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Opening

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on our defense posture and policy in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) areas of responsibility, alongside Commanders General McKenzie and General Townsend.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy, my portfolio spans the entire globe, including a vast network of U.S. allies and partners in the Middle East and Africa. These partners are a force multiplier, and ensuring our interests are aligned and our shared goals are resourced appropriately is among my top priorities.

The Biden Administration is committed to strengthening and expanding the U.S. alliance and partnership architecture, because these relationships are a critical strategic asset. In the Middle East and Africa, the United States is better able to disrupt terrorist networks, counter proliferation, and resolve complex armed conflicts if we do so in cooperation with allies and partners. The Global Posture Review completed by the Department at the end of last year also recognized the importance of engaging with our allies and partners on our overseas posture, and working in concert to align our resources against strategic objectives.

In the Middle East, the Department of Defense (DoD) employs security cooperation, multilateral exercises, consistent and high-level defense policy engagements, supported by our overseas posture, to increase stability and secure U.S. interests. Most important, the military instrument of power supports diplomacy, this Administration's tool of first resort. By enhancing partners' capabilities and capacities to provide for their own defenses and to address regional problems, the DoD can advance U.S. interests more efficiently and effectively.

In Africa, our policy objectives are to counter violent extremist organizations that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. interests; strengthen ally and partner networks to support mutual security objectives; and address targeted strategic competition concerns that present a military risk to the United States. Additionally, we support whole of government activities to prevent and respond to crises that threaten U.S. nationals, facilities, and interests. We seek to accomplish these objectives working primarily by, with, and through our allies and partners.

Middle East

With respect to the Middle East region, the Department remains focused on counterterrorism in order to prevent attacks on the homeland; countering Iran's destabilizing activities; working together with allies and partners to support freedom of navigation; and demonstrating our commitment to regional partners and allies, including through security cooperation and supporting humanitarian crisis response, when necessary. The Department's approach to the Middle East is also informed by growing threats to a free, stable, and open international order, including those posed by Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), that seek to increase their influence in the region. Across each of these efforts, the Department prioritizes countering risks to U.S. forces.

Strategic Competition

While the Department works to advance U.S. strategic objectives in the Middle East and Africa, Russia and the PRC are also pursuing their own interests and influence in the USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM areas of responsibility. Their objectives often run counter to those of the United States, threaten U.S. force protection, and seek to limit U.S. operational flexibility. Both countries use weapons sales as a leading tool to deepen their influence and compete with the United States. Russia seeks to reshape Middle East security structures by offering a no-strings attached weapons sale process and by exploiting governance vacuums to increase leverage and influence from the eastern Mediterranean into North Africa, and south and east into the Red Sea and Gulf.

As articulated in the China Military Power Report submitted to Congress in November 2021, the PRC intends to reshape the international order to better align with its authoritarian system. Like with Russia, the PRC is aggressively seeking inroads at the expense of both our influence and our direct security interests. As part of its efforts, it is establishing overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to project and sustain military power at greater distances, including in Africa and the Middle East. As the Department coordinates with partners on shared threats and seeks to address our partners' security needs, it will also continue to limit Russian and PRC influence in the region through sustained engagement and by demonstrating the superiority of U.S. security solutions – including equipment and training – to remain the partner of choice.

Iran

The Department of Defense employs a wide range of capabilities to deter and defend against threats from Iran and its proxies, and maintains readiness to provide the President with all options necessary to keep the United States secure. The Department supports Department of State diplomatic efforts to return to mutual compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and restore verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program. The Department's core activities are to protect U.S. forces, support the defense of our partners from Iranian malign activities, synchronize our capabilities and actions with those of our allies and partners to deter Iran, and counter Iran-backed destabilizing activities.

Iran continues to play a destabilizing role in the region through its development and proliferation of short and medium range ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial systems, which have been used by Iran and its proxies to launch attacks against a wide range of commercial shipping, oil facilities, and even U.S. forces.

The Department is stepping up its efforts to interdict Iranian proliferation and expose its maritime malfeasance, so that Iran can no longer hide behind the veneer of plausible deniability. In July 2021, the Department released photos and analysis on the Iranian attack on the merchant ship *Mercer Street*, which killed two civilian crewmembers. In response, the G-7 issued a statement condemning Iran's reckless actions. This past December and January, the U.S. Navy interdicted two shipments of rifles and urea fertilizer, used for explosives, which were en route from Iran to the Houthis in Yemen. Iran's latest violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which prohibits weapons transfers to the Houthis, shows its determination to violate

international norms in order to proliferate destabilizing weapons which have been used to attack U.S. forces, our partners, and civilians throughout the region.

Iraq and Syria

In Iraq and Syria, the Department is committed to the enduring defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It pursues this objective through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which brings together 79 nations and 5 international organizations to provide an array of military capabilities, funding, and political support to the campaign against ISIS. Since 2014, the United States and its partners in the Global Coalition have made progress in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Still, the group remains a threat – demonstrating the intent to reconstitute and terrorize – as evidenced by recent attacks including on a detention facility holding ISIS detainees in northeast Syria. The United States continues to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga forces, and other vetted local partners as they lead in the fight against ISIS.

In Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR) completed the transition to an advise, assist, and enable role, fulfilling commitments made during the July 2021 U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. The Department completed this transition ahead of schedule and announced on December 9, 2021 that no U.S. forces with a combat role remain in Iraq. This early transition was possible because of the tremendous progress achieved by the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga in developing the capability and capacity to lead the fight against ISIS in Iraq. As part of this process, the Department redeployed combat equipment from Iraq and transferred military vehicles to the Iraqi security forces; downgraded the OIR command from a 3-star to a 2-star; and OIR transitioned its Support Command and Special Operations Command out of Iraq. The United States welcomes this new phase and will continue to support the Iraqi security forces at the invitation of the Iraqi government. The Department will also continue to provide enabling support, within means, to NATO Mission – Iraq, which conducts ministerial-level advising.

The Department is committed to the Defeat ISIS mission and committed to maintaining a presence in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government in order to advise, assist, and enable the Iraqi security forces. At the same time, force protection remains of the highest priority. The United States is prepared to defend U.S. forces in Iraq from Iranian-backed threats and respond to threats and attacks. This Administration has made clear that it stands ready to take necessary and proportionate actions to defend U.S. forces.

In Syria, the Coalition continues to work by, with, and through the SDF and other vetted Syrian partner forces to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS. The January 20, 2022 ISIS attack against the largest detention facility in northeast Syria demonstrates the continued threat the group poses and the need to maintain counterterrorism pressure on ISIS. The attack highlights the need for members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to provide additional funding to improve the secure and humane detention of the more than 10,000 ISIS fighters held by the SDF. It also underscores the urgent need for countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and prosecute, where appropriate, their nationals who are detained or displaced in northeast Syria.

Military activities to support the enduring defeat of ISIS are just one piece of a broader whole-of-government strategy designed to address the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that gave rise to ISIS and that ISIS continues to exploit. The Department continues to work across Federal departments and agencies to best support our local partners in Iraq and Syria and encourage international action to address the challenges that remain in order to ensure ISIS's enduring defeat.

Yemen

In Yemen, U.S. policy objectives are to advance a durable resolution that ends the now seven-year civil war there, cease Iranian-supported cross border attacks against Saudi Arabia and the UAE, alleviate humanitarian suffering, and to defeat the threat from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS elements in Yemen. While the United States – with the Department of State in the lead – continues its effort to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the Iranian-backed Houthi armed group continues to threaten U.S. partners, U.S. interests, and U.S. persons. With Iranian support, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated missiles and lethal unmanned aerial systems against U.S. partners – including against infrastructure and airports where American citizens and other civilians are present. The Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea threatening a major maritime corridor. Despite Saudi willingness to support a comprehensive ceasefire, over the past year, the Houthi leadership has prioritized offensive operations in the city of Marib and repeated attacks on key infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over an agreement on a UN-brokered ceasefire proposal.

The Department of Defense is providing support to both the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the defense of its territory and people, including through long-standing support to those partners' air defenses. The Department also continues to provide limited, non-combat support to the Saudi-led Coalition for the purpose of defending Saudi Arabia and the other members of the Coalition from external threats, consistent with the policy President Biden laid out in his February 4, 2021 remarks at the Department of State. Roughly 60 DoD military advisors are deployed to help Saudi Arabia's Armed Forces defend their territory from threats emanating from Yemen. In U.S. engagements at all levels with the Saudi-led Coalition, reducing harm to civilians is a consistent priority and message.

Inside Yemen itself, the Department of Defense maintains a small presence of U.S. special operations forces to combat the al-Qa'ida and ISIS terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests, and that have capitalized on Yemen's instability. Along with our Gulf partners such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, U.S. efforts have degraded AQAP's ability to conduct external attacks and ISIS's presence.

Partnerships: The Gulf, Egypt, and the Levant

The Department's objectives for a more stable and secure region are best met by working in lock step with our partners and allies. Over the past year, the immense value of our strategic defense partnerships in the region was made evident when these partners provided unprecedented support for the evacuation of over 124,000 American citizens, Afghan citizens, and third country

nationals from Afghanistan through the Department's network of military bases throughout the region. In particular, the Department is grateful that Qatar and the UAE continue to host evacuees. Qatar plays a particularly key role in facilitating sustained evacuations of American citizens and the flow of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

The Department will continue to lean forward in strengthening multilateral security cooperation in order to strengthen integrated deterrence and to address threats, particularly those emanating from Iran. In 2021, the Department restarted annual bilateral defense meetings with partners from Egypt to Iraq and Israel to the UAE. U.S. forces joined Exercise BRIGHT STAR in Egypt in September 2021, which tested countries' ability to work together to address regional challenges across air, land, sea and cyber domains; the International Maritime Exercise 2022 in Bahrain, which brought together 60 nations and international organizations in February; and other multinational exercises.

Each of these engagements is a step toward building out an integrated deterrence framework that synchronizes U.S. efforts and capabilities with those of our partners and allies. Integrated deterrence means creating advantages for ourselves, our partners, and our allies, while creating dilemmas for our competitors. The Department will achieve this through increased interoperability and coordination and communication across land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace to meet ongoing threats and new challenges that do not respect borders and are not limited to a single terrain. With the persistent threat of air and maritime attacks from Iran and Iranian-backed groups, integrated regional operations have taken on new importance. The Secretary of Defense highlighted DoD's focus on greater multilateral cooperation with regional partners during his November 2021 address at the Manama Dialogue.

The Department is also committed to deepening cooperation and coordination between the United States, Israel, and other partners across the Middle East and Africa. The revision of the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility to encompass Israel will help facilitate the Department's efforts to build upon ongoing normalization efforts to enhance multilateral cooperation in the security sphere. Just last month, Israel's president made an historic visit to the UAE; Israel and Bahrain signed a security cooperation agreement; and the King of Bahrain welcomed Israel's prime minister in Manama. The Department is poised to facilitate additional cooperation, in accordance with our steadfast commitment to Israel's security.

Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts, and is a key stakeholder in resolving the Yemen conflict. The Saudis are an important partner for cooperation in promoting regional stability, security, and countering Iranian influence. The UAE remains a willing and capable partner in regional security efforts, including on maritime security and counterterrorism operations in Yemen. The UAE, along with our other Gulf partners, provides us with critical access, basing, and overflight for regional operations including over-the-horizon efforts in Afghanistan. Oman serves as a critical waypoint for DoD operations in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility and is a consistent voice for moderation in regional affairs. Kuwait remains a key partner for force-flow and logistic support to U.S. forces throughout the region, and continues to host the fourth largest presence of U.S. forces outside the United States. Qatar is a critical host for U.S. forces and is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain is a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and has served as a

forward-looking leader in the region through its enhanced security cooperation with Israel. Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a critical resource in protecting the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, and the International Maritime Security Construct, an eight-nation consortium that helps to maintain the free flow of trade for legitimate mariners in the region.

Egypt remains a key strategic partner to the United States and a partner for improving regional stability in Gaza, Libya, Iraq and throughout the region. Suez transit and Egypt's responses to U.S. overflight requests remain critical to U.S. commercial interests and military responsiveness. The Department supports Egypt's military modernization, and in particular Egypt's efforts to bolster its counterterrorism capabilities and border and maritime security efforts. The Department also continues to maintain U.S. contributions to the Multinational Force and Observers, or MFO, which monitors the implementation of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Department will continue its efforts to promote stability and security in Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan remains a steadfast partner to the United States and a leader for stability throughout the region. The Department continues to work with Jordan to bolster its ability to secure its borders against the continued threat posed by ISIS and address new and emerging threats such as drug smuggling, unmanned aerial systems, air and missile threats, and other challenges posed primarily by Iran. In Lebanon, the Department continues to work closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces, or LAF, to help them counter violent extremist organizations, secure their border with Syria, maintain internal stability, increase professionalism, and preserve stability in Lebanon. The LAF's reputation as a capable, nonsectarian and responsible institution also undermines Lebanese Hizballah's false narrative that its weapons are necessary to defend Lebanon.

In the Middle East as in every region of the world, DoD's ability to advance cooperation and deepen partnership is most effective when U.S. interests and U.S. values are aligned. As DoD works with its partners toward security and stability in the region, it is also coordinating across the U.S. Government to address human rights concerns and reinforce the U.S. interest in a stable and rules-based international system reinforced by a network of alliances and partnerships. In practice, this translates into consistent engagement by senior DoD officials encouraging support for fundamental freedoms and expressing concern for corruption, inequality, and disinformation trends that contribute to less stable, less secure partners. The Department regularly raises the need to prioritize civilian protection and offers programs to help partners reduce civilian harm.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia

From 2001 to 2021, our military members served with courage and conviction in Afghanistan to defend the U.S. homeland, support our allies and partners, and ensure that Afghanistan did not become a terrorist safe haven. We are all grateful to our military personnel and their families for their sacrifice, including the 13 service members who were killed in a suicide bombing at Hamad Karzai International Airport on August 26, 2021, while courageously helping with the evacuation of 124,000 civilians, including 5,500 Americans, from Afghanistan. I want to thank Congress for its consistent support of our military personnel in their past and present missions. Gen. McKenzie will detail how our over-the-horizon counterterrorism mission will reinforce our enduring policy of ensuring terrorist

organizations are not able to use Afghanistan to conduct attacks against the United States, our Allies and our partners.

Although we have withdrawn U.S. forces from Afghanistan, our service members and civilian employees remain hard at work to advance our interests in Afghanistan, which includes supporting the Department of State's efforts to facilitate the departure of American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and our Afghan allies from Afghanistan. We continue our efforts to support interagency partners to care for and resettle Afghan evacuees who have come to the United States.

The Department is also working hard to aid our interagency partners in efforts to mitigate the overwhelming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Our colleagues at the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Treasury can provide further information on the support the United States is providing to mitigate Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

Initially, there were predictions that the U.S. military withdrawal would signal a disengagement from the broader region, but these concerns have proven unfounded as the United States continues to engage its Central Asian partners in all spheres, including on security cooperation issues, and at all levels. We continue to work with our Central Asian partners to develop and maintain long-term security cooperation programs focused on bolstering regional capabilities. These programs help counter a wide range of threats to the region and to the U.S. homeland. The United States and its partners in Central Asia continue to cooperate on the shared interests of countering terrorism and violent extremist organizations while also enhancing border security in support of regional stability.

We also work with Pakistan across several issues that are important to our national interests. We continue to seek and build upon areas of mutual interest to improve regional security and our bilateral relationship. Counterterrorism remains an area of mutual interest as several violent extremist organizations seek to target U.S. and Pakistani interests. Pakistan has also participated robustly in counter-piracy efforts, meant to ensure a rules-based international order with free and open maritime transit. Strategic stability in South Asia remains an enduring interest of both Pakistan and the United States. There are several ways we can continue to cooperate with Pakistan to pursue these interests.

Africa

In Africa, the Department remains focused on countering violent extremist organizations that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. interests, strengthening ally and partner networks to support mutual security objectives, and addressing targeted strategic competition concerns that present a military risk to the United States. The Department's approach to Africa, as in the Middle East, also considers growing threats to a free, stable, and open international order, including those posed by Russia and the PRC, which continue to increase their influence on the continent.

Countering Violent Extremist Organizations

The destabilizing effects of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) throughout the continent, but most acutely in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, represent a major security challenge. This challenge garners the attention of many U.S. allies and partners, as well as our strategic competitors.

Progress has been exceptionally challenging in the Horn of Africa region due to persistent

regional political-military instability, exacerbated by issues such as draughts, famine, and flooding. DoD remains committed to supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the countries contributing forces to that mission, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi, and Uganda. We seek to address the threats posed by al-Shabaab and ISIS Somalia by adopting a tailored, effective, and sustainable strategy to achieve our national security interests in Somalia and East Africa. As an element of that focus, we are reviewing our posture in the region and looking closely at the safety of U.S. personnel operating in Somalia and the current terrorist threats throughout the region.

The ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia is a tragedy causing immense human suffering and threatens the unity of the Ethiopian state. We fully agree with United Nations and African Union leaders: there is no military solution to this crisis. At the same time, we value Ethiopia's contribution to AMISOM, which has remained constant despite Ethiopia's ongoing internal security conflict. Kenya also continues to be a strong DoD partner in AMISOM and we mutually benefit from our bilateral engagements. Uganda remains a critical partner to East and Central Africa security efforts, including through AMISOM contributions and CT operations against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. While we value Uganda's key role in AMISOM, we continue to have concerns over Ugandan Security Force conduct during last year's presidential elections and some reports of human rights abuses. We also support the Department of State in promoting accountability for those individuals who have violated the Ugandan people's human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Djibouti, also a key AMISOM Troop Contributing Country and as host to Camp Lemonnier with about 3,500 DoD military and civilian personnel, remains a critical U.S. partner. Djibouti's geostrategic location near the Bab al-Mandab strait is a critical node in supporting DoD operations at the seam between the AFRICOM and CENTCOM areas of operations. Djibouti also hosts a constellation of foreign militaries to include U.S. partners like France and Japan, as well as the PRC, whose first overseas naval base is six miles from Camp Lemonnier, and which has grown substantially over the past year.

In the Sahel and West Africa, DoD supports whole of U.S. government and multilateral efforts to address the drivers of insecurity, contain the spread of violence, and stabilize the region. The Department recognizes France's repositioning plans and activities, and remains committed to working with our allies and partners to ensure a smooth transition. DoD will continue to support the militaries of our African partners, and our European partners supporting them, in their fight against VEOs throughout this vast region. Additionally, we continue to work closely with international partners to coordinate security and civilian protection efforts, including the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), France's transition and reorganization of Operation BARKHANE and Task Force TAKUBA, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Multinational Joint Task Force, and bilateral security forces of Chad, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. Military assistance to Mali and Burkina Faso remains suspended due to the August 2020 coup and January 2022 coup respectively. Despite vast current and emerging challenges, to include Russia's growing malign PMC Wagner presence in Mali, DoD remains focused on improving coordination of these efforts, and preventing the spillover of instability into littoral West Africa. DoD also continues to work closely with West African partners to professionalize their armed forces, including focusing on the adherence to the law of armed conflict, and the

prevention of and accountability for human rights violations.

In West Africa, DoD is also concerned by the rising rates of piracy, illicit trafficking, and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Gulf of Guinea that impede global trade and put freedom of navigation at risk. Alongside the Department of State, DoD continues to work with global and regional partners to support maritime security in the South Atlantic, including through the provision of security cooperation activities and joint exercises that enhance the capabilities of partner nation navies and coast guards.

Strengthening Ally and Partner Networks

The Department of Defense will continue to build partnerships in Africa to support conflict resolution, combat threats posed by violent extremism, limit and/or deny malign strategic competitor advances contrary to U.S. and African interests, improve the institutions of defense ministries, and strengthen democratic norms and the rule of law. Enhancing our alliances and partnerships in Africa through diplomatic, development, and security initiatives will enable us to be more effective in protecting and securing U.S. interests in and related to Africa.

DoD supports a holistic approach to the security challenges in Africa, ensuring that U.S. security and governance approaches are mutually reinforcing and sufficiently comprehensive. This holistic approach is evidenced by the diverse set of programs DoD implements in Africa to help build resilient defense institutions. For example, in coordination with Department of State, DoD's training and exercises promote a respect for law of armed conflict, civilian oversight over the military, human rights, and gender diversity in partner nation security and defense sectors. Other aspects of this approach include key leader engagements, counter-terrorism training and operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, military training exercises, foreign military sales and other security-related assistance, intelligence sharing, institutional capacity building, crisis response, and humanitarian assistance.

DoD values the support of our European and international partners who have deep ties to Africa. The Sahel and West Africa highlight the assistance of European partners taking the international lead to counter VEOs and achieve mutual objectives. In Mozambique, the European Union and Portugal have provided training to the Mozambique military in its fight against ISIS-Mozambique. In East Africa, the UK is a key partner in countering al-Shabaab and ISIS Somalia. The Department of Defense welcomes the support of like-minded partners to help bring stability and peace in support of African solutions to African challenges.

In North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia continue to be key security partners who broadly support our common security objectives on the continent and the southern Mediterranean. As the only two major non-NATO Allies in Africa, Moroccan and Tunisian partnership remains exceptionally strong and these two countries host the largest land and naval exercises in the USAFRICOM area of responsibility as well as other training events. Morocco and Tunisia maintain professional militaries capable of interoperability with U.S. forces and they desire stronger roles as regional leaders, particularly in counterterrorism. Both countries have committed to helping export security to other African partners through training, exercise, and support to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Mali and the Central African Republic.

Nevertheless, and despite their security importance, we urge a swift return to the path of Tunisia's parliamentary democracy and support a UN-led political process to advance a durable and dignified solution to the conflict in Western Sahara

In Libya, the United States, in support of the UN-facilitated political process, continues to urge the quickest possible path forward to presidential and parliamentary elections. It is vital that Libyan parties find a peaceful and non-violent way forward with interim governance that can legitimately guide Libya forward to those elections. The Libyan people have clearly expressed their commitment to choosing their own leaders and building a more secure future for all Libyans free from foreign interference. In this regard, we fully support the October 2020 Libyan ceasefire agreement and its call for the departure of all foreign forces, fighters, and mercenaries, including Russian elements. DOD supports interagency efforts to promote Libyan elections and implementation of the Libyan decision calling for the withdrawal of all foreign elements. The Department's force posture in Africa is primarily concentrated in the Horn of Africa, with additional presence in West Africa. This is augmented with modest security cooperation investments, which are also directed to the Maghreb, Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and West Africa/Littoral state regions. Our engagements elsewhere in Africa, such as in Central and Southern Africa, are designed to keep an open dialogue and encourage positive changes toward more robust bilateral efforts, where possible.

Strategic Competition

DoD's work is important in the light of malign strategic competitors' interests in Africa. The PRC remains a serious competitor on the continent where its expansive economic, security, and political engagements, coupled with increased military expansion and power projection activities, provide it access and influence. Its activities too often undercut regional and global efforts to strengthen local defense institutions and long-term stability grounded in international rules and norms. As the PRC's overseas development and security interests expand, we are observing a steady rise in its military and logistical support system to project power and protect those interests. A global People's Liberation Army (PLA) logistics network could interfere with U.S. and Allied military operations and eventually support offensive PLA operations. We are seeing increased indicators and warning signs of this in Djibouti, the PRC's first overseas military base, where the PLA has violated international norms by lasing U.S. military equipment and sought to restrict Djiboutian sovereign airspace, all while steadily expanding and increasing its military basing facilities, posture, and influence. DoD is committed to halting the spread of these destabilizing activities in Africa through strong partnerships, multilateral engagement, and support of interagency initiatives that provide our partners with options that adhere to international norms. U.S. Defense Attaché Offices (USDAOs) and Offices of Security Cooperation (OSCs) play critical roles throughout the continent in monitoring PRC activities and are frequently the only DoD presence in most countries throughout Africa. We are returning, and have returned, officers to posts that were previously affected by a 2020 plan to shutter Defense Attaché Offices. We continue to explore all options to ensure we have sufficient attaches to achieve U.S. policy objectives.

Concurrently, Russia's security influence operations and outsourcing to private military companies directly undermine our efforts to advance U.S. interests and values in Africa.

Together with interagency partners, we are concerned about Russia's expanding military partnerships, resource extraction, and malign influence in Africa.

Conclusion

With the support of Congress, the Department of Defense remains well positioned to support our allies and partners, compete with Russia and the PRC, and deter and defeat our adversaries across the Middle East and North Africa. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.