realize that is a very difficult task and it can't be done just militarily. It also needs to have high diplomatic levels of effort which Ambassador Jeffrey is working with the SDF, with Turkey, and with coalition to see if we can have coalition forces, SDF, in coming up with a plan to see what we can do to try to keep the pressure on.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Jeffrey has replaced McCabe in this task of working with the—

General HECKER. Ambassador Jeffrey is the one that is currently working with both Turkey and the SDF on agreements.

Mr. GARAMENDI. How about the reconstruction of the cities, and the economy, and the societies that have been pretty much smashed? Mr. West.

Secretary WEST. Sir, the heart of your question is stability operations, and is there going to be a vacuum now that the U.S. has withdrawn. And we are doing our very best in terms of what we can do as a military to prevent that vacuum from being filled by malign actors.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Is there any reconstruction plan for the communities and cities, or are you going to leave the fertile ground of the destruction for ISIS to then flourish?

Secretary WEST. Sir, our orders are deliberate withdrawal. But there is a coalition in place. So we certainly are not the only actor there, and we certainly can support from afar.

Mr. GARAMENDI. My question isn't on the military side, it is on the humanitarian side. Is there any plan?

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry, we will have to take that one for later. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Wittman.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Major General Hecker and Mr. West, thanks so much for joining us today.

I wanted to begin with Major General Hecker. This past November, I traveled with my colleagues to Afghanistan to really get a laydown of what is happening there. I had a chance to meet with General Miller, President Ghani, to talk about them—to them about what is happening with negotiations with insurgent groups, specifically, the Taliban, and what is happening in the reconciliation effort. And what we found out was that from their perspective, it is going to take more than political force and posturing to bring substantive change to the dynamic that is happening between those insurgent groups and U.S. forces and the Afghan Government.

I want to go to what Chairman Dunford said in early December, I want to say his words. He said "Reconciliation between the Afghan Government and Taliban can only be achieved by bringing sufficient political, social, and military pressure on the insurgents to accept a negotiated settlement. And this strategy would not work if the U.S. did not retain its capability to bring military pressure on the insurgents to accept the deal."

And Major General Hecker, I know your experience there with the 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force in Afghanistan as past commander and past commander of the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Air Command in Afghanistan. I wanted to get your perspective about how you feel the drawdown puts us in a position as far as being able to bring the necessary military force to make sure that there is a substantive and lasting opportunity for reconciliation between the Taliban, and not just the United States forces, but most specifically, the Afghan Government?

General HECKER. Yes, Congressman. Thanks for that question. And I just don't want to presuppose that there is going to be a drawdown. It is in relation to how the negotiations go. But those different types of pressure that you talked about, it is really the whole-of-government efforts that are going to be required to make this happen. We see the ongoing efforts, you know, socially, you know, with some of religious leaders and how they have spoken up against some of the things that the Taliban leaders are doing. So they are getting some social pressure there. We are working the political pressure, albeit it is early in its state with Ambassador Khalilzad and the negotiations that he is working.

On the military side of the house, our desire is to keep the pressure on the Taliban. We know that some of the Taliban are in part of these negotiations, so we have kind of made a distinction between Taliban. There is unreconcilable Taliban, which we don't think will ever reconcile. And then there is others that they are thinking about it. When I was in Afghanistan, when I first showed up about a year and a half ago, reconciliation wasn't in anyone's vocabulary. Since then, we have had a ceasefire. So we have made

progress, but we still have a long ways to go. So what we need to do is keep pressure on the nonreconcilable Taliban to help the negotiations that the State Department and we are doing diplomatically to keep the pressure on.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. Thank you, Major General Hecker.

Mr. West, I wanted to get your reflection on an article that you wrote back in 2012 for a news outlet, better known as Slate. And you wrote a series of pieces titled, "Can the United States Build a Foreign Army?" And you wrote "One belief was constant, adviser teams work. I only wish some of our predecessors had seen the eventual turnaround." So my question for you is this: Do you believe that the Afghan National Army [ANA] will have sufficient military advisers and support to effectively combat the threat going into the future, whether it is Taliban or al-Qaida? And are they ready for what they will have to deal with, more of a U.S. hands-off approach, and less U.S. presence, and maybe less U.S. support in the train and advise and assist mission?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I am not well-versed enough in the ANA to answer that specifically. I do believe that combat advisers provide us—or combat multipliers, they provide us real leverage, and the train, advise, assist mission is crucial.

Mr. WITTMAN. Let me ask another element too. The Army's Security Force Assistance Brigades continue to bring a new Army presence there, more permanent and more continuing ability to help the Afghan National Army build capability and be effective in the future. Do you believe that structure has long-lasting opportunity there? And do you think that that should be a continual presence there in helping the Afghan National Army not only attain but to maintain capability to defeat insurgent forces in that country?

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir.

Mr. WITTMAN. Okay. Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. NORCROSS.

Mr. NORCROSS. Thank you, Chairman. Thank the two of you for coming before us today.

I want to focus a little bit more on the evaluation of the Department's counterterrorism approach, the very focus of the committee hearing today. And General, you mentioned something that when you are assessing the threats across the Middle East, but particularly focused in that area, that you need to take troops from somewhere where the threat is not as great. Let's take those words and we think about the threat assessment that is going across Syria, Iraq, Iran, through that Middle East area. You are suggesting that the threat on our southern border is greater than the threat coming from the Middle East, and that is why the troops would be going south?

General HECKER. No, Congressman. I am sorry. I was just addressing the southern border with the question. I didn't mean to impose that there are terrorists coming across the southern border at all.

Mr. NORCROSS. Let me drill down. You said you make the threat assessments and you take the troops from where the threat is less and put them where there is more. And we just talked about an

additional 2,500 troops going to the southern border, which would suggest by your own words that that is the greatest threat taking place, because that is where you are sending troops. Is that the case?

General HECKER. Uh-huh. So we—we were given, you know—we were requested for assistance from Department of Homeland Security on if we could put troops and help them out on some gaps that they had on the southern border. We looked throughout the forces, and we determined that we had some forces that we could take and move down there. And we obviously sourced them very carefully to make sure that they weren't about to go to one of the areas that you were talking about, where they would be supporting counterterrorism. And we have them go down there for a short amount of time, and then come back in plenty of time to get their readiness back up to speed before they go to do counterterrorism type actions.

Mr. NORCROSS. So there is no impact to the force readiness for counterterrorism by sending those 2,500 troops?

General HECKER. I won't go as far to say there is no impact, but I will say that we have minimized that impact where it is not that great.

Mr. NORCROSS. There have been times that you had been requested for help that you haven't been able or you chose not to answer the call for Homeland Security in the past.

General HECKER. Yes, sir, that is the case. As a matter of fact, I mean, even in the recent past, they have asked for things that we have not provided them.

Mr. NORCROSS. And we understand that. You make a threat assessment throughout our world and put the troops where they are needed. So is this one of the times that the threat has diminished that we can send the troops there?

General HECKER. Where the—

Mr. NORCROSS. Send the troops to the southern border versus elsewhere in the world.

General HECKER. I think we can send some troops down to the southern border, if requested, to fill a gap. And we can do that, but what we do before we do that is assess to make sure that the readiness will not decrease to an extent where we can't fulfill our other missions. And in this case, what we are talking about is counterterrorist missions.

Mr. NORCROSS. Certainly appreciate that.

Just to follow up on the recruitment techniques because, A, we are trying to stop the attacks now, but we are also trying to stop the attacks from future—through recruitment. And that brings me to my question. The government-as-a-whole approach, there is a lot of rhetoric going on that talks about Muslim bans, withdrawal from Syria.

Is this a positive thing that cuts down on the recruitment in social media by our enemies? Mr. West, you certainly could address that.

Secretary WEST. Sorry, sir, could you repeat the first part of that question?

Mr. NORCROSS. We are talking about recruitment for the future by terrorism groups across the board. Their use of social media is quite high. It enables them to have a tremendous reach. So, when

we look at some of the things that are taking place immediately, we are pulling out of Syria. Do you see an uptick in their recruitment saying, "The Americans are leaving, we have a chance"? Is this a positive statement when we say we are leaving?

Secretary WEST. We have not, to my knowledge, sir, seen an uptick in recruitment as a result of the announcement to withdraw from Syria.

Mr. NORCROSS. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, I have a couple of questions about AFRICOM [U.S. Africa Command]. And I was at Camp Lemonnier not too long ago with a couple of other members. And questions then about AMISOM [African Union Mission in Somalia] and whether or not it was going to stay together. But the thing that struck me about Camp Lemonnier was the lack of assets that it was General Furness at the time had at his disposal.

And as we talk about the National Defense Strategy, I recognize that China and Russia are the focus in that. But when we start talking about pulling assets out of a region, that has got to have an impact on how our partners feel about our commitment to that region.

And so, with regard to Somalia in particular, there is discussion in here about the terrorists that are in the south. There are also terrorists that have moved into the north part of Somalia as well. And as we talk about the assets, General, what assets are being pulled out of Africa? Can that be disclosed in here? I mean, it seemed to me that Camp Lemonnier, quite honestly, needed significantly more assets, especially with the Chinese and the activities that they are engaged in in Djibouti.

General HECKER. I think it is hard to ever pull out any assets. And I do think, as we go a little bit deeper on this subject, I think it would be a little bit better if we did that in a closed session and we will be happy to discuss that.

Mr. SCOTT. I know that Camp Lemonnier is in Djibouti, but that is where the Somalia—those are the assets that we use for the fight in Somalia.

A couple of other questions. As foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq that are currently fighting for ISIS or other terrorist groups, as we have seen the collapse of the territory, as these fighters migrate into other regions, how is that going to impact our National Security Strategy, and do we expect these fighters to return to their homeland, or do we expect these fighters to migrate to other areas, like the Horn of Africa, where some of the others have set up camp?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, it is a good question. There are a large number of foreign fighters that the SDF has currently detained that we and our partners view as very high threat. And then, as you mentioned, there are the 40,000-odd fighters that infiltrated and those that remain who may go back to their territories or may stay in the fight in Iraq and Syria.

I think the broad assessment from the intelligence community is both. That number one, we have got to stay very connected with

our international partnerships and begin to track these folks; there is a biometric effort underway which we can discuss in a closed session, to make sure that we are connected and follow these folks. And then there is an insurgency, where many of these people will simply go underground in this same locale and stay in the fight until they are captured or killed.

Mr. SCOTT. I would just, you know, again remind people that Africa is larger than China, the U.S., India, and the majority of Europe geographically. There are over a billion people on the continent of Africa, better than 50 different states—or countries, I should say, in Africa. A lot of challenges there. Not possible to resolve it without the partnerships.

And I just want to make sure that as we talk about the moving of any assets, that that is coordinated with our partners in such a manner that they recognize that we are committed to stamping out these terrorists, regardless of where they are.

I yield the remainder of my time.

Gentlemen, thank you for your service.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Gentlemen, thank you both for your service to the country.

I just wanted to start, General Hecker, with you and the withdrawal from Syria. We have talked a lot about how it is important to keep up the pressure on ISIS, and that is one of the most important lessons that we have learned overall from the global war on terror. How does our precipitous withdrawal from Syria, at the request of the Turkish President, keep up the pressure on ISIS in Syria?

General HECKER. It is going to be a very difficult situation. What we need to do is work with our allies, work with the SDF, work with the surrounding countries, whether that be Iraq, Jordan, or Turkey, on how we can keep the pressure on, enabling some of our partnered forces outside of Syria without having boots on the ground.

Mr. MOULTON. So, General, what you are saying is it does not keep up the pressure and so, therefore, it is going to be difficult to do so.

General HECKER. No, I said it is going to be difficult to keep up the pressure, but that is what we are doing. A detailed plan—

Mr. MOULTON. So you agree with my statement that it does not keep up the pressure to withdraw from Syria?

General HECKER. I will say that there will be a decrease in the amount of pressure that we will be able to apply, but we will still be able to apply pressure.

Mr. MOULTON. We are playing a game of semantics here, but it is pretty clear it decreases the pressure.

Mr. West, your former boss, Secretary Mattis, disagreed with the President's plan to withdraw from Syria. Do you think he was wrong?

Secretary WEST. No, sir.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you very much. Mr. West, when Secretary Carter came before the committee in 2017, he talked about a mission statement for the war against ISIS, the fight against ISIS.



And he said, the mission statement is “a victory over ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] that sticks.” Is that still the mission statement from the Department?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, I am not sure what the specific mission statement is, but I would say that, since that time, ISIS has morphed, and so we will likely need a new mission statement. What I mean by that is there is a physical component to this fight. The physical caliphate is very nearly defeated. And then there is a massive ideological and underground network. They have globalized. We can talk in a closed session about the number of countries they were in in 2014–2015 and the number of countries that have ISIS affiliates today. So it is a different fight altogether.

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. West, at the time General Dunford was holding a meeting every 3 weeks with the Department of State. And he stated that even so, he was not satisfied with the level of coordination. I would offer that another critical lesson we have learned from the global war on terror is that a military solution alone doesn't defeat the terrorists. You need to have a whole of government. You need to have a political plan. General Dunford certainly recognized this, and he said that even meeting every 3 weeks was not enough to do the coordination that was required.

How has that improved over the last 8 months, that coordination?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I can answer that, over the last month, there has been a meeting that includes the State Department and many agencies that occurs two or three times a week.

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. West, you spent a lot of time in Iraq, and I am grateful for your service there. What is the current purpose of U.S. troops in Iraq, and what is the counterterror mission there?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I think the purpose is twofold. Number one, we support the Iraqi Government; we still do some advising and assisting of their security forces. And, number two, this gives us regional reach.

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. West, I would agree with those. You did not mention countering Iran, which the President has stated is a new mission for the troops in Iraq. Are you aware that Congress has not given authorization to counter Iran?

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir.

Mr. MOULTON. And are you aware that our troops are in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government?

Secretary WEST. I am fully aware of that, sir.

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. West, how do we deal with the fact that Iraq has indicated that it is unwilling to continue hosting American troops?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I think that is mixed, and we are extremely hopeful that they will continue this relationship.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you.

One last question, General Hecker. We talked a lot about the success of the war on terror and preventing terror attacks at home, and there is some real truth to that. We also heard that there are four times as many Sunni extremists now than versus 9/11. How does the amount of territory compare? Do Sunni extremists control more territory now than on 9/11 or less?

The CHAIRMAN. And if you could be fairly quick in that answer, that would be helpful. The gentleman's time has expired.

General HECKER. I will have to get back to get the exact numbers on that.

[The information referred to is for official use only and retained in the committee files.]

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Cook.

Mr. COOK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

And, Mr. West, I appreciate your candid response to the comment. General Mattis is going to be certainly missed. And in the line of questioning, I am also one of those ones; I was a product of the military. And for years, you had the State Department over here and you had the Defense Department over here and never the two shall mix. Maybe that is an oversimplification of it, but that was a huge, huge problem.

And I want to go off script just a little bit, in light of the fact that very, very concerned about some of our allies, and I put that in quotes, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar, maybe Egypt, and the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood, which may have contributed, obviously, to the situation in Turkey and the strain on our relations on many of these host nations that we need so desperately if we are going to continue the fight in the future and, of course, be a key ally to Israel.

In your calculus, when you make that up, and I know we talked about ISIS and we can talk about al-Qaida and Hamas and Hezbollah and what have you, but the Muslim Brotherhood, at least in regards to Turkey and Egypt and Saudi Arabia, depending upon what side of the fence, it influences a lot of these actions or decisions. Can you comment on that, please? Mr. West. I will keep you in the hot seat for a while.

Secretary WEST. The Muslim Brotherhood is not a named terrorist group, to my knowledge, by the State Department, nor do we target them in counterterror operations.

Mr. COOK. No. The reason, I am looking at it more, and I am going into foreign affairs. And, obviously, if they are going to meddle in Egypt or they are going to create situations in Qatar, which might strain relationships with Saudi Arabia or the Emirates, and, of course, the bases that we have, particularly in the UAE [United Arab Emirates] and Qatar, this is going to be—and Turkey is a key NATO member.

And I am just saying that is not a variable or, in general, maybe I am just worried about that situation and maybe I shouldn't be.

Secretary WEST. Sir, I don't know enough about it to answer your question.

Mr. COOK. General, from a military standpoint? NATO is huge.

General HECKER. From a military standpoint, we have no orders, you know, to go after the Brotherhood right now. So, obviously, they have effects around the world. I am not as well versed, as well, on this, but it is something that we can both look at and give you some comments back on.

Mr. COOK. Okay. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Violent ideologies can serve as a vehicle for legitimate local grievances, ranging from the lack of economic opportunity to political disenfranchisement and human rights abuses. How is our current counterterrorism approach addressing these underlying drivers of recruitment? To both of you.

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Congressman. The national counterterrorism strategy does address this. This is a very, very difficult problem, and we have not done well with this in the past. I think broadly, from a DOD perspective, one of the lessons we learned is that this is where we try to empower our local partners. When we have tried to message, especially from a military, to do counter, say, radicalization efforts, it has been challenging, but we are seeing inroads at the local grassroots level.

Mr. CARBAJAL. General.

General HECKER. I think a lot of this, you know, you have to get to the nonkinetic effects. What can we do nonkinetically to influence the amount of recruits that these radical extremists are getting. And I think we are tackling that problem, but I think we can put some more pressure there as well.

Mr. CARBAJAL. The administration considers both Syria and the Palestinian territories vulnerable to radicalization yet pulled back nearly \$200 million of reconstruction funds for Syria as well as aid to the Palestinian civilians.

Do you agree that the administration's policy of slashing reconstruction and stabilization funds is counterproductive and actually makes it more difficult to effectively implement a counterterrorism strategy, and especially when we talk about the three points of pressure that we have heard, at least I heard when I was in Afghanistan in December of 2017. The best way to address many of these issues are diplomatic, social, and militarily.

So what would you say to the slashing of those reconstruction funds?

General HECKER. Unfortunately, I don't have the details of why those funds were slashed, but I will agree with you that reconstruction efforts do help prevent recruiting and further radicalization, as long as you have security forces in place that can make sure that the area stays relatively safe.

Mr. CARBAJAL. When do you think we might be able to get an update on the progress of these three approaches, not just the military approach that we oftentimes hear about, but the diplomatic and the social combined as a cohesive counterterrorism strategy?

General HECKER. It might be good, you know, instead of just having military up here is maybe we have a hearing with our State brethren, and we can talk some of the diplomatic questions that come up at the same time. Because, you know, as much as we try to get together, just like General Dunford said, you know, three times a week isn't enough. Now, we do have the Global Engagement Center, which is a State Department kind of run thing, that we go over there pretty much weekly, and we try to engage on things. We have different meetings on the Joint Staff where we have Ambassador Khalilzad. We have Ambassador Jeffrey. And

that used to be a daily meeting when we were talking Syria kind of things.

I think the more that we can work together with the other inter-agencies, I think we have seen a military solution isn't working, and we need to make sure that we include our diplomatic efforts and the whole of government.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. And, moreover, the environment here at home affects the counterterrorism operations we carry out globally. The fearmongering approach this administration has pursued while alienating the Muslim population here at home has only made it easier for terrorists to operate, especially in terms of recruitment. A successful counterterrorism strategy requires a whole-of-government approach, which means our messaging and actions need to be consistent and aligned.

I would assume you agree with that.

General HECKER. Yes, Congressman.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Bacon.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. West, thank you for being here.

And General Hecker, I should point out that I used to work with a Colonel Hecker, a Brigadier General Hecker, and I got to visit him in Afghanistan. And you have my utmost respect, you both do. So thanks for being here.

I think a holistic strategy is required to defeat ISIS and al-Qaida. Kinetic targeting, going after their finances, the internet and how they do their recruiting, their ideology.

Is there an area that you think that we are a little light on that we need to put more emphasis in a holistic strategy?

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir, the ability of terrorists to use cyberspace as their stage.

Mr. BACON. So more focus on going after the cyber arena.

How do we do a better job with the ideology portion? It seems to me that is their center of gravity. I know we may talk about this in the next forum, but this is what they use to recruit through the cyber, and I don't know how we do a good job in trying to counter that ideology.

Can you expand on that at all? How do we go about doing that? Can we do that on our own, or do we have to use our moderate allies, for example?

Secretary WEST. Sir, for specific tactics, in a closed session, we can go over exactly what we are trying to do in cyberspace, and I think it has been very effective. But stepping back more broadly, in terms of the ideology, it absolutely must run through our local partners.

Mr. BACON. Okay. Do we have any evidence of state sponsorship of ISIS or al-Qaida at this point? I know we did the previous decade.

Secretary WEST. Sir, that is a question for the intelligence community. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. BACON. Let me just maybe do one follow-on. About a decade ago, we knew that Iran was harboring or sheltering some al-Qaida leadership. Do we have any evidence that we can talk about in this forum if that is continuing?

Secretary WEST. We cannot talk about that in this forum, sir.

Mr. BACON. I appreciate the word “deliberate” when we talk about the pullout out of Syria. I think it requires a very deliberate process. I think you have bipartisan concern here that if we don’t do this right, we will allow ISIS to reconstitute, and that would be a tragic mistake.

One last question: In regards to the talks with the Taliban, is the Afghanistan Government involved in these talks?

General HECKER. I think so. What you have seen so far is the initial, you know, diplomatic efforts, but I think, to get a closure to this, it can’t just be between the U.S. and the Taliban. It needs to have President Ghani. It needs to have the Afghan Government and the Taliban that will sit down together and come up with an agreed-upon reconciliation. And I know that the diplomatic efforts that we are doing right now are going towards that goal.

Mr. BACON. I was a little concerned with the reporting yesterday that show that the government has not been involved. It seems to me that they need to be an integral part of this.

So, gentlemen, thank you for being here, appreciate both of you and your leadership.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I didn’t think I would necessarily be asking about terrorism at the southwest border in today’s hearing, and I didn’t think I would because, as I went through the 25-page National Strategy for Counterterrorism, the Western Hemisphere, other than passing reference to the homeland, there is no mention of the Western Hemisphere. There is mention of Africa and Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. There are 25 references to specific countries in the Middle East, and no references to any nation in South, Central America.

But, General Hecker, you made a comment that adds to the confusion that I have about the administration’s analysis or assessment of the terrorist threat at the southern border. So let me ask this question, maybe you can clarify.

Early January, the press office in the White House said 4,000 known or suspected terrorists come into our country. The most vulnerable points of entry are at our southern border. Days later, the DHS Secretary says 3,000 special interest aliens, which she defined as those terrorist travel patterns and/or known or suspected ties to terrorism. She says 3,000 and that we have seen a twofold or an increase at the southwest border.

Now, the State Department has downplayed that. But your comment in response to a question and your reference to 49 buses from the southern border, I just need you to clarify. Do we have a terrorist threat in the Western Hemisphere that is based in Central America and that is moving northward, northerly, to our southwest border?

General HECKER. I am not aware of any terrorist threat on those 49 buses. And I didn’t mean to imply that there are any terrorists on those 49 buses. We were just asked to help because we were getting a massing of a caravan of roughly 2,000 people, of which I am

not aware that there is a single terrorist in there, and I didn't mean to imply that.

Mr. BROWN. Okay, and I appreciate that. You also mentioned but you couldn't complete a crisis reaction force. You mentioned that in the context of Active Duty, you know, new Active Duty deployments to the southwest border. Are those deployments to the southwest border, the most recent Active Duty deployments, the types of forces that we typically deploy in a counterterrorist operation?

General HECKER. No. Okay. I think I see where the—what we had is we have Reserve forces that we call crisis reaction forces that were just going to be used against the southern border in case there was a mass at one of the points of entry.

Mr. BROWN. Okay, I got that. We had a briefing last week. I just want a clarification that we are not deploying special operators—

General HECKER. No, no.

Mr. BROWN [continuing]. Special forces, SOCOM [U.S. Special Operations Command] forces, to the southwest border because of some perceived or fabricated concern of a terrorist threat.

General HECKER. These are engineers and cops is basically what it is, and it is the most recent, and it is roughly 240 people that left yesterday.

Mr. BROWN. Okay, thank you. Let me shift my question. It sort of picks up where Representative Carbajal and Moulton were. Beginning with the Bush administration—this may be more for Mr. West—the United States made a concerted effort to use foreign aid as an instrument in countering terrorism. During the Obama Presidency and under Republican majority Congresses, foreign aid was funded at a fairly constant level of approximately \$50 billion annually.

The National Strategy for Counterterrorism, which was released in October, as you know, declares that we will, quote, “use all available instruments of United States power to counter terrorism,” unquote. Yet President Trump's budget, his budgets in each of the last 2 years has reduced foreign aid by 25 percent each year, only to have it restored by Congress.

Do you believe that reducing foreign aid by this amount supports our strategy of using all instruments available to the United States?

Secretary WEST. No, Congressman, I don't.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Gallagher.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. West, what is the goal of Ansar Allah in Yemen?

Secretary WEST. I think we should take that into a closed session, Congressman, if we may.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I would submit that the organization's formal slogan—death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam—gives us a sense of the general direction. If the U.S. withdrew its forces from Yemen, would it negatively impact the Saudi-led coalition's ability to defeat Ansar Allah?

Secretary WEST. So I want to make clear that our counterterror operations in Yemen are absolutely distinct from the Houthi-Saudi war.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So what are our goals with respect to the Houthi movement and any Iranian presence in Yemen?

Secretary WEST. Sir, our counterterror goals are distinct from the two actors you mentioned. Again, we in Yemen specifically and with limits target AQAP and the ISIS Yemen factions.

Mr. GALLAGHER. In 2015, Houthi rebels obtained as many as 6 operational launchers and 33 Scud-B short-range ballistic missiles. Do you assess that the Houthis are working to acquire additional weapons, such as antiship missiles, from Iran?

Secretary WEST. I don't have any information to indicate that, Congressman.

Mr. GALLAGHER. If we were to withdraw any support to our regional partners from Yemen, would it, in your opinion, ease the ability of the Houthis to acquire additional advanced weapons in Yemen?

Secretary WEST. It depends which troops, but broadly, yes, Congressman.

Mr. GALLAGHER. In 2016, the Houthis fired at the USS *Mason*. Do you assess that the Houthis still have a desire to attack U.S. Navy or civilian ships in the area?

Secretary WEST. That is an intelligence question, sir, and I don't have the answer to it.

Mr. GALLAGHER. If provided an opportunity, what kind of threat might Houthi or Iranian military power in Yemen pose to the free flow of commerce through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I believe that roughly 10 to 20 percent of global oil flows go through the strait, perhaps a little more. So it is a key strategic choke point.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So I guess more broadly, I understand that our mission there, as you put it, is narrowly focused on al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, other Sunni terrorist groups that might threaten our interest. Should we consider designating a group like Ansar Allah as a foreign terrorist organization?

Secretary WEST. Sir, I think that is more appropriately taken on by the intelligence community, just because I lack the underlying information to make that decision.

Mr. GALLAGHER. And looking more broadly across the region, as you pursue your counterterrorism goals, would it be fair to say that ISIS is sort of your number one priority in the Middle East, or ISIS combined with al-Qaida and its adherents? How then do you assess Iranian terrorist proxies in the region? In other words, let me put it differently. If our goal—and I think it is the administration's regional policy to roll back Iranian influence; correct me if I am wrong on that point—but if that is the goal, then what is our posture with respect to Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies in the region?

Secretary WEST. Sir, this is an authorities question largely, but to what the basic goals are and when we talked about prioritization, our first priority as laid out in the National Counterterrorist Strategy is to hit those groups that are directly threatening the homeland. The Iranians are not doing that.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you. I yield the balance of my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. If I could, just a couple quick follow-ups there because I think that is a real issue in Yemen. Long before the current Houthi uprising, we had an interest in Yemen because, well, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula was present there—and this was mentioned in opening statements—tried to conduct attacks against the U.S.

But would you consider the Houthis to be an aspiring transnational terrorist group, or are they more interested in what is going on in Yemen specifically and in their interests there? I mean, when you are looking at all these different threats, personally, it doesn't seem to me that that is what the Houthis are trying to do. Now, there is still an al-Qaida in there. And I will emphasize that those of us who are concerned about the Saudi Arabia and UAE campaign against the Houthis have always been clear: we do not want to withdraw our effort to contain the terrorism threat coming out of Yemen.

But the terrorism threat is not the same thing as what the Houthis are doing. Is that not correct? Not to say that there isn't a problem there, but the Houthis are not actually an aspiring transnational terrorist group, are they, in your estimation? Is that part of your planning is considering that they might be planning those sorts of attacks?

Secretary WEST. Sir, they are not.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay.

Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. West, your office has been tasked with the oversight of U.S. Special Operations and Command, and you have policy oversight over strategic capabilities and force transformation.

One of our strongest tools I think that we have in combating terrorism is our civilian workforce, and could you share with us how involved they are with the Pentagon and the various combatant command J2s [intelligence directorates], and how mission critical these civilians are, and how often they are deployed in the zones, in war zones?

Secretary WEST. Sir, the civilian-military partnership is crucial. And U.S. SOCOM, as you mentioned—and thank you for bringing it up—our special operations forces around the globe represent about 2 to 3 percent of the force, but have taken about 40 percent of the overall casualties in the last 2 years.

But from what I have witnessed sitting in this seat for about 14 months, the partnership with civilians is excellent and there is a lot of intellectual firepower that comes in those ranks as well.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. And your responsibility too, our office would really look forward to working with you to incentivize, you know, the civilian-military people too and make sure that some of the treatment they get, for instance, if they are deployed in a combat zone that the same creditor kind of relief might be applied. So we would like to work with your office on that in the future, and thank you for your comments in that regard.

Quickly, this week the lead inspector general put out a report that gave a status update on OIR [Operation Inherent Resolve], the military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. There are a cou-



ple of quotes I would like to share from that. “If Sunni socioeconomic, political, and sectarian grievances are not adequately addressed by the national and local governments of Iraq and Syria, it is likely”—“very likely,” I think they said—“that ISIS will have the opportunity to set conditions for future resurgence and territorial control.” They also went on to say that “absent sustained counterterrorism pressure, ISIS could likely resurge in Syria within 6 to 12 months.”

So do you believe that and have any confidence that the Sunni grievances will be addressed so that the conditions are not in place for a resurgence of ISIS that way, those underlying Sunni grievances that were quoted in this report?

Secretary WEST. Sir, that question might be more appropriately answered by my regional counterpart, but I will say that I read the report that many of the conditions that gave rise to ISIS still exist, with one major exception, and that is the SDF and the international coalition that is there right now.

And, in my judgment and as General Votel said yesterday, he has supreme confidence that our special operations forces and conventional forces, along with our allies, can continue to keep up the pressure to prevent a resurgence.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. I think the other questions I have will be dealt with in a different setting, so I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Waltz.

Mr. WALTZ. Thanks so much for coming today. I appreciate your time.

I am struck by your title here of the handout: Conditions favor expanded ISIS network insurgency in 2019, showing the growth from 2013 to 2018 worldwide. Would you agree that the statement that ISIS may be defeated as a caliphate in Iraq and Syria but is not defeated as a movement?

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir, I do agree with that.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. And I think I have heard you say—and I am a Green Beret by background so I certainly buy into this—that by, with, and through is kind of the operative strategy for defeating ISIS, particularly in Syria.

Secretary WEST. Yes, sir.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. So “with” is a key term there. And, as I understand the pullout strategy, we will no longer be with our allies on the ground. Is that correct?

Secretary WEST. We will not be co-located, sir.

Mr. WALTZ. So I heard you mention remote advise and assist, and I think referenced that was successful in the past. I don’t know that I would agree with that statement, that it was successful under the Obama administration; hence, why we had such a burgeoning caliphate in the first place.

So can you explain to me how we plan to conduct remote advise and assist? And if we need to take this in the other setting, that is fine.

Secretary WEST. Sir, I would prefer we take this in the other setting. And both General Hecker and I can directly address this question.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. Would you just agree then that it is more effective to be with on the ground, from an air strike capability, from understanding who is who and the human terrain, and just generally being more effective, is it more effective to be with than to not be with?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, it is much more effective to be co-located with your partners.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. So is the objective now, as you understand the strategy, to withdraw or to win and stabilize that region so that we no longer suffer attacks in the United States and with our allies? Which is the strategic objective, to get out or to be successful?

Secretary WEST. The strategic objective is to prevent an attack on the homeland, even from this region and from Syria. The order we have been given is a deliberate withdrawal while continuing the fight in the MERV [Middle Euphrates River Valley].

Mr. WALTZ. Even though we are more effective, though, with and on the ground. So we now have a less effective means to achieve that objective. Do you agree with that statement? We will not be as effective remotely as we will on the ground with a small force presence?

Secretary WEST. Sir, militarily, we would be less effective.

Mr. WALTZ. Separately, related to Syria but separately, the Idlib pocket where al-Qaida still has a presence, what is our counterterrorism strategy for affecting al-Qaida and degrading and continue the destruction of al-Qaida in that pocket?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, that is a very important question that we need to take to a closed setting.

Mr. WALTZ. Would you say that Turkey has the same counterterrorism, counterinsurgency military capability as the United States?

General HECKER. No, Congressman.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. So we have two questions here. We have Turkey's will to take on ISIS, which I would submit Turkey is much more concerned with the Kurds than with ISIS. But then we also have the capability. And if you look at the geography down in the MERV, the Euphrates River Valley where ISIS remains, all the way in the southern part of Syria and then Turkey in the north, would you say, in your military opinion, that Turkey has the ability, the capability to destroy and to keep ISIS suppressed in that pocket?

General HECKER. Not without help.

Mr. WALTZ. With whose help?

General HECKER. Either our help or other allies' help.

Mr. WALTZ. Okay. Separately, just my time remaining, to Afghanistan, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, spent a little bit of time there. Half the world's terrorist organizations still exist there.

Do you think the Taliban has the capability—assuming that we buy into the fact that they have the will, do they have the capability to keep ISIS and al-Qaida out of Afghanistan?

General HECKER. When you say "out," you know, zero, no.

Mr. WALTZ. Well, training camps, the ability to then stage attacks on the United States and West. Does the Taliban, setting will aside, which I think is highly debatable, do they have the capability, the military capability if they renounce those groups to then keep them suppressed?

General HECKER. I think assuming the government has come together and you now have Taliban as well as the ANASOF [Afghan National Army Special Operations Forces] and ANA, and they are all working together—

Mr. WALTZ. Working together, big assumption.

General HECKER [continuing]. Which is a huge—

The CHAIRMAN. Sorry. We are going to have to cut this off, and you can continue in closed. I want to get to other members.

Mr. Kim.

Mr. KIM. Yes. Thank you so much.

I appreciate everything that you said so far. I just wanted to delve into a few things. Certainly, with the loss of physical space that ISIS has had in Iraq and Syria, that is one measure of progress, but we know never to underestimate the threat that is faced.

I remember in the early days of Operation Inherent Resolve, General Dempsey at the time often always talked about an enduring security, that that was the goal this time. That, during my lifetime, we have had three wars in Iraq, every 12 years of my life. How do we make sure that this is one that is going to be an enduring security going forward, that we measure this only by whether or not it is our last war in Iraq as the benchmark for success?

On that front, you talked about in your written statement that Operation Inherent Resolve provides an excellent template for future operations. While I agree that certainly that could be the case for when we face a crisis situation as we did in 2013–2014, we hope that we are not in that kind of situation again where it requires that level of terrorist threat before we take some actions of that magnitude.

Now, what got us in that situation in the first place was the failure to prevent these types of crises. Now, what I saw was both the rapid rise of ISIS, but also the rapid attrition and degradation of the skills and capabilities of the Iraqi security forces from all levels, including some of the most high-performing elements like the Counterterrorism Services, CTS. So while I certainly think the train, advise, assist mission that we have engaged in has been successful in bolstering up those capabilities, what I still don't understand is, what is the long-term goal and what are we trying to get towards so that we can ensure that there is going to be an enduring security that doesn't require a constant train, advise, assist physical presence on the ground?

So I wanted to ask, what are we doing differently this time? What does success look like for us when it comes to the train, advise, assist to make sure that those skills don't degrade and degrade?

General HECKER. Well, what I can tell you is, you know, the CTS took a pretty hard hit when they cleared out ISIS over the last 2 or 3 years. Their numbers decreased. The Iraqi National Army took a lot of casualties as we went through. So we are building back up, but they are a little bit tired, and we have got to get their readiness going.

It is going to take kind of like what we have, you know, in our forces. It is going to take the CTS doing special ops stuff, and it is going to take the Iraqi National Army to build up and work together cohesively along with an air force. Now, we have elements

that are training all three of those in Iraq. So we just stood up a Canadian two-star command, the NATO, it is called NATO Mission in Iraq, just stood up here a couple months ago, and they are going to be concentrating on the conventional forces. We have an Air Force wing that is out there, U.S. Air Force, that is teaching them how to fly F-16s and other sorts of aircraft. And then we have the CT force.

And what we are trying to do is put that all together and make sure that they know how to interact well with one another. But that is going to be an ongoing mission before they can interact and be able to take care of these terrorists themselves.

Mr. KIM. That is helpful. I think for me, where I am having trouble understanding the full totality is there will always be a use for train, advise, and assist. They will always be useful to helping the Iraqi security forces, but what is the actual metric by which we are measuring when we no longer need a physical presence of American soldiers on the ground to be able to help them do that?

General HECKER. I think the metric is going to be when, you know, you have train, advise, assist, accompany. If you can get rid of the accompany and just do train, advise, assist. And then if you can get rid of the assist, i.e., the enablers, right, some of our ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] assets stuff. And then you are just training. And then the obviously big metric is when you don't have to do any of it, and they can take care of this all by themselves.

So I think you just kind of peel back the level of effort that we are participating in the CT mission, and as you peel that back, those are your metrics.

Mr. KIM. That is helpful. I think just to conclude here, my concern here is that we have invested a significant amount in helping the Iraqi security forces and CTS. When I see that these metrics weren't engaged in the way that you would just talk to me about on the Syria side, I worry about how we are going to be engaging on the Iraq side of the equation here.

Just with my last second, I did want to just point out something, which is with the Global Engagement Center that you talked about before, we still, after 2 years, don't have a director appointed to that center. So these are the types of efforts that we need to move forward on so the administration is strong on that civilian-military partnership. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I will point out we are going to stop at noon because I want to get to the classified setting. So we will get to as many people as we can, but that is just the way it is going to have to happen.

Mr. Banks.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, in your opening statement, you say, you write, quote, "We assess that both ISIS and al-Qaida are degraded."

Is it not true that ISIS-K [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan Province] is growing in Afghanistan?

General HECKER. I don't have indications they are growing. In the classified session, I can give you the current numbers that we have in Afghanistan, but I will tell you that the al-Qaida numbers in Afghanistan are extremely low.

Mr. BANKS. But ISIS-K, you can't say for the record whether ISIS-K is growing in Afghanistan?

General HECKER. I have not seen that.

Mr. BANKS. It is well reported that ISIS-K is growing in Afghanistan. You don't agree with that?

General HECKER. I would agree that it has been state—

Mr. BANKS. Mr. West, would you agree that ISIS-K is growing in Afghanistan today?

Secretary WEST. Sir, on balance, if we subtract their casualties, our estimated casualties that we have inflicted on them from their numbers a couple years ago, I think the answer is yes.

Mr. BANKS. Okay. Do we believe that ISIS-K potentially poses a threat to the homeland?

Secretary WEST. The intelligence community believes that, yes, sir.

Mr. BANKS. General Votel was quoted recently saying, quote, "We have no illusions about reconciliation with ISIS-K. Our mission is to destroy this organization," end quote.

How do we destroy ISIS-K if we pull out of Afghanistan, Mr. West?

Secretary WEST. Sir, first, we have received no orders to pull out of Afghanistan and our CT mission there remains exactly the same, which is focus, and ruthless focus, on ISIS-K and al-Qaida.

Mr. BANKS. General, can you describe the threat that ISIS-K poses that makes them different from the Taliban?

General HECKER. Their tactics are pretty ruthless. We see some of the things that they do. They like high-profile attacks. They like to go to downtown Kabul and take a suicide bomber and get as many civilians around them as they can and blow themselves up.

Mr. BANKS. Is it easy to speculate that if we did draw down substantially or pull out of Afghanistan, that ISIS-K would pose a greater threat to the stability of Afghanistan than the Taliban?

General HECKER. I think it depends under, you know, what metric we withdraw and what reconciliation efforts Ambassador Khalilzad was able to make. I think if we have a united Taliban with the forces that we have been building up along and they choose—big if, right—but if they choose to take on ISIS, I think there is a time in the future where we could see them, you know, keeping ISIS at bay.

Mr. BANKS. Mr. West, would you agree with that?

Secretary WEST. I think that is a question for intelligence community as well, sir. And I am not as well informed on the issues or implications, and I think that requires some speculation to answer that well.

Mr. BANKS. I understand you haven't received orders to withdraw from Afghanistan or to substantially draw down, but there has been a lot—you would agree that that appears to be the way forward that this administration is forecasting.

Could you not agree, though, that that would be a dangerous path forward if ISIS-K is growing, with the nature of the threat that they pose, to not just the stability of Afghanistan but as a threat to the homeland?

Secretary WEST. The way I would articulate it is, is that a significant or sudden drawdown of our counterterror ability or footprint would be a risk.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Cisneros.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here this morning.

I just want to follow up on our earlier question about the radicalization. We know these terrorist groups have done very well at using technology, basically the internet, to push forth their propaganda and to recruit. Can you give me some information on what we are doing to prevent the recruitment of new members and the radicalization of individuals online?

General HECKER. Congressman, I would be happy to give you that information in a closed session. I think there have been a couple other questions along that line, and I can give you some specifics.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you.

I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Mrs. Hartzler.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Thank you very much.

Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate your work. We know that we have had the degradation of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and that is very encouraging, but as we have heard, those ISIS fighters are going across the world. And I was in the Philippines last year and very concerned with the growth of the foreign fighters there and ISIS growing. We know, in 2017, an ISIS-affiliated group took over the city of Marawi for 5 months. And just last month, we had a suicide bombing that killed 20 people, wounding 100 more in the Philippines.

So can you speak to the Department's assessment of ISIS's current operational capacity in the Indo-Pacific region and then address what the DOD partnership building efforts are in that state?

Secretary WEST. Yes, Congresswoman. From a DOD perspective, this is a very big problem, because this franchise, for lack of a better term, that has grown up, some of it formed from the former Abu Sayyaf but now affiliating themselves with ISIS, has taken the tactic of suicide bombing and employed it. This is a very difficult tactic to combat, and it does require the same basic template that we have begun to use the world over, which is a local partnership, some fiscal authorities, but then some presence of U.S. forces to help them target and track, because this is now happening at both a group level but also an individual level, in terms of what we might call here lone-wolf attacks.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Would you say that the ISIS involvement there and presence is increasing or decreasing? Do you think we are getting a handle on this, or is this just burgeoning out of control?

Secretary WEST. Congresswoman, my intelligence counterparts are better informed. I would say we don't know whether we are at the outset of what will be a long-term trend in terms of the migration of this ideology and an end-state where you have folks committing attacks on a regular basis.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Okay, great. Just switching gears, ISIS grew due to the very active recruitment efforts, which I am looking forward to hearing what we are doing to counter some of the social media recruitment, but also there was a real problem in the beginning with financing. I believe the report that we were given, \$30 million a month in revenue ISIS was bringing in there initially, and now it is down to \$1.2 million a month in 2018, if I read that right.

But what is the status of the financing? Because that was certainly a concern that helped fuel their rapid expansion there initially. So how successful are we on cutting off their financing, where is it coming from, and what are we doing to target that?

General HECKER. Congresswoman, are you particularly talking about the financing in the Philippines?

Mrs. HARTZLER. No, just ISIS in general.

General HECKER. Just ISIS in general?

Mrs. HARTZLER. Yes.

General HECKER. I have some numbers that I pulled from a classified source that I can tell you about in the next meeting, but I can say I think at this level, very broadly, that ISIS's core has a relatively significant amount in their coffers, if you will. Very little, though, in the Philippine area there.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Well, initially they got a lot of that through taking over the oil rigs and shipping the oil over through Turkey and then the kidnapping and asking for ransom and things. So what methodologies are we seeing maybe still financing? Or maybe that should be in our next setting. How are they being financed?

General HECKER. I think we can broadly talk about it. The oil is not there pretty much anymore, but now it is more of the robberies, it is more of the kidnapping for ransoms, and those kind of activities.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Okay. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Ms. Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, gentlemen. I am sorry. I was just in a meeting on Yemen, and I understand that a bit of my question was asked already, but I will ask it more broadly.

What is your assessment of our competitors' support for proxy groups that counter our national security objectives, and do you see more Russian weapon sales or Iranian support for proxy groups and militias on the rise, and if so, where other than Yemen?

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Congresswoman. Broadly, yes, proxy warfare is on the rise. Indeed, while warfare's nature doesn't change, its face has changed in the last decade. And specifically, as you pointed out, great powers are now competing and in an irregular space, and we must quickly adjust.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And my second question has to do with whether or not you see either a rise in competition or an increasing competition between al-Qaida and ISIS, and is that contributing in Africa to any sort of anxiety that you have that there will be an increased influence of terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaida?

Secretary WEST. Congresswoman, I do know that, you know, following the split in February of 2014, I believe, from ISIS and al-Qaida in West Africa, as you point out, these groups' affiliations, we have had mergers and then splits.

Stepping back, I am not sure it matters much to us except for the fact that we have got to carefully prioritize these threats and allocate the appropriate resources to them. What I mean by that is terrorists with local ambition or little capability do not deserve the same footprint or resources as those who have demonstrated the capability and will to strike the homeland.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And do you think if we pull out in any sort of meaningful way from participating in Yemen that there will be sort of a vacuum created between any of those groups that will increase the competition and will allow for an increased threat in the terms of sort of terrorism from al-Qaida or ISIS?

Secretary WEST. In Yemen, in terms of our counterterror strategy, we are ruthlessly focused on al-Qaida and ISIS, and we should continue to have a presence because these groups have not only threatened us but demonstrated the capability to do so against the homeland.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, gentlemen.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. We are going to wrap up and go upstairs for the classified briefing, but, Mr. Thornberry has a followup. We will wrap up with that, and then we are going to go upstairs to 2212.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. West, I want to follow up on an answer you gave to Mr. Gallagher a while ago about Iran's intention or efforts to conduct terrorist attacks inside the United States. I noticed that last week, in his World Threat Assessment, the Director of National Intelligence listed at least two incidents in his chart where Lebanese Hezbollah had attack planning disrupted, including operatives detained, arrested, discovery of weapons, explosive caches, detection of surveillance inside the United States.

Now, I presume that you would not disagree that at least their proxies have made efforts to conduct terrorist attacks inside the United States?

Secretary WEST. That author is far more informed than I am, Congressman.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

All right. We are adjourned. And we will reconvene probably like 5 minutes, maybe 10 if the gentlemen need a brief break, upstairs in 2212. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:48 a.m., the committee proceeded in closed session.]



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**A P P E N D I X**

FEBRUARY 6, 2019

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**PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD**

FEBRUARY 6, 2019

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**Chairman Adam Smith**  
**Full Committee Hearing on**  
**“Evaluation of the Department of Defense’s Counterterrorism Approach”**  
**Opening Statement (Prepared)**  
**February 6, 2019**

Good morning. The purpose of today’s hearing is to understand the Department of Defense’s global approach to counterterrorism – what is the Administration’s strategy to confront the threat of terrorism, how does this approach nest within the Department’s own, larger National Defense Strategy, and how does this approach compliment the activities of other departments and agencies for a more effective “whole-of-government” approach?

To help us understand, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, Owen West, and the Vice Director for Operations from the Joint Staff, Maj. Gen. James Hecker, are here to testify. Thank you for very much for being here.

To begin, I’d like to know what the Department’s plan is to effectively confront the threat of terrorism. What exactly is the strategy? Where are the greatest threats? What locations should we be focused on? What groups? How does the Department plan to approach the threat of terrorism, while positioning itself to confront future threats? What risks should we be willing to accept?

In my view, there are concerning disconnects between the National Defense Strategy and the National Strategy for Counterterrorism. The unclassified summary of the former includes only small mention of counterterrorism. The latter appears to prioritize all threats, which almost certainly will lead to a counterterrorism budget that accepts no risk and attempts to fund a wide net, and in doing so, fails our troops and makes us less safe. By failing to prioritize the threats, and allocate resources based on those priorities, I am concerned that this Administration has no meaningful strategy to confront terrorism in a sustainable way.

Further, since the start of the Trump Administration, there has been an observed increase in strikes on terrorist targets. What have additional strikes accomplished? What is the accuracy of these strikes and has there been a change in the number of civilian casualties? What impact has such an approach had on U.S. interests to degrade terrorist threats and prevent threats to U.S. interests?

From the lessons of the last 18 years of conflict, it is clear that the current approach needs adjustment. For example, military action alone is insufficient to defeat terrorism. We cannot shoot or bomb our way to a victory over extremist ideology.

Former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis made it clear that “national security is much more than just defense.” This is absolutely the case. The Department’s counterterrorism activities should nest within a wider whole-of-government policy that includes non-military lines of effort. There must be a balanced investment in the “3Ds” of diplomacy, development, and defense. Military might is not the only

way to confront terrorism. Holistic approaches through diplomacy and development, such as coordination with allies and partners, also address the political, economic, and social conditions that drive instability and insecurity. So, how is the Department coordinating its approach to complement diplomatic and development programs and activities, and what risks are there to our counterterrorism missions if those programs and activities are not properly resourced? Pursuing a whole-of-government approach has become more critical than ever as the Department attempts to execute the National Defense Strategy, which requires sustainable solutions to address terrorist threats, that will allow the military to recover the readiness and lethality of our force to defend against our strategic competitors.

Finally, if you look around the world, it is incredibly clear, even if there is a coherent strategy that prioritizes missions and allows for informed resource allocation decisions, the elephant in the room remains. This Administration has not demonstrated a coherent national security policy. It is most apparent by force reduction decisions and shifts in counterterrorism missions that are made at the whim of the President via tweet. There may be strategies on paper but we have seen time and again the President undermine his own Administration's plans and policies with his unpredictability. I need only mention Afghanistan and Syria. This leads me to ask the obvious. What is the strategic rationale for the drawdown in Syria? How can we contain the threat of ISIS in light of such a reduction? In Afghanistan, the terrorist threat remains as well. With a reported reduction of up to 7,000, how will U.S. interests be protected? How can the Department sufficiently plan and execute sustainable counterterrorism operations and activities and ensure the safety and security of our personnel, partners, and allies in that fight when the future of our counterterrorism missions can turn on a dime?

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

Joint Statement by  
The Honorable Owen West  
Assistant Secretary of Defense  
for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict  
and  
Major General James B. Hecker  
Vice Director of Operations  
The Joint Staff  
Before the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress  
House Armed Services Committee  
February 6, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thornberry, for the privilege of testifying before the committee this morning. The counterterrorism fight continues to evolve. I want to take this opportunity to highlight where we have been and where I think we are headed.

I will start with our counter-ISIS campaign. Our coalition has liberated the vast majority of ISIS' so-called physical caliphate. By this, I mean ISIS no longer governs a pseudo state in Syria that at its height attracted tens of thousands of recruits from around the world who easily slipped across the borders, took up arms, and shared in ISIS illicit revenue streams, that at one time topped \$250M per month. The human toll had a much higher price.

The so-called ISIS caliphate has been systematically destroyed in one of the most lethal offensive surrogate operations in history. Using an approach of "by, with, and through" our local partners, supported by a robust Coalition partnership, we were able to achieve a victory over ISIS in Syria. U.S. special operations forces partnered with and mentored the Syrian Democratic Forces, which grew from a few hundred to tens of thousands of Kurds and Arabs, all supported by the U.S. Marines, Army, Air Force and international partners. The SDF, fighting for their homeland, suffered thousands of casualties. ISIS suffered the most. While still dangerous and operating as insurgents, ISIS no longer has a sanctuary to swiftly lure thousands of terrorists to operate freely and in the open. This achievement should not be discounted, and the model should remain an enduring lesson.

Terrorism remains a persistent condition driven by political, religious and socio-economic trends. While we assess that both ISIS and al Qa'ida are degraded, they remain threats that can regenerate capability if pressure is reduced. So, we must simultaneously acknowledge that we are close to a tremendous battlefield victory and yet still face a resilient



enemy. At the height of its power, ISIS once held an area slightly smaller than the State of Maine. At its peak, some 10 million people were living in territory under ISIS control, yet now the number is counted in the hundreds. Millions of people have been liberated from ISIS control.

The end of the so-called physical caliphate heralds a new phase to the long term fight. ISIS has morphed from a fake caliphate to an insurgency. This form of ISIS will continue to pose a threat while being less susceptible to kinetic attack. To defeat this global network and others like it, including al Qaeda and its affiliates, requires a coalition of allies applying pressure at the local level. The National Defense Strategy emphasizes such coalitions as we are required to increase our focus on near-peer competitors such as China and Russia, necessitating a resource-adjusted CT fight. The United States will maintain sufficient capabilities in the region to collect intelligence and prevent any ISIS resurgence.

The long-term nature of the counter-terrorism fight means we must make cost-informed decisions in the future. Operation Inherent Resolve provides an excellent template for such future operations. The United States must scope and resource operations for threats to our country and interests. By prioritizing our threats and applying resources appropriately, we can sustain this long fight through preserved resources and will.

A disciplined approach to this long fight will also enable our Department's pivot towards great power competition, and the renewed importance of irregular warfare in this space. The Department continues to broaden its focus to the rising challenges of great power competition with near-peer adversaries in line with the National Defense Strategy.

Lessons learned from our "by with and through" model of counterterrorism, and the increased focus on the importance of partnerships in this approach, will pay dividends as we refine our approach to irregular warfare in this competitive environment. The Department will

focus on rebuilding and preserving our unmatched military strength and lethality while bolstering the United States' diplomatic, economic, and other security-related activities to ensure that we can deter, compete, and win against any threat, nation state or other.

DoD will continue to execute counter-terror operations globally in order to prevent an attack on America and her interests. Congress has been a stalwart partner in helping to ensure that we have the necessary resources and authorities to continue to achieve this overriding goal. I look forward to our continuing dialogue and welcome your questions.

**Owen West**  
**Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict**

Mr. Owen West is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. Previously, Mr. West worked for Goldman, Sachs as an energy trader. He has 19 years of experience in risk-management and the most volatile international markets, leading the global natural gas and U.S. power businesses.

While at Goldman, Mr. West took two leaves of absence to activate and deploy with fellow Marines to Iraq. In 2003 he was the fire support officer for Force Recon Company and in 2006 he deployed as an advisor to an Iraqi infantry battalion holding a remote outpost in Anbar Province, where he led a group of 12 soldiers and Marines living among 500 Iraqi soldiers.

Mr. West is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a Director of the Positive Coaching Alliance, and is a certified trainer of youth coaches and a multi-sport coach for his two boys. He is also a Director of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation. Mr. West and his wife have founded two cornerstone scholarships benefitting the children of fallen troops.

He is the author of three books about military affairs. *Sharkman Six* (Simon and Schuster, 2001) won the Boyd literary award for best military novel. *The Snake Eaters* (Simon and Schuster, 2012) detailed the combat advisory mission in Iraq. He has written dozens of articles and op-eds on the military and adventure sports published in several publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Slate*, *Men's Journal*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Topic*, and *The New York Times*.

Mr. West graduated cum laude from Harvard College as a Government major and was commissioned in the Marine Corps where he served for 6 years as a platoon commander and a reconnaissance platoon commander.

He twice deployed overseas to Asia and the Middle East before attending Stanford Business School. At Stanford, Mr. West was co-president of his class and the CEO of Challenge for Charity, the largest business school non-profit corporation.

**Maj. Gen. Jim Hecker**  
**Vice Director of Operations, J3**

Maj. Gen. Jim Hecker is the Vice Director, Operations, Joint Staff, the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia. The Vice Director for Operations serves as the principle assistant to the Director for Operations in assisting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in fulfilling his responsibilities as the principle military advisor to the President and Secretary of Defense, in developing and providing operational guidance, and in fostering clear communication between the President, Secretary of Defense, unified commands, and services.

General Hecker was commissioned in the Air Force in 1989 after graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was both a graduate and instructor at the U.S. Air Force Weapons Instructor Course. In response to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, General Hecker was responsible for coordinating both civilian and military disaster relief and humanitarian assistance during Operation Tomodachi, while working with U.S. Forces Japan at Yokota Air Base. He has also worked as a military legislative assistant for the Senate majority leader in Washington, D.C. and has commanded at the squadron, group, wing and numbered Air Force levels. Additionally, he has served as the Director of Plans, Programs and Requirements at Headquarters Air Combat Command, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia. General Hecker last served as Commander, 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force-Afghanistan; Commander, NATO Air Command-Afghanistan; Director, AFCENT's Air Component Coordination Element for U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and NATO's Operation Resolute Support and Deputy Commander-Air for U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

General Hecker is a command pilot with more than 3,500 hours flying various aircraft including the F-15C, F-22, MQ-1B, HH-60, C-208 and the T-38C.

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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING**

FEBRUARY 6, 2019

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## QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GALLEGO

Mr. GALLEGO. I understand that there have been efforts to implement changes and recommendations of AFRICOM's investigation into the ambush in October 2017 that resulted in the deaths of four U.S. soldiers and a number of Nigerien soldiers accompanying the unit in question. What changes to policy have been made?

Mr. WEST. As a result of the Niger investigation report, then-Secretary Mattis directed U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, the Department of the Army, and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to conduct a comprehensive review of procedures, policies, and training programs and report back to him with a plan of action and corrective measures. The Acting Secretary of Defense is currently reviewing these reports and all commendatory and disciplinary actions related to the attack. After the Acting Secretary's review, we will provide an update on the measures taken consistent with the Niger investigation report to mitigate risk to and increase the preparedness of members of the U.S. Armed Forces conducting missions, operations, or activities in Niger and throughout Africa. U.S. Africa Command has already begun implementing significant changes and improvements at all levels, including with U.S. Special Operations Command Africa and U.S. Air Forces Africa. Updates include improvements to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards and requirements; increased synchronization and coordination between ground forces, partner forces, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). There have also been changes to guidance and directives to improve pre-deployment training and pre-mission battle drill rehearsals with partner forces; sustainment of medical field care training programs; as well as recommendations and support for awards for valor by U.S. service members and foreign military personnel.

Mr. GALLEGO. What is AFRICOM and the wider DOD doing to ensure that we are coordinating better with allies such as France and Niger in austere and dangerous environments like North and West Africa?

Mr. WEST. Over the last year, USAFRICOM has improved integration with partner countries in the region and our European allies. With regard to our French allies, USAFRICOM has renewed agreements for mutual support, formalized memorandums of agreement for medical evacuation, and improved coordination on intelligence and logistics support. DOD also provides other support to French CT operations, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. U.S. forces continue to work alongside our partners in Niger at the request of its government. For instance, we are continuing the construction of a Nigerien air base in Agadez. Once complete, this location will enable partner operations against violent extremist organizations. More detailed information can be provided in a classified setting.

Mr. GALLEGO. I am concerned that reprimands and blame for the series of errors that led to the Niger operation in 2017 will fall disproportionately on junior officers and enlisteds rather than on Army and Pentagon brass that either knew or should have known of internal U.S. problems that led to this incident. How is the Army and Department proceeding with the review of this incident and policy concerning reprimands and discipline?

Mr. WEST. In the wake of the Niger investigation report, then-Secretary Mattis directed Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), to provide the plan for individual accountability. The Acting Secretary of Defense is reviewing the actions taken and planned regarding individual accountability, and the Department will provide an update once his review is complete.

Mr. GALLEGO. Your response to Mr. Moulton's question of whether you disagree with former Secretary Mattis' opposition to a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria was "No, sir." Why?

Mr. WEST. As the principal assistant to the President in all matters relating to the Department of Defense, Secretary Mattis provided his best advice to the President. Sometimes there is disagreement. Once given the order, however, the Department executed those orders.

Mr. GALLEGO. I understand that there have been efforts to implement changes and recommendations of AFRICOM's investigation into the ambush in October 2017

that resulted in the deaths of four U.S. soldiers and a number of Nigerien soldiers accompanying the unit in question. What changes to policy have been made?

General HECKER. At this time, we are still waiting for Department of the Army, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOOCOM) to announce any changes that were recommended.

Mr. GALLEG0. What is AFRICOM and the wider DOD doing to ensure that we are coordinating better with allies such as France and Niger in austere and dangerous environments like North and West Africa?

General HECKER. U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) maintains a partner-centric strategic approach across the entire area of operations. This partner-centric approach comprises the following three cross-cutting themes: First, the challenges throughout Africa cannot be resolved by using the military element of national power alone. Second, USAFRICOM aims to work by, with, and through partners and allies to strengthen enduring relationships and ensure partner ownership of solutions to various problems. Finally, in the most austere and dangerous environments, USAFRICOM works with partners and allies to continue to put pressure on the networks that resource and enable Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) in order to provide increased security, and time and space for good governance. Over time, this partner-centric approach aims to effectively facilitate coordination with allies and strengthen partners and decrease U.S. security assistance requirements.

In West Africa, specifically the Sahel region, the Department of Defense (DOD) provides support to French counter-terrorism (CT) efforts. Since 2013, the French Armed Forces (FAF) has conducted CT operations against VEOs in northern and western Africa. USAFRICOM provides logistic support, supplies, and services (LSSS) consisting of air refueling services, fixed-wing and rotary-wing airlift, including intra-theater and inter-theater, on a non-reimbursable basis. USAFRICOM ensures coordination with the French Armed Forces through the deployment of liaison and planning teams that co-locate at the strategic, operational, and tactical headquarters.

Additionally in the Sahel, the U.S. supports the Group of Five (G5) Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) as an African led, European-assisted and U.S. supported regional approach. DOD aims to enable Sahel state defense institutional development while supporting partner-led counter-VEO operations. The FC-G5S presents an opportunity to coordinate and integrate Security Force Assistance efforts with international partners and facilitates sustainable burden-sharing. DOD supports an engagement strategy that is partner-led and requirement driven to identify and verify priority support requirements for the FC-G5S. DOD will continue a bilateral security cooperation approach in accordance with U.S. law and authorities but will maintain the flexibility to shift support requirements based on partner decisions and operational capabilities of the force. Through existing security cooperation efforts and planned embedded planner support, DOD is well positioned to provide future support and coordination within this austere environment.

In Niger, DOD partners with military forces and trains with them during multiple exercises. In 2018 Niger hosted FLINTLOCK18, an annual training exercise focusing on operational tasks, tactical events, and command and control functions for U.S. forces to counter-VEOs. This exercise is just one of many examples that enables and trains U.S. forces within the region, but also allows for increased coordination with multiple allies and partners.

In the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region, the U.S. strategy to counter VEOs includes strengthening the capacity of the security sector of the LCB countries. The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is an African-led organization consisting of military and civilian elements and include all of the LCB countries and Benin. The goal of the MNJTF is to assist the LCB governments to develop rule of law frameworks, to provide long-term security for the population, to build resilience of the affected communities, and address the underlying socio-economic political drivers that lead to violent extremism. The P3 countries (U.S., France, and United Kingdom) supporting the MNJTF provide a Coordination Cell, Liaison (CCL) to facilitate tactical and operational planning and execution across the four operational sectors within the MNJTF area of responsibility. The CCL is comprised of 15 personnel—of which three are U.S. service members.

In conclusion, USAFRICOM's partner-centric approach aims to effectively facilitate coordination with allies and strengthen partners and decrease U.S. security assistance requirements—enabling better coordination with allies such as France and Niger, among others, in austere and dangerous environment within North and West Africa.



**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BROWN**

Mr. BROWN. Mr. West, last September, then-Assistant Secretary Karem testified before members of this committee that “ISIS remains stronger now than its predecessor was when the United States withdrew from Iraq in 2011.” The National Strategy for Counterterrorism released in October of last year declared “ISIS remains the foremost radical Islamist terrorist group and the primary transnational terrorist threat to the United States”. Yet, just three months later, the President declared via twitter that “We have defeated ISIS in Syria” and he ordered the U.S. military’s complete withdrawal from Syria. Between September and December, what changed?

Mr. WEST. The statements are not mutually exclusive. Our counter-ISIS campaign has effectively destroyed the “physical” caliphate in Syria, eliminating a safe have that served as the crowning achievement of ISIS. ISIS no longer governs a pseudo-state in Syria that, at its height, attracted tens of thousands of recruits from around the world. At the same time, the ideology of ISIS remains unchanged and the group continues to seek ungoverned or weakly governed areas from which they can launch attacks against U.S. interests. DOD remains committed to working by, with, and through partners and allies, such as the 79-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, to secure the enduring defeat of ISIS.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. West, by open sources we currently have 2,000 troops in Syria; 5,200 in Iraq; 14,000 in Afghanistan. In addition, General Thomas, SOCOM Commander, stated in his testimony to HASC last year that we currently have deployed approximately 8,300 special forces personnel across 90 countries. Can you tell me how many roughly how many special forces personnel are deployed to Central America and Mexico?

Mr. WEST. The total number of USSOF (including enablers) deployed to South America and Mexico fluctuates. However, there are typically approximately 100 USSOF personnel deployed throughout Central America (not including the Caribbean) and approximately 30–40 USSOF personnel deployed to Mexico.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. West, beginning with the Bush administration, the United States made a concerted effort to use foreign aid as an instrument in countering terrorism. During the Obama Presidency—and under Republican majority Congresses—foreign aid was funded at a fairly constant level of approximately \$50B annually. The National Strategy for Counterterrorism released in October declares that we will “use all available instruments of United States power to counter terrorism.” Yet, the President’s Budget in each of the last two years has reduced foreign aid by 25% each year, only to have it restored by Congress. Do you believe that reducing foreign aid by this amount supports our strategy of using all instruments available to the U.S.?

Mr. WEST. Administration is seeking the resources we need to support targeted efforts to advance our counter terrorism goals and objectives, while pressing our allies and partners to contribute their fair share to these joint efforts. I defer to the Department of State, however, to further elaborate on U.S. foreign assistance and burden sharing.

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. STEFANIK**

Ms. STEFANIK. Secretary West, as you and I have discussed before, we must not forget the long-term objectives when it comes to counterterrorism, and by that I mean ensure that our successes are not only of a kinetic nature. Throughout my time in Congress and as the ranking member of IETC Subcommittee, I am very much aware of the continuous work between the Department and Congress to achieve rigorous oversight of dynamic counterterrorism operations through the Oversight of Sensitive Military Operations Act (OSMOA). But as we approach year 18 of near-constant combat, it is critical that we understand our long-term, sustainable objectives. While we have indeed made progress—and in doing so have developed a surgical strike and direct action capability second to none—we have yet to sustain many of our hard fought gains. How do we ensure and measure regional and strategic effects on the battlefield that contribute to national security and protect our homeland?

General HECKER. Our principal measure of success is the number of attacks against the homeland and U.S. interests abroad. DOD works closely with other departments and agencies of the U.S. Government and allies and coalition partners to continuously assess the effectiveness of our approach as well as the progress of our partners towards development of effective CT capabilities. Key conditions for success in our approach will be the reduction of terrorist safe-havens and terrorist attacks in a region, an increase in local and regional security that facilitates good

governance, and a sufficient number of capable and competent security forces that adhere to the rule of law and respect human rights, to address threats independently.

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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GAETZ**

Mr. GAETZ. Counterinsurgency and drug interdiction is the primary mission of 7th SFG based out of my district. Recently it has come to light that a potential new area of influence for terrorists is Venezuela. Hezbollah and Iran have interests in seeing a destabilization of Venezuela.

Do you believe that Iran will use the instability in South America to maneuver more of its irregular forces and terrorist partners into the AO?

Do you believe that we are prepared to fight a COIN mission in South America? What are the key differences between COIN in the Middle East and COIN in South America?

General HECKER. [The information is classified and retained in the committee files.]

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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WALTZ**

Mr. WALTZ. In January, ELN, a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist organization, detonated a car bomb in Colombia, killing 21 people and injuring 68 more.

Juan Guaido, President of Venezuela's National Assembly, said the bomber spent years living in Venezuela. ELN terrorists are operating in Venezuela, engaged in smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal mining. There are reports that ELN is actively recruiting hungry Venezuelans, some as young as 15, taking advantage of the country's economic and political crisis to reinforce their criminal enterprise. Furthermore, ELN commander Pablo Beltran has pledged his support for the Maduro regime.

How would you rate the threat ELN poses as a destabilizing force in our hemisphere? Are there state-actors that are aiding or harboring ELN terrorists?

Mr. WEST. I would defer to the intelligence community to provide an assessment of the capabilities and threat posed by ELN. With that said, we would welcome the opportunity to go more in depth on the issue within a classified setting.

Mr. WALTZ. Can you provide a status update of any Americans, including dual-citizens and legal permanent residents, being held hostage in Syria?

Mr. WEST. U.S. and partner forces are tracking U.S. citizens being held hostage in Syria and continue to collect information that may assist in their recovery, as well as the recovery of remains of U.S. citizens murdered by ISIS. The interagency Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell (HRFC) tracks hostage-related information from across the U.S. Government, coordinates department and agency actions, and recommends recovery options. Additional information can be provided in a classified setting.

Mr. WALTZ. The Idlib pocket where al-Qaida still has a presence. What is our counterterrorism strategy for effecting al-Qaida, and degrading, and continue the destruction of al-Qaida in that pocket?

Mr. WEST. The Coalition primarily operates in northeastern Syria and in a 55-kilometer area surrounding the At Tanf Garrison in southeastern Syria. To complement Coalition counterterrorism operations in these areas, DOD seeks a political solution to the Syrian Civil War under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. Such a political solution is critical to addressing the terrorist threat across all of Syria—including in Idlib.

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General HECKER. A Deputies Committee meeting was convened in late November, 2018 to conduct an in-depth study, assessment and recommendation concerning the current, and future DIME options for the Idlib pocket. While it is recognized across the Department of Defense (DOD), Intelligence Community, and Interagency what threat potentials can emanate out of Idlib, it was agreed to provide time and space for the Russia/Turkey tactical engagement for addressing Idlib to take its due course. As a collective DOD/Intelligence Community approach, we will continuously look at options that range across both military and State capabilities for engagement if we feel the threat warrants taking our eye off the current Defeat ISIS (D-ISIS) fight.

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. ESCOBAR**

Ms. ESCOBAR. Secretary West, recently the President said in an interview that “we’ll come back if we have to” in reference to the troop withdrawal in Syria. Is this cost effective? What impact will this back and forth have on readiness? Is this a sustainable solution?

Mr. WEST. The Department of Defense is drawing down forces in Syria and leaving behind a residual force that will work by, with, and through our partners to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS. This is expected to be a more sustainable approach compared to sustaining a larger force in Syria. The Department will continue to prevent terrorists from directing or supporting external operations against the U.S. homeland and our citizens, allies, and partners overseas. Our force posture and employment seek to be adaptable in the global strategic environment while balancing the impacts of operations with force readiness.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Secretary West, has the Department conducted a cost-benefit analysis of withdrawing and then going back to Syria if needed? How would this cycle impact military readiness?

Mr. WEST. The Department of Defense has not done a formal cost benefit analysis, USCENTCOM continues its force planning in Syria. We are drawing down our forces in Syria, and leaving behind a residual force that will work by, with, and through our partners to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS. This approach utilizes an adaptable force posture in the global strategic environment and balances the impacts of operations with force readiness.

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. HORN**

Ms. HORN. Central Command-Afghanistan. In seeking to enable stability in the region U.S. forces are focusing on two lines of effort: 1) counter terrorist operations to disrupt and disable terrorist networks, and 2) training and equipping the Afghan security forces to maintain internal security. Much of this mission is carried out through the deployment of the Security Force Assistant Brigade (SFAB) in the train, advise, and assist model. It is no secret that there have been challenges both expected and unexpected with the training and engagement of Afghan forces.

Can you briefly review our overall strategy? What unexpected issues are you encountering with the training of the Afghan forces, and what solutions are you implementing?

How are the Afghan forces handling different emerging threats?

Can you discuss the risk of pulling back U.S. training and financial support to the Afghan forces? What immediate and long-term impacts would that have on sustainability in the region?

Mr. WEST. The ultimate goal of the 2017 South Asia Strategy is a durable and inclusive political settlement. The overall strategy in Afghanistan is focused on efforts to Reinforce, Realign, Regionalize, Reconcile, and Sustain. There have been more promising indicators on reconciliation over the last several months than at any time since 2002. We are also focused on applying maximum pressure on the Taliban, and these efforts are designed to support Department of State efforts towards reconciliation and a political settlement. Consistent with this, we continue to support our Afghan partners with training, advice, and assistance to increase their capabilities and effectiveness in providing security and combatting terrorism. The addition of the SFABs in 2018 extended the reach of U.S. advisors to 8 different Afghan National Army (ANA) Brigades and 34 ANA kandaks. There is still progress to be made, but the Afghan forces are pushing the fight against the Taliban and against ISIS Khorasan. We are continuing to advise at critical points to ensure the tactical and operational success of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Right now, there are no plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan, and we are committed to achieving a political settlement. Any changes to U.S. force presence will be driven by conditions on the ground and informed by ongoing assessments of current efforts.

Ms. HORN. Now a couple of questions on AFRICOM. There seems to be an increased terrorist activity in the Central and East Africa region. There was an alert published just two days ago by the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi that read “Credible information indicates Westerners may be targeted by extremists in Nairobi and coastal areas of Kenya. This message comes weeks after the al-Qaida-linked terrorist group al-Shabaab took credit for the killing of 21 people in a hotel.

What specificity is being done to suppress the growing emerging threats, specifically ones that seem to originate in Somalia?

What is AFRICOM’s overall strategy for eradicating threats in the area?

Mr. WEST. DOD efforts have focused on applying pressure persistently to al-Shabaab, building relationships with key regional and international partners, and building the capacity of Somali security forces to address the threats in their own country. USAFRICOM has the authority to conduct military direct action against al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Somalia. These strikes provide opportunity for the Federal Government of Somalia to expand its influence and control in the country and allow time for the Somali National Army to increase its capability to provide security in Somalia. USAFRICOM's strategy entails a sustainable approach, building strong, enduring partnerships with African and international partners and organizations that are committed to improving security in Somalia, and assisting in the development of elements of the Somali National Army that respect human rights, adhere to the rule of law, and contribute to stability in Somalia.

