

POSTURE STATEMENT OF
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Introduction

When United States Central Command (CENTCOM) formed in the 1980s, the U.S. military trained and equipped to fight high-end warfare against the Soviet Union under conditions of limited communications and the routine employment of nuclear weapons. Times changed; the wall fell. The U.S. welcomed change in Russia while retooling heavy conventional forces to fight an 18-year protracted global counterterror campaign. Simultaneously the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerging from its 1979 revolution, embarked on a deliberate and extended campaign of terror and violence across the Middle East, directly engaging or sponsoring partners in a 40-year-long struggle against the U.S. and our allies.

Today the rise, fall, and rise again of Russia; the continuing asymmetric campaign of violence and coercion by Iran; and the emergence of China as our pre-eminent economic and military power competitor signal that while the nature of war is unchanging, the character of war has evolved. CENTCOM acknowledges our nation does not have the luxury of a single strategic focus. The Joint Force must posture globally with the ability to balance multiple priorities and tasks, from combat with peer competitors to expeditionary counterterrorism operations, understanding that the nation's top defense priority must relentlessly focus on adversarial great powers that possess the power and means to destroy our country.

While Iran lacks the capability to destroy us, its regime's hatred of the U.S and growing arsenal of ballistic missiles, cyber reach, and depth and breadth of its terror networks clearly position it as a priority, although clearly and inarguably not the main one. The U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) directs the U.S. to work with partners to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon and neutralize Iranian malign activity. While this is only one aspect of the NDS, it is directive for the Department of Defense and a key task for both CENTCOM and

EUCOM.

The current U.S. policy of maximum pressure against Iran is supported by the deterrence provided by our U.S. force presence, which helps to stabilize the region and acts as a counterbalance against the Iranian regime's overt and covert military responses. The ramifications of this policy have led to direct and indirect Iranian military threats and actions against U.S. interests in the region, and similar threats to U.S. national security interests globally. Iran's lack of effective economic or diplomatic levers to counter the U.S. maximum pressure campaign has caused it to resort to pursuing overt and covert military options against the U.S. and our partners. The Iranian regime's strategy seeks to undermine international and regional support for U.S. policies with attacks and threats against U.S. interests and those of our partners and allies.

CENTCOM plans and executes missions across its area of responsibility (AOR), but embraces a global planning perspective supporting national objectives and the execution of global military campaigns. Adjustments in U.S. global force posture to support the NDS compels the U.S. to accept greater risk in the CENTCOM AOR. We recognize significant future conflicts will be trans-regional, cutting across multiple global combatant commands, and involving multiple domains. The ongoing global fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and other violent extremist organizations (VEOs) provides a stark example of this threat.

As CENTCOM approaches its missions, acknowledging priorities outlined in the NDS, we also remain keenly aware that our adversaries in the region retain a willingness to contest our actions. Iran's regime is not a peer competitor to the U.S., but it does possess the ability to negatively affect global commerce, trade, and the world's energy supply. These malign actions,

while not posing a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, significantly threaten our national interests abroad, those of our allies and partners, and negatively affects the U.S. military's long-term posture as we react to immediate threats. During my year in command, I have observed multiple Congressional engagements to the CENTCOM AOR. Your oversight, partnership and advocacy, based on first- hand knowledge, lays the foundation for enduring success.

CENTCOM Priorities

Deterring Iran. The long-term challenges we face in the CENTCOM AOR are the destabilizing and escalatory actions of the Iranian regime. The Iranian regime's quest for nuclear weapons, coupled with its hegemonic ambitions, misbehavior, and threats to the United States and its regional partners have been consistent elements of its policy for decades. Deterring Iran from its destructive and destabilizing activities in the military domain underpins everything we do, and is CENTCOM's top priority. Until such a time as the regime in Tehran decides to be a responsible member of the international community, CENTCOM must work to establish and maintain military deterrence with Iran, notably within the context of the ongoing economic and diplomatic maximum pressure campaign.

Since May 2019, Iranian-supported groups in Iraq have attacked U.S. interests dozens of times and conducted scores of unmanned aerial system (UAS) reconnaissance flights near U.S. and Iraqi Security Force (ISF) bases. The Iranian regime has attacked or seized foreign vessels in the Gulf, facilitated attacks by Houthi forces from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, continued to export lethal aid to destabilizing groups throughout the region including those aiming to attack Israel, supported the Assad regime's brutal conflict against its own people, and carried out an unprecedented cruise missile and UAS attack in September against Saudi oil facilities that destabilized international energy markets. In early January, Iran launched more than a dozen

ballistic missiles in a deliberate attack against U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq. This state-sponsored missile attack, in response to the U.S. killing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani crossed a threshold compared to previous “grey-zone” attacks and may set a lower bar for future actions by the regime. While periods of decreased tension may provide the illusion of a return to normalcy, ample intelligence exists indicating the Iranian regime’s desire to continue malign operations that threaten lives, disrupt the internal matters of sovereign nations, and threaten freedom of navigation, regional commerce, global energy supplies, and the global economy.

CENTCOM recognizes that so long as the United States continues to apply diplomatic and economic pressure against Iran, the Joint Force must be postured to deter Iran from using the military element of power to counter our actions. While our steady-state posture does not require offensive forces in theater to achieve overmatch or unintentionally provoke Iran’s regime, our presence sends a clear and unambiguous signal of our capabilities and, most importantly, the will to defend partners and U.S. national interests. This exemplifies the concept of deterrence.

Deterrence is not a military concept, but a diplomatic and political construct obtained from the effect demonstrated capabilities have on the mind of a potential opponent. Deterrence can be contested – Iran’s regime retains the ability to interfere with our efforts to deter. Historically, Iran has never doubted the U.S. capability to respond, but frustrates our ability to do so by focusing on deniable, hard to attribute activities. Targeting the Kata’ib Hezbollah group and Soleimani clearly demonstrated U.S. will. Our posture – the bases, forces, and activities that we undertake – maintains the other half of the deterrence equation: capability.

Reduction of U.S. forces in the AOR combined with a perception of U.S. disinterest in the

Middle East fueled thinking in Iran in the spring of 2019 that the U.S. was no longer committed to defending our national interests in the region. That misperception led directly to the cycle of escalation that crested in January 2020. In order to maintain the contested deterrence our recent military actions have re-established, Iran's regime must continue to see the U.S. has enough forward-deployed forces for a credible military capability, that we are willing to employ that capability for defense of U.S. interests with conviction, and any decision to contest our actions will not yield a positive outcome.

Deterrence can be difficult to establish and measure, and costly to maintain. CENTCOM prosecutes numerous missions simultaneously, scattered across the breadth and depth of the region, all in areas suffused with Iranian-backed forces continuing their decades-long struggles against us. While the cost of regaining and maintaining deterrence is expensive, it is less expensive than the deployment of forces required to fight in full-scale conflict: the failure of deterrence. CENTCOM's objective is therefore to posture forces with operational depth in the region to achieve a sustained state of deterrence against Iran's regime without undue provocation, and to be adaptable to future Iranian threats while the U.S. maximum pressure campaign continues. In addition to posture, a key part of deterrence is intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). While presence can fluctuate based on deterrence needs, consistent ISR is necessary to identify subtle changes that shape posture and ensure we align our presence appropriately.

Negotiated Resolution of the Conflict in Afghanistan. All wars must have a political end. Reconciliation between the Taliban and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan represents the best option for bringing the 18-year-long fight in Afghanistan to a favorable conclusion, while meeting long-term U.S. security requirements. CENTCOM efforts support

the U.S. South Asia Strategy and remain fully aligned with the efforts of U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

Our military mission in Afghanistan continues in support of our overriding national interest: preventing terrorist attacks against the homeland from Afghanistan and Central Asia. Safeguarding this means we must remain focused on retaining a counterterrorism platform under any of the multiple political eventualities that may take shape. U.S. Forces-Afghanistan continues to examine efficiencies in force structure to reduce our military footprint and reduce costs while maintaining counterterrorism pressure on VEOs and provisioning the capability to do so in the future. We also continue to help the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces develop and refine their force generation processes for campaign sustainability. Without continued pressure, groups such as the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) will regain the ability to mount or sponsor a transnational terrorist attack within a few years. Your support to our critical authorities such as the Afghanistan Security Forces Funding, Commander's Emergency Response Program, Coalition Support Fund, and others have remained paramount during this transition.

Maintaining Defeat-ISIS Campaign in Syria and Iraq. Similar to Afghanistan, most of the U.S. intelligence community predicts that without sustained pressure levied against it, ISIS has the potential to reconstitute in Iraq and Syria in short order, beyond the current capabilities of the U.S. to neutralize it without a capable, partnered ground force. Syria remains a dynamic situation with multiple parties and agendas involved. The Syrian regime, with support from Russia and Iran, continues to seek a military victory. We are seeing this play out in northwest Syria as the Assad regime, Russian, and Iranian campaign of violence has escalated since December, resulting in almost one million more displaced persons, innumerable people injured

or killed, with many more in critical need of assistance, and dangerous clashes between our NATO ally Turkey and the Syrian regime. We likewise see the Assad regime continuing its use of chemical weapons in blatant violation of its commitments to the Chemical Weapons Convention – deterring this use in the future remains a CENTCOM priority. In eastern Syria, U.S. and Coalition forces under command of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve assist with ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS, including safeguarding energy sources to prevent their seizure by ISIS for revenue generation. Moving forward, we must continue our support to NATO ally Turkey and our D-ISIS partner force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), while maintaining deconfliction with Russia, which, along with the Assad regime, aggressively challenges the Coalition mission in various ways.

Despite the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October, ISIS remains a threat in Syria, with most of its activity focused on reestablishing networks; assassinating and intimidating local leaders and security forces; and extending its influence in rural areas throughout eastern Syria and Iraq.

Iraq remains a strategic partner in the fight against ISIS and is key human and geographic terrain. We remain in Iraq at the request of the Government of Iraq (GoI) for one mission: the defeat of ISIS. Hindering our ability to work with the ISF toward this objective are rogue elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces more beholden to Iran's regime than the GoI. Some of these militias smuggle advanced weapons into Iraq from Iran, not to defend the country from ISIS, but to undermine existing security and threaten U.S. and Coalition forces partnered with the GoI. Given ISIS' demonstrated tenacity and ability to reconstitute, we cannot afford to divert focus from the D-ISIS mission, understanding that the territorial defeat of ISIS does not mean the absence of ISIS. The years ahead will not be bloodless. Attacks may continue in the form of

an insurgency, but the goal is to develop and enable the ability of the Iraqi Security Forces to contain and defeat ISIS without external assistance.

Countering the UAS Threat. In the aggregate, the U.S. maintains air dominance across the AOR but lacks a comprehensive joint solution to counter the growing Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) threat. Inexpensive and easy to proliferate, UASs provide adversaries the operational ability to surveil, target, and attack U.S. and partner facilities, providing the means to engage in mass-casualty or large-scale, critical infrastructure attacks with cheap, off-the-shelf technology while affording deniability and a disproportionately high return on investment.

CENTCOM employs current systems and tactics to best equip and enable U.S. forces to meet this challenge, but the growing threat posed by UASs, coupled with our lack of dependable, networked capabilities to counter them is the most concerning tactical development in the CENTCOM AOR since the rise of the Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Just as the IED threat galvanized operational, industrial and scientific communities in the U.S. toward the development of solutions like the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle (MRAP), we are fast approaching a juncture requiring a similar mobilization to counter the UAS threat. Your support and funding of Science and Technology is vital to our success in the Great Power Competition.

Weaponization of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees. The manipulation or co-opting of IDPs and refugees by an adversary to gain a political, military, or economic advantage is not historically uncommon. However, in vast swaths of Syria and Iraq the systematic indoctrination of IDP and refugee camp populations who are hostages to the receipt of ISIS ideology is an alarming development with potentially generational implications.

There is no known, successful methodology of de-radicalization for hard-core ISIS believers. This radicalized population currently numbers in the thousands and preys on the disenfranchised and weak IDP and refugee populations already highly susceptible to extremist indoctrination. The longer these IDPs remain in refugee camps, the more likely they are to become radicalized. While there is no military solution for de-radicalization, the military can set the conditions for stability and security necessary for these populations to return to their original homes and begin the process of regaining power over their own lives. The sheer number of IDPs and refugees presents a challenge to the timeline along which necessary levels of long-term stabilization can take root.

Also concerning are near- and long-term implications of SDF detention facilities in Syria and the disposition of foreign-terrorist fighters (FTFs). While CENTCOM and our coalition partners are working to address and mitigate security challenges at the facilities, this serves only as a tactical-level band-aid, not a long-term solution. The United States can mitigate the risks associated with these populations by facilitating repatriations, training and equipping guard forces, and providing the funding required to improve prison infrastructure. Ultimately, the best way to alleviate this problem is to reduce the numbers of detainees through repatriation. The ISIS detainee and IDP populations represent more than 60 nations. While some countries have made efforts to reclaim their foreign fighters, full resolution requires a comprehensive diplomatic and international effort. This problem will not go away by ignoring it, and can only be addressed by the international community working together to accept its shared responsibilities.

As noted, military solutions do not exist for the issues of de-radicalization and repatriation of FTFs. They are international problems requiring international solutions. The longer these conditions persist; the IDP population becomes more and more ensconced in ISIS philosophy

creating a petri dish of future terrorists. Action now by the international community is imperative to protect our homeland and our allies. Left unchecked, these issues are a ticking time bomb with the potential to spark the resurgence of ISIS, despite the destruction of the physical caliphate we and our allies and partners have worked so hard to accomplish. Your support to increase Special Immigrant Visas in Afghanistan and stabilization funding is much appreciated by me, our troops, and our partners.

Basing and Posture in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR)

Fragile security environments across the AOR reflect a variety of contributing factors, including heightened ethno-sectarian tensions, economic uncertainty, weak or corrupt governance, and exploitation by VEOs which have clearly indicated their desire and intent to attack the homeland, U.S. interests abroad, and the interests of our partners and allies. At the same time, the AOR is growing increasingly crowded with external nation-states, such as a resurgent Russia and expansionist China, pursuing their own interests and attempting to shift historical alliances. These dynamics necessitate that CENTCOM explore options with regional partners to posture itself in depth across our AOR to create efficiencies, and increase strategic depth, resiliency and operational agility. With the enactment of the FY20 NDAA, Section 1263, I look forward to the posture review and reporting back to Congress with the findings.

Over the past year, CENTCOM has re-evaluated its posture, taking action to close, consolidate, or in some cases expand some of its air, land, and sea bases; as well as access, basing, and overflight rights with our partners. Some of these actions represent immediate, near-term adjustments for survivability and to improve our deterrence capabilities – like the buildup of Prince Sultan Air Base in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Other decisions are driven by long-

term efforts to achieve cost savings, and increase interoperability or partner burden sharing – like the establishment of CENTCOM Forward-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This forward deployed element assesses requirements and integrates U.S. forces into an international collective defense effort.

The Western Sustainment Network is a newly-created logistics system extending from the Red Sea and Mediterranean Ports to the Arabian Gulf, designed to mitigate the potential impact of chokepoint closures at the Bab Al Mandeb and Strait of Hormuz. To build sustainment depth over the last year, CENTCOM has increased deployment and redeployment traffic across the Arabian Peninsula, shipped ammunition to Kuwait from the Red Sea, negotiated movement of materiel and supplies across borders affected by the Gulf Rift, and developed the port of Duqm in Oman. Developing this operational depth enhances protection of critical infrastructure while providing reduced cost options for deployment and obviating the need to transit potentially contested maritime chokepoints. This network increases our agility, enables Dynamic Force Employment, and reduces deployment timelines in the event of a contingency, thereby reducing risk and providing additional strategic options. Taken together, the result is a tailored, responsive basing network, connected by dependable lines of communication with AOR-wide reach, supported by prepositioned equipment and supplies to facilitate the rapid movement and employment, of U.S., allied, and partner forces.

Armed with the knowledge that resources are at a premium, and a pragmatic appreciation that each country is working through its own challenges with economic and social reforms, CENTCOM supports initiatives that approach defense from a cooperative perspective. This is the only practical way to approach the problem. The reality on the ground is that every partner country cannot afford to have their own Patriot battalion, nor should they; just like every U.S.

combatant commander cannot retain their own heel-to-toe carrier strike group.

The International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), which achieved initial operating capability in November 2019 and full operating capability in January 2020, provides an instructive example of this kind of regional cooperative effort. Participating nations include the U.S., U.K., Albania, Australia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, working together to support freedom of navigation and maritime domain awareness in the Strait of Hormuz and assist in attribution of malign actions in these vital waters. The vessels and aircraft of IMSC member nations provide vigilance, surveillance, and assurance, supporting the free flow of commerce through the critical choke points of the region.

In the air domain, CENTCOM operates in an environment where our partners possess and operate the majority of air and ballistic missile defense capabilities in the theater. This compels CENTCOM to lead efforts to establish a framework to coalesce and optimize each Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nation's individual ballistic missile defense capabilities into a regional, integrated air and missile defense construct to defend against the shared threat posed by Iran and the proxies it controls. Our GCC partners contribute to interoperability through purchase and use of Patriot, Theater High Altitude Air Defense, and the development of the GCC Ballistic Missile Early Warning System – a collective system of systems across the Arabian Peninsula designed to establish an effective early warning and supporting architecture to benefit all GCC Partners. The Link-16 system provides a combined, integrated air picture through a shared network of sensors and systems across the AOR to receive, populate, and share information among partners. CENTCOM builds confidence and proficiency among our partners through combined, distributive IAMD exercises that leverage virtual and simulated technologies to bridge the geographic distances across the region.

As we work with our partners along collaborative lines of effort to safeguard our mutual interests, we do so with the knowledge that we are stronger together, and our strategic strength has never rested on the volume of materiel we bring to the fight, but the partnerships and whole-of-government efforts no other country in the world can match. Key to building and maintaining these partnerships in the region is the enduring authorization, funding, and combined employment of the Department of State's (State) security assistance (SA) and DoD security cooperation (SC) and security assistance (SA) programs. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency administers the Department of State's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs, with our partners' capabilities, interoperability, and burden sharing. Foreign Military Sales in CENTCOM totaled nearly \$23 billion in 2019, accounting for more than 42 percent of all FMS globally. The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) cultivates relationships and improves interoperability with six nations across the CENTCOM AOR currently, with more considering entry.

CENTCOM supports the execution of over \$2 billion annually in SA funds, consisting of \$1.7 billion in Department of State Foreign Military Financing to obtain articles, services, or training; \$265 million in Department of Defense Section 333 funds authorizing the U.S. to help partner nations build capacity; \$17 million in Department of State International Military Education and Training (IMET) to improve interoperability and establish relationships with future leaders; \$4 million for the Counter Threat and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program; and \$3.6 million for the Wales Initiative Fund (WIF). Taken together, these State and DoD programs help maintain U.S. influence, improve our posture and interoperability with partners, and create opportunities to advance U.S. objectives. The State IMET, and DoD WIF and SPP programs in particular often yield a far greater return on investment compared to the resources allocated

against them. On average, over 5,500 students receive U.S. military education and training through our SA and SC programs annually.

Conclusion

The U.S. must posture itself globally to contend with an array of security challenges detailed in the NDS. While Iran represents but one of those national security challenges, deterring the Iranian regime is the primary security challenge for CENTCOM and critical for ensuring the Department can focus on near peer competition rather than an expansion of conflict in the Middle East. The rapid escalation from grey-zone conflict to open, kinetic strikes between the U.S. and Iran in January of this year underscores the immediacy of this threat, and the need for vigilance paired with the proper capabilities on hand necessary to deter the Iranian regime.

Readiness and capabilities allocated toward this mission are supportive of the NDS not only with regard to Iran, but also in the context of supporting great power competition as it manifests itself in the Middle East. As the U.S. reorients itself globally, our leadership, presence, and demonstration of commitment to our allies and partners in the region are crucial, now more than ever. We have an opportunity at this moment in history to establish the foundations of collective, effective collaborative security apparatuses throughout the region with the U.S. serving not as the core member, but a contributing member in a burden-sharing construct.

For more than 37 years, the men and women of CENTCOM – about 90,000 uniformed military and civilian strong today – have devoted themselves to securing U.S. national interests in the Middle East that help protect the homeland. They operate in real time, against real enemies. Across 18 years of extended combat operations, the missions they have executed yielded tangible results. The steadfastness and sacrifice of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen,

Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Civilians – and their respective families – is both humbling and inspirational. Public support for our mission, troops, and families is precious and not taken for granted. Your communication with your constituents is key in maintaining public support that serves as the bedrock and fosters morale, enabling the mission going forward.

As CENTCOM continues to fulfill its ongoing missions, we appreciate the efforts of our civilian leadership at the Department of Defense, acknowledge the teamwork of the interagency, and thank the members of Congress and their staffs, without whose consistent and timely support we would be unable to accomplish our mission.