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# UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
DEFENSE

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

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Chairman, House Subcommittee on Defense

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**General Lloyd J. Austin III** [\[view PDF\]](#)  
Commander, United States Central Command

**General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr.** [\[view PDF\]](#)  
Commander, International Security Assistance Force and United States Forces Afghanistan

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**Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen**  
**Subcommittee on Defense**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**FY14 Oversight Hearing: United States Central Command and International Security**  
**Assistance Fund**  
**March 14, 2014**  
**OPENING STATEMENT AS PREPARED**

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The Committee will be in order.

Generals, the turmoil and instability in the Central Command area of responsibility is concerning to all Americans. Continued uprisings associated with the Arab Spring, the undeterred desire by Iran to seek nuclear weapons, the presence of Al Qaeda throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa, Taliban factions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, state sponsored terrorism exported from that region throughout the world, and a refugee crisis created by internal conflict, are concerning, just to name a few. Undeniably, this is a region in turmoil.

Today we welcome the sharing of your expertise, sound military judgment, and candor. This is a closed hearing, so feel free to get to the facts. Just as you have the daunting task of trying to bring peace to a troubled region of the world, this Committee has the daunting task of giving oversight and requisite funding to support your efforts. Make no mistake – this Committee is united in its bipartisan, unwavering, strong defense of this nation and its allies. We can only perform our duties adequately when we receive candid, unbiased advice from our nation's military leadership.

The Ranking Member and I were pleased to have recently led a Delegation visiting several key nations within the U.S. Central Command. As I have previously mentioned, this is a region plagued with turmoil and instability – and – “there is no ‘good news’ to be found in the region. Our partners and allies appear very worried about U.S. commitment, resolve, and frankly, our reliability.” Yet, there was a further perception among our Delegation that the Administration’s lack of announced intentions regarding post 2014 may mean a zero option.

Generals, this Committee wishes to explore these perceptions further during our hearing today.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to welcome you both. You are the two Generals that make difficult missions in this part of the world a reality.

General Lloyd J. Austin III is the Commander, U.S. Central Command. This is General Austin’s second appearance before this subcommittee in his capacity as the Central Command Commander. General Austin is a West Point graduate and his extensive combat experiences include Operations Iraqi Freedom, 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 most recently served as the Vice Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army.

General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., is the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A). General Dunford has also commanded at every level in the Marine Corps. He was Commanding General to the First Marine Expeditionary Force and Commander, Marine Forces Central Command. Prior to accepting command of ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, General Dunford served as the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Generals, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to attend this hearing. Generals, we look forward to your testimony, but first, I would like to call on the ranking member, my friend, Pete Visclosky for his comments.

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The Subcommittee stands in recess until the morning of March 25<sup>th</sup> at 10am when we will hold a briefing regarding the Navy and Marine Corps budget.

STATEMENT OF

GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III

COMMANDER

U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE –  
DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE

ON

THE POSTURE OF U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

14 MARCH 2014

**Introduction:** The Central Region, comprised of 20 countries in the Middle East and Central and South Asia, is geographically vast and holds as much as 60% of the world’s proven oil reserves and plentiful natural gas reserves. Both of which will remain vital to the global energy market, to the economic health of our allies and partners, and to the United States. This strategically important region also claims major sea lines of communication for international commerce and trade, including the critical maritime chokepoints of the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The region is rich in history and culture, and there are numerous ethnic groups, languages, and traditions represented. It is also home to three of the world’s five major religions. All things considered, events that occur there have considerable and far-reaching impacts. The past has clearly shown that when the region experiences any degree of strife or instability, every country there and others around the globe – to include the U.S. – feel the effects. Specifically, what happens in the Central Region influences the global economy and affects, in ways big and small, our vital interests and those of our partner nations, namely, as President Obama affirmed before the United Nations in September 2013: the free flow of resources through key shipping lanes; the defense of our homeland against the pervasive and persistent threat of terrorism and extremism; and, the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Thus, it is critical that we do what is necessary to bolster security and stability in this most important part of the world. It is for this same reason that we continue to confront external aggression against our allies and partners.

In this context, in 2014, the U.S. finds itself at a strategic inflection point. Though problems abound in the Central Region, perspective is everything. In the decisive year ahead resides a real chance for the United States, together with our partners and allies, to achieve diplomatic and

military successes and thereby generate much-needed positive momentum in the Middle East and Central and South Asia. To do so, we must widen our collective perspectives and look beyond the challenges that exist and seize the many opportunities that are present throughout the region. The USCENTCOM team is fully committed to doing so and to ensuring that our efforts contribute to an effective whole-of-government approach to advancing and safeguarding U.S. vital interests in the region and around the globe.

We, at USCENTCOM, remain always ready to seize available opportunities, while responding to contingencies and providing support to our partners and allies. We remain always vigilant to ensure that we avoid strategic surprise. At the same time we remain engaged and present, while doing all that we can to improve security and stability throughout the Central Region, in part by helping our partners to build military capability and capacity. This work is being done each day by the dedicated and hard-working men and women of this command, including more than 94,000 U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and Civilians selflessly serving and sacrificing in difficult and dangerous places. They – *and their families* – are doing an extraordinary job. They are and will remain our foremost priority.

This past year has been an active one for U.S. Central Command. In Afghanistan, we expect to complete our transition from combat operations to our train, advise and assist (TAA) and counter-terrorism (CT) missions by the end of 2014. The Afghans have taken the lead on nearly all security operations and are showing considerable capability and fortitude. While our diplomats continue to pursue a bilateral security agreement (BSA) with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), our retrograde and base closures remain on schedule.

Pending further policy decisions, while we are readying for the TAA and CT missions, we remain prepared to implement the full-range of options with respect to our post-2014 presence. Meanwhile, we continue to provide critical assistance to the Egyptian Armed Forces in the Sinai. We also have been doing what we can to manage the effects of the ongoing civil war in Syria. Of particular concern is the growing refugee crisis affecting millions of people in Syria and neighboring countries, namely Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. We also developed strike options in response to Syrian President Bashar al Assad's use of chemical weapons. The credible threat of the use of military force ultimately contributed to the diplomatic option currently being implemented. We are hopeful that a positive outcome to the crisis in Syria will be reached. We continue to undertake contingency planning to address a variety of potential scenarios. This also holds true of our efforts with regard to Iran, where we support the U.S. Government policy combining diplomacy, economic pressure, and the resolve to keep military options on the table. In the past several months, we supported embassy ordered departures from Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, and South Sudan. We continue to do all that we can to counter the growing terrorist threat emanating from the region, and we are assisting our partners in their efforts to build greater capability and capacity to defend their sovereign spaces. Finally, we conducted and participated in 52 multilateral and bilateral training exercises held in the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR), along with many of our allies and partners.

As we look ahead, our goal is to build upon our past achievements. We recognize that we must do all that we can to address the challenges and also pursue the opportunities present in the Central Region. At USCENTCOM, we are appropriately postured, and have adopted a theater strategy and a deliberate approach that we are confident will enable us to accomplish our mission.

**USCENTCOM's Mission.** USCENTCOM's mission statement is: *“With national and international partners, USCENTCOM promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters or defeats state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability and prosperity.”*

**Strategic Environment.** Developing nations within the region are plagued by poverty and violence, mired in political discord, beset by ethnic and religious tensions, stressed by resource competition and economic stagnation, and strained by a ‘youth bulge’ that both impels and reinforces popular discontent, and drives demands for political and social reforms. All combine to imperil our vital national interests and those of our trusted partners and allies.

**“Underlying Currents.”** To effectively address the challenges present in the Central Region, we must understand and take into account the full range of forces, or what I refer to as the “underlying currents,” at play in this strategically important part of the world. Attitudes and behaviors in the Middle East are driven by these political, economic and socio-cultural currents. They are fueling many of the tensions and conflicts across the USCENTCOM AOR. Each of them, or some combination thereof, is directly contributing to the chaos, volatility, and violence that we are seeing in many regional countries. The principal underlying currents are:

**Growing ethno-sectarian divide**—we are seeing a significant increase in ethno-sectarian violence in the Middle East. More so than in the past, groups are coalescing around ethnic or sectarian issues, rather than national identity. This is causing a fracturing of institutions (e.g.,

governments, militaries) along sectarian lines and associated rifts among mixed populations (e.g., Sunni, Shia). If allowed to continue unabated, this type of regional sectarian behavior soon could lead to a decades-long sectarian conflict stretching from Beirut to Damascus to Baghdad to Sanaa.

At present, we are seeing this divide playing out between several ethno-sectarian groups. The one that is growing the widest and most dangerously is the Sunni-Shia divide. At the same time, there is the ongoing Arab-Kurd divide, which has worsened in Iraq. Lastly, there is the ongoing Arab-Israeli divide. These and other similar confrontations, such as those between Pashtun and other ethnicities in Afghanistan and Pakistan and between Muslims and Hindus, are emotionally charged and will prove difficult to resolve. There is deep-seated distrust among these groups and this continues to hinder any attempts at reconciliation. These relationships are also affected, in many cases, by territorial disputes, proxy activity, violence, and regional instability.

**Struggle between Extremists and Moderates**—of significant concern is the growing struggle across the region between Extremists and Moderates. The growing activism of radical elements is of particular concern to the United States and our partner nations because the beliefs and practices espoused by many of these groups do not align with our values or the values of the majority of the populations in that part of the world. The dangers of Islamic extremism are on the rise throughout the Central Region. To effectively address this threat it is necessary to counter the ideas that often incite extremism. We also need to do all that we can to limit ungoverned spaces by ensuring that countries develop the capability and capacity to exercise greater control over their sovereign territories. Central to our strategy are our efforts to promote

moderate elements and participatory governance and build security capacity to facilitate improved stability.

**Rejection of corruption and oppressive governments**—The Arab Spring movement reflects a widespread desire for freedom and reform. People want change and they want to have a say in their fate. In many ways, the global expansion of technology triggered this upheaval because more people were able to see alternatives on the television and the Internet, and this made them increasingly intolerant of their own circumstances and oppressive governments. The conditions that caused this shift to come about still exist throughout the USCENTCOM AOR. In fact, it is likely that what we have seen to date is only the beginning of a long period of change. Citizens in many countries are rejecting autocratic rule and publicly expressing their opinions and frustrations with their governments and leaders. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have provided people with a public voice, and they are expressing their discontent and the strong desire for political reform with increased frequency. The desire for change and for increased freedom and reforms is likely to become even more pronounced in the Central Region in coming months and years.

**The “Youth Bulge”**—Stability in the region is further complicated by the growing population of young, educated, largely unemployed and, in many cases, disenchanting youth. This “youth bulge” in many respects breeds and reinforces discontent and drives demands for political and social reforms. This demographic is of particular concern given its size; over 40% of the people living in the region are between the ages of 15 and 29. These young, energetic, and dissatisfied individuals want change. They want greater autonomy, the right of self-determination, and

increased opportunity. They are willing to voice their opinions publicly without fearing the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, these disillusioned young people also represent ripe targets for recruitment by terrorist and extremist groups.

We must be able to recognize and understand these and possible other “underlying currents” at play in the Central Region if we hope to effectively manage the challenges that are present and also pursue opportunities by which to shape positive outcomes in that part of the world. It may not be possible to halt or reverse the trends. However, the effects may be mitigated if properly addressed.

**Top 10 USCENTCOM Priorities.** Looking ahead to the next year, USCENTCOM will remain ready, engaged and vigilant—effectively integrated with other instruments of power; strengthening relationships with partners; and supporting bilateral and multilateral collective defense relationships to counter adversaries, improve security, support enduring stability, and secure our vital interests in the Central Region. In support of this vision, the command remains focused on a wide range of issues, activities, and operations relevant to the USCENTCOM AOR, including our Top 10 priority efforts:

- Responsibly transition Operation Enduring Freedom and support Afghanistan as a regionally integrated, secure, stable and developing country;
- Prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, as directed, disrupt their development and prevent their use;
- Counter malign Iranian influence, while reducing and mitigating the negative impact of proxies;

- Manage and contain the potential consequences of the Syrian civil war and other “fault-line” confrontations across the Middle East to prevent the spread of sectarian-fueled radicalism threatening moderates;
- Defeat Al Qaeda (AQ), deny violent extremists safe havens and freedom of movement, and limit the reach of terrorists;
- Protect lines of communication, ensure free use of the global commons, and secure unimpeded global access for legal commerce;
- Develop and execute security cooperation programs, leveraging military-to-military relationships that improve bilateral and multilateral partnerships and build interdependent collective partnered “capacities”;
- Lead and enable the continued development of bilateral and multilateral collective security frameworks that improve information sharing, integrated planning, security and stability;
- Shape, support and encourage cross-combatant command, interagency, and partner/coalition programs and approaches, while making the best use of military resources; and,
- Maintain and improve our ready and flexible headquarters, capabilities, protected networks, and forces enabled by required freedom of movement, access, and basing to support crisis response

**USCENTCOM Challenges and Opportunities.** There are significant opportunities present amidst the challenges that reside in the Central Region.

**Challenge (Afghanistan):** Operations in Afghanistan remain our top priority. Our goal is to conduct a successful transition in Afghanistan while also helping to achieve a capable and sustainable Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Equally important are our continued efforts in support of ongoing CT missions. We must maintain pressure on terrorist networks to avoid resurgence in capability that could lead to an attack on our homeland or our interests

around the globe. If the United States and Afghanistan are unable to achieve a BSA, we will move rapidly to consider alternatives for continuing a security cooperation relationship with Afghanistan. Unfortunately, in the wake of such a precipitous departure, GIRoA's long-term viability is likely to be at high risk and the odds of an upsurge in terrorists' capability increases without continued substantial international economic and security assistance.

We are currently focused on four principal efforts: 1) Completing the transition and retrograde of U.S. personnel and equipment out of Afghanistan; 2) Maintaining the safety and security of U.S./Coalition troops and personnel; 3) Supporting continuing CT efforts that are contributing to the defeat of Al Qaeda (AQ) and other violent extremist groups, including the Haqqani Network; and, 4) Advising, training and assisting the ANSF, while also helping them to prepare to provide security in support of the April 2014 scheduled national elections.

Our retrograde operations remain on-track, with the vast majority of movement conducted via ground through Pakistan. We have several means for conducting retrograde available to us, including multiple ground routes through Pakistan and the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) in Central Asia, Russia and the Caucasus. We use multiple modes of transport to maximize our efficiency and, in some cases, retrograde solely via air routes. However, movement in this region is quite difficult, principally due to terrain and conditions on the ground. While base closures and materiel reduction are proceeding as planned, our services' equipment reset will likely continue into 2015.

The surest way to achieve long-term stability and security in this region is a self-sustaining security force. Our continued presence – if a BSA is concluded – complemented by NATO’s presence, will enable us to assist our Afghan partners through a critical period of transition. It would also serve to further reassure allies and partners of U.S. and Western military staying power.

It truly is remarkable all that U.S., Afghan and Coalition forces have accomplished in Afghanistan over the past 12+ years. The ANSF has dramatically improved its capability and capacity. Today, their forces are comprised of nearly 344K Afghans [352K authorized], representing every ethnicity. They are leading nearly all security operations throughout the country and actively taking the fight to the Taliban. The campaign also has had a positive impact on education, literacy levels, and women’s rights throughout much of the country. Some of these effects, particularly the increase in literacy levels, are irreversible.

There is still much work to be done by the government and people of Afghanistan. Enduring success will require the Afghan government to continue to enhance its capabilities in the wake of a successful transfer of power following the scheduled national elections to be held in April 2014. This represents the critical first step in the country’s political transition. They will also have to make a more concerted effort to counter corruption. If the Afghan leadership does not make the right decisions going forward, the opportunities that they have been afforded could easily be squandered. Furthermore, the return of instability and diminished security and even tyranny will affect Afghanistan, as well as the surrounding Central Asian states and the region as a whole. We have been in Afghanistan for nearly 13 years, representing the longest period of

continuous conflict fought by our Nation's all-volunteer force. Together with our Afghan and Coalition partners, we have invested lives and other precious resources to improve security and stability in that country. Going forward, we want to do all that we can to preserve those hard-earned gains.

**Opportunity (Afghanistan):** Our intent is to maintain an enduring relationship with the Afghan military as we work together to preserve improved security and stability in the region. Our continued presence – if a BSA is concluded – will enable us to train and advise Afghan security forces and further improve their capability and confidence during a critical period of transition. Our presence would also allow us to maintain much-needed pressure on Al Qaeda.

There also exists an opportunity to normalize our relationships with Afghanistan and Pakistan, while also improving relations between these two countries in a way that will enhance regional security. We should encourage them to find common ground in their efforts to counter the increasingly complex nexus of violent extremist organizations operating in their border regions.

The past 12+ years in Afghanistan have witnessed incredible growth and maturation in USCENTCOM's collaborative partnerships with USEUCOM and NATO. Now, as operations wind down in that country, we should look to identify areas of common interest that would benefit from our continued collaboration. Certainly the convergence of our shared interests with those of Central and South Asia (CASA) states, specifically in the areas of CT, counter-proliferation (CP), and counter-narcotics (CN), provides a place from which to effectively

engage and shape regional stability, especially in the context of a reduced U.S.-international presence in Afghanistan post-2014.

**Challenge (Syria):** We are also focused on the conflict in Syria. It represents the most difficult challenge that I have witnessed in my 38-year military career. What started as a backlash against corruption and oppressive authoritarian rule has now expanded into a civil war. Nearing its third full year, the conflict appears to have reached, what I would characterize as a “dynamic stalemate” with neither side able to achieve its operational objectives.

The conflict is further complicated by the presence of chemical weapons (CW), the tremendous influx of foreign fighters and a humanitarian crisis that affects millions of people in Syria and in neighboring countries; and is exacerbated by the Assad regime’s deliberate targeting of civilians and denial of humanitarian access. We are collaborating with our interagency partners in developing solutions to the pressing humanitarian crisis that threatens the stability of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Meanwhile, the credible threat of the use of military force, initiated by the United States in response to the regime’s use of CW, prompted President Assad to agree to destroy all such weapons in Syria under the direct supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Thus far, the Assad regime has missed milestones set by the international community to transport priority chemicals to the Syrian coast for removal and destruction. The regime must follow through on its obligation to eliminate its chemical weapons program. Meanwhile, we remain committed to facilitating a negotiated political solution, which remains the only way to sustainably resolve the conflict.

Support and engagement by the United States and others is needed to bolster the broader regional effort in response to the conflict in Syria. This sentiment was consistently echoed by regional leaders during my recent engagements. Nearly all partners, both in and out of the region, have expressed growing anxiety with respect to the violent extremists operating from ungoverned space within Syria. The flow of foreign fighters and funding going into Syria is a significant concern. When I took command of USCENTCOM in March of 2013, the intelligence community estimated there were ~800-1,000 jihadists in Syria. Today, that number is upwards of 7,000. This is alarming, particularly when you consider that many of these fighters will eventually return home, and some may head to Europe or even the United States better trained and equipped and even more radicalized. At the same time, extremists are exploiting the sectarian fault line running from Beirut to Damascus to Baghdad to Sanaa. Left unchecked, the resulting instability could embroil the greater region into conflict. Several nations are pursuing independent actions to address this threat. We will continue to support our partners in order to protect our vital interests and theirs as well.

**Opportunity (Syria):** Much effort is being put forth by U.S. Government elements and others to achieve the desired diplomatic or political solution to the crisis in Syria. This work must continue in earnest. The widespread violence and tremendous human suffering that is occurring in Syria and in neighboring countries will likely have far-reaching and lasting consequences for the region. In the near-term, work to remove or destroy declared CW materials from Syria is underway. Successfully removing these weapons would create additional decision space that could enable us to do more to address other difficult challenges present inside that country. If the flow of foreign fighters could be curbed significantly, and the support provided to the regime

by Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), Iranian Qods Forces and others was stopped or greatly reduced, it could lead to a break in the stalemate and an eventual resolution to the conflict.

**Challenge (Iran):** We continue to pay close attention to Iran's actions. As a result of the understandings reached with the P5+1, Iran has taken specific and verifiable actions for the first time in nearly a decade that halted progress on its nuclear program and rolled it back in key respects, stopping the advance of the program and introducing increased transparency into Iran's nuclear activities. Despite this progress, significant concerns do remain. In addition to the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, there is growing anxiety in the region and beyond concerning the malign activity being perpetrated by the Iranian Threat Network (ITN), which consists of Qods Force, Ministry of Intelligence and Security, regional surrogates, and proxies. We are seeing a significant increase in Iranian proxy activity in Syria, principally through Iran's support of LH and the regime. This is contributing to the humanitarian crisis and significantly altered political-societal demographic balances within and between the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. There is also widespread unease with respect to the counter-maritime, theater ballistic missile and cyber capabilities possessed by Iran. Each of these represents a very real and significant threat to U.S. and our partners' interests. Going forward, we should look to employ nuanced approaches in dealing with these distinct challenges, while providing the means necessary to enable our partners to do their part to address them, both militarily and diplomatically.

**Opportunity (Iran):** Progress towards a comprehensive solution that would severely restrict Iran's nuclear weapons 'breakout' capacity has the potential to moderate certain objectionable

Iranian activities in non-nuclear areas (e.g., ITN, theater ballistic missile, cyber). If the P5+1 are able to achieve a long-term resolution with respect to Iran's nuclear program, that would represent a step in the right direction, and present an unprecedented opportunity for positive change.

**Challenge (Counter-terrorism):** While we have made progress in counter-terrorism (CT), violent extremist ideology endures and continues to imperil U.S. and partner interests. Al Qaeda and its Affiliates and Adherents (AQAA) and other violent extremist organizations (VEOs) operating out of ungoverned spaces are exploiting regional turmoil to expand their activities. Among the VEOs present in the region, AQAA pose the most significant threat. In recent years, AQ has become more diffuse, entrenched, and interconnected. While AQ core is less capable today, the jihadist movement is in more locations, both in the Central Region and globally. This expanding threat is increasingly difficult to combat and track, leaving the U.S. homeland and our partners and allies more vulnerable to strategic surprise. At the same time, we are increasingly concerned about the expanding activity of extremist elements operating in sovereign spaces, to include Iraq, Egypt and Syria. These elements threaten U.S. interests because they foment regional instability and create platforms from which to plot actions targeting our homeland. Many of these extremist elements are highly capable and clearly maintain the intent to conduct future attacks on the U.S. homeland and our interests around the globe. In particular, we must keep pressure on AQ elements operating in Eastern Afghanistan, in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Yemen, and elsewhere. USCENTCOM will continue to support our partners' CT efforts. Our collaboration, particularly through joint combined exercises and training events, helps to build our partners' capability and confidence, and thereby

contributes to increasing governance over ungoverned spaces. This, in turn, helps to deny terrorists and extremists freedom of movement.

**Opportunity (Counter-terrorism):** The main strength of most VEOs is their extremist ideology, which shows no signs of abating. Ideology transcends personalities and persists even after key leaders are killed. This threat cannot be eliminated simply by targeting individuals. To defeat AQ and other VEOs, we must defeat the ideas that often incite extremism, while also guarding against ungoverned spaces and conditions that allow those ideas to flourish. Our continued presence and active engagement is the most effective way that we can help our partners build greater capability and capacity to meet these threats. We must also look at realigning our critical resources, recognizing that by developing a structure that provides for greater agility and speed of action we will go a long way towards improving our posture and security in the face of this growing threat.

**U.S. Engagement in the Central Region.** There is a widely-held misperception that the United States is disengaging from the Middle East in order to focus our efforts and attention elsewhere around the globe. To the contrary, the United States fully intends to maintain a strong and enduring military posture in the Central Region, one that can respond swiftly to crisis, deter aggression and assure our allies. However, the differing perception held by some must not be overlooked. If not effectively countered, the perceived lack of U.S. commitment could affect our partners' willingness to stand with us and thereby create space for other actors to challenge U.S. regional security interests. We must assure our regional partners of our continued, strong commitment and demonstrate our support through our actions and active presence.

**A Regional Perspective.** Today, the Central Region is experiencing a deep shift, the total effects of which will likely not be known for years to come. In some parts of the Levant, into Iraq, and even as far as Bahrain, we see a more obvious and accelerating Sunni-Shia sectarian contest. The increasing violence, unresolved political issues, and lack of inclusive governance have weakened Egyptian and Iraqi internal stability, as well as each country's regional leadership potential. The outcomes of the situations in Egypt, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria will largely determine the future regional security environment. Poor outcomes will create additional seams and ungoverned spaces that will be exploited by malign actors, including Al Qaeda.

**Around the Region: 20 countries, 20 stories.** If we want to achieve lasting effects in the Central Region we must view the challenges present in the 20 countries that make up the USCENTCOM AOR in the context of the "underlying currents" at play and in view of the interconnectedness of behaviors and outcomes. Equally important, we must take care not to simply respond to or manage the challenges that exist. We must also pursue the many opportunities present in the region, understanding that it is principally through these opportunities that we will achieve diplomatic and military successes in specific areas. These successes will, in turn, serve as "force multipliers." The compounding progress and momentum achieved will enable us to increase stability in the region and enhance security on behalf of the United States and our partners around the globe.

Below are synopses of the current state of affairs in each of the 20 countries in the USCENTCOM AOR minus Afghanistan, Syria and Iran which were addressed in the previous section, "USCENTCOM Challenges and Opportunities" (see pages 9-15):

**The Gulf States**—We enjoy strong relationships with our partners in the Gulf States and will continue to engage with them, both bilaterally and as a collective body through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This collaboration enhances U.S. security, as our capabilities are made more robust through enhanced partner capacity and, ultimately, working “by, with and through” the GCC. This is currently on display and paying dividends at the Combined Air Operations Center in Qatar and the Combined Maritime Operations Center in Bahrain. It is important that we continue to support Gulf States’ efforts as they work to address crises emanating from Syria, Yemen, Iraq and elsewhere; internal political challenges; growing ethno-sectarian and extremist violence; demographic shifts; and, Iranian hegemonic ambitions. We remain focused on improving their capabilities specific to ballistic missile defense, maritime security, critical infrastructure protection and counter-terrorism. We have also strongly advocated increased ballistic missile defense cooperation among the GCC states and are beginning to see increased interest and progress.

In December, at the Manama Dialogue held in Bahrain, Secretary of Defense Hagel announced several new initiatives designed to further strengthen cooperation between the United States and our GCC partners. First, DoD will work with the GCC on better integration of its members’ missile defense capabilities, acknowledging that a multilateral framework is the best way to develop interoperable and integrated regional missile defense. Second, the Defense Department intends to expand its security cooperation with partners in the region by working in a coordinated way with the GCC, including the sales of U.S. defense articles to the GCC as an organization. Third, building upon the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum and similar events, Secretary Hagel invited our GCC partners to participate in an annual U.S.-GCC Defense Ministerial, which

will allow the United States and GCC member nations to take the next step in coordinating defense policies and enhancing our military cooperation. All of these initiatives are intended to help strengthen the GCC and regional security, and USCENTCOM intends to fully support them. Through our continued presence in the region, training and equipping programs, and further expansion of multilateral exercises and activities, we are setting conditions for increased burden-sharing. Ultimately this will enable us to remain better postured to respond to crises or contingency operations, while also providing a counterbalance to the potential threat posed by Iran.

For decades, security cooperation has served as the cornerstone of the United States' relationship with **Saudi Arabia**. Now, as we face compounding security challenges in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is taking a more independent and outspoken role in safeguarding its interests in the region. Still, despite recent policy disagreements pertaining to Syria, Egypt and Iran, the United States and Saudi Arabia continue to work closely together to contend with violent extremist groups operating in ungoverned spaces, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the humanitarian crisis emanating from Syria and other challenges threatening regional security and stability. Our support of Saudi Arabia in enhancing its defense capabilities will serve to further deter hostile actors, increase U.S.-Saudi military interoperability and, in so doing, positively impact security and stability in the region, as well as the global economy.

A long-time partner and strong ally in the region, **Kuwait** provides critical support for U.S. troops and equipment, and it is playing a significant role in the retrograde of equipment from Afghanistan. For the first time, Kuwait committed to hosting the U.S. multilateral exercise,

Eagle Resolve 2015, which will further bolster regional cooperative defense efforts. Kuwait continues to struggle with significant political challenges that threaten internal stability.

Meanwhile, they have made progress in reconciling long-standing issues with neighboring Iraq, thereby contributing to improved stability in the region. Looking ahead, we can expect to enjoy strong relations with the Kuwaiti military, built upon many years of trust shared since the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** is a valued, contributing partner with whom we share a historically strong military-to-military relationship. The UAE remains solidly committed to a collective defense of the region and has taken the lead in providing air and missile defense capabilities for the Gulf. The Emiratis recent combined U.S. Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) live-fire exercise demonstrated yet another important capability added to its formation. Given their potential to enhance the AOR's stability by providing leadership and military capability, they most certainly merit our continued close engagement and tangible foreign military sales (FMS) support.

We share a close and robust partnership with **Qatar**. They host and provide critical support to two of our forward headquarters and facilities. Over the past several months, Qatar has experienced some friction with GCC partners, namely Saudi Arabia and UAE, principally due to Qatar's perceived support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and radical jihadist groups operating in Syria. Despite this, Qatar represents a voice able and willing to take a lead in the GCC's ongoing pursuit of improved regional stability and security. Qatar's multiple FMS

requests and renewed Defense Cooperation Agreement provide tangible examples to this end. They warrant our continued close engagement and support.

**Bahrain** remains an important partner and one of the greatest bulwarks against Iranian malign influence in the region. We have a long-standing close military-to-military relationship with Bahrain, one of four partners with whom we share a bilateral defense agreement, in addition to UAE, Kuwait and Jordan. Bahrain provides key support for U.S. interests by hosting the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and by providing facilities and infrastructure for U.S. forces engaged in regional security operations. Despite their efforts in The National Dialogue, Bahrain's Sunni-dominated government and Shia opposition have failed to achieve a political compromise. This effort has been complicated by radical elements supported by Iran. Frequent public protests have created further opportunities for external actors to enflame tensions. This has led to miscalculation, non-proportional responses to perceived threats, and a hardening of both government and opposition positions. We must maintain a pragmatic policy that supports Bahrain while encouraging adherence to human rights. We are starting to see a logical hedging by Bahrain as it seeks assistance from others, specifically China. The current FMS holds may be perpetuating this behavior. In the wake of the successful Manama Dialogue, held in December 2013, we have an opportunity to work with the Bahrainis to address these and other challenges and, in so doing, further improve internal and regional security and stability.

**Oman** continues to play a steadying role and provides a voice of moderation in the region. The country also provides the United States and our allies and partners with critical regional access.

We value our shared appreciation of the situation in the Gulf. At the same time, we recognize that Oman seeks to maintain a constructive relationship with its close neighbor, Iran. Recent terror threats from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have stimulated closer cooperation between Oman and the United States specific to counter-terrorism. We will continue to support and, where possible, expand upon these collaborative efforts.

**Iraq**, positioned between Iran and Saudi Arabia, remains at the geo-strategic center of the Middle East and the historically preeminent Shia-Sunni fault-line. Over the past year, the country's security situation has deteriorated significantly with violence reaching levels last seen at the height of the sectarian conflict (2006-2008). The principal cause of the growing instability has been the Shia-led government's lack of meaningful reform and inclusiveness of minority Sunnis and Kurds. The situation is further exacerbated by the active presence of Al Qaeda (through the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and the steady influx of jihadists coming into Iraq from Syria. This has come to a head most recently in key areas of Anbar Province. In response to this immediate threat, USCENTCOM, with Congressional support, was able to meet urgent materiel requirements through the FMS process (e.g., small arms, rockets, Hellfire missiles). Leveraging this opportunity, we continue to expand security cooperation activities aimed at strengthening our military-to-military ties. Examples include inviting the Iraqis to participate in regional exercises, such as Eager Lion, and facilitating support for Iraq from nations other than Iran, such as Turkey and Jordan. Now one of the world's largest producers of oil, Iraq has the potential to become a prosperous country and a leader and proactive enabler of regional stability. However, it will be unable to achieve its potential without first achieving a sustainable level of stability and security. This will require major internal political reform, and

the sincere inclusion of the Sunnis and Kurds into the political process that will significantly curb violence across the country.

In **Yemen**, President Hadi worked faithfully through the political transition plan mandated by the 2011 GCC-brokered agreement. The successful conclusion of the National Dialogue was a major achievement. However, it represents one of many steps required to establish a more representative government. While Hadi continues to exhibit sound leadership and a strong commitment to reform, he is facing an increasingly fragile security situation impacted by secessionists in the south, a growing AQAP threat and escalating violence between proxy-funded Houthis and Salafists. We are working closely with the Yemeni Ministry of Defense to restructure the military and security apparatus to effectively deal with these national security threats. We will persist in our efforts to strengthen our relationship in the face of the very serious threat posed by terrorists groups operating out of ungoverned spaces. We also will continue to provide support to the national unity government and to the Yemeni Special Forces focused on reducing those opportunities that enable violent extremists groups to hold terrain, challenge the elected government and prepare to conduct operations elsewhere in the region and against the U.S. homeland.

**The Levant**—Over the past three years, countries bordering Syria have absorbed more than 2 million refugees. This is causing considerable internal domestic problems. However, these partner nations continue to show tremendous compassion and resiliency in response to this devastating humanitarian crisis. We will keep doing all that we can to support them. Meanwhile, the expanding brutality, as illustrated by the Assad Regime’s 21 August 2013

chemical weapons attack in the suburbs of Damascus, has drawn the focus and ire of the international community. Fracture of opposition forces and the increasing prominence of radical Islamist elements on the battlefield further adds to the tremendous complexity of the problem set in Syria. The direct involvement of Iran and LH fighters also is complicating and enflaming this expanding conflict. This growing crisis must be addressed and will require the efforts of regional partners and the international community, recognizing that, allowed to continue unabated, it will likely result in a region-wide conflict lasting a decade or more.

The Government of **Lebanon's** recent formation of a cabinet ended a 10-month political stalemate. While this positive development could lead to a better functioning government, violence is unlikely to subside until the Syria conflict is resolved. Currently, Lebanon is threatened by growing instability inside the country, as evidenced by increasing incidents of sectarian violence, including car bombs. This is due to a variety of contributing factors, including poor governance, Lebanese Hezbollah's involvement in the Syria conflict, which has resulted in a cycle of retaliatory violence, and the significant influx of Sunni refugees from Syria. This is negatively impacting the delicate sectarian balance in the country. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a multi-confessional and national security force, is striving to contain the spread of violence. However, its ability to do so is increasingly strained. We continue to work closely with our military counterparts in addressing their growing security demands. Our expanded support of the LAF, specifically through foreign military financing (FMF), the Global Security Contingency Fund and other train and equip funds, represents our best method for enhancing their capability and capacity to meet current and future security challenges.

**Jordan** remains one of our most reliable regional partners, as demonstrated by our formal defense agreement, their direct support to Afghanistan, participation in multilateral exercises and support for the Middle East Peace process. Jordan continues to struggle with growing instability, primarily stemming from the crisis in Syria. The influx of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees has placed a heavy burden on Jordan's government and economy. There is also increasing concern regarding the growing threat to the region posed by violent extremists. As a consistent moderate voice, Jordan is an exemplar in the region. We will continue to work closely with Jordan to address our shared challenges. I have dedicated a forward presence, USCENTCOM Forward-Jordan, to assist the Jordanian Armed Forces in their efforts. The U.S. goals are to help ease the burden on the nation's economy and enhance its overall stability and security situation.

While **Egypt** is an anchor state in the Central Region, it has experienced a considerable amount of internal turmoil in recent months. The change in government in July 2013, was prompted by growing popular unrest with the Morsi government because it proved unwilling or unable to govern in a way that was fully inclusive. The interim government has made some strides towards a more democratic and inclusive government, primarily through the lifting of the state of emergency (14 November 2013) and the successful conduct of a public referendum on the constitution (14-15 January 2014). However, despite the progress made on the political roadmap, the interim Egyptian government has made decisions inconsistent with inclusive democracy—through restrictions on the press, demonstrations, civil society, and opposition parties. The interim government has yet to tackle the dire and pressing economic problems that are greatly affecting the country and its people. Absent significant economic reforms or

sustained levels of external financial support from the Gulf, Egypt's economy will continue to falter. As the political transition continues, Egypt is also facing heightened extremist attacks in the Sinai and the Nile Valley. The military and security services have heightened counterterrorism operations in the Sinai, but continue to struggle to contain this threat.

We maintain a historically strong military-to-military relationship with the Egyptian Armed Forces and will continue to work with them to advance our mutual security interests. Given the importance of Egypt's stability to overall security and stability in the region, we should continue to support the political transition and encourage pursuit of necessary economic reforms.

USCENTCOM will continue to work closely with the Egyptian military to improve its ability to secure Egypt's borders and to help it to counter the threat posed by extremists in the Sinai and the Nile Valley.

**Central and South Asia (CASA)**—The CASA states are in the midst of a crucial period as ISAF reduces its presence in Afghanistan and completes the shift from combat operations to the current train, advise and assist mission in support of Afghan security forces. There is growing uncertainty regarding long-term U.S. and NATO commitment to Afghanistan and the region post-2014. There is also concern with respect to Afghanistan's ability to preserve the gains achieved and to maintain long-lasting security and stability in the absence of U.S. and Coalition forces. As a result, we are seeing a number of complex hedging activities by Afghanistan and neighboring states looking to protect their individual interests. This behavior highlights the importance of adjusting our strategy in the CASA region as we look to support our partners and also confront the significant threats of narcotics trafficking, proliferation of WMD and terrorism.

We continue to look for opportunities to mature military-to-military relationships among the Central Asian states, ideally helping them to move beyond rivalries and towards finding common ground for increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Al Qaeda continues to operate in Pakistan's FATA and, to a lesser extent, areas of eastern Afghanistan. Continued pressure on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan also increases the chances that AQ will be displaced to less restrictive areas in the CASA region that would provide AQ and other violent extremists with safe havens from which to facilitate terror networks, plan attacks, pursue WMD, etc. Meanwhile, other regional actors, to include Russia, China and Iran, are attempting to expand their spheres of influence in the CASA region for security and economic purposes. Long-standing tensions between Pakistan and India also threaten regional stability as both states have substantial military forces arrayed along their borders and the disputed Kashmir Line of Control.

In **Pakistan**, we face a confluence of persistent challenges that have long hindered the efforts of the Pakistan government to fight terrorism and our ability to provide needed assistance. Central to Pakistan's struggles is its poor economy and burgeoning "youth bulge." Given these conditions, radicalism is on the rise in settled areas and threatens increased militant activity and insurgency in parts of Pakistan where the sway of the state traditionally has been the strongest. At the same time, terrorist attacks and ethno-sectarian violence threaten the government's tenuous control over some areas. Further compounding these internal challenges is Pakistan's strained relationships with its neighbors.

The U.S.-Pakistan military-to-military relationship has improved over the past two years, reflecting increased cooperation in areas of mutual interest including the defeat of AQ, reconciliation in Afghanistan and support for Pakistan's fight against militant and terrorist groups. Greater security assistance, training, support and operational reimbursement through the Coalition Support Fund have enhanced Pakistan's ability to conduct counter-insurgency (COIN)/CT operations. In November 2013, we held the second strategic-level Defense Consultative Group meeting, focused primarily on implementing a framework for promoting peace and stability based on common COIN and CT interests. The Out-Year Security Assistance Roadmap will focus on enhancing Pakistan's precision strike, air mobility, survivability/counter-improvised explosive device (IED) capability, battlefield communications, night vision, border security and maritime security/counter-narcotics capabilities. Additionally, we are nesting these initiatives within our Military Consultative Committee, which finalizes our annual engagement plan and the USCENCOM exercise program. The end result will be a synchronization of activities aimed at helping Pakistan build capabilities in support of our common objectives across all security cooperation lines of effort. While we continue to strengthen our cooperation in areas of mutual interest, we are engaging with Pakistan where our interests diverge, most notably with respect to the Haqqani Network which enjoys safe haven on Pakistan soil.

Our relationship with **Uzbekistan** is advancing in a deliberate, balanced way driven by shared regional security concerns. We have resumed Special Forces training and initiated a non-binding five-year framework plan. Our bilateral training conducted in June 2013 focused on CT and CN and renewed collaboration in support of shared interests. The Uzbeks also continue to provide support for operations in Afghanistan, principally by allowing access to NDN routes. While the

Uzbeks prefer to work bilaterally, we see significant potential in their expressed desire to contribute positively to regional stability. Our security cooperation programs are carefully managed so as not to upset the regional military balance.

Our relationship with **Tajikistan** continues to improve against the backdrop of significant security challenges. They are supporting operations in Afghanistan by allowing transit along the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan route of the NDN. Additionally, they have shown their support for broader security initiatives, including CT, CN and border security. Tajikistan's lengthy border with Afghanistan and the associated access to ungoverned spaces presents difficulties for the country's security forces. Enhancing Tajikistan's ability to secure this border against narco-traffickers and VEOs is vital to ensuring internal and regional stability. Our modest investment of resources in support of their force modernization efforts is primarily focused on enhancing the country's capability to address security challenges while encouraging the continued professional development of its defense. This will contribute to the protection of our shared interests from the threat of VEOs.

We are redefining our relationship with the **Kyrgyz Republic** as we ascertain the full impact of the planned July 2014 closure of the Manas Transit Center and termination of our Framework Defense Cooperation Agreement. A new Framework Agreement will be necessary to maximize U.S.-Kyrgyz Republic security cooperation. Until such an agreement is reached, our security cooperation activities will likely decrease. While these challenges have limited our ability to further develop our military-to-military relationship, we continue to pursue all opportunities where our interests align, particularly in the areas of CT and border security.

Our relationship with **Kazakhstan** continues to mature and has great potential for expansion. In 2012, we signed a Five-Year Military Cooperation Plan (2013-2017) and a Three-Year Plan of Cooperation in support of Kazakhstan's Partnership for Peace Training Center. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense is transforming its forces from a traditional Soviet-style territorial defense role into a western-modeled expeditionary, professional and technologically advanced force capable of meeting threats in the post-2014 security environment. Kazakhstan is the most significant regional contributor to stability and security in Afghanistan. They have pledged grants to the ANSF fund after 2014, while also offering technical service support for ANSF equipment and providing educational opportunities in Kazakhstan for young Afghans. In August 2013, we conducted Steppe Eagle, an annual multinational peacekeeping exercise co-sponsored by the United States and Kazakhstan. This exercise facilitated the continued development of the Kazakhstan Peacekeeping Brigade. Once the brigade is operational, Kazakhstan intends to deploy subordinate units in support of U.N. peacekeeping operations as early as this year. Kazakhstan remains an enduring and reliable partner, well positioned to serve as bulwark for increased stability within the region.

**Turkmenistan** is a valued partner and enabler for regional stability. Of note is their support of Afghanistan where they are contributing through a series of bilateral development projects. They also permit DoD humanitarian assistance overflights. While the United States and Turkmenistan share numerous regional interests, their policy of positive neutrality governs the shape and pace of our security assistance relationship. Turkmenistan remains committed to self-imposed restrictions on military exchanges and cooperation with the United States and other nations in order to maintain its neutrality. Our security assistance relationship has seen modest growth as

we help Turkmenistan to further develop its border security forces and the capabilities of the Turkmen Caspian Sea Fleet. However, we do not foresee any changes to their policy, so it is likely our interactions, though productive, will remain limited.

Central Asia's position, bordering Russia, China, Iran and Afghanistan, assures its long-term importance to the United States. By improving upon our military-to-military relationships we will be better able to maintain access and influence, counter malign activity, protect lines of communication and deny VEOs access to ungoverned spaces and restrict their freedom of movement. Going forward, initiatives will be tailored to transform our current limited transactional-based relationships into more constructive cooperative exchanges based on common interests and focused on training and equipping them to conduct more effective CT, CP and CN operations.

**Our Strategic Approach.** USCENTCOM's goal is to effect incremental, holistic improvements to Central Region security and stability, in part, by shaping the behaviors and perceptions that fuel regional volatility. The intent is to generate a cumulative impact that de-escalates conflicts, mitigates confrontations and sets conditions for durable peace, cooperation, and prosperity throughout the region. Our strategic approach is defined by the "**MANAGE-PREVENT-SHAPE**" construct.

Our priority effort is to **MANAGE** operations, actions and activities in order to de-escalate violent conflict, contain its effects, maintain theater security and stability and protect U.S. interests and those of our partners. At the same time, we recognize that our charge is not simply

to wage today's wars for a period. Rather, our goal is to achieve lasting and improved security and stability throughout the Middle East and Central and South Asia. We do so by managing the current conflicts, while also taking measures to **PREVENT** other confrontations and situations from escalating and becoming conflicts. At the same time, we are pursuing opportunities and doing what we can to effectively **SHAPE** behaviors, perceptions and outcomes in different areas. These efforts cross the entire theater strategic framework (near-, mid-, long-term actions).

Our ability to effectively employ our MANAGE-PREVENT-SHAPE strategic approach is largely dependent upon the capabilities and readiness of our forward deployed military forces, working in concert with other elements of U.S. power and influence. These elements include our diplomatic efforts, both multilateral and bilateral, and trade and energy. Equally important are our efforts aimed at building regional partners' capability and capacity and also strengthening our bilateral and multilateral relationships, principally through key leader engagements and training and joint exercise programs. The long-term security architecture of the Central Region demands that our partners be capable of conducting deterrence and defending themselves and our common security interests. This can only be accomplished if we maintain strong military-to-military relationships and build on existing security frameworks; recognizing that we cannot surge trust.

**Leverage Partnerships.** In an effort to counter the “underlying currents” that are the root cause of violence and instability in the Central Region, we must leverage the ability and willingness of key regional leaders to influence behaviors. By encouraging certain states to adopt more moderate positions, for example, while promoting the efforts and voices of others that are

already considered moderate, we may be able to limit the impact of radical Islamists. Likewise, by limiting the availability of ungoverned spaces, we may diminish the reach and effectiveness of violent extremists operating in the region. We cannot force a universal change in behaviors. But, we can set the right conditions and promote the efforts of influential states and regional leaders who may, through their words and actions, achieve significant and lasting improvements.

**Building Partner Capacity (BPC).** Building partner capacity is a preventative measure and force multiplier. Our goal is for our partners and allies to be stronger and more capable in dealing with common threats. Joint training exercises, key leader engagements and FMS and FMF financing programs all represent key pillars of our BPC strategy. When compared to periods of sustained conflict, it is a low-cost and high-return investment that contributes to improving stability throughout the Central Region while lessening the need for costly U.S. military intervention. Tangible by-products include increased access, influence, enhanced interoperability and improved security for forward-deployed forces, diplomatic sites and other U.S. interests. Working “by-with-and through” our regional partners, whenever possible, also serves to enhance the legitimacy and durability of our actions and presence and allows for increased burden sharing.

**Training and Joint Exercise Programs.** The USCENTCOM Exercise Program continues to provide meaningful opportunities to assist with BPC, enhance unity of effort and shape occasions for key leader engagements throughout the AOR. During FY13 and 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter FY14, four of the five USCENTCOM component commands developed or continued existing exercises covering the full spectrum of USCENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation Objectives. This

past year, USCENTCOM executed 52 bilateral and multilateral exercises. Our successful training efforts included the Eagle Resolve exercise, which was hosted by Qatar and included naval, land, and air components from 12 nations, as well as 2,000 U.S. service members and 1,000 of their counterparts. Our Eager Lion 2013 exercise in Jordan involved 8,000 personnel from 19 nations, including 5,000 U.S. service members. The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise 2013, conducted across 8,000 square nautical miles stretching from the North Arabian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz to the Gulf of Oman, united some 40 nations, 6,500 service members, and 35 ships in defense of the maritime commons.

In addition to military-to-military engagement, the exercise program achieved a number of objectives, including: demonstrating mutual commitment to regional security; combined command, control and communications interoperability; integrating staff planning and execution of joint combined operations; the development of coalition warfare; the refinement of complementary warfare capabilities; the enhancement of U.S. capability to support contingency operations; and the maintenance of U.S. presence and basing access and overflight in the region. FY14-16 exercise focus areas will be: enhanced U.S./coalition interoperability; CT/critical infrastructure protection; integrated air and missile defense; counter WMD; and, maritime security, with an emphasis on mine countermeasures.

**Critical Needs and Concerns.** The realities of the current fiscal environment will have a lasting impact on USCENTCOM headquarters (HQs), our five component commands and 18 country teams, and these realities must be confronted soberly, prudently and opportunistically. The cumulative effects of operating under successive continuing resolutions and budget uncertainty

have created significant obstacles to both USCENTCOM HQs and the USCENTCOM AOR in terms of planning and execution. Persistent fiscal uncertainty hinders efficient and timely implementation of operational, logistical, tactical and strategic milestones and objectives.

**Required capabilities.** For the foreseeable future, turbulence and uncertainty will define the Central Region, and vitally important U.S. national interests will be at stake. Therefore, it is necessary that USCENTCOM be adequately resourced and supported with the authorities, equipment, capabilities and forces required to address existing challenges and to pursue opportunities. Among the specific capabilities required are:

**Forces and Equipment.** Forward-deployed rotational and permanently-assigned joint forces, fighter and lift assets, surveillance platforms, ballistic missile defense assets, naval vessels, ground forces, and cyber teams that are trained, equipped, mission-capable and ready to respond quickly are indispensable to protecting our vital interests and reassuring our partners in the region. It is likewise essential that we maintain the strategic flexibility required to effectively respond to contingencies.

**Information Operations (IO).** Our adversaries continue their reliance on the information domain to recruit, fund, spread their ideology and control their operations. Our investments in IO thus far have made it USCENTCOM's most cost-effective method and the top non-lethal tool for disrupting terrorist activities across the Central Region. Our military information support operations programs provide critical non-kinetic capabilities designed to conduct a range of activities. Our Regional Web Interaction Program (RWIP), for example, provides non-lethal

tools to disrupt ongoing terrorist recruitment and propaganda. The requirement to employ IO will persist beyond major combat and counter-insurgency operations. We will need to maintain the technological infrastructure, sustained baseline funding and continued investment to allow for further development of this valuable tool.

**Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD).** The theater ballistic missile threat is increasing both quantitatively and qualitatively. The threat from short-, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in regions where the U.S. deploys forces and maintains security relationships is growing at a rapid pace, with systems becoming more flexible, mobile, survivable, reliable, and accurate. This trajectory is likely to continue over the next decade. We must be ready and capable of defending against missile threats to United States forces, while also protecting our partners and allies and enabling them to defend themselves. Our capability and capacity would be further enhanced through the acquisition of additional interceptors and BMD systems. However, the global demand exceeds supply. Therefore, the U.S. should continue to pursue investments in re-locatable ground- and sea-based BMD assets balanced against U.S. homeland defense needs.

**Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) Assets.** We have enjoyed, for the most part, air supremacy for the last 12+ years while engaged in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. Now, we are out of Iraq and in the process of transitioning forces from Afghanistan. However, VEOs, principally Al Qaeda and other proxy actors continue to pose a significant and growing threat in the Central Region. Ascertaining the intentions and capabilities of these various elements is not an easy task. As airborne ISR and other collection assets diminish in the region,

our knowledge will lessen even further. Now, more than ever, a persistent eye is needed to gain insight into threats and strategic risks to our national security interests. In many ways, collection in anti-access/area denial (A2AD) environments presents the toughest problem for the future. It simply cannot be overemphasized that human intelligence, satellite and airborne assets, and other special collection capabilities remain integral to our ability to effectively counter potential threats.

Combined military intelligence operations and sharing is a critical component of USCENTCOM operations. Over the past decade, intelligence community sharing policies have enabled near-seamless operations with traditional foreign partners. Over the last year, we have seen an increase in military intelligence collaboration with regional allies who bring new and unique accesses and insights into the actions and plans of our adversaries. These increasingly important regional partnerships are possible because of the close working relationship USCENTCOM's intelligence directorate maintains with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The progressive intelligence sharing authorities that we possess were provided by Director Clapper's team. I will continue to ask the intelligence community's senior leaders to emphasize the production of intelligence in a manner that affords USCENTCOM an opportunity to responsibly share it in a time-sensitive environment with our most trusted partners in order to enable increased bilateral and multilateral planning and operations.

**Appropriately Postured.** We sincerely appreciate Congress' continued support for capabilities required to sustain future operations in the Central Region and to respond to emerging situations; these include: prepositioned stock and munitions; a streamlined overseas military construction

process that supports our necessary posture and security cooperation objectives; continued contingency construction and unspecific minor military construction authorities; increased sea-basing capabilities; and airfield, base, and port repair capabilities needed to rapidly recover forward infrastructure in a conflict. These capabilities enable our effective and timely response to the most likely and most dangerous scenarios in the Central Region. They also support our efforts to shape positive outcomes for the future.

**Cyber Security.** In the coming month and years, USCENTCOM will need to be able to aggressively improve our cyber security posture in response to advanced persistent threats to our networks and critical information. As the cyber community matures, we will plan, coordinate, integrate and conduct network operations and defensive activities in cooperation with other U.S. Government agencies and partner nations. Key requirements, resourcing and training and awareness for adequate cyber security remain at the forefront of USCENTCOM's cyber campaign. This campaign entails a multi-disciplined security approach to address a diverse and changing threat, adequate resourcing at appropriate operational levels to enable the rapid implementation of orders and a command and control framework that aligns with the operational chain of command.

DoD requires redundant and resilient communications in this AOR. We ask for your continued support in sustaining the investments we have made to make our information technology and communications infrastructure resilient, as these programs are currently 97% Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funded. In addition, we are assisting our regional partners in building their capacity and expertise in the cyber domain as we are heavily reliant on host nation

communications infrastructure across the Central Region. With Congress' backing, we will continue to focus on cyber security cooperation as a key part of our theater strategy.

**Enduring Coalition Presence at USCENTCOM HQs.** We enjoy a robust coalition presence at USCENTCOM HQs that currently includes 55 nations from five continents. These foreign officers serve as senior national representatives, providing USCENTCOM with a vital and expedient link to our operational and strategic partners. Their presence and active participation in the command's day-to-day activities assists the commander and key staff in retaining military-to-military relations with representatives of a country's chief of defense. Coalition presence also enables bilateral and multilateral information sharing, while maintaining a capability to rapidly develop plans to support military and humanitarian operations. It is a capability that we should retain, though I am currently looking to reshape and refocus the coalition as an enduring entity, post-2014. While their continued presence will require an extension of current authorities and funding, it represents a strong investment that aligns with and directly supports USCENTCOM's mission in what is a strategically critical and dynamic area of responsibility.

**Required Authorities and Resources.** We appreciate Congress' continued support for the following key authorities and appropriations. They remain critical to our partnerships, access, interoperability, responsiveness and flexibility in the dynamic USCENTCOM area of responsibility.

**Building Partner Capacity.** Continued support for flexible authorities is needed to effectively react to urgent and emergent threats. Global Train and Equip and Global Security Contingency

Fund authorities demonstrate the ability of DoD and the Department of State to work together to effectively build partner capacity. The FY14 NDAA extends authority for DoD to loan specific equipment to partners through Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA) through December 2014. We strongly endorse and support making this authority permanent and global as an integral part of all ACSAs since it facilitates greater integration of coalition forces into regional contingencies and enhances security cooperation. Finally, continued support for our exercise and engagement efforts is necessary to maintain and enhance partnerships that are critical to ensuring and defending regional stability, which supports our national military and theater campaign strategies within the USCENTCOM AOR.

**Foreign Military Financing and Sales (FMF and FMS).** Our need for continued Congressional funding of FMF programs that support USCENTCOM security cooperation objectives cannot be overstated. We appreciate Congressional support for interagency initiatives to streamline the FMS and FMF process to ensure that we remain the partner of choice for our allies in the region and are able to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

**Coalition Support (CF).** Authorities, such as Global Lift and Sustain, are critical to our ability to provide our partners with logistical, military, and other support, along with specialized training and equipment. Continuing to provide this support is vital to building and maintaining a coalition, which in turn reduces the burden on U.S. forces and increases interoperability.

**DoD Counter-Drug and Counter-Narcotics Authorities.** USCENTCOM uses existing worldwide DoD Counter-Drug (CD) authorities to provide support for Afghanistan security force

development and U.S. Government agency law enforcement. These authorities provide wide latitude to support our law enforcement agencies in building reliable CD security partners. Funding under these authorities represents one of the largest sources of security assistance for Central Asia, and it provides leverage for access, builds security infrastructure, promotes rule of law, and reduces funding for violent extremists and insurgents in the Central Region. The majority of USCENTCOM's CD funding is through OCO appropriations; however, the program must endure in order to sustain these cooperative law enforcement activities in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Finally, to maintain the additional gains we have made in disrupting the flow of VEOs and illicit narcotics trafficking, we must maintain our counter-narcotics programs in the Central Asian states.

**Resourcing Afghanistan Transition.** In addition to the efforts referenced above, several key authorities and appropriations are essential to maintaining our momentum in the Afghanistan transition and will remain critical in the future environment as we shape the region to prevent crises; these include:

The **Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)** is the cornerstone of our strategy and essential to ensuring the ANSF are capable of providing for the security and stability of their country after the conclusion of Operation Enduring Freedom. It is from the authorities and funding of ASFF that we provide assistance to the ANSF through the procurement of equipment and supplies, services, specialized training, and facility and infrastructure support, as well as salaries for the 352,000 members of the ANSF and 30,000 Afghan local police. Continued sustainment of the ANSF will prove the key component of the post-2014 train and advise mission in Afghanistan.

We will also need to honor our commitments to the Afghan people and complete the critical infrastructure projects we began under the **Afghan Infrastructure Fund (AIF)**, as part of the Afghan counterinsurgency campaign. These projects focus on power, water and transportation as we transition out of Afghanistan and set the conditions for a long-term security relationship. Many key AIF projects will reach completion post-2014. .

**Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)** funds enable commanders on the ground to provide urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction to maintain security and promote stability during transition. We need this funding to continue, albeit at a much reduced level, as long as U.S. forces are on the ground in Afghanistan to ensure our commanders have the full spectrum of capabilities at their disposal.

**Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)-funded Accounts.** For over a decade, the full range of military operations in the Central Region has been funded through contingency appropriations. By nature, OCO funding is temporary. However, many of our missions in the region will endure despite their initial ties to Operations Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn and Enduring Freedom. To do so we will need to develop an enduring approach to resourcing the defense strategy in the USCENTCOM AOR.

**The U.S. Central Command Team.** Over the course of my 38-year military career, one truth has held constant: provided the right resources and equipment, people can and will successfully accomplish any mission given to them. During three deployments to Iraq and one to

Afghanistan, and also while stationed stateside, I have seen our men and women in uniform do the most incredible and selfless things in support of operations and one another. They continue to humble and inspire me each and every day.

At USCENTCOM, people absolutely are our most important assets. The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and Civilians, and their Families who make up our world-class team are doing an outstanding job, day-in and day-out, selflessly serving and sacrificing in support of the mission at our headquarters in Tampa and in forward locations throughout the Central Region. We absolutely could not do what we do without them, and they will maintain our strong and unwavering support. In addition to making sure that they have the necessary resources, equipment, and authorities, we remain 100 percent committed to doing everything we can to take care them, both on- and off-duty.

**Suicide Prevention.** Suicide Prevention remains a top priority across all levels of leadership at USCENTCOM HQs and throughout the USCENTCOM AOR, to include among the ranks of our deployed service members. We are fully committed to ensuring access to the full range of available resiliency building and suicide prevention assets and resources. We continue to partner with our Service force providers to educate leaders and service members, both at home and abroad, on behavioral health issues, available resources and ongoing efforts to decrease the stigma often associated with seeking and receiving treatment. All efforts retain the singular focus that the loss of even a single service member from suicide is one too many.

**Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR).** Over the past year, the SAPR program has taken center stage in our endeavor to provide an environment free from sexual assault and discrimination. Ongoing efforts throughout USCENTCOM focus on increased training and awareness in coordination with victim advocates and victim assistance, and we will continue to actively pursue, investigate and prosecute sexual assaults as warranted. In the unfortunate event that a sexual assault occurs, the victim's physical and emotional needs are immediately addressed, whether or not he or she opts for restricted or unrestricted reporting of the assault. The military cannot afford such attacks from within and you can be assured that this is and will remain a top priority for all personnel assigned to or associated with this command.

**Conclusion.** The year ahead is certain to be a decisive one throughout the Middle East and Central and South Asia. The region is more dynamic and volatile than at any other time. What will unfold will inevitably impact the global economy, as well as the security of U.S. vital interests and those of our partner nations. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to do all that we can to help keep things in USCENTCOM's AOR as stable and secure as possible. To this end, in the coming year, we will pursue stronger relationships with and among our partners and allies. We will view the various challenges in the region through a lens that takes into account the "underlying currents" at play. We will manage existing conflicts, while helping to prevent confrontations and situations from becoming new conflicts. At the same time, we will vigorously pursue opportunities, recognizing that it is through them that we will shape positive outcomes and achieve improved security, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond. We also will actively support the efforts of our colleagues in other U.S. Government departments and

agencies; realizing that, while we may employ different methods, we are in pursuit of many of the same goals and objectives.

The tasks ahead will prove extremely challenging, yet they are absolutely worthy of our collective efforts and sacrifices. Given the enormity of the stakes, we must—*and we will*—work together to enable a Central Region where improved security leads to greater stability and prosperity for all people, throughout this strategically important part of the world and around the globe, including here at home.

*USCENTCOM: Ready, Engaged, Vigilant!*

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD  
COMMANDER  
U.S. FORCES AFGHANISTAN  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE  
OVERSIGHT HEARING – U.S. CENTRAL  
COMMAND AND INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE  
14 MARCH 2014

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

## ***Afghanistan: What We've Achieved***

### **I. Where We Are – State of the Campaign**

In the final year of the military campaign, U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) and our coalition partners have not forgotten the objective that brought us to Afghanistan more than 12 years ago: to prevent the country from once again becoming a safe haven for al Qaeda and international terrorism. Since 2001, our presence in Afghanistan and the extraordinary efforts of both conventional and special operations forces have prevented another 9/11. Today, USFOR-A forces continue to place constant pressure on terrorist networks. Concurrently, troops from the 49-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) continue to develop credible and capable Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – forces that can secure Afghanistan in the long term and prevent the re-emergence of safe havens from which al Qaeda can launch attacks against the U.S. and her allies.

Last June, coalition forces achieved a major milestone in the military campaign when the ANSF took the lead for security operations nationwide. Progress was further made when the ANSF emerged from the 2013 fighting season as a confident force capable of securing the Afghan people. With the ANSF in the lead, ISAF forces transitioned to a support role and began a train, advise, and assist mission initially focused on further maturing ANSF combat capability. Currently, ISAF advisors are re-orienting their focus away from developing combat skills to now developing the capabilities and institutions needed for the ANSF's long-term sustainability.

The nine remaining months of the ISAF campaign will have a decisive impact on Afghanistan's future. We will be focused on supporting the ANSF as they prepare for the fighting season, political transition, and security transition in December, when they will assume full responsibility for Afghanistan's security. ISAF will also continue to posture the force in preparation for NATO's post-2014 Resolute Support train, advise, and assist mission that will address gaps in capabilities that are necessary for the ANSF to become self-sustainable.

### **II. Where We Are – State of the ANSF**

Today, Afghanistan is being secured by a confident ANSF with limited coalition support. The only unilateral operations ISAF is conducting are for our own force protection, sustainment, and redeployment. As a result of the ANSF's new lead role and the coalition's new support role,

our Afghan partners are bearing the brunt of enemy attacks, although their cohesion remains strong. American and coalition casualties have significantly dropped, with casualties in 2013 being nearly a quarter of what they were in 2010.

The transition to Afghan forces leading security operations in the summer of 2013 was a marked change in the campaign, which had coalition forces leading combat operations for the previous 12 years. Despite ISAF's early recognition that Afghanistan's security would depend on indigenous forces and coalition efforts beginning in 2002 to build an Afghan security force, progress was slow. In 2009, enabled by the U.S. troops surge ordered by President Obama, the coalition made a conscious effort to first grow ANSF numbers (quantity) and get them into the fight. This was then followed by an effort – which continues today – to develop ANSF enablers and professionalize the ranks (quality). As a result of this plan, the ANSF have grown to a force of nearly 350,000 soldiers, airmen, and police today. These forces are augmented by an additional 26,000 local police forces.

In 2010, coalition and Afghan forces began conducting partnered operations, which developed combat capabilities and leadership skills from the tactical level on up. As a result of the ANSF's progress, President Obama and President Karzai agreed in January 2013 that Afghan forces would take the lead for security nationwide at the Milestone 2013 ceremony on June 18, 2013. As the Afghan forces stepped into the lead role for counterinsurgency operations, ISAF forces stepped back into a support role. This new role had coalition members serving as combat advisors to Afghan units to further develop tactical fighting skills and the integration of combined arms, such as artillery, mortars, and attack helicopters.

### 2013 Fighting Season

In their first fighting season in the lead, the ANSF proved capable of securing the Afghan people, fighting their own battles, and holding the gains achieved by ISAF over the last decade. Like the coalition forces who led operations the year prior, the ANSF successfully maintained control of all key terrain and populated areas. Today, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) remains in control of its 34 provincial capitals and all of its major cities. The majority of violence continues to take place away from populated areas, and polling shows the vast majority of Afghans hold a favorable view of their soldiers and police.

The ANSF consistently demonstrated tactical overmatch against the Taliban-led insurgency, and proved resilient in a tough fight. They independently planned, led and executed

combined-arms operations. They improved cooperation across the Ministry of Interior (police), the Ministry of Defense (army), and the National Directorate of Security (intelligence service). And they generated an impressive operational tempo as they secured the Afghan people.

The ANSF's improving capabilities were demonstrated in large and complex combat operations across the country. In July, the ANSF launched *Operation Semorgh* in eastern Afghanistan. It was the largest Afghan air assault in history, followed by a two-pronged attack into the Azrah Valley. The three-week operation – which involved the Afghan air force, the 201st and 203rd Army Corps, the 111th Capital Division, special operations, and police – began with Mi-35 attack helicopters escorting Mi-17s helicopters as they inserted 250 Afghan soldiers and 13,000 pounds of supplies. Afghan helicopters provided fire support and casualty evacuation while Afghan artillery and mortars provided surface fires in support of the ground force's movement through difficult, mountainous terrain. Despite insurgent attacks, bad weather, and the soldiers' fasting for Ramazan, the ANSF successfully cleared the valley of insurgents and secured the district center, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid and voter registration materials. Once the operation was complete, Afghan police remained in the valley to provide for its long-term security. The ANSF independently planned, executed, and sustained the operation; ISAF only provided enabler support, such as close air support, casualty evacuation, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

Throughout the rest of the summer and winter, each of the six Afghan Army corps planned and executed multiple complex operations throughout the country with the support of the Afghan air force, special operations, and police. Highlights include the 205th Corps' *Operation Chamtoo* in southern Afghanistan, where they cleared almost three hundred villages in 14 days with minimal casualties; in the process, they discovered and confiscated 1.5 tons of homemade explosives and more than 1,000 IEDs and components. The 207th Corps's *Operation Abu Nasr Farahi* in western Afghanistan cleared insurgents along Highway 1, protecting the Afghan people and securing a vital road for commercial and military needs. The 209th Corps' *Operation Hindukush* in northern Afghanistan cleared insurgent safe havens in the Warduj Valley. And the 215th Corps' *Operation Oqab* in southwestern Afghanistan took the fight to insurgents in Sangin, demonstrating strong combined arms capabilities during clearing operations to deny insurgents safe haven.

The ANSF's growing capability was particularly evident during the Loya Jirga in November, when 3,000 Afghan leaders from around the country met in Kabul to discuss the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). Despite concerted efforts from the Haqqani Network and other insurgents to disrupt the Loya Jirga, the ANSF successfully secured the event without incident. This accomplishment was the result of extensive planning and integrated operations in Kabul, other major urban centers, and the key routes connecting them by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the National Directorate of Security for weeks leading up to the event. This performance reflects a degree of coordination between the three different security pillars that simply didn't exist in early 2013.

Despite the ANSF's successes throughout the fighting season, they also faced several challenges. Due to existing capability gaps and shortfalls, the ANSF relied on ISAF for enabler support, particularly in the areas of close air support, casualty evacuation, logistics, counter-IED, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The ANSF also suffered high casualties and instances of poor leadership, but impressively remained a cohesive and resilient fighting force.

On balance, after watching the ANSF respond to a variety of challenges over the past year, I do not believe the Taliban-led insurgency represents an existential threat to GIRoA or the ANSF. However, while the ANSF's performance shows they require less ISAF assistance in conducting security operations, they do need a great deal of help in developing the systems, the processes, and the institutions necessary to run a modern, professional army and police force.

#### *ANSF Capability Gaps*

ISAF forces are in the process of re-orienting from combat advising at the unit level to functionally-based advising at the Afghan security ministries, the six army corps, and the police zones. In this new role, advisors are focusing on tasks that will build the ANSF's long-term sustainability to make the progress that has been made to date enduring.

At the security ministries, advisors are focusing on building ministerial capacity in planning, programming, budgeting, and acquisition. Advisors are also working to improve integration between the different security pillars— army, police, and intelligence service – at all levels. In the fielded force, advisors will focus on capability gaps like the aviation, intelligence, and special operations. They will also focus on developmental shortfalls in areas like logistics, medical, and counter-IED. At all levels, our advisors will work to improve Afghan transparency

and accountability of donor resources, and reduce casualties and overall attrition. In total, our shift to functionally-based advising is putting the ANSF on a path to sustainment.

Despite our advisory efforts in 2014, four capability gaps will remain after the ISAF mission ends. I assess that without the Resolute Support mission, the progress made to date will not be sustainable. A limited number of advisors will be required in 2015 to continue the train, advise, and assist mission. These advisors will address gaps in 1) the aviation enterprise, 2) the intelligence enterprise, 3) special operations, and 4) the security ministries' capacity to conduct tasks such as planning, programming, budgeting, acquisition, and human resource management so they can provide tactical units the support they require to function. These advisors will put the Afghans on the path to sustainment that the Afghans can further develop after Resolute Support concludes.

In summary, although clear challenges exist along the security line of effort, I believe the physical capabilities and capacities of the ANSF will be sufficient to secure the election, to achieve transition in December, and – with a post-2014 advising mission – to provide for Afghanistan's long-term security. These collective efforts are hardening the Afghan state and giving it needed time to develop and mature. These efforts are also reducing the insurgency's operating space and incentivizing its participation in the peace process.

### **III. Where We Are – State of the Threat**

ISAF and Afghan forces remain focused on denying safe haven to al Qaeda and keeping pressure on the extremist network to limit the operational ability of al Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, and other transnational and foreign military groups inside Afghanistan.

Sustained counter-terrorism operations have prevented al Qaeda's use of the country as a platform for terrorism. Operations have restricted their permanent presence to isolated areas of northeastern Afghanistan and have resulted in only a seasonal presence in other parts of the country. These efforts have forced al Qaeda to focus on survival rather than on operations against the West. Counter-terrorism pressure placed on al Qaeda –as well as the elimination of fighters and facilitators – has prevented another attack on the homeland. Yet, continued operations are necessary to prevent al Qaeda from regenerating degraded capabilities.

Challenges remain despite this success, as the extremist network within Afghanistan has become more complex over the last decade. Where at one time al Qaeda could be isolated – as

we intended to do in 2001 – extremist networks have now expanded in the country. Increased cooperation and coordination can be seen between al Qaeda and other extremists like the Haqqani Network, Tahrik-e Taliban Pakistan, and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The Haqqani Network remains the most virulent strain of the insurgency, the greatest risk to coalition forces, and a critical enabler of al Qaeda. The Haqqani Taliban also shares the Afghan Taliban's goals of expelling coalition forces, removing the Afghan government, and re-establishing an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They lead the insurgency in three eastern Afghan provinces (Paktika, Paktiya, Khost) and have demonstrated the capability and intent to launch and support high profile and complex attacks against the coalition across the country. In response to several dangerous threat streams against coalition and Afghan personnel, ANSF and U.S. special operations forces have expanded their security and counter-terrorism operations. These operations have successfully disrupted several dangerous threats streams that sought to inflict significant casualties on the force and break the coalition's will.

The Afghan Taliban also remain a potent and resilient threat. At the beginning of the 2013 fighting season, they outlined their operational objectives: seize and hold district centers, increase violence across the country, conduct insider and high profile attacks to garner media coverage, and crush the will of the ANSF in their first fighting season in the lead.

Despite their continued efforts, the Taliban made very limited progress in achieving these objectives and in exploiting ISAF's reduced troop presence to generate operational or strategic momentum. The Taliban were not able to hold terrain, crush the ANSF's spirit, or increase insider attacks and violence levels from 2012 when coalition forces led security operations. However, the Taliban were able to project violence into urban areas from rural safe havens, threaten freedom of movement along major highways, and contest government control in some areas. They were also able to conduct high profile attacks that negatively influenced Afghan and international community perceptions about security, and capitalize on the existing uncertainty surrounding the coalition's post-2014 mission. Despite these successes, recent polling data shows the Afghan population continues to widely reject the Taliban, challenging their ability to expand influence.

As we look to the remaining months of the ISAF campaign, we can expect the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other extremists to attempt a higher operational tempo than in previous years to disrupt the political process and prevent the signing of the BSA. They will

seek to increase propaganda, assassinations, and high profile attacks to create a perception of insecurity and weaken coalition cohesion. In response, ISAF will continue to support the ANSF as they continue a high rate of security operations to mitigate these threats.

While insurgent and terrorist threats have proved resilient, ISAF and ANSF operations have kept these groups at bay. Continued pressure will be required to prevent al Qaeda from regenerating degraded operations with the support of groups like the Haqqani Network. Continued pressure will also be required to address the broader extremist network in Afghanistan, which threatens the stability of the nation as well as the broader region. The long-term solution to this challenge remains a capable and sustainable security establishment and responsive institutions of civil governance that together can secure the nation and prevent the re-emergence of al Qaeda safe havens. Continued international support in both of these areas will be essential to GIRoA's long-term capacity to govern and serve as a security partner in the region.

#### **IV. Challenges and Opportunities**

##### **Strategic Partnership with GIRoA**

Despite political challenges, the fundamental partnership between ISAF and the ANSF remains strong. Coalition and Afghan leaders retain a positive day-to-day relationship and continue to work together in pursuit of shared strategic objectives. Afghan government, civil, and military leaders demonstrate a growing appreciation for the coalition's efforts; these leaders are genuine in their gratitude for our shared sacrifice over the last decade. I have also seen our Afghan partners develop a growing sense of ownership and pride in their army and police force. Over the last year, Afghans have begun to realize that they have credible security forces that can protect them. However, the Afghan people still desire continued and broader international support, as evidenced by the Loya Jirga's endorsement of the BSA and widespread popular sentiment among Afghans for a signed BSA.

##### **Narrative**

Uncertainty continues to exist throughout Afghan society and within the ANSF about the U.S.' and the international community's commitment to Afghanistan post-2014. Absent confidence and hope for a brighter future, many Afghans are planning for the worst. Numerous reports cite the depreciation of Afghan currency, plunging real estate prices, capital flight, and

young, well-educated Afghans trying to emigrate. This uncertainty, and a subsequent fear of abandonment, spurs hedging behavior by Afghan power brokers. Uncertainty also spurs hedging by regional actors. These behaviors have a corrosive effect on Afghan confidence and the broader campaign, and they distract attention from issues important to Afghanistan's future, such as good governance and economic development.

The Taliban continue to capitalize on these challenges and leverage the information environment to advance a narrative of coalition abandonment. In fact, the Taliban's failure to achieve their operational intent in 2013 was partially offset by their effectiveness in negatively influencing public perceptions about security and the future. In addition to undermining Afghan confidence and advancing a narrative that they are chasing coalition forces out of Afghanistan, the Taliban ranks continue to gain strength from their belief that all coalition forces will depart Afghanistan at the end of the year.

I believe a signed BSA and NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) will address the Afghan people's concerns and damage the Taliban's confidence. These documents – combined with clarity on the post-2014 mission and associated financial commitments from the Chicago Summit and Tokyo Conference – will significantly enhance Afghan confidence and erode our enemy's will. While the information environment is a challenge today, I believe it can be turned around.

In the meantime, we are working to mitigate the risk that uncertainty poses to the relationship between the ANSF and the coalition. We are communicating our commitment through both actions and words, and are expressing our confidence in the ANSF's ability to secure the election and the Afghan people post-2014. We are also working to ensure they know how proud we are of our relationship – a relationship built on trust and a common vision for a stable, secure, and unified Afghanistan.

#### *Insider Threat*

Although insider attacks against ISAF forces in 2013 declined sharply from 2012, they remain a focus area for our force protection. Thus far, these attacks have not significantly affected the strong relationship between coalition and ANSF personnel, particularly in the field where they face a common enemy every day. ISAF is cautiously optimistic that the mitigation measures applied over the previous year are working. These measures have reduced, but not eliminated, the threat. We remain vigilant to prevent future insider attacks.

### Attrition

A high attrition rate, particularly in the Afghan National Army, continues to pose challenges to force development. The main causes of attrition are assessed as high operational tempo, sustained risk, soldier care/quality of life, and leave issues. Afghan casualties have also increased since the ANSF took the lead for security last June.

While combat losses comprise a relatively small percentage of ANSF attrition numbers, reducing ANSF casualties remains both a top moral and operational priority for ISAF and ANSF leaders. Several factors in addition to enemy action contributed to casualties in the 2013 fighting season, such as shortfalls in medical care and casualty evacuation. We are aggressively addressing these shortfalls in several ways: the introduction of combat lifesaver skills and medical kits so soldiers can give self aid and buddy aid at the point of injury, the use of Mi-17 helicopters for casualty evacuation, and improved Afghan medical capabilities and long-term care. Reducing casualties also depends on the ANSF's warfighting capability, which ranges from a commander's competency to a unit's ability to integrate combined arms. ANSF leaders are working hard to improve these areas.

Although the overall attrition rate is high, it has not impacted combat readiness, as the ANSF remains sustainable in numerical terms due to robust recruitment. However, if the current attrition rate persists, it could have an adverse effect on the long-term quality of the ANSF. Urgent action is therefore being taken to address the root causes of attrition beyond combat casualties, and to develop a culture of accountable leadership in the ANSF. In particular, ANSF senior leadership has established a Joint Attrition Working Group and an Absent Without Leave Prevention Committee to identify and mitigate its causes.

### Af-Pak Military to Military Relationship

Security within Afghanistan and Pakistan remains inter-dependent, and requires a cooperative effort between the two nations. Cooperation is necessary to address the common threat of extremism, mitigate the risk of violence on the Afghan-Pakistani border, and give Afghans and their neighbors confidence in the future. Another challenge involves enemy sanctuary in Pakistan, which is a major factor preventing ISAF's decisive defeat of the Afghan insurgency in the near term. To advance stability, ISAF continues to play a facilitator role in pursuit of a constructive and effective relationship between the Afghan and Pakistani militaries.

In the past year, positive political developments have provided space for the Afghanistan-Pakistan military relationship to grow. These developments include visits between President Karzai and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, their participation in tripartite meetings in London and Ankara, and Pakistan's support to an Afghan-led reconciliation process. As a result, ISAF was able to facilitate trilateral engagements at the senior military level that augmented a growing bilateral relationship at lower levels. However, progress remains fragile. Minor issues – as demonstrated by a border incident in December – can quickly stall gains in the bilateral relationship. However, the absence of publicity and unhelpful rhetoric during the December incident reflects a change to the status quo and signals the potential for continued progress.

### Stewardship of Resources

Stewardship of taxpayer dollars is a priority for USFOR-A, and is critical to keeping the trust and confidence of the American people. Yet, war is an inherently inefficient and challenging endeavor, and despite the dedicated efforts of many, cases exist over the years where American resources were not spent as efficiently as possible. USFOR-A takes seriously our obligation to protect taxpayer dollars, and is working hard to ensure both wise spending and the identification of areas for cost savings or avoidance.

In 2013, USFOR-A developed a five-step process to increase checks and balances and improve the planning, execution, and oversight of resources. This process mandates a continuous and rigorous review of all requirements (e.g., Afghan Security Force Funds, Military Construction, Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund, Commander's Emergency Response Program) based on changes in the mission and operating environment. Requirements are scrutinized and subsequently validated, de-obligated, or re-scoped based on input from relevant stakeholders. In fiscal years 2013 and 2014 (to date), these efforts have resulted in cost savings and avoidance of more than \$5 billion. USFOR-A has also welcomed and incorporated into our processes independent agencies' recommendations for improvement, which have proven most helpful when released in time to effect change.

USFOR-A will continue to scrutinize every dollar spent to ensure spending is necessary to mission success and results in the desired effect. This approach applies equally to post-2014 ANSF funding that was committed at the Chicago Summit.

## **V. Milestones and Major Events**

### **Presidential Election**

ISAF is decisively engaged in supporting the ANSF as they plan for the security of Afghanistan's presidential election on April 5th. The presidential election will serve as a defining moment in the campaign, as it will usher in the nation's first democratic and peaceful transfer of power. ISAF understands that an election process that is inclusive, transparent and credible will be critical to the long-term partnership between Afghanistan, the U.S., and the international community. Successful political transition will also be critical to meet a precondition for continued donor resources, as outlined in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

To ensure a secure environment that will both encourage and facilitate voter participation, ISAF is supporting the Ministry of Interior, which has lead responsibility for election security, and the Ministry of Defense and the National Directorate of Security, which are in support. ISAF assistance involves planning, logistical and operational support requested by, and in coordination with, GIRoA and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). ISAF is also prepared to provide in extremis security support if needed. Throughout the election process, ISAF will remain a neutral player.

To reduce the risk of an election delay, ISAF is currently supporting the movement of election materials throughout the country. While the IEC and ANSF are transporting election materials to 98 percent of election locations (e.g., regional hubs, provincial centers, district centers, and polling centers), the Afghan government has requested limited assistance from ISAF due to security conditions, weather conditions, and the volume of election materials that need to be moved. ISAF assistance includes providing enablers – such as intelligence and air support – to the Afghan forces as they transport materials to 19 locations. ISAF is also directly moving materials to four regional distribution hubs, five provincial centers, and 17 districts. During air and ground movements by ANSF and ISAF forces, election materials have been and will remain under IEC control and custody.

My confidence in the ANSF's ability to secure the election is based on several factors. First, the ANSF have already facilitated a successful, nationwide voter registration process. Their performance during the fighting season and the Loya Jirga also serves as a positive indicator for the election. Second, there will be more forces providing security than during the

2009 election. Then, there were approximately 250,000 coalition and Afghan forces securing the election. In April, there will be approximately 425,000 troops, of which 375,000 will be Afghan. Third, ANSF planning efforts are well ahead of where they were in 2009 and include several rehearsal exercises to prepare for the historic event.

### *Posturing the Force*

As ISAF looks to December, two campaign imperatives guide our actions. First, we are taking steps to reduce risk and ensure a smooth transition to the Resolute Support mission. We are also focused on maintaining simultaneity in the campaign by building ANSF sustainability while providing support to the ANSF as they prepare for the election and the fighting season.

To focus our efforts, ISAF has divided 2014 into three phases with specific outcomes. On March 1st, we completed our first phase. This phase saw us continuing to transition from combat advising to functionally-based advising, and working with the ANSF to disrupt high profile threats. Concurrently, we executed 50 tasks to increase Afghan readiness, such as improving vehicle maintenance and stocking ammunition supplies. These tasks will help the ANSF operate throughout the election and fighting season without taking an operational pause or reaching a point where their operations are disrupted or halted due to lack of logistical support.

In the second phase of 2014, from now to July, we'll complete the transition to functionally-based advising. This will facilitate the arrival of ISAF's final troop rotation in July and will begin what we conceptually view as Phase 0 of Resolute Support. In the third and final phase, from August to December, we'll finish posturing the force to ensure a smooth transition to the post-2014 mission.

ISAF's retrograde and redeployment efforts remain on track or ahead of schedule. U.S. troops in theater number fewer than 34,000 – well below the 100,000 U.S. troops at the height of the surge. By December 31, U.S. forces will be at the post-2014 number decided by President Obama. As forces have redeployed, ISAF has closed, de-scoped, or transferred tactical infrastructure – ranging from large bases to small combat outposts – to the Afghans. Coalition bases and outposts now number less than 90, from a height of more than 850 in 2012. In December, we'll be at our Resolute Support number. In terms of materiel reduction, fewer than 10,000 U.S. vehicles not needed for the post-2014 mission will be returned to the military services. This is down from a high of more than 40,000 vehicles in June 2012. To provide

context, during the summer – and in the middle of the fighting season – we moved 6,000 vehicles.

### Post-2014 Mission

In anticipation of a signed BSA and NATO SOFA, ISAF continues to plan for the Resolute Support train, advise, assist mission. This mission will focus on the four capability gaps at the operational/institutional and strategic levels of the ANSF that will remain at the end of the ISAF mission: 1) Afghan security institution capacity, 2) the aviation enterprise, 3) the intelligence enterprise, and 4) special operations. In accordance with NATO guidance, ISAF is planning on a limited regional approach with 8,000 - 12,000 coalition personnel employed in Kabul and the four corners of Afghanistan. Advisors will address capability gaps at the Afghan security ministries, army corps, and police zones, before eventually transitioning to a Kabul-centric approach focused on the Afghan ministries and institutions. Due to delays in the completion of the BSA, and at the recent direction of NATO, we will begin planning for various contingencies in Afghanistan while still continuing to plan for Resolute Support.

## **VI. What Winning Looks Like**

Despite the remaining challenges in the campaign, we remain focused on winning in Afghanistan – as defined below. Its key components include:

- The transition of security responsibility to a confident, self-reliant and sustainable ANSF capable of protecting the population and securing a legitimate Afghan government
- An operationally ineffective al Qaeda deprived of safe haven from which to plan and conduct operations outside the area
- An acceptable political transition following an election viewed as inclusive, transparent, and credible by the Afghan people and the international community; and Afghan government adherence to the Mutual Accountability Framework
- A constructive Afghanistan-Pakistan military to military relationship

On December 31, we will reach the end of the ISAF combat mission. Until then, USFOR-A and ISAF will be focused on maximizing the time left to advance the campaign. While work remains after 2014 – such as building ANSF sustainability– the components of winning can largely be achieved by the end of the year. I am confident in our ability to effect full security transition in December. I am certain that counter-terrorism operations by American

and Afghan forces will continue to deprive al Qaeda of safe haven. I am optimistic that political transition will successfully take place. And I believe we are on track to develop a constructive military to military relationship between the Afghanistan and Pakistan militaries that can be a foundational element in a broader partnership between the two countries. In the remaining months of the campaign, American and coalition personnel will work to achieve these goals.

When the men and women of USFOR-A and ISAF depart Afghanistan this December, they will depart knowing their hard work and sacrifice – and that of those who came before them – have not only built a capable Afghan security force, have not only given the Afghan people the opportunity to determine a future of their own, but have also enhanced our collective security and kept the American people safe. That is what winning will look like.