

Statement by

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Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on policy matters related to the USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM theaters, alongside Commanders General McKenzie and General Townsend. I would also like to thank the women and men of the Department of Defense, whose dedication, talents, and sacrifices enable us to execute our policies and achieve our objectives in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere.

I would also like to recognize and thank you for the strong collaboration and bipartisan support you provide the Department. Given my time serving as a senior staff member with national security committees in both the House and Senate, I appreciate for this committee's role in overseeing the Department's efforts to defend our country. It is a privilege for me to be here today to explain our defense policy toward the Middle East and Africa to ensure you have the information you need to properly provide congressional oversight of the Department of Defense.

Our approach to Middle East and Africa policy is nested within the guidance from the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS). The overall goals of the National Security Strategy are to protect the American people, defend the Homeland, and to promote prosperity and peace from a position of strength. The National Defense Strategy supports our National Security Strategy by focusing on three key aspects of U.S. power: our lethality, our partners and allies, and our institutions. The NDS also directs the Department to focus on Great Power Competition with China and Russia, while remaining vigilant in countering threats from rogue states like Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations like ISIS.

To compete effectively in this environment and defend against rising near-peer competitors, our forces must remain dominant by increasing modernization, technological adaptation, and readiness;

we must also ensure increased lethality while being responsible stewards of taxpayers' contributions; and, we must strengthen our partnerships and alliances around the globe. The need to address near-peer competitors now and in the future requires us to make adjustments to our posture and avoid unnecessarily prioritizing near-term problems at the expense of building readiness and capacity for potential high-end conflict in the future. As we do so, we must deter and confront adversaries, while avoiding miscalculation or escalation that would distract from and ultimately undermine our national security interests.

In the Middle East and Africa, our policy objective is to increase regional stability and secure U.S. interests by working by, with, and through networks of regional partners and international allies. By enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our partners to provide for their own defense and address regional problems, we reduce the risk to our Homeland while increasing the internal security and stability of potentially vulnerable states. We often consciously play a supporting role to other government agencies and our partners in these regions. We seek to address shared security threats with partners and allies, while maintaining the ability to act unilaterally, if and when necessary.

Middle East

The United States' strategy in the Middle East seeks to ensure the region is not a safe haven for terrorists, is not dominated by any power hostile to the United States, and contributes to a stable global energy market. For the Department of Defense, this translates into the following six objectives: (1) Utilize a dynamic U.S. military presence with strategic depth to deter and, if necessary, respond to aggression; (2) Strengthen the defensive capabilities of regional partners; (3) Advance partnerships and burden-sharing with allies and partners to address shared security concerns; (4) Protect freedom of navigation; (5) Deny safe haven to terrorists that threaten the

homeland; and (6) Mitigate WMD threats.

To that end, the Department is focused on ensuring continued success in our campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qa'ida (AQ), while also strengthening deterrence and defenses in the face of Iranian aggression, and competing with China and Russia for regional and global influence. This will require investing in sustainable partnerships to reduce the vulnerabilities of weak states as part of a whole of government effort to enhance stability in the region. These policy objectives inform our decisions on the risks and benefits of actions. We understand the importance and trust emplaced upon the Department as good stewards of security for every American. This is our commitment to our national security and prosperity.

Iran

In Iran, the Department of Defense has played a supporting role to the United States' economic and diplomatic maximum pressure campaign. These efforts seek to bring the Iranian regime back to the negotiating table for a new and better deal that addresses the full range of threats emanating from Iran. Iran has chosen to respond with a campaign of violence that has grown increasingly reckless over the past year with attacks on the U.S. counter-terrorism presence in Iraq along with economic infrastructure and international shipping in the Gulf region. In addition to displaying an increased willingness to carry out direct attacks on our forces and its neighbors, Iran continues proliferating advanced conventional weapons with the purpose of building influence in vulnerable states and undermining the security of our partners.

While DoD's Middle East policy has not changed, Iran's increased aggression has required DoD to temporarily strengthen our defensive posture to protect our forces and regional partners, as well as ensure the President has a wide range of options to respond to future Iranian attacks if necessary. In deploying additional forces to the region, DoD is leveraging new Dynamic Force

Employment concepts to rapidly move forces in and out of the Middle East in reaction to specific threats, keeping adversaries off balance and mitigating the long term burden on the joint force.

DoD will continue to using our force posture to deter Iranian aggression and limit its freedom of maneuver, while building the capabilities and capacity of our partners to address the Iranian threat in the region. As we seek to balance our global responsibilities, our forces remain poised to address any Iranian provocation, while remaining cognizant of the risk of unintended escalation into war and the effects of overall readiness of the force for high-end warfare and NDS priorities.

International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC)

We are also internationalizing the response to Iran's aggression, working with allies and partners to improve regional defenses and deterrence through multilateral frameworks. Our participation in the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) is an example of how we have successfully worked through a multinational maritime force to patrol threatened waterways in the Middle East to dissuade further attacks and deescalate tensions.

Operation INHERENT RESOLVE and Yemen

In Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, our sustained support to partner counter-terrorism operations is bringing success. The so-called ISIS caliphate, which once controlled large swaths of Syria and Iraq, no longer controls physical territory and has reverted to an underground insurgency movement. As we turn to consolidating those gains and ensuring the lasting defeat of ISIS, we will continue to work with our Coalition and interagency partners to build local security forces and good governance. In Syria these partners include the SDF and their associated political organization; in Iraq this includes long-time security partners such as the Counter Terrorism Service, the Iraqi Army, and the Kurdish Peshmerga.

ISIS today is not the threat it once was, but the group has survived debilitating setbacks before and remains committed to enduring and achieving its grim vision. If CT pressure were significantly reduced, ISIS would likely attempt to intensify its insurgency throughout Iraq and Syria, expand its influence in Sunni-majority areas, and rebuild its core capabilities. Make no mistake: this is a group that remains committed to attacking the West, and if allowed to regenerate in this way would be better poised to do so. The Global Coalition to Defeat was developed to defeat a global enemy— but we must not lose focus on securing our gains against its core in Iraq and Syria.

Specifically in Syria, the U.S. policy priorities are to ensure the enduring defeat ISIS, support a political solution to the conflict in concert with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, and seek the withdrawal of Iranian-backed forces from the country. We maintain our leadership role in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which brings together 77 nations and 5 international organizations to provide an array of military capabilities, funding, and political support to the campaign against ISIS. Specific to the Department of Defense, our military mission remains limited to the D-ISIS campaign, and to that end we are maintaining a military presence in northeast Syria and at the At-Tanf Garrison. We also continue to operate by, with, and through the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to consolidate our military gains and to ensure ISIS is unable to resurge.

We are also working with the Department of State to enable local security forces and prevent the resurgence of ISIS networks in territory liberated from the group. Our drawdown and repositioning of forces in northeast Syria represents a new phase in this continuing mission. The President decided that the United States will maintain a residual force in Syria to support and enable our partners on the ground as they work to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. We continue

that partnership today, degrading ISIS's capabilities and denying ISIS the ability to retake territory and resources it once controlled and used to generate revenue for global attacks and to administer its so-called caliphate. The United States also continues to believe that the only way to resolve the Syrian conflict is through the UN-facilitated Syrian-led and -owned political process pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

The fight against ISIS in Iraq—the territory from which the group first took shape and where it retains its deepest roots—is every bit as critical. We seek a stable, independent, and resilient Iraq that is able to secure its own territory and advance our shared security interests in the region. Our forces remain in the country as part of a Global Coalition to advise, assist, train, and equip the Iraqi Security Forces to secure the lasting defeat of ISIS. In 2014 this terrorist group controlled nearly a third of Iraq's territory, now they have regressed back into a latent insurgency unable to hold ground or challenge the ISF directly. However, we should not make the mistake of thinking they are gone for good; given an opportunity, they will exploit continued instability and popular grievances to reassert themselves in ungoverned spaces across the region. It is vital that we continue our security cooperation and diplomatic engagement with the Government of Iraq to ensure the gains against ISIS, which came a tremendous cost to ourselves, our Coalition partners and most significantly to the Iraqi people, do not slip away.

In Yemen, DoD's military actions and partner support are intended to help end the war and avoid a regional conflict, counter the threat from AQAP and ISIS-Yemen, mitigate the humanitarian crisis, and help our partners defend their territory. The United States seeks a peaceful resolution to the conflict that will bring much-needed security to Yemenis and the region. Together with the Department of State and the United Nations, we are working to facilitate a cessation of hostilities in order to move towards a more stable Yemen. The Department has two lines of effort in

Yemen. First is our fight against terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests, and have capitalized on Yemeni instability. Along with our partners, we have significantly degraded al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's external plot capability and ISIS-Yemen's presence. Our second line of effort is to provide limited, non-combat support to the Coalition, which is supporting the recognized Government of Yemen and working to bolster Yemeni infrastructure and institutions where possible. U.S support to the Saudi-led Coalition began in 2015 under President Obama after Iran-backed rebels attempted to overthrow the Yemeni government and began cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia. That support continues under President Trump, based upon 2017 guidance that coupled continued support with efforts to further limit civilian casualties. DoD's support to the Coalition has been a key factor in influencing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to back the UN process. Supported by Iran, the Houthis are using increasingly sophisticated ballistic missiles and explosive unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) against our partners—including civilian infrastructure, including airports where American citizens are present. Houthis also target military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea threatening a major maritime corridor.

Today, roughly 60 DoD military advisors, deployed to Saudi Arabia, enable the Coalition to address these threats. These advisors are not engaged in offensive military operations against the Houthis. Rather, they help the Coalition defend itself from these external attacks. Fighting between the Saudis and Houthis has resumed in recent weeks, and so I want to emphasize that Yemen is at a critical juncture that has implications for our strategic interests in the region. If the Iran-backed Houthis continue to refuse to negotiate meaningfully with the legitimate Yemeni government and regional partners, the potential for a stable and secure Yemen will continue to diminish. It is critical to continue both of our lines of effort in Yemen in order to protect the interests and

equities of the United States and our regional partners. A change in our approach would work against our efforts to encourage negotiations, a cessation of hostilities, and the means to a legitimate, inclusive government of Yemen. Withdrawing U.S. support would embolden the Houthi rebels, and the worsening of conflict between all parties would further empower AQAP and ISIS in Yemen.

Partnerships: Levant and Gulf

Our successes in these immediate conflicts are contingent upon our regional defense partnerships. Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel all play critical roles in our efforts to prevent Syria from once again becoming a safe haven for extremists, just as our long-time partners in the Gulf are instrumental in supporting the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. We continue to support Egypt in its fight against terrorists in the Sinai who threaten Egyptian and Israeli security interests. For decades, we have invested in these bilateral partnerships to advance our collective security. Our national security depends on more than our force posture and our unilateral actions. Through our resources and network of partnerships and alliances, we seek to build local capacity, develop coalitions with the ability to respond to future threats, and ensure the United States remains the defense partner of choice in the region.

Saudi Arabia remains a central pillar of our regional counterterrorism efforts, and is a key stakeholder in the Yemen conflict. The Saudis are a crucial partner for us to help foster stability, security and also counter Iranian influence in Yemen. Despite recent challenges we must address, Riyadh's influence extends through the Muslim world to Central Asia and East Africa; leveraging it serves as a force multiplier for U.S. interests. The UAE has demonstrated it is a willing and capable partner in regional security efforts, including participation in IMSC and joint counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan and Yemen. 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 entire region. Qatar, as the second largest customer of Foreign Military Sales and a critical host for U.S. forces, is taking steps to increase its interoperability with U.S. and NATO forces. Bahrain helps to shape the Gulf's security architecture as a key U.S. partner in regional coalitions and U.S.-led defense initiatives, including the Global D-ISIS Coalition. Bahrain also hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, a critical resource in protecting the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, reinforcing a strong and enduring security partnership.

Great Power Competition in the Middle East

Even as we see combat success, we must recognize the importance of fully implementing our NDS guidance on near-peer competition with Russia and China, addressing regional challenges from Iran, and combating the residual terrorist threat to our Homeland. Russia and China seek to expand their influence in the Middle East using similar tools as us, but are otherwise unconstrained by respect for international rules and norms. We see Russian and Chinese defense sales increasingly seeking to drive a wedge between us and our long-time partners. We see Russian military action in Syria as an attempt to increase their influence in the region and negatively affecting how partners balance their security interests. We see Chinese economic activity—along with a corresponding expansion of its military footprint—finding new homes across the region. These actions put our own influence—both military and economic—at risk. In response, we must continue to invest in our regional partnerships to ensure that American will remain the partner of choice in the Middle East.

Afghanistan

Our mission in Afghanistan is guided by the President's South Asia Strategy. The South

Asia Strategy identifies our vital national interest in South Asia: to protect the U.S. homeland, citizens, and interests overseas from threats originating from South Asia. Central to protecting our interests is ending the war in Afghanistan through a durable and inclusive political settlement, thereby mitigating the threat of Afghanistan serving as a safe haven for terrorists. Our military mission in Afghanistan has increased pressure on the Taliban, ensuring they understand that they cannot win on the battlefield. Peace will only be achieved at the negotiating table.

The United States conducts two complementary missions in Afghanistan under Operation Freedom Sentinel. First, U.S. forces conduct a counterterrorism mission against al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and their associates to prevent their resurgence and their potential to conduct external attacks. U.S. Forces - Afghanistan works by, with, and through the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces on the counterterrorism mission.

Second, in collaboration with NATO Allies and partners under the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, U.S. forces train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to strengthen their ability to secure their country from insurgent and terrorist threats. Our train, advise, and assist efforts seek to develop institutional capacity in the Ministry of Defense and Interior, integrate capabilities, and improve tactical proficiency.

On February 29, 2019, the President announced that we have achieved an agreement with the Taliban that is a major milestone toward our goal of a durable and inclusive political settlement. The U.S. - Taliban agreement will pave the way for negotiations between Afghans on the future of their country. This was done in parallel with a U.S. and Government of Afghanistan agreement. We are hopeful that the intra-Afghan negotiations that will [soon begin/ began on] will yield positive results. We have insisted to the Taliban that they abide by their counterterrorism commitments, negotiate in good faith with all Afghan stakeholders, and not restart their campaign

of violence. However, we are prepared for all eventualities. If the Taliban do not follow through on their counterterrorism commitments, if they resume attacks against U.S. or Coalition forces, or if they demonstrate that they are unwilling to negotiate in good faith, we will hold them accountable.

Following the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement, we are adjusting our force posture in Afghanistan. U.S. Forces - Afghanistan has conducted prudent planning, in close consultation with NATO, to adjust our force posture, taking into account the developments in the political landscape, while ensuring that we can effectively execute our core missions with fewer U.S. forces. I want to emphasize that our presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based. Our goal remains that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven from which terrorists can conduct external operations. Further changes in our force posture will continue to be dependent upon conditions on the ground, including all sides' demonstrated commitment to the peace process.

To sustain our mission and achieve our goals in Afghanistan, we will continue to ask for your support. Maintaining funding and authorities for Operation Freedom's Sentinel and the Resolute Support Mission will ensure that our forces can continue their mission as long as necessary. Sustaining a sufficient Afghanistan Security Forces Fund appropriation is especially critical to Afghanistan's stability and security, and to maintaining a counterterrorism capability within the ANDSF, even in a post-settlement environment. Finally, the continued support and contributions of the international community will also remain a vital factor for ANDSF funding.

Africa

The Department of Defense (DoD) is reviewing activities and resources across combatant commands; beginning with U.S. Africa Command. We are rebalancing and right-sizing to ensure DoD is aligned to most effectively meet NDS priorities, such as the great power competition and

countering violent extremist organizations that threaten the Homeland. The first decision from this review was to improve upon the training, advising and assisting we provide partners through the announced deployment of a Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) in the coming weeks in place of a conventional infantry battalion currently on the continent. Army SFABs are manned, trained and equipped specifically for our mission in Africa. The deployment of the SFAB is “right-sizing” the mission and reflects our continued commitment to regional partners.

The United States maintains a whole-of-government approach to advancing security and stability in Africa. The U.S. government’s commitment to Africa is demonstrated across the spectrum of national power- including diplomatic, military and economic efforts. Persistent U.S. military presence is not the only measure of the Department of Defense’s commitment in Africa, but we will continue to do our part. DoD’s commitment is demonstrated by counter-terrorism training and operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, dynamic force employment, military training exercises, foreign military sales/financing programs, intelligence sharing, crisis response, and emergency humanitarian assistance.

DoD efforts are primarily concentrated on the Horn of Africa, the Maghreb, Sahel, and Lake Chad regions. DoD is also engaged in central and southern Africa.

The Horn of Africa has made some progress but remains challenged on several fronts, including security. The January 2020 al-Shabaab attack on Camp Simba, Kenya, which killed three Americans, is a serious reminder of the threat that al Shabaab poses to U.S. interests in the region. While Somalia struggles to fully reform its security sector, these threats are a reminder of the need for continued support to the African Union Mission in Somalia and the troop contributing countries to that mission including Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

The Department is also pursuing activities such as adding a National Guard Bureau State

Partnership Program to support Prime Minister Abiy's transformative efforts in Ethiopia this year. Djibouti, as host to Camp Lemonnier with about 3500 DoD military and civilian members, is a critical, strategically located U.S. partner. China's naval base is only a few miles from our U.S. location and demonstrates one way in which Great Power Competition is playing out in Africa.

In the Sahel, the 250 percent increase in VEO violence since 2018 in Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger is threatening to destabilize the West Africa coastal states. As security in the region rapidly deteriorates, African partners are working to focus their collective efforts on addressing this growing threat through regional efforts including the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and in collaboration with European partners.

In the Lake Chad Region, where Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) operate, years of violent terrorist activity have displaced large populations and created a humanitarian crisis. Niger and Chad, which are facing threats on multiple fronts (e.g., Sahel and Lake Chad Basin), are both increasingly capable and willing partners working to stem the threat these VEO pose for vulnerable populations throughout the region.

Conclusion

Under the guiding framework of the NDS, the Department is well positioned to address the range of dynamic issues facing the United States in the Middle East and Africa. This balanced approach helps ensure the Department can meet a variety of present and future threats while enhancing the strength and agility of our forces. Thank for the opportunity to share my views relating to USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM posture.