



FEBRUARY 11, 2015

SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

U.S. SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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Former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan

Ryan C. Crocker [\[PDF unavailable\]](#)
Dean and Executive Professor, the George Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University and Former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan

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Former Commander, United States Special Operations Command

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Former Director, United States National Counterterrorism Center

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**Opening Statement of Senator John McCain
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SH-216
Hart Senate Office Building
9:30 am, Wednesday, February 11, 2015**

To receive testimony on Afghanistan.

The Committee meets today to receive testimony on Afghanistan and U.S. efforts to sustain the gains that have been made over the past 13 years. I want to thank each of our witnesses for appearing before us today:

- Ambassador James Cunningham, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan until he retired from the Foreign Service last December;
- Ambassador Ryan Crocker, former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan, and Iraq, and many other countries;
- Admiral Eric Olson, former Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command; and
- Mr. Michael Leiter, former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

All of our witnesses are national security professionals who have served loyally and with the highest distinction in both Democratic and Republican administrations, including the current administration. All of them also have years of experience working on, and often serving in, Afghanistan.

More than 2,200 Americans have given their lives in Afghanistan and thousands more have been wounded. And the progress they have enabled is extraordinary:

- The number of Afghan children in school has increased ten-fold since 2001—from less than 1 million to almost 10 million today. Forty percent of these students are girls, and 40 percent of Afghan teachers today are women.
- Life expectancy has increased by over 20 years in less than a generation – an achievement unheard of in modern history.
- Less than 10 percent of the Afghan population supports the Taliban, while over 70 percent express confidence in the Afghan military.

These gains, and others, are significant. But as General Mattis testified last month, “the gains achieved at great cost against our enemy in Afghanistan are reversible.”

Afghan National Security Forces are now leading the fight and responsible for safeguarding their country. They have made real progress as a fighting force. The Afghan Army and Police maintained their professionalism during the Presidential runoff last summer, upholding security and allowing the democratic process to play out without armed intervention. And while the casualty rates of our Afghan partners in their fight against the Taliban are high, there is no doubt—none whatsoever—about the Afghan willingness to fight, and die, for their country.

But like the Iraqi Security Forces at the end of 2011, the Afghan National Security Forces are still developing some key enabling capabilities. The shortfalls sound eerily familiar – intelligence, logistics, air lift, close air support, special forces, and institutional development. Our commanders on the ground in Afghanistan are developing plans to address these shortfalls, but they need the time, resources, and authorities to help our Afghan partners to develop these nascent capabilities.

As I've said before, wars do not end just because politicians say so. Indeed, in Afghanistan, we see an initial emergence of ISIS as well as the residual capabilities of Al Qaeda wrapped in the support network of the Taliban insurgency.

The world walked away from Afghanistan once, and it descended into chaotic violence that became the platform for the worst terrorist attack in history against our homeland. The threats are real, and the stakes are high. We cannot let Afghanistan become a sanctuary for Al Qaeda or ISIS. Failure in this manner would destabilize the region, especially by undermining the security of a nuclear-armed Pakistan. Worse still, failure would condemn millions of Afghans, especially women and girls, to live again under the tyranny of violent radicals.

We cannot turn the clock back in Iraq, but we can, and we must, apply the tragic lessons that we learned in Iraq to Afghanistan. To preserve the progress enabled by our troops and the Afghan people, President Obama must replace his plan for unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan with a conditions-based drawdown and a clear commitment to maintain a limited residual force. If the President repeats his mistakes from Iraq, we can expect a similar disaster in Afghanistan: growing instability, terrorist safe havens, horrific human rights abuses, the rapid dissolution of the hard-won gains that our men and women in uniform purchased at such high cost, and ultimately, direct threats to the United States.

I want to thank the witnesses again for testifying today. I look forward to hearing the views they have developed based on their years of experience in the region.

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SH-216
Hart Senate Office Building
Wednesday, February 11, 2015**

To receive testimony on the situation in Afghanistan.
(As Prepared for Delivery)

Ambassador Crocker, Ambassador Cunningham, Admiral Olson, and Mr. Leiter, welcome. This is an impressive panel of individuals who have served the country with distinction, and we thank you for that service.

And thank you, Chairman McCain, for holding this hearing on the situation in Afghanistan, ahead of tomorrow morning's hearing with General Campbell. The United States has devoted significant resources to the Afghanistan campaign, both in the sacrifices of our military and civilian officials and in America's financial resources. So it is important that we get this mission right, and this hearing is useful for advancing that goal.

Afghanistan has successfully come through national presidential elections and formed a new national unity government with the leadership of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah. The hard-won gains of the past decade are significant, but remain fragile. According to recent public opinion surveys, a significant majority of the Afghan people feel their country is moving in the right direction. Compared to a decade ago, millions more students are in school, about 40 percent of which are girls; dozens of new universities are open; health clinics are available to much of the population and life expectancy is up; and women are participating in Afghanistan's civic and political life.

Afghan security forces have transitioned to having responsibility for securing Afghanistan, even as U.S. and coalition forces have drawn down and shifted to the more limited train-advise-and-assist mission and conducting counterterrorism operations. Success in Afghanistan will depend on a number of factors, including our partnership with the new government in Kabul; the willingness of that government to improve governance and fight corruption; the development of leadership within the Afghan security forces; and the political support of the American people for the mission in Afghanistan. I hope our witnesses will give us their recommendations for ensuring the success of that mission.

The President's fiscal year 2016 budget request includes funding for training Afghan forces and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. Yet, it remains to be seen whether conditions on the ground in Afghanistan will improve sufficiently by the end of 2016 to warrant the pace of further reductions under the current plan. During his nomination hearing, General Campbell assured this committee that, if confirmed, he would provide his best military advice on the requirements of the mission in Afghanistan. To the extent our witnesses are in a position to comment on the current conditions in Afghanistan or the mission requirements going forward, we would welcome your views.

Again, I thank the witnesses and look forward to your testimony.

Stenographic Transcript

Before the

COMMITTEE ON

ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

To Receive Testimony on the Situation in Afghanistan

Wednesday, February 11, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Wednesday, February 11, 2015

U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:33 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Sessions, Ayotte, Cotton, Ernst, Tillis, Graham, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, and King.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN McCAIN, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM ARIZONA

3 Chairman McCain: Well, good morning. The committee
4 meets today to receive testimony on Afghanistan and U.S.
5 efforts to sustain the gains that have been made over the
6 past 13 years.

7 I want to thank each of our witnesses for appearing
8 before us today: Ambassador James Cunningham, who was the
9 U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan until he retired from the
10 Foreign Service last December; Ambassador Ryan Crocker,
11 former United States Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq and
12 many other countries; Admiral Eric Olson, former Commander,
13 U.S. Special Operations Command; and Mr. Michael Leiter,
14 former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

15 All our professionals are -- all our witnesses are
16 national security professionals who have served loyally and
17 with the highest distinction in both Democratic and
18 Republican administrations, including the current
19 administration. All of them also have years of experience
20 working on, and often serving in, Afghanistan.

21 And, on a personal note, could I just say that I --
22 I've had the great pleasure of knowing these four witnesses
23 over the -- many years. And I don't know of four more
24 honorable witnesses who have ever appeared before this
25 committee in the years that I've on it. So, I consider this

1 committee honored by your presence today on an issue of
2 crucial importance to our country, the future, and the men
3 and women who are serving in the military.

4 More than 2,200 Americans have given their lives in
5 Afghanistan, and thousands more have been wounded. And the
6 progress they have enabled is extraordinary. The number of
7 Afghan children in school has increased tenfold since 2001,
8 from less than 1 million to almost 10 million today. Forty
9 percent of these students are girls, and 40 percent of
10 Afghan teachers today are women. Life expectancy has
11 increased by over 20 years in less than a generation, an
12 achievement unheard of in modern history. Less than 10
13 percent of the Afghan population supports the Taliban, while
14 over 70 percent express the confidence -- express confidence
15 in the Afghan military.

16 These gains and others are significant. But, as
17 General Mattis testified last month, the gains achieved at
18 great cost against our enemy in Afghanistan are reversible.
19 Afghan National Security Forces are now leading the fight
20 and responsible for safeguarding their country. They've
21 made real progress as a fighting force. The Afghan army and
22 police maintained their professionalism during the
23 presidential runoff last summer, upholding security and
24 allowing the democratic process to play out without armed
25 intervention. And, while the casualty rates of our Afghan

1 partners in their fight against the Taliban are high, there
2 is no doubt -- none whatsoever -- about the Afghan
3 willingness to fight and die for their country.

4 But, like the Iraqi Security Forces at the end of 2011,
5 the Afghan National Security Forces are still developing
6 some key enabling capabilities, the shortfalls sounding
7 eerily familiar: intelligence, logistics, airlift, close-
8 air support, special forces, and institutional development.
9 Our commanders on the ground in Afghanistan are developing
10 plans to address these shortfalls, but they need the time,
11 resources, and authorities to help our Afghan partners to
12 develop these nascent capabilities.

13 As I've said before, wars do not end just because
14 politicians say so. Indeed, in Afghanistan we've seen an
15 initial emergence of ISIS as well as the residual
16 capabilities of al-Qaeda wrapped in their support network of
17 the Taliban insurgency.

18 The world walked away from Afghanistan once, and it
19 descended into chaotic violence that became the platform for
20 the worst terrorist attack in history against our homeland.
21 The threats are real and the stakes are high. We can't let
22 Afghanistan become a sanctuary for al-Qaeda or ISIS.
23 Failure in this manner would destabilize the region,
24 especially by undermining the security of a nuclear-armed
25 Pakistan. Worst still, failure would condemn millions of

1 Afghans, especially women and girls, to live again under the
2 tyranny of violent radicals.

3 We can't turn the clock back in Iraq, but we can, and
4 we must, apply the tragic lesson that we learned in Iraq to
5 Afghanistan. To preserve the progress enabled by our troops
6 and the Afghan people, President Obama must replace his plan
7 for unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan with a
8 conditions-based drawdown and a clear commitment to maintain
9 a limited residual force. If the President repeats his
10 mistakes from Iraq, we can expect a similar disaster in
11 Afghanistan: growing instability, terrorist safe havens,
12 horrific human rights abuses, the rapid dissolution of the
13 hard-won gains that our men and women in uniform purchased
14 at such high cost, and, ultimately, direct threats to the
15 United States.

16 I want to thank the witnesses again for testifying
17 today, and we look forward to hearing the views that they
18 have developed based on their many years of experience in
19 the region.

20 Senator Reed.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE
2 ISLAND

3 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4 Ambassador Crocker, Ambassador Cunningham, Admiral
5 Olson, and Mr. Leiter, welcome. This is an impressive
6 panel, as the Chairman has pointed out, and I want to thank
7 you for serving your country with distinction in so many
8 different ways, and also thank you for your -- the advice
9 and the support that you have personally extended to me over
10 many, many years. Thank you, gentlemen, for what you've
11 done.

12 And thank you, Chairman McCain, for holding this
13 hearing on the situation in Afghanistan ahead of tomorrow
14 morning's hearing with General Campbell, our Commander in
15 Afghanistan. The United States has devoted significant
16 resources to the Afghanistan campaign, both in the
17 sacrifices of our military and civilian officials and in
18 America's financial resources. So, it is important that we
19 get this mission right. And this hearing is useful for
20 advancing that goal.

21 Afghanistan has successfully come through national
22 presidential elections and formed a new National Unity
23 Government with the leadership of President Ghani and Dr.
24 Abdullah. The hard-won gains of the past decade are
25 significant, but remain fragile. According to recent public

1 opinion surveys, a significant majority of the Afghan people
2 feel their country is moving in the right direction.
3 Compared to a decade ago, millions more students are in
4 school, about 40 percent of which are girls. Dozens of new
5 universities are open. Health clinics are available to much
6 of the population. And life expectancy is up. And women
7 are participating in Afghanistan's political and civic life.

8 Afghan Security Forces have transitioned to having
9 responsibility for securing Afghanistan even as U.S. and
10 coalition forces have drawn down and shifted to the more
11 limited train, advise, and assist mission and conducting
12 counterterrorism operations.

13 Success in Afghanistan will depend on a number of
14 factors, including our partnership with the new government
15 in Kabul, the willingness of that government to improve
16 governance and fight corruption, the development of
17 leadership within the Afghan Security Forces, and the
18 political support of the American people for the mission in
19 Afghanistan.

20 I hope our witnesses will give us their recommendations
21 for ensuring the success of that mission.

22 The President's fiscal year 2016 budget request
23 includes funding for training Afghan forces and
24 counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, yet it remains
25 to be seen whether conditions on the ground in Afghanistan

1 will improve sufficiently by the end of 2016 to warrant the
2 pace of further reductions under the current plan.

3 During his nomination hearing, General Campbell assured
4 this committee that, if confirmed, he would provide his best
5 military advice on the requirements of the mission in
6 Afghanistan. To the extent our witnesses are in a position
7 to comment on the current conditions in Afghanistan or the
8 mission requirements going forward, we would welcome your
9 views.

10 Again, let me thank you and thank the Chairman.

11 Chairman McCain: Mr. Leiter.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL E. LEITER, FORMER DIRECTOR,
2 UNITED STATES NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER

3 Mr. Leiter: Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,
4 members of the committee -- first of all, I would like to
5 thank the committee for having us up here. And, as we face
6 so many crises in the world, that this committee is
7 maintaining the focus on Afghanistan, not thinking it is
8 done, is greatly appreciated by those of us who have spent
9 more than a decade focused on issues of Afghanistan and
10 Pakistan.

11 I'm going to speak, Mr. Chairman, from the perspective
12 of terrorism and the homeland threat of Afghanistan and
13 Pakistan. And I do think that what we've done over the past
14 13 years is a relative bright spot in the world of
15 terrorism, especially as compared to issues in Iraq and
16 Syria. And the way we accomplished that was from a cohesive
17 effort between the U.S. and our allies on the diplomatic,
18 intelligence, and military fronts to bring the fight to al-
19 Qaeda in Afghanistan and the Pakistan border areas. And
20 with that, I think we have seen al-Qaeda at its absolute
21 weakest since 9/11 in the region. With the death of bin
22 Laden in 2011, Ayman al-Zawahiri took over the core of al-
23 Qaeda. But, since that time, the U.S. military and
24 intelligence community has continued to bring the fight to
25 al-Qaeda and, again, although it still aspires to attack the

1 West, is at its weakest position it has been in the past 13
2 years.

3 That being said, I think the drawdown of U.S. and
4 allied forces, although not currently affecting al-Qaeda in
5 a positive way, does pose a real pivot point, where there
6 could be real danger. So, what you're obviously going to
7 ask is, Will there be an al-Qaeda renaissance with a further
8 drawdown of U.S. troops? And my short answer to this
9 question, that, if done properly -- and I stress "properly"
10 -- I believe that the U.S. can withdraw more, but it has to
11 be done based on conditions on the ground. And in my view,
12 we need to maintain sufficient military and intelligence
13 presence, based on those circumstances on the ground, to
14 support intelligence and special forces operations in the
15 region to continue to target groups that are organizing
16 transnational plots and simultaneously to continue to fund,
17 train, and support, with logistics and other specialized
18 support, to the Afghan National Security Forces. If we do
19 that, we can maintain the pressure on these groups and not
20 allow them to actually spring back to where they once were.

21 But, this is obviously not just about al-Qaeda. A
22 lesser U.S. presence will, of course, be greeted with
23 significant satisfaction, if not joy, by elements like the
24 Haqqani Network and the Taliban. Historically, the Haqqani
25 Network has not focused on attacking the far enemy, they

1 have focused on their interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
2 And I don't believe they will automatically revert to a
3 transnational threat with U.S. withdrawal. But, the
4 continued strength of the Haqqani Network and the Taliban
5 certainly provide a potentially fertile ground for al-Qaeda
6 to have some rejuvenation. Hence, my belief that we need to
7 maintain sufficient resources there to keep pressure on
8 those elements.

9 I think there is some possibility of violent jihadists
10 continuing to be attracted to the region, but, although this
11 isn't much of a silver lining broadly for U.S. national
12 security, frankly Syria and Yemen have become far greater
13 magnets for jihadists around the world, and especially from
14 the West, than had Afghanistan and Pakistan. And al-Qaeda
15 in Pakistan and Afghanistan have attempted to become and
16 remain central, most recently with a 2014 magazine known as
17 "Resurgence," which was focused on radicalizing Westerners
18 and attracted them to Zawahiri and al-Qaeda and the region.
19 But, frankly, it got very, very little attention in jihadi
20 circles and was largely drowned out, again, by the
21 propaganda, which is far more effective, emanating from Iraq
22 and Syria.

23 Now, those are some potentially positive trends, but
24 there is a second generation of violent jihadists in the
25 region which is waiting for a U.S. withdrawal to release

1 some of the pressure that they have felt over the past
2 several years. And, although Zawahiri, I think, will remain
3 largely incapable of capturing the Western imagination,
4 there are sufficient numbers of jihadis globally that will
5 still be attracted by his message.

6 So, in my view, we can't simply declare victory and
7 move on. As I've said, it is a very fertile ground for
8 transnational terrorism, and, in my view, we will need
9 continued weeding. And that weeding has to be intelligence,
10 special operations, and support to our partners in the
11 region. And that will be increasingly difficult with a
12 reduced footprint, because our footprint in Afghanistan has
13 been critical, of course, not just to fighting these groups
14 in Afghanistan, but also cross-border into Pakistan.

15 So, what is currently missing for new recruits for al-
16 Qaeda in the region are new recruits, real operational
17 sophistication, and room to train and plan in a manner that
18 bred success in previous years. Now, these aspects are not
19 in short supply because of a lack of attraction in the
20 region to the ideology. They are in a lack of supply
21 because of our U.S. counterterrorism operations and, to a
22 lesser extent, the partnerships that we've forged with
23 Pakistan and others.

24 So, in my view, a reduced U.S. presence in the region
25 poses a real risk that the success we have seen will become

1 harder to sustain. And, as a counterterrorism homeland guy,
2 I can tell you that only playing defense in this world will
3 not lead to continued success. We cannot stop all the shots
4 if we are only in a defensive posture in this region.

5 So, with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for
6 inviting me to testify, and I look forward to continuing to
7 working with the committee and others on this very important
8 issue.

9 [The prepared statement of Mr. Leiter follows:]

10 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much.

2 Admiral Olson.

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1 STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL ERIC T. OLSON, USN (RET.), FORMER
2 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

3 Admiral Olson: Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, members
4 of the committee, thank you very much for your expressed
5 interest in the future of Afghanistan, and for convening
6 this hearing.

7 And I'm proud to be here alongside such distinguished
8 colleagues from the world of intelligence and statecraft.

9 I recognize that I'm here primarily as a former
10 military planner and practitioner of the missions that are
11 of special interest in Afghanistan as we look forward. They
12 are commonly known as train, advise, and assist, and
13 counterterrorism. I should probably acknowledge that these
14 are the two mission areas in which Afghan National Security
15 Forces need comprehensive and enduring support.

16 I didn't submit a written statement, so I'll speak
17 briefly about each of these in some detail.

18 For the train, advise, and assist mission, I'll
19 emphasize that it is far more demanding than it may first
20 appear. The forces to be trained must be carefully
21 selected, vetted, matched to the appropriate skill areas,
22 and prepared to receive the training. In many cases, this
23 requires such basic programs as reading and physical
24 readiness. And the scope and pace of the training must be
25 tailored to each of the trainees. The concept of "training

1 the trainers" is certainly appropriate, and, if given enough
2 time, it will raise Afghan National Security Force
3 instructors to a level where they can conduct much more
4 self-training. But, this must be carefully evaluated, skill
5 by skill, if we are to hand over responsibility with full
6 confidence that it will be sustained.

7 Current assessments are that the Afghans are ready to
8 teach themselves certain individual and unit-level skills,
9 but it will be some time, perhaps some years, before all
10 necessary soldier tasks and higher-level disciplines can be
11 fully handed over.

12 And training soldiers, policemen, and intelligence
13 specialists does not, by itself, create a meaningful
14 operational capability. Without corresponding quality in
15 the higher leadership skills, logistics, combat,
16 administrative, and communications support, the tactical
17 units are placed at higher risk of increased casualties and
18 failed missions.

19 And, in any case, the train-and-equip mission is never
20 "once and done." The high attrition and casualty rate in
21 the Afghan National Security Forces means that, I believe,
22 at least 30,000 new troopers enter the force each year, so
23 it requires not just sufficient capability and capacity to
24 train, but an acknowledgment that the task is never
25 complete.

1 Before I go on, though, I do want to pay tribute to the
2 Afghan soldiers. The country has been at war for more than
3 30 years. They live in an atmosphere of poverty,
4 corruption, and dissension. In a tribe- and family-based
5 culture, they are far away from their roots for weeks or
6 months on end. Some of them are undermotivated,
7 undisciplined, and even violently traitorous, but many --
8 most -- are fierce and courageous, with an admirable
9 patriotism and enviable fighting spirit, and they are
10 suffering casualties at the high rate of close to 90 killed
11 in action per week.

12 As for the counterterrorism mission, it is a most
13 complex undertaking that requires a sophisticated
14 choreography of intelligence collection, information
15 analysis, policy development, operational capability and
16 flexibility, specialized equipment, and tactical
17 proficiency. The counterterrorism forces must be especially
18 adept at offset insertions, long-range foot patrols,
19 achieving surprise on the objective, instinctive target
20 discrimination, adjustment to countersurprise, site and
21 document exploitation, treatment and evacuation of
22 casualties, monitoring the operation using remote and
23 overhead platforms and assets, and returning to base through
24 a hostile and now energized environment. So, the Afghan
25 counterterrorist forces must be extremely good, well led,

1 properly equipped, and thoroughly trained. And I'm told
2 that certain elements of the Afghan National Security Forces
3 are up to an acceptable tactical standard, but, absent
4 continued support and more experience in the advanced
5 tactics and techniques of this dangerous and demanding
6 mission, the overall counterterrorism capability in
7 Afghanistan will be quite limited. And if the enemies, such
8 as the Haqqani Network, still have safe havens across
9 borders that allow them to enter and leave Afghanistan at
10 will, the operational challenge is enormously more
11 difficult.

12 Before I close, I'd like to share a couple of my
13 fundamental beliefs as they relate to Afghanistan:

14 First, surprise is an essential element in any
15 competition or conflict. Camouflage and concealment,
16 deceit, deception, and even denial, protection of
17 exploitable information are historically very basic to
18 military operational planning. The Russians call it
19 "maskirovka," and they used it very effectively in seizing
20 Crimea and occupying eastern Ukraine. It's a military
21 reality that exposure of units, locations, intent,
22 timelines, and force size and capabilities puts people and
23 missions at risk. And, in this regard, I applaud General
24 Campbell's recent decision to classify previously
25 unclassified information about the status and posture of

1 U.S. and Afghan forces in Afghanistan.

2 And, second, I am one who believes in developing as
3 many military options as possible, and keeping them open as
4 long as feasible, so the plans and operations can adjust to
5 evolving situations and conditions. The crafting of
6 doctrine, templates, and timelines is useful, but mostly for
7 the purpose of carefully thinking through a problem. They
8 rarely apply directly to any specific circumstances, but I
9 think that we still tend to fall too much in love with them
10 as expedient solutions. Actual war is too dynamic to
11 accommodate fixed models. So, I would urge strategic and
12 operational flexibility as we move forward in Afghanistan.

13 And I'll conclude by acknowledging that other emerging
14 crises may require additional U.S. troops, so I'm not
15 advocating a large and open-ended commitment to Afghanistan.
16 I simply believe that a total drawdown on a pre-stated
17 timeline is worth reconsidering so that we can reduce the
18 odds of losing the significant progress that has been
19 achieved at such cost.

20 With that, I'll pass the microphone to my colleague on
21 my right and look forward to your comments and questions.

22 [The prepared statement of Admiral Olson follows:]

23 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you, Admiral.
2 Ambassador Crocker.
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1 STATEMENT OF HON. RYAN C. CROCKER, DEAN AND EXECUTIVE
2 PROFESSOR, THE GEORGE BUSH SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC
3 SERVICE, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY; AND FORMER UNITED STATES
4 AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

5 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator
6 Reed, Senators. Thank you for convening this important
7 hearing on Afghanistan and its future. To a marked degree,
8 that future touches on the future of U.S. national security
9 interests and goals.

10 I'm going to start by looking back. I spent almost 40
11 years in the Foreign Service, almost all of it in the
12 greater Middle East. During those 40 years, I learned maybe
13 two things -- sort of, one thing every couple of decades:

14 First thing I learned is: Be careful of what you get
15 into. Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan. It's an away game.
16 We're playing on somebody else's field and by somebody
17 else's ground rules. We'd better understand what they are
18 and be prepared for the advantages that do fall to the home
19 team.

20 The second thing I learned was: Be at least as careful
21 over what you propose to get out of. The consequences of
22 disengagement can be as great or greater than the
23 consequences of engagement, intervention in the first place.
24 I saw this in Lebanon, back in the '80s. I am afraid we're
25 seeing it now in Iraq. I certainly don't want us to see it

1 in Afghanistan.

2 Actions have consequences. We all know this. And I'd
3 like to just spend a minute on what you alluded to, Mr.
4 Chairman, in your opening statement: the Soviet experience
5 in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and, more particularly, what
6 came after their withdrawal in 1989. We withdrew, too. We
7 weren't there militarily, but we were certainly there in
8 strong support of the Mujahideen in their fight against the
9 Soviets. We were there as a major ally of Pakistan, where
10 we staged, with their cooperation, most of our support for
11 the Mujahideen. But, once the Soviets were gone, so were
12 we. It didn't matter that we could see the civil war
13 coming, as the seven dominant Mujahideen factions looked
14 around and realized, well, they had gotten the Soviets out,
15 now it's a time for the run for the roses, "Who's going to
16 control Kabul?" And in the space of just a few years, the
17 Mujahideen factions did more damage to Afghanistan, took
18 more Afghan lives, than the Soviets and our allies ever did.
19 But, more fundamentally for U.S. security, that vicious
20 civil war opened the way for Taliban to take over the
21 country, which they did, of course, as we all remember, in
22 the mid-1990s.

23 Pakistan supported the Taliban. I was Ambassador to
24 Pakistan, and I heard it over and over and over for my 3
25 years there, "Well, you're back after 9/11. It's nice to

1 have you. We'll get what we can, but we're going to hedge
2 our bets, because we know how you operate. You'll be here
3 for a while, and then you'll leave. We live here. So,
4 we're going to look to our long-term needs, our own vital
5 interests. And, where they coincide with your short-term
6 interests, that'll be great. Where they diverge, we'll
7 follow our own way, because we've learned that what you lack
8 is strategic patience."

9 And so, I'm afraid we do, Mr. Chairman. I use it in a
10 different sense than the recent national security strategy
11 does. What our adversaries have learned to count on with
12 U.S. engagements in the Middle East, is that it won't be for
13 all that long. Apply some pain, extract a cost, and we'll
14 go home. Our allies have come to fear it, whether in
15 Lebanon, in Iraq, or Afghanistan.

16 So, moving very briefly to the present, my two
17 colleagues to my left, geographically speaking, have spoken
18 to that. And Ambassador Cunningham, who served a remarkable
19 3 and a half years in Afghanistan, will address it from a
20 political and diplomatic perspective.

21 It is a long game, a long war. We have to understand
22 that wars don't end when we withdraw our troops. That is
23 what our adversaries are waiting for. Admiral Olson, Mr.
24 Leiter, have both referred to that in different ways. Al-
25 Qaeda is at a low point, but they are not defeated, just as

1 al-Qaeda in Iraq was not defeated at the time I was there,
2 2007 to 2009. Badly degraded, but not defeated. And now
3 they're back. You know, version 4.0, with the Islamic
4 state. The Islamic state seems to be in Afghanistan. We
5 all saw yesterday's reports of the killing of a former
6 Guantanamo detainee, who, because of the splits within the
7 Taliban, has thrown -- had thrown his lot in with the
8 Islamic state. I'm glad we got him. I hope we continue to
9 get them. And I hope that we maintain the requisite force
10 levels to ensure that we are supporting the Afghan military
11 and police in their development efforts, that we are
12 supporting the Afghan state as it seeks to assert a credible
13 and more effective level of governance and tackle, as you
14 alluded to, Senator Reed, in your remarks, problems of
15 endemic corruption. All of these can lead to state failure.
16 What they need is time, and they need our support.

17 And again, to give this perspective, in the roughly 100
18 years of the existence of the modern Afghan state, from the
19 ascent of Amanullah Khan in 1919, that state has always
20 required outside support -- not necessarily boots on the
21 ground, but it has required train-and-assist for its
22 military, it has required economic support. This is, again,
23 a long game and a long war.

24 Our support and our leadership, going forward, are
25 vital. We cannot turn our backs on what happens in

1 Afghanistan. We paid the price for this before. We should
2 not do so again. This is America's national security.

3 It is also America's values, something I feel very
4 deeply about. My colleagues have alluded to the enormous
5 progress that young Afghans have made. Both you and Senator
6 Reed have alluded to the extraordinary increase in Afghan
7 students in school. I have seen the progress Afghan women
8 have made. A precipitate U.S. departure, military and
9 political, could put all of those gains and all of those
10 lives at risk. That is not the set of values that this
11 country stands for.

12 So, in addition to the fundamental issues of national
13 security, Mr. Chairman, we have issues that touch on who we
14 are as a people. I hope we will take the right decisions on
15 force levels, going forward, based on conditions, not on
16 calendars, that will ensure we meet all of these American
17 goals.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Crocker follows:]

20 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much, Ambassador.
2 Ambassador Cunningham.
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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES B. CUNNINGHAM, FORMER UNITED
2 STATES AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

3 Ambassador Cunningham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman,
4 Senator Reed, Senators.

5 Let me start by just saying how much I appreciate the
6 invitation to meet with you today, how much I appreciate the
7 many members of this committee who have come to see us in
8 Afghanistan; and, for those you who haven't, please do.

9 Chairman McCain: Did you always appreciate it,
10 Ambassador?

11 Ambassador Cunningham: I always did.

12 [Laughter.]

13 Ambassador Cunningham: Always. Even when there were
14 some testy questions.

15 [Laughter.]

16 Ambassador Cunningham: The United States has led the
17 international community and our Afghan partners in
18 implementing a strategy that puts the responsibility for
19 securing the Afghan people where it properly belongs, with
20 the Afghan government. The challenge now is to afford the
21 Afghan people and their new government the time and space to
22 cement the progress that's been made in preparing the Afghan
23 National Security Forces so that they can continue to
24 protect the country from the Taliban and violent Islamist
25 extremism.

1 It's that violent extremism embodied in a network of
2 groups operating in both Afghanistan and Pakistan which
3 threatens both countries and, ultimately, the United States
4 and our partners. That threat, first and foremost, to
5 America is why we are there: to protect Americans. An
6 increasingly stable and secure Afghanistan is the best way
7 to do that.

8 We've made a tremendous investment in preventing the
9 international terrorist threat from reconstituting itself in
10 South Asia and in degrading al-Qaeda. Afghans now have a
11 historic opportunity to continue, with international
12 support, to build a better future, to contribute to
13 stability and progress in their region, to combat the
14 Taliban, and to seek peace for their country. With the
15 agreement on the Government of National Unity, which the
16 United States played a major role in forging in the
17 Bilateral Security Agreement, which I was privileged to
18 sign, Afghanistan now has a chance to open a new chapter in
19 its history. It will be manifestly in our interest if it is
20 able to do so.

21 It was not at all preordained that we and the Afghans
22 would reach this point. And no one can guarantee the
23 outcome over the next several years. The performance of the
24 Afghans themselves, and particularly the Afghan political
25 class, will be critical and essential if Afghanistan is to

1 earn the continued support which is on offer from the
2 international community. But, there are certainly realistic
3 prospects for continued progress. This will also require
4 the sustained support of this committee, the Congress, and
5 the American people, whose commitment has already been
6 extraordinary.

7 I am concerned when I hear suggestions that we have
8 lost in Afghanistan or that our continued support is
9 unnecessary, too expensive, or futile. Continued engagement
10 is necessary in order to protect the investment and the
11 significant gains we have already made and for Afghanistan
12 to play its role in contributing to the development of a
13 sustained and effective counterterrorism strategy, which
14 must be global, multifaceted, multinational, and,
15 unfortunately, as others have noted, long term.

16 This critical time in Afghanistan's history will
17 determine whether it becomes a positive element in defeating
18 extremism or a negative and dangerous one. With Islamist
19 extremism now morphing and moving across borders, it seems
20 clear what the future in Afghanistan will be if we do not
21 make the effort. And yes, it is expense, and the -- but,
22 the challenge is historic. And we have many partners in
23 sharing the burden, including new Afghan leadership. Rather
24 uniquely, we also have a common understanding with our
25 partners and with most Afghans about what is required.

1 Continued U.S. commitment is an insurance policy at much
2 lower cost against the harm that might ultimately come from
3 an Afghanistan once again open to hostile actors.

4 From our long conversations, especially over the past
5 year, I believe President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah,
6 and many Afghans understand the unique opportunity which
7 exists for their country, and they understand that this will
8 not come again if they get it wrong. Afghans are undergoing
9 unprecedented security, political, and economic transitions
10 that would sorely stress any country, let alone one with
11 Afghanistan's difficulties and struggling institutions. The
12 elections and the ensuing long and difficult political
13 debate created massive uncertainty and the drift which is
14 still felt today.

15 But, Afghanistan is not a failed state. Its people are
16 resilient and proud and desirous of protecting what they
17 have achieved. Afghanistan democracy is imperfect, but last
18 year millions of people cast valid ballots twice, at
19 personal risk. The Afghan Security Forces have been tested,
20 they fight and will only get better, as long as they
21 continue to receive the support they need. In my view,
22 under today's circumstances, the goals of ensuring ANSF
23 capability, maintaining an effective counterterrorism
24 effort, and of bolstering Afghan confidence in this period
25 of massive transition are more likely to be achieved by a

1 longer presence of the resolute support mission and a longer
2 regional presence of U.S. and partner forces than is
3 currently planned.

4 I hope Americans will have the foresight to view
5 Afghanistan in the context of the broader struggle against
6 violent extremism. As some of you know, I was the acting
7 U.S. Representative to the United Nations on September 11.
8 I told my staff, the next day, that history had changed and
9 would demand of us a generational struggle against
10 ideological international terrorism. I still believe that
11 to be the case. And, as we are seeing, we and our partners
12 must learn to deal with the threat on multiple fronts
13 simultaneously, with multiple instruments.

14 In Afghanistan, we have entered a new phase of the
15 conflict against terror. We have a new government, an
16 Islamic partner eager to provide for its own security and
17 committed to working with us. It would be regrettable and
18 very risky not to maximize the prospects for the success of
19 that partnership when we, the Afghans, and the international
20 community have sacrificed so much and worked so hard to
21 counter the negative forces which will continue to challenge
22 all of us.

23 Thank you for your time.

24 [The prepared statement of Ambassador Cunningham
25 follows:]

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[COMMITTEE INSERT]

1 Chairman McCain: Well, I thank you all for the
2 important statements.

3 Could each of you give your views on the potential
4 consequences of the announced calendar-based plan, which is
5 to reduce to 5,500 troops before the end of 2015, and to a,
6 quote, "normal embassy presence" in Kabul at the end of
7 2016?

8 Ambassador Cunningham?

9 Ambassador Cunningham: As I said in my statement,
10 Senator, I think that, under the circumstances, that
11 timeline is probably too short and the rate of withdrawal is
12 too steep. What those dates really mean is that, in order
13 to withdraw forces, you need to begin well before the time
14 that's indicated for the endpoint, which detracts from the
15 missions that are being undertaken, whether it's train,
16 advise, and assist, or counterterrorism. I know that my
17 colleagues in the administration are aware of this. And, as
18 Secretary-designate Carter said the other day, there is a
19 plan, but it's a plan that can be reviewed as circumstances
20 change. And I think it should be reviewed.

21 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

22 Ambassador Crocker.

23 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 I have believed, whether in Iraq or in Afghanistan,
25 that our force levels and drawdowns, or plus-ups, have to be

1 conditions-based, not based on a timeline. I clearly
2 remember, in testimony with General Petraeus in 2007 before
3 this committee, among others -- many others -- trying to
4 make that point, that conditions are what count out there,
5 not calendars.

6 I would be further concerned, Mr. Chairman, that, as I
7 tried to suggest in my opening statement, that, by fixing a
8 date certain to draw down to a certain number, and then to
9 drawn down to, basically, an office in an embassy, simply
10 tells our adversaries how long they have to hold out before
11 they have the field to themselves. You know, I'm a
12 diplomat, not a warrior, but that never seemed to me
13 particularly good strategy.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

16 Ambassador -- Admiral?

17 Admiral Olson: Mr. Chairman, I agree that it does our
18 force a disservice to announce too precisely in advance what
19 the timeline for the drawdown will be. And, in any case, I
20 -- my sense is that, in -- 2016 is too soon to assume that
21 we -- that the Afghan National Security Forces will be
22 capable enough that we can afford to withdraw all of our
23 forces from the field, from training, mentoring, advising,
24 supporting the Afghan forces at a time that I believe they
25 will still need the help.

1 Mr. Leiter: Mr. Chairman, I concur with all of my
2 colleagues. I'm not in a good position to judge whether it
3 should be 5500 or 8500 immediately, but I absolutely agree
4 that simply an embassy force in 2016 will not be sufficient
5 to provide the intelligence, the direct action, and the
6 advise-and-assist to the ANSF to make sure that we are
7 detecting and disrupting transnational plots in the region.

8 Chairman McCain: And I think you would all agree,
9 probably there's many individuals and entities to rely on to
10 make that assessment, but the Ambassador in Kabul and the --
11 our military commander there are probably two of the people
12 we would rely on, obviously, the most.

13 I don't want to take the time of the committee. I know
14 the witnesses very well. I'll turn to Senator Reed.

15 Just to say, Ambassador Crocker, I will probably forget
16 many of the hearings that I've attended over the many years
17 that I've been a member of this committee, but one I will
18 never forget is yours and General Petraeus's appearance
19 before this committee in 2012 -- 2007. I think it literally
20 changed the course of history.

21 Senator Reed.

22 Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 And thank you, gentlemen, for your -- again, your
24 service to the Nation and your excellent testimony.

25 As you've all pointed out, this is a combination of

1 military capacity and political capacity, on both sides --
2 the United States, NATO, and the Afghanis. It strikes me
3 there's three factors, here in Afghanistan, that were not
4 present in Iraq. One is, there is a Bilateral Security
5 Agreement that allows our forces to stay. So, we have the
6 legal ability to pull up or bring down our forces. Second,
7 we seem to have a government -- a new government that is
8 much more cooperative with, and consistent with, our views
9 and values, even though they represent very staunchly the
10 people of Afghanistan, as they should. And then, third, we
11 have a NATO element, also, too. This is not a -- just a
12 United States mission.

13 So, can you, sort of, comment, Mr. -- Ambassador
14 Cunningham and Crocker, on these three factors and how it
15 sort of -- it supports or helps us to make the case, or not
16 make the case, with respect to increased forces or continued
17 forces?

18 Ambassador Cunningham: I'll be glad to, Senator.

19 I think that this time in the history of Afghanistan
20 and our engagement in Afghanistan this -- for the next
21 couple of years is really pivotal on both fronts, on the
22 second front and on the political front. As you know, I
23 spent hours and hours of -- in discussion with Dr. Abdullah
24 and President Ghani after the elections, and then in the
25 discussion that -- in which we were trying to help them form

1 the National Unity Government. This really is a fundamental
2 shift in Afghan political life, having created a Unity
3 Government which really does effectively represent the vast
4 majority of Afghans, whatever happened in the elections.
5 It's going to be difficult, politically, for this government
6 to function. We all knew and understood that as we were
7 going through the process.

8 But, it -- a page has turned in Afghan history now.
9 They have to decide whether to take advantage of that
10 opportunity. I think there's good -- a good chance that
11 they will. The instruments are in place. The elections
12 were held, a new government has been established or is being
13 established. We have the Bilateral Security Agreement
14 finally signed, a year later than we originally thought it
15 would be, but it is signed. It reflects the will have the
16 Afghan people. There's no huge movement in Afghanistan that
17 wants the United States out of Afghanistan. And, indeed, to
18 the extent that there is concern, it's mostly over whether
19 the withdrawal will take place, and under what conditions.

20 I think that affords both the Afghans and us a great
21 opportunity, over the next 2 to 3 years, to cement this
22 relationship, this partnership in which the Afghans now have
23 the lead and are fighting and dying for their country in
24 providing security in a way that serves our interests
25 because it will contain the violent extremism that we're all

1 concerned with.

2 Senator Reed: Ambassador Crocker, any comments?

3 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator.

4 Just very briefly. The three factors you note are very
5 important. I associate myself completely with Ambassador
6 Cunningham's remarks. This new government, in spite of the
7 difficulties it's faced -- even because of the difficulties
8 it faced, because it is overcoming them -- is an
9 extraordinary step for the Afghan nation and the people.

10 In terms of governance, the fight against corruption, I
11 am heartened, both by the President himself, with long
12 experience in financial matters from his time at the World
13 Bank. He knows how the world works, how nations succeed or
14 fail. And I'm very heartened by his choice of Ambassador
15 Eklil Hakimi, who many of you know, still, I guess,
16 Ambassador to Washington for Afghanistan, but who
17 understands us and the world of finance very well. They
18 need our support in order to succeed.

19 I have spoken to senior Afghan officials over the last
20 week. Many of you have done the same. They all say the
21 same thing to me, "Please continue your support. We know
22 what we have to do. We need you, to get it done." I
23 haven't talked to anybody out there who doesn't want us to
24 stay, to stay militarily and to stay at or near our current
25 force levels, for all sorts of reasons.

1 The final point I'd make, because you mentioned NATO,
2 NATO will stand, both as a military component of a force and
3 in providing critical economic backing and financial backing
4 for the Afghan National Security Forces, as long as we stand
5 and as long as we lead. It was our leadership, in May 2011
6 at the NATO summit, that produced out-year commitments of
7 financial support to the Afghan National Security Forces.
8 It was our leadership, at the Tokyo Economic Ministerial,
9 that produced international pledges in excess of \$16 million
10 for economic support in the out years. Without us, that
11 evaporates. Without us, the Afghan leadership, off to a
12 very promising start, is going to have increasing difficulty
13 in overcoming the many hurdles they will face, now and in
14 the future. Our leadership is key, whether military or
15 perhaps as, or even more, important, politically, to be
16 engaged is crucial.

17 Senator Reed: Thank you.

18 Thank you, gentlemen.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Sessions.

21 Senator Sessions: Thank you very much.

22 And Senator McCain has had more experience than anybody
23 in the White House and most other places in this government
24 in dealing with this. He was right about Iraq. And I
25 believe he's calling us correctly, and the warnings he's

1 given about Afghanistan are correct and should be heeded.

2 Let me just briefly ask this. This is one thing I
3 think that worries the American people. Is this a hopeless
4 effort? Or, if we have a reasonable, smart application of
5 American assistance, can Afghanistan achieve, let us say,
6 modestly, a decent government that functions and that
7 creates a nation that's not a haven for people who would
8 threaten us?

9 Just briefly -- maybe, Ambassador Cunningham -- do you
10 -- is this a hopefully situation, or not?

11 Ambassador Cunningham: No, Senator, it's not hopeless.
12 Indeed, after 3 and a half years of experience there, I
13 think it's finally possible to see a future for Afghanistan
14 that is both possible and promising. Much will depend on
15 what the Afghans, themselves, do. And they provide their
16 security, they run their government, they are in charge of
17 their politics. And life is difficult there. There's no
18 denying that. And they're having a great deal of difficulty
19 setting up the new government, as one would expect, because
20 they also have a parliament that they need to deal with.

21 But, the elements are there for Afghanistan to continue
22 down the positive road that we've been helping them create
23 over the past several years. If the Afghans will seize the
24 opportunity and if our -- by -- and, by "our," I mean
25 international support, not -- we have to remember, there are

1 many nations who are contributing to Afghanistan, both
2 militarily and economically, not just the United States,
3 although we are, obviously, the leader, in every sense, as
4 Ambassador Crocker said. And that support will not be
5 sustained without our leadership and our commitment.

6 But, the road is there -- you can see it -- on
7 security, on economic development, even on relations with
8 their neighbors, where there is -- are new opportunities for
9 a better dialogue with Pakistan, and better cooperation.
10 So, I am actually hopeful. As I said in my statement, I
11 can't guarantee the outcome, but I'm hopeful that the right
12 outcome can be achieved.

13 Senator Sessions: Well, the rest of you basically
14 share that view? I understand that from your testimony.

15 So, Ambassador Crocker, you're correct that we need to
16 be careful what we get into. And I, for one, am going to be
17 more humble about my understanding of what we can achieve in
18 the world. But, we've invested a tremendous amount in
19 Afghanistan. We have stood shoulder to shoulder in
20 Afghanistan, and in Iraq. And, in my view, this is -- and
21 we are at a point where I think, with a modest additional
22 commitment of resources over a period of time that creates
23 confidence in the Afghan people and their military, we may
24 have a very good result in that area of the world. It would
25 be good for the world and good for us and good for the

1 people there.

2 Admiral Olson, you -- you know, I know that Afghanistan
3 has to stand up, but, in my view, you can't ask them to do
4 more than they can do. Kabul has never ruled that country.
5 They've always had corruption. To expect it's going to be a
6 perfect government anytime soon is unrealistic.

7 Now, Admiral Olson, would you tell us what a lot of
8 military people have told me about why even a small amount
9 of American presence -- embedded Special Forces, for
10 example, with Iraqi or Afghan military -- why they can make
11 an incredible difference in their ability to be effective,
12 their ability to fight? Just give us some of your insights.
13 You mentioned several complex things that a good military
14 has to have to be successful. Give us your thoughts on that
15 and why even a small amount of forces can make a difference.

16 Admiral Olson: The forces that have the greatest
17 impact are the ones who have some experience, typically
18 older than the average soldier in the United States Army,
19 who have more deployments, typically, who have operated on
20 teams with each other for longer periods of time, and who
21 then can help gel those around them into more coherent,
22 effective kind of units. The forces that do this best have
23 a cultural appreciation, maybe a minor language capability
24 so that communication is not always through an interpreter,
25 and they are willing to fight alongside the forces that they

1 are mentoring, when that's necessary.

2 Senator Sessions: Well, you commanded the --

3 Admiral Olson: And so, I think --

4 Senator Sessions: -- you command our Special
5 Operations Command, and that's the kind of forces you're
6 talking about. Is that correct?

7 Admiral Olson: Yes, sir. But, not only Special
8 Operations Forces. I mean, there are elements within the
9 United States military who have stepped up to that task and
10 performed very well.

11 Senator Sessions: But, will it make a difference in
12 the outcome? Is it a significant factor, that deployment of
13 a limited number of Special Forces? And --

14 Admiral Olson: Sir, the evidence to date is that it
15 does. The Afghan National Security Forces are far more
16 capable than they were just a few years ago, when these
17 kinds of efforts began in earnest, to put small numbers of
18 U.S. troops at remote locations, where they were a daily
19 presence, a daily part of the lives of the Afghan units.
20 And it's not just the training. Much of it is just sort of
21 the example that they set in how to think about conflict,
22 how to prepare for a fight. And that just can't help but
23 rub off on the Afghan forces.

24 Senator Sessions: Thank you.

25 Mr. Leiter: Senator, if I could, very quickly. You've

1 asked the question, Should the American people think this is
2 hopeless? The last 13 years have showed us that the
3 counterterrorism fight and protecting the homeland in this
4 region is not hopeless. We've been very successful at
5 stopping attacks from the region.

6 And I would flip it around: From a homeland security
7 perspective, I think it is close to hopeless to think that
8 we can have that same success without some ongoing presence
9 in the region.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

11 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 And thank all of you for your service and for being
13 here today.

14 And Afghanistan is a troubling place. And I hear a lot
15 from the constituents, back in West Virginia. You know, we
16 have an awful lot of military, and we've rotated many, many
17 times. And I've been there a few times, myself. But, you
18 know, people have said, "No one in history has had success
19 in Afghanistan. Why do we expect to be any different?" So,
20 you hear that playing out. But, on the other hand, it's
21 much different. We've been attacked by people who planned
22 and plotted from that part of the world. And we try to
23 explain that and try to get support from the public.

24 I think I'm going to -- I need -- some questions, if
25 you can help me, on what size of support levels will be

1 needed in Afghanistan. Is it 5-, 10,000? What type special
2 types? Is it Special Ops, Black Ops? And also, Bagram Air
3 Force Base, I see that as a great asset. Are we determined
4 to keep that as our asset, or do you see any -- I mean, as
5 we've given everything else away, are we planning on giving
6 that away, too, to somebody, whatever?

7 And I just -- I'd like to know about the morale with
8 the training mission, with green-on-blue attacks. One of
9 the most atrocious things I've ever attended was a Wounded
10 Warriors dinner one night, and had a few of them tell me the
11 horrific stories of the attacks that they've seen and the
12 attacks that they were subject to from people they were
13 training and had to trust. So, I know that takes a toll on
14 them.

15 And just really the developing economy. Is there ever
16 going to be an economy based on anything other than U.S.
17 military presence?

18 So, I -- that's a big plate, and I would just -- I know
19 we are limited on time, so -- I guess we'll start with the
20 size of support you think we need.

21 And I agree with our Chairman, you know, Iraq didn't
22 work. So, if we learn from past mistakes, what -- and I
23 think the people in West Virginia will support -- we will
24 maintain to make sure that we're able to prevent that from
25 happening again from that part of the world. What does it

1 take to do that?

2 Admiral?

3 Admiral Olson: If -- that's a question for me,
4 Senator? I mean, I don't claim to be "the" expert on
5 precise force levels. I think that that's better addressed
6 by General Campbell in tomorrow's hearing. But, having seen
7 how this has developed, now, for so many years, I've held
8 the opinion that somewhere around 10,000, plus or minus --

9 Senator Manchin: Are they --

10 Admiral Olson: -- is probably --

11 Senator Manchin: -- going to be combat? I mean -- or
12 are they going to be basically training strategic personnel?

13 Admiral Olson: It will be a split between those who
14 are in the field conducting the day-to-day training,
15 mentorship, advising, supporting --

16 Senator Manchin: So, we'll say approximately --

17 Admiral Olson: -- providing the logistics support and
18 the other support that it takes. I mean, airspace --

19 Senator Manchin: Sure.

20 Admiral Olson: -- management, medical care, those
21 sorts of things.

22 Senator Manchin: So, we're talking around 10,000. And
23 right now, we're -- what's our level right now in
24 Afghanistan?

25 Admiral Olson: We -- that's about where we are now, I

1 think.

2 Senator Manchin: But, we're supposed to go down to 5-
3 by the end of the year?

4 Admiral Olson: Sir.

5 Senator Manchin: So, you think it'll be of critical
6 mass, if you will, going that low.

7 Admiral Olson: I won't say "critical mass." I'll just
8 say that we ought to really very carefully --

9 Senator Manchin: I got it.

10 Admiral Olson: -- get through all that.

11 Senator Manchin: Can anybody speak about the economy
12 over there, if you see any economy?

13 Ambassador?

14 Ambassador Cunningham: Yes. I'll address that. Let
15 me just add to your -- to the point that Admiral Olson just
16 made, though.

17 It's important to remember that the U.S. mission and
18 force level and our partners -- our NATO allies and other
19 partners' presence and force level are organically
20 connected. And that's one of the -- and that -- as things
21 now exist, that enables the resolute support mission force
22 to be present in Kabul and Bagram and other parts of the
23 country. As -- if the U.S. forces draw down to the -- to
24 5500 by the end of this year, that presence won't -- that
25 regional presence will no longer be possible, because our

1 partners won't have the support and connectivity to our
2 forces that they would wish to have. So, that's another
3 factor to be looked at as this process goes forward.

4 On the economic side, the economy last year took a huge
5 hit, both from the withdrawal of the international forces as
6 they drew down to their present levels, but also, very
7 importantly, from the political uncertainty that was created
8 by the elections, in the aftermath, and concern, among
9 Afghans as well as foreign investors, about what the outcome
10 of that was going to be and whether there would be a
11 workable dispensation, ultimately, that would allow economic
12 activity to resume, and, indeed, encourage it. That's now
13 coming into place.

14 The removal of uncertainty is a huge goal for the new
15 Afghan government. As Ambassador Crocker said, President
16 Ghani, Dr. Ghani, is very experienced and well versed in
17 economic matters and finance, as are other people in his
18 government. And, again, from my conversations with him and
19 with Dr. Abdullah, they understand clearly that a high
20 priority for this new government has to be the regeneration
21 of economic activity within Afghanistan, by Afghan
22 investors. There's a lot of money available in Afghan hands
23 to be used in business activity, but it's been held or it's
24 -- or used outside the country because of uncertainty inside
25 the country. So, they need to find ways to stimulate that

1 activity, as well as ways to improve trade in the region,
2 which they are working on, and to encourage foreign
3 investment. So, that's as high on their agenda as anything,
4 I think it's safe to say.

5 Senator Manchin: Mr. Chairman, if I can just have one
6 second to just make one comment.

7 I have a hard time -- you know, with the dependency
8 they have on the United States and our presence there,
9 whether it be in Afghanistan or in Iraq, and allow a person
10 like Karzai or Maliki to destroy that type of a
11 relationship, and we're -- take us that far backwards --
12 what's any assurance for us that we wouldn't -- I mean, we
13 have -- right now, we have a better -- let's say, a better
14 relationship. We have people we have confidence in, in Iraq
15 and Afghanistan. But, it seems that we have no large input
16 and assurances that could continue.

17 Ambassador Crocker?

18 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator.

19 It -- for me, it comes down to U.S. engagement and
20 leadership as a key determinant. During my years in Iraq,
21 '07-'09, it was the same Prime Minister, Maliki, and many of
22 his colleagues from other communities could be every bit as
23 difficult. But, we were constantly engaged, at my level, at
24 the level of the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense,
25 at the level of the President. I think that engagement is

1 absolutely crucial.

2 These people, whether in Iraq or Afghanistan, have been
3 through a type of hell that's very hard for Americans to
4 even imagine. It reduces them to core identities and zero-
5 sum thinking, "If you're not part of my clan, my party, my
6 tribe, I can't trust you. And not being able to trust you
7 doesn't mean losing an election, it means maybe losing my
8 life."

9 We can be the essential middleman. We did play that
10 role in Iraq, for a time. We are playing that role now in
11 Afghanistan. Ambassador Cunningham and Secretary Kerry, of
12 course, were the ones who essentially brought that
13 compromise into place that led to a National Unity
14 Government between Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah. I would be
15 as -- so bold to suggest, I'm not at all sure they could
16 have done that without us. But, we were there, we got it
17 done. And the Afghan people now have a hope they didn't
18 have before. It takes our leadership.

19 Finally, because I do care very much about this, I got
20 to Kabul, on my first assignment, about 10 days after then-
21 Chairman Karzai arrived in Kabul from the Bonn Conference
22 that placed him as Chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority.
23 I worked closely with him during those initial months, when
24 he had nothing -- no government, no police, no army, no
25 resources -- absolutely nothing. I worked with him again

1 when I returned to Afghanistan in 2011. Yes, it was
2 difficult. He had been through a lot. We had been through
3 a lot. But -- Ambassador Cunningham was with me -- it was
4 President Karzai who put the final seal of approval on our
5 Strategic Partnership Agreement that President Obama came to
6 Kabul to sign. We had that engagement.

7 So, you know, we all look for the day, whether in Iraq
8 or Afghanistan, when these peoples, these governments, are
9 able to stand on their own, dispensing good governance and
10 justice under law. They're not there yet. And our role,
11 politically, I think, is absolutely crucial to helping them
12 get there.

13 Chairman McCain: Senator Ernst.

14 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. I do
16 appreciate your service.

17 I apologize. I think there are several hearings going
18 on this morning.

19 Admiral Olson, you have mentioned, a couple of times,
20 the need for our combat troops, more counterterrorism,
21 train-and-assisters, to stay on beyond 2016. And I
22 appreciate the fact that you have also mentioned -- I made
23 note earlier -- you mentioned logistics, and you mentioned
24 equipping the men and women that we have serving over there.
25 And I would like to focus a little more on that, because I

1 -- I do believe -- I am hopeful -- that we will be able to
2 train the Afghani Security Forces to continue with
3 operations in Afghanistan, hopefully after we have exited
4 theater, whenever that point is. But, we do need to know,
5 beyond that, beyond any kinetic operations that are going
6 on, Will they be able to logistically support themselves?
7 Will they be able to maintain their equipment? What do we
8 have in place to make sure that they will continue in a
9 support role, also? What are those plans, if you know of
10 any, Admiral?

11 Admiral Olson: Thank you, Senator.

12 I'm not expert on the current plans. And again, I
13 think that will be a question better asked of General
14 Campbell tomorrow.

15 But, our experience so far has been that, absent a
16 continued U.S. engagement in the nonkinetic sort of
17 disciplines -- in the intelligence, in the administration,
18 in the logistics and the communications -- then the
19 capabilities do tend to deteriorate. Those don't all have
20 to be supported by U.S. Active Duty soldiers. There's room
21 for others to provide that kind of training and support so
22 that the soldier population can be in the field, supporting
23 the more direct fight.

24 But, I do think it is essential -- I mean, I'll repeat
25 myself just a little bit -- in that great shooters don't

1 make a great army. We -- it takes much more than that. In
2 fact, we saw, in Iraq, in fact, a quite capable army that,
3 absent the political, logistics, et cetera, support, was
4 unable to sustain the fight.

5 Senator Ernst: Thank you. I believe it's imperative
6 that those warfighters need to be supported, whether they're
7 United States forces, whether they are Afghani forces.

8 Do you see that this is a role that contractors could
9 fill? Or do you believe that it is better supported by a
10 U.S. military standpoint during any sort of transition
11 period before the United States hands off to Afghani forces?

12 Admiral Olson: Well, we already have a history of
13 certain contractors performing some of those roles. And we
14 have a generation of veterans, from Iraq and Afghanistan,
15 many of whom are willing to go perform those sorts of roles.
16 So, I think there is potential. I'm not, again, the expert
17 on that. I think it's a case-by-case evaluation. But, I do
18 believe there's room to reduce the Active Duty presence by
19 replacing some of them with private contractors who would
20 not be expected to be in the fight.

21 Senator Ernst: Okay.

22 Any other thoughts, gentlemen, in that area? Okay.

23 Yes, Ambassador.

24 Ambassador Cunningham: If I just could add, briefly.

25 There's actually a very detailed plan for what the

1 train, advise, and assist process will consist of, with
2 multiple lines of effort, that General Campbell can outline
3 and provide you in writing. And most of that is built
4 around things like logistics and the nuts and bolts of how
5 you run and support a military force. And much -- actually,
6 most of it is on intel and logistics.

7 Senator Ernst: Great.

8 Ambassador Cunningham: A very small part has to do
9 with the actual war -- what we would think of as
10 warfighting.

11 Senator Ernst: Great. I appreciate that.

12 Thank you very much, gentlemen.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen.

15 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 And thank you all, both for your service and for being
17 here today.

18 I have had the opportunity to work with Senator McCain
19 on the Special Immigrant Visa Program, trying to extend the
20 number of visas that are available for Afghans coming to the
21 United States. I wonder, Ambassador Crocker, if you could
22 talk about why this program is important.

23 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you very much, Senator, for
24 your support for the Special Immigrant Visa Program, and for
25 the question.

1 This is something I feel passionately about, whether in
2 Iraq or in Afghanistan. I worked very hard, in both
3 countries, to do everything I could to see that we did the
4 right thing by those who supported us and whose lives all
5 too often were at risk because of that support. We ramped
6 up considerably in both countries. In both countries, I
7 think we have now fallen short, not only of what I believed
8 was the right thing to do, but what, again, this Nation
9 stands for.

10 These people stepped up to serve us, whether the
11 civilian presence or the military presence, not for a
12 paycheck, but because they believed it was the right thing
13 to do. Almost all of them had qualifications that could
14 have landed them probably better-paying jobs with
15 substantially less risk. They believed that we were there
16 to help pull their country out of a dark hole, and they
17 wanted to support that effort. They run enormous risk, and
18 many of them have paid for their -- paid for that with their
19 lives.

20 And I would just urge this committee, the Senate, the
21 Congress, to do everything they can to ensure that
22 processing is expedited and that the resources are
23 available, once they get to the United States, to support
24 them. I have heard too many stories of Afghan and Iraqi
25 immigrants or refugees, depending on the program, who have

1 come here and have had to go back to very uncertain fates
2 because they simply could not support their families. That
3 is just wrong.

4 So, again, thank you, Senator Shaheen, for being our
5 conscience on this.

6 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you very much. I
7 certainly share your view that we should do everything
8 possible to make sure that those people who helped our men
9 and women on the ground have a safe future and can come to
10 the United States. And we'll continue to work on that. And
11 appreciate all of the support from so many men and women who
12 served with these Afghans and Iraqis, because they've been
13 the cheerleaders for making sure that this program goes
14 forward.

15 Ambassador Cunningham, you talked about the hours that
16 you spent with Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah. And one of the
17 questions that I have is looking at the partnership
18 government that has been formed, the potential challenges to
19 that. As we all know, it's always hard to have more than
20 one person in charge. And I wonder if you could give us
21 some insights on how they're dividing up responsibilities.
22 I was curious to see that Dr. Ghani, despite his
23 understanding of economics, is really focused more on the
24 international aspects, the defense aspects of things, and
25 Dr. Abdullah is more focused on domestic. So, I wonder if

1 you could talk about how that partnership is working and how
2 you think it will continue to work in the future.

3 Ambassador Cunningham: Thank you, Senator.

4 I think the best way for me to respond to that is to
5 describe the National Unity Government as a work in
6 progress. This is a unique phenomenon in Afghanistan, which
7 is much more prone to a winner-take-all way of doing
8 business and way of doing politics, which is part of what
9 led to the civil war that Ambassador Crocker referred to.

10 One of the driving forces behind the effort to create
11 the National Unity Government was the realization that
12 everything that the Afghans had accomplished in the past
13 decade was at risk if they didn't figure out a way to
14 overcome their very bitter feelings about the elections,
15 bitter feelings on both sides. And that's one of the
16 factors that is -- that will make the government a difficult
17 proposition. The two leaders and their teams fought a very
18 bitter political competition in which both sides sincerely
19 believed that they had won. So, overcoming that division,
20 turning the page, as we kept saying, "You know, you have to
21 turn the page. The political competition is over. You have
22 to realize that. Somebody's going to be named President.
23 That person needs to figure out a way to govern the country
24 under today's circumstances." That's what the National
25 Unity Government is an attempt to do.

1 I believe firmly that Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ghani are
2 both committed to making it work. That doesn't mean it's
3 going to be easy. And they don't have many members of --
4 they don't have many members of the government named yet,
5 because -- they've made presentations to the parliament.
6 Some of those people have withdrawn their candidacies
7 because of treatment that they received in the parliament.
8 Others were rejected. So, it's a back-and-forth
9 proposition. This also was to be expected. It took
10 President Karzai, who was completely in charge of his
11 government and his political affairs after the last election
12 -- after his last election -- it took him months to form a
13 government, just doing it by himself. Dr. Ghani and Dr.
14 Abdullah are trying to do this in a collaborative fashion,
15 so it's taking long -- the whole process is taking longer
16 than anybody wants or would like, but it is moving forward.
17 And I think there is a real drive, on both sides, to make
18 this work, but we'll have to see.

19 Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much.

20 My time is ended, but thank you all, also, for your
21 continued support for a secure Afghanistan.

22 Chairman McCain: And I thank Senator Shaheen for her
23 efforts on behalf of these individuals, as Ambassador
24 Crocker described them, who virtually risked their lives on
25 behalf of the freedom of their country. And if there's

1 additional measures that need to be taken on this issue, we
2 would be glad to take it up in the defense authorization
3 bill, Ambassador Cunningham or Ambassador Crocker, if we
4 need to take additional measures to help these people come
5 to the United States, if necessary.

6 Senator Tillis.

7 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 And, gentlemen, thank you for your past, current, and
9 continued service.

10 Admiral Olson, you mentioned that surprise is an
11 essential part in playing out any strategy over in that
12 area. The only thing I find surprising about the
13 President's strategy is how transparent we've been in
14 announcing timeline and definitive troop withdrawals. It
15 seems -- I think Ambassador Crocker mentioned -- now that's
16 sort of what our adversaries are waiting for.

17 So, in the context of the current strategy, I'm also
18 concerned with this withdrawal creating a new place for
19 terrorist organizations to train and potentially develop a
20 capability that threatens the homeland. But, based on your
21 perspective of the terrorist threat, what kind of
22 counterterrorism strategies should we be thinking about or
23 putting into place to make it less likely that we go back to
24 a pre-9/11 threat in Afghanistan?

25 Admiral Olson: Thank you, Senator.

1 The counterterrorism strategy has, in my view, got to
2 be some centralized command capability, with pods of forces
3 that are prepared to move on to terrorist targets as they
4 develop, with enough striking power to resolve that
5 situation and keep those terrorists from taking the actions
6 that they intend to take. Very much -- very important that
7 that's done in concert with Afghan partners and colleagues,
8 depending, in part, certainly on Afghan-sourced
9 intelligence, but it is still sophisticated enough an
10 operation that, in my view, it will require some external
11 support for some time.

12 Senator Tillis: And, Admiral Olson, I know that the --
13 at least some spokesman for the President characterized the
14 Taliban as an insurgency. Do you think that there is a
15 potential transition back to, once again, considering the
16 changes that will go on in Afghanistan if the current
17 administration's policies are carried forward, to where they
18 are actually viewed as a part of the terrorist organizations
19 that we may have to look at in Afghanistan?

20 Admiral Olson: I'm sure my colleague on my left, Mike
21 Leiter, will appreciate me passing this question to him,
22 because that's really more of an intelligence-based question
23 than a military question.

24 Senator Tillis: Mr. Leiter?

25 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I do think that the Taliban has

1 some appreciation that their willingness to allow al-Qaeda
2 to launch transnational effect -- attacks around 9/11 were a
3 very bad thing for the Taliban. So, I think there is some
4 appreciation on their part that they would prefer al-Qaeda
5 not to do that.

6 Do I think that there are elements -- not just in
7 Afghanistan -- in Pakistan and elements within the Taliban
8 that are more open to that sort of training and launching
9 attacks? Absolutely. I believe the Haqqani Network is
10 extremely problematic.

11 And the only thing I would add to Admiral Olson's wise
12 vision on what those counterterrorism operations need to be
13 to protect the homeland, we need to continue to have the
14 deep engagement and strategic patience that Ryan Crocker
15 talked about with regards to Pakistan. You cannot separate
16 these two nations out yet. We have to understand that our
17 presence is required, not just to combat these forces in
18 Afghanistan, but continue to work with the Pakistanis and
19 pressure the Pakistanis to target those same groups.

20 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

21 Ambassador Crocker -- again, I mentioned earlier that
22 you said that -- I think, that the current timeline and
23 troop withdrawal is now something that some of our
24 adversaries are waiting for. And I know that you've dealt
25 with the effect -- or the influence of Iran and Iraq and

1 Afghanistan. If we follow through with the current
2 strategy, what different strategies do you anticipate Iran
3 may -- or role may they play in Afghanistan?

4 Ambassador Crocker: It's a very important question,
5 Senator. We don't share very much in common with the
6 Islamic Republic. For most of the last 13 years, I would
7 suggest that we have objectively, on a very broad level,
8 sought similar outcomes in Afghanistan. Iran and
9 Afghanistan almost went to war, in the late 1990s, under
10 Taliban rule. This is an existential issue. There can only
11 be one faith-based theocracy in Islam. The Iranians claim
12 it, and so do the Taliban. And it was an existential fight.
13 They do not want to see the Taliban back.

14 That said, I would be concerned that, if they see us as
15 leaving the field, militarily and politically, they will
16 ramp up their own game. They have allies among some of the
17 minority groups in Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance was
18 closely tied to Iranian support during the Taliban years as
19 a means of keeping them -- keeping the Taliban from running
20 over the whole country. Those linkages are still there.

21 So, if we pull out, I don't think we would see an Iraq-
22 type situation, but we would see more Iranian involvement.
23 And, based on the pattern of Iranian involvement in other
24 countries, I'm not sure we would like it.

25 Senator Tillis: Mr. Chair, if I may, the -- just a

1 followup question. It's a little bit off the subject, but
2 -- with the ANSF being an all-volunteer force, and with the
3 current strategy publicized by the administration, do we
4 have any sense of what effect that could have, in terms of
5 their continued recruiting and buildup of that force? Or is
6 it even material to their recruiting efforts?

7 Ambassador?

8 Ambassador Cunningham: Well, one of the good-news
9 items with regard to the ANSF is, as you said, it is a
10 volunteer force. And, despite the high level of casualties
11 that they are taking, levels of casualties that need to be
12 reduced, and I think will be reduced as the leadership gets
13 better and better, but there's no -- they are not having any
14 difficulty in recruiting people to join the military or the
15 police. I expect that will remain the case.

16 As both institutions mature and continue to get better,
17 they will become more attractive. They're both making
18 efforts to recruit women, by the way, which is a very
19 difficult proposition. They are both doing that.

20 The determining factor in all of this is the sustained
21 international funding that's required. As part of our plan
22 for funding the ANSF, the Afghan government is committed to,
23 over time, increase its share of its own defense budget,
24 with a view, ultimately, to becoming self-sufficient.
25 That's going to take a while -- quite a while. And, for the

1 foreseeable future, they will be highly dependent on the
2 international funding that we and our NATO and other allies
3 have committed to provide. That is the determining factor
4 that makes everything else run.

5 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

6 Senator Reed [presiding]: Senator Donnelly, please.

7 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 And thank you all. I apologize for having to step out
9 for a few minutes.

10 And this may have been asked, and I'm sorry if it has.
11 In regards to Pakistan, how big a percentage of getting
12 Pakistan right is getting Afghanistan right?

13 Ambassador Cunningham: That's -- I'd like to ask
14 Ambassador Crocker also to respond to that -- that's a very
15 difficult question. But, as Mr. Leiter said, the two are
16 inextricably linked. They have their own history that they
17 need to overcome, and the phenomenon that we're trying to
18 deal with both the Taliban and the -- what I call the
19 network of Islamist extremism -- exists on both sides of the
20 border, and moves back and forth across the border. That
21 includes al-Qaeda, but it also includes a host of other
22 folks.

23 A long-term solution has to include dealing with the
24 presence of those folks on the -- in the Pakistani side of
25 the border. For both countries. There's evidence that the

1 awareness of -- a realistic awareness of that is growing in
2 Pakistan. We have been encouraging that relentlessly over
3 the past couple of years. And I hope the Pakistanis will
4 come to realize, genuinely, that they need to act in their
5 own interests, as well as in the regional interest.

6 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you for that question,
7 Senator, because it is central to the long-term stability of
8 that region and to our own long-term security.

9 Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan. As both Mr.
10 Leiter and Ambassador Cunningham said, it's also about
11 Pakistan, and vice versa. The border between the two states
12 is an artificial one, drawn by the British at the end of the
13 19th century, deliberately to divide the Pashtun community.
14 There are tribal and familial affinities that cross that
15 border that make this an extraordinarily complex situation.

16 As I noted in my opening remarks, the Pakistanis have
17 hedged their bets, based on their experience in the 1990s.
18 They supported the Taliban then as a vehicle to put an end
19 to the Afghan civil war and produce a government in
20 Afghanistan that, again, would stabilize the situation and
21 with which they had some purchase. That, over time, I
22 think, has led them to some strategies that I would hope
23 they regret, like support for the Haqqani Network.

24 Senator Donnelly: Right.

25 Ambassador Crocker: You know, going back almost 10

1 years, I remember discussions with the Pakistani leadership
2 -- intelligence, military, and presidential -- that the
3 Haqqanis were really dangerous, not just to us, not just to
4 the Afghan state, but to the Pakistani state. Well, so it's
5 proved. But, it does raise a question, given the current
6 challenges Pakistan faces, whether they could really subdue
7 the Haqqanis, or not.

8 And, you know, that is why long-term U.S. engagement
9 and leadership is so critical. It's 185 million people,
10 with nuclear weapons, that is facing a set of insurgencies
11 that could grow to threaten the state. Some of these,
12 insurgencies of their making that got out of control. But,
13 the threat, nonetheless, is there.

14 Senator Donnelly: I am -- I apologize -- I'm running
15 out of time. I just want to ask one other question, and
16 that would be: In places like Kunar and Nuristan and
17 Helmand and Khost, as we look forward to the next few years,
18 how successful do you think we'll be in those areas? And
19 will the core -- the Kabul area, those areas -- will it be a
20 solid core, with continued challenges in those areas, or how
21 do you see this, if we work in a flexible and conditions-
22 based way?

23 Ambassador Cunningham: All of those -- all of the
24 areas that you mentioned are already under -- well under the
25 responsibility of the Afghan Security Forces, who are being

1 tested -- were tested last year by the Taliban, particularly
2 in places like Helmand. They had some difficulty, but,
3 where the Afghans lost ground, they've quickly recovered it,
4 recovered themselves and then recovered the territory, and
5 held their own last year. I don't see any reason to think
6 that the -- that they will be less effective this coming
7 year and in the future. So, while they will continue to be
8 contested by the Taliban, I think they will more than hold
9 their own.

10 Kabul is, and has been, under Afghan security control
11 for -- as far as I know. And that will remain the case. A
12 critical factor in all this is the continued
13 counterterrorism effort that some of our forces will
14 continue to be involved in directly in mentoring the Afghan
15 Special Operations Forces, who are already very good and,
16 again, getting better all the time.

17 So, the -- there will continue to be conflicts in the
18 countryside, and even parts of the countryside that the
19 Taliban controls but don't really matter very much, but I
20 think the main effort to secure most of the population as it
21 is now will be successful.

22 Senator Donnelly: Thank you so much.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman McCain [presiding]: Senator Hirono.

25 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to all of

1 you.

2 A stable Afghanistan is desired, not just by our
3 country, Pakistan, but apparently now China is stepping up
4 in a much more overt way. So, there was an article in a
5 recent Wall Street Journal talking about what China has been
6 doing, and in discussions with us, also. Would you all
7 share what you think about China's growing interest in the
8 security of Afghanistan, what you see as the positives, what
9 concerns you think are raised by their involvement?

10 Ambassador Cunningham: I'd be glad to, Senator.

11 I and a number of my colleagues in the administration
12 have felt for some time that the Chinese had a positive role
13 to play in Afghanistan, that their interests in Afghanistan
14 and in the region were coincident with ours, in both the
15 stability of the region and in stimulating economic activity
16 and investment that they could make on their own. So, we
17 have been in discussions with the Chinese government for
18 some time about this, about how we could better work
19 together and how China could be a more active and positive
20 participant. And I think it's basically a good thing that
21 they are now slowly moving into a more forward-leaning
22 posture, both politically and economically, because
23 stability in that part of the world is in their interest, as
24 well as it is in ours.

25 Ambassador Crocker: I certainly would endorse

1 Ambassador Cunningham's remarks. I would note just a couple
2 of additional points.

3 I am not a huge supporter of Chinese activism outside
4 its borders, except maybe in this case, where there are,
5 indeed, common threats. The Chinese are worried about
6 radicalization of their Muslim population, primarily the
7 Uyghurs, that can flow through Afghanistan and Pakistan.
8 They have a very close relationship with Pakistan. I
9 understand -- I'm not sure how valid it is -- that the
10 Chinese are now beginning to use that relationship with
11 Pakistan to get the Pakistanis to ensure that there is not
12 infiltration from Afghanistan through Pakistan up into
13 western China.

14 The Chinese have substantial economic interests in
15 Afghanistan, in the mineral sector. Ambassador Cunningham
16 and I both have argued that, well, if they're reaping the
17 benefits, they need to step up to help the state ensure
18 security. I understand they are now looking at police
19 training. I'm not sure that is the model I would uphold for
20 the world's police forces, necessarily. But, to the extent
21 it suggests that the Chinese are now engaged in trying to
22 support a viable and stable Afghanistan, then I think it
23 gives us something to work with.

24 Senator Hirono: Thank you. And if -- Admiral and Mr.
25 Leiter, if you basically agree that this is a -- this could

1 lead to a fruitful kind of an approach to civility in
2 Afghanistan, we -- I can go on to my next question.

3 So, all of you have said that our withdrawal -- our
4 drawdown in Afghanistan should be based on conditions rather
5 than a calendar. So, my question is, you know, What kind of
6 conditions do you -- do we want in Afghanistan to enable us
7 to draw down? And do we have an agreed-upon, articulated
8 goals between us and the Afghans as to what should be --
9 what kind of conditions would occur, should occur, from our
10 end, from their end, to enable us to withdraw from
11 Afghanistan?

12 Ambassador Cunningham: Senator, I think the discussion
13 about conditions and the timeline is something that not --
14 is not only a matter for us, it's also a matter for -- of
15 discussions with the Afghans --

16 Senator Hirono: Yes.

17 Ambassador Cunningham: -- themselves. And that --

18 Senator Hirono: That is -- that was my --

19 Ambassador Cunningham: -- that has been happening.
20 It's been part of -- a regular feature of the transition
21 that's taking place over the past several years has been to
22 do a -- I don't know, every couple of months, an assessment
23 of how the transition was evolving and what the status of
24 the Afghan Security Forces was, as going forward. That's
25 the kind of process that I think -- not that I think -- that

1 will continue with the new Afghan government and the new
2 leadership. And it's on the basis of that process and
3 assessment of Afghan Security Force capabilities, what they
4 can do and what they need and what kind of assistance they
5 still require, that the timeline and the drawdown should be
6 measured against.

7 Senator Hirono: So, do the rest of you agree that it's
8 basically the capability of the Afghan Security Forces to
9 defend their own country that should be the primary basis on
10 which we withdraw?

11 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I think it's potentially the most
12 important, but I would put right up there, as well, the
13 potential for the Afghans not just to secure their own
14 country, but target terrorist networks which have
15 transnational aspirations. And this is something that I
16 think is going to be as hard as anything else for the
17 Afghans to develop and maintain, as compared to what we are
18 used to after the past 14 years. And we will be critical in
19 both informing them as to the threats we see and also
20 maintaining some of those high-end capabilities which have
21 been so critical beyond securing Kabul and elsewhere into
22 areas where the transnational threats have tended to hide
23 over the past decade.

24 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing
25 me to go over my time.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

2 Senator Cotton: Thank you all again for your service
3 to the country, which I know has been long and
4 distinguished, and particularly in a tough and difficult
5 place like Afghanistan and, more broadly, in the Middle East
6 and Central Asia.

7 I'd like to start out by asking a question about
8 ongoing political developments in Afghanistan. Obviously,
9 we have new partners at the senior levels of the government
10 there. I -- last month, I think the parliament confirmed
11 about a third of the nominees for the new cabinet that
12 President Ghani proposed. Could I get your quick
13 perspective on the prospects for further confirmations so
14 there would be a full working leadership at the senior
15 levels of the Afghan government?

16 Ambassador Cunningham: Senator, I know that President
17 Ghani and Dr. Abdullah are quite focused on filling out --
18 fleshing out the rest of the leadership positions in the
19 government. I'm not directly involved in conversations with
20 them, but I know that they are working hard to present both
21 another list of candidates for positions, as well as doing
22 the necessary work that needs to be done with the
23 parliament, itself, to obtain confirmations of their
24 ministers.

25 It's to be expected that this is a difficult process.

1 It's a unique arrangement that they now have, working
2 together on the government and cooperating with each other
3 as a collaborative effort in identifying people for
4 positions, as well as trying to set the bar for capability
5 higher than it may have been in some cases in the past. So,
6 it's taking longer than anybody wants. It's certainly
7 taking longer than either of them want or the Afghan people
8 want. But, they're working hard at it, and I'm confident
9 that they will succeed.

10 Senator Cotton: Ambassador Crocker?

11 Ambassador Crocker: Again, Senator, I look at this
12 over a longer timeline, having been in Afghanistan shortly
13 after the fall of the Taliban and seeing how little there
14 was, including any real basis for political understandings
15 among factions who had been on opposite sides of the fight
16 in many cases. So, I perhaps see more progress than those
17 who are looking at snapshots today.

18 The fact that Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah can sit down
19 and thrash through a slate of ministerial nominees, to me is
20 the important point, not that some of them ran into trouble
21 with the parliament, not unexpectedly. And we're now going
22 through, again, a second round, as Ambassador Cunningham
23 said, as they try to get nominees identified, vetted.
24 Financial disclosure statements do have their use, I can now
25 acknowledge, no longer having to do them. But, this is a

1 slow, painful process. But, it is a process that is working
2 -- frankly, far better than many would have expected.

3 Senator Cotton: Does the Government of Afghanistan
4 still -- the President still appoint the provincial and
5 district governors? That was the case when I was there on
6 Active Duty in '08 and '09.

7 Ambassador Cunningham: Yes, that's still the case.

8 Senator Cotton: Have you seen the -- have we seen the
9 quality of local government services and responsiveness
10 increase over what I saw in 2008-2009, when governors were
11 understandably responsive to their constituency of one in
12 Kabul, as opposed to the local population?

13 Ambassador Cunningham: I'd say it's mixed bag. The
14 provincial and district government works when there are good
15 people there and when they both know how to work Kabul and
16 they know how to cooperate with their security and other
17 partners at the provincial and district level. And there
18 are places where it still doesn't work very well. It's a
19 high priority for both President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah to
20 improve the operations of the Kabul/provincial/district
21 relationship, both in terms of the people who are appointed
22 and in terms of reforming how business is done. This is,
23 again, one of the several reform items that's being delayed
24 by the delay in setting up the new government. But, they
25 and the people around them are aware of the problem. And

1 one of Ghani's driving principles, which Abdullah has bought
2 into quite completely, is, they need to have better people
3 in government.

4 Senator Cotton: Good.

5 Ambassador Cunningham: Period.

6 Senator Cotton: Good.

7 If I could squeeze in one more question. Admiral
8 Olson, could you give us your thoughts on the practical
9 effect on our counterterrorism efforts if we follow one
10 course of action, which is essentially to shut down every
11 installation in Regional Command East and Bagram Airfield
12 and retrench back to Kabul Airfield?

13 Admiral Olson: Effective counterterrorism requires a
14 rapid response capability. And I think withdrawing to a
15 single location in central/south-central Afghanistan will
16 reduce the capability to respond rapidly to emerging
17 situations. And so, I think that there would be -- it would
18 have a detrimental effect.

19 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Nelson.

21 Senator Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to
22 compliment you for the series of very thoughtful hearings
23 that you've had early on in this Congress. It's been very,
24 very helpful.

25 Ambassador Crocker, I want to go to the subject of

1 Syria. I understand that you support the training of the
2 Syrian opposition and removal of Assad. Would you share
3 with us your thoughts?

4 Ambassador Crocker: Thank you, Senator.

5 I certainly would like to see a trained, effective,
6 well-equipped, moderate Syrian opposition force that could
7 replace Assad. However, I -- admittedly some vast removed
8 now from what's going on, I don't think that either are very
9 likely.

10 The Islamic radicals, be that al-Qaeda in Syria, the
11 Nusra Front, or even worse, the Islamic state, clearly have
12 the ascendancy in Syria now. I would be concerned that
13 weapons be very, very tightly controlled, lest they wind up
14 in the hands of these groups that clearly are our mortal
15 enemies.

16 I have also said, and I have said it for some time, I
17 don't think President Assad is going anytime soon. I will
18 spare this committee yet another history lesson, but this
19 has its roots in the Hama rising in 1982, when Hafez al-
20 Assad and his brother Rifaat slaughtered the Syrian Muslim
21 Brotherhood and somewhere north of 15,000 Syrian Sunnis.
22 You know, that is why you have a radicalized Sunni community
23 in Syria. That is why you have a regime that was ready for
24 a day of reckoning.

25 You know, Assad should go. Okay. And what army is

1 going to remove him? If you set a policy, you'd better have
2 the means to carry it out.

3 Thank you, Senator.

4 Senator Nelson: Thank you.

5 Mr. Leiter --

6 And, by the way, thank all of you for your public
7 service. It's extraordinary. And it's good to see you,
8 Admiral, again.

9 Mr. Leiter, you have expressed the concern that we
10 exchanged the Taliban five for Bergdahl. You want to
11 elaborate?

12 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I was concerned. First, I think
13 it -- I hope that everyone who needed to be involved in that
14 discussion about the potential consequences was. I was not
15 in the administration, so I can't say it. But, I hope that
16 there was a full conversation about the consequences.

17 Second, there was much commentary as to whether the
18 Qataris would, in fact, control these five. I think there's
19 some reporting that at least one may not be under control.
20 Frankly, I was less concerned with that question and more
21 concerned with the timeline we put on the Qatari control of
22 them, which I believe now -- I apologize -- I believe it was
23 only 2 years, or potentially 3 years. It was not an
24 extended period. And I thought that was problematic,
25 because it starts to undermine -- again, I think, a phrase

1 that Ambassador Crocker brought up, which I think is exactly
2 right -- that people in the region, our allies and our
3 enemies, must understand that we will have deep engagement
4 and strategic patience. And putting relatively short
5 timelines on controls of people who really have been central
6 to transnational threats, in my view, is deeply problematic
7 and shows a lack of patience, which our adversaries
8 absolutely love in the United States at times.

9 Senator Nelson: Thank you.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

11 Senator Graham: Let's continue the discussion. It's a
12 good discussion.

13 Do you think, if you were negotiating, you might have
14 could have gotten the Taliban to take three instead of five?

15 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I apologized. I understand the
16 --

17 Senator Graham: All -- yeah --

18 Mr. Leiter: I think --

19 Senator Graham: My point is that they probably -- what
20 if we insisted they take five?

21 On a scale of 1 to 10, what's the likelihood of these
22 five going back to the fight at the end of the 1 year in
23 Qatar, not 3?

24 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I actually -- I tend to think the
25 Qataris have been a reasonably good partner in some ways.

1 Senator Graham: At the end of the year, these people
2 can go anywhere they want to go.

3 Mr. Leiter: I think, in some foreseeable amount of
4 time, where we still have very important strategic interests
5 in the region, they will be back in the fight.

6 Senator Graham: Is that within a year of when they can
7 go back?

8 Mr. Leiter: I think we have strategic interests within
9 the region for far more than a year.

10 Senator Graham: Yeah.

11 Mr. Leiter: So, anything even beyond a year --

12 Senator Graham: Right.

13 Mr. Leiter: -- I'm still worried about.

14 Senator Graham: I couldn't agree with you more.

15 To the Ambassadors, we don't have a medal for dealing
16 with Karzai, but we should create one. I don't know where
17 it would fit into the scheme of medals, but, to all of you
18 who have had to deal with this problem in Afghanistan all
19 these years, God bless you. And I think each one of you, in
20 your own way, did a terrific job.

21 What happens, Ambassador Cunningham, if -- well, what
22 would be losing in Afghanistan, very briefly? If you and
23 Ambassador Crocker could take a shot at describing, in a --
24 just a little bit of time, what losing would be, in your
25 mind.

1 Ambassador Cunningham: In my mind, losing is the
2 collapse or incapacity of the Afghan state and the ability
3 of the Afghans to control security for most of the country,
4 which leads to Afghanistan again becoming a place where
5 people whose interests are hostile to ours return and begin
6 to operate again. That's what affects our interests. There
7 are many other negative implications of that, including for
8 other countries in the region and Pakistan. But, that's the
9 main feature of loss.

10 Senator Graham: What about you, Ambassador Crocker?

11 Ambassador Crocker: I would fully endorse that. We --
12 Senator, as you know, we've seen this movie before, in the
13 early 1990s, up through 9/11. We have enemies that would, I
14 am convinced, like to bring us another 9/11. And if they
15 can get strategic space and depth, they will go to work
16 planning it. They may already be doing so, in the form of
17 the Islamic state that now doesn't have to worry about day-
18 to-day survival in large swaths of Syria and Iraq.

19 Senator Graham: So --

20 Ambassador Crocker: They and al-Qaeda would love to
21 have Afghanistan back.

22 Senator Graham: So --

23 Ambassador Crocker: We've seen what happens when they
24 got it.

25 Senator Graham: Sure. So, let's talk about how to

1 prevent that. A counterterrorism platform in Afghanistan
2 would probably be in our national security interest, to make
3 sure they don't regenerate. Does that make sense to both of
4 you, all of you? Yeah. A robust counterterrorism program.

5 Supporting the Afghan Security Forces to make sure they
6 don't fail makes sense, in terms of preventing the outcome
7 you both described? We're going to have to pay for their
8 army, at least in part, for a long time to come, because of
9 their budget problems. Do you all agree with that? Okay.

10 What's the likelihood of losing if we stick with the
11 current plan, which is to go down to 1,000 U.S. soldiers,
12 Kabul-centric, in a security cooperation agreement
13 environment? What's the likelihood of us losing if we
14 follow that plan, versus, say, keeping a force of around
15 10,000, based on conditions-on-the-ground withdrawal? Could
16 you start, from Ambassador Cunningham, and go through the
17 whole panel and give me your evaluation?

18 Ambassador Cunningham: Senator, I've -- as I've said,
19 I think the current projected timeline for the withdrawal
20 and for the -- the timeline for withdrawal and the rate of
21 withdrawal is -- under current circumstances, isn't the way
22 to maximize the prospects for success. I don't know at what
23 point mission failure kicks in.

24 But, there are two elements, as you've said and others
25 have noted, that need to be maintained. And they're

1 related, but they're different and have different functions.
2 One is the train, advise, and assist, which goes to ensuring
3 that the Afghan Security Forces remain capable of securing
4 the country and the Afghan people. And the second is the
5 counterterrorism mission, which also has an intelligence
6 component, as well as a military component. Both of those
7 need to be effective until such time as the Afghans are
8 capable of doing more and more on their own. And they are.

9 So, there will be -- there will be periods when it is
10 safe to further withdraw U.S. support and resources and
11 soldiers. American forces are basically -- they're not
12 doing combat operations now in Afghanistan. They haven't,
13 for a while. Mostly, they are doing counterterrorism and
14 force protection, and the train, advise, and assist, and
15 occasionally helping the Afghans, themselves. But, it's a
16 question of --

17 Senator Graham: But, we're doing unilateral
18 counterterrorism operations today.

19 Ambassador Cunningham: Yes. But, the Afghans are also
20 increasingly developing --

21 Senator Graham: So, that's --

22 Ambassador Cunningham: -- their own capability to do
23 that. And many of their operations are supported by us, but
24 conducted by them.

25 Senator Graham: Absolutely.

1 Ambassador Cunningham: So, that's the balance that
2 needs to be maintained in a way that is -- provides the
3 effect that needs to be provided.

4 Senator Graham: I'm sorry, I'm over my time. Does --
5 do the rest of you generally agree with that statement?
6 Anything you would like to add? Okay.

7 Thank you all.

8 Chairman McCain: Senator Blumenthal.

9 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want
10 to join in thanking you for this series of very thoughtful
11 hearings, which have been, I think, a great advantage to us
12 in drawing a perspective for the rest of the congressional
13 session and the tasks that we have ahead.

14 And thank you, to our panel, each of you, for your
15 extraordinary, distinguished, and lengthy service to our
16 Nation, and, in particular, to Ambassadors Cunningham and
17 Crocker for your hospitality and graciousness to me on my
18 trips, which I was privileged to do three times, two of them
19 with our Chairman, and for your insight and information,
20 then and now.

21 I think that one of the points that is most important
22 for us and the American people to understand is how
23 inextricably bound, as you've said -- I think, all of you,
24 but, most recently, Ambassador Crocker -- Afghanistan and
25 Pakistan are in their futures, their pasts, and their fates

1 come. And I know that one of my areas of interest, on my
2 trips and since then, has been the flow of bombmaking
3 materials from Pakistan into Afghanistan, and the
4 manufacturing of those fertilizers and other bombmaking
5 materials in Pakistan, which has been to their sorrow and
6 destruction as well as our troops and the people of
7 Afghanistan. So, I wonder, Ambassador Cunningham and
8 Ambassador Crocker, whether you can give us some idea of
9 what's happening on the ground. Has that problem been
10 successfully addressed in Pakistan, or even measurably
11 addressed?

12 Ambassador Cunningham: To my knowledge, Senator, there
13 hasn't been any major progress in dealing with that
14 particular phenomenon up to this point, but there may be an
15 opportunity for doing so, now that the Pakistanis are
16 embarked on a -- their own campaign to address the
17 extremists that are operating in northern Pakistan, and also
18 to get them engaged in a -- in more practical cooperation.
19 But, as I said, for a -- at least as far as I know, there
20 hasn't been any major progress in that area, so far.

21 Senator Blumenthal: Because, in a certain way, for me
22 at least, apart from its very practical destructive effects
23 on both sides of that border, it's also been a barometer of
24 whether the Pakistanis really are serious about combating
25 extremists and terrorists, in their own country, that do

1 such ravaging harm to their own people.

2 Admiral Olson, I wonder if there are, broadly, lessons
3 that we've learned from our very successful special
4 operations in Afghanistan that we could apply now to the
5 fight against ISIS and the state that, as you or others have
6 said, now occupy such large swaths of land in Iraq and
7 Syria.

8 Admiral Olson: Thank you, Senator.

9 Certainly, there are some. I think the lessons we've
10 learned about locating and tracking our adversaries, about
11 precision strikes on them when we do have that sort of
12 opportunity, the lessons we've learned about developing
13 counterpart counterterrorist forces and working with our
14 allies who have capable forces, all may apply at some level
15 in the fight against the Islamic state.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Is there the possibility of doing
17 in Iraq, do you think, what apparently is ongoing fairly
18 successfully in Afghanistan in having special operators
19 trained and then operating with the advice of American
20 special operators?

21 Admiral Olson: You mean Iraqi special operators
22 operating with the advice of Americans?

23 Senator Blumenthal: Correct.

24 Admiral Olson: Yes, sir. We've been there before, and
25 it -- several years ago, I would have told you that the

1 Iraqi Special Operations Forces were really quite capable
2 and were performing complex operations at a very high level.

3 Senator Blumenthal: And that's not so now.

4 Admiral Olson: I'm not there now, so I don't have
5 firsthand knowledge. I -- if it doesn't exist, I do believe
6 that, at some level, it could be regenerated.

7 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

8 My time is expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman McCain: Senator King.

10 Senator King: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the
11 opportunity.

12 Gentlemen, thank you for your testimony. I apologize,
13 I had to attend another hearing. I'm -- I suspect that all
14 the questions have been asked and answered.

15 I heard your opening statements, to the effect that it
16 would be a grave mistake to withdraw from Afghanistan on an
17 arbitrary timeframe not based upon conditions on the ground,
18 that we would lose the benefits, the progress that's been
19 made in that country, and, at a modest additional
20 investment, we could achieve significant long-term success.
21 And I would just like to ask each of you to confirm. Is
22 that a -- is that an accurate statement of your position?

23 Ambassador Cunningham: Yes, Senator, it's an accurate
24 description of what, I think in my statement, I called -- I
25 called our continuing presence an insurance policy, at

1 relatively -- it's -- it will still cost, but at relatively
2 low cost, compared to the effort that we've made. And I
3 think it's one that we need to continue to make.

4 Senator King: I like the "insurance policy" image.
5 Mine is, "Let's not fumble the ball on the 5 yardline."

6 Ambassador Crocker?

7 Ambassador Crocker: That's -- Senator, that was an
8 excellent summary. It reflects exactly what I believe. I,
9 too, have used the term "insurance policy." You know, I
10 think a -- "let's not fumble" and "let's not throw an
11 interception" are just as good.

12 Senator King: Thank you.

13 Admiral?

14 Admiral Olson: Senator, I believe that continuous
15 evaluation of the status and conditions on the ground is
16 essential to making the right decisions. And I also believe
17 that, once those decisions are made, we ought to hold them a
18 little more closely to our vest.

19 Senator King: I would agree with that. And it seems
20 to me that the length of time it took to get through the
21 Afghan elections and the long period between the elections
22 and the installation of the President and Chief Executive
23 give us a readymade, perfectly defensible reason and
24 rationale to extend the clock, if you will. And I think
25 that's just part of the reality that we face there. Plus,

1 we have -- for the first time in, I don't know, living
2 memory, have a real partner that we can work with who has a
3 chance to make Afghanistan work. And to pull the support
4 out that they need at this moment would be ironic and
5 tragic, in my opinion.

6 Mr. Leiter: Senator, I think you captured my position
7 well. And I would just say, historically, although not
8 perfect analogies, we've seen this before. We have done it
9 well after World War II. We did it well after Korea. We
10 made investments to remain in those places where we were
11 victorious to support a long-term transition to other
12 capabilities and security.

13 Senator King: Thank you.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 Chairman McCain: Ambassador Crocker, I'd like to ask
16 one additional question. Just this morning, I received a
17 copy of the administration's proposal on the AUMF, and the
18 title of it is "Authorization for Use of Military Forces
19 Against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant." Now, we
20 are presently setting up training for -- in Saudi Arabia and
21 other places, to train and equip the Free Syrian Army to
22 fight against Bashar Assad. Have you got a view that this
23 resolution makes no mention whatsoever of Bashar Assad, who
24 has slaughtered well over 200,000 people? You know the
25 statistics. Does -- do you have a view on that aspect of

1 this request? And could it possibly mean that we are not
2 going to use any force to stymie Bashar Assad's behavior?

3 Ambassador Crocker: It would seem to me, Mr. Chairman,
4 that implicit in an effort to train and equip a moderate
5 Syrian opposition is that that opposition will go into a
6 fight against the forces of Bashar al-Assad, as well as, if
7 they can handle it, also to blunt the expansion of gains by
8 the Nusra Front and the Islamic state. Whether they're
9 going to be able to do that or not is another matter. But,
10 certainly the effort is worth making, as long as, as I said
11 earlier, we can have reasonable assurance that, when we get
12 to the equip part of training Syrian opposition, that that
13 equipment will not wind up in the hands of either the regime
14 or forces that are our avowed enemy.

15 Chairman McCain: But, does it strike you that there is
16 no mention of Bashar Assad or an authorization to do
17 anything in opposition of Bashar Assad? In other words,
18 isn't it conspicuous, by its absent in the title of this
19 authorization?

20 Ambassador Crocker: As I said in my earlier comment,
21 if you're going to have a policy, and you're going to
22 articulate a policy publicly, you'd better be sure you have
23 the means to carry it out. I think we articulated a policy,
24 back in 2011, that was based on a misreading of reality in
25 Syria. Where we will go -- where the administration --

1 Chairman McCain: In other words, we articulated we
2 were going to get rid of Bashar Assad.

3 Ambassador Crocker: Without having the means to do it,
4 and without --

5 Chairman McCain: Yes.

6 Ambassador Crocker: -- understanding that he was not
7 Mubarak, he was not Qaddafi, he was not bin Ali of Tunisia.

8 He was an Assad of Syria with a entirely different lineage
9 and a ruthless commitment to the endurance of his regime.

10 Chairman McCain: And with assistance from the
11 Iranians, of 5,000 Hezbollah, arms supplies, equipment from
12 Russia and from Tehran, which then swung the momentum on his
13 side.

14 Ambassador Cunningham, do you have a view on this?

15 Ambassador Cunningham: I have a personal view that's
16 not informed by any particular knowledge. But, I agree with
17 Ambassador Crocker, that we need a clear understanding of
18 what the realistic possibilities are and what the means are
19 to carry it out. And it doesn't seem very likely, to me,
20 that a moderate and effective Syrian fighting force is going
21 to be able to be constituted quickly or easily. But, if it
22 is, it's also going to require outside support, which
23 doesn't necessarily have to be just American; it probably --
24 may not desirably be American. But, they will -- one of the
25 things that we need to do in that region, I think, is also

1 broaden the effectiveness of the coalition and the others
2 who are participating in this. And, to do that, you need
3 clear goals and objectives.

4 Chairman McCain: Ambassador Olson or Mr. Leiter, do
5 you have a comment?

6 Mr. Leiter: Senator, not specific to Bashar al-Assad,
7 but I know, with several of the colleagues here at the
8 table, I sat through too many meetings in the White House
9 Situation Room discussing whether or not a terrorist group
10 fit under a very precise definition within an authorization
11 of force. Frankly, I thought some of that time could have
12 been put to better use.

13 I understand the risk of having an overly broad
14 authorization, but I think any authorization limited to a
15 single group or a single name runs a real risk of not
16 keeping up with time as a terrorist threat morphs.

17 Admiral Olson: Sir, I would agree with Mr. Leiter, as
18 well as the Ambassadors. I think that, in general, the AUMF
19 authorizations ought to be more generally written. We did
20 spend much too much time parsing who fit within specific
21 authorizations, which delayed the decision to take some sort
22 of action -- in some cases, costing us an opportunity.

23 Chairman McCain: Do you agree with that on the overall
24 authorization, Ambassador?

25 Ambassador Crocker: I certainly do. The broader they

1 can be written to allow their application to emerging
2 threats without having to drag through the whole process
3 again, I think is very important.

4 I would like to make one other point, Mr. Chairman, on
5 behalf of my former profession, the Foreign Service. I do
6 believe, and I have said so on a number of occasions, that
7 there was a period after 2011 in which, if we had chosen to
8 send in, not boots on the ground, but wingtips and pumps on
9 the ground, in the person of language-proficient, area-
10 familiar Foreign Service officers, we could have done, at
11 that time, under conditions of reasonable security, working
12 with the Turks and others, to make on-the-ground liaison
13 with the non-Islamic opposition, to evaluate them, to
14 influence them, to assess them, and to make cogent
15 recommendations back to Washington. I think of all the gaps
16 that we may have in our Syria strategy, not deploying
17 Foreign Service officers into an admittedly risky
18 environment, but a manageable environment at that time, may
19 be our most egregious.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

21 Senator Reed: Are there going to be any more questions
22 or is this --

23 Chairman McCain: No.

24 Senator Reed: I just -- I want to follow up with one
25 question, the Chairman's very thoughtful discussion about

1 the issue of the AUMF, ISIL, and Syria. Ambassador Crocker
2 and Ambassador Cunningham, do you feel that ISIL is an
3 imminent threat to the United States, in terms of what they
4 could do or what they might be planning to do?

5 Ambassador Cunningham: One of the principals that I've
6 brought to this kind of work, and especially dealing with
7 groups like that, is that, when they say they're going to do
8 something, you ought to think that they're serious about it.
9 In the case of ISIL, they've demonstrated that they'll do
10 what they say they're going to do.

11 Whether the threat is imminent, or not, I don't know.
12 I don't have access to intelligence. But, there's no doubt
13 in my mind that, over the long term, if they succeed in
14 establishing themselves, that they will both seek to expand
15 to other parts of the world, which they've said they will
16 do, and they will seek to take on us and our European allies
17 directly -- or, not just the Europeans -- others who are
18 engaged against them.

19 I know it's difficult. I've been asked by my friends,
20 "Why don't we just go away and leave them alone, let them
21 fight it out? Why make this our fight?" I firmly believe
22 we don't have that option. We can decide not to do anything
23 about it. That's a policy choice. And you -- we should
24 have that debate. The American people should understand
25 what the choices are and what the options are, and also what

1 the likely outcomes are going to be. But, we don't have the
2 option of saying, "The problem doesn't exist." We can say,
3 "We're not going to deal with it," and then we can absorb
4 the consequences of that later on, sometime -- who knows how
5 long. But, there will be consequences.

6 Senator Reed: Would you say the same thing about
7 imminent threat with respect to the Assad government, given
8 their history, given the experience that you've both had
9 dealing with them?

10 Ambassador Cunningham: I have had not very much
11 experience dealing with the Assad government, but my guess
12 would be that there -- a line has been crossed in the region
13 that is not going to be easy to repair soon or if ever. And
14 that will also have consequences for our interests in the
15 region. Negative consequences.

16 Senator Reed: Ambassador Crocker, your comments on
17 both, sort of, the potential threats.

18 Ambassador Crocker: On the Islamic state, ISIS, ISIL,
19 I believe there is an imminent threat. I just saw the news
20 report this morning. I believe it was an NCTC estimate of
21 20,000 foreign fighters in ISIS ranks. A number of those --
22 I think the report I saw said 150 -- are American passport
23 holders. Several thousand others hold Western European
24 passports. They don't need visas. If they're not on a
25 watch list, they just get on a plane and they're here. That

1 is an advantage al-Qaeda didn't have. So, I know our
2 security agencies are hard at work at this, as they should
3 be, but I think that danger is very, very imminent.

4 I have had long experience -- too long -- with the
5 Assad regime, either as the recipient of their favors in
6 Lebanon over a 6-year period or in Damascus as Ambassador.
7 Father and son, it is an evil regime. And that evil could
8 not be more manifest than it is in the recent fighting with
9 the barrel bombs, deliberate attacks on civilians, over and
10 over and over again.

11 Do they constitute a direct threat to American
12 security? At one point, they did. There was a Syrian hand
13 behind the marine barracks bombing of 1983 and, 6 months
14 earlier, the American embassy bombing. I was in it. The
15 Syrian regime was tied to an effort to blow up an El Al
16 plane out of the U.K. in the mid-1980s. We withdrew our
17 Ambassador over that.

18 Are they still in that business? Certainly not now.
19 Have they been in that business? Not directly or, I think,
20 even indirectly, for some time. Might they go back to it?
21 As Ambassador Cunningham said, the region, for better or
22 worse, is never going to be the same again after what is
23 happening in Syria. And, while the Assad regime may endure
24 in some form or another, I don't think they're going to have
25 the luxury to plan outside operations anytime in the

1 foreseeable future. That doesn't mean you don't watch them.

2 Senator Reed: Right. Okay.

3 Ambassador Crocker: But, I would put them pretty far
4 down on the threat list.

5 Senator Reed: Thank you.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman McCain: Would you also agree that it's
8 accurate to depict Bashar Assad as the father of ISIS?

9 Ambassador Crocker: You drag me back into history, Mr.
10 Chairman.

11 [Laughter.]

12 Ambassador Crocker: I would say that the father of
13 Bashar al-Assad, Hafez, is the father of ISIS, or was the
14 father of ISIS. What he did to the Sunni population of Hama
15 in 1982 is something no American really remembers and no
16 Syrian will ever forget.

17 Chairman McCain: And also, isn't there a principle
18 about the requirement to protect, when people are being
19 slaughtered -- in this case, well over 200,000 -- 150,000 in
20 his prison, millions of refugees that are destabilizing
21 Lebanon, as well as other countries in the region? I don't
22 think there's -- if you ask the King of Jordan, I think he
23 would say, absolutely, that they have posed a threat to the
24 stability of his country because of Bashar Assad's actions.
25 And also for -- whether he's right or wrong, or not, the

1 President of Turkey views Bashar Assad as a greater threat
2 than ISIL.

3 So, my point is, to make no mention in this
4 authorization whatsoever of Bashar Assad, and, at the same
5 time, training young Americans to go in and -- young Syrians
6 to go in and fight him is a contradiction and, in a way,
7 immoral, if we're going to subject them to being barrel
8 bombed by Bashar Assad. And that -- the point that I was
9 trying to make, here. And if were Bashar Assad today, and I
10 looked at this resolution, which says only ISIL, I think I'd
11 be pretty pleased this morning.

12 I thank the witnesses --

13 Senator Cotton: Mr. Chairman?

14 Chairman McCain: Senator Cotton.

15 Senator Cotton: I'd like to ask a specific point about
16 this draft use-of-force resolution, that goes to the broader
17 point we've been discussing about deadline-driven
18 operations.

19 The resolution also has a 3-year expiration date on it.
20 Are any of you aware of past use-of-force resolutions or
21 declarations of war, going back to the start of our
22 country's history, that had an explicit expiration date?

23 Ambassador Crocker: Senator, I am not -- flipping
24 through my depleted memory banks in 30 seconds, cannot be
25 considered the definitive statement on that subject. But, I

1 would just offer the opinion -- and I have not seen the
2 draft authorization. It goes back to our earlier
3 conversation about calendar- versus condition-based
4 timelines. I -- you know, in the world that I have spent so
5 much of my life in, it's all about conditions, it's not
6 about calendars. You all know the hackneyed mantra
7 attributed to the Taliban, "You Americans may have the
8 watches, we have the time." Calendars work for our
9 adversaries more than they work for us. And again, I
10 haven't seen the language of the authorization, so I can't
11 comment on it. In the world that is the Middle East, having
12 arbitrary timelines generally does not serve U.S. interests.

13 Senator Cotton: And can you -- you've all said that
14 you take the view that, in Afghanistan, we're sending the
15 wrong message by having a deadline-driven policy rather than
16 a conditions-driven policy. Would you agree with Ambassador
17 Crocker's statements that, more broadly, if we have
18 deadline-driven policies, if we pass resolutions authorizing
19 the use of force with explicit authorization dates, we're
20 sending the same signal to different adversaries all around
21 the world?

22 Ambassador Cunningham: I think the issue is what --
23 the issue will be, What is the rationale behind having the
24 deadline? Again, I don't know if there's been any precedent
25 for that, or not. There may be. I don't remember what the

1 Patriot Act said, for instance. I remember it was
2 repeatedly debated and updated over the years.

3 If the purpose of this is to signal that that's only as
4 long as we're willing to make the effort, then I think
5 that's the wrong signal, because I think we're -- as I said
6 earlier, before you came, Senator, this whole complex of
7 issues, I believe to be a generational challenge that we
8 will be dealing with for a long time. And we need to get
9 smarter at dealing with them.

10 But, if the purpose is to signal the importance of
11 maintaining political control in updating the provisions of
12 the use of force -- and there will be a debate about that in
13 the Congress, I know -- then that is -- I think that's
14 entirely appropriate.

15 Chairman McCain: We can't close the hearing without an
16 Independent question.

17 Senator King: You mentioned that you hadn't seen the
18 authorization. I think it's important, in light of Senator
19 Cotton's questions that -- it says, "This authorization
20 shall terminate 3 years after the date of the enactment of
21 this joint resolution, unless reauthorized." In my view,
22 this document is trying to strike a balance between
23 presidential authority and congressional authority in the
24 area of, particularly, warmaking. And so, it's not -- if it
25 didn't say "unless we -- reauthorized," I think your point

1 would lie. But, I think the fact that it leaves it within
2 the discretion of Congress to determine, in 3 years, whether
3 it's in the national interest to continue this legal
4 authority of the President -- I mean, I find it somewhat
5 ironic that we're all -- you know, I'm the one talking about
6 asserting congressional and constitutional authority,
7 because I think there is a question, here. If it's entirely
8 open-ended, in terms of time, in terms of enemy, in terms of
9 geography, then we've written the war power out of the
10 Constitution, as far as I'm concerned, and the Congress has
11 no role.

12 The question that we're going to be wrestling with, Mr.
13 Chair -- and I think it's going to be a vigorous debate --
14 will be, Where's the balance between Commander in Chief and
15 the power to declare war? The framers clearly believed that
16 there was -- the President did not have the unfettered power
17 to commit the Nation to war. They talked about it at the
18 convention and in the Federalist Papers. So, I think that's
19 the -- that's the debate that we have to engage in.

20 And I haven't yet taken a position on this document. I
21 probably won't, for some time. But, I understand -- I think
22 it's important that the Presidents come to us and ask for an
23 authorization. And it's now up to us to determine what the
24 nature of that authorization should be.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman McCain: Is a question in there somewhere?

2 [Laughter.]

3 Senator King: I'm sure the Chairman can find one,

4 Senator. Thank you.

5 [Laughter.]

6 Chairman McCain: Could I say, this has been extremely

7 helpful.

8 I thank these great and outstanding Americans, who have
9 devoted their mature lives in service of the country. And
10 I'm honored and humbled to be in your presence.

11 This hearing is adjourned.

12 [Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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