

**House Armed Services Committee Hearing National Security
Challenges And U.S. Military Activities In The Greater Middle East And Africa**

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WITNESSES:

MS. AMANDA DORY, ACTING UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY,
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

GENERAL KENNETH MCKENZIE JR., USMC, COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL
COMMAND

GENERAL STEPHEN TOWNSEND, USA, COMMANDER, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

SMITH: This is the full committee hearing on "National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa." We have with us Ms. Amanda Dory, who is the acting undersecretary of defense for policy; General Kenneth McKenzie, who is the commander of U.S. Central Command; and General Stephen Townsend, who is the commander of U.S. African Command.

As always, this is a hybrid hearing, so I will read the instructions for how to conduct a hybrid hearing, so we are all on the same page. Members who are joining remotely must be visible on screen for the purpose of identity verification, establishing and maintaining a quorum, participating in the proceeding, and voting. Those members must continue to use the software platform's function while in attendance, unless they experience connectivity issues or other technical problems that render them unable to participate on camera.

If a member experiences technical difficulties, they should contact the committee staff for assistance. Video of members' participation will be broadcast in the room and via the television internet feeds. Members participating remotely must seek recognition verbally, and they are asked to mute their microphones when they are not speaking.

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Finally, I have designated a committee staff member to, if necessary, mute unrecognized members' microphones to cancel any inadvertent background noise that may disrupt the proceeding. Thank you.

As mentioned, we are here today to hear from our Central Command and African Command commanders. And there is, to put it mildly, a lot going on in both of your areas of responsibility. And we look forward to getting an update on those challenges. You know, certainly the counterterrorism challenge has been central for a very long time in the region, as we've dealt with ISIS in the Middle East, you know, between Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, and then various affiliates of many different groups, including ISIS and Al Qaida throughout Africa.

I think educating members on exactly what's going on with the fights there will be very important, because, you know, some of that is not on the front pages. But I know, for instance, what's going on in the Sahel in West Africa is very concerning. We are working with our partners in the European Command -- sorry, with our partners in Europe who have interests there, as well. I'm very interested to hear how that is going and what we can do to be supportive of that.

But also, as is previewed by the slides that General Townsend has passed out for us, both of these areas of responsibility are also part of the larger great power competition. I think that is very important to understand that both Russia and China are particularly active in Africa, also obviously active in the Middle East. You know, how does our military play a role in those parts of the world with dealing with the great power competition that we're facing from both China and Russia? We'll be very interested to hear that.

And then, of course, there is the big issue of the moment, and that is the president's decision to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan and NATO's corresponding decision to also withdraw their troops by September. I think this is the right decision. There was no easy, good decision here. There was no win-win-win, where everything was going to be fine no matter what we did. Afghanistan is a very difficult part of the world.

But when you look at the maps in front of us, when you look at just these two areas of responsibility, much less the concerns that we have elsewhere in the world -- certainly in Asia, but increasingly in Latin America, as we see the difficulties down there spilling across to our border, we come to understand that the level of investment in Afghanistan does not meet where it currently falls in our national security objectives.

We have accomplished much of what we set out to accomplish in terms of degrading Al Qaida. Certainly, we killed Osama bin Laden and we have significantly reduced the ability of terrorist groups to operate out of that region. And at between \$14 billion and \$20 billion a year, I don't think that investment is justified at this point. And I think the president made the right decision in terms of what our current defense priorities are.

That is not to say that we're going to cease to have interests in the Afghanistan region. We will. But there are other, better ways to meet those interests that are more cost-effective.

And the final point I would make on this is, you know, we've been in a bit of a lull in terms of U.S. casualties over the course of the last year, since the preliminary -- well, peace agreement is an overstatement. But the preliminary understanding was reached with the Taliban whereby they have not been attacking us. As we know, that expires on May 1st, and at some point after that, we would be back into a hot war and we would once again be losing U.S. servicemembers' lives in Afghanistan.

Given the commitment and given where we're at in our national security needs, I think the president made the right call. The risk of staying outweighs the benefit at this point, but we will want to hear the details from General McKenzie and Ms. Dory on how we plan to execute that, what the risks are, and how we're going to mitigate those risks.

With that, I just want to thank our witnesses again for being here, for their service. And I will turn it over to Mr. Rogers for his opening statement.

ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome our witnesses and express my appreciation for their service and their time to prepare for this hearing.

In both AFRICOM and CENTCOM, we've made progress in combatting terrorists, but they're not completely gone. Adding to the problem, many groups have spread out, making them more difficult to locate. General Townsend, as we discussed last week, maintaining pressure on these terrorist networks remains vitally important.

But spending in AFRICOM comprises only 0.3 percent of our defense budget. Spreading those resources even further is the increased presence of Russia and China on the continent. Russia is entering into a disturbing number of arms sales and strategic agreements with African nations. China is using its Belt and Road Initiative to extract African natural resources. The Chinese Communist Party is also building its first overseas military base on the strategically important Horn of Africa. Alarming, it's only a few miles away from our own base.

Given the increased role China and Russia are playing in Africa, and its geostrategic importance, it's imperative that we continue to make investments there. I look forward to hearing from General Townsend about how we can maximize diplomatic and military efforts to eliminate terrorist footholds and counter Russia and China's global ambitions in Africa.

In CENTCOM, General McKenzie is facing tremendous challenges from hardened terrorists and nations bent on our destruction. President Biden's decision to unconditionally withdraw all forces by September 11, 2021, will only complicate matters.

I am very concerned the Taliban will overrun the democratically elected government soon after we withdraw. When that happens, what assurance do we have that Afghanistan will not become another breeding ground for terrorists? I've yet to hear how the president intends to conduct counterterrorism operations without any U.S. troops in

the region. There had better be a plan for that, and I expect the administration to explain it to us as soon as possible.

I'm also very concerned with the ongoing the destabilizing actions of Iran. The ayatollah continues to fund and equip terrorists targeting American troops. His cronies are prolonging a civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria. And his regime is aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons. We absolutely cannot allow that to happen. And I am not convinced that re-entering JCPOA will stop them.

I look forward to hearing more about the administration's plan for ending the ayatollah's quest for nuclear weapons and how they intend to deal with the rest of the regime's destabilizing actions.

Finally, I want to express my deep frustration with the defense budget proposed by President Biden. Cutting defense spending below the rate of inflation will mean combatant commanders like General Townsend and General McKenzie will not have the resources and capabilities they need to do their jobs.

I look forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats on this committee to pass a defense budget that adequately supports our servicemen and women.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you.

Ms. Dory, you're recognized for your opening statement.

DORY: Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers. Can you hear me OK?

SMITH: I believe so, yes.

DORY: OK, very good. Thank you. And distinguished members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on our defense policy in the U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Central Command areas of responsibility alongside their commanders, General McKenzie and General Townsend, today.

I'd also like to express my appreciation for the strong support Congress provides the Department of Defense. As a career civilian in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I've seen firsthand how the executive and legislative branches work together to ensure our armed forces have the resources and authorities required to deter and, if necessary, defeat any foe.

Secretary Austin has emphasized the need to match resources to strategy, strategy to policy, and policy to the will of the American people. The president's interim national security strategic guidance speaks to that approach by prioritizing the security of the

American people, expansion of economic prosperity and opportunity, and the defense of our democratic values. This requires Department of Defense to defend our people and economy, deter and prevent adversaries from threatening the United States, our allies and partners, and support whole-of-government efforts to lead a stable and open international system.

An early priority for the secretary is to match our resources to strategy by right-sizing our posture investments. To that end, at the president's direction, the department is undertaking a global posture review to balance operational requirements, risk, readiness, and international commitments.

In Africa and the Middle East, DOD plays a supporting role to broader U.S. government efforts in an acknowledgement that military force is not the answer to the challenges in these regions. Our policy objective is to increase stability and secure our interests by working by, with, and through our re-invigorated networks of allies and partners.

Africa is a continent ripe with opportunities and challenges. In Africa, the interim national security guidance directs us to continue building our partnerships and to work toward bringing an end to the deadliest conflicts while preventing the onset of new ones. It also directs to assist African nations to combat the threats posed by climate change and violent extremism.

Undergirded by the investments and tools you have afforded the department for building partnership capacity, and in close cooperation with our diplomatic and development colleagues, the resulting partnerships enable us to support conflict resolution efforts, combat the threats posed by violent extremism, improve defense institutions, and strengthen democratic norms and the rule of law. These modest investments play an outsized role in Africa and the department's objectives across the continent.

In the Middle East, DOD works to deter Iranian aggression, disrupt Al Qaida networks, prevent an ISIS resurgence, and protect vital interests such as freedom of navigation. We've made progress toward achieving the enduring defeat of ISIS and transition the focus of Operation Inherent Resolve to advising, equipping, and assisting partner forces to enable them to manage the ISIS threat independently.

The State Department is leading diplomatic efforts to bring Iran's nuclear program back into compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, while DOD focuses on deterring and defending against Iranian threats. In Yemen, we ended support to Saudi-led offensive operations, but continue to demonstrate our commitment to the defense of Saudi Arabia by providing limited non-combat support to help our partners defend our territory from Houthi attacks.

In Afghanistan, our mission has been preventing terrorist groups from using the country to threaten the interests and security of the United States, our allies and

partners. After two decades of U.S. and NATO military involvement in Afghanistan, we have accomplished that mission, and President Biden has decided to draw down the remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

In closing, I'm confident in the department's capacity to contend with the range of dynamic challenges facing the United States in Africa and in the Middle East. We retain many advantages, including our economic power, dynamism, democratic values, military capabilities, and global alliances.

Thank you to the members of the committee for your continued support, and I look forward to discussing the topics further in the rest of the hearing. Thank you.

SMITH: Thank you. General McKenzie?

MCKENZIE: Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, I appear before you proudly representing the 70,000 men and women of the United States Central Command.

It's a great pleasure to be with you here today. It's my duty to testify, of course, but I have to say it's also a privilege to address this body and all the greater honor to do so sitting beside the acting secretary of defense, Ms. Dory, and the commander of U.S. Africa Command, General Steve Townsend.

Since my last testimony, the region has continued to evolve, and it remains as dynamic as ever. With the president's announcement last week, we are focused on working closely with the Afghan government and our NATO allies to responsibly conclude Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan.

This is my main effort at present, but it's not my only responsibility. My private sector addresses our other missions in detail. The United States and our NATO allies sent forces to Afghanistan nearly 20 years ago, and the president has judged that now is the appropriate time to redeploy and reposition these forces so that they're better arrayed to deter adversaries and respond to threats globally, including those in the Central Command region.

Our singular purpose in Afghanistan has been to ensure that Al Qaida and other violent extremist organizations could never again plot, prepare, and perpetrate attacks against the United States and our allies from the refuge of that country. The campaign has evolved considerably over the years, from active combat operations with U.S. and NATO forces in the lead to advisory efforts designed to enhance the Afghan national defense and security forces' ability to conduct their own campaigns against violent extremist organizations. That there has not been another 9/11 is not an accident. It is the cumulative product of these efforts.

We will now conclude our Afghanistan-based advise and support mission. We are further planning now for continued counterterrorism operations from within the region,

ensuring that the violent extremist organizations fighting for their existence in the hinterlands of Afghanistan remain under persistent surveillance and pressure.

Ever since 12 September 2001, when our allies invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, we have done everything in Afghanistan within a partnership framework, and that will not change in the months ahead. We are planning collaboratively with our interagency and international partners and we'll take all measures to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of all of our forces and those of our partners from Afghanistan.

This includes positioning significant combat power to guard against the possibility that the Taliban decision to interfere in any way with our orderly redeployment.

I'd now like to briefly summarize some other challenges in the region. While Iran has itself avoided state-on-state attacks on U.S. forces, since last January, strikes on the Al Asad and Erbil air bases, it continues to menace regional partners and the free flow of commerce through the use of proxies and the proliferation of armed unmanned aerial systems and other munitions. Its pursuit of regional hegemony remains the greatest source of instability across the Middle East.

In Iraq and Syria, the campaign to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS has entered a new phase. In Iraq, we are engaged in a strategic dialogue with the Iraqi government to determine the nature of our security relationship. ISIS's so-called physical caliphate is no more, but its toxic ideology lives on. The problem is especially acute in communities ravaged by conflict and at sprawling camps for displaced persons, where ISIS preys upon vulnerable populations.

What has accelerated in the last year is the influence of China and Russia, which each in their own way are attempting to subvert the rules-based international order and to gain strategic influence in the Middle East. China's activity in the region takes the form of economic investment, arm sales, and other overtures.

Russia has made an 18th century power play in Syria, propping up the murderous Assad regime. The Middle East remains key terrain, and I believe China and Russia will continue to expand their efforts to improve their position in the region and diminish U.S. standing wherever possible.

The CENTCOM area of responsibility is the most cyber-contested theater in the world. It is also the proving ground for the proliferation and employment of unmanned weaponized systems, many emanating from Iran. This difficult and complex operational environment provides units inside CENTCOM opportunities to operate and to conduct realistic training within an environment that exists nowhere else in the world. I can state as a matter of fact that the units and ships assigned to CENTCOM are as ready as any in the joint force.

The weeks and months ahead will see us execute a very complicated and demanding military operation to withdraw U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan. This

is presently the main effort of my command, and we have tools necessary to accomplish the task.

With that, I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you, sir.

SMITH: Thank you very much.

General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.

It's a privilege to represent America's exceptional men and women at U.S. Africa Command who are dedicated to securing U.S. interests' and preserving our strategic options on the African continent. This morning, I'm accompanied by one of my key staff advisers, Air Force Colonel Jacqueline Breeden. I'm also here this morning with my colleagues and friends, Ms. Amanda Dory, our acting undersecretary of defense for policy, and General Frank McKenzie, the CENTCOM commander, to discuss our shared challenges and opportunities in our areas of responsibility and the high return the American people get for their defense investments around the globe.

Historically, America has not been penalized for underestimating the importance of Africa. Today, we can no longer afford to underestimate the economic opportunity and strategic consequence Africa embodies and which competitors, like China and Russia, recognize.

Africa is the crossroads of the globe. The recent blockage of the Suez Canal not only demonstrated the importance of critical sea lines of communication flowing through the Mediterranean and Red Seas, but also around the Cape of Good Hope. Violent extremist organizations, competitor activities, and fragile states are among some of the threats to U.S. interests.

Beyond geography, global population growth is largely African. By 2050, one in four people on the planet will live in Africa. Rapidly growing markets, 60 percent of the Earth's arable land, and vast, untapped resources including strategic rare earth minerals provide tremendous economic potential. Thirteen of the world's 25 fastest growing economies are in Africa.

Africa's tremendous opportunities are offset by significant challenges, including climate change, food shortages, poverty, ungoverned spaces, historic grievances, and other factors that make the continent also home to 14 of the world's 20 most fragile countries.

Our strategic competitors are very active in Africa. China has invested heavily in their second continent, or as some think-tanks call it, China's fourth or fifth island chain.

Russia seeks to exploit instability and fragility for their own gain and at U.S. expense. Iran is also increasingly active on the continent.

African-based VEOs, like Al Qaida, their affiliate, Al-Shabaab, and ISIS thrive in the continent's ungoverned spaces. They provide the greatest threat to many of our African partners and aspire to kill Americans in Africa, as well as here at home.

Across this diverse continent, U.S. AFRICOM operates with 0.3 percent of the DOD's budget and 0.3 percent of DOD's manpower. This tiny investment pays enormous dividends, as just under 6,000 servicemembers, civilians, and contractors work with our partners, both interagency and foreign, to counter malign actors and transnational threats, respond to crises, and strengthen security forces to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.

AFRICOM works every day to protect America's security and advance our access and influence. We do this arm in arm with the U.S. interagency and through coordinated action with allies and partners. What AFRICOM accomplishes with a few people and a few dollars on a continent three-and-a-half times the size of the continental United States is a bargain for the American taxpayer and a low-cost insurance policy for America.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, thanks for your continued support to our armed forces. I look forward to your questions.

SMITH: Thank you all very much. I think something you said very interesting there about Africa and our investment there and DOD's investment there is a lot of bang for the buck. And as I look around the world, I think with the multiple challenges that we have, that's sort of key to how we approach them is, you know, how can we make a difference and cover all the areas we cover?

And that -- I know SOCOM has been very involved in that, being present in countries, building partner capacity, working with other allies. Can you expand upon that a little bit and how that plays out in Africa as you deal with all the various challenges that are spread out across the continent?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Chairman. So, first of all, everything we do is through partners. America's military is not really in the lead for anything in Africa. We work first with our African partners. We work secondarily through other partners like Europeans, notably in West Africa the French, for example, but many countries, actually.

So everything we do -- and our interagency partners, of course. So everything we do is through partners. You mentioned, Chairman, U.S. Special Operations Command. A lot of the troops who have boots on the ground in Africa are U.S. special operating forces. Not all of them. There are plenty of general purpose forces there, as well.

So we don't try to be all things to all people. We try to focus our efforts in priority areas. There are 53 countries in my area of operation. We don't have -- we don't try to win in all 53 countries. But we do try to focus our efforts where it matters the most for America's security.

SMITH: And now I'll ask you a question that's probably impossible to answer at this point, but I'm curious what you think. As we pull out of Afghanistan, I mean, the budget in Afghanistan last year was \$14 billion, 3,500 troops. A lot of what we've been doing has been about the rotations that are involved in sending our forces into Afghanistan.

With that extra money and those extra forces, have you guys, you know, within the Pentagon started to think about, how do we then distribute them? Do we bring them all home? Are there places in Africa or elsewhere where you could shore up your efforts? How do you see a benefit coming from, you know, reducing that expenditure by that amount?

And, General McKenzie, it's your AOR as a starting point, so I'd be curious what your thoughts are. And I know this is probably early on, but curious where you see that going.

MCKENZIE: Sir, I think there -- as our forces come out and we're able to re-posture, I think, first of all, we have to look at what we define as the pacing threats for the department. And I think we look to China. We look to Russia. And we have to look at those areas.

I think some of the forces are going to remain in Central Command, because we are going to look at offshore over the horizon options, and that's going to require us to do some things. Nothing on the scale of the expenditures that you're seeing now in Afghanistan, of course, but we will still need to do some things there, as well.

But I think broadly, it's going to be a significant lever for the department to apply against what I agree are the most significant challenges that we face today.

SMITH: Thank you. I appreciate that.

With that, I will recognize Mr. Wilson, who I believe is with us virtually.

WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

And I'm really grateful. General McKenzie, a question. I believe the U.S.-Israel relationship is of paramount importance to U.S. foreign policy. Given that Israel has now been moved under the purview of CENTCOM, I want to ensure that our cooperation with Israel continues to be a priority.

In moving Israel to CENTCOM, it's important that we not undermine the cooperation Israel has in Europe, particularly with NATO. The question would be, how are we ensuring this move does not undermine agreements and understandings that currently exist?

MCKENZIE: Sir, that's a great question about Israel. So today, Israel does most of its operational business with U.S. Central Command. Their threats typically emanate from the east. Nonetheless, they have broad, enduring cultural and other ties to the Europeans and to NATO.

So as part of the direction I've received from the secretary of defense, over the next several months, we will work a careful plan to integrate Israel into the Central Command AOR, while preserving their unique nature and their unique ties back into Western Europe. So we think we have a good plan to do that.

But in many ways, the movement into the Central Command AOR simply reflects an operational fact that's been in existence for some time. We work closely with them every day. Now we'll have not a divided responsibility for it, but rather a single responsibility for it. But I would tell you that I will still be in very close touch with General Todd Wolters and U.S. European Command as we go forward.

And I think that is an important relationship, as you note, but also it's going to be important for Israel to have the opportunities to develop normalized relationships with Arab nations. And that's one of the key things that will accrue from having them in the Central Command AOR.

WILSON: Well, thank you very much. And I appreciate that assurance to our friends of Israel.

Secretary Dory, the U.S. defensive expeditionary operations are naval by network of American bases and facilities hosted and allied in partner countries, particularly in Afghanistan. Presuming that the withdrawal of all forces results in the loss of control of Bagram and Kandahar air bases, how does that complicate our ability to reenter Afghanistan to combat resurgent terrorist groups, as we had to do in Iraq? What number of U.S. forces will be required to reenter Afghanistan without control of existing infrastructure?

The attacks of 9/11 by Osama bin Laden were from a cave in Afghanistan in 2001. What assurance does the president have that future attacks will not come from caves of Afghanistan against the American public?

DORY: Congressman, thank you for the question about what our future posture will look like with respect to Afghanistan following the force drawdown. What I can say at this point is that work is underway to adapt to the adjusting security environment and consider how to continue to apply pressure with respect to potential CT threats emanating from Afghanistan.

So looking throughout the region, in terms of over the horizon opportunities, of course, the surveillance intelligence component of that is fundamental to ensuring the type of scenario that you just laid out would not persist in the future with respect to individuals in caves who would threaten the U.S. homeland. What I can say from the decision process that the president led with his national security team is that there was consideration of a range of scenarios for the future of Afghanistan and our ability to continue to apply pressure, but the commitment is that there will not be threats emanating from Afghanistan against the U.S. homeland looking ahead into the future.

WILSON: And additionally, Secretary, over the last several years in the conflict in Syria, Iran has entrenched itself deeply within Syrian territory. It has bases, factories, weapons storage facilities. These pose a threat to U.S. interests in the region, including our alliance with Israel, as well as safety of the Syrian people, who often are being used as human shields.

Does the U.S. continue to support the freedom of action for Israel to address Iranian threats emanating from Syria?

DORY: Congressman, our commitment to Israel remains ironclad. I think we have seen through the secretary's initial visit to Israel last week and in the dialogues that have been conducted with Israel already in this administration, including a rejuvenated effort led by the national security adviser, that the relationship remains robust and close, that there is a strong level of dialogue and commitment to one another.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

SMITH: Thank you.

Mr. Langevin is recognized for five minutes.

LANGEVIN: Very good. Do you hear me OK, Mr. Chairman?

SMITH: Yes, we got you. We'll turn your volume a little bit here, but you're good. Go ahead.

LANGEVIN: Very good. Thank you. Well, good morning. And I want to thank our witnesses for your testimony today.

So we've heard entities like Special Operations Command say that counter-VEO is a form of great power competition. General Townsend, do you believe that that statement is true? And if so, why?

TOWNSEND: Thank you, Congressman. I absolutely believe that statement is true. In fact, we say that often in Africa. And here's why.

So what is -- we don't use the term great power competition. Our partners don't really like to hear that term, so we use global power competition in Africa. What's the purpose of global power competition but to expand America's access and influence? So how do you get that?

You get that by helping a partner with a problem that they have. And one of the significant problems that many of our African partners have is the scourge of terrorism. So by doing counter-VEO or counterterrorist operations, supporting our African partners, we are gaining access and influence by doing that. Absolutely, in Africa, counterterrorism operations are a way of global power competition.

LANGEVIN: Thank you. I personally also agree with that statement. I think it's important that we look at this holistically, because terrorism is not going away any time soon, in my view.

But what other forms of great power competition happen in Africa, or global competition, as you talk about it? And what role does the military play as China in particular makes diplomatic and economic inroads there?

TOWNSEND: So China and Russia are very active in Africa. Russia is very active with arms sales, but most of their activity on the continent I judge to be self-interested and exploitative in nature. And I think though they may be a threat today, I think they are less of a threat tomorrow.

China, however, is of great concern. They are literally everywhere on the continent. They're placing a lot of bets down. They're spending a lot of money. We know they use debt trap diplomacy, coercion with corrupt politicians. They build a lot of critical infrastructure, and they -- so most of their competition is through economic means, building infrastructure and trapping African countries in bad loans that give the Chinese access to that infrastructure after they build it.

They're also -- you know, their first overseas military base, their only one, is in Africa, and they have just expanded that by adding a significant pier that can support even their aircraft carriers in the future.

Around the continent, they're looking for other basing opportunities. They're also doing cooperation in the intelligence realm that concerns me significantly. I would say that they have offered training and arms sales. Frequently that winds up working out OK for us, because their quality of their equipment that they sell frequently is inferior and the Africans wind up being disappointed with both the equipment they get from China and the training they get from China. But China is a learning organization, under the concern for the future.

LANGEVIN: Thank you, General.

Let me turn to General McKenzie, if I could. General McKenzie, in your testimony, you list great power competition as your third priority behind containing Iranian influence and the VEO operations. What does great power competition look like in your AOR? And what is your timeframe for shifting your priorities to great power competition?

MCKENZIE: Sir, so we see with Russia disruptive activities. You know, they've seized a foothold in Syria that allows them to pursue an age-old dream of a warm water port in the eastern Mediterranean and basing in the eastern Mediterranean, which also allows them lily pad to go into Africa.

So Russia is generally opportunistic. Weapons sales, as General Townsend noted. China is, as in Africa, playing a much deeper and a longer game, and it is principally an economic effort, although we believe they do aspire at some point to have basing in the theater, but that's still ahead of them. But right now, we see China as principally economic.

SMITH: The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Turner is recognized for five minutes.

TURNER: Thank you. Ms. Dory, as Mr. Langevin just mentioned, General McKenzie has in his comments, the importance of deterring Iran, looking to how do we strengthen our allies, and the importance of intelligence to be able to respond to their malign activities. In your statement, throughout, you reference the malign activities that Iran has done and has performed that is obviously of grave concern.

Other than the entering back into the JCPOA, which is a flawed agreement of which they've currently breached, what else do we need to be doing to deter Iran?

DORY: Thank you, Congressman. I would start off by saying the president has chosen to lead with respect to diplomacy when it comes to JCPOA and the nuclear file. That leaves an important role for DOD with respect to deterring malign activity in the other range of activities Iran engages in.

And so there's a very important role for the department to continue with respect to the range of allies and partners in the region, to backstop them, to have forces on the ground working to advise, train, and assist with the different partners. Each partnership has its own character and quality, but the combination of the force presence, the ability to provide the president with options in the event those are required, those are the fundamental roles of the department at this point.

TURNER: General McKenzie, you mentioned ISR in the tools that are necessary to be able to deter Iran, specifically citing the MQ-9. I know that you know that there is pressure on the committee for the purposes of diminishing the role of MQ-9 and other deployable ISR.

I thought you might want to take an opportunity to give a commercial for the importance of that tool as you look to deterring Iran.

MCKENZIE: Well, sir, let me begin by saying I recognize that there is a global demand for ISR. And also we need to move beyond the MQ-9 system, which is the backbone system for U.S. Central Command. The future is going to demand bigger, better, different kinds of ISR, more sophisticated than what we've got now.

However, right now, for me, the MQ-9 is a very good platform. And what we have found that particularly against Iran, they do not like their activities to be exposed. In the summer of 2019, we believe we stopped several imminent attack streams from ships at sea simply by positioning MQ-9s overhead so they could hear them operating. I'm confident of that. The intelligence is very clear on that.

So the intelligence, first of all, the platform, first of all, allows us to gather intelligence, but, second, we have an observed and reported upon deterring effect on Iran by simply manipulating those platforms. So I use them, but I am not insensitive to the future of this platform and the fact we've got to make some adjustments globally.

TURNER: Great. In your comments, you emphasize our need to work with our allies. Certainly in working with those allies, we need to be strengthening their capabilities. The Trump administration had entered into a transaction to provide the F-35 to UAE. The Biden administration has confirmed its interest in continuing to do so.

Could you speak for a moment about how important it is for us to have advanced tools and equipment like the F-35, and certainly weapons systems, in the hands of our allies that join with us in trying to deter Iran?

MCKENZIE: So one of the key aspects to deterring Iran is an international community that is devoted to that deterrence. Iran has no friends. So what we have is lots of friends, friends across the region and friends across the globe, as well. But one of the things for supporting our friends in the region is to give them the best capability that we can afford to give them, consistent with the other requirements, such as reassurance of Israel, which is always in my mind when I give advice on these deals, but it is not a CENTCOM decision.

But I think that is a good capability and it will stand us in good stead with our friends in UAE.

TURNER: Thank you, General. I yield back.

SMITH: Mr. Larsen is recognized for five minutes.

LARSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Townsend, I don't know if I need an answer. This won't be a -- it'll be a comment, really, on this issue that Mr. Langevin brought up about CT and global power competition. My concern with your answer is a concern I've expressed to SOCOM. It's just that sometimes it should only be a CT mission and not creep into something else. And sometimes it should start out as a global power competition mission and not be necessarily based in a CT mission.

That may not be the case for everywhere on the continent of Africa for you. But do you -- I guess I do have a question. Do you have an example where a SOCOM mission that's operating under AFRICOM is just a global power competition mission?

TOWNSEND: Yes, Congressman. I'd prefer to discuss that in the closed session.

LARSEN: Yes or no is fine with me. And you said yes, and I appreciate that.

I just want to make the point that sometimes they're related and sometimes they're not. And I don't need to -- I don't want to keep hearing CT is GPC, because it sounds like an excuse to keep CT all the time, and sometimes it's not appropriate, and sometimes it is. And we're just trying to -- I'm trying to get SOCOM to think through this a little bit more than I think I'm getting the impression that they are.

So I've been clear to SOCOM folks about that, as well, so -- to stay on the continent, actually specific countries, and, Secretary Dory, 20 years ago, it was all Afghanistan, all the time, when I got here. Just in the last three weeks, I wouldn't have heard this 20 years ago. I've heard from Ugandan constituents -- they're from -- their country of origin is Uganda. I've heard from constituents from Tigray -- I think I've got that pronounced correctly, I don't want to be disrespectful -- about the respective problems in those countries.

Wouldn't have heard that 20 years ago. My district's changing. The country's changing. We are a nation of immigrants and new immigrants. So can you -- on those two areas, can you give us -- give this committee or give me an update, something I can tell my constituents who are both concerned about the elections in Uganda and my other constituents who are concerned about how their families are being treated in northern Ethiopia?

DORY: Thank you, Congressman. In that period of time, I previously served as the deputy assistant secretary for Africa. So for some of us, those were areas we were working even before the recent renaissance, if you will.

In terms of Uganda, what I would say there is the U.S. government is very concerned at this point in terms of the quality, or lack thereof, of the election, the repression against the other candidates who contested the election, and the actions of the security services in Uganda in terms of repressing participation by citizens and their concerns in governance.

So messages in particular via the State Department are robust with respect to our concerns. We do recognize the positive role that Uganda has played with respect to the Amazon mission in Somalia over many, many years on the one hand, but that does not counterbalance the concerns in terms of the repression that's underway in Uganda proper.

Similarly with respect to Ethiopia and Tigray...

LARSEN: Tigray.

DORY: ... intense concerns on the part of the U.S. government with respect to the conflict underway there and concerns that it's fundamental to have a negotiated settlement to the conflict at this point. You have participation by regional players in addition to the different groups within Ethiopia, and the way forward is through dialogue, and that's something that our embassy on the ground and the State Department are leaning into robustly.

LARSEN: Thank you.

General Townsend, back to you, can you comment on Mozambique and -- in the last 45 seconds, if -- how you assess what's happening in northern Mozambique? And what does that mean for decisions and advice you're providing to the department?

TOWNSEND: Over the last two years, ISIS Mozambique has been an increasing threat in northern Mozambique, in the Cabo Delgado province. As you saw a couple of weeks ago, they launched a 7- to 10-day siege on the town of Palma.

It's not clear to me if they're actually more than just local groups flying an ISIS flag of convenience, but ISIS core has claimed them as their own. My view is that African partners need to do more and European partners need to do more before the United States does more there.

LARSEN: OK, thank you.

SMITH: Thank you.

Ranking Member is recognized.

ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, in your 2020 posture statement, you noted that without sustained pressure levied against ISIS had the potential to reconstitute in Iraq and Syria. I'm interested in your thoughts in your 2021 posture statement about that, as well as ISIS blossoming under a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after we leave.

MCKENZIE: Sir, in Iraq and Syria, we have completed the physical destruction of what was the so-called ISIS caliphate. ISIS remnants still remain in Syria and some in Iraq, as well. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to hold ground. They can still conduct small-scale terror attacks, and they do that.

But largely in Iraq and Syria, in Iraq, the Iraqi security forces are generally able to handle that problem. We are not patrolling with the Iraqis on the ground. The Iraqis are doing it. Now, we provide them enabling support. We provide them high-level advice and assist. But generally the Iraqis are doing that themselves.

In Syria, sort of the same thing. Our SDF partners there are conducting those operations with our back in the rear advice and support for them. So those operations are continuing.

Now, the future in Iraq and Syria is not going to be bloodless. They're going -- ISIS is not going to go away. It's going to remain. But our objective there is to enable local security forces that we have trained and enabled to be able to handle the problem at a local level without significant external assistance from either us or our European allies.

The other component of that is you want to prevent those elements from being able to develop global connective tissue to reach out to other entities. And that is not only a physical fight on the ground there, but also a fight in cyber. And we conduct it in all those domains.

So that's the way I read the picture right now. Continued pressure is still necessary. The trends are moving the right way, and the strategic dialogue with our Iraqi partners is just one example of that moving forward.

As we go forward, we'll be able to look to re-examine the posture we have in Iraq, and that will be something we'll take a look at here in the future with our Iraqi partners.

In Afghanistan, as you noted, the principal reason that we see that ISIS and Al Qaida have been so significantly degraded has been the significant CT pressure that we have been to put on them over the past several years. ISIS is very small in Afghanistan. Probably several hundred fighters. ISISK, a little bigger, but still disaggregated. They have not been able to hold ground successfully in the east. They look to reassert themselves if they can.

But it's a -- but pressure is the important component of that. And I see that I'm out of time there.

ROGERS: But so if we're gone, and the coalition forces are gone, and Taliban does take a more prominent role in Afghanistan, is it a concern of yours that they may increase their presence without us there to push back?

MCKENZIE: Sir, the Taliban has undertaken to agree to not allow that to happen. With the Taliban, I've learned to not listen to what they say, but rather to watch what they do, so we will watch closely what they do.

ROGERS: Great.

General Townsend, given the massive size of your AOR, I'd like to hear more about your additional -- any additional resources or capabilities you need, particularly in the southern part of the continent and the western part, to carry out your mission? Are you adequately resourced in that part of the continent?

TOWNSEND: Ranking Member, as you noted, Africa is three-and-a-half times the size of the continental United States and we have about 6,000 total troops spread over that area. We don't have a significant footprint from about the equator south. And I'm not sure that we need that.

I would say that our force posture is under review as part of this global posture review, so I don't really want to get ahead of my civilian leaders on describing what we might need or might not need. However, there are some perennial things that are always on the razor's edge of, are we going to get that or are we not going to get that?

One of them is the ISR that General McKenzie has already mentioned. We -- the simple fact of the matter is, we do not have enough to do what we assess we need to do in Africa. I realize there's pressure on it across the entire department.

And then our warfighter recovery network, which is providing timely casualty evacuation and medical care to our troops, that's a fairly -- we do most of that through contracted. We don't actually need to put pressure on low-density, high-demand units, like military medevac and personnel recovery assets. We can do most of our work through contracted sources.

That takes money. And we're always waiting to get that money to make sure our troops have what they need. Those are probably two things right off the top of my head.

ROGERS: All right, thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

SMITH: Mr. Courtney is recognized for five minutes.

COURTNEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, General McKenzie, thank you for reminding us just a moment ago that there actually was an agreement in place that the sitting government of this country entered into in the last administration, and in many respects the announcement that President Biden made was really to try and make that agreement more logistically executable so that we're not in a situation like Saigon 1975.

So Ms. Dory sort of alluded a moment ago to the fact that we are still going to retain over the horizon capability to make sure that a counterterrorism effort can continue and

protect the homeland. Can you describe just a little bit more detail what that looks like? Because that is, I think, the real heartburn that I certainly pick up from my constituents about the decision. Is it going to be at sea? Is it going to be in neighboring countries where we, again, have the ability to deploy assets to, again, respond to a terrorist threat?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I'm actually conducted detailed planning by the direction of the secretary to look at those options right now. And I will report back to him by the end of the month with some alternatives. But I can broadly state, if you leave Afghanistan and you want to go back in to conduct these kinds of operations, there are three things you need to do. You need to find the target. You need to fix the target. And you need to be able to finish the target.

So those three things -- the first two require heavy intelligence support. And if you're out of the country and you don't have the ecosystem that we have there now, it will be harder to do that. It is not impossible to do that. It will just be harder to do it.

You will have to base your overhead ISR from no longer within Afghanistan, where an MQ-9 can take off and be over its target in a matter of minutes, to perhaps much further away. We will look at all the countries in the region. Our diplomats will reach out and we'll talk about places where we could base those resources. Some of them may be very far away and then there will be a significant bill for those types of resources, because you'd have to cycle a lot of them in and out.

That is all doable, however. So there are ways to get to the find and the fix part. The fix part is very important, though, because if we're going to strike something, we're going to strike it in concert with the law of armed conflict and the American way of war. We're going to minimize collateral damage. We're going to make sure we have a precise target and that we're going to be able to control what happens there.

It's difficult to do that at range. It is not impossible to do that at range. And so you have a variety of ways that you could actually strike the target if you chose to do that. You could do it with long-range precision fires. You could do it with manned raids. All of those are inherently dangerous, but you could still do it. You could do it with manned aircraft. There are problems with all three of those options, but there's also opportunities with all three of those options.

So I don't want to make light of it. I don't want to put on rose-colored glasses and say it's going to be easy to do. I can tell you that the U.S. military can do just about everything, and we're examining this problem with all of our resources right now to find a way to do it, you know, in the most intelligent, risk-free manner that we can.

COURTNEY: Well, thank you for that answer. And again, I think it is important to remember that we're not in the same mindset we were at the time of 9/11. I mean, I think, you know, certainly it sounds like, again, you're very focused in terms of making

sure that a threat like what occurred back then is going to be planned for and, again, addressed as the case may be.

General Townsend, in the last NDAA, there probably were at least two or three provisions regarding critical minerals and rare earth minerals, which -- I've been on this committee a while. That was pretty unique. But again, I think from a security standpoint, I think there is now a pretty widespread recognition that China has been very methodical and successful in terms of cornering the market in terms of critical minerals in Africa. I think it's clearly a part of the world that they've succeeded at that.

Again, your map on economic activity I realize was kind of a global view, but is that something that AFRICOM is watching and at least being able to help -- if nothing else, educate us back here about the fact that, you know, we've got to pay attention to this, because they have a stranglehold -- let's face it -- in terms of things like antimony and cobalt, lithium, all these minerals that go into everything from our cellphones to platforms that we need for our national defense?

TOWNSEND: Congressman, you said it great. So the Russians are looking -- to me, they're looking at exploiting and short-term gain. The Chinese have a much longer-term view that's more concerning to me. And so they are not only mining rare earth minerals in Africa for their own use, they are cornering the market on these concerns in Africa to have them under control for a rainy day in the future. That should be of concern to us.

As you look at the list of rare earth minerals, and you named a few of them, a couple others, tantalum, I was just looking at this yesterday...

SMITH: I'm sorry, General. I do apologize. Gentleman's time is expired. We'll try to get to other folks here.

TOWNSEND: Sure.

SMITH: Mr. Lamborn is recognized for five minutes.

LAMBORN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm concerned because as Robert Gates said famously regarding when Joe Biden was a senator and then vice president, he seemed to be on the wrong side of foreign policy decisions at almost every turn. You could go back to the '80s, when the nuclear freeze was being discussed, and that would have frozen a permanent advantage into Russia's favor, Soviet Union's favor, to as vice president promoting the withdrawal of troops out of Iraq that let ISIS come to the fore, or counseling against the strike against Osama bin Laden. And on and on and on.

And I'm just concerned that we're seeing this bad decision-making today with Afghanistan and Iran. So on Afghanistan, General McKenzie, are you able to tell us

whether or not you advised the president to unilaterally withdraw by September 11th all U.S. forces? Or are you able to not -- are you not able to discuss that?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I can tell you that I had multiple opportunities to have a detailed conversation with the president and give my advice. He heard my advice. I'm not going to be able to share it with you here this morning, sir.

LAMBORN: OK. Regarding the Taliban -- we've talked a little bit about that. The ranking member had some questions. Are they a reliable partner in negotiations?

MCKENZIE: I have grave doubts about the Taliban's reliability. I have expressed those publicly going back for a long period of time. But we need to see what they're going to do here.

The fact of the matter is, if -- let's say we leave -- if they want any form of future international recognition for Afghanistan, if they want any form of international support, they're going to have to keep to the agreements that they've made. We will be able to observe that and see it very clearly and directly whether or not they're able to do it.

LAMBORN: Well, I am happy to hear that we're going to be watching them closely, but my concern is that we've been watching them closely and they've been pretty much uniformly unreliable.

Ms. Dory, I'd like to ask you about Iran. Recently, they made the announcement that they were going to upgrade their highly enriched uranium to 60 percent. And that pretty much goes against everything that we want them to be doing or peace-loving people in the world want them to be doing.

So what is the Biden administration going to do about that?

DORY: Congressman, I think what we see with that announcement is playing out -- in terms of the public nature of the announcement is the jockeying for leverage with respect to the negotiations that are underway in Vienna right now. So it's important what is happening in public. It's also important what's happening behind closed doors and whether we're getting closer through the talks that are underway to a resumption of compliance on the part of Iran with the agreement.

LAMBORN: Would you agree that upgrading their HEU to 60 percent is unacceptable?

DORY: Absolutely.

LAMBORN: And how close does that get them to weapons-grade capable HEU, highly enriched uranium?

DORY: Congressman, it puts them farther along that path. You know, 90 percent level and above is where you would need to be in terms of weapons-grade uranium.

LAMBORN: OK. Well, I've just got a lot of concerns. Like you, General McKenzie, I'm going to be watching closely.

Oh, I do have one last question for you, General McKenzie, my last minute. And this is a concern I have that where we're not taking advantage of a capability that we have. We have purchased some Iron Dome batteries from Israel. And we know that these are highly capable units shooting down incoming rockets and missiles.

Are there places in CENTCOM where we could be using these Iron Dome batteries? And my understanding is we're not using them at all. I hope I'm wrong on that, but if we're not using them at all, aren't there places where they could be put to good use?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I prefer to talk that a little more directly in the closed session a little bit later this afternoon. But I will just tell you this. We look globally at the management of our air defense assets. CENTCOM has requirements. There are other places in the world that have requirements, as well, and we just need to bear that in mind.

And I go in and fight for the resources for CENTCOM, but there are, in fact, other places in the world that need air defense assets, as well. And so I just -- I do recognize that.

LAMBORN: OK, well, let's continue that discussion later today.

MCKENZIE: Yes, sir.

LAMBORN: Thank you all for being here. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

SMITH: Thank you.

Mr. Garamendi is recognized for five minutes.

GARAMENDI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General McKenzie, is it true that President Trump reduced the number of troops from 10,000 to 2,500 via a tweet last year and then via another tweet decided that we would leave by May, early May, all troops out of Afghanistan?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I believe he tweeted it, but my orders came through the chain of command resultantly from the president to the secretary, written orders. And in the Department of Defense, we move troops based on execute orders. So he may have tweeted that at the beginning. I'm not exactly aware of the time when he did or didn't do it, but the chain of command, which the president sits at the top of, is what directs us to move forces.

GARAMENDI: OK. So it was President Trump that said all troops would be out by May of this year.

MCKENZIE: Conditions-based.

GARAMENDI: Conditions-based, OK. Just a slight clarification there of the way in which we now find ourselves with troops leaving in September.

My question is to the countries surrounding Afghanistan, what is your assessment -- Ms. Dory first and then General McKenzie -- about the role of the surrounding countries, Pakistan, India, China, Russia, others? How are they going to respond to the departure of NATO and U.S. troops?

DORY: Congressman, I think you'll see an array of hedging behaviors as the U.S. and coalition forces begin to depart and as we focus in on a diplomatic first presence in the country. You'll see behaviors in terms of -- already we see it with Pakistan, where Pakistan is applying pressure to an extent with respect to the Taliban out of concern for the impact on Pakistan should civil war break out again and refugee flows affect their country.

I think that same dynamic is true with the other neighbors, as well, where each is looking at the situation now to assess for themselves what are the risks, what are the threats, and how will we posture ourselves going forward.

GARAMENDI: General?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I think Ms. Dory captured it pretty clearly. I think the country that's going to be the most affected, frankly, is going to be Pakistan, because of the possibility of unconstrained refugee flow, because of the possibility of renewed terrorist attacks in Pakistan that could ramp-up as a result of this. All of those things are certainly very possible.

I think we should also -- the countries to the north of Afghanistan will also be concerned. Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, those countries up there, because they're going to be worried about refugee flow and the flow of fighters perhaps to the north, as well. So I think all of them -- we'll see what happens when we leave. They'll look at how we posture after we go. And then they'll have to decide, you know, the way they're going to go forward with that, it's going to be -- they're going to face some very tough choices, though.

GARAMENDI: So they may or may not be encouraging or engaging in what could be a civil war? Just don't know?

MCKENZIE: I think they will all be keenly aware of the probable -- should a civil war occur, they'll be very aware of the population flow, the violence that will certainly spill over from Afghanistan if that's the case.

GARAMENDI: Thank you. Let's turn to Africa, General Townsend. Climate change, the Sahel, how is climate change likely to affect at least the Sahel area, and if we have time, beyond?

TOWNSEND: Well, first of all, I think AFRICOM's role is to support the State Department and USAID in this area of climate change. But we see clear evidence of that on the African continent. And probably -- you mentioned the Sahel -- the biggest issue we see there is water shortages and desertification of the farmland there. And that spreading southward of the Sahara Desert is probably one of our biggest concerns, and that sparks all kinds of conflict between herders and farmers, for example.

I think the ways the Department of Defense is looking at a lot of ways -- we've been charged by the president and secretary of defense to look at ways we can contribute to helping mitigate the climate change problem. Some of those ways are with unique energy solutions, and those kind of projects are starting to unfold in Africa.

GARAMENDI: Thank you very much. I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you. Mr. Wittman is recognized for five minutes.

WITTMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us today.

General McKenzie, I'd like to begin with you. You know, there's a concern that I have about the tension between our service branch chiefs and our combatant commanders. As your demand signal is before you with the global force management allocation plan, generating readiness today, and the service branch chiefs' focus on making sure that there's not only readiness today, but there's modernization and we'll call it revitalization for meeting the future demand signal.

Let me ask, to begin here, when we look at the GFMAP today, and we see in many circumstances the increased number of RFFs, requests for forces, does that reflect that the continuity of what's happening is changing? Or is the GFMAP maybe a little bit outdated and we need to look at that? Give me your perspective on where that dynamic is today, from your thoughts.

MCKENZIE: Certainly, sir, thank you. So my last job before I was the commander of U.S. Central Command, I was the director of the Joint Staff. And before that, I was the J5 of the U.S. Joint Staff. So I was at the very core of the GFMAP process. I would consider myself an expert on the GFMAP process.

And so there is always going to be a natural tension between those who raise and maintain forces and those who employ forces. That is natural. It goes back as long as we've had joint chiefs and combatant commanders.

So that's just -- that's just a natural byproduct of that. It is not new. And those tensions are adjudicated by really only one person, and that is the secretary of defense, and the process to do that adjudication is actually quite good.

Now the GFMAP is actually a design for the future. And like any design for the future, it's based on a set of assumptions. The GFMAP is as good as the assumptions that were made. I would argue that over the last couple of years the GFMAP has not completely incorporated the rise of Iran in the White House's thinking and importance. So there were a lot of tensions as a result of that. Should tension with Iran go down or should we adopt a new policy, then you could have a GFMAP that would be more aligned to that.

But again, the key thing is, the GFMAP is simply a plan. Any plan is based on assumptions. If the assumptions change, you have to change the plan. So I am not particularly -- when I was the director, I wasn't particularly concerned by it. Now that I'm a COCOM, I'm not particularly concerned by it. I ask for forces I need based on the tasks I'm given. It is the secretary advised by the Joint Staff and by his civilian leadership in the department to determine if they can fix that by either changing the tasks they've given me, giving me more forces, or accepting the risk. And then that's a risk that we all know and understand.

So I would argue, frankly, the process works pretty good. We might not like the answers from the process, but it's a pretty good process.

WITTMAN: Sure. That's a constant dynamic is mitigating risk today versus risk in the future. How much risk do we take today to make sure we mitigate in the future?

Unfortunately, it seems like history looks at us in a not so kind way and that many times we've not estimated well what the future risk is and we focus too much on what's in front of us today. So hopefully as we look at what's out there -- and I'm glad you mentioned the dynamic element of the environment and how we're looking at that future versus today in generation of force and readiness. So, thanks.

General Townsend, let me point to you. I know that your AOR you see that Russia is looking to increase influence there. You see their effort in the agreement with Sudan for essentially putting a naval base there for the next 25 years. My concern is, is, again, you see the Chinese presence in Djibouti. Now you see Russian presence in Sudan. You see them trying to expand their influence in those areas.

Are there concerns that this development or this placement of hardware there could go to other areas? Could it go to areas like South Sudan and areas in -- the Tigray

region of Ethiopia? Are we going to see an expansion of Russian influence in that area? What are your perspectives in what we see with Russian activity?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. I am concerned about what Russia's doing on the continent. First, their influence in Libya, that seems to be maybe trending in a positive direction. Next concern I have, as you just pointed out, is Sudan and their efforts to place a naval base there. That project has been a little fraught with some friction for them, but they seem to be trying to push that forward.

First of all, I would say that there are two types of naval bases. So here I am, an Army infantryman talking about naval bases. But my naval component commander has educated me America.

There's two types. The one type where you can stop and get gas and groceries. That's useful for port calls and steaming around the world, but for war, you need a militarily useful naval base and the ability to rearm and repair ships. So it's not clear to me that -- they're just on the ground stages of trying to get an agreement solidified to get -- so we've got some time to work this.

WITTMAN: Very good.

TOWNSEND: I am concerned about what they're doing. And you mentioned that they connect all the way...

SMITH: I'm sorry.

TOWNSEND: Russian activity connects all the way to the Central African Republic.

SMITH: I apologize, General. Gentleman's time has expired. My bad.

Mr. Brown is recognized.

BROWN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Is that my echo? Hmm.

SMITH: You're good.

BROWN: Mr. Chairman, can you come back to me? And maybe tech can help me with this? Or am I OK?

SMITH: We're hearing you just fine. Are you hearing an echo?

BROWN: Yeah, I'm hearing an echo. Are you?

SMITH: No, we got you loud and clear. We're OK.

BROWN: OK. Could I just ask then that my clock be reset to five minutes? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SMITH: Absolutely. We'll reset and start now. Go ahead.

BROWN: Thank you. I appreciate it. And thank you to our panelists. General Townsend, a question for you. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa Affairs Mr. Meyers recently said that U.S. engagement with the nations of the continent is crucial for peace, democracy, and development.

Could you describe what additional security resources, military assistance, and capabilities that you need to mitigate the risks and support the various diplomatic, disaster assistance, and humanitarian efforts across the continent?

TOWNSEND: Thanks. Thanks, Congressman. I would like to defer my conversation about -- my answer about forces as we are engaging in this global posture review and I haven't presented our plans yet or recommendations yet to the secretary of defense about forces.

But other capabilities, I'd like to address. Those are foreign military sales, foreign military financing, Section 333 support, IMET. Those types of security assistance are absolutely vital to our ability to get our mission accomplished in Africa.

And AFRICOM has seen significant reductions in those types of security assistance over the last couple of years. And one of them, IMET, is of great concern, but also 333 funding. So it's those types of things that I am willing to talk about now, short of actually talking about forces. Over.

BROWN: Thank you. Can you describe how terrorists and extremist activity interferes with the humanitarian missions and how it stalls economic development across the continent? I witnessed that on a CODEL. I spoke with, you know, representatives from USAID and the embassy. They said they just can't do their work in a secure enough environment because of terrorist and extremist activities.

Can you share a little bit -- put a little bit of meat on that bone?

TOWNSEND: Sure, Congressman. Thank you. So there's a symbiotic relationship between those three D's -- diplomacy, development, and defense -- and one of the ways we assist those two other D's in getting their work done is providing a secure environment.

So our work with the security forces of an African country is critical to allowing USAID do development work and the Department of State do their diplomatic work. And that symbiotic relationship is very evident in Africa. And because of generally, you know,

security and status of the security environment there, the Department of Defense's assistance is regularly needed. Over.

BROWN: Thank you. And just -- in what little time we have left, for General McKenzie and General Townsend, if you could take 30 seconds or so each, can you please describe the programs and initiatives within your command that you use to foster a culture of inclusion, diversity, and equity within our ranks in your command?

General McKenzie?

TOWNSEND: Yeah, go ahead, Frank.

MCKENZIE: Yeah, sir. So there are a variety of programs, but I would say what is absolutely most important is what leaders do by -- if you go into the front office of a leader, who's in the outer office? Who do leaders pick as principal staff officers? Who -- people see those things. And while the programs are very important and we have a variety of those programs that are underway, I think for a high-level leader, the most important thing you have to do is act, because I think that's what actually people see. And I'll pause there, sir.

BROWN: General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: I think General McKenzie said it very well. The only thing I might add is, at AFRICOM, we have a gender adviser on our staff to help us with that. But that gets back to what General McKenzie said. It's about what leaders do.

BROWN: And I agree with you on that -- people that you have in place and the commitment of leaders to diversity, equity inclusion are extremely important. I will point out that in the F.Y. '21 NDAA, this committee, along with our colleagues in the Senate, collectively Congress directed the secretary of defense to establish a mentor program, among many other things we're asked him to do regarding diversity and equity inclusion, but a mentor program to encourage greater diversity among more career fields and throughout the rank structure.

So I know you're doing a lot of good things. We're probably going to want you to do - step it up even a little bit more. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you.

Mr. Scott is recognized.

SCOTT: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, thank you for your support of CODEL Panetta in August of '19. Mr. Brown, Mr. Panetta, Mr. Hudson and I had a great trip, learned a lot, and could not have learned what we did had it not been for your support at that time.

We visited the U.N. mission at Mali. And many of the people in the meeting that we had discussed China's activity and expressed concerns that China's activity was going to lead to civil war in many of the countries on the continent of Africa.

Yesterday -- I'm sorry, last week, Admiral Faller, head of SOUTHCOM, testified -- and I'll quote him -- our interagency partners in the United States (inaudible) the FBI and others that Chinese money laundering is the number-one underwriting source for transnational criminal organizations. In your testimony, you mentioned on page 12 that illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by the Communist Chinese is the primary contributor to a growing food crisis that will further drive instability in West Africa. And obviously, food crisis and instability have historically led to civil wars.

My question for you is, how do we stop this activity from China, short of absolute war?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. I think the solution there is competition, right? We want to compete before war comes. And competition is a forever task, because you're always trying to stay short of war.

So with China, we have to compete. And we don't have to compete with them in all 53 countries of the AFRICOM AOR equally, but we have to pick and choose where we're going to compete. And one of the ways we do that is just simply by calling out their activity on the continent.

You mentioned illegal fishing. And they are probably -- my assessment is they're probably the number-one offender in illegal fishing. And it's commercial, but we all know that China has a command economy. So calling that out has helped us a lot.

Another example is helping countries avoid getting into bad deals with China. And this is an example where our Department of State does something -- I'm aware of it -- but we offer a free service to evaluate the contracts of any of our African partners before they enter, sign a contract with China or Chinese entity. The U.S. embassy will review that contract and point out the inconsistencies and the potential pitfalls in that contract and advise the African partners so they can make smart decisions.

SCOTT: General, I appreciate your question. I will tell you, I also think we need the support of corporate America and the American consumer in that, while I recognize that our manufacturing base has become contingent upon Asia, there are a lot of other countries that share our interests and share our values outside of China, and it bothers me when I walk into a store to buy a power tool that virtually every power tool that's available on the shelves in America is manufactured in China. And so we've got to have some help from corporate America to source our products from countries outside of China.

One of the other things I want to mention is that on that CODEL we got to witness the ODA missions and the training missions. And this is something that, Ms. Dory, may be more for you. But we bring these young men in from Africa. They're 18 or so. They have at best a middle school, 6th, 7th, 8th grade education. We have them on site for 24 months, 7 days a week. And they leave with that 7th or 8th grade education after we've trained them to fight.

And my concern is that without an education that they become the people that -- you know, leave and their ability to fight is their greatest asset. So I would encourage you to work with your counterparts -- this is more of a State Department mission. And then maybe more of a mission for the French in the area. But while we have those young men on our bases, our bases where we're training them, I do think it would be worthwhile to look at what it would take to educate those men and try to move them from that middle school education closer to a high school graduate education.

With that said, I look forward to the classified hearing. My time is up. Thank you all for everything you do for our country.

SMITH: Thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Crow is recognized.

CROW: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for coming in here today.

My first question is to Ms. Dory. Ms. Dory, last NDAA process, this Congress passed a provision, section 1215, that would ensure that any administration -- at that time, the Trump administration -- would actually engage with Congress on the issue of Afghanistan.

Specifically, 1215 requires that the administration make assessments regarding the impeding of counterterrorism missions -- because we saw what happened with the insurgence of ISIS after our withdrawal in Iraq. It talks about the risk posed to U.S. personnel, because these are obviously the men and women that we represent in our communities. It talks about the issue of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist safe haven and the assessments that are required there. And of course the impact on our partners, allies, and the humanitarian conditions on the ground, because we have made substantial investments in capacity-building, investments in humanitarian aid, and the men and women and children and vulnerable populations in Afghanistan.

So with that said, and the fact that this is America's war and not any one administration's war, and it is federal law that the administration provide that assessment to Congress in advance of a withdrawal from Afghanistan, is it the administration's intent to comply with that law and provide those assessments to the United States Congress?

DORY: Congressman, it's my understanding that the administration will comply with the law. My understanding, further, the briefings that will be provided later today are a down payment in some respects with respect to section 1215.

CROW: Well, just as you know, I don't expect a briefing would satisfy those requirements. And when I say comply with the law, the last administration, the Trump administration, basically provided a certification invoking an emergency to bypass the intent of the law and not actually provide those assessments. And we would expect this administration to comply in good faith with the intent of that law, and that is have written and comprehensive assessments.

Can you provide any insight into which approach the administration is going to take here?

DORY: Congressman, all I can say right now, based on just the evolving nature of the decision-making process, so the decision just happened, and we're now moving into implementation, but I fully expect compliance with the law in a manner that's intended by the Congress.

CROW: OK. Thanks, Ms. Dory.

General McKenzie, over to you. One of my biggest concerns is force protection. Obviously, retrograde operations are some of the riskiest things we do. You had testified earlier as to a surge of combat power into Afghanistan to set the conditions for the withdrawal.

But I'm gravely concerned as our footprint gets smaller, what the QRF capacity looks like in the event the security situation dissolves much faster than our assessments might indicate. Can you speak to what forces, regional forces would be available and how we're going to ensure that the last remaining units in Afghanistan have assistance available to them?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I'd prefer to talk to specific tactical details in the closed session this afternoon, but I'll be happy to do that in that session. I would tell you that I spent a lot of time looking at force protection in Afghanistan.

The withdrawal such as we are doing is based of three components. One is the equipment extraction, what you're going to do with it. The other is turning over the bases and the infrastructure. And the third and the most important is the force protection itself for our forces.

General Miller and I talk every day about force protection in Afghanistan. And I'm confident that we will have the forces necessary to protect our forces should the Taliban decide to begin attacking us on 1 May or at any other date. And I'll be happy to provide the details to you in a classified forum.

CROW: Thank you. Look forward to having that discussion this afternoon.

And General Townsend, very briefly, I represent one of the nation's largest communities of Ethiopians -- in Ethiopian diaspora. And I'm extremely concerned for the security situation, particularly the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project. Could you provide some insight as to our efforts to ensure that that project does not result in regional armed conflict?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. With the remaining 30 seconds, I might want to give some to Ms. Dory on this.

We're watching the situation with the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and we're trying to keep people informed. I think this is mostly a diplomatic-led effort. And I'll turn it over to Ms. Dory there.

DORY: I agree fully with General Townsend. There is a big diplomatic push at this point with respect to the gird concerns.

CROW: OK. Thank you to all of you. Appreciate the testimony very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you.

I want to make sure members know -- I did not announce this upfront -- we have a hard stop at 1:30 for this portion. And then we'll be reconvening at 3:00 in this room, actually, for the classified hearing. So I want to emphasize that point, because normally we do it in the CVC, but the CVC is occupied today by extended discussions about Afghanistan. So 1:30, hard stop, and then 3:00 back here for that.

I will be departing shortly and turning the committee over to the capable hands of Mr. Larsen to go over and do one of the CVC briefings. But just want to make sure everyone had that scheduling update.

And with that, Mr. DesJarlais is recognized.

DESJARLAIS: Thank you, Chairman Smith.

General McKenzie, which state actor in your area of responsibility do you believe to be the United States' greatest geostrategic foe?

MCKENZIE: I consider Iran to be the greatest threat to regional stability in the Middle East.

DESJARLAIS: And with Israel moving from EUCOM to CENTCOM later this year, do you believe that they will be your closest partner in the AOR?

MCKENZIE: We have a lot of close partners in the AOR. Israel will certainly join a line of dependable friendships and partnerships that we have in the region. We have a unique and old relationship with Israel. But I wouldn't further characterize it.

DESJARLAIS: OK. When you have the political leadership of our greatest foe in the region, Iran, threatening our closest ally, Israel, and stating that its mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to erase Israel from the map of the region, do you believe that one of our top priorities should be keeping a nuclear war out of Iran's hands?

MCKENZIE: I believe the president has stated that is a high priority. I also believe that one of the things Central Command does on a daily basis is deter Iran from acting against us and against our partners and friends in the region.

DESJARLAIS: OK. If Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, what do you believe would be the response from some of our allies in the region? And do you believe such a move could have the potential to set off an arms race?

MCKENZIE: I would prefer not to speculate about future contingencies. I can tell you that it would be very concerning to us if Iran possessed a nuclear weapon and it was able to possess a nuclear weapon. And it is the aim of United States' policy to prevent that condition from occurring.

DESJARLAIS: OK. You'd mentioned in your opening statement that as a result of the challenges faced with UAS detection and interdiction, that the United States is for the first time since the Korean War operating without complete air superiority. What would we -- what should we be doing to address this gap in our capabilities and retain the advantage against Iranian forces?

MCKENZIE: Sir, I think the -- I think, first of all, the Department of Defense has moved up very aggressively to address this problem. The Army is the executive agent for close-in protection against these small UAS systems that are most concerning to me. But I think we still have a ways to go to get on the right side of the curve with this, because right now you can go out and buy one at Walmart or some other location. You can weaponize it very readily. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to detect them until it's too late.

We have a variety of systems that we're testing now in a free market of competition to find the best and most integrated capabilities. We are not there yet, and it remains a very concerning priority of mine.

DESJARLAIS: OK. Can you spell out the implications of China's 25-year agreement with Iran, which includes expanding military cooperation?

MCKENZIE: Sure, so, you know, China has had an existing military agreement with Iran for a period of time. I'm not certain that this is going to produce anything new or

different. Again, we'll watch to see what it does with oil exports, and I'm probably not the best person to talk about that right now, but a number of sanctions could still come in place against Chinese companies should they elect to do business with Iran.

So again, I'm probably not the best guy to give you an answer on that, sir.

DESJARLAIS: OK. The annual threat assessment issued earlier this month by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, they highlighted Iraq as the key battleground for Iran's influence this year and during the next several years. Do you agree with this assessment?

MCKENZIE: I completely agree with that. And I would go further to say that the year 2020, Iran's plan was to, again, through political action, the ejection of the United States from the region and principally from Iraq, they failed in doing that. And as a result, we're beginning to see attacks ramp up from their Shia groups in the region, and I think that's going to continue.

DESJARLAIS: OK, so you kind of partly answered that. But what would be the net effect if the U.S. were to draw down or completely withdraw troops from Iraq?

MCKENZIE: Well, that move is not contemplated. If there's -- one of the good news stories in the region is, I believe we have a good relationship with the government of Iraq. This recently completed strategic dialogue is going to provide a framework for us to decide what our forces are going to look like going forward. So I don't think there's a - I don't see us withdrawing completely from Iraq in the future.

DESJARLAIS: OK, well, thank you, General, both generals, for your service, and Ms. Dory.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you. Mr. Carbajal?

CARBAJAL: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to all the witnesses here today.

Ms. Dory, I welcome this administration's decision to strategically withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. I must say, though, that the difference between this administration and the previous administration is that it seems that we're doing it with our allies, and we're doing it in close coordination and collaboration, instead of hearing about a tweet and our commanders not really being in the loop. So I appreciate that.

But still the question that stays as a significant issue is, well, what is our plan? That was my criticism before with the previous administration, and that's I think what we're all looking to better understand. What is the plan as we leave Afghanistan?

So if you could answer that. And then help me understand what President Biden meant when he said we'll reorganize our counterterrorism capabilities and the substantial assets in the region to prevent reemergence of terrorism. Can you elaborate on that statement?

DORY: Thank you, Congressman. This administration has reinvigorated a focus on alliances and partnerships. And I think you see it in the work that has been underway to support taking a decision with respect to the future of the U.S. force posture in Afghanistan, so the intensive engagement that we saw most recently with NATO and coalition partners with respect to the decision to draw down in Afghanistan.

In the very near term, there is detailed planning underway, as you heard General McKenzie refer to a few moments ago, with respect to how the force drawdown will proceed in conjunction with allies and partners, separate planning underway with respect to what the counterterrorism footprint will look like going forward, given the focus in Afghanistan, the primary vital interest that has sustained us over time being to ensure that there are no attacks emanating from Afghanistan with respect to the U.S. homeland.

And we'll have -- in the classified briefings later today, we'll be able to get into that in a lot more detail.

CARBAJAL: OK. Does that include what our footprint will look like moving forward?

DORY: Well, I think what we understand is from here into September that we'll -- we will not have U.S. combat forces -- U.S. or coalition combat forces there. And we will transition to a diplomatically oriented footprint with the U.S. embassy.

CARBAJAL: Thank you. Can you provide us with an update on where the intra-Afghan peace talks are at, at this point?

DORY: I think Ambassador Khalilzad will be one of the panelists in the briefings later this afternoon and will be well postured to give a just fresh update on those talks.

CARBAJAL: Great. Thank you.

General McKenzie, in your testimony, you comment that CENTCOM is committed to working with interagency partners to develop mechanisms that ensure continued oversight of and accountability of the Afghanistan security forces fund. What oversight tools do we currently use that will be important to continue after the withdrawal? How will our oversight adapt to having a limited presence on the ground?

MCKENZIE: The principal tool that we use to manage the oversight of the disbursement of those funds and the proper use of it are the people on the ground that see what happens to it and monitor that. As we draw down, that's going to become our principal challenge. How do we do that from a remote location?

A lot will depend on the size of the U.S. embassy that remains. And we have not finally determined that. And that's something that we're talking about planning right now. The smaller the embassy is, the more difficult it will become to manage the ASFF as we go forward.

We're keenly aware of that. That is right at the centerpiece of our planning. And we're working very closely with the Department of State to make those determinations.

CARBAJAL: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

LARSEN: Thank you, Representative Carbajal.

The chair now recognizes Representative Gaetz from Florida for five minutes.

GAETZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to talk about Chad, General Townsend. It appears in the last several hours the president of Chad was killed, engaged in front line fighting against rebels who had based in Libya and had crossed the border. What do you know currently about the situation in Chad? And particularly any change to the counterterrorism cooperation that we've been able to rely on from that government?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. As you know, it's sort of a breaking news story. As I walked in here this morning, we learned about the reported and confirmed death of President Deby. He's a retired general. And he has in the past gone to the front where there was action. And we don't know exactly how he got killed, but the report is he was killed in action up there, facing off with a column of rebels that are not terrorists, they're not ISIS, they're not Al Qaida. They are anti -- they were actually anti-regime in Chad.

They were based in southern Libya. They mounted up in several hundred vehicles and they transited a long way across the Chadian Desert towards the south. The Chadian government forces started engaged them. They were supported by the French. We observed this and then -- it looked like that the column had made the decision to withdraw.

This has happened before. They were about to withdraw, we think. And then the news of the President Deby's death became known. It's unclear what this means for our relationship there. His son, President Deby's son, former intel chief, has been appointed as the interim president.

We expect that he -- he is inclined towards good relationships with France and the United States. We think that will continue. There could be some potential for violence, and we are working closely with our country team there. Our embassy did a precautionary drawdown of personnel to a minimum staff. And we also have some

military folks there working with the French and the embassy, so we're watching this very closely to keep Americans safe while this becomes a little more clear.

GAETZ: Yeah, it seems tactically significant that these rebels were able to base in southern Libya, that they were able to traverse such a distance, and then execute this mission. It might suggest that the situation in Libya is getting worse, as well, with a failed state following the Gadhafi regime.

With this transition council that has President Deby's son now in some position of leadership -- I guess the position of leadership in the country -- what do we expect from the French? I know that they were very supportive of the regime. Is there anything that we would expect as a change from -- regarding their involvement with the country?

TOWNSEND: On your point about the situation in Libya, we know that the Chadian government had been supportive and there were also factions in Chad that supported various factions in Libya.

Regarding the future with this interim president, the son of President Deby, the interim President Deby, right now, I anticipate that I will -- he will be favorable to good relations with France. And France, I anticipate, will continue to do what they've been doing up to this point, supporting the government of Chad. But I have to be honest with you, this is breaking news and it's not clear.

GAETZ: Yeah, it sort of seems when a president who took power through a military coup then dies in a battle against political rebels, not religious extremists, and then gives rise to his son being selected by the national council, that it's not the strongest case for emerging democracy in Africa. It seems to suggest more of a move toward authoritarianism and I think that's something we should all watch carefully.

I thank the chairman and I yield back.

LARSEN: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Representative Slotkin of Michigan for five minutes.

SLOTKIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to see all three of you here, some of our really foremost experts on the Middle East and Africa that we have in our government. My questions are going to be primarily for General McKenzie on Afghanistan.

You know, I think for the most part, most of us feel -- at least I feel from my constituents that they want to be out of Afghanistan. We have fathers who are sending off their sons to fight in the same war they fought in.

But what holds people back is this fear that the exact reason we went in -- you know, threat of terrorist attacks against our homeland and our allies -- could creep back up

again. So help us understand -- I understand we'll talk more of the classified stuff in a separate session, but General McKenzie, help reassure my constituents that by pulling out we won't be doing right -- going right back in because we have a threat that impacts us here in the homeland.

MCKENZIE: Thanks. Thanks, ma'am, for that. And I appreciate the concern of your constituents. Like them, I've sent my son twice to Afghanistan, so I'm very much aware of those concerns.

As we've talked a little bit before, we're going to go to zero in Afghanistan. That means there will be no U.S. forces on the ground there. We will use a variety of means to monitor Al Qaida and ISIS in Afghanistan. The intelligence will decline. The director of national intelligence -- or CIA director has said that. But we will see be able to see into Afghanistan. There still will be ways to do that.

Much of that will depend on the embassy platform that remains, and that is yet undetermined, but that will be helpful if we maintain an embassy there. But we're going to be able to continue to look into Afghanistan. And I think the president's been very clear. We're not going to reenter to reoccupy Afghanistan under any conceivable circumstances.

What we will retain the ability to do is to find and fix those people who plan attacks against us that we can detect. And then, when appropriate, we will be able to strike them. I don't want to make that sound easy, because it's not easy. It's going to be extremely difficult to do it. But it is not impossible to do it.

SLOTKIN: So I'm deeply impacted by our experience in Iraq, as someone who grew up as an Iraq specialist and who didn't agree with the decision to go to zero in Iraq, and then watched in the years after we had pulled out how difficult it was to get Washington to pay attention to what was then a growing threat of ISIS.

We couldn't get the intelligence support. We couldn't get the overhead imagery support. We couldn't get the attention of folks when we saw things creeping back in the wrong direction. Please help me understand how this will be different.

MCKENZIE: Well, speaking to the future, I don't know. But I will certainly be a relentless advocate to keep the focus on Afghanistan. We are going to shift assets out of Central Command. That's a given. That's going to happen. At the same time, we need to balance against what we know, the known aspiration of these groups to launch attacks against the United States. That hasn't gone away.

And it's there right now. They're depressed. They have very little ability to do that. Certainly, it's possible that they could reestablish themselves in the future. It's also possible the Taliban will do some of the things that they've said they're going to do. I'll just watch that very closely to see that it happens.

I think that is a reasonable concern. And I share that concern, frankly.

SLOTKIN: And I know that, you know, we've learned in the past 20 years that our best attempts in these wars is through coalitions, through alliances, doing things with partners and allies. So I'm heartened that we're having the conversation with them, but is there anything planning on the regional security architecture, a formal plan with our allies and partners to have a conversation not just about how to end the war, but how to contain the situation after the war has ended?

MCKENZIE: So I'd defer to Ms. Dory for some of that. But I would say what's been very impressive to me has been the complete and comprehensive degree of consultation that went into this decision and the execution of this decision, both with our NATO partners, our other coalition partners on the ground, and, in fact, regional partners.

So I think that sets the stage for some form of regional architecture, but I'd defer to Ms. Dory for further comments on that.

SLOTKIN: I'll go to Ms. Dory in just a second. But just to finish out, you're one of our most seasoned, experienced four-star generals with experience on the ground in the Middle East, tour after tour. Do you feel confident that the American people will stay safe and not be attacked again emanating out of Afghanistan?

MCKENZIE: The key thing that's different in 2021 from 2001 is not only what's going on in the theater, but our ability to harden the country here, the steps we've taken here to protect ourselves. It's a very different country in terms of ability to enter and operate in the United States than it was in the fall of 2001.

So we work very hard to ensure that attacks aren't going to come from Afghanistan or from Africa or from any other place. It begins on the ground there, but there's also a broad in-depth defense that is in place that was not in place before.

SLOTKIN: And in my last remaining 20 seconds, do you know of any discussions with the Afghans about -- with the Afghans, excuse me -- on a status-of-forces agreement or a diplomatic security agreement for our embassy?

MCKENZIE: I know that's actively being worked now, but I don't have any details beyond that.

SLOTKIN: Thank you, General. Appreciate it. I yield back.

LARSEN: Thank you, Representative.

Chair recognized Representative Waltz of Florida for five minutes. Representative Waltz?

WALTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Want (inaudible) OK?

LARSEN: You're good.

WALTZ: All right, thank you. General, I just want to pick up on Ms. Slotkin's questions. I certainly share her concerns. And it was good to spend some time with you a few weeks ago.

Can you talk to me about -- or Ms. Dory -- what basing agreements do we have from any of the 'Stans? Tajikistan, we're -- obviously, we no longer -- where we have no basing, Kyrgyzstan, where we no longer have Manas, Uzbekistan, where we no longer have K2 -- what agreements do we have with any of the neighboring countries to be able to base our forces and conduct lethal strikes or even surveillance back into Afghanistan? Do we have any currently?

MCKENZIE: At this time, we have none of those agreements in place.

WALTZ: General, do you think it would have been optimal to have those agreements before we announced to the world that we're going to zero in a few months?

MCKENZIE: I can't speak to that. I would tell you that right now we're engaged in a significant effort to evaluate where we want to put potential CT forces, where they'd be best optimized from geography, and also the diplomatic angle of it as we go forward.

WALTZ: I think it's -- we need to be clear with the American people that when the military goes, our intelligence assets go, the agency -- the Central Intelligence Agency and other agencies are dependent on that military backbone and basing, and also our contracts and our contractors go, with estimates of 15,000 to 20,000 currently there, providing logistics, maintenance, and other critical support to the Afghan security forces.

What's the plan for the continuing presence of those critical contract support services?

MCKENZIE: So right now, most of the contractors are going to leave. Certainly, the U.S. contractors are going to leave. We'll try to develop ways to do distant contracting where we can. Clearly, there are going to be some things that we're not going to be able to do anymore as the contractors leave, and I don't want to minimize that.

WALTZ: And it's important for everyone to understand that those contractors are providing maintenance, for example, for the Black Hawks that we've provided to the Afghan security forces, to the limited close air support capabilities that they have, and again, critical logistic and advisory functions. All of that's going to be gone in the next few months.

And both -- a number of reports, both think-tank, intelligence community, and even the Afghans themselves have cast real doubt on the ability of the Afghan security forces to continue to hold without that support.

So I fear, to add on to Ms. Slotkin's questions, if the Taliban does take over or we do even have a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban, we'll now be reliant on them for any basing overflight or any type of authorities that we need to go after Al Qaida, assuming that they'll give them. Is that -- do I have that wrong?

MCKENZIE: Sir, that's a lot of future hypotheticals that I'm probably not the best person to talk about. I would tell you right now, though, there's still the possibility of inter-Afghan dialogue. That could still continue. We could all have our own assessment about the probability of that reaching success, but that still continues.

WALTZ: Well, but, General, but I want to be clear with everyone that it is not a hypothetical that the State Department has introduced a draft power-sharing agreement into the dialogue, where the Afghan government would dissolve as it currently stands and share power with the Taliban. So I don't think it's a leap to say we would then have to negotiate them for any ability to return and go after Al Qaida.

But my question is, what military -- so assume they have the will to turn on and conduct operations against Al Qaida, what military capability does the Taliban have that a 300,000-man Afghan Army and 42 coalition nations have struggled in terms of containing Al Qaida -- what military capabilities do the Afghans have?

MCKENZIE: So the Afghans would have significant residual capability. It would depend on if the nation is whole, if the nation is fractured, if there's a civil war. There are a variety of future contingents that would directly affect the ability of the Afghan -- whatever -- whoever's leading the Afghan government and whatever state it is, their ability to actually concentrate combat power.

Some of those scenarios you've outlined, it would be a fractured state. They would not be able to do it. Other scenarios, they might be able to do it.

WALTZ: Thank you, General. And just in the time I have remaining, would Bagram air base be valuable to you, being where it's located geographically, west of China, south of Russia, east of Iran?

MCKENZIE: Bagram is key terrain...

WALTZ: In great power contingencies?

MCKENZIE: Bagram is key terrain tactically in Afghanistan, operationally and strategically. It's the definition of key terrain.

WALTZ: And it's notable that we're about to just give that away with nothing in return. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

LARSEN: Gentleman's time expired.

The chair recognizes Representative Houlahan of Pennsylvania for five minutes.

HOULAHAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions first to General McKenzie and General Townsend have to do with China, which has obviously significantly invested in Pakistan and parts of Africa as part of their Belt and Road Initiative. And I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit, if you have any concerns about them in terms of national security and the region, and also if you might be able to tell us if you have heard any whisperings of the fact that they are maybe interested in sending peacekeeping troops to Afghanistan, if we, indeed, do leave the region?

MCKENZIE: I'll begin briefly just to talk about the Central Command before handing over to General Townsend.

So we see China operating in Central Command principally from an economic perspective. They offer a number of apparently seductive and attractive infrastructure and other development loans and projects to countries in the region, which then have -- on the back end of that are not such -- don't appear to be such a good deal after all.

They want access to the region. They would I think eventually want to seek naval basing in the region because they do import a significant amount of their hydrocarbons through the Strait of Hormuz and out of the region.

But for now, for the short term to the medium term, it is principally economic engagement going forward. And you're right. We see it in Pakistan, but also in some of the gulf states. It is significantly concerning to me. They are playing a very long game. And they're playing it with vast amounts of resources.

HOULAHAN: And, sir, do you see any concerns or significant concerns as a result of that?

MCKENZIE: I am very concerned about where we're going to be in a few years with China in the region. I believe that some of the nation-states in the region are also waking up to this and are becoming aware of it, because they see what's happening in Africa. They see what's happening in South America and other parts of the globe.

And as you know, there are nations in the region that actually do have significant resourcing themselves so they don't need to fall into the debt trap with China. Others are susceptible to that predatory diplomacy.

HOULAHAN: And, General Townsend, do you have anything, as well?

TOWNSEND: I'd say our concerns are very similar to those expressed by General McKenzie. I don't know if you received the placemats. We handed out placemats here in the room, and I was told we distributed them electronically, as well. One of them is...

LARSEN: General, we do have those placemats.

TOWNSEND: Thank you. What China is doing in Africa. And that kind of gives you an idea. I think the only thing I'd add to what General McKenzie said is, they very much have intent to establish additional overseas bases in Africa. Whether that be on the Atlantic coast of Africa or the Indian Ocean coast of Africa, they're working hard to establish naval bases and/or air bases. And that is of great concern to AFRICOM.

HOULAHAN: And sir, with regard to a potential build-up of China, do you anticipate, General Townsend, with the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, that we might increase our troops in AFRICOM, given that they, as we know, is a constant threat of extremism. How will we possibly do that if, indeed, that is our plan, do you think?

TOWNSEND: Congresswoman, I don't -- as an economy of force effort for the Department of Defense, I don't anticipate significant uplift of resources to AFRICOM, despite the drawdown in Afghanistan. So I'm not anticipating that. But we're going to undergo this global posture review and we're going to work through all those questions.

HOULAHAN: I look forward to that. I do have concerns. I know I'm not alone in sharing those concerns with that particular part of the world. Africa seems to be a rising opportunity for terrorists to land there, in the absence of other places around the world that they could land. And I just want to make sure that we're keeping our eye on the region.

I appreciate your time, gentlemen. And I'll yield back.

LARSEN: Thank you, Representative.

The chair now recognizes Representative Bice of Oklahoma for five minutes.

BICE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General -- I'm sorry, thank you for being here this afternoon. My first question revolves around China and Russia and their continued reach into the AFRICOM region. One of the things that I have learned in my very short time here is that rare earth minerals are becoming a very big concern, and the Chinese and Russians are tapping into the African region to try to mine those.

Is the DOD taking any steps to facilitate access to those rare earth minerals for domestic use?

TOWNSEND: Thanks for your question, Congresswoman. On the topic of rare earth minerals, both countries, as you've pointed out, are seeking to exploit those on the African continent. The Russians are sort of near-term exploiters, and the Chinese are more strategic exploiters, in my view. They're very carefully seeking out mineral deposits that they want to lock down for the future.

The Department of Defense is supporting the USAID and the Department of State in this effort. We don't have a particular effort directed at securing rare earth minerals on the DOD side. But we are supporting our interagency partners in that regard.

BICE: Do you feel like that's being effective?

TOWNSEND: I know that it has the energy of this administration. It's a great concern to this administration. I think it's a legitimate concern.

BICE: Pivoting just a bit here, you know, we've also heard a lot about technology and the use of technology across the region. How are CENTCOM and AFRICOM addressing the emerging threat of drones and drone swarm tactics?

TOWNSEND: I'll...

BICE: And that can really sort of apply to -- yeah, CENTCOM or AFRICOM.

TOWNSEND: Sure, I'll answer it and hand it off to General McKenzie. My first encounter with drone delivered munitions was in the Battle of Mosul in Iraq two or three years ago. So this is an area of great concern to us.

We haven't seen significant employment of weaponized drones in Africa yet, but we are working very hard to be ready for that and to head that off. The Department of Defense, as General McKenzie explained earlier, the Department of Defense has a great program focused on that threat. I am concerned about the small armed drones, as well as the larger one-way attack drones that we've seen employed in the region.

So I think we're focused on it and we're employing as much technology as we can to prepare for that. General McKenzie?

MCKENZIE: Thanks. So small, commercially available drones are one of the most persistent and dangerous threats that we see in the Central Command AOR. I am very concerned about it. We have ways to deal with larger land attack cruise missiles. They're equally -- they're concerning, but we can deal with them as an air defense problem. It's a lot harder to deal with something that's small, perhaps commercially off-the-shelf bought, modified. And we're on the wrong side of the cost imposition curve when it comes to these systems.

So we're -- a lot of great work is being done in the department. We are not there yet.

BICE: And that sort of leads to my next question, which was the factors that are limiting your ability to deploy counter-UAS systems within CENTCOM and AFRICOM.

MCKENZIE: So within CENTCOM, there are a variety of systems out there. I'd take any system and employ it immediately.

What we -- where we need to go is an integrated system, because the system -- an integrated system would give you early warning of launch perhaps through a variety of means. It would give you an idea of where they're coming and their altitude. Then it would give you an ability to engage them kinetically and non-kinetically.

We do not yet have a single system that can do all that. What we have are a variety of systems that all do part of this. And that's part of the problem. We're not integrated. So we push very hard to get an integrated system, but one that is not delivered late, behind need. That's the problem when you push for an integrated system.

BICE: Ms. Dory, do you have any comments on that?

DORY: I would just add to that, Congresswoman, that the issue of counter-UAS is something not just within the department at this point, but has a profile in terms of the interagency discussions on how to deter and defeat that threat. So within the Department of Defense, there is the joint effort underway that the generals have referred to, but there's also a broader whole-of-government approach that has recently initiated. Thank you.

BICE: Well, thank you, Ms. Dory, General McKenzie, and General Townsend for your time. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

LARSEN: Thank you. Before I go to the next questioner, I do want to just stop and as well thank General McKenzie for his hospitality a few weeks ago at CENTCOM. I appreciate that. And I did not take that opportunity earlier. I wanted to thank you for that.

The chair now recognizes Representative Luria of Virginia for five minutes.

LURIA: Well, thank you, gentlemen and Ms. Dory, for your testimony today. I'd like to first address the issue with General McKenzie of mine warfare in the CENTCOM AOR. Iranian mining capability is obviously a vulnerability for U.S. and allied military forces within the region, as well as for commercial shipping and free trade. And the Navy plans to soon decommission its remaining four MCM platforms stationed in the gulf in Bahrain.

And as we know, the material condition and capabilities that these aging MCMs have been severely degrade over time. However, the Navy's planned replacement of mine warfare capability through the mission modules on the LCS class of ships is neither fully developed, nor has it been successfully deployed from the LCS.

However, testing of the MCM suite of platforms on -- on platforms of opportunity, such as provided by allied navies, in 2019, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's Mounts Bay successfully tested this, and then the ESB-4, Hershel "Woody" Williams, also in 2019, proved successful. And these AGWA (ph) capabilities are not resident in the CENTCOM AOR, which is going to leave a significant gap in MCM capability once these ships are decommissioned.

As a combatant commander, are you confident in the current and future mine warfare capabilities provided by the Navy in your AOR? .

MCKENZIE: Thank you for the question. I am very concerned about Iranian mine warfare capabilities. I think it's one of their great asymmetric weapons, and they employ it in two areas, up in the Strait of Hormuz...

LARSEN: General McKenzie, I'm sorry. Could you just get that microphone pointed right at your chin?

MCKENZIE: Sure. How's that? Better?

LARSEN: Yeah, a little better, yeah.

MCKENZIE: I am very concerned about Iranian mine warfare capabilities. It's a significant asymmetric threat that they possess. And they possess it not only up in the Strait of Hormuz, which is where we always think about it, but also down in the Bab-el-Mandeb in the Red Sea. Their ability to deploy a wide variety of thousands of mines is very concerning to me.

Right now, we have a very limited mine warfare capability in the theater. Our ships, as you have noted, and the ships of our British partners are also about all we have, if we had to sweep and open the Strait of Hormuz, which is a vital international passage, and it would take us an extended amount of time to do it with the resources that we have now.

I, too, have noted the LCS and the problems that have attended it as a possible minesweeping variant. Regardless, it's not going to be available in a reasonable amount of time for me in my requirements in U.S. Central Command. So I would share your concerns. We talk about this all the time. This is an area of Iranian capability that remains vexing and concerning to me.

LURIA: So, General, since there was a successful test of these new advanced mine warfare capabilities using the TESV platform (ph), which is something that's already deployed in your theater, would that be a valuable addition in the CENTCOM AOR, if we were able to leverage that capability on the TESV (ph)?

MCKENZIE: CENTCOM would be happy to leverage any capability that's out there right now, given the significant gap between our available resources and the scope and scale of the problem.

LURIA: OK, thank you.

And in the time remaining, General Townsend, I wanted to focus as some of my colleagues already have in the rapidly expanding Chinese influence on the African continent. We've already referenced the strategic location of the Chinese overseas base in Djibouti, adjacent to Bab-el-Mandeb and the entrance to the Red Sea.

But more than a strategic positioning from their maritime perspective, I wanted to focus on some of the infrastructure and transportation investments that they're making, reaching into Ethiopia. It appears that the Chinese, who inarguably want to grow their position on the world stage and in Africa, are engaging in their own version of modern-day colonialism in the African continent, as they venture to find cheaper labor markets and use infrastructure debt to leverage -- as a leverage tool.

Can you comment on the domestic and regional impact of the Chinese economic expansion into Ethiopia? And then maybe a little bit of the time remaining on how the recent unrest in the Tigray has changed any Chinese activity in the area?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congresswoman. So the -- you mentioned Chinese, an example of their investments on the African continent. Transportation infrastructure is certainly one of those. Sea ports, airports, and rail lines, in particular. And you see that with Ethiopia with rail lines running to the Red Sea from the country. You see that in Kenya, as well.

In some places, these investments have worked out OK. I don't -- I haven't seen any of them that have worked out really well, as the Chinese had hoped they would.

Regarding your question about Tigray, we haven't -- I haven't seen a connection to Tigray and China.

LARSEN: Representative's time has expired.

LURIA: OK.

LARSEN: Thank you.

Chair now recognizes Representative Franklin from Florida for five minutes.

FRANKLIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And in the interest of time, I do have a couple of questions for General McKenzie. First, following up on Representative Waltz's dialogue earlier regarding basing in the region and the changes we're now going to face with Afghanistan, not being there with a physical presence on the ground, I think back to

just after 9/11, I was in Bahrain. We were planning some of those initial strikes into Afghanistan.

The challenge we had was long distances to make those happen. And we had carrier pilots that were flying 8- to 10-hour missions with multiple refuelings to get there. That's obviously going to be a challenge, if we find ourselves having to go back in, in that kind of scale in the future.

But in your testimony, you had mentioned pursuing opportunities to enhance expeditionary basing in less vulnerable areas of the AOR. Could you expand a little bit on those and where they may stand?

MCKENZIE: Certainly. When we talk about that, I am primarily talking about the Iran problem and the fact that our bases now, such as Al Udeid, Al Dhafra, Manama, Bahrain, as you noted, have the virtue of being close to the area you might want to fight. They also have the problem of being very close to the Iranians.

So what we would seek to do is examine alternatives further to the west in the Arabian Peninsula that would make it more difficult for the Iranians to target our bases there. It would increase the range. Many of their weapons would not actually have the range to reach out there and get to those bases.

The problem would be the tanker bill that's associated with that. On the other hand, if the tanker can survive out to the west, it's probably better than it being close where it can be struck. So there's a tradeoff that we make. And we look to our partners to help us on this with these bases. And we'd never look to base permanently there. Rather, you'd like to have the ability to go in there, as you noted, in an expeditionary manner, in a time of crisis or in a time of war, just to make it harder for an opponent to threaten the force.

FRANKLIN: Great, thank you. Switching gears to the displaced persons camps in northeast Syria, particularly Al Hawl, I guess from your testimony, General, we talked about 61,000 people there, 94 percent women and children, two-thirds under 18.

I mean, in addition to the obvious humanitarian crisis, I know there's a big problem with radicalization of a lot of these children. So this I guess would be a question for you, General McKenzie, and also Ms. Dory, what's the way ahead in that? How do we fix this problem? I know a lot of the countries that these people are coming from don't want them back. What's the end game for this?

MCKENZIE: Sure, so I'll defer to Ms. Dory here in just a minute, but I will say it is not a military problem, but it will manifest itself in 5 to 10 years as a military problem unless we solve it now, because these children are going to grow up radicalized and we're going to see them on battlefields fighting us.

So it is an international problem. It requires repatriation. It requires nations to step up to the plate, claim their citizens, bring them home, reintegrate them back into their communities. And it demands de-radicalization, which is extremely difficult to do. It is best done and practiced by nations in the region who have a cultural affinity for the people that are largely in these camps.

It is a tough problem. Our diplomats, Department of State, USAID, and a lot of NGOs are working at this very hard. It is one of the most pressing problems we have in the CENTCOM region right now. And with that, I'll defer to Ms. Dory for anything she'd like to add.

DORY: I think General McKenzie put it beautifully. It's not a military problem. It is an interagency issue. And it's a question of political will in terms of host nations for the individuals who are in the camps.

FRANKLIN: So what pressure do we have that we can apply to get these folks to step up and accept these people? We can't leave them there in the desert forever.

DORY: I think it depends on which countries you're talking about and the state of the dialogue with them, what forms of dialogue and leverage we have at our disposal to encourage stepping up to that responsibility.

FRANKLIN: OK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

LARSEN: Thank you, Representative Franklin.

The chair recognizes Representative Strickland. Before you go, Strickland, just the next questioner will be Representative Veasey.

So, Representative Strickland of Washington state, you're recognized for five minutes.

STRICKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, you noted in your testimony that AFRICOM supported U.S. efforts to provide COVID-19 assistance in 43 countries, including the delivery of nearly \$500 million in medical supplies. The United States is often at its best when it leads in crises, as it did during the Ebola crisis.

Can you tell me please how AFRICOM is working alongside whole-of-government efforts to respond to COVID-19, and specifically have we along with USG started to develop a plan to distribute vaccines for COVID to partners on the continent?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congresswoman. So as you saw in the testimony there, there have been significant Department of Defense efforts, but those are small in

comparison to the U.S. government's COVID assistance on the African continent that's been led primarily by the USAID and the Department of State.

So there are some military or DOD capabilities that we have employed to the maximum extent possible, things like medical supplies and mobile field hospitals that are being fielded to military partners that are being used by those partner countries to treat COVID.

So that's all been part of the larger U.S. government response. And it's a small part compared to what the State Department and USAID have done.

On your question about vaccines, I'll defer to Ms. Dory, but the U.S. government is going to provide eventually vaccines internationally and in Africa, but we're making sure we've taken care of the American population first. We have been asked for input to provide that input to the Department of Defense and the government for decisions about where vaccines might go first.

Ms. Dory?

DORY: Thank you, General Townsend. Just to add on that, that with the state of vaccination at home in a much better place than it has been, plans are underway with respect to how the U.S. government will be able to help overseas. Our AID colleagues and State Department colleagues are at the forefront of those efforts, and I think we'll see the results of those in coming months.

STRICKLAND: Great, thank you. And then one more question. Ms. Dory, we'll stay with you. The prior administration chose to close U.S. defense attache offices in several West African countries. Defense attache perform a vital role in representing the U.S. military and removing them can send the wrong message to host governments about the importance that we put on the relationship and how much we value it.

As you review the decisions of the prior administration, can you tell me about the status of these defense attache offices?

DORY: Congresswoman, I'd be glad to. And I can imagine General Townsend might like to add onto this, as well.

Defense attaches are fundamental to the way the Department of Defense does business in the interagency context on the ground in our missions across the world. We have the continued challenges, as we see in every other type of personnel category, of supply and demand, and insufficient supply relative to demand has led to some difficult decisions with respect to how we're represented in different countries and whether individual attaches are responsible for more than one country at a time. I'd very much like to see sufficient attaches to go around.

General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congresswoman. So as you heard, Congresswoman, the last administration did make a decision to close six defense attache offices on the African continent. Some of those were hub that did several smaller countries, as well. That decision was overturned, actually, before the end of the -- by the acting Secretary of Defense Miller before the administration ended.

I suspect it may get reviewed during this global posture review. The problem is, between the initial decision to close those offices, we had a personnel assignment cycle go by, so no backfills were identified. So now that the decision was overturned, we have -- we're going to probably have a gap, potentially of a year or two, in some of those defense attache offices.

Anyway, that's the current state of that. And Ms. Dory covered very well the importance of defense attache offices in Africa.

STRICKLAND: Great. Thank you both of you. I yield back my time, Mr. Chair.

LARSEN: Thank you, Representative Strickland.

The chair now recognizes Representative Veasey of Texas for five minutes.

VEASEY: Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

General Townsend, you testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2020 and warned that VEOs were expanding at a very rapid rate across West Africa, noting that substantive external assistance from Western partners was critical to help our African partners make progress to contain these VEOs.

At the end of September 2020, AFRICOM reported that VEOs in the Sahel were neither degraded nor contained and that VEOs in West Africa continued to expand geographically, conduct attacks, and threaten people that are partners in the region.

What do you believe were the driving factors behind the lack of progress over the past year? And how can we better leverage USG resources, specifically in Nigeria, where violence threatens the prosperity of Africa's largest democracy, and making sure that we keep Nigeria as stable as possible, because they're so important for the entire continent, quite frankly?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. You're right. In my last testimony, I said that the VEO threat in West Africa was expanding. I don't know if I used the analogy then, but it's appropriate, like a wildfire, coming south from Mali and Niger towards Burkina Faso and the littoral states.

And I believe the reason for that is that the international efforts there by the African partners and foreign partners were both insufficient and uncoordinated. They might

actually be sufficient if they were better coordinated but it was impossible to tell, because they were uncoordinated.

Now, that advance has not progressed at the speed that I feared it would a year ago. That advance is still north along the northern borders of the littoral states, which we have a great deal of concern about. I think that's partly because -- a number of factors. One of them, though, is the European partners led by the French have initiated a couple of things to try to improve the coordination between all the international efforts that are going in there. They're also doing much more effective advise and assist operations.

Partnership for West Africa is one of these things to increase coordination. Task Force Takuba is an advise and assist organization the French have stood up. They have asked for European partners to join in that effort. They have joined in that effort. And it's starting to be more effective.

So I think they've done some work to improve the coordination of the international effort. That has slowed that spread some. That said, that forest fire is dancing along the northern borders of all those littoral states. And I'm of the view that we need to do -- I would like -- for once, I'd like to do something to prevent a fire, prevent those littoral states from getting fully engulfed like Mali is, for example. And I think there are some fairly low impact things that could be done there in the littoral states that might do fire prevention there.

So I think a fire break across the Sahel, which largely is with resources we have there now, mostly African and European, and then some fire prevention efforts in the littoral states.

VEASEY: Let me also ask you, several years ago, myself and Representative Panetta and Mr. Scott from Georgia, we visited Camp Lemonnier and several countries there in Africa. And one of the areas of concern was exactly where the Chinese base was being built. I know that there was -- strategically where it was at seemed to be a very good location for the Chinese and what they're trying to do to expand, you know, their naval operations and their presence in the continent.

With the Chinese and the fact that, you know, they don't care about human rights violations, corruption. You know, they'll fly prime ministers and presidents from the continent over to China and put them up at nice houses.

What can we do to counter that as, you know -- as more and more countries in Africa seek to be able to, you know, come into the -- continue to grow economically and prosper, as they want to, like any other nation does?

TOWNSEND: Congressman, the African nations are not blind to what the Chinese are up to. They have fallen prey to some of these debt trap diplomacy traps. But they're not blind to it. They can see it. They believe they can -- many of them believe they can

manage it. And I think that's probably the biggest thing we can do is, help them try to manage their interactions with the Chinese on the continent.

LARSEN: I thank the gentleman.

Next up will be Representative Panetta, followed by Representative Speier. And so Representative Panetta from California is recognized for five minutes.

PANETTA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And gentlemen and ma'am, thank you for obviously your service, your time, your preparation, and for being here today, and your answers to our questions.

As my colleague just mentioned, we did a CODEL -- I forget when that was, maybe 2018, summer of 2018, where we had -- and we were -- definitely had one of the top CODELs I've been on, in that we were based in Djibouti and obviously flew C-130s all around.

One of the bases we went to was Manda Bay. And obviously, subsequent to that, you're very familiar with the attack that occurred in Manda Bay. Unfortunately, not just because of the attack, but unfortunately, we're trying to get the review of what happened in regards to the initial investigation, because of, obviously -- I've been there, and obviously the tragedy that happened as well.

But what's going on with the report? I know it's been 15 months since the attack took place. And I know that Secretary Austin has ordered now another review of it. Can you give us some insight as to what's going on with that report and when do you think we're going to get this report as to what the heck happened there?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman. Your visit was in summer of 2019, not 2018. It was my first CODEL after I took command at AFRICOM.

PANETTA: No, that was a different one. This was to Manda Bay. Manda Bay was before. We went to West Africa after that, another excellent CODEL facilitated by you, General. And I appreciate that. But before that, we were in -- we went to the east side of Africa. That was the west side of Africa.

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Congressman, for the correction. So Manda Bay report. So first of all, let me reassure you and the other members that all the steps that have been needed to take corrective, immediate corrective action have been taken long ago. Not only did we take those steps at Manda Bay, we took that report and applied those lessons learned at every base across Africa.

Now, to answer your specific question about the status of the report, AFRICOM concluded its investigation in December of last year. Of course, the timing of that, trying to get that through the Department of Defense and released, became problematic because it was overlaid on top of the change of administration. The new secretary of

defense came in, he received this report. He didn't have all the depth of background on it, and so I think very rightfully said, OK, thanks, AFRICOM, I think I'd like to have a separate look at this. And AFRICOM supports that separate look.

So the secretary of defense has appointed a disinterested four-star from the Army to look at the report of the investigation and give him advice on it. This is also necessary because many of the fixes pertain to other services and other COCOMs. So they weren't all within -- all the recommendations of the findings weren't within AFRICOM's purview to see through, so the secretary of defense has to do that.

So that's the current status of it. I think he gave the Army a target of 90 days to report out. And I think that's the current situation.

PANETTA: Good, outstanding. Great, thank you for that very thorough answer, General. I appreciate that.

Now going to the summer of 2019, when I did -- when we did the CODEL to West Africa, which, once again, we completely appreciate you facilitating that, let me read you something that really kind of summarizes what I came away with. An article in the Economist last month, two months ago, basically talked about France's challenge there in that area.

And it said basically France is challenged, it's faced by others who have recently fought insurgencies in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq. It is that of trying to improve security, which is almost impossible to do without development, and also drive development, which cannot happen without better security. I think, you know, that was the impression I had coming away from that trip to West Africa.

My question to you is, is how do we get out of that catch 22? What can we do? Obviously, you gave an excellent answer to my colleague, Marc Veasey, about coordination and cooperation. Is there anything else that we can do in order to provide security and development as we go forward, especially in the Sahel?

TOWNSEND: Congressman, I'd say that the thing that's probably the easiest to solve is the security challenges, but they can't be solved without better development, as you pointed out, and better governance. That is the root of all of this.

And as we've seen that from Afghanistan to Africa, the root cause is poor governance, insufficient development, which needs a secure environment to proceed. And I think probably...

LARSEN: The gentleman's time has expired. I'm sorry, General. You'll have to finish up for the record.

TOWNSEND: Thanks. The international efforts are really focused on security, unfortunately.

LARSEN: Great, thank you.

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

LARSEN: The chair recognizes Representative Speier from California for five minutes.

SPEIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your great service.

General McKenzie, let me start with you. I'm very concerned that the May deadline is upon us, and I don't know that we have any assurances that the Taliban will not start attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Can you provide us any consolidation regarding that?

MCKENZIE: I can tell you that we're prepared for those attacks should they occur and we'll be able to defend ourselves.

SPEIER: But we don't have any subsequent agreement then, it appears?

MCKENZIE: We have no agreement on that past 1 May. And I'm not concern what decision-making is going on inside the Taliban pursuant to what actions they might or might not take. We're ready for whatever they choose to do.

SPEIER: And do we have any intention to maintain defense contractors in Afghanistan after we depart?

MCKENZIE: Everyone will leave. All U.S. defense contractors will leave as part of the withdrawal.

SPEIER: All right. I think that kind of answers my questions, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

LARSEN: Representative yields back. Just a moment for everyone. I'm just checking with staff on other members. OK, it looks like we're all good.

So I want to thank the panel for coming today. We'll, I think, adjourn -- or recess until 3:00 p.m. and meet back here at 3:00 p.m. for a classified portion of the hearing. It'll give you all some time to have some lunch. So appreciate your patience with us and answers to our questions. Very much appreciate that.

With that, we will stand in recess until 3:00 p.m. We will adjourn until 3:00 p.m. I apologize.

END
SPEAKERS:

REP. ADAM SMITH, D-WASH., CHAIRMAN

REP. JIM LANGEVIN, D-R.I.

REP. RICK LARSEN, D-WASH.

REP. JIM COOPER, D-TENN.

REP. JOE COURTNEY, D-CONN.

REP. JOHN GARAMENDI, D-CALIF.

REP. JACKIE SPEIER, D-CALIF.

REP. DONALD NORCROSS, D-N.J.

REP. RUBEN GALLEGU, D-ARIZ.

REP. SETH MOULTON, D-MASS.

REP. RO KHANNA, D-CALIF.

REP. SALUD CARBAJAL, D-CALIF.

REP. ANTHONY G. BROWN, D-MD.

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REP. WILLIAM KEATING, D-MASS.

REP. ANDY KIM, D-N.J.

REP. ELAINE LURIA, D-VA.

REP. MIKIE SHERRILL, D-N.J.

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