

STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL  
COMMANDER  
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE  
ON  
THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

28 MARCH 2017

**Introduction.** The outstanding men and women who make up the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Team are the very best in the world at what they do. The incredibly dynamic, volatile and tumultuous Central Region presents a complex convergence of compounding multifaceted security challenges. Such an environment generates near continuous crisis action planning and response. These conditions demand a highly capable, vigilant capability at USCENTCOM Headquarters and our Service Component Headquarters, as well as forward throughout our area of responsibility (AOR). The exceptional individuals on the USCENTCOM Team expertly navigate this challenging environment. In doing so, they effectively protect and promote our Nation's interests and they represent our values wherever they go around the world. They work selflessly each day in support of our mission and the exceptional men and women serving in harm's way around the globe. We could not be more proud of them and proud of their families. They truly are the strength of our USCENTCOM Team.

The Central Region is a **fascinating area of the world**. Spanning over four million square miles it is populated by 550+ million people from more than 20 ethnic groups representing multiple religions and speaking eighteen languages with hundreds of dialects. The region lies at the intersection of three continents and important commercial sea lanes, flight corridors, pipelines, and overland routes run across it supporting regional and global economic networks.

It is also a **highly-complex area**, widely characterized by pervasive instability and conflict. The 20 nations that make up the Central Region have various forms of government, ranging from absolute and constitutional monarchies to theocratic, parliamentary, and presidential republics. The economic and social-political landscape is diverse, volatile at times, and rivalries often

create tensions that affect security and stability. Violent extremist organizations (VEOs), such as the terrorist organizations al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), exploit these conditions to foment unrest, challenge or destabilize governments, and threaten the global economy and U.S. national interests.

The turbulence across the region reflects a number of contributing factors or **“drivers of instability,”** including ethnic and sectarian hostilities between Shia and Sunnis, and Arabs and Persians; economic uncertainty and sustained low oil prices that severely strain energy-based economies across the region, contributing to reduced government services and weakened prospects for economic growth; a disproportionately large youth population facing increasing poverty and unemployment, which may make them susceptible to unrest, radical ideologies, and VEO recruitment; expanding ungoverned or under-governed spaces, exploited by VEOs; civil wars, which are “engines of instability” all by themselves; worsening humanitarian crises, contributing to growing refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) populations; and, competition among outside actors, including Russia and China, seeking to promote their interests and supplant U.S. influence in the region. While we must take the necessary actions to counter immediate threats, such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, we also need to find ways to address these and other root causes of instability if we hope to achieve lasting positive effects in that part of the world. This cannot be accomplished solely through military means. The military can help to create the necessary conditions; however, there must be concomitant progress in other complementary areas (e.g., reconstruction, humanitarian aid, stabilization, political reconciliation). There are a variety of interagency programs and efforts underway that are

essential to translating military gains into actual achievement of stated goals and objectives. Support for these endeavors is vital to our success.

The current evolving security environment in the Central Region is further complicated by the fact that **most challenges transcend borders**; they are **trans-regional** (cutting across multiple combatant commands (CCMD)), **all-domain** (land, sea, air, space, cyberspace), and **multi-functional** (e.g., conventional, special operations, ballistic missile defense, cyber). Of note, the Middle East remains the global epicenter for terrorism and violent Islamist extremism.

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace's 2016 Global Terrorism Index, the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) AOR accounted for 78% of all terrorism incidents worldwide, and the turmoil stretches across CCMD seams into Africa, Europe, South Asia, and beyond.

The security environment is further challenged by the emergence of a “**virtual caliphate**” and increased access and activity in the cyber domain. Ready access to the Internet, social media, and other messaging platforms has enabled a new generation of extremists to spread their radical Islamist views, incite widespread violence, and recruit new followers to their cause. As we have seen with the ongoing campaign to defeat ISIS, diminishment of the physical organization does not equate to the dismantlement of their virtual presence. To the contrary, terrorist organizations' activities in cyberspace enable them to remain relevant despite setbacks on the battlefield, while reaching out to direct, enable, and/or inspire audiences well beyond the region's geographic borders. Countering the “virtual caliphate” will require a concerted ‘whole

of government' effort led by the people of the region. We can support our partners' activities, but their voices and influence will be required to achieve enduring positive results.

We also acknowledge, particularly in the current **resource-constrained environment**, the need to find additional means for countering existing and emerging threats and deterring potential adversaries. No other country in the world has a military with a greater ability than the U.S. to achieve kinetic and non-kinetic effects and sustain those effects. Through the application of “hard” and “soft” power capabilities, including kinetic strikes, raids, and information operations, we have been very effective at degrading and disrupting violent extremist networks in the USCENTCOM AOR and elsewhere around the world. It is an important and a necessary competency. However, a solely military response is not sufficient. We must continue to look for ways to further enhance our effectiveness through the application of military and non-military activities. Ultimately, we want to increasingly involve other elements of the U.S. Government and the International Community, recognizing that it is only through a **combination of capabilities** that we will achieve and sustain our strongest deterrence posture.

This is especially true today given the **changing character of warfare**. For much of the past 15+ years our Nation has increasingly operated in the “gray zone” of military confrontation—that range of activities short of conventional conflict; a dangerous space in which miscalculation can easily occur, leading to escalatory conflict and misunderstanding. In the “gray zone,” adversaries employ unconventional methods that include cyber warfare, propaganda, and support to proxy elements in an effort to achieve their objectives while minimizing the scope and scale of actual fighting. At the same time, **these unconventional methods increase tensions between**

**partners by emphasizing competing priorities that detract from** support for our common objectives (e.g., Turks and Syrian Kurds). To be successful in this ambiguous environment, we must find alternate ways to compete against our adversaries in the “gray zone” short of conflict, while collaborating with our partners to achieve our desired end-states.

We must – *and will* – continue to pursue the many **opportunities** that exist today throughout the Central Region, recognizing that by pursuing these opportunities we will achieve improved stability and security in that challenged part of the world. As Sir Winston Churchill wisely stated, “*Difficulties mastered are opportunities won.*” The key to success is ensuring that we remain ready and capable of effectively countering all threats. We need to make sure that we have an accurate understanding of the situation. We must take care to build and cultivate strong **relationships**, here at home and abroad. We need to be **responsive** to our partners and always listen and strive to understand their points of view and priorities. We also need to be properly **postured** with the necessary capabilities, resources, and appropriate authorities to protect and promote U.S. and partner nations’ interests.

**In recent years, we have been encouraged to see many of our regional partners take a more active role** in providing for the security of their sovereign spaces. Ultimately, we want to **empower our partners and allies** by helping them build additional capability and capacity while strengthening relationships and improving cooperation and interoperability among nations. This is – *and will remain* – a top priority for the USCENTCOM Team at our headquarters in Tampa, Florida, as well as among our Component Commands, combined/joint task forces, and forward in the region.

**U.S. Central Command’s Mission.** *“USCENTCOM directs and enables military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of enduring U.S. interests.”*

**Our Strategic Approach.** Our strategic approach is focused on protecting our national interests and those of our partners. It is designed to reflect our values, align our behaviors, and support the National Military Strategy. It is proactive in nature and endeavors to set in motion tangible actions in a purposeful, consistent, and continuous manner. Each aspect of our approach – ***Prepare – Pursue – Prevail*** – enables the next and collectively contributes to the successful achievement of our goals, objectives, and overall mission.

**Prepare the Environment** – The volatile nature of the Central Region requires that we be well-postured to protect our enduring national interests. “Well-postured” means that we are ready to execute military tasks; physically and virtually present in the AOR; integrated in all our actions; responsive to the needs of our partners; and, able to provide options for our leadership. Proper preparation in advance of crises creates decision space for leaders and allows for the responsible and effective employment of available resources and forces. Well-prepared and motivated personnel with shared values provide a comparative advantage over our adversaries and competitors. Preparation of the environment – including agreements for assured access, basing, and overflight and the ability to adapt our expeditionary and enduring footprint – ultimately ensures a high level of readiness, increased responsiveness, and strong and productive relationships with partners and allies, all of which serve to enable our success in our various endeavors.

**Pursue Opportunities** – In a region beset by myriad challenges we must always be on the lookout for opportunities to seize the initiative to support our objectives and goals. Pursuing opportunities means that we are proactive – we don't wait for problems to be presented; we look for ways to get ahead of them. It also means that we have to become comfortable with transparency and flat communications – our ability to understand our AOR better than anyone else gives us the advantage of knowing where opportunities exist. Pursuing opportunities also means we have to take risk – by delegating authority and responsibility to the right level, by trusting our partners, and being willing to trust our best instincts in order to move faster than our adversaries.

**Prevail in Conflict** – There are no easy victories or quick wins in the USCENTCOM AOR – ours is an area of protracted struggles and conflicts. Our overriding objective, despite these challenges, is to prevail. Prevailing means winning; coming out on top of our adversaries. We prevail when our national interests and objectives are preserved; when we maintain decision space for our leaders; and, when we maintain and sustain our access, posture, and relationships with our vital partners. We choose to prevail “by, with, and through” our partners. Prevailing in this AOR requires resolve and resiliency – and continued momentum.

### **U.S. Central Command Priorities.**

**Ensure an Effective Posture** – An effective posture with trained and ready forward-stationed forces and equipment demonstrates our tremendous capability and enduring commitment to our partners and allies in the region. It reassures them; it enables access and influence; and, it positions us to secure our enduring national interests. An effective posture also optimizes



freedom of movement, deters state aggressors, and provides decision space and flexible response options for national-level decision makers.

**Strengthen Allies and Partnerships** – A coalition approach – at home and abroad – expands our ability to operate on multiple fronts. Strong relationships based upon shared values create greater cohesion and enhance the effectiveness of available resources and capabilities.

Integration with partners, within the region and beyond, enriches the benefit of our presence, mitigates resource constraints, and expands the reach of the force. By building the capacity of regional partners, we enable them to assume a larger share of the responsibility for securing their sovereign spaces.

**Deter and Counter State Aggressors** – Effectively posturing to maintain freedom of movement, freedom of action, and freedom of navigation is essential to securing our enduring national interests and the interests of our partners and allies. We must also actively counter malign influence, and be prepared to confront aggression, while reducing the freedom of action of surrogates and proxies operating in the region.

**Disrupt and Counter Violent Extremist Organizations and their Networks** – We must protect our Homeland from terrorist threats that emanate from the Central Region. We will accomplish this by degrading and defeating VEOs and their networks, including ISIS and al Qaeda and their associated forces, and by preventing the further spread of sectarian-fueled conflict and VEOs.

Ultimately, our goal is to achieve a Central Region where improved security leads to greater stability, and where regional cooperation counters actors that threaten U.S. interests.

**Desired End States.** Our efforts in support of partners throughout the USCENTCOM AOR are designed to achieve our desired end states. **These end states include:** USCENTCOM properly postured to protect U.S. interests; free flow of commerce and access to areas in accordance with international law; strong and supportive allies and partners; state aggressors deterred or countered; WMD safeguarded and use prevented; VEOs degraded and their influence eroded; and, lasting increased regional stability and security. **The key to achieving these ends is the effective use of available ways and means to address challenges and pursue opportunities in the region.**

**Challenges and Opportunities in the Central Region.** Many conditions exist in the strategically-important Central Region that threaten stability, access to the region, and transit via maritime chokepoints. The resulting challenges – to include the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen, rising tensions with Iran, and increased provocative behavior by Iranian-backed elements in and around the Bab al Mandeb (BAM) Strait – clearly demand our attention and directed efforts. Among the dynamics contributing to the complexity of the current security environment are the same socio-political factors that caused the Arab Awakening, fomenting social unrest and creating conditions for sectarianism, violence, and extremism. In parts of the region, reforms have fallen short, politics remain exclusive, economic growth stagnates, education systems under-deliver, and/or social contracts are falling out of balance. Opportunities for youth remain limited. Concurrently, large-scale displaced populations stress

already fragile economies, social welfare systems and security architectures. The resulting instability provides opportunities for VEOs and insurgents and those who actively provide support and sanctuary to them. Competition for water, oil, and other natural resources are other drivers of instability and conflict. **Resurgent geopolitics and the continuation of national rivalries fuels inter-state hostility and may potentially hasten the pursuit of nuclear weapons.** As we look to address the multitude of challenges present today across the USCENTCOM AOR, it is absolutely essential that we understand the conditions and root causes of the instability and turmoil. If not, our efforts are likely to be insufficient or even misdirected and any gains achieved, temporary.

In addition to addressing challenges, **we must pursue the many opportunities present today throughout the Central Region.** Doing so will enable us, working together with our partners, to shape the security environment and increase stability across our AOR. Opportunities manifest in a variety of ways, including bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises and training programs, Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance, information operations and messaging, and other cooperative endeavors in support of common objectives. **Most notably, by supporting and enabling partner-led operations we achieve shared goals while limiting U.S. investment and troop presence and increasing regional partners' capability, confidence, and overall stake in providing for the security of their sovereign spaces.** For example, we continue to support the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Syrian Democratic Forces in their efforts to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Also, in recent months we supported successful United Arab Emirates (UAE)-led operations in Yemen against the al Qaeda affiliate, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In terms of future opportunities, we need

to find ways to increase information sharing with key partners, like the UAE, to further enable their efforts. Enhanced information sharing with regional partners can also advance efforts against ISIS and other terrorist facilitation networks. We should pursue increasing our support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which have demonstrated tremendous return on investment in recent years. The need for improved communication between and among elements, particularly regarding common regional disputes (e.g., Sunni-Shia tensions, Kurdish expansionism) also presents opportunities and should be pursued by relevant elements of the U.S. Government (USG). **The key outcomes achieved through the pursuit of these and other opportunities present in the Central Region are improved awareness and information-sharing, enhanced capability, and increased trust and confidence among partner nations,** all of which are key components underpinning our mission in pursuit of our national interests. Thus, it is essential that we view all challenges with an eye for corresponding opportunities that provide the best means for addressing those challenges and achieving desired end-states.

Given the trans-regional nature of the current security environment coupled with the competing demands for limited resources and capabilities, it is essential that we find efficiencies and alternative means for accomplishing stated objectives. This includes **building and enabling coalitions comprised of willing partners**, recognizing that collaboration enhances overall capability while providing a stronger, united front against potential adversaries; the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. The **initial building blocks for strong coalitions are relationships**. The **cornerstone for effective enduring collaboration among coalition members is information-sharing** which enables **coalition compliant planning**, resulting in successful execution of campaign goals and objectives. One quick-yield way to enhance the

capability and effectiveness of our partners is by **expanding our intelligence sharing** with them. To date, we have seen significant return on investment each time we have made such allowances in support of our partners.

**Key Focus Areas.** While the USCENTCOM Team manages a broad range of difficult challenges on a daily basis, **a significant portion of our efforts and resources are necessarily focused in five priority areas. These five areas are: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (Iraq and Syria), Operation FREEDOM’S SENTINEL and Resolute Support Mission (Afghanistan), Iran, Yemen, and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.** Below are summaries, highlighting substantial challenges and efforts underway aimed at improving stability and security in each of these critical areas.

**Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (Iraq and Syria).** The Counter-ISIS (C-ISIS) Campaign has entered its third year and we are on track with the military plan to defeat the terrorist organization in Iraq and Syria. Our “by, with, and through” approach and operational level simultaneity strategy are working, and our partner forces **continue to build momentum across the battlespace** as we **pressure the enemy on multiple fronts and across all domains.** Together we are **forcing the enemy to deal with multiple simultaneous dilemmas** (e.g., ground operations, airstrikes, cyber activities, information operations, and discrete interdictions of resource flows). This is putting increased pressure on their operations and command and control capability while stretching their limited resources.

The strength of the C-ISIS Campaign is the C-ISIS Coalition consisting of all branches of service and our Interagency and international partners, and the many contributions they willingly make to the fight against our common enemy—*“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”*

Without the support of the Coalition, our “by, with, and through” approach would not be doable.

Our stand-off fires, including **Coalition air and artillery, remain another lynchpin of the C-ISIS Campaign.** Improved intelligence has enabled the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) to increase the number of deliberate strikes conducted in recent months, targeting ISIS’s infrastructure, oil revenue sources, etc. **Over the past year, the Coalition’s precision effects campaign has removed dozens more ISIS senior leaders from the battlefield, attrited large portions of the organization’s forces, further disrupted its command and control capability, and greatly degraded its pool of resources and access to replacements and personnel reinforcements.** As the campaign progresses, and as ISIS shifts actions and behaves increasingly like a terrorist organization, hiding amongst civilians as a force protection measure, we will continue to make the necessary adjustments to our air operations. We want to target the enemy effectively, while also ensuring that we minimize collateral damage. International law requires it; and, **when America’s sons and daughters go to war, they go with our values.** **Thus, it is imperative that when we conduct operations we do so in such a way that we limit the loss of innocent lives.**

Over the past year, **ISIS lost a significant amount of capability and large swaths of territory.**

The Iraqis are now in control of eastern Mosul, although clearing operations continue in several areas. In Syria, operations are ongoing in three key geographic areas—Raqqqa, Manbij, and al

Bab; it remains a very complex fight given multiple simultaneous activities and the management of partners and battlefield effects. In Iraq, in the coming weeks and months we will continue to support the Iraqi Security Forces as they complete the seizure of western Mosul. After Mosul operations are complete, we expect the Government of Iraq to prioritize military operations to recapture Tal Afar, Sinjar, and Hawija, and to secure the border in order to diminish ISIS' freedom of movement and ability to target major population centers. In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces have almost completed the isolation phase of Raqqa operations and will, in the coming months, begin operations to seize Raqqa, dismantling a key node in ISIS' external operations network. Additionally, we would look to continue our security operations along the Jordanian border to prevent re-infiltration of ISIS remnants.

The cumulative effect of operations in Iraq and Syria has **cut off key lines of communication** for ISIS, while restricting their ability to bring in additional fighters and **curbing their flow of financial resources**. The terrorist organization is struggling financially and is experiencing low morale in its ranks and steady leadership attrition due to coalition airstrikes. There has also been a nearly 75 percent decline in ISIS's media and propaganda as compared to a year ago.

Our efforts, in conjunction with our interagency and international partners' efforts, to **stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters** – both into Syria and Iraq and also those attempting to return to their countries of origin – continue to bear fruit. The U.S. and Coalition member nations are highly concerned about the threat these experienced fighters present to our respective homelands. We have made considerable progress identifying and targeting fighters and insurgent networks, principally through our Joint and Interagency targeting processes, and this will remain a priority.

These processes will also help to combat the evolving hybrid threat (conventional and irregular warfare). U.S. Special Operations Command has been designated lead for external operations (EXOPs) for the U.S. military efforts and this has contributed greatly to organizing the broader efforts against this threat. Whole of government efforts and collaboration with partners have also played a key role in stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF). Spurred by the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2178 in September 2014, more than 60 nations have enacted laws to restrict FTF travel. The U.S. now collaborates through information-sharing agreements with 59 international partners to identify and track travel of suspected terrorists in real time.

While we continue to make great strides towards countering ISIS trans-regionally, we recognize that **we are dealing with a highly adaptive enemy**. In particular, ISIS' use of chemical weapons and its evolving application of available off-the-shelf technologies that include unmanned aerial systems now used for both observation and to achieve lethal effects, poses a growing threat. For example, ISIS has reportedly used chemicals, including sulfur mustard and toxic industrial chemicals, in attacks more than 50 times in Iraq and Syria since 2014. Although the threat of chemical weapons has not slowed the Counter-ISIS Campaign, ISIS could further develop its chemical weapons capability. We are committed to working with partners to locate, secure, render harmless, eliminate or destroy any chemical and biological weapon materials found during the course of operations in Iraq and Syria, and to effectively remove this threat from our troops and civilian populations.



We will defeat ISIS militarily; however, **a lasting defeat of this enemy will not be achieved unless similar progress is made on the political front.** Instability all but guarantees a resurgence of ISIS or the emergence of other terrorist groups seeking to exploit conditions to advance their own aims. We remain fully committed to the “whole of government” approach and continue to ensure our actions are synchronized with and supportive of the efforts of our partners across the Interagency and the International Community.

This also holds true on the humanitarian front. UN-led efforts to date are having positive impacts and thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have already returned to their homes. However, tough work remains, given the enormity of the **humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria and in neighboring countries.** The growing number of displaced persons presents a unique set of challenges that include protection and assistance to civilians caught in the various conflicts, as well as assistance to those seeking asylum in neighboring countries.

**Regional actors** – There is a significant number of players currently operating in Iraq and Syria with both common and competing interests. While they have been present for many years, several of them have become emboldened and have taken a more active role in addressing regional issues.

In Iraq, we have seen encouraging progress made in the relationship between the leadership of the **Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).** This past year, for the first time since 2013, Prime Minister al-Abadi met with President Barzani in Baghdad to discuss expanded cooperation between the ISF and the Kurdish Peshmerga. We also

see increased collaboration between the ISF and elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). In November 2016, Iraq's parliament voted to fully legalize elements of the PMF, including but not limited to Shia militias. While they are achieving some positive effects, their participation does present challenges, particularly post-Mosul offensive, as Iranian-backed elements of the PMF seek to increase their influence in the country through both military and political channels.

**Turkey remains an important NATO ally and Counter-ISIS Coalition member that supports the campaign through its operations and by providing access, basing, and overflight permissions. Some Turkish activities and rhetoric, however, have the potential to impact campaign momentum.** Turkey's actions in northern Iraq continue to strain relations between the GoI and the KRG, which serves to further complicate the C-ISIS Campaign. Likewise, in Syria, Turkey has helped clear ISIS from its border, but Turkish-backed forces have also clashed with the Syrian Democratic Forces near Manbij and al Bab and we continue efforts to resolve tensions.

**Since Russia's entry into the Syrian conflict *en masse* in 2015, they have negatively impacted the regional balance of power.** Russia's primary goal is to maintain Syria as a client state in the future and they have propped up the Assad Regime to support this overarching objective. Also very concerning is the fact that Russia's air operations have targeted civilians and U.S.-supported opposition groups. Without effective de-confliction measures, we see increasing opportunity for miscalculation and potential for unintended, counter-productive engagement between nation states. We are not currently coordinating or cooperating with the

Russians; we are simply de-conflicting our air operations. This has become increasingly difficult in the crowded airspace as our operations come into closer proximity. In recent months, the Russians also introduced a number of new surface-to-air systems which can be employed to impact our freedom of maneuver. While our de-confliction efforts have been effective to date, as the fight expands in northern Syria and the battlespace becomes more congested, we should consider enhancing our de-confliction mechanisms with the Russians.

We continue to see **Iranian malign influence across Iraq and Syria**. While they currently are focused on countering ISIS in Iraq, we remain concerned about Iran's efforts to prop up the Syrian regime against the opposition and its desire to exploit Shia population centers to increase their malign influence, not just in Syria, but also in Arab states across the region. This supports their long-term aspiration to achieve regional hegemony. Moreover, we are watching closely for indications and warnings of decreasing Iranian concern regarding the threat posed by ISIS, leading to a potential shift to targeting U.S. and coalition personnel and infrastructure in an effort to influence a potential long-term U.S. security presence. Furthermore, we must take care to ensure that our actions do not unintentionally strengthen the Iranian position within the region.

**The military campaign plan to defeat ISIS is on track in both Iraq and Syria. The coalition's "by, with and through" approach is proving effective.** Recognizing that ISIS will be defeated militarily, **we want to ensure that we have an enduring posture in the region to support and enable partners' efforts to preserve security and stability.** Iraq remains an anchor in the region and we would be wise to continue to support their efforts going forward. We have a willing partner in Iraq and Prime Minister al-Abadi has clearly articulated a desire for

continued U.S. support post-ISIS. We are working with the GoI to finalize a Five-Year Plan to ensure enhanced cooperation. This presents an opportunity to preserve gains achieved to date, while strengthening key relationships and countering malign influence in the region.

**Operation FREEDOM’S SENTINEL and Resolute Support Mission (Afghanistan).** The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are beginning their third year with full responsibility for security with limited U.S. or coalition support. They continue to take the fight to the Taliban and, despite some territorial losses, have retained control of major population areas and key lines of communication. While the Taliban made gains in 2016, namely in the north and south, in most cases, the ANDSF quickly responded to and reversed some of those gains over the past year. While the balance of power favors the government, neither side is currently able to achieve its stated objectives. Looking ahead, it is **essential that we continue to assist the ANDSF in addressing their capability gaps, particularly in the areas of aviation, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), personnel management and development, logistics, and sustainment.** Our sustained force presence, over 8,400 U.S. military personnel, will allow us to conduct counter-terrorism operations and meet our requirements for staffing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Resolute Support (RS) Mission. However, the RS Mission still has **a shortfall of a few thousand personnel needed to conduct the complementary mission of training, advising, and assisting the ANDSF.**

In 2015, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) worked with the Afghans to develop a **Sustainable Security Strategy based upon three key tenets: “Fight, Hold, Disrupt.”** The strategy identifies areas the Afghans will hold, areas they will fight to retain, and areas where

they will conduct an economy of force effort and disrupt the enemy if they appear, Afghan resources permitting. The ANDSF continues to make progress in implementing this strategy, thereby assuming a more proactive stance in addressing multiple threats while securing the population and denying terrorist safe havens. As General Nicholson, the commander of the RS Mission and USFOR-A stated, “[The Afghans’] ability to deal with simultaneous crises ... is a sign of an army that’s growing in capability, [and] that’s maturing in terms of its ability to handle simultaneity and complexity on the battlefield.”

**While the ANDSF continues to make progress, they do face a number of significant challenges.** Poor leadership and corruption are two key factors that need further improvement and President Ashraf Ghani has made addressing these issues a top priority for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). The GIROA established the Anti-Corruption Justice Center in 2016 with the help of the international community and has already tried, convicted, and sentenced senior Afghan officials for corruption. Below are other challenges and critical capability gaps must be addressed.

**ANDSF casualty rates** – High ANDSF casualties remain a concern. This can be attributed to several factors, including poor leadership, corruption, tactics, and training. Deficiencies in ANDSF leadership occur primarily because of patronage vice merit-based appointments. The extensive use of static checkpoints and the lack of training on how to defend them, as well as a more aggressive posture – which has resulted in the ANDSF more frequently taking the lead and actively taking the fight to the enemy – have also contributed to an increased number of casualties. The ANDSF also experienced an increase in the number of insurgent attacks on

inadequately protected fixed positions, and poor and corrupt leadership also may have contributed to higher casualty rates. The ANDSF lacked an operational readiness cycle (ORC) to ensure forces are well-rested and well-trained before returning to the fight. During the Winter Campaign this year, many ANDSF units successfully established ORCs, and our advisors have fostered an increased focus on company-level training and leadership development.

**Afghan Air Force** – The Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Special Mission Wing (SMW) continue to build capability. Their ability to provide airlift, casualty evacuation, and aerial fires has steadily improved as the U.S. provides more aircraft to the AAF and as its pilots and crew gain additional operational experience. The Afghans are proving effective at integrating their AAF aviation assets as evidenced by a number of successful operations conducted over the past year. However, **significant capability gaps remain. The current rotary wing fleet consisting primarily of the Russian-made Mi-17 is both undersized and proving to be more expensive and difficult to sustain than originally envisioned and is experiencing a higher than expected attrition rate.** Going forward, transitioning from Russian to U.S. airframes will ensure Afghan forces have a more sustainable fleet that is interoperable with U.S. forces and will enhance the Afghans' ability to operate independently of coalition forces. The U.S. government is considering a critical AAF initiative to replace the unsustainable Russian-manufactured aircraft fleet and make up for combat losses in Afghan transport helicopters by providing U.S. UH-60s. The DoD-request of \$814.5M for FY17 for the first year of our plan to recapitalize the Afghan fleet provides funding to procure 53 UH-60s, with refurbishment and modification of the first 18; 30 additional armed MD-530F helicopters; 6 additional A-29 attack aircraft; and five AC-208s. The requested FY2017 Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) budget, including the

additional funds for the first year of this proposed aviation initiative, went to Congress on 10 Nov 2016. The FY17 proposal is pending approval and we appreciate your support in reaching resolution as soon as possible to mitigate the gaps in Afghan aerial fires and lift capabilities. Transition from Mi-17 to UH-60 airframes will eventually eliminate reliance on Russian sourced parts for maintenance requirements. With our support, we can expect the AAF will continue to build needed capability over the next few years and into the future.

**Influence of external actors** – Stability in Afghanistan is further challenged by the malign influence of external actors. The enablement of violent extremist groups operating inside of Afghanistan and along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, receiving sanctuary or support from outside governments, is of particular concern. **So long as these elements remain, they will threaten our hard-earned gains and regional stability writ large.**

**Pakistan's shared border with Afghanistan remains a safe haven for terrorist and violent extremist elements.** There are 20 U.S.-designated terrorist organizations present today in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban serves as a facilitator to some of these groups' operations. The death of Taliban Supreme Leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in a U.S. strike on 21 May 2016 had a disruptive impact on the Taliban and gave a psychological boost to the Afghans. However, the group still presents a formidable threat to stability in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) sub-region. The convergence of these groups and, in particular, the convergence of the Afghan Taliban and its component, the Haqqani Network, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, is of particular concern given the direct threat posed to U.S. and Coalition personnel and the Afghan government. Key to improving the security environment in Afghanistan is eliminating sanctuary

of militant groups in Pakistan's territory. The U.S. maintains consistent diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to take appropriate steps to deny safe haven and work to improve the security of the tumultuous Af-Pak border region.

**Illicit narcotics production and trafficking** – Illicit narcotics production and trafficking continue to flourish in Afghanistan, particularly in areas where state institutions are weak. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated 2016 Afghanistan poppy cultivation to be 201,000 hectares with a net opium yield of 4,800 metric tons and a farm gate value of \$900M, which is a 57 percent increase in revenue generated from the opium trade. In Afghanistan, a symbiotic relationship exists between the insurgency and narcotics trafficking where traffickers provide weapons, funding, and material support to the insurgency in exchange for protection. Additionally, some insurgent commanders traffic drugs to finance operations. However, trafficking is not limited to insurgent-controlled areas. The narcotics trade undermines governance and rule of law throughout Afghanistan and plays a critical role in underwriting corruption and a loss of confidence by the Afghan people in the GIRoA.

**Regionally, USCENTCOM supports law enforcement counterdrug and border security training, equipping of regional partners, construction activities, and information sharing initiatives to build the capacity of our security force partners that aid in the regional response to illicit drugs trafficking.** Counterdrug activities are a critical component of USCENTCOM's theater security cooperation strategy; provide for regional engagement and comprise a significant source of security assistance funding in Central Asia. These efforts



improve regional illicit drug detection and interdiction and improve overall border security for the detection of other forms of contraband, including weapons and IED materials.

Amidst the challenges confronting Afghanistan today are many **opportunities**. Most notably, **we have willing partners in the GIRoA and ANDSF and our collaboration in support of common objectives continues to pay significant dividends**. Following are three areas in particular where potential “game-changing” opportunities exist and merit our sustained commitment.

**Government of National Unity** – The Government of National Unity (GNU) survived several political crises in 2016. President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah provided the leadership that has enabled progress to be made in a number of areas, as well as the development of the framework for enduring partnerships with NATO and the United States. Nevertheless, significant challenges still exist and must be addressed. While the NUG provides needed structure and a source of stability for Afghanistan, it remains fragile. Although the ANDSF has remained apolitical so far, failure of the NUG could threaten ANDSF cohesion and the progress achieved throughout the country. Our message to the political elites of Afghanistan has been that “we respect your political progress, but please do not allow political tensions to undo the hard fought gains you have made.”

**The International Community’s Demonstrated Commitment to Afghanistan** – Thirty-nine NATO allies and partner nations committed more than 13,500 troops to sustain the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016. **Thirty nations have also pledged more than \$800 million**

**annually to sustain Afghan security forces through 2020.** Combined with the requested U.S. commitment of \$3.5 billion for FY2017 and additional funding from Afghanistan, a total of more than \$4.3 billion has been pledged for the ANDSF for 2017. Additionally, **seventy-five countries and 26 international organizations confirmed their intention in 2016 at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan to provide \$15.2B for Afghan development during the 2017-2020 period.** The International Community's strong showing, coupled with the continued commitment of U.S. troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016, has bolstered Afghan confidence and resolve and will surely pay dividends going forward.

**Counter-terrorism (CT) Platform** – The existence of violent extremist groups in Afghanistan requires a U.S. presence in the region that can monitor and address threats, even as the United States helps to build the Afghans' capability to deter terrorist exploitation of Afghan territory. As we adjust the U.S. CT mission, our support to the NATO TAA mission will also evolve in the coming year. Currently, advisory efforts are at four of the six corps and police zone levels, in addition to the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) and the AAF. In 2017, we will advise all six corps and police zones to provide critical support where needed to capitalize on the success and continued implementation of the sustainable security strategy.

Although we see encouraging progress being made in Afghanistan, it remains a very challenging environment. While the ANDSF confronts difficulties in a number of areas, they are providing for the security of their country, achieving good effects against the Taliban, and building much-needed capacity and momentum while gaining increasing confidence in what is still a tough fight. Additionally, although it does face significant challenges, the GIRoA, under the leadership

of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, has proven to be a reliable and willing partner. **The U.S. and our coalition partners have invested greatly in Afghanistan over the last 15+ years. The country merits our continued demonstrated commitment given our national security interests in the sub-region, namely protection of the U.S. Homeland.** By strengthening our partners and weakening our enemies we will achieve increased stability in that strategically important part of the world.

**Iran. Iran poses the most significant threat to the Central Region and to our national interests and the interests of our partners and allies.** We have not seen any improvement in Iran's behavior since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), addressing Iran's nuclear program, was finalized in July 2015. **Iran aspires to be a regional hegemon** and its forces and proxies oppose U.S. interests in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria, and seek to hinder achievement of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan and some Central Asian States. They also are working to subvert the GoI by establishing a long-term presence within Iraq's security forces. Of note, Iran exerts influence and a degree of control over the majority of the nearly 100,000 Shia militias within the PMF. Furthermore, **Iran has expanded cooperation with Russia in Syria** in ways that threaten U.S. interests in the region.

The JCPOA removed a key threat posed by Iran for at least a number of years. Unfortunately, the agreement has led some to believe that we have largely addressed the Iranian problem set and that is not the case. **In addition to its nuclear weapons potential, Iran presents several credible threats.** They have a robust theater ballistic missile program, and we remain concerned

about their cyber and maritime activities, as well as the activities of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Forces (IRGC-QF) and their network of affiliates.

Iran implements its strategy primarily within the “gray zone,” the space short of conventional conflict where miscalculation can easily occur, leading to escalatory conflict and misunderstanding. Iran fosters instability by funding and promoting a threat network that employs provocation, violence, and covert arms transfers that serve as the stimulants for a range of conflicts across the region. It complements this subversive arm with conventional military provocation and overt threats to close key maritime sea lanes, especially at critical international economic chokepoints, namely the Strait of Hormuz and the BAM Strait, which puts global political stability and economic prosperity at risk.

Recognizing that **Iran poses the greatest long-term threat to U.S. interests in the Central Region**, we must seize opportunities to both reassure our allies and shape Iran's behavior. In order to contain Iranian expansion, roll back its malign influence, and blunt its asymmetric advantages, we must engage them more effectively in the “gray zone” through means that include a strong deterrence posture, targeted counter-messaging activities, and by building partner nations' capacity. Through both messaging and actions, **we must also be clear in our communications and ensure the credibility of U.S. intentions**. Iran must believe there will be prohibitive consequences if it chooses to continue its malign activities designed to foment instability in the region. The U.S. Government should also consider communicating directly with Iran's leadership to improve transparency and lessen the potential for miscalculation.

To further strengthen deterrence against Iran, we must also take the necessary proactive measures to build the capacity of partners and allies in the region. Ideally we want to improve interoperability, expand communication, and enhance security mechanisms. **Stronger, more capable partners, able and willing to assume a greater role in countering Iran, will serve to further enhance deterrence and improve stability in the region.**

In addition to ready military actions, we must support the broader USG strategy with regard to Iran which should include new diplomatic initiatives that provide Iran with viable alternatives to its present course. While Iran continues to pose the most significant threat to regional security, we remain optimistic and believe that by taking proactive measures and reinforcing our resolve we can lessen Iran's ability to negatively influence outcomes in the future.

**Yemen. Yemen remains a critically unstable state** engrossed in a civil war that has produced a significant humanitarian crisis and growing instability ripe for exploitation by VEOs, most notably al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the ISIS affiliate, IS-Yemen. The lack of a comprehensive peace agreement that leads to a durable resolution of the conflict under a unified Yemeni government further contributes to continued uncertainty in the country.

The civil war between the Republic of Yemen Government (RoYG) and the alliance of Former President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh- and Huthis has entered its third year with little progress made towards achieving an enduring resolution despite concerted efforts by the United Nations, the broader International Community, and regional stakeholders. **While the United States is not directly involved in the civil war, we are providing limited assistance to the Kingdom of**

**Saudi Arabia (KSA)-led coalition in an effort to help protect their territorial integrity and sovereign borders.** Huthi forces have seized and attacked military border outposts inside KSA territory and continue to occupy Saudi lands. Ballistic missile attacks launched from Yemen have struck deep into the country causing casualties and potentially threatening the Islamic holy sites in Mecca. We will continue to work to resolve the conflict as an ending to the war through a comprehensive political agreement provides the surest security of Saudi's Arabia's border and territorial integrity , enables us to conduct counter-terrorism operations, allows the population to receive food and medicine, and blocks Iranian malign activities. Until the war is over, we will assist Saudi Arabia in its efforts to defend against these attacks and restore the territorial integrity of their country.

**Our primary focus in Yemen remains protecting the U.S. homeland** from threats posed by VEOs operating within Yemen's ungoverned spaces, while **ensuring freedom of navigation and commerce** through the southern Red Sea and the Bab al Mandeb (BAM) Strait. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has indicated clear desire and ability to conduct attacks on the U.S. Homeland. Ongoing U.S. unilateral counter-terrorism operations and determined efforts by UAE in leading RoYG and Yemeni tribal forces, as demonstrated during the Mukalla offensive in April 2016, have degraded and disrupted AQAP's operational networks and reduced their access to sources of financial support. Despite the complexity of the environment, our efforts aimed at degrading AQAP remain critical to protecting our national security interests in the region and must continue.

In October 2016, **the Iranian-supported BAM Maritime Threat Network (BMTN)** demonstrated the ability to threaten freedom of navigation by successfully attacking a UAE vessel and a Saudi warship, and attempting to attack U.S. Navy warships in the southern Red Sea. We responded swiftly and decisively, destroying several Huthi coastal defense radar sites. While the origin of these attacks is found in the ROYG-Huthi conflict, the threats posed by the BMTN to the safe passage of vessels, either through deliberate action or unintentional acts, has the potential for significant strategic and economic impacts throughout the region. We continue to closely monitor the BMTN and remain prepared to promptly and decisively respond to any threats.

Going forward, our efforts against violent, non-state actors and support for similar efforts by our regional partners will remain our primary focus in Yemen. At the same time, we continue to do what we can to enable ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a resolution to the hostilities that pose an enduring threat to stability in the country and the region writ large.

**Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.** The Central Region remains the global epicenter for terrorism and violent Islamist extremism and the resulting turmoil continues to bleed across geographic combatant command “seams.” **Terrorism and violent extremism represent trans-regional threats, where malign actors seek to exploit ungoverned and under-governed spaces and vulnerable, disenfranchised populations worldwide.**

One aspect of this threat that makes it particularly challenging is the **terrorists’ and VEOs’ ability to operate across multiple domains and in both physical and virtual spaces.** Today,

the unprecedented global access achieved through the use of the Internet and various social media platforms enables terrorist and violent extremist groups to promulgate their radicalized ideologies while reaching a vast pool of potential recruits, many willing to conduct lone wolf-style attacks on behalf of these groups. Also, as we have seen with ISIS, the ability of violent extremist groups to **operate effectively in the virtual battlespace, makes them more challenging to defeat due to the nature of that domain.** As we degrade their physical capability, groups often shift focus to the virtual battlespace while their forces consolidate and regroup. We must continue to identify attributable and non-attributable methods and techniques for combatting groups in the virtual domain.

**We must also find ways to address the drivers of instability** that create the conditions that allow these groups to flourish. The root causes of instability must be dealt with if we hope to achieve a lasting defeat of terrorist and violent extremist groups operating in the USCENTCOM AOR. **The people of the region must lead this effort; we cannot do it for them.** However, we can and will continue to support and promote their efforts wherever possible.

We cannot allow terrorist groups and violent extremist organizations to operate uncontested, enabling them to grow stronger and expand their global reach. **By working together with our Interagency Partners and the International Community, operating from multiple strategic platforms around the globe and across all domains, we will reduce the gaps and “seams” exploited by these groups and better protect our interests against this common threat.**



**Our Partner Nations in the Central Region.** Below are synopses of the current state of affairs, including challenges, opportunities, and status of our military-to-military (mil-to-mil) relationships with partner nations, except Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Yemen which were addressed in the previous section, “Key Focus Areas” (see pages 13-31).

**The Gulf States** – The Gulf States are among our best partners in the region. The Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) willingness to provide basing and access for U.S. forces is crucial to our ability to operate militarily in the USCENTCOM AOR. The GCC countries provide critical nodes for achieving operational objectives and continued success against ISIS. Their troops and aircraft continue to play a key role in the ongoing fight against this terrorist organization. At leader-level summits in 2014 and 2015, the GCC countries committed to pursue collective defense initiatives, including joint counter-terrorism and ballistic missile defense; however, progress towards those ends has been relatively slow. Nevertheless, the GCC’s desire to create a unified military command and more closely coordinated economic policy could create opportunities for greater interoperability between GCC and coalition forces over the medium- to long-term. While individual GCC nations’ sometimes divergent foreign policies present an obstacle to achieving a unified defense posture, we remain committed to helping them achieve this desired end state through senior leader engagements, combined exercises, and more standardized equipment and training. As agreed upon at the May 2015 Camp David Summit, we have increased cooperation on maritime security, military preparedness, arms transfers, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and logistics interoperability. Our total GCC FMS open case portfolio is valued at over \$150B and continues to help our partners defend their sovereignty and economic interests against emerging threats. As Gulf countries look to the United States for

military equipment, training, and assistance, it is essential that we reinforce efforts to include them in our joint endeavors to defeat regional threats posed by violent extremism and Iran's malign influence. Through our continued support for and collaboration with our GCC partners we will positively impact stability and security in the strategically important Central Region.

**Bahrain** is an important partner in the region, hosting USCENTCOM's naval component, U.S. Navy Central Command (NAVCENT) and U.S. Fifth Fleet Headquarters and Combined Maritime Forces in Manama at the Naval Support Activity Bahrain and Isa Air Base, respectively. The Bahrainis have actively supported coalition operations against ISIS in Syria since the start of the C-ISIS Campaign in September 2014, primarily by allowing us continued use and access to these facilities. They also continue to support Saudi-led operations in Yemen. We are making strides in our collaborative efforts to enhance the Bahraini Coast Guard's capacity, which aim to enable Bahrain to expand its role in countering piracy and violent extremism in the region's maritime domain. Internally, the Bahrainis are dealing with a tough domestic economic hit by low oil prices and a persistent, low-level threat from Iranian-backed militant groups, and we continue to provide appropriate assistance to help them address the security threat. While we have historically enjoyed a strong mil-to-mil relationship with our Bahraini counterparts, the slow progress on key FMS cases, specifically additional F-16 aircraft and upgrades to Bahrain's existing F-16 fleet, due to concerns of potential human rights abuses in the country, continues to strain our relationship. We continue to urge the Government of Bahrain to reverse steps it has taken over the past year to reduce the space for peaceful political expression in its Shia population and have encouraged the Bahrainis to implement needed

political reforms in the country while reassuring them of our strong commitment to our valued partnership.

**The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** (KSA) is undertaking potentially far-reaching economic and related reforms under the banner of Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Plan. The goal of these measures is to diversify the Saudi economy and generate increased economic growth in the wake of low oil prices, as well as expanded opportunities for the nation's burgeoning youth population. The Kingdom is a key regional leader, calling upon partner nations to join them in addressing regional challenges, including Iranian malign influence. Having actively supported the fight against ISIS in the early stages of the campaign, KSA shifted its priority of effort to Yemen in 2015 where it leads the coalition against the Saleh- and Iranian-backed Huthis, who continue to pose a threat to Yemen's internal stability, security in KSA's southern border region, and the flow of commerce through the Bab al Mandeb Strait. The Saudis also are concerned about the threat posed by VEOs operating in Yemen, including the al Qaeda affiliate, AQAP, and the ISIS affiliate, IS-Y. We are principally focused on helping KSA to improve its target development and accountability processes in order to reduce incidence of civilian casualties, while also providing them with focused logistics and intelligence sharing support. Our long-standing partnership with KSA remains critical to maintaining stability in the region given their influence in the GCC and among many Muslim-majority countries. Our mil-to-mil relationship represents the strongest component of that partnership and continues to serve as the foundation for productive collaboration. By continuing to provide opportunities for the Saudis to enhance their defense capabilities, mainly through our substantive training and exercise program and

robust FMS valued at \$109B in open cases, we aim to improve interoperability while effectively addressing challenges in pursuit of our shared security goals and objectives.

**Kuwait** continues to be one of our strongest allies in the Central Region. Owing to the generous provisions of the Defense Cooperation Agreement, the Kuwaitis provide one of the most permissive environments in the USCENTCOM AOR with respect to access, basing, and overflight in support of U.S. and coalition presence in theater. Kuwait hosts the forward headquarters of USCENTCOM's army component, U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT). Kuwait is also the most active combat support logistics hub globally and plays a critical role in support of ongoing operations in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Kuwait utilizes its leadership role in the GCC to help mediate internal GCC rifts while promoting a regional response to crises. Kuwait has also led the GCC in helping to address the regional refugee crisis emanating from Syria and been an invaluable partner in supporting the Iraqi government's C-ISIS efforts. Our mil-to-mil relationship with the Kuwaitis remains strong. Going forward we will look to pursue additional opportunities for joint training and further collaboration in support of common objectives.

The relationship between the United States and **Oman** remains strong, strengthened by our shared interests in the region and expanding access to Omani bases and ports. Oman is consistently viewed as a source of stability in the Gulf Region, and its neutral stance has enabled it to serve as a key interlocutor, most notably with Yemen and Iran. Of note, in October 2016, Oman's leadership facilitated the release of two U.S. citizens held by the Huthis in Sanaa, Yemen. Additionally, Oman's strategic location on the Arabian Sea, outside of the Bab el

Mandeb Strait and the Strait of Hormuz provides USCENTCOM with access to key logistical, operational, and contingency capabilities that are crucial to maintaining open sea lines of communication. While Oman does face significant challenges, namely a growing threat from VEOs in neighboring Yemen and a declining economy that could potentially impact its youth population, the leadership of the country is taking appropriate steps to address these and other issues. We enjoy a good relationship with the Omani military and will continue to work closely with them in support of shared interests.

**Qatar** remains a highly valued partner, providing critical access and basing in support of coalition forces and operations being conducted in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Central Region. The country hosts more than 10,000 U.S. and Coalition service members at Al-Udeid Air Base, home of USCENTCOM's Forward Headquarters, our air component, U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT), and its Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC). Qatar's Armed Forces also continue to support external operations in Syria and Yemen. In Syria, given their relationships with a wide range of actors, including more moderate elements, the Qataris are well-positioned to play an influential role in facilitating a political resolution to the conflict. Like most GCC countries, they continue to demand the removal of Bashar al-Assad as part of any resolution. Qatar has indicated a strong desire to enhance its partnership with the United States, both in terms of training engagements with U.S. forces and procurement of U.S. military equipment. Our continued role in their military modernization and development presents an invaluable opportunity to help expand their capability while strengthening our mil-to-mil relationship with a key and critical partner in the region.

**The United Arab Emirates** (UAE) is one of our most steadfast and capable partners in the USCENTCOM AOR. The Emirates have clearly demonstrated a willingness and ability to take an active role in shaping outcomes in the Central Region. The country hosts more than 4,000 U.S. service members and provides critical support for U.S. operations, goals, and objectives. The UAE was among the first countries to join the Counter-ISIS Coalition in 2014. While their primary focus has since shifted to support the ongoing KSA-led military campaign in Yemen, UAE continues to provide support to several of the C-ISIS Coalition's key lines of effort, including counter-messaging, counter-financing, and stemming the flow of foreign fighters. In Yemen, the UAE serves as the leading ground element in ongoing operations against the Saleh- and Iranian-backed Huthis. The Emirates are also supporting our efforts to counter the al Qaeda affiliate, AQAP. In April, using local fighters and tribal militias, the Emirates played a critical role in liberating Mukalla, driving AQAP elements out of the port city and thereby denying them a key source of revenue. In conjunction with its military efforts, the UAE is heavily focused on providing humanitarian assistance to ease the crisis facing Yemen's population. We value our strong relationship with the Emirates and seek to build upon our robust mil-to-mil relationship, including by concluding a new Defense Cooperation Agreement that could serve as a foundation for expanded, mutually beneficial defense cooperation. We will work to expand our collaboration, specifically in the areas of security cooperation and foreign military sales. Additionally, we will work with the Emirates to promote their leadership role among partner nations in the region.

**The Levant** – The Levant represents the epicenter of ethno-sectarian tension and conflict in the USCENTCOM AOR. Partner nations in this sub-region continue to struggle with the impacts of

the fight against ISIS, as well as the ongoing civil war in Syria, which is an “engine of instability” in and of itself. The persistent conflict and resulting widespread unrest have caused an expanding humanitarian crisis with ramifications that reach far beyond the USCENTCOM AOR. Stability in the Levant is further complicated by competition for influence therein from outside actors, principally Iran and Russia. Many of the challenges present today in the Levant originate from or affect neighboring countries and thus are trans-regional in nature and require cross-COCOM coordination. We routinely work closely with our colleagues in U.S. European Command, U.S. Africa Command, and other USG agencies and organizations to ensure that our various efforts are complementary and well-synchronized.

With its strategic location, control of the Suez Canal, enduring peace treaty with Israel coupled with a religious and cultural Pan-Arab influence, **Egypt** remains a stalwart partner in pursuit of shared Middle East policy objectives that include counter-terrorism, counter-violent extremism, and improved regional stability. Of particular concern is the threat posed by the ISIS affiliate, IS-Sinai which conducts frequent attacks against the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) and security services. While the EAF has managed to contain violence in the Sinai Peninsula without a comprehensive strategy to defeat IS-Sinai, we have a vested interest in helping them to effectively address this threat to ensure that the Sinai does not become a safe haven for extremist elements, including by providing additional bilateral military and security training. Egypt is further challenged by a weak economy and widespread unemployment or under-employment, as well as an aggressive approach to countering internal threats which makes its population highly susceptible to radicalization by extremist elements. Continued U.S. support to Egypt is crucial to our strategic partnership, and our long-standing, resilient mil-to-mil relationship represents a key

pillar of that partnership. Over the past several months, we have expanded our collaboration while taking steps to bolster our force protection measures and rebalance the Multinational Force Observer (MFO) mission in the Sinai. In the coming months, we will continue to work closely with the EAF to further enhance their counter-terrorism capabilities and improve the security of their borders through continued engagement and our robust assistance and security cooperation programs.

**The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan** is one of our strongest and most reliable partners in the Levant sub-region. Jordan provides access, basing, and overflight equal to or greater than that provided by any other partner in the USCENTCOM AOR. The Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF) continue to make key contributions in support of the Counter-ISIS Campaign. With U.S. and coalition assistance, the JAF have fortified Jordan's borders with Iraq and Syria, while enabling the International Community's ongoing efforts to address the burgeoning humanitarian crisis manifesting inside of Jordan (~650,000 refugees) and in two camps located along the border in southern Syria (~55,000-65,000 IDPs). It is imperative that we remain actively engaged with our Jordanian partners. Jordan provides a much-needed moderate Islamic voice in the region and is a trusted intermediary in efforts to advance progress between the Israelis and Palestinians. Our strong mil-to-mil relationship and continued demonstrated support for the Government of Jordan, the JAF, and the RJAF remains critical to ensuring that Jordan is able to effectively manage the broad range of challenges facing the country and the region now and in the future.



**Lebanon** remains a key partner in our efforts to counter violent extremism in the Central Region, and their ground forces offer one of the greatest returns on investment in the region. They are routinely countering groups that include ISIS and Al Nusra Front, denying them freedom of movement, and strengthening the country's border defenses with our continued support. U.S. security assistance to Lebanon has enhanced the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) ability to counter malign influences and terrorist elements operating within the country. A strong and capable LAF acts as a counterweight to the militant arm of Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), while diminishing LH's claim as the sole "resistance" in Lebanon. While LH has been preoccupied with its involvement in the fight in Syria in support of the Assad Regime, the LAF has gained increasing credibility among the Lebanese populace as the most respected institution in the country. On 31 October 2016, the Lebanese parliament ended the over two-year presidential vacancy with the appointment of President Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian and leader of the Free Patriotic Movement Party. While this positive development ended political gridlock and restored government functions, significant challenges remain, exacerbated by the civil war in neighboring Syria. Of particular concern are the approximately 1+ million Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This population presents political, economic, and security challenges to Prime Minister Hariri and his newly formed government. In addition to straining national resources, the Syrian refugee population is mostly Sunni and thus could threaten the fragile sectarian balance of power in the country. The humanitarian burden facing Lebanon will require significant international assistance to bolster limited local resources. Our continued support for this valued partner is both merited and has proven to pay tremendous dividends as the LAF has routinely demonstrated the ability to make best use of U.S. assistance to increase its capability and capacity and bring about positive, measurable results.

**Central and South Asia** – Our primary interests in the Central and South Asia (CASA) sub-region are to prevent the establishment of terrorist safe havens, assure continued U.S. access, and support the sovereignty and independence of partner nations. Our engagement strategy is focused on these three interests and strengthening our bilateral relationships with the seven partner nations. We also encourage multi-lateral cooperation amongst these same seven nations, and our annual CASA Chiefs of Defense Conference serves as a mechanism for facilitating expanded dialogue and increased cooperation. This past year, we also held the highly successful inaugural CASA Directors of Military Intelligence Conference. The increased participation and elevated levels of mil-to-mil discussions clearly convey increased appetite for further U.S.-led engagement.

Despite increasing Russian, Chinese, and Iranian pressure designed to limit U.S. influence in the sub-region, the U.S. maintains its regional position by focusing on security cooperation areas where we have a comparative advantage such as counter-terrorism, border security, defense institution building, and professional development. Several CASA governments support transit of supplies to U.S. troops in Afghanistan through the Northern Distribution Network. We anticipate a continued need for these access routes. In this regard, our CASA partners have been and continue to be strong partners in our efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Other areas of shared interest include countering violent extremism and counter-narcotics. Our training and exercise programs in the CASA sub-region clearly demonstrate our strong commitment to addressing these and other common challenges. For example, Exercise STEPPE EAGLE, traditionally a trilateral exercise with the U.S., U.K., and Kazakhstan, has become more regional in scope with Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic also now taking part. Additionally, we are increasing

multilateral collaboration with our CASA-wide annual USCENTCOM Exercise REGIONAL COOPERATION.

We share two primary concerns with our CASA partners regarding stability and security in the region: 1) persistent worries about the long-term stability and viability of Afghanistan and 2) the threat posed by returning foreign fighters. The United States and NATO's continued commitment to the ongoing Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan is helping to assuage these concerns, primarily by bolstering the Afghan security forces' ability to defend their security interests. At the same time, we continue to pursue opportunities that would allow for increased information sharing, improved border security, and enhanced training and multi-lateral collaboration to support our shared interests.

While our efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to require significant investment, elsewhere in the CASA sub-region we have clearly demonstrated the ability to achieve good effects with modest investments in terms of building partner nations' capabilities, improving multi-lateral cooperation, and addressing common security threats. Going forward, we intend to strengthen relationships and build on previous accomplishments while working together with our Interagency Partners to explore and pursue new opportunities in this strategically important part of the world.

The U.S.-**Kazakhstan** relationship is our most advanced military relationship in Central Asia. We are making notable progress as the Kazakhstani Ministry of Defense continues to focus on institutional reform of its NCO corps, training management, human resources administration, and

professional military education system. This progress continues despite enduring Russian influence and a Kazakhstani economy that is still recovering from the recent downturn in oil and gas prices. Kazakhstan remains the most significant regional contributor to Afghan stability, donating money to the ANA Trust Fund, continuing to provide educational opportunities to Afghans, and offering technical support services. Kazakhstan is also moving closer to a United Nations peace-keeping operations deployment with a unit that has been trained with U.S. assistance. Looking at future opportunities to strengthen our partnership, Kazakhstan has expressed interest in working with the U.S. to improve its logistical, medical, and engineering military branches. Kazakhstan also partnered with the Arizona National Guard through our State Partnership program, providing us the ability to assist in this effort.

**The Kyrgyz Republic**, Central Asia's sole democracy, faces a number of challenges including economic and border security issues. The Kyrgyz Republic sees political pressure from its larger, more powerful neighbors, including Russia, hosting a small Russian airbase outside the capital, Bishkek. Despite ongoing challenges in our bilateral and security cooperation, we continue to seek opportunities to improve our mil-to-mil relationship. After a lengthy period of time during which few bilateral activities occurred, the Kyrgyz military may be increasingly receptive to higher level military engagements and expanded cooperation in the areas of border security, counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism. Furthermore, we continue to assist the Kyrgyz in building a deployable peace-keeping (PK) hospital capability that should be ready to support United Nations PK operations in the near future. Looking ahead, we intend to pursue opportunities for increased cooperation while taking steps to strengthen our relationships with the Kyrgyz.

**Pakistan** remains a critical partner in the counter-terrorism fight. Twenty U.S.-designated terrorist organizations operate in the Afghanistan-Pakistan sub-region; seven of the 20 organizations are in Pakistan. So long as these groups maintain safe haven inside of Pakistan they will threaten long-term stability in Afghanistan. Of particular concern to us is the Haqqani Network (HQN) which poses the greatest threat to coalition forces operating in Afghanistan. To date, the Pakistan military and security services have not taken lasting actions against HQN. We have consistently called upon the Pakistanis to take the necessary actions to deny terrorists safe haven and improve security in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. We have seen some promising coordination between the Pakistan and Afghanistan militaries aimed at addressing instability in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. The Pakistan military in particular continues to conduct counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations in the FATA and facilitate, via ground and air lines of communication, the sustainment of coalition operations in Afghanistan.

This past year we became increasingly concerned about the growing threat posed by the ISIS affiliate, Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K). Although their operational capacity has diminished as a result of U.S., Afghanistan, and Pakistan military operations, we remain focused on defeating the group in both countries. Of note, we were encouraged to see the Pakistani military plan and execute a recent named operation in which they set up simultaneous multiple blocking positions along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in order to reinforce ANDSF efforts to disrupt IS-K activities.

We also continue to see ongoing tensions between Pakistan and neighboring India. India remains concerned about the lack of action against India-focused militants based in Pakistan and even responded militarily to terrorist attacks in India-held territory earlier this year. We assess that these types of attacks and the potential reactions, increase the likelihood for miscalculation by both countries. Furthermore, India's public policy to "diplomatically isolate" Pakistan hinders any prospects for improved relations. This is especially troubling as a significant conventional conflict between Pakistan and India could escalate into a nuclear exchange, given that both are nuclear powers. Additionally, Pakistan's increased focus on its eastern border detracts from its efforts to secure the western border with Afghanistan from incursion by Taliban and al-Qaida fighters. Security along the western border will nevertheless remain a priority for Islamabad, as the Pakistani military seeks to expand border control and improve paramilitary security.

While there are challenges with respect to the U.S.-Pakistani relationship, we have endeavored to maintain a substantial level of engagement with our Pakistani military counterparts. We continue to execute a robust joint exercise program. Most recently, the Pakistani Air Force sent airmen and aircraft to participate in Exercise RED FLAG and GREEN FLAG at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada this past summer. The Pakistani military also continues to support our efforts elsewhere in the region; most notably, the Pakistani Navy is the most consistent and longstanding participant, second only to the United States, in Combined Task Force (CTF)-150 (counter-terrorism operations) and CTF-151 (counter-piracy operations) led by U.S. Naval Forces Central (USNAVCENT). Our relationship with Pakistan remains a very important one. We look forward to continuing our engagement with the Pakistani military leadership, to include

the new Chief of the Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, in the days ahead as we work together in pursuit of shared interests.

Our mil-to-mil relationship with **Tajikistan** is deepening despite Moscow's enduring ties and the presence of the 201st Military Base near Tajikistan's capital of Dushanbe, Russia's largest military base outside of its borders. China has also initiated a much stronger military cooperation partnership with Tajikistan, adding further complexity to Tajikistan's multi-faceted approach to security cooperation. Tajikistan's long border with Afghanistan remains the nation's top concern, as the Taliban intermittently fights for control of Afghanistan's Kunduz province, which is less than 160 miles from Dushanbe. These border concerns remain a focus area for U.S. security cooperation as we continue to develop the Tajiks' capacity to address violent extremism, terrorism, and narco-trafficking; enhance border security; and, confront other trans-regional threats.

**Turkmenistan's** UN-recognized policy of "positive neutrality" presents a challenge with respect to U.S. engagement. Our efforts to date have focused primarily on training, including in the areas of counter-narcotics and medical services. Due to Turkmenistan's shared border with Afghanistan, the Turkmen remain concerned about the continuing instability in Afghanistan and, separately, the potential for the return of foreign fighters. We are encouraged somewhat by Turkmenistan's expressed interest in increased mil-to-mil engagement with the U.S. within the limits of their "positive neutrality" policy.

We are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of **Uzbekistan's** improved relations with its neighbors in the region following the first presidential succession in the nation's 25-year history. This is a promising development given Uzbekistan's central and strategic geographic location, in the heart of Central Asia and bordering Afghanistan. President Mirziyoyev has reaffirmed the country's unwillingness to allow other nations to establish military bases in Uzbekistan, its restriction against aligning with foreign military or political blocs, and its self-imposed restriction against any type of expeditionary military operations. Despite these limitations, our bilateral mil-to-mil efforts are focused on helping the Uzbeks improve border security, enhance their counter-narcotic and counter-terrorism capabilities, and prevent the return of foreign fighters into the country, which are shared U.S. interests in the region. We remain committed to these security assistance efforts. We also are helping the Uzbek military, which is the largest military in Central Asia, to professionalize its forces through advisory support and assistance to its professional military institutions.

**Required Programs, Capabilities and Resources.** The security environment in the Central Region remains complex and highly volatile. To ensure we are able to effectively achieve our mandate to protect our national interests, we must be properly postured with the necessary capabilities and resources to pursue opportunities in support of our goals and objectives, and to prevail in our various endeavors throughout USCENTCOM's 20-country area of responsibility. Below are the programs, capabilities, and resources most critical to our success.

**Building Partner Capacity.** Building Partner Capacity (BPC) is essential to achieving our objectives in the Central Region. To improve stability in the USCENTCOM AOR and mitigate



the need for costly U.S. military intervention, we must be forward-leaning and empower our partners to meet internal security challenges and work collectively to counter common threats. BPC is a lower-cost alternative to U.S. boots on the ground, has longer-term sustainability, and is necessary for interoperable, combined coalition operations. As such it represents a high return investment in the future of the Central Region. **By building capacity and enabling partners to assume a larger role in providing for the stability and security of their sovereign spaces, we will enhance regional stability while still maintaining our critical access and influence in the region.** Other tangible by-products achieved through our BPC efforts include enhanced interoperability, improved security for forward deployed forces and diplomatic sites, continued access and influence, and more professional regional militaries comprised of forces learning the importance of rule of law and compliance with human rights norms. **Continued support of key partners engaged in the ongoing military campaign to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria is particularly important.** As important as long-term regional stability is BPC's focus on the threat environment and shaping the region is critical to better prepare and deter and counter state and non-state aggression. Our key partners' ability to procure U.S. weapons and equipment and increase interoperability with U.S. and coalition forces is critical to our success. Any reduction of U.S. assistance risks undermining our allies and creating a security vacuum for exploitation by state and non-state actors with counter-U.S. or violent intentions.

**Foreign Military Financing and Foreign Military Sales.** For decades, U.S. security assistance provided to countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait and Egypt, has helped create lasting partnerships and improve regional stability. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance and the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program enable countries to meet their defense

needs, while also promoting U.S. national security interests by strengthening coalitions and enhancing interoperability between and among U.S. and coalition forces. **When we provide defense systems through U.S. security assistance, we are not just providing our partners with capabilities, we are committing to a long-term relationship that includes sustainment of those capabilities.** The complex and technical nature of advanced defense systems often require continuous collaboration between countries. This may include training and support in the use of the equipment, maintenance assistance, and, in some cases, continuing help to update and modernize the equipment throughout its life-cycle.

Nevertheless, **we must better anticipate our partners' requirements and find ways to improve our FMF and FMS programs' processes to better meet demand in today's high-paced global security environment.** Delays in procurement and delivery can, over time, jeopardize relationships with buyer nations and the potential for future FMS and FMF transactions. It is imperative that we make the FMF and FMS processes more responsive to partner needs.

In recent years we have seen an increase in restrictions placed on assistance provided to partner nations, limiting their ability to acquire U.S. equipment based on human rights and/or political oppression of minority groups. While these are significant challenges that must be addressed, **the use of FMF and FMS as a mechanism to achieve changes in behavior has questionable effectiveness and can have unintended consequences.** We need to carefully balance these concerns against our desired outcomes for U.S. security assistance programs – both DoD and State-funded – to build and shape partner nations' capability, interoperability, and self-reliance in

support of broader U.S. foreign policy. We should avoid using the programs as a lever of influence or denial to our own detriment.

**USCENTCOM Exercise and Training Program.** The USCENTCOM Exercise Engagement Training Transformation (CE2T2) program enhances U.S. capability to support contingency operations while improving readiness and maintaining presence and access to the region. At the same time, the program indirectly increases partner nations' operational capability; demonstrates mutual commitment to regional security; ensures an effective coalition posture; strengthens relationships; and, improves combined command, control, and communications interoperability (C3I). More importantly, in light of the fact that today's conflicts are increasingly trans-regional, all-domain, and multi-functional in nature, bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises support the unity of effort requirement for coalition operations.

The USCENTCOM CE2T2 program continues to grow in complexity and relevance with expanded participation throughout the USCENTCOM AOR during FY2016 and into FY2017.

**Last year, the command conducted 45 USCENTCOM- and/or Component-sponsored bilateral and multi-lateral exercises with 41 partner nations and spanning seven**

**Geographic and Functional Commands.** These exercises shape the perceptions of key audiences in the USCENTCOM AOR to support U.S. strategic goals of reassuring partners and deterring aggressive and malign behavior. Exercise objectives and outcomes include maintaining key relationships while demonstrating multilateral, as well as unilateral, capabilities. They also enable increased cooperation and interoperability with our partners and

help to reinforce a strong military posture in the region. This helps counter any false perception of the U.S. “abandoning” the region.

Continued, robust, and reliable funding is necessary to fully support exercises as planned. For example, insufficient resourcing of component requirements can result in curtailment or even cancellation of efforts like Exercise EAGER LION, an annual multi-lateral training event in Jordan. This sub-optimization of the USCENTCOM exercise and training program ultimately will affect U.S. Joint and Combined Force readiness and create a perceived lack of commitment to our coalition partners. Combined with BPC, FMS, and FMF, the USCENTCOM CE2T2 program also actively promotes and supports regional stability through increased partner action and capability. These engagements not only build interoperability at the highest levels of command, but the benefits derived at the lowest, tactical levels of command and logistics manifest in long-term professional and personal relationships among participating country staffs.

**Information Operations.** Information Operations (IO) will continue to serve as a key element in shaping the environment to reduce or avoid conflict and as a force multiplier in the information space during and after major combat and counter-insurgency operations. **We have an enduring responsibility to employ IO to counter trans-regional threats.** By utilizing IO as a comprehensive, long-term capability to degrade VEOs’ effectiveness and counter state-sponsored destabilizing activities across the USCENTCOM AOR, the USG helps to improve regional stability while reducing the requirement for deployed U.S. forces. The Department of Defense (DoD), in concert with other USG agencies, has developed several IO campaigns, leveraging the latest technologies, which operate in the information domain. These campaigns

include counter-propaganda messaging in print media, radio, television, short message service, Internet, and social media, and take a proactive approach to coordinating these activities with the country teams and embassies in our AOR. The nature and scope of threats prevalent today in the USCENTCOM AOR necessitates a robust response, and **IO is a cost-effective application of DoD resources to deter aggression, counter destabilizing behavior, and decrease the potential for kinetic operations in order to protect USG and partner nation interests in the Central Region.**

**Cyberspace Operations.** USCENTCOM cyberspace operations are built on the foundation of cyber readiness and include both Department of Defense Information Network (DODIN) Operations and command-centric Defensive Cyberspace Operations. **Our top cyberspace priority is mission assurance; the goal is to preserve freedom of maneuver in cyberspace to assure access to both U.S. and foreign assets critical to military operations.** Efforts include, but are not limited to, helping to set priorities and contributing to the desired end-state of denying adversaries the ability to operate on our networks and impact our missions. We recognize the importance of maintaining a holistic approach to this evolving capability that emphasizes the need for a synchronized effort across the whole of government. While the full and proper implementation of all available USG/DoD technical defenses plays a vital role, the human element is the most important factor to protect and defend from malicious cyber activity. Looking ahead, USCENTCOM will continue to adapt our network defenses to detect, deter, and better react to known or anticipated threats.

**Anti-Access Area Denial.** Potential adversaries are actively investing in competitive responses that include anti-access/area denial (A2AD) systems to minimize U.S. influence and abilities. Adversaries are also pursuing “layered defenses” to directly challenge U.S. diplomacy and presence. An enemy may use combinations of kinetic (e.g., ballistic/cruise missiles, moored/floating mines, small boat swarms, submarines, aircraft, drones, irregular warfare using proxies, terrorism, WMD) and non-kinetic (e.g., GPS jamming, spoofing, cyber hacking, EMP, underground facilities, dispersal/camouflage of weapons/assets, shielding from aerial/satellite surveillance, decoys) capabilities to inhibit projection of force and/or precision strikes.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance Assets.** USCENTCOM holds daily requirements for over 2,800 hours of full-motion video, thousands of still images, thousands of hours of signal intelligence, and other key intelligence collection sources. **These requirements do not reside only in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, but span the entirety of the USCENTCOM AOR. It is the layering, synchronization, and prioritization of national, theater, and tactical ISR capabilities that enable USCENTCOM force protection of transition, stability, and combat forces.** This critical capability also performs several key functions including: battlespace awareness for partner and U.S. operational commanders, as well as indications and warning to guard against strategic threats and miscalculation; identification of fixed ground networks and facilities; location and tracking of adversary operational elements and units; mapping and development of adversary command and control; interdictions of facilitation entities, suppliers, and supply routes; and, characterization and targeting of funding centers and other support nodes. Our greatest difficulties in this fight remain in the development of enemy networks, groups, cells, and nodes that fight from within the populace. There are critical airborne ISR

functions that must be present to map this unconventional threat. In priority order they are: 1) full-motion video, 2) signals intelligence, and 3) geospatial intelligence. **USCENTCOM's requirements consistently outpace theater airborne ISR capacity and capability and the demand will continue to grow.** We are able to address some of the shortfall through cross-CCMD and partner-nation coordination and capacity development. We also need to explore innovative ways to develop capabilities for persistent ISR through experimentation and technology maturation and demonstration projects. **Additionally, we need to address the shortfalls associated with processing, exploitation, and dissemination of collected intelligence.** For the foreseeable future, in the absence of additional much-needed ISR assets, maintaining operational awareness on threats, risks, regional stability, and humanitarian crises will require constant attention, creative application of ISR, hard choices on the prioritization of resources, and the determination of acceptable risk to mission and forces.

**Precision Munitions.** Highly accurate munitions are vital components of our kinetic strike and integrated air and missile defense capabilities, to dominate and counter our adversaries' increasingly sophisticated networks of coastal and air defenses coupled with precision ballistic missiles. Missile interceptors, air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, precision air-to-ground and air-to-air missiles, and long-range precision ground-to-ground missiles work in concert to counter the growing threats we face today. **We appreciate Congress' continued support for the procurement/replenishment, development, and forward positioning of precision and specific purpose munitions that are critical to the way we currently fight** – in urban areas, with very specific rules of engagement designed to protect civilians and limit damage to infrastructure. \

**Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS).** The enemy Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) threat and employment in the USCENTCOM AOR is rapidly evolving. Numerous non-state actors including ISIS, al Qaida, Taliban, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Fatah al-Sham are using both commercial-off-the-shelf and military drones to conduct operations against U.S. and coalition forces. This threat has evolved from reconnaissance and surveillance missions to weaponized drone attacks resulting in battlefield casualties. State actors continue to increase the sophistication of their UAS with all countries in the USCENTCOM AOR utilizing various classes of UAS for operations. **Given the evolving threat, the need for an effective Counter-UAS capability that can defeat all classes of UAS remains a top priority.** To address this problem, USCENTCOM is working with various Defense agencies and Industry through the Joint Urgent Operational Need (JUON) process to develop and acquire an effective system to employ against UAS. The ability to rapidly respond to this emerging threat is critical to mission success and requires increased funding to promote innovative solutions with expedited testing and rapid acquisition.

**Joint and Interagency Partners.** To ensure success in the pursuit of shared goals and objectives, our Joint and Interagency Partners must also be properly postured with the necessary capabilities and resources. Below are two key partners that play a significant role in support of USCENTCOM's mission and merit continued Congressional backing.

**Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO) – JIDO, an element of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, is an invaluable organization that is even more important as we fight by, with and through our partners with fewer resources, but more exposed U.S.**



**personnel and equipment in the fight.** Their ability to rapidly respond to emerging threats is essential to enabling our efforts to counter improvised threats (e.g., counter-facilitation, counter-tunneling, counter-UAS) and build partner capacity in support of our deployed warfighters. The expert JIDO personnel embedded within our formations at USCENTCOM's headquarters in Tampa, forward deployed, and across the globe, provide mission-critical analytical, planning, and rapid acquisition support. Having this invaluable joint organization that can expose the broader counter-IED network, identify future disruptive threats, stay in front of technological changes, and integrate our efforts across the Interagency to rapidly implement solutions is essential to our ability to protect our forces, defeat threat networks and build partner national capacity.

**Global Engagement Center** – The best way to defeat an idea is to present a better, more appealing idea to vulnerable and undecided audiences. **The State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) effectively coordinates, integrates, and synchronizes messaging to foreign audiences designed to undermine the disinformation espoused by violent extremist groups,** including ISIS and al Qaeda, while offering positive alternatives. The Center is focused on empowering and enabling partners, governmental and non-governmental, who are able to speak out against these groups and provide an alternative to ISIS's nihilist vision. To that end, the Center offers services ranging from planning thematic social media campaigns to providing factual information that counters disinformation to building capacity for third parties to effectively utilize social media to research and evaluation.

**Required Authorities and Appropriations.** Fluid environments require flexible authorities with sustained and timely funding to respond to changes in conditions and maintain momentum of operational forces. **We sincerely appreciate Congress' continued support for key authorities and appropriations needed for current and future operations and response to unforeseen contingencies.** The required authorities and resources listed below enable USCENTCOM to accomplish its mission and stated objectives in support of U.S. national interests and the interests of our partners in the Central Region.

**Iraq Train & Equip Fund (ITEF).** Iraq's ability to defeat ISIS requires professionalizing and building the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including military or other security forces associated with the Government of Iraq, such as Kurdish and tribal security forces or other local forces with a national security mission. Most notably, the ongoing Coalition Military Campaign to defeat ISIS relies on indigenous Iraqi Security Forces to conduct ground operations against the enemy and liberate ISIS controlled territory. They have risen to the task and are making progress in this ongoing endeavor. While the initial training and equipping of the ISF focused heavily on developing Iraqi Army (IA) Brigades to conduct offensive operations, future efforts will shift to sustainment of combat capability and hold forces **to ensure that liberated areas remain under the control of the GoI and that these forces are able to counter remaining ISIS pockets and any other VEOs which may emerge and attempt to fill the void created by the defeat of ISIS.** These hold forces will be a combination of local tribal fighters and police forces.

**Syria Train & Equip Program. Protecting the United States from terrorists operating in Syria and setting the ultimate conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in that country will require the continued training and equipping of Vetted Syria Opposition (VSO) forces.** Additional recruitment, retention, resupply, and support are central to our strategy to defeat ISIS in Syria. Our revised training approach is proving successful, improving the effectiveness and lethality of the force on path to a projected strength of up to 35,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017 and growing to 40,000 in 2018. **Procurement and manufacturing lead times for non-standard weapons and ammunition and delivery from various foreign vendors complicates the already complex train and equip mission, so we appreciate as much flexibility as possible in authorizing and appropriating funds for this effort.** The SDF and VSOs continues to advance in defeating ISIS and holding and defending liberated areas, while also assisting local authorities in providing humanitarian and security assistance to the populace.

**The Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF).** Since 2005, U.S. provision of funds executed through ASFF has provided training, equipment, infrastructure, sustainment and salaries for a generated force of up to 352,000 Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and 30,000 Afghan Local Police (ALP). **ASFF plays a critical role in enabling the ANDSF to secure Afghanistan with an effective and sustainable force** that is central to the U.S. strategy to prevent a Taliban or al Qaeda resurgence, defeat VEOs, and deny safe haven for external plotting against the U.S. Homeland and U.S. and partner nation interests in the region.

**Afghanistan Aviation Transition Funding** – The proposed Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Special Mission Wing (SMW) aviation transition program is critical to addressing capability gaps in Close Air Support (CAS) and lift for the ANDSF. **The program is designed to address the shortfall in available aircraft and trained pilots to ensure Afghan forces have the required aviation support and maintenance pipeline to move toward self-sustainment and increased independent operations.** DoD plans to achieve these results by transitioning the AAF and SMW to U.S.-manufactured rotary wing platforms. Although the availability of trained pilots remains a particular challenge for the ANDSF, recent successes are producing capable pilots and the recap plan is designed to ease the human capital burden over time. The additional capability that would be gained through the aviation transition program will provide the Afghans needed overmatch against insurgents and terrorists while improving ground forces' effectiveness and reducing ANDSF's casualty rates.

**Coalition Support.** The authorities and funding that underpin our ability to effectively conduct Coalition operations, including in support of partners whose contributions are critical, but who lack the resources to participate without our assistance, are key to our continued success. The Coalition Support Fund (CSF) provides the authority to reimburse certain Coalition partners for logistical and military support provided by that nation in connection with Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan operations. The CSF also funds the Coalition Readiness Support Program (CRSP) which authorizes supplies, the loaning of equipment, and specialized training assistance to coalition forces. The CSF relieves the operational burden on U.S. forces and enhances the visibility of Coalition presence. This authority remains critical to our strategic approach to Coalition operations, **including, but not limited to, the ongoing military campaign to defeat**

**the terrorist organization, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and our transition in Afghanistan.** The capability and interoperability that CSF funding facilitates is crucial to our bilateral relations, Coalition operations and training with partner nations, and to the success of our broader strategic and trans-regional objectives. The *Global Lift and Sustain* and successor authority further complements this approach by enabling us to provide transportation and life support to select Coalition partners.

**Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP).** CERP is authorized for local commanders to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements in Afghanistan, and may be used to make condolence payments for the loss of life, injury, or property damage resulting from U.S., coalition, or supporting military operations. The NDAA for FY2017 provides authority for ex gratia payments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria for damage, personal injury, or death that is incident to U.S. combat operations. CERP funded projects directly benefit the indigenous civilian populations in Afghanistan and demonstrate the positive effects of our presence, while also providing tangible, quick mitigation when coalition actions result in casualties or property damage to civilians during the course of military operations. CERP is a proven force multiplier and a key enabler in responding to urgent humanitarian needs and promoting security. Going forward, we want to ensure commanders engaged in the Counter-ISIS missions can provide immediate, but limited, small scale humanitarian assistance to ISIS liberated areas, until national and international relief agencies can provide that support. Our responsiveness is critical to quickly stabilizing those areas in order to begin the holding phase of the campaign and to counter ISIS messaging.

**Military Construction (MILCON).** USCENTCOM stewards constrained resources and maintains an expeditionary approach to posturing capabilities in theater. We leverage existing infrastructure and host nation support and funding where possible, as well as maritime posture and reach back capabilities to meet steady state and surge requirements. In some instances, MILCON is required to establish infrastructure to support forces and equipment in the execution of their missions. Of note, **USCENTCOM requires support for development at Muwaffaq-Salti Air Base (MSAB), Jordan and construction of the new Consolidated Squadron Operations Facility at Al Udeid, Qatar. These two projects are essential to our contingency and steady state operations and support the Defense Strategic Guidance.** The projects will support executing our priority war plans by providing critical dispersed, resilient and flexible capacity to accept both steady state and enduring joint forces, multiple aircraft types and provide critical air C4I (command, control, communications, computers and intelligence) for current and future contingencies, theater and strategic surge and maritime operations within the USCENTCOM AOR. MILCON development is critical to support the realignment of U.S. forces operating from an expeditionary approach at various contingency bases scattered across the AOR to the required enduring posture approach necessary to protect U.S. interests and to sustain key bilateral relationships.

**Prepositioned War Reserve Materiel (PWRM).** Service Prepositioned War Reserve Materiel and capability sets remain critical force multipliers required to execute USCENTCOM's most dangerous and critical contingency plans. The Services and Defense Agency prepositioned capacity provides a shock absorber in rapidly emerging contingencies, buys critical decision

space for our national leadership, and mitigates the risk associated with the tyranny of distance when we are called upon to rapidly aggregate and reintroduce forces into the region.

**The U.S. Central Command Team. The outstanding men and women who comprise the USCENTCOM Team truly are our most important assets.** They continue to make tremendous contributions on behalf of our Nation and our partners and allies around the globe. **We must ensure they have everything they need to do their jobs effectively, efficiently, and as safely as possible.**

**We also continue to benefit from the unique capability provided by our Coalition Coordination Center, which consists of more than 200 foreign military officers from nearly 60 partner nations.** They, too, are important members of our USCENTCOM Team and play a critical role in strengthening the partnerships between our nations.

We remain mindful of the fact that **success requires that we work together, not just within the command, but also with our teammates from other Combatant Commands, our Component Commands, established combined/joint task forces, the Central Region's 18 county teams, and various agencies and organizations throughout the USG and the Interagency.** Our close collaboration with counterparts at the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Treasury, CIA, FBI, and JIDO, for example, has paid enormous dividends in the pursuit of shared national goals and objectives. We look forward to continuing to work with them and others on behalf of our Nation.

**We also are incredibly grateful for the support of our families.** They are highly valued members of our USCENTCOM Team and we could not do what we do without them. They make important contributions and tremendous sacrifices each and every day in support of us and on behalf of the command and a grateful Nation.

The upcoming year promises to be a busy and challenging one in the Central Region. You can be assured that the world-class team at U.S. Central Command – *which includes more than 80,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and Civilians stationed today throughout the USCENTCOM area of responsibility* – is up to the task, and is highly-skilled, motivated, and stands ready to do whatever is necessary to accomplish the mission: defend our Nation and our interests, the interests of partners and allies, and improve stability and security in that strategically important part of the world.

*USCENTCOM: Prepare, Pursue, Prevail!*