HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND
UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

Thursday, March 9, 2017

U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:29 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Chairman McCain:  Good morning.

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on the posture of U.S. Central Command and Africa Command.

We are pleased to welcome our witnesses: General Votel and General Waldhauser. We thank each of you for your decades of distinguished service and for your leadership of our men and women in uniform.

More than a decade and a half since the September 11th terrorist attacks, our Nation is still at war with terrorists that seek to attack our homeland, our interests, our allies, and our partners. In this fight, our military service members are doing everything we ask of them from North Africa to the Middle East to South Asia. Thanks to their tremendous talent and dedication, we have made important tactical and operational progress.

Our military has gradually eroded ISIS’s territorial control and removed key personnel from the battlefield. ISIS has been expelled from its Libyan stronghold in Sirte, and I am confident that soon the same will be true in Mosul and Raqqa. Our military has kept up the pressure on terrorists operating in countries like Yemen and Somalia. And in Afghanistan, we have kept Al Qaeda on the run and
helped our Afghan hold the line against renewed Taliban assaults.

But much to the frustration of the American people, this hard-won tactical progress has not led to enduring strategic gains. In fact, the sad reality is America’s strategic position in the Middle East is weaker today than it was 8 years ago. And the positions of Vladimir Putin’s Russia and the Iranian regime and its terrorist proxies have improved. This is not a military failure. Instead, it is a failure of strategy, a failure of policy, and most of all, a failure of leadership.

The fact is for at least the last 8 years, we have tried to isolate the fight against terrorism from its geopolitical context. Or as General Mattis put it 2 years ago, we have been living in a “strategy-free environment” for quite some time. The result is that we have failed to address and, at times, exacerbated the underlying conflict, the struggles for power and sectarian identity now raging across the Middle East. We have been unable or unwilling to either ask or answer basic questions about American policy in the region. We have been reluctant to act, and when compelled to do so, we have pursued only the most limited and incremental actions.

We are fighting ISIS in Syria but ignoring the Syrian civil war that was its genesis and fuels it to this day. We
are fighting ISIS in Iraq but failing to address the growing influence of Iran. We are fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan but pretending the Taliban is no longer our problem. We are fighting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen but refraining from confronting the threat posed by Iran’s Houthi proxies. In short, we are treating the symptoms and ignoring the disease, and we should not be surprised at the results: a Middle East aflame, America’s influence squandered, America’s adversaries emboldened, America’s friends disheartened, and America’s policy options narrowed and worsened.

This is the unfortunate inheritance of the new administration. Yet as difficult and complex as our challenges are in the Middle East, we have an opportunity to chart a new and different course. Seizing this opportunity will require more than just a plan for the accelerated defeat of ISIS. We have to raise our sights, look beyond the tactical and operational fight, and start answering some basic but difficult strategic questions. What enduring objectives do we hope to achieve across the Middle East? How will we achieve those goals, and on what timeline, and at what cost?

In Iraq, Mosul will be retaken eventually, but that will only likely reignite the battle for the future of Iraq, a battle in which we have an important stake. What is
America’s policy and strategy to deal with the problems that lie ahead: combating the malign influence of Iran and its militias, addressing the future of the Kurds and their place in Iraq, and attenuating the disenfranchisement of Sunni Iraqis that gave rise to ISIS in the first place?

Likewise in Syria, I believe Raqqa will eventually be liberated. But the closer we come to that day, the more it becomes clear that we cannot avoid difficult questions about Syria any longer. What is America’s policy and strategy concerning a political transition in Syria, the future of Assad and his regime, the fate of the Kurds in Syria, and the influence of extremist forces from Sunni terrorists to Iranian-backed militias? In short, what is America’s vision of an end-state in Syria?

In Libya, the ISIS stronghold in Sirte has been degraded. But what remains is a divided nation littered with independent militias, flooded with arms, and searching in vain for legitimate governance and political unity. What is America’s policy and strategy for addressing these conditions, which unless confronted will make Libya fertile ground for extremism and anti-Western terrorism?

In Afghanistan, we have settled for a strategy of “don’t lose.” And the result is that last month, General Nicholson testified before this committee that this war is now in a stalemate after 15 years of fighting. After 15
years of fighting, we are in a stalemate. What is America’s policy and strategy for rolling back a resurgent Taliban, for addressing the terrorist sanctuaries within Pakistan’s borders, and pushing back against Iranian and Russian meddling? In short, what does victory look like in Afghanistan, and what is our strategy for achieving it?

Across the region, Russian and Iranian influence is growing at America’s expense. Russia and Iran even hosted Syrian peace talks in Moscow last year without America present at the table.

Russia’s cruise missiles crisscross the region while its aircraft indiscriminately target Syrian civilians. Iran’s proxies wield lethal rockets and ballistic missiles with impunity, sensing that the nuclear deal shields them from American pressure. What is America’s policy and strategy to counter Russian and Iranian malign influence that often manifests itself below the threshold of open conflict? How do we restore the trust of our regional allies and partners and convince them to forego hedging strategies that only add to uncertainty and instability?

These are the major policy and strategy questions hanging in the balance. The stakes are high, not just for the stability of the Middle East and Africa, but for America’s national security. It is not the job of our witnesses to provide answers to these questions. That is
the job of the President, his administration, and the
Congress. We owe our witnesses and the men and women they
lead unambiguous national security priorities, clarity in
our strategic thinking, and an unwavering commitment to
provide them the resources required to support the necessary
courses of action.

Once again, I want to thank our witnesses for appearing
before the committee today and look forward to hearing how
the military efforts will help us achieve favorable
strategic outcomes.

Senator Reed?
STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND

Senator Reed: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses not only for your appearing here today but for your extraordinary service to the Nation over many, many years. And also please relay our thanks to the men and women that you lead, and we appreciate their efforts extraordinarily so.

You are in a situation of very challenging times in all of the areas of operation. This hearing is especially timely, given unfolding events on the ground in Iraq and Syria and the reported completion of a proposed strategy to accelerate efforts against ISIS. Our assistance to partners on the ground is helping them to make steady progress in reclaiming areas of Iraq and Syria once held by ISIS, most notably in Mosul.

However, the situation in Syria seems to get more complicated by the day as different actors on the ground pursue divergent goals. Russia’s continued support for the Assad regime fuels the country’s civil war, enables the abuse and killing of the Syrian population, and allows ISIS to exploit the resulting instability for its own gains. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford met with his Russian and Turkish counterparts just this week to discuss deconflicting operations in Syria, a battlespace
that has become increasingly complicated as U.S., Turkish, Russian, Iranian, Assad regime, and local partner forces converge in northern Syria. And, General Votel, we look forward to your update on these particular issues.

According to public reports, the Defense Department has presented the White House with a draft strategy to accelerate progress against ISIS. While details of the strategy have not been publicly released, reports indicate that it retains many of the core elements of the strategy put in place under the Obama administration. General Dunford has described the strategy as a “political-military plan” and a “whole of government approach” requiring important contributions from other non-DOD departments and agencies, most notably the State Department.

This is why it is so concerning to me that the Trump administration’s budget would apparently cut the State Department by a reported 37 percent at the very time that we need a surge of diplomatic and other assistance efforts to achieve the political conditions necessary to ultimately prevail in our fight against ISIS. As then General and now Secretary of Defense Mattis warned this committee, “if you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition.” We just cannot keep buying bullets as the Trump administration is proposing.

General Waldhauser, the importance of a robust
interagency is perhaps of even greater importance in your area of responsibility, where you are primarily working by, with, and through partner military forces in conjunction with U.S. interagency efforts. General, as you share your assessment of current and future AFRICOM efforts in places like Libya and Somalia, I look forward to hearing the ways you are incorporating a whole of government approach into your planning. Such incorporation is particularly important in places like these where conflict resolution will ultimately rely less on the military toolkit and more on generating the proper political conditions to sustain and build upon security gains.

Turning back the CENTCOM AOR, over the last few years, there has been a persistent focus on Iran’s nuclear program and appropriately so. We passed the 1-year anniversary of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, in January, and Iran appears to be living up to its commitments under this agreement. However, the JCPOA only addresses one facet of the challenge posed by Iran. Its destabilizing activities in the region, ballistic missile development efforts, and unprofessional and dangerous behavior in the maritime environment continue. Sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program were successful because of the extraordinary unity within the international community. We must approach the remaining
challenges in a similar way if we are to be successful in
calming Iran’s behavior. Any new sanctions must be
carefully applied in concert with our international partners
so that we do not give Iran a pretext to withdraw from the
JCPOA and risk reversing the progress that has been made on
limiting their nuclear ambitions.

Last month, as the chairman indicated, General Mick
Nicholson, Commander of Resolute Support and U.S. Forces-
Afghanistan, testified that despite significant security
gains and political efforts, Afghanistan is currently facing
a stalemate. Further complicating the security landscape
are the range of external actors, including Iran, Russia,
and Pakistan, who seem intent upon interfering with the
stability in Afghanistan. It was General Nicholson’s
assessments that increased troop levels for the NATO train,
advise, and assist mission, as well as the continued growth
in the size and capability of the Afghan Air Force, would be
necessary to break the stalemate.

General Votel, the committee would benefit from hearing
your assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan and
what can be done to protect the hard-won progress that has
been achieved and ensure that further progress is made.

Again, thank you both for your continued service to the
Nation, and I look forward to your testimony.

Chairman McCain: I welcome the witnesses. And your
written statements will be made part of the record. We will begin with you, General Votel. And welcome and thanks for the service that you both render to our Nation.
STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA, COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

General Votel: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the current posture and state of readiness of the United States Central Command.

I am very pleased to appear today with my good friend and highly respected brother in arms, General Tom Waldhauser.

I come before you today on behalf of the outstanding men and women of the command, military, civilians, and contractors, along with our coalition partners representing nearly 60 nations. Our people are the very best in the world at what they do, and I could not be more proud of them and their families. Without question, they are the strength of our Central Command team.

I have been in command of CENTCOM for about a year now. It has been an incredibly busy and productive period. Over the past 12 months, we have dealt with a number of significant challenges in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt in the Sinai, the Bab al Mandeb Strait, and elsewhere throughout our area of responsibility. We are making progress in many areas, but as you know, there is much work that remains.
We are also dealing with a range of malign activities perpetrated by Iran and its proxies operating in the region. It is my view that Iran poses the greatest long-term threat to stability for this part of the world.

Generally speaking, the central region remains a highly complex area, widely characterized by pervasive instability and conflict. The fragile security environments, which reflect a variety of contributing factors, including heightened ethno-sectarian tensions, economic uncertainty, weak or corrupt governance, civil wars, and humanitarian crises are exploited by violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. These groups have clearly indicated their desire and intent to attack the U.S. homeland, our interests abroad, and the interests of our partners and allies.

At the same time, the central region is increasingly crowded with external nation states such as Russia and China, and they are pursuing their own interests and attempting to shift alliances.

The point that I would emphasize to you is this, that while there may be other more strategic or consequential threats in regions in the world today, the central region has come to represent the nexus for many of the security challenges our Nation faces. And most importantly, the threats in region continue to pose the most direct threat to
the U.S. homeland and the global economy. Thus, it must remain a priority and be resourced and supported accordingly.

The team at U.S. Central Command remains appropriately focused on doing what is necessary to protect our national interests and those of our partners. Our strategic approach is straightforward: prepare, pursue, and prevail. And I will explain what I mean by that.

We prepare the environment to ensure an effective posture. We actively pursue opportunities to strengthen relationships and support our interests, and when we do put our forces into action, we prevail in our assigned missions.

I would also point out to you that today to the credit and professionalism of our armed forces and coalition partners, we are executing campaigns in the central region with significantly fewer U.S. forces on the ground than in previous years. As you have seen clearly demonstrated in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere throughout our area of responsibility, we have adopted a by, with, and through approach that places a heavy reliance on indigenous forces. While this approach does present some challenges and can be more time-consuming, it is proving effective and is likely to pay significant dividends going forward.

Indigenous force partners continue to build needed capability and capacity and they are personally invested in
the conduct of operations and thus inclined to do what is
necessary to preserve the gains they have achieved going
forward.

We also have a vested interest in ensuring increased
stability and security in this strategically important
central region. To this end, I will close by highlighting
three areas where I do believe, if we apply the appropriate
amount of energy and effort, we can and will have a lasting
impact in this part of the world.

First, we must restore trust with our partners in the
region while at the same time maintaining the strong trust
of our leadership here in Washington. The fact is we cannot
surge trust in times of crisis, and we must do what is
necessary now to assure our partners of our commitment and
our staying power.

Second, we must link our military objectives and
campaigns as closely as possible to our policy objectives
and our other instruments of national power. In other
words, we must rely on our military objectives and our soft
power capability with desired national and regional
strategic end states, recognizing that if we do not do this,
we risk creating space for our adversaries to achieve their
strategic aims.

Finally, we must make sure that we are postured for
purpose in the region. We must have credible, ready, and
present force, coupled with foreign military sales and foreign military financing programs that serve to build and shape partner nations’ capability in a timely and effective fashion.

Ours is a challenging and important mission. Much is at stake today in the central region. We recognize this fact, and I assure you that the CENTCOM team stands ready and willing to do what is necessary to protect our national interests and the interests of our allies and partners.

Let me close by thanking the committee for the strong support that you continue to provide to the world-class team at United States Central Command and particularly to our forces located forward in the region. As I said at the outset, the 80,000-plus soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen, and civilians that make up the command are truly the very best in the world at what they do, and I could not be more proud of them and their families. I know that you are proud of them as well.

Thank you again, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Votel follows:]
Chairman McCain: Thank you.

General Waldhauser?
STATEMENT OF GENERAL THOMAS D. WALDHAUSER, USMC,
COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

General Waldhauser: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the activities and efforts of United States Africa Command.

I would like to also say it is an honor for me to sit next to my battle buddy here, General Votel.

For the past 9 months, I have been honored to lead the men and women of this geographic combatant command. Africa is an enduring interest for the United States. Small, but wise investments in the capability, legitimacy and accountability of African defense institutions offer disproportionate benefits to America, our allies, the United States, and most importantly, enable African solutions to African problems.

Parts of Africa remain a battleground between ideologies, interests, and values. Equality, prosperity, and peace are often pitted against extremism, oppression, and conflict.

Today trans-regional violent extremist organizations on the continent constitute the most direct security threat to the United States. To address this threat, our military strategy articulates a long-term, regionally focused
approach for a safe and stable Africa.

Specifically, the strategy outlines an Africa in which regional organizations and states are willing and capable partners addressing African security challenges all while promoting United States’ interests. The Africa Command strategy builds our partners’ abilities to direct, manage, and operate capable and sustainable defense institutions. While we have achieved progress in implementing our strategy, threats and challenges still remain.

In East Africa, we support African Union and European Union efforts to neutralize al Shabaab and other violent extremist organizations operating in Somalia. And we also support the eventual transfer of security responsibilities from the African Union mission in Somalia to the Somali National Security Forces.

In 2016, al Shabaab regained some previously held Somalia territory, and today the group continues to conduct attacks on AMISOM forces, the national security forces of Somalia, as well as the federal government of Somalia.

Additionally, we have also seen elements of ISIS begin to make inroads into Somalia, which will further test AMISOM forces and the federal government of Somalia as well.

The instability in Libya in North Africa caused by years of political infighting may be the most significant near-term threat to the U.S.’s and allies’ interests on the
continent. Stability in Libya is a long-term proposition. We must maintain pressure on the ISIS-Libya network and concurrently support Libya’s efforts to reestablish a legitimate and unified government. This is a significant challenge, and we must carefully choose where and with whom we work and support in order to counter ISIS-Libya and not to shift the balance between various factions and risks of sparking greater conflict in Libya.

In West Africa, our primary focus is countering and degrading Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. Since 2011, Boko Haram has consistently carried out attacks against civilians and targeted partner regional governments and military forces in the Lake Chad Basin region. With forces from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, we are working with the multinational joint task force located in Niger to enable regional cooperation and expand partner capacity to ensure Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa do not further destabilize the region.

The multinational joint task force has been successful in enabling multinational cooperation and coordinating multinational operations and placed a significant pressure on Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa.

In Central Africa, through the combined efforts of military forces, civilian agencies, and nongovernmental organizations, we work to build the capacity of our partners
to address regional threats, such as maritime security, illicit trafficking of goods and persons, the Lord’s Resistance Army, and other criminal networks and enterprises.

Africa-wide we support the efforts to enable African partners to respond to humanitarian crises, mass atrocities, disaster contingencies, and to support peace operations. Through the United States National Guard’s State Partnership Program, along with their African partners, we have improved disaster management competency and readiness to assist civilian-led efforts. We continue to see great value in the National Guard’s persistent engagement and fully support the State Partnership Program’s efforts.

Africa’s security environment is dynamic and complex requiring innovative solutions. Even with limited resources or capabilities, Africa Command aggressively works with partners and allies to execute our missions and mitigate risk. Moving forward, we continue to focus our decisive effort on building African partner capacity and will continue to work closely with the international and interagency partners to make small, wise investments which pay huge dividends in building stable and effective governments, the foundation for long-term security in Africa.

I am confident with your support Africa Command will
protect and promote United States’ interests and keep the
United States safe from threats emanating from the African
continent

And finally, on behalf of the United States Africa
Command, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be with
you this morning, and I also look forward to your questions.
Thank you.

[The prepared statement of General Waldhauser follows:]
Chairman McCain: Thank you, General.

General Votel, do you agree that we are in a stalemate in Afghanistan after 15 years?

General Votel: Mr. Chairman, I do.

Chairman McCain: And in some measurements, maybe you could argue that when we go from control of 72 percent of the country to 52 percent, that is worse than a stalemate.

Would you agree that one of the most disturbing things about the attack on the hospital yesterday -- that attack was carried out by ISIS, not by the Taliban, which shows at least to this person that we are seeing an increase in influence of ISIS, as well as Russia providing weapons and the Iranians playing a greater role than in the past.

I guess my question is, are we developing a strategy to break the stalemate, and is it going to require additional U.S. troops?

General Votel: Mr. Chairman, the answer to your question is yes, we are developing a strategy, and we are in discussions with the Secretary and the Department right now. Both General Nicholson and I are forming our best advice and recommendations to the Secretary, and we look forward to moving forward with that.

I do believe it will involve additional forces to ensure that we can make the advise and assist mission more effective.
Chairman McCain: Already you have received a capability on rules of engagement which enhance your abilities to combat the enemy. Is that correct?

General Votel: That is correct.

Chairman McCain: We have got a very interesting and challenging situation in Syria, and that is the whole issue of the Kurds, our relationship with them, Erdogan’s relationship with them, the importance of the use of Insurlik, the importance of our relationship with Turkey. And I met with President Erdogan in Ankara recently. He is passionately opposed to Kurdish involvement and our support of the Kurds that I understand are going to be a very vital element in expediting the retaking of Raqqa.

This is a complex situation, and it would take all my time, as you know, to go through all this. But I think there is a possibility of an impending conflict between Turkey and the Kurds as opposed to us all working together to try to defeat ISIS and remove them from Raqqa. Do you see that as a scenario that we should be concerned about?

General Votel: I do, Mr. Chairman, and to that end, we are trying to take actions to prevent that from occurring.

Chairman McCain: Well, we find ourselves in kind of a strange situation that we and the Russians are allied against the Turks, as far as the Kurds are concerned. Is that a correct assessment?
General Votel: I would not necessarily say that we are aligned against the Turks. We certainly understand what their interests are and we understand their concerns about the partners that we are working with. Turkey is a vital partner in this effort here. We could not do what we are doing without them. So our efforts are to try to work through this tension through dialogue, through information, and through identifying alternatives that give us a way to move forward against ISIS without damaging the long-term relationship with a NATO partner.

Chairman McCain: Well, as you know, we are working with the Kurds and arming and training them, and they are a very effective fighting force, the same Kurds that Erdogan has labeled as a terrorist organization and, in the view of some, a greater threat to Turkey than ISIS is. Who is going to sort all this out?

General Votel: Well, I think there certainly has to be an effort, Mr. Chairman, at the military level, and there has to be an effort at the political level to address this. Chairman McCain: I am not sure there is an understanding of how seriously Erdogan views this issue, and I am not sure we appreciate the importance of the role that Turkey plays in our effort to retake Raqqa particularly in the use of Insurlik and other activities that require Turkish cooperation. Unless something changes, I foresee a
train wreck here, and I am not sure that the administration recognizes how seriously particularly President Erdogan views the threat that he views that the Kurds oppose.

Finally, General Waldhauser, let us talk about Libya a second. Who is the most powerful influence in Libya today? And briefly, what is the answer to this chaos?

General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator.

It is difficult to say who is the most powerful partner right now inside Libya. If you took polls, you would see that the Libyan National Army has got great support in the east and the GNA has support in the west. So there needs to be accommodation of those two organizations in order to get to a political solution there.

Chairman McCain: Does it bother you that Haftar has been visiting with the Russians and went out to a Russian carrier? Obviously, now the Russians may be assuming a role in Libya that they never had before.

General Waldhauser: It is very concerning, Senator. Haftar has visited, as you said, on the carrier with the Russians. He has also visited in the country of Russia. Also this week, as reported in the open press, Siraj from the Government of National Accord has also visited Russia.

Chairman McCain: As is the case with Afghanistan that I mentioned, I hope we will be developing a strategy as regards to Libya as the volatility of that situation can
clearly lead to the rise of ISIS and other extremist
organizations, as I know you are well aware, General.

Senator Reed?

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

General Votel, you are now in the process of evaluating
the mission and the strategy. For many years, the mission
seemed to be very clear with respect to Syria and to Iraq of
degrade and defeat ISIS. Now there are activities
particularly around Manbij where you are in the process of
trying to separate forces. The issue here really is not
only define the mission, but preventing mission creep in
terms of starting to find ourselves committed not just to
destroying ISIS but to somehow refereeing a very complicated
situation with Russians, Assad forces, anti-Assad forces,
Turkish forces, Kurdish forces, and an array of other forces
that you can allude to.

How are you going to prevent that mission creep, or is
there that possibility?

General Votel: Well, thank you, Senator. Yes, I do
agree. If we are not careful, we could find ourselves in a
different situation. The presence of our forces in Manbij
is not new to just the current situation. They have
actually been on the ground since Manbij was secured here 6
or 7 months ago. And they are principally there to ensure
that ISIS is not able to reestablish itself in the area.
And we have undertaken a number of operations in that particular regard.

As the situation is currently played out, that is the principal focus of our elements there. They do have the benefit by virtue of being there to also provide overwatch and, I would add, a measure of assurance not just for our local partners on the ground there, but I would also suggest for our Turkish partners. We understand what their concerns are about undue Kurdish influence in this particular area. So the best way that we can keep an eye on that I think is through our well trained SOF forces on the ground.

Senator Reed: One of the areas I touched upon in my comments was the interagency. And, General Waldhauser, can you accomplish your mission in AFRICOM if you do not have rather robust support by the State Department and other agencies, including our European allies?

General Waldhauser: The short answer, Senator, is no, we cannot. We work very closely with various agencies, USAID, the State Department, and the like. I could give numerous examples if you would like of how we partner with them and how they contribute to development, which is so important in our mission.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

And, General Votel, likewise?

General Votel: I absolutely agree.
Senator Reed: As we go forward in terms of the new strategy that the President is asking for, one point he made was requesting a recommendation to change any U.S. rules of engagement and other U.S. policy restrictions that exceed the requirements of an international war. My sense is that the requirements and the authorities that the military has asked for is, one, they can do the job, but two, they also do things like minimize civilian casualties, provide for an appropriate relationship with the local populations, which helps you rather than hurts you. Is that still the sensitivity that you have? I mean, adherence to the minimum international law might not be the smartest military approach.

General Votel: Well, we conduct all of our operations, of course, in accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict, and we bring our values to the fight wherever we are.

I do not think those are particular limitations on us at this particular point. My advice here moving forward has been to ensure that our forces have the operational agility to maintain pressure and sustain our approach of presenting ISIS with multiple dilemmas and really pursuing a military strategy of simultaneous operations to really overwhelm them quickly. And so the preponderance of our discussions and our recommendations really fell within that area.

Senator Reed: But again, the rules that we have
adopted have been based on best military policy, not just adherence to arbitrary rules. We minimize casualties because it has an effect on the population that will hurt our operations. Is that correct?

General Votel: Senator, that is absolutely correct.

750,000 people in the west portion of Mosul. And so we certainly have to conduct our operations with the full knowledge that that is the situation.

Senator Reed: Again, gentlemen, thank you for your service, and I look forward to continuing these discussions. Thank you.

Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe?

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Waldhauser, as you and I discussed in my office, Senator Rounds and I just returned from several areas in your command. You know, when you stop and look at it, it seems like it has been shorter than that, but it has been 10 years since we started AFRICOM. And the continent used to be divided in three different commands. Now, since that time, we have had a lot of successes.

General Rodriguez, one of your predecessors said, Africa is an enduring interest to the United States and its importance will continue to increase as African economies, population, and influence grow. Do you agree with that statement?
General Waldhauser: Senator, I do.

Senator Inhofe: It was not long ago when Chuck Wald had the job that you have right now. He talked about the significance of Phase Zero. He actually wrote an article about the Phase Zero campaign, why is Phase Zero important, and how does it apply to AFRICOM. Could you make any comments about that?

General Waldhauser: Senator, thank you. What I would say to that question is that the ability to engage with the population and have such exercises and engagements with agencies, as was previously described, things like education, health care, jobs for the significant youth bulge that is in Africa is very, very important. We have got to get at these drivers that make these individuals, young men especially, want to join groups like al Shabaab. In order to get at that part of the problem, we need to be engaged with education, health care, jobs, and the like.

Senator Inhofe: To preclude something from happening, head it off at the pass. And I would agree with that.

We were also in Afghanistan, General Votel, and we met with our service members and, of course, the new President. And General Nicholson and I -- I think maybe we might be in my opinion -- and I might be influenced by the fact that I knew the new president’s predecessor, and there is no comparison. Summing up kind of what General Nicholson said
-- I will read this -- a need for a long-term coalition commitment to Afghanistan, a need for increased coalition forces for training and assisting the Afghan military, the strength and the commitment of the Afghan people who want to take their country back from the insurgents, shifting the focus to winning versus not losing, the high casualty rate among the Afghan forces, the increase in territory controlled by the Taliban, the importance of cutting the Taliban’s access to financing their operations.

Do you pretty much agree with his assessment with what the situation is there?

General Votel: I do, Senator.

Senator Inhofe: And do you think that maybe, when we get some of these less than optimistic reports in these committee hearings that we have, that you get a little bit different idea when you are actually there? And one of the things that I think we are not factoring in enough would be President Ghani. I would like to have your idea as to what a difference that can make because I can remember sitting there with his predecessor and then evaluating the situation, what his commitment is right now and what he really believes his people are going to be able to do.

General Votel: Senator, I absolutely agree with you. I do think we cannot overestimate the strategic advantage of having a leader like President Ghani in place. His
willingness to partner, his visionary ideas about this, and his general approach to bringing the coalition on board I think have been very good, and I think they provide us a very good opportunity to build upon. 

Senator Inhofe: With him and with your experience from the last fighting season that we had, since we are coming up now to the next fighting season, do you have any projection as to differences we might see with that leadership and where we are right now? 

General Votel: I think that we will continue to see very steady leadership from President Ghani and his government through the next fighting season. I think the challenge that we will have will be sustaining the Afghan forces as they move forward. As you have noted, as others have noted, they have absorbed a lot of casualties, and yet they have been resilient through that. But there is a need to ensure that they get into a normal operational cycle that allows them to recover, to rebuild themselves, to reset themselves, and then get back into the fight. And I think that as we move forward, that will be the challenge that General Nicholson and I will have to manage. 

Senator Inhofe: And I would agree with that. And I think that there is an effect that the new president has on the fighting troops over there, on theirs, that will yield a better performance.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: And the fighting season has begun earlier than ever in Afghanistan. True, General?

General Votel: I think the fighting season does not end. I agree with you, Senator.

Chairman McCain: Senator Peters?

Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to both of you today for testifying. I appreciate all that you do. You have a very difficult job and both of you do it with honor. So thank you so much for your service to our country.

I represent in Michigan probably the largest Arab American, Muslim American community here in the United States and had an opportunity just recently to meet with a number of community members at the Islamic Center and heard some great concern from the Yemeni American community as to what they are seeing in Yemen in terms of Saudi Arabia and the operations, what seems to be indiscriminate bombing, the killing of large numbers of civilians. I think, according to some estimates, close to 4,000 civilians have been killed in Yemen by a Saudi Arabian-led air campaign, which appears to them as indiscriminate and, according to them, does great damage to the United States. People see those Saudi attacks as related to the United States. There has been increasing recruitment for folks who want to do harm to the United
States because of the actions that are being undertaken by the Saudi Arabians.

So if you could comment, General Votel, a little bit about what is happening there to us, and what do you assess the cause of the large number of civilian casualties that we are seeing in Yemen and what can we do to reduce that?

General Votel: Thank you for the question, Senator.

I attribute those types of situations more to the competence of the forces that are operating there and their ability to properly target. As you are aware, we do not provide intelligence for those things. We do not make decisions for them.

But yet, we have a relationship with Saudi Arabia. And at my level and at levels below me, my air commander, a variety of subordinate commanders, we have engaged with our partner leaders in Saudi Arabia to talk to them about the effects of this and to provide opportunities for them to learn from our experience in terms of this and improve their capabilities in this particular regard. And I think they have done that.

In addition, I personally have reached out and talked to my counterpart about the importance of reaching out to international organizations like the ICRC, Doctors Without Borders, who also operate in these areas, and ask that they establish relationships and begin a discussion between the
Saudi Arabian Government and Ministry of Defense and these particular organizations so we can better understand what is happening on the ground and we can begin to work through this. And I am very happy to tell you that that is taking place now.

Senator Peters: So you would characterize this as a training issue as opposed to some other factor that is causing --

General Votel: I do not attribute it to deliberate decisions to target civilians. I attribute it to a growing need to develop a better and more precise targeting process for their operations.

Senator Peters: And are we able to assist them in that?

General Votel: We do not assist them directly with targeting on the ground, but we are able to, through our experience and through our people, engage them and help with their professionalism and give them the benefit of our experience and tactics, techniques, procedures, processes that we use to try to absolutely minimize those types of events. And we are doing that.

Senator Peters: Well, it is good to hear. Thank you.

General Votel, to move to Syria now, you were recently quoted in the "New York Times" about saying that we want to bring the right capabilities forward, not all of those
necessarily resident in the special operations community.

If we need additional artillery or things like that, I want
to bring those forward to augment our operations. And I
note today in the news there was an artillery unit that I
believe is being positioned in Syria now.

In your estimate, what is the right mix of conventional
and special operations forces that are going to be required
to succeed in Syria?

General Votel: Senator, I am not sure I can give you
an exact percentage-wise mix of this. But what I can tell
you is that the way that we operate today with our special
operations forces and unique capabilities they bring,
through our experience of the last 15 or 16 years, we have
become very comfortable and capable of operating together.

And so what I have pledged to our commanders and what I
expect from them is for them to ask for the capabilities
that we need and then for us to ensure that we have the
right command and control, the right force protection, the
right resources in place to ensure that it can function
properly together. And that to me is much more important
than a particular mix of whatever the capabilities are. I
think as we move more towards the latter part of these
operations into more of the stability and other aspects of
the operations, we will see more conventional forces
requirements perhaps.
Senator Peters: Thank you, General.

Chairman McCain: Senator Wicker?

Senator Wicker: Let us get back to Afghanistan, General Votel. Do the Afghan people support the presence of the United States there?

General Votel: I believe that they do, Senator.

Senator Wicker: And how do you measure that?

General Votel: I think we measure that by favorability ratings that we see of them for the Government of Afghanistan and the activities that they are pursuing. And I think we measure that through our direct contact with them with teams that we have out there on the ground and others that interact with the Afghan people on a regular basis.

Senator Wicker: And as a matter of fact, several years ago, there was a loya jirga convened of most Afghan leaders, and they overwhelmingly were in support of the United States presence there to protect them against what had happened before.

Has there been another loya jirga, or do we simply assume that the elected leadership of the government represents them?

General Votel: There has not been another loya jirga I think of the same scope that you referenced, Senator. But we do pay attention to the polling. I would note in some recent polls that I have seen, the favorability ratings for
the Taliban are very low in the 6 to 7 percent range as opposed to much, much higher for the Government of Afghanistan.

Senator Wicker: You had strong praise for President Ghani. How is the relationship there between the president and Mr. Abdullah who is his nearest competitor?

General Votel: It has improved significantly. And I contribute that directly to the engagement of our ambassadors on the ground who have personally invested in that and worked that relationship, and it has had a positive impact on our operations.

Senator Wicker: Well, that is good to hear.

Now, the information we have -- and the chairman alluded to this -- the Afghan Government controls 57 percent of the country’s districts. A year and a half ago, that figure was 72 percent. What happened?

General Votel: Senator, I would tell you that there are other numbers out there. We have some slightly different ones, but they are in the general ball park of what you are saying.

Senator Wicker: Generally, those numbers are correct.

General Votel: In general.

Senator Wicker: So there has been a significant drop, as the chairman said, in a year and a half.

General Votel: There have been areas that we would put
into the contested space area here that have increased over
the last year.

Senator Wicker: Your testimony would be that this has
not happened because the support among the Afghan people of
our efforts has diminished.

General Votel: I do not think so.

Senator Wicker: Something we did?

General Votel: I think this is the effect of the
fighting that is taking place and of the efforts by the
Taliban to be more resurgent in specific areas in
Afghanistan.

Senator Wicker: Well, okay. General Nicholson said in
talking about the stalemate that what will break the
stalemate are offensive capabilities such as special forces
and allowing the air force to overmatch the Taliban. Also
he said we have a shortfall of a few thousand troops in
Afghanistan for the train, advise, and assist mission.
Would you talk about those two aspects, and would you
support a few thousand more American troops to get the job
done in this mission?

General Votel: Senator, With respect to the last part
of your question, that is certainly a discussion we are
having with the Secretary right now. I will not pre-stage a
decision here. That is certainly his regard. But certainly
I agree with what General Nicholson’s approach is. And I do
agree that one of our efforts to improve the capabilities and equipment of the Afghan Air Force is a big part of this, as is improving and expanding their special operations capability.

Senator Wicker: Thank you.

General Waldhauser, the Wasp amphibious expedition did over 100 consecutive days of strikes. It is considered to be an impressive success. What lessons have we learned from that deployment, and are we sending you what you need to get the job done in that respect?

General Waldhauser: The Wasp and Marine aviation that was on board that ship was a significant contributor to the GNA forces and ridding Sirte of ISIS. Lessons learned at the tactical level have to do with coordination on the ground and special forces who were there on the ground, but I think it is important to point out that from 1 August until middle of December there were nearly 500 strikes. Most of them came from ISR platforms, but a lot of them, as you said, came from the ship. And I think the ability to have zero civilian casualties in a very, very dense urban environment underscores the training and the professionalism of those who were conducting that operation.

So in sum, that was a huge asset for us. We actually borrowed it from CENTCOM in order to make it happen, but that is how we have to do business these days. AFRICOM and
CENTCOM coordinate on various trans-regional asset changes, and that was an example where it worked very well.

Senator Wicker: Thank you, sir.

Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen?

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And General Votel and General Waldhauser, thank you both for your testimony and for your service.

General Votel, there has already been reference to the marines who have arrived in Syria. The “Washington Post” story this morning reports that the battalion landing team, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, will man the guns and deliver fire support for U.S.-backed local forces who are preparing an assault on the city.

First of all, is that accurate, and should we take that to mean an assault is imminent in Raqqa?

General Votel: Well, certainly we will not talk about any timings of any of our particular operations. But our intention here with this -- and this fell within the authorities that are provided to me right now was to ensure that we had redundant capable fire support on the ground to support our partners and ensure that we could take advantage of opportunities and ensure the continued progress that we have been seeing.

Senator Shaheen: And are you comfortable that that gives us that progress and support that we need?
General Votel: In conjunction with our excellent coalition air forces, yes, I am very confident that that will help us.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

Yesterday in our meeting -- and we heard similar comments from General Nicholson when he was here talking about Russian influence in Afghanistan. They are trying to legitimate the Taliban and undermine our mission and NATO’s mission there. Can you talk about what alternatives we have to respond to Russian activities there?

General Votel: I think the best alternative that we have is to ensure that we demonstrate our commitment to the mission that we have in place here with the Government of Afghanistan. Certainly with our twofold mission, we focused on counterterrorism and then, of course, the train, advise, and assist mission. So the most important thing we can do is send a very clear message that we are going to see this mission through and support the Government of Afghanistan in the way that they require with military capabilities and other things to ensure that they can be successful.

Senator Shaheen: And to what extent does our effort in Eastern Europe with NATO affect Russia’s ability to undermine what we are doing in Afghanistan? How much do they need to be focused on what is happening in Eastern Europe?
General Votel: From my perspective, I would like them totally focused on Eastern Europe and not on Afghanistan. I am being a little facetious here. I am not sure that I can comment that there is necessarily a direct relationship between that, Senator. Certainly I think if their attention can be drawn to other challenges, other problems that they are focused on, that helps us.

Senator Shaheen: General Waldhauser, in your statement, you point out that long-term success in slowing the progress of Boko Haram and ISIS in West Africa requires Nigeria to address development, governance, and economic deficiencies, which are drivers of terrorism in that region. As we look at the future where one in four Africans are Nigerian, what happens in Nigeria has a huge impact on what happens throughout the rest of Africa. Do you agree with that?

General Waldhauser: I most definitely do. With 182 million people in that country -- it is the seventh largest country in the world -- what happens there has a significant impact not only on the continent, but it could be in Europe and the United States as well.

Senator Shaheen: And to what extent do we feel like they are addressing the threat from Boko Haram and also addressing those deficiencies that have existed there?

General Waldhauser: Senator, 2 weeks ago, I was in
Abuja and talked with the acting vice president, and he is very, very aware of the fact that there is still much work that needs to be done in northeastern Nigeria both with Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. And I came away from that visit in a positive way because there have been some human rights issues with the Nigerians, but they are taking that on. I mean, they are making some progress there. But I think the acting vice president or acting president understands there is still a threat. Boko Haram has weakened a bit, but they are still a threat. ISIS-West Africa is still there and they are still a threat. But this Lake Chad Basin region task force has been doing fairly well with at least trying to keep the problem inside the Nigerian borders.

Senator Shaheen: And are they working to address the historic divisions between the Christian southern part of the country and the Muslim north? Are there any initiatives underway that help to resolve some of those historic conflicts?

General Waldhauser: Senator, I am not aware of any perse. I would just say that in my discussions with senior leadership there 2 weeks ago, they have a fairly wide-ranging and overarching strategy of where they want to go which ultimately will turn over northeastern Nigeria to the police forces.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer?

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Votel, since the nuclear deal with Iran was announced, Iran’s behavior in the region, its support for terrorism, and its domestic repression -- it appears to have gotten worse. Iran wields significant power in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, and it seeks to destabilize our key allies. What do you see as Iran’s goal in the region?

General Votel: Senator, I believe Iran seeks to be the regional hegemon, to be the most influential country in the region.

Senator Fischer: And how would you characterize Iran’s regional behavior since the nuclear agreement? Has it improved or has it worsened?

General Votel: I would describe it as destabilizing to the region. It has not been helpful to anything that I can see going on across the region.

Senator Fischer: How would you characterize Iran’s relationship with Russia in the region?

General Votel: Again, not having firsthand knowledge on that, I guess I would characterize it as they find areas of cooperation. I am particularly concerned how both Iran and Russia have cooperated to prop up the Assad regime and make them stronger. That is certainly of some concern. So
I do see that level of cooperation being very unhelpful to the things that we are doing across the region. I do not know what the long-term views of each of these countries might be and how that might play out, but it certainly looks like they are taking the opportunity of convenience to join efforts in some regard.

Senator Fischer: And I wanted to ask you your long-term view with regards to the United States and our position in the region, first of all, just with Iran’s destabilizing activities but also with their relationship with Russia. Can you give us in your best opinion how that affects the United States and our involvement?

General Votel: I can, Senator, and I will offer you my observation. It is based on my travels throughout the region over the last year and meeting with our partners across many of the countries. My consistent takeaway here is that the partners in the region would strongly prefer to have a relationship with the United States over any other nation that might be external to the Middle East. And I think that is an opportunity for us to move forward on. We have long-term historical relationships with many of these countries, and we should capitalize on that as we move forward. And I think that offers us the best opportunity.

Senator Fischer: As we look over the last year, we have seen Iran has escalated its harassment of our vessels,
our personnel in the Persian Gulf. And just last week, multiple fast attack vessels from the IRGC came close to a U.S. Navy ship in the Strait of Hormuz, and they forced it to change direction.

What is CENTCOM doing to address that harassment that we are seeing by Iran?

General Votel: First off, we are ensuring that our maritime forces have all the right rules of engagement and capabilities and training and techniques to deal with that, and I do believe they are effectively doing that. One of the first things I did after coming into command was get on a ship and go through the Straits of Hormuz so I could see it with my own eyes, and I was extraordinarily impressed with the maturity of our sailors and the judgment of our leaders as we went through that.

More broadly, I think we have to hold Iran accountable for their actions. No other nation operates the way they do in the Arabian Gulf. Nobody does that in the Arabian Gulf. And they need to be held accountable for that and they need to be exposed for those types of unprofessional, unsafe, and abnormal activities.

Senator Fischer: It sounds like you are very concerned with Iran’s growing asymmetrical capabilities, and that includes its acquisition of advanced cruise missiles, I would assume.
General Votel: It does, Senator.

Senator Fischer: What about naval mines, ballistic missiles, and UAVs? I guess when we are looking at our interests in the Persian Gulf and our allies’ interests in the Persian Gulf, how do those growing threats affect that?

General Votel: The way they affect us is they provide Iran with a layered capability where they can use their fast boats, they can use cruise missiles, they can use radars, they can use UAVs to potentially dominate specific areas. So this is a concern, and it is something that certainly we look at in our capabilities and it is something that we have engaged our partners in the region on on how we work together to mitigate the effects of that layered approach that Iran pursues in these critical chokepoints.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Warren?

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you for being here.

I would like to return to an issue raised by Senator Reed. There is a big debate going on right now, as you know, about military spending, and of course, we need a strong military. But the military is not the only element of our national security strategy. Spending on security outside the military budget is very small. Diplomacy and
development combined is about 1 percent of our annual
budget, but it includes programs that promote democracy,
human rights, the rule of law that boost economic growth,
that improve access to education, that fight hunger, that
treat infectious diseases, and it provides disaster relief
around the world.

General Votel and General Waldhauser, you command our
armed forces in some of the most active and dangerous parts
of the world. Do you think the activities of the State
Department and other civilian partners are a waste of time
and taxpayer money?

General Votel: I do not, Senator.

Senator Warren: Thank you.

General Waldhauser: Senator, nor do I. They are a big
part of what we do.

Senator Warren: Thank you. And I agree. But the
Trump administration’s blueprint budget would increase
defense spending in some areas by massively slashing through
other programs that are critical for our national security.
Not every international problem is the same and the right
tool is not always a military response. Recapping our State
Department by cutting an already small foreign aid budget
makes America less safe, and that is just not smart.

I would like to turn to another issue, and that is the
ongoing fight against ISIS in Iraq and in Syria. General
Votel, you contributed to the Pentagon’s plan to accelerate the fight against ISIS which Secretary Mattis delivered to the White House last week. I have every confidence that the U.S. military can defeat ISIS on the battlefield and help retake strategically important cities.

But what I want to ask you is about what comes next. You are going to be mediating between armed opposition forces that dislike each other intensely in cities where existing infrastructure has been completely destroyed with a population that has been traumatized and displaced. What will it take to create conditions for normal life to resume in Mosul and Raqqa?

General Votel: I think it starts certainly following up our military operations with good local governance and addressing humanitarian aid, addressing issues like demining, of restoring basic services to the people, of trying to bring additional aid in there so small businesses and other things can get going, and then the bigger aspects of governance can begin to take place. And so as we look at our military operations, particularly as we look at places like Raqqa or Mosul, what we have tried to do is ensure that our military planning is very closely linked to the political planning, what comes next so that we do not just finish a military operation and then just leave. It is important that we have local hold forces. It is important
that we predetermine local governance that is going to come in and begin to take this over. So I think that is an extraordinarily important point. The transition from military operations to the stability operations and things that come next I think is a significant lesson learned for us -- relearned for us many times, and it is something that we have specifically focused on in this campaign.

Senator Warren: Thank you. I am very glad to hear that, General. Planning for peace is hard. We did not do it after we toppled Saddam Hussein, and we are still paying a price for that blindness today. I do not want to see us turn around and make that same mistake again. I think we need to be very careful that we do not create an environment that breeds the next generation of extremists, and I am grateful for your work in this area. I am grateful to both of you for all that you are doing. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed [presiding]: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Cotton.

Senator Cotton: Thank you.

Gentlemen, welcome back to the committee.

General Waldhauser, you were speaking with Senator Shaheen about Nigeria and the role that it plays not just in the African continent but around the world. Could you speak a little bit about what President Buhari’s absence from the
country means and what the status is right now of Nigerian politics for the committee?

General Waldhauser: Senator, I would just have to say that open source reporting indicates that he is still in London receiving medical help. That was a topic that was not discussed with officials when I was there.

But what I did observe was acting President Osinbajo has done extremely well. He is very competent. He has a, I would say, very wide view of the problems and issues, and he seems to want to get after them. And he was definitely genuinely interested in making things happen, and I thought we had some very frank discussions with him on the way ahead with regard to our support for the defeat of ISIL-West Africa and Boko Haram.

Senator Cotton: What is the level of political consensus and stability between the north and the south in that country right now?

General Waldhauser: I really could not give you a fair assessment of that. It was not part of the discussion. We did not have that topic.

Senator Cotton: I understand.

Looking to the east, would you please discuss the strategic implications of China’s new base in Djibouti and what it means for our presence there and throughout the Horn of Africa?
General Waldhauser: So the Chinese base is right outside Camp Lemonnier, about 4 miles or so from our base. The intention for that location was to provide a port for their ships to have in the area. They have about 2,200 peacekeepers on the continent. This is the first time for them that they have kind of journeyed in that direction. So right now, it is due to be completed later this summer.

I would just say the concern that I have from an operational perspective is the operational security when we operate so close to a Chinese base. And the Camp Lemonnier-Djibouti area is not only AFRICOM, but CENTCOM uses it, SOCOM uses it, TRANSCOM, EUCOM, and the like. So it is a very strategic location, and visiting Djiboutian officials twice, I have talked with their president and expressed our concerns about some of the things that are important to us about what the Chinese can or cannot do at that location.

Senator Cotton: Thank you.

General Votel, you have already spoken with several Senators this morning about the stalemate in Afghanistan. For many years now, we on this committee and many leaders in the executive branch have been lamenting the existence of sanctuaries for the Taliban and other terrorist groups in Pakistan. As you think about the strategy to break this stalemate, what is the role of eliminating those sanctuaries inside of Pakistan? How do you plan to get after this
longstanding problem?

    General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

    Pakistan, of course, remains a key partner in this fight here. I have been encouraged by my meetings with the new Chief of Army Staff, General Bajwan, and his commitment to help address this. They have done some things that have been helpful to us. Most recently they have supported General Nicholson in some operations along the border, making sure that they were well coordinated and doing the activities on their side of the border. That is a very positive sign and a move in the right direction. And they have done things against the principal concerns that we have, the Haqqani Network and Taliban. But what we do need is we need that to be more persistent and continue to focus in that particular area. And so we will continue to engage with Pakistan throughout this.

    I think it is key to ensure that Pakistan and Afghanistan have a very good relationship. There certainly are tensions along the common border between those countries. And I think a key role that we can play is in helping move that relationship forward.

    Senator Cotton: Let me ask you about a seam on the map between you and Harry Harris, but it is an important seam because it involves Pakistan and Afghanistan and India and PACOM. To what extent do you think Pakistan’s Afghan policy
is driven in part by its India policy and, in particular, whether an independent Afghanistan conducting its own foreign policy might be adverse to Pakistani interests?

General Votel: Senator, I think Pakistan’s view of the region I think as they look at their interests, it plays very largely in how they look at both sides of their country.

Senator Cotton: One final question. Since the 1970s, Russia’s influence throughout the Middle East has been minimal, thanks in large part to the diplomacy of Henry Kissinger and Presidents Nixon and Ford. How would you assess the level of Russia’s influence in the region today?

General Votel: Russia is attempting to increase their influence throughout the Middle East, as we have seen in Syria. We have seen them do things certainly with our longstanding partner Egypt and others across the region. So it is my view that they are trying to increase their influence in this critical part of the globe.

Senator Cotton: Do you think they have been successful in any of those attempts thus far?

General Votel: Well, they certainly have been successful in supporting the Assad regime, and so that is certainly an example of that. I am hopeful that we will be able to reassert our own relationships as well.

Senator Cotton: Thank you, gentlemen.
Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator King.

Senator King: Thank you, Senator Reed.

General Votel, let us talk about four areas where we are engaged in conflict: Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

By the way, I want to compliment you on your written statement. It is a primer on the region that I think should be required reading for everyone in this body. It is very well done, very thoughtful, and comprehensive.

Who are our allies in Iraq? Who are we fighting next to? The ISF. Right?

General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

Senator King: And the Kurds.

General Votel: The Peshmerga in the northern part of Iraq.

Senator King: And what religion are the members of the ISF and the Kurds?

General Votel: They are Muslims.

Senator King: And in Syria we have got the Syrian Democratic Forces and also the Kurds?

General Votel: We have Syrian Kurds and we are working with local Syrian Arabs, Turkmen and in some cases local Christian forces.

Senator King: But the vast majority of those forces
are Muslim. Is that correct?

General Votel: That is correct.

Senator King: And in Yemen, UAE, Saudi Arabia, those forces are Muslim?

General Votel: Absolutely.

Senator King: And in Afghanistan, the ANSF, the Afghan National Security Forces, also Muslim?

General Votel: They are Muslim.

Senator King: One of the statements you made in your opening comments was that our strategy rests upon, quote, a heavy reliance on indigenous forces. Is that correct?

General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

Senator King: And it is fair to say that the vast majority of those indigenous forces are Muslim.

General Votel: That is the case today.

Senator King: So it would be a mistake as a matter of national policy, rhetoric, or discussion if we attempted to alienate or marginalize Muslim citizens of anywhere in the world because these are our allies in all of the fights that we are engaged in in your area. Is that not correct?

General Votel: I believe it is correct, Senator.

Senator King: And you talked about restoring trust with our partners in the region. Our partners in the region are all based upon Muslim societies. Is that not correct?

General Votel: They largely are. It is largely a
Muslim area.

Senator King: The second area -- and this has been discussed to some extent but again it is in your report on page 3 and 5 of your statement. The goals that you define cannot be accomplished solely through military means, you say. The military can help create the necessary conditions. There must be concomitant progress in other complementary areas, reconstruction, humanitarian aid, stabilization, political reconciliation. On page 5, you say, however, solely a military response is not sufficient. This must be accomplished through a combination of capabilities if we are going to achieve and sustain our strongest deterrence posture.

Again, just to put a fine point on what has been discussed previously, to solely rely on military strength in solving these very complex and difficult problems would be a serious mistake. Would you agree?

General Votel: I would agree, Senator. I think we have to have a combination of all of our elements of power, hard power and soft power.

Senator King: Thank you.

Next question. This is a slightly different subject. You work with a lot of these allies. You work with these countries, with Iraq and other countries in the region. How would it be received in the Arab world if the United States
relocates its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem without a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

General Votel: I think from my personal discussions with some in the region, I think that it would create some challenges for some of those countries.

Senator King: Some challenges? Can you expand?

Serious challenges?

General Votel: It could potentially be very serious.

Senator King: And does that include our staunch ally Jordan?

General Votel: I believe, yes, sir, it does, Senator.

Senator King: Thank you.

Final question to both of you. Foreign military sales and foreign military financing programs -- are they appropriately calibrated to meet your needs in the region? My sense is that that is an area where we could use some work.

General Votel: From my perspective, Senator, the importance of the foreign military sales and foreign military funding programs is to help build capability for our partners that is interoperable with us. They generally want to buy U.S. equipment because it comes along with training. It comes along with sustainment, and it makes them more interoperable with us. I think we have to take a long-term view in terms of this, and I think it is in our
interests for our partners in the region to use capabilities that are interoperable with ours.

Senator King: General Waldhauser, in just a few seconds I have left, a quick update on the status of ISIS in Libya.

General Waldhauser: The status of ISIS in Libya is they right now are regrouping. They are in small numbers, small groups. We tried to develop the intelligence, but after they left Sirte, we developed intelligence. We bombed them on January 18th and they were in the southern part of Libya. They have scattered again now. They are in small groups trying to regroup.

Senator King: No longer control Sirte.

General Waldhauser: Correct. No longer control Sirte. They were out of Sirte in the middle of December.

Senator King: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain [presiding]: By the way, General Votel, just to complicate things further, Barzani, the leader of the Iraqi Kurds, does not support the KRG, the Syrian Kurds. Right?

General Votel: That is correct, Chairman.

Senator King: Senator Ernst?

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, gentlemen, for being here today and your
General Votel, we had an interesting conversation the other day, and as the chair of the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, you mentioned something to me that I thought was very interesting and something that I am concerned about. And that is the increasing threat that is posed by ISIS’s ability to use drones. We had a great conversation about that. And what they are using you say was kind of a modified commercial, off-the-shelf drone. And can you tell us about that emerging threat and maybe describe for those on the committee exactly what they are using and what those capabilities are?

General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

What we are seeing I think are commercially acquired drones. They are generally quadcopters that are available I think very easily by anybody online or at other places, hobbyist locations. And what they are able to do is, obviously, operate them for purposes of their own surveillance, and as we have seen in the news, in some cases they have been able to rig grenades and other things to them. So they have been able to achieve some effects with that.

So it is concerning to our partners. It is certainly concerning to us. And I think it is a reminder of just how savvy and challenging of an enemy that we are dealing with
here, and I think it requires us to make sure that we are
equally savvy in our approach to this, making sure we have
the right tools to defend against these types of threats.

Senator Ernst: Absolutely. Thank you. It reminds me
of the early part of the Iraq war when the forces were using
remote controlled cars with explosives as a first form of
IEDs. And of course, through the years, they grew
technologically advanced. And so I see something so simple
as this that could become much more complicated over time.

Do the Iraqi forces have the capabilities to defeat
those drones?

General Votel: We are working on providing them the
capabilities. Right now, they enjoy protection against
these threats in a number of areas largely because we have
capabilities with our forces that are accompanying them and
are located in their locations.

Senator Ernst: Very good. Thank you.

And we also spoke about troop numbers yesterday and how
random some of those numbers tend to be when you have that
artificial boundary of a country line between Iraq and
Syria. And if you could, please share with the committee
what is our role in that. Should that role of troop numbers
and where those troops are located be left up to our on-the-
ground combatant commanders? If you could just share a
little bit of that conversation.
General Votel: Senator, I think the more we can provide agility for our commanders on the ground to make decisions about where they need forces and when they need it, I think that is the most appropriate thing that can be done. I think we are most successful when we enable our very good and well qualified leaders and people on the ground to make decisions in the situations in which they see it. So I am for making sure that we try to provide them the agility and the process around that. We certainly understand why it is important to look at things like numbers and stuff like that. It certainly drives our resources and budgeting and other aspects of that. So that certainly has to be taken into consideration. But I look at this more from a flexibility and agility standpoint for our commanders on the ground.

Senator Ernst: Thank you very much.
And, General Waldhauser, thank you as well.
As you know, Tunisia has sent more foreign fighters than any other country to join the ranks of ISIS abroad. In addition to supplying the foreign fighters, Tunisia struggles with containing the terrorist activity on their own soil, so much that they have had a physical wall built along the border with Libya in an attempt to deter terrorists from entering their country.

Is AFRICOM currently equipped to address the potential
influx of ISIS fighters returning home to Tunisia as we
strike them elsewhere, whether it is in the Middle East or
other places?

General Waldhauser: Senator, I would have to
classify Tunisia as one of the bright spots on the
continent. They are in the process of transforming their
military to be more capable of dealing with terrorist
threats. They have purchased equipment from the United
States, which we are helping them with right now,

helicopters and the like. We have people on the ground who
are training, advising, and assisting their special
operations forces. And I believe the wall that you refer to
is technical equipment provided by DTRA, as well as Germany,
to help them contain the foreign fighter flow back and forth
between especially Libya and Tunisia.

But the bottom line is they are a bright spot. I
visited them twice, and they are headed in the right
direction. They are struggling with what to do with foreign
fighters who return, but again, I think that is not a
negative against them.

Senator Ernst: Very good. Well, I appreciate it.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for your input.

Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator

Blumenthal.
Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank both of you for your service and, as you did in your testimony, General Votel, the outstanding men and women under both your commands who make us proud and who are doing such great work under your command. I want to join Senator King in thanking you for your testimony, which is a very, very enlightening for me, elucidating outline of the challenges and I would note for my colleagues particularly in your description of the next generation of cyber warriors or the use of cyber warfare by our adversaries going from the rather rudimentary weapons of the roadside bombs to the much more sophisticated use of cyber and, as my colleague has pointed out, drones and other challenges that face us there.

I want to focus on Iran. In response to Senator Fischer’s question about whether Iranian aggression has increased since the nuclear treaty, you pointed out that their conduct there has been destabilizing -- the word you used was “destabilizing” -- and abnormal. And, of course, we know Iran has tested an anti-ship ballistic missile there, a new Russian made S-300 missile air defense system, as well as harassing a Navy ship, the USS Invincible, in the Strait of Hormuz by sending an Iranian frigate within, I think, 150 yards, smaller boats within 600 yards. Last month, the Iranians fired a medium-range ballistic missile
in violation of the U.S. Security Council resolution resulting in United States sanctions enforcement against 25 individuals and entities. That action was in violation of the U.N. resolution. But none of these other activities are in violation of the nuclear agreement. Are they?

General Votel: My understanding, Senator, is the nuclear agreement did not address any of those other aspects of the Iranian threat.

Senator Blumenthal: But would you agree with me that they do demand a response from the United States?

General Votel: I would absolutely agree, Senator.

Senator Blumenthal: And much more aggressive not only sanctions but warnings and actions against their partners in this effort, most prominently the Russians.

General Votel: I would agree. I think we should use a combination of both diplomatic and other security-related tools here, economic tools to address this concern.

Senator Blumenthal: Would you agree with me that the Russians through the Iranians, in effect, are testing us in that area because they are, in effect, aiding and abetting the Iranians in this increasing destabilizing activity?

General Votel: Well, I would, Senator, and I would certainly point to a place like Syria where these two countries have essentially propped up a regime here and made them more capable, more powerful, and kept them from
collapsing.

Senator Blumenthal: But when we complain about the Iranians -- and all of us probably in this room would agree with you that they are the major destabilizing influence in that area -- we are talking as much about the Russians as we are about the Iranians.

General Votel: Senator, in my comments here I was specifically talking about the Iranian threat. That is the one that we confront with. Certainly, as I mentioned also in my opening statement here, we are concerned about external actors and what their interests are in the region as well, and those can contribute to more destabilizing aspects as well. So I think they have to be addressed -- they both have to be addressed.

Senator Blumenthal: And how would you suggest that we should address the Iranian destabilizing influence of this regime?

General Votel: I think there are a variety of things. I think the most important thing is to work with our regional partners here to ensure that we have a common approach to this. I think in some cases we should look at ways that we can disrupt their activities through a variety of means, not just military means. We have to expose them for the things they are doing. They should be held accountable for those things. And I think we have to
contest their revolutionary ideology, and it is not just the United States, but it has to be those in the region. Iran has a role in the region. They have been around for a long period of time. Nobody is trying to make Iran go away, but we are concerned about the destabilizing behavior that they pursue on a regular basis.

Senator Blumenthal: My time has expired, but this topic is one that I think is profoundly important. I will have some more questions that I hope you and your staff perhaps can answer and maybe in a different setting as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Reed: Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator Perdue.

Senator Perdue: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is an honor to be here before you two gentlemen. Thank you for your great careers and what you are doing for our country today. And I hope you will take this message back to your troops, that everything they do over there is not missed on us.

I have a question about ISIS. General Votel, first of all, I think one of the first things that the President has done is ask for a 30-day review of the current strategy and so forth. Where are we in that process? And what types of things can we expect to see in terms of our strategy there?
And I would like you also to address what is our end game, and can you talk about that today or should we wait until we see the 30-day review?

General Votel: Senator, I think it is most appropriate for the Secretary who I believe has presented his findings to the new administration, and I think he is probably the person who is most appropriate to talk about the decisions and end states that will come out of that.

Senator Perdue: Fair enough.

With regard to ISIS in the Sinai, right now Egypt -- there are daily efforts there I think. Can you give us an update on what is being done and what other countries are involved in the fight with ISIS? And give us an order of magnitude of the size of that action in the Sinai.

General Votel: The Egyptians several months ago have deployed forces into the Sinai and specifically around the area where the multinational force is. That has been helpful. That has helped address a threat that was emerging there, and they are engaged on a regular basis in fighting ISIS in that particular area.

Egypt is addressing this. We are helping them in some areas, particularly with some of our expertise in improvised explosive devices. They have asked for that, and so we have been key to help them with that in this particular area.

Senator Perdue: Do we have any troops on the ground in
the Sinai?

General Votel: We do not have any troops on the ground that are fighting ISIS. We do have troops on the ground in the Sinai that are associated with the multinational force mission.

Senator Perdue: Thank you.

General Waldhauser, I want to go back to a question that was earlier asked of you about China’s presence in Africa and particularly the base at Djibouti. Given what Russia has done with Crimea and now at Latakia and at Tartus, are you concerned that we will see other activity of base building in Africa? Have you had any other indications of either Russia or China developing permanent positions or presence in that theater?

General Waldhauser: Senator, in 2013, the Chinese laid out a strategic plan of One Belt, One Road where they will have commerce that starts in China, goes down to Indonesia, the Malacca Straits, across over to Djibouti, up into Europe and back. And that is roughly 60 countries and 40 percent of the global GDP that goes on in that area. It is all about trade. This is their first endeavor in an overseas base, and it will not be their last.

Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir.

I want to ask one more question real quick. I am about out of time. But in Somalia and Sudan, there is a growing
threat that there is a real serious famine that is about to happen if it has not already started there. What will that do to the military situation in that area?

General Waldhauser: Well, first of all, in Somalia, Senator, this right now is the most pressing issue to the brand new president who was just elected this last month. Right now, there are over 6.2 million individuals who have been affected by it, and it has not been, to my knowledge, actually declared a famine yet. But in terms of combating al Shabaab and the like, movement of people in those large masses has an impact on military operations.

But the bottom line in Somalia is right now -- and we have counterterrorism operations. We are trying to build up the national security forces. But that famine for the brand new president and this fledgling national government is the biggest thing on their plate. They have to do well in this because if they cannot provide for this famine, then Somalia, who has been without a national government for over 20 years, is going to question what the purpose and what contributions they will make.

Senator Perdue: Thank you, sir.

One last real quick question. In Moron, Spain, I was fortunate enough to meet and visit with some of your great marines there. They have got a very strong mission. Unfortunately, late last year, they had to move about half
of their air assets back to the U.S. for training. Can you talk about readiness with regard to their mission in Africa?

General Waldhauser: Senator, the impact right now is really capacity for us. So we have had to kind of center their activity mostly on western Africa. And so some of the missions we have in eastern Africa that they would have been able to deploy to in the past, we would have to coordinate with CENTCOM, and we have actually used marines from the Oregon MEU in CENTCOM on the ground in Djibouti to take care of crisis response activities, specifically South Sudan, that we had at that time. So the readiness of the airplanes has gotten better, but when you go from 12 to 6, the capacity is cut in half. And the impact is we have got to do a better job coordinating and sharing assets because the Africa continent is extremely large.

Senator Perdue: Yes, sir. Thank you. Thank you both.

Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Donnelly?

Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for your service. We are so grateful for your hard work.

General Votel, as we move forward in Mosul and some of the ISIS fighters head out, what efforts do we have in place to try to capture them before they head to Raqqa or to other areas, or where are they heading out to?

General Votel: Well, Senator, thank you for the
question.

Our intention, of course, is to prevent them from getting out. And so the first part of all of our operations is to isolate the areas where we are, where our attacks are taking place by our partners, and where we are bringing our enabling capabilities so that we do not let anybody get out or get in. Being a desert, this is obviously a very porous area, so there probably are some that get out. I think they are generally moving into the middle Euphrates River valley, which is a location that is equidistant between Mosul and Raqqa.

Senator Donnelly: A while ago, we were just outside Hadditha in Anbar Province meeting with the Iraqi leaders there. And I just wanted to follow up. At that time, they were close to starvation, for a lot of their citizens. It was extremely difficult for all of their families. Where are we now in terms of solidifying Hadditha, Fallujah, Ramadi, those areas, and are they working with us and with the central government?

General Votel: Senator, they are and we are making progress with the humanitarian aid and the needs of the people out in all of those areas. This I think is an area that we have to pay particular attention to as we move forward, particularly in the large urban areas. Our military operations -- planning for those has to be done in
conjunction with the humanitarian aid planning and providing for the needs of the people that will be left behind. So I think this is a key aspect for us.

Senator Donnelly: As we head toward Raqqa, we have seen that marines have come in. Are you getting everything that you need in terms of equipment, manpower, all of those things to take Raqqa back?

General Votel: We are, Senator, and I am certainly in discussions with the Secretary about what we might need going forward.

Senator Donnelly: Because I think our feeling is we do not want to not get this done as soon as possible because we did not provide you with the necessary equipment, necessary personnel.

As we look at Raqqa and moving forward, obviously there is a lot of complication with the Turks and with others. How are all those pieces coming together for you?

General Votel: Well, as you know, Senator, this is an extraordinarily complex area here. And so we are trying to work with an indigenous force that has tensions with a NATO ally. And so that is not an easy situation to move through. But I think the way we are addressing it is in the right way. We are being as transparent as we can. We are providing information. We are looking for options on a day-to-day-to-basis to ensure we can mitigate and minimize the tension
that exists in this area. So I will not try to tell you
that there is an easy way through all this complexity.
There is not. It is going to take a lot of hard work. It
is going to take military work. It is going to take
diplomatic work as we move forward. And I do believe that
is the approach that we are taking and I think that
ultimately it will work for us.

Senator Donnelly: I was going to follow up -- you were
kind enough to come by my office -- to follow up and say I
think your idea of complete transparency, here is what we
are doing, here is what we are working on, here is how we
plan to do it and to try to cooperate as much as we can with
other countries, but to tell them this is the plan and this
is where we are going seems to make a lot of sense to me.

As you look at what has gone on in the Arabian Gulf, we
just saw another incident with our ships recently. And as
we move forward, the distances seem to be less. They get
closer. They get closer. Do we have a plan ready to go
where at some point we say, you know, you have crossed the
red line, and if they continue, that we take appropriate
action?

General Votel: Senator, I am very confident in our
ship captains and in our crews for them to deal with the
situation. I do believe they have the right rules of
engagement. They have the right tools to prevent things,
and in the case that prevention does not work or deterrence
does not work, then they have the capabilities to defend
themselves and take action. So I am very confident in our
people.

Senator Donnelly: My guess is that there will become
an X crosses Y point, and I just want to make sure that our
captains and all of them are ready. And I have the same
confidence.

General Waldhauser, as you look at your area of
command, what do you see as our biggest challenge right now
that you are dealing with?

General Waldhauser: Senator, I think the biggest
challenge perhaps is the development piece for the
demographics of a very youthful population. 41 percent of
the continent is under the age of 15. We have got to find a
way to get at education, health care, hopelessness,
livelihood, and the like in order to give those individuals
a future because we could knock off all the ISIL and Boko
Haram this afternoon, but by the end of the week, so to
speak, those ranks would be filled. We know from those who
have kind of come out of the forest and given themselves up,
so to speak, that the reason they joined was they needed a
job, they needed a livelihood. It is not, for the most
part, in those regions about ideology. That is not the
driver. It is those factors I just talked about that drive
them into that line of work because there is nothing else for them to do. So I think the youth bulge and the demographics and providing development and a way ahead for those youth are very, very important.

Senator Donnelly: So we cannot fight our way out of it. What we have to do is to try to give them hope and dignity and purpose I guess.

General Waldhauser: Exactly. I am not the first. Many people, especially those in uniform, have said we cannot kill our way to victory here. And this is about the long-term investment in capacity building because at the end of the day, that is what is going to try to help solve the problem especially on the African continent.

Senator Donnelly: Thank you. Thank you both for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis?

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Votel, thank you for spending the time with me in my office this week. And, General Waldhauser, welcome to the committee. Thank you both for your service.

I will ask this of both of you. One area that I would like to get your feedback on is foreign military financing, foreign military sales and to what extent do we need to focus on that with some of our partner nations that you
believe is helpful to you completing your missions in each
of your commands. General Votel, we will start with you.

General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

I think foreign military funding, foreign military
sales are extraordinarily important.

Senator Tillis: Can you get more into specifics about
certain areas where we need to really look at on a more
immediate basis?

General Votel: Yes, I do. I think certainly looking
at ballistic missile capabilities for some of our Gulf
partners is an important area. Certainly some of the
aircraft programs out there -- there is a great desire to
have U.S. programs in many of these countries, and those are
certainly areas where we have to pay strong attention.

Senator Tillis: What sort of capabilities in Egypt?

Senator Perdue asked you questions about the Sinai and
increasing threat in that region because of the
consolidation of ISIS and other entities. What kinds of
things would be helpful in particular to Egypt in that area?

General Votel: Well, certainly the suite of counter-
improvised explosive device equipment we have out there,
running from jammers to protected vehicles and a variety of
things in between, I think would be extraordinarily helpful
to them.

Senator Tillis: Do you have any specifics? And,
General Waldhauser, I want to go to you with the same line of questioning. But any specific things that you can provide us, any specific areas where we need to take a look at and maybe get back to where we are helping build that partnership with Egypt?

General Votel: Senator, we do, and with your permission, we will look for an opportunity to come and talk with you specifically about that so we can get into some detail about what we think would be most useful for Egypt and in fact for other partners across the region.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

And, General Waldhauser, same line of questions.

General Waldhauser: Thank you, Senator.

Interestingly, in Africa, the foreign military sales is a very interesting choice. Many of the countries that we deal with are not financially in good shape, and consequently the ability to pay and the ability to fund for long-term parts blocks behind that is a difficult task. So I am not suggesting that we should alter the rules or change the rules, but I think we need to be very flexible when we deal with some of these poor countries and make sure we understand their absorptive capability so that what we are selling them they not only can use them in the first few years, but there will be a parts block behind that, if you will. There will be an institution, a logistical
infrastructure behind that, that will allow them to keep these pieces of equipment, whether they be vehicles or maybe C-130 airplanes, keep them in good shape for years ahead and years to come.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

On another subject -- and it relates to foreign military aid. General Votel, when you were in my office, we were talking about Afghanistan. When I was there the year before last, at the time there was a concern that there was going to be a drop-off in foreign investment and the tools that Afghanistan needed for its economic development, which is a key part of stabilizing the country -- what is the current situation there?

General Votel: I think the situation looks good, both from a NATO standpoint and from a much broader international standpoint. The donation conferences and other things that have been convened here over the last year --

Senator Tillis: Are we building a reliable stream, or is there another cliff that we have to be concerned with?

General Votel: I think we are building a reliable stream out to the 2020 time frame and in some cases beyond that. So I think the international community has stepped up to the plate in this particular area.

Senator Tillis: Thank you.

General Waldhauser, when General Votel and the people
that we have assisting countries in CENTCOM are successful in Mosul and Raqqa, it seems to me the good news is maybe we are getting some level of success there. But I have got to believe that that is going to potentially cause some additional challenges for you. Can you talk about the ones that you are specifically concerned with?

General Waldhauser: Senator, anytime you put pressure on the network and disrupt or dislodge ISIL from a certain area, movement will occur. So that means the border countries toward that took place are very concerned about foreign fighters moving back and forth. And so that is one of the big concerns that we have. And one of the issues that we have to deal with when we conduct operations, it is important that the neighbors of those countries know what we are trying to do and understand why we are trying to do that so we can help them with the foreign fighter flow if movement should occur.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine?

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks to the witnesses.

The Marine Corps doctrinal publication entitled “Strategy” has this phrase in it. What matters ultimately in war is strategic success, attainment of our political aims, and the protection of our national interests. History
shows that national leaders, both political and military, have failed to understand this relationship, sow the seeds for ultimate failure, even when their armed forces achieve initial battlefield success. Battlefield brilliance seldom rescues a bad strategy.

I have been heartened by the American military’s performance on the battlefield. Very heartened with our partners against ISIL in Iraq and now Syria. And although we would not want to predict anything about timing, I think that we are going to continue to have battlefield success.

What is our political strategy, say, following the fall of Raqqa that would lead us to have a belief that there is going to be a better next chapter to follow in Syria especially?

General Votel: Senator, I am not sure I can comment on what the political strategy is. I do believe this is a key aspect of what Secretary Mattis and the administration are discussing right now with respect to what this looks like long-term.

Senator Kaine: And, General Votel, I think that is a good answer. You are not commenting because the political strategy is really for the political leadership not the military leadership. The administration and Congress. You understand that Congress has a role in this as well, not just the administration.
General Votel: I do, Senator.

Senator Kaine: We are pursuing a war now based on an authorization that was passed in September of 2001. It is now nearly 16 years old. Do you think it would be helpful in terms of articulating a political strategy that would put the military mission into a context and to find an end result and a potential desired future state if Congress were to grapple with the question of the authorities and this desired end political strategy?

General Votel: Senator, I think the current AUMF has provided what we needed, but I do believe an updated authorization certainly would send a stronger commitment to uniformed military of our commitment and desire to support them.

Senator Kaine: In the CENTCOM space, if the military mission succeeds and Raqqa were to fall, do you still believe that the American mission against ISIL and al Qaeda will take a long time?

General Votel: I do. This is a very savvy enemy, and they are adapting. Like we are adapting on the battlefield, they are adapting on the battlefield.

Senator Kaine: Just like the ISIL attack --

General Votel: Right.

Senator Kaine: -- in Afghanistan dressed as doctors attacking the hospital. This is a threat that is not going
to go away just because Raqqa were to fall. Correct?

General Votel: That is right. They will begin to adopt other forms, and we will need to be persistent against that and we will need to work with our partners to address that in both Iraq and Syria.

Senator Kaine: Well, my colleagues know because I have said it a lot and others view it the same way, that this question of authorities -- I do think it is past time for Congress to address it. Whether you think the 9-14-01 AUMF legally covers the battle against ISIL or not, I think there are prudent reasons at a minimum and I think legal reasons as well that we should tackle it.

On the question of legal authorities, traditionally you need two kinds of legal authorities to be engaged in a military mission. You need a domestic legal authority and you need an international legal justification as well. The most common international legal justification for military action in somebody else’s territory is that they invited you. We are conducting military actions in Iraq with the request and support of the Iraqi Government. We are conducting military operations in Afghanistan with the support and request of the Afghan Government. We just conducted a DOD ground operation for the first time in Yemen with the request and support of the Yemeni Government.

Are we deploying marines in Syria at the request or
with the permission of the Syrian Government?

General Votel: We are not, Senator.

Senator Kaine: What is the international legal justification for the U.S. taking military action in another country without the request of that country? We have criticized nations such as Russia, for example, for undertaking military actions in the Ukraine or Crimea without the request of the government.

General Votel: Thank you, Senator. I think we certainly make a judgment about the ability of the government to make a decision. In that case I think what we are doing in Syria, we are looking at that as an extension of the authority to operate from Iraq.

Senator Kaine: Iraq has had us in and we are cooperating with Iraq. We are there in Iraq at their request. But I guess the bottom line is there is no such request from Syria. We do not judge that government capable of making such a request, and we do not really recognize the legitimacy of Bashar al Assad’s government. But you are saying that the international legal justification for American military action in a country that has not asked us is the fact that we are engaged in a military action in a country next door that has asked us?

General Votel: I believe we are being extended that authority by our leadership to conduct those operations
principally because we are operating against an enemy that
operates on both sides of that border.

Senator Kaine: If I might, one last question with
respect to Yemen. We have had hearings in this committee
about the ground operation in Yemen, which to my knowledge
was the first ground operation by DOD forces in Yemen.
There were a number of questions raised by that. I do not
want to go into the classified briefing we had, but
questions about was the mission compromised in some way in
the advance. What intel was gained? There was some after-
the-fact justification of the mission using video that
actually had been taken in another mission. Is the DOD
conducting an ongoing investigation of that mission to
determine all lessons learned, what worked, what did not,
and what we can do better?

General Votel: Senator, thank you, and let me answer
this a little more comprehensively.

First and foremost, I am responsible for this mission.
I am the CENTCOM Commander and I am responsible for what is
done in my region and what is not done in my region. So I
accept the responsibility for this. We lost a lot on this
operation. We lost a valued operator. We had people
wounded. We caused civilian casualties. We lost an
expensive aircraft.

We did gain some valuable information that will be
helpful for us. Our intention here was to improve our
knowledge against this threat, a threat that poses a direct
threat to us here in the homeland. And that was what we
were focused on.

There have been a number of investigations that have
been initiated. Most of these are regulatory or statutory
in terms of things that we normally do.

When we lose an aircraft, there is both a safety
investigation to ensure that we disseminate lessons learned
for the broader fleet, and there is also a collateral
investigation that tries to determine the specific reason
why that happened and establishes accountability over that.

We have done an investigation into the civilian
casualties. That has been completed. The helicopter
investigations are ongoing. The civilian casualty aspect
has been completed, and we have made a determination based
on our best information available that we did cause
casualties, somewhere between 4 and 12 casualties that we
accept -- I accept responsibility for.

We have done a line of duty investigation, again a
statutory investigation, on the death of Senior Chief Owens
that determined that he was in the line of investigation.

The key mechanism that I have, Senator, is the after-
action review, and this is something we do with every
operation we do. And the intention here is to review the
operation in great detail to understand exactly what happened. And it is done with the chain of command in place. And we have done that and I have presided over that. Based on my experience, nearly 37 years of service, I have certainly appointed a lot of investigations and I have been through a lot of these after-action reviews. When I go through these things, there are some specific things that I am looking for. I am looking for information gaps where we cannot explain what happened in a particular situation or we have conflicting information between members of the organization. I am looking for indicators of incompetence or poor decision-making or bad judgment throughout all of this.

So what I can tell you is that we did an exhaustive after-action review on this. I presided over that. It went down to a level that included people who were on the specific objective. As a result of that, I was satisfied that none of those indicators that I identified to you were present. I think we had a good understanding of exactly what happened on this objective, and we have been able to pull lessons learned out of that that we will apply in future operations. And as a result, I made the determination that there was no need for an additional investigation into this particular operation.

Senator Kaine: So the only investigation that
continues is the investigation -- or the loss of the
helicopters is still not complete.

General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

Senator Kaine: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCain: Just to follow up, General, there has been a lot of conversation about this particular mission and the point that some of us are trying to make that the heroism and sacrifice of those who served has nothing to do with the mission itself. In other words, we honor their sacrifice no matter what happened in the mission.

And when you have women and children killed, as you pointed out, the loss of a $70 million aircraft, you did not capture anyone as was part of the mission, that mission is not a success. But that happens in war. There is a thing called the fog of war. They did the best they could under very difficult circumstances. And I hope in the process of your investigation, when heavy fire was encountered why the decision was made to continue the mission -- I still do not think this committee has an answer to that question. But it does not question the loyalty and sacrifice and bravery when we question the mission.

And unless we tell the American people the truth, the absolute truth, then we are going to revisit another war a long time ago where we did tell the American people the
truth and we paid a very heavy price for it. There are 55,000 names engraved in black granite not far from here, and the American people were not told the truth about whether we were succeeding or failing in that war. And then because of that, it all collapsed. So I hope that we will not forget that lesson, and in no way does it detract from the heroism and professionalism and sacrifice of the brave men and women who serve under your command.

Senator McCaskill?

Senator McCaskill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to underline the comments you just made, and I do think it is important that we get answers to the questions about what happened at that moment in very difficult circumstances, admittedly, that heavy fire occurred and the decision was made to continue. And I am also anxious to have the questions answered about the real value of the intelligence that was gathered. I think there have been some mixed signals about the value of the intelligence that was gathered.

I want to talk to you today. I have spent an awful lot of time working on contracting in contingencies. And I remember my very first trip to Iraq included a stop in Kuwait to look at contracting. And I had an encounter with a general there that I will never forget. I will always admire him for being so honest with me because I was
pointing out all of these massive problems with contracting, especially Log Cap 1, Log Cap 2 and all of those associated contracts. And he looked at me and he said, Senator, I wanted three kinds of ice cream in the mess yesterday, and I do not care how much it costs.

Now, while I admired him for his honesty, it kind of underscored for me that contracting oversight was not a core capability many times within commands within contingencies. If it were, we would not have this long trail of mistakes made going all the way back to Kosovo on contracting.

So I was upset yesterday when I saw the DOD IG report coming out of Kuwait where they said that ineffective monitoring of contractor performance for the Kuwait base operations -- a particular concern that the contracting officer representatives, which we have worked very hard -- I mean, at the point in time I was over there, it was the worst guy in the unit got handed the clipboard, had no idea what he was supposed to do in terms of contracting oversight and did not do much. We have done a lot of work on this, training, and making sure people understand and with the standing up the Contracting Command.

So the fact that there is no consistent surveillance of these contracts in Kuwait, no assurance that the contract requirements have been met, and the entire $13 million performance bonus was paid even though it is not clear that
it was earned, and maybe most worrisome, this environmental and health hazard that has been allowed to languish. It is fairly clear from reading this report that a stagnant wastewater lagoon went unresolved, that it was probably never constructed correctly, and it is really impacting the health and safety of some of our men and women that are stationed there.

So I need you to reassure me that we have not taken our eye off the importance of contracting oversight. And this is not just you. This is also the ACC and the 408th Contracting Support Brigade.

General Votel: Thank you, Senator.

I absolutely agree with you, and I recognize my responsibility as the CENTCOM Commander and as a senior leader in the Department of Defense to ensure that the expenditure of our national treasure and our resources is done in an effective and efficient manner. And I look forward to an opportunity to talk with you specifically about this situation in Kuwait.

Senator McCaskill: I would like that very much, and we will look forward to hearing from you directly. The thing that was the most frustrating about the contracting through much of the Iraq conflict before we did the contracting reforms that the Wartime Contracting Commission set out -- and we codified all of those, most of them in this committee
the amount of money that was wasted was astounding. And we just cannot afford it. We just cannot afford it.

Let me briefly, in the time I have remaining -- I know that they have covered Russia as it relates to what has been going on in Afghanistan. I am not sure that it has been touched on, what is going on in Nigeria, and would love you to speak to that, General Waldhauser, about the fact that we refused to sell them the Cobra attack helicopters because of the history of human rights problems. And undeterred by that history, of course, Russia stepped up and now sold them attack helicopters. They are now training the Nigerian military, including the special forces, instead of the United States.

Could you give us any assessment of the impact of that, that Russia has stepped in where our better judgment said it was not a good idea and is now taking on that primary role with the Nigerian special forces?

General Waldhauser: Senator, not only Nigeria but other countries on the continent. If there are easier ways to get to military sales, if countries come in, China, Russia, North Korea, for example -- if they come in and do not have a lot of strings attached, then sometimes it is easier for those countries to purchase weapon systems from others than the U.S.

So we try to accommodate certain financial situations.
I know the DSCA people that work for OSD try hard to accommodate that. And when you look closely at the absorption capabilities of these countries -- but again in many occasions, human rights is not an issue when it comes to weapon sales from countries other than the United States.

Senator McCaskill: Well, I think it is something we need to worry about because it is, obviously, a powerful way to spread the influence and power of Russia. And I think we all, no matter what our party is, have figured out in the last 6 months that this is a real threat to our country and to our national security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCain: Senator Graham?

Senator Graham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think you have been asked about soft power and the need for it. Both of you said it is an important tool in the toolbox to win the war. Is that correct?

General Votel: That is correct, Senator.

General Waldhauser: Yes, Senator. Yes.

Senator Graham: And you are warfighters extraordinaire. So I appreciate you putting a plug in for soft power.

Let me dig in with it. Can you win the war without it?

General Waldhauser: I do not believe you can, Senator.

Everything comes from security. Once you have a secure
environment, development needs to take place, and that is where soft power kicks in.

General Votel: I agree with, General Waldhauser.

Senator Graham: So really, this war is about a glorious death being offered by the terrorists and a hopeful life by the rest of the world. Is that a pretty good description of what we are trying to do is offer a hopeful life to compete with a glorious death?

General Votel: I think in very general terms, I think it is about that. It is about offering alternatives to people to the situations that they find themselves in.

Senator Graham: And the good news is that most people over there do not want what ISIL is selling. There is not a big demand for that product. Is that a fair statement?

General Waldhauser: Certainly on the African continent that is true, very true.

General Votel: I would agree with that, Senator.

Senator Graham: Very few fathers and mothers want to turn their daughters over to ISIL if they do not have to. Is that a fair statement?

General Votel: It is, Senator.

General Waldhauser: Yes, Senator, it is fair.

Senator Graham: Is it a fair statement we are not going to win this war without partners in the faith? The only way you can win this war is to have fellow Muslims
fighting with us against ISIL.

General Votel: It is my view that we have to have local forces engaged in this.

General Waldhauser: That is what by, with, and through is all about, Senator.

Senator Graham: And is it fair to say that most people in the faith reject this hateful ideology?

General Votel: That is true, Senator.

General Waldhauser: I agree.

Senator Graham: So I want the committee to understand that any budget we pass that guts the State Department’s budget, you will never win this war. As a matter of fact, ISIL will be celebrating.

What is Russia trying to do in Libya, General Waldhauser?

General Waldhauser: Senator, Russia is trying to exert influence on the ultimate decision of who becomes and what entity becomes in charge of the government inside Libya. They are working to influence that decision.

Senator Graham: They are trying to do in Libya what they have been doing in Syria?

General Waldhauser: Yes. That is a good way to characterize it.

Senator Graham: It is not in our national interest to let that happen. Is it?
General Waldhauser: It is not.

Senator Graham: The political situation in Libya is pretty fractured?

General Waldhauser: It is very fractured, Senator.

Senator Graham: So the commander of their military is at odds with the political leader supported by the U.N. Is that fair?

General Waldhauser: That is fair, yes.

Senator Graham: And if we do not fix that, it is going to be tough moving forward?

General Waldhauser: We have got to get the entities, specifically Haftar and the government of national accord, together to make an accommodation in order to get any government moving forward.

Senator Graham: Would you say that Secretary Tillerson is very important in this regard?

General Waldhauser: Very important, Senator.

Senator Graham: So we need to put that on his radar screen.

General Waldhauser: Yes, we do.

Senator Graham: Syria. The Kurds that we are training, General Votel, are they mostly in line with the YPG? Are they YPG Kurds?

General Votel: They are, Senator.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that in the eyes of
the Turks, the YPG Kurds are not much better, if any better, than the PKK?

General Votel: Senator, that is the view of the Turks.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that the YPG Kurds have sort of a communist/Marxist view of governing? That is what their manifesto says anyway.

General Votel: Senator, I think it is fair to say that there is some affinity back towards that.

Senator Graham: So is it fair to say that we have got to be careful about over-utilizing the YPG Kurds? Not only will it create problems for Turkey, other Kurds in the region do not buy into their agenda also.

General Votel: I think it is important. And that is why as we look to a place like Raqqa, we are attempting to do that with majority Arab forces.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that how we take Raqqa can determine the outcome of Geneva in terms of a political settlement?

General Votel: It is certainly a key operation. We will support that.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that the balance of power on the ground in terms of Assad’s regime that he is in a good spot?

General Votel: He is in a better position than he was a year ago.
Senator Graham: That the opposition has basically melted away because Russia, Iran, and Assad have gone after them full throtted.

General Votel: The support that has been provided by Russia and Iran has certainly enabled the regime.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say that most Syrians want two things: to get rid of ISIL but also to get rid of Assad because he slaughtered their families?

General Votel: The Syrians that I have talked to I think would agree with that.

Senator Graham: Is it fair to say it is in our national security interests for Damascus not to be handed over to Assad, a proxy for Iran, in any final settlement, that you cannot have Iran dominating Damascus?

General Votel: Senator, I think that is certainly a decision for our political leadership to make, but I think there is a strong consensus.

Senator Graham: Final thought. How we take Raqqa will determine if we can get a political settlement in Geneva if we do not change the balance of military power on the ground, go outside of this Kurdish construct, reassure the Arabs that we are a better partner than we have been in the past, we are going to give Damascus to the Iranians, if we help those Syrian Arabs who want to fight and take their country back from Assad and his brutal dictatorship, I think
we can change the balance of power on the ground and get a
better deal in Geneva. So if the Trump administration is
listening, how you take Raqqa will determine how successful
we are in neutralizing Iranian influence and Russian
influence.

Mr. Chairman, you have been terrific on this issue. I
want to thank you for your leadership.

Chairman McCain: I thank you.

I thank you, Generals, for your appearance here this
morning. It has been very helpful to the committee and to
the United States Senate. I know it is not your favorite
pastime, but I think it is very important that we hear
directly from you. Thank you for your leadership, and we do
want you to be assured that we will do everything we can to
support you as we go through what is a very complicated and
difficult challenge.

Senator Reed?

Senator Reed: I simply want to thank you, gentlemen,
for your service and for your testimony today. And please
relay our thanks to the men and women who serve so well with
you. Thank you very much.

Chairman McCain: This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]