



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations

FY 2017 Budget Hearing: Central Command

March 17, 2016

Opening Statement As Prepared

General Lloyd J. Austin III is the Commander, U.S. Central Command - a West Point graduate with extensive combat experience including service in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn.

He has commanded at every level, previously served as the Chief of Staff for U.S. Central Command, and Vice Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army.

This is General Austin's fourth and final appearance before this subcommittee as the Central Command Commander. In coming weeks, General Austin will begin a well-deserved retirement. Be assured that the Members of this Committee wish to thank you for your many years of service to our nation and wish you well – God's speed!

General, from public reports, the turmoil and instability in the Central Command area of responsibility has increased to a level we may not have thought possible when you last testified before this Committee (some of it public, some of it disclosed behind closed doors.)

Today we see:

- a resurgence of Al Qaeda throughout the region,
- the advancement and influence of ISIS throughout the Middle East and northern Africa,
- continuing Russian military operations in Syria;
- undeterred Taliban factions in Afghanistan and Pakistan with large portions of Afghanistan under Taliban control;
- an aggressive Iran asserting itself in Iraq, Yemen and Syria;
- terrorism that is being exported from the region throughout the world – enhanced by foreign fighters, and an ongoing refugee crisis that has spread throughout the Mediterranean and Europe.

Undeniably, your Command faces major challenges.

And, if media reports are accurate, so does your headquarters.

I am sure you are aware that this Committee has joined with the Armed Services and Intel Committees to investigate if intelligence reports were manipulated to make it appear that the U.S. effort in the CENTCOM area is going better than some analysts think it is.

And, I am sure you have read recent media reports citing staff surveys in which the environment in CENTCOM headquarters as characterized as “toxic” and “hostile.”

Then there are also difficulties with “training and equipping” in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan where some of these forces – too many – are not “ready for prime time.”

This Committee is deeply concerned about these and other issues as we conduct our oversight and provide appropriate funding to support your efforts, and those of General Joe Votel, who will succeed you in command.

With that said, we look forward to your testimony, informed by your experience, military judgment and candor. This is a closed hearing in a classified setting, so feel free to give us the facts. We can only perform our duties when we receive candid, unbiased advice.

Once again, General Austin, welcome back to the Committee.

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