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Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON U.S. MILITARY  
OPERATIONS TO COUNTER THE ISLAMIC STATE IN  
IRAQ AND THE LEVANT

Wednesday, September 16, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
U.S. MILITARY OPERATIONS TO COUNTER  
THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT

Wednesday, September 16, 2015

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:53 a.m. in Room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators McCain [presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Lee, Reed, Nelson, McCaskill, Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono, Kaine, King, and Heinrich.

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

3           Chairman McCain: Well, good morning, all. The Senate  
4 Armed Services Committee meets today to receive testimony on  
5 the United States strategy and military operations to  
6 counter the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant, or ISIL.

7           I want to thank our witnesses, Under Secretary Wormuth  
8 and General Austin, for appearing before us today, and their  
9 continued service to our Nation.

10           It's been 1 year -- it's been 1 year since President  
11 Obama spoke to the Nation about the threat posed by ISIL and  
12 increased U.S. military operations against us. Many of us  
13 believe that the goal the President laid out, quote, "to  
14 degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL" is right. Many of us  
15 agree with a military strategy that seeks to empower local  
16 forces in Iraq and Syria to combat ISIL with U.S. and  
17 coalition training, equipment, assistance, and airpower.  
18 One year into this campaign, it seems impossible to assert  
19 that ISIL is losing and that we are winning. And if you're  
20 not winning in this kind of warfare, you are losing.  
21 Stalemate is not success.

22           It is accurate that we have conducted thousands of  
23 airstrikes against ISIL, trucks and fighters, bunkers and  
24 buildings. This conjures the illusion of progress, but what  
25 effect has that had? ISIL has lost some territory on the

1 margin, mainly to Kurdish and Shi'ite forces, but ISIL has  
2 consolidated control of its core territories and expanded  
3 its control in Syria. It continues to dominate Sunni Arab  
4 areas in both Iraq and Syria. It maintains control of key  
5 cities, like Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi. And efforts to  
6 retake those territories appear to have stalled entirely.

7         Meanwhile, ISIL is expanding globally. It's now  
8 operating in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt. And  
9 other radical Islamic groups, like Boko Haram in Nigeria and  
10 al-Shabaab in Somalia, have pledged allegiance to ISIL.  
11 This appearance of success only enhances ISIL's ability to  
12 radicalize, recruit, and grow.

13         Published media reports suggest that the CIA's  
14 estimates of ISIL's manpower has remained constant, despite  
15 U.S. airstrikes, which suggests that either they were wrong,  
16 to begin with, or that ISIL is replacing its losses in real  
17 time. Neither is good. Indeed, this committee is disturbed  
18 by recent whistleblower allegations that officials at  
19 Central Command skewed intelligence assessments to paint an  
20 overly positive picture of conditions on the ground. We are  
21 currently investigating these allegations, which we take  
22 with the utmost seriousness. The Department of Defense  
23 should, as well. And, if true, these -- those responsible  
24 must be held accountable.

25         Ultimately, it's not -- ultimately, it's not that we

1 are doing nothing to counter ISIL, it is that there is no  
2 compelling reason to believe that anything we are currently  
3 doing will be sufficient to achieve our strategic objective  
4 of degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL. The United  
5 States and our partners do not have the initiative. Our  
6 enemies do. They're capitalizing on our inadequate policy  
7 to maintain and enhance their initiative, as they have for  
8 the past 4 years. Indeed, the situation on the ground is  
9 now taking yet another dramatic turn for the worst, as  
10 several recent events make clear.

11 Recent published reports state that U.S. officials  
12 believe that ISIL is using mustard gas and may even be  
13 manufacturing these chemical weapons by themselves. Whether  
14 ISIL is manufacturing chemical weapons themselves or  
15 acquired from former or current stocks maintained by Bashar  
16 Assad, this is a potential nightmare scenario for our  
17 partners in the Middle East and for us. At the same time,  
18 the United States effort to train and equip Syrian rebels to  
19 fight ISIL is clearly and unfortunately failing. The goal  
20 was 3,000 fighters in the first year. Instead, this program  
21 has trained and equipped only 54 fighters, some of whom were  
22 killed or captured by al-Qaeda as soon as they returned to  
23 Syria. This program the administration promised would  
24 result in a viable indigenous ground force in Syria has yet  
25 to produce any significant effects on the battlefield. To

1 be sure, the fixation with perfect vetting, both in the  
2 Congress and the administration, is contributing to this  
3 failure. But, far worse has been the administration's  
4 requirement that this new Syrian force could only fight  
5 ISIL, not the Assad regime, which has killed far more  
6 Syrians than ISIL, and the President's refusal, until just  
7 week's ago, to authorize the close air support and other  
8 military assistance to ensure our Syrian partners would be  
9 successful.

10           Unfortunately, these contradictions were clear from the  
11 beginning, and many members of this committee warned the  
12 administration to change course. Their failure to do so has  
13 squandered a lot of time, money, and, worst of all,  
14 credibility. For this committee to continue supporting this  
15 program, we need some major changes.

16           Into this vacuum has now stepped Vladimir Putin. As in  
17 Ukraine and elsewhere, he perceives the administration's  
18 inaction and caution as weakness, and he is taking  
19 advantage. According to media reports, Putin has deployed  
20 strike aircraft, T-90 tanks, Howitzers, armored personnel  
21 carriers, Russian marines, and housing for up to 1,500  
22 personnel in military bases in western Syria. This is an  
23 expansion of Russian power in the Middle East that we have  
24 not seen in four decades, and it will allow Putin to further  
25 prop up Assad, fuel his indiscriminate killing machine, play

1 kingmaker in any transition, undermine U.S. goals, policy,  
2 and operations, and ultimately prolong this horrific  
3 conflict. The main beneficiary will be ISIL.

4 Many of us have said from the beginning -- from the  
5 beginning -- that the conflict in Syria would not be  
6 contained. And, for 4 years, we have seen evidence of that:  
7 the hundreds of thousands dead, the millions of driven and  
8 displaced people, the use of chemical weapons, and the rise  
9 of the worst terrorist army in the world. Now we are seeing  
10 the latest manifestation of this failed policy -- the flood  
11 of people pouring out of the Middle East -- that has led to  
12 the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

13 The administration has promised to accept 10,000  
14 refugees in the coming year. That's a noble gesture. But,  
15 unless we address the cause of this crisis, which is the  
16 continued grinding conflict in Syria, the refugees will keep  
17 coming, ISIL will grow stronger, the Middle East will  
18 descend further into chaos, and U.S. national security  
19 interests will be put at greater risk.

20 For 4 years, we have been told that there is no  
21 military solution to this conflict, as if anyone believes  
22 there is; and there are no good options, if anybody -- as if  
23 anybody believes there are; that our influence is limited,  
24 as if that has not always been the case; that we will not  
25 succeed overnight, as if our problem is one of time, not

1 policy; and that we cannot solve every problem in the Middle  
2 East, as if that absolves us of our responsibility to make  
3 the situation better, where we can.

4 This is not a question of our capacity or our  
5 capabilities or our options. We have options between doing  
6 nothing and invading Iraq and Syria. Many members of this  
7 committee have suggested such options, for years now, and  
8 they are still relevant. We need to put an end to Assad's  
9 ability to use airpower against his people, especially the  
10 use of horrific barrel bombs. Shoot down planes that drop  
11 barrel bombs that slaughter innocent civilians. It's one of  
12 the leading killers of innocent civilians. We need to help  
13 establish safe zones, inside Syria, where refugees and  
14 displaced people can be secure. We need forward air  
15 controllers to add precision and lethality to our air  
16 campaign. We need to make significant changes in order to  
17 improve and rapidly expand our training of Syrian and Iraqi  
18 forces. And, while no one believes that we need to invade  
19 Iraq or Syria, the fact is that we will likely need  
20 additional U.S. Special Forces and military advisors to be  
21 successful.

22 I hope our witnesses will not repeat our desired policy  
23 goals and a list of tactical achievements and talk about,  
24 quote, "nine lines of effort." We have heard all of that  
25 before, but we have yet to hear a theory of victory. I hope

1 to hear one today.

2 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 Secretary Wormuth and General Austin, welcome.

5 This morning's hearing continues the committee's review  
6 of U.S. military operations to counter ISIL in Iraq and  
7 Syria, and its growth in the broader Middle East, Africa,  
8 and South Asia. Through its extreme ideological and brutal  
9 tactics, including the reported development and use of  
10 chemical weapons, ISIL has gained control over portions of  
11 Syria and Iraq effectively erasing the border between these  
12 countries. This violent extremist group has slaughtered  
13 civilians, enslaved women and girls, and carried out  
14 horrific attacks in ethnic and religious minorities, and  
15 broadcast its barbaric acts on social media. To escape the  
16 violence of ISIL, the Assad regime, and multiple other armed  
17 elements, millions have been displaced or fled outside Iraq  
18 and Syria. The crush of fleeing refugees into Europe has  
19 only added to the sense of urgency regarding the need to  
20 restore security in the region.

21 The military campaign against ISIL remains complex,  
22 with no easy answers. While the coalition has had success  
23 in pushing ISIL out of some territory, including gains by  
24 the Kurdish peshmerga in the north, the retaking of Tikrit  
25 by Iraqi Security Forces, and the Syrian Kurds' removal of

1    ISIL along sections of the border with Turkey, the self-  
2    described Islamic State continues to hold key cities,  
3    including al-Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. The Iraq  
4    Security Forces' counteroffensive to take back Ramadi has  
5    struggled over the last few months, and Bashir remains  
6    contested. At the same time, Iranian-backed Shi'a militias  
7    have stalled in operations near Fallujah. And, despite its  
8    recent setbacks, ISIL is consolidating its control over the  
9    local populations in the areas that it holds in both Syria  
10   and Iraq.

11           The agreement between the United States and Turkey,  
12   expanding access to land and use of Turkish airbases and  
13   seeking to create an ISIL-free zone on the Syrian side of  
14   the border, is an important step forward. However, the  
15   provocative deployment by Russia of additional military  
16   forces to bases in Syria, under the guise of assisting in  
17   countering ISIL efforts, appears to be an effort by Putin to  
18   prop up the Assad regime, further complicating efforts to  
19   restore security in Syria.

20           These events have raised concerns over whether the  
21   current level of our efforts against ISIL is sufficient. A  
22   critical issue for the military lines of effort within the  
23   counter-ISIL strategy is the progress of the U.S. train and  
24   equipment programs for coalition-backed forces in both Iraq  
25   and Syria. While the U.S.-led air campaign has had an

1 effect in degrading ISIL, effective local forces that can  
2 take full advantage of coalition airpower, seize ground from  
3 ISIL, and then hold it, are essential to success.

4 In Iraq, operations to take Anbar require recruiting  
5 significant numbers of Sunnis into the Iraqi Security Forces  
6 and equipping them to resist the ISIL threat. I am  
7 concerned by reports that Sunni recruitment has fallen short  
8 of its targets and that the Government of Iraq has been slow  
9 in delivering equipment for arming Sunni forces.

10 In Syria, the DOD Syria train-and-equip program,  
11 according to public reports, has experienced a variety of  
12 setbacks. We'll be interested in your assessment of this  
13 effort. Quite interested.

14 And, General, I also hope you will address what you  
15 believe might be done to intensify military operations to  
16 counter the ISIL threat. For example, would you support a  
17 more active role for U.S. military personnel in facilitating  
18 the engagement with Sunni tribes, or providing advisors  
19 within the Iraqi Ministry of Defense to build institutional  
20 capacity, or accompanying Iraqi Security Forces, on a  
21 limited basis, when direct contact with the enemy is not  
22 anticipated?

23 The ISIL problem is not geographically bounded by Syria  
24 and Iraq. And indeed, as the Chairman has pointed out,  
25 ISIL-inspired or -directed groups have appeared in Yemen,

1 Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, the Horn of Africa, and  
2 the Caucasus, and elsewhere. General, I am interested in  
3 your assessment of the group's growth in the region and how  
4 CENTCOM is contributing to transregional efforts to combat  
5 the group.

6       Ultimately, the success of the counter-ISIL effort will  
7 depend on a number of nonmilitary factors also, including  
8 whether the reforms Prime Minister Abadi has initiated are  
9 implemented and result in an Iraqi government that is more  
10 inclusive and responsive to the concerns of the Sunnis,  
11 Kurds, religious minorities, and other factions in Iraq  
12 society; whether the international coalition, including  
13 states in the region, can effectively counter ISIL's  
14 propaganda, financing, and the spread of its extreme  
15 ideology; and whether a political solution can be found for  
16 the crisis in Syria. These issues are the primary  
17 responsibility of departments other than Department of  
18 Defense, but I assume our witnesses would agree that these  
19 issues are integral to our comprehensive approach to  
20 countering the ISIL threat.

21       General Austin, I hope that you will also, to the  
22 extent possible, given the ongoing review by the Inspector  
23 General, address questions involving intelligence  
24 assessments with respect to ISIL. It is important that we  
25 wait for the Inspector General's investigation before --

1 complete it -- before making a judgment, but I have no doubt  
2 that you will take such allegations as seriously as we do in  
3 Congress. And we take them very seriously. Like Senator  
4 McCain, I expect the committee will be kept apprised of this  
5 investigation as it continues, and be active, in terms of  
6 the recommendations.

7 Let me thank both witnesses for their testimony this  
8 morning.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman McCain: Ms. Wormuth.

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1           STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTINE E. WORMUTH, UNDER  
2           SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

3           Ms. Wormuth: Thank you, Chairman McCain and Ranking  
4           Member Reed, as well as members of this committee. Thank  
5           you for the opportunity to be here today to give you an  
6           update on the military aspects of our counter-ISIL campaign.

7           It's also a pleasure, as always, to be here with  
8           General Austin. We work very closely together every day on  
9           a range of issues, so it's nice to be here with him today.

10          As the Chairman said, it's been just over a year since  
11          the United States and a coalition of nations began the  
12          military campaign against ISIL. When we began that campaign  
13          about a year ago, ISIL was pushing into Kurdish territory in  
14          northern Iraq and pushing towards Baghdad. Over the past 12  
15          months, ISIL has lost territory in both Syria and Iraq,  
16          despite advances it's made in Ramadi and Palmyra. Progress  
17          has been slow, but steady.

18          There have definitely been setbacks in the past year.  
19          While not 10 feet tall, ISIL remains a thinking enemy that  
20          adapts to evolving conditions on the battlefield. Our  
21          train-and-equip programs in Iraq and Syria have faced  
22          challenges. In Iraq, the pace of our program has moved more  
23          slowly than we'd like, and, in Syria, the stringent vetting  
24          criteria we're using at the outset of the program has  
25          contributed to smaller numbers than we'd hoped for. As the

1 military campaign continues in both countries, we expect  
2 there will continue to be challenges clearing and holding  
3 territory.

4 But, we've also seen progress in the past year. You're  
5 all familiar with the successful operations to take back  
6 Kurdish territory in Iraq, to defeat ISIL in Khobani, and  
7 to, more recently, retake Tikrit, as well as other  
8 successful engagements.

9 On the political front, Prime Minister Abadi continues  
10 to demonstrate the resolve necessary to confront ISIL, and  
11 he is striving to manage what is a very difficult political  
12 landscape in Baghdad.

13 In Syria, we've seen some opportunities emerge that we  
14 didn't envision a year ago, particularly in the northern  
15 part of the country, where Syrian Kurds, working with Syrian  
16 Arabs, have successfully pressured ISIL along the Turkish  
17 border.

18 Over a year ago, the President outlined a whole-of-  
19 government strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL,  
20 and he emphasized it would be a multiyear campaign. When  
21 Secretary Carter was here in July, he outlined the nine  
22 lines of effort that comprise our strategy, so I won't go  
23 over them again in detail, but I would emphasize it will  
24 take more than the military campaign to be successful. We  
25 also need to dry up ISIL's finances, we need to stop the

1 flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria, in particular,  
2 protect the United States from potential attacks from ISIL,  
3 provide humanitarian assistance in areas that we are taking  
4 back from ISIL, and find a way to more effectively counter  
5 ISIL's very successful messaging campaign.

6 As Secretary Carter said to the committee in July, the  
7 administration believes we have the right strategy in place.  
8 We're now focused on implementing the strategy as  
9 effectively as possible. This is very much an interagency  
10 effort, with increasingly better synchronization against all  
11 of -- across all of the departments and agencies that are  
12 involved. And, in fact, Secretary Carter and Secretary  
13 Kerry have been meeting together with their senior staffs to  
14 monitor and identify issues in the campaign. And they're  
15 meeting tomorrow with NCTC to focus in particular on foreign  
16 fighters.

17 DOD, as you know, is responsible for two of the lines  
18 of effort inside the strategy: denying ISIL safe haven and  
19 building partner capacity. So, I'd like to speak briefly to  
20 those areas, and General Austin will also elaborate.

21 The coalition campaign has degraded ISIL's military  
22 capacity, has removed some of its key leaders and enabled  
23 gains by local forces in Iraq and Syria. The ISF has  
24 regained control of Tikrit from ISIL earlier this year. And  
25 Syrian Kurds and Sunni Arab partners have recently taken the

1 key border town in Syria of Tal Abyad, which severed one of  
2 ISIL's key lines of communication and supply, and put ISIL  
3 on the defensive, and also put more pressure on its  
4 stronghold, Raqqa, in Syria. These examples demonstrate  
5 how, when we have credible ground forces and we support them  
6 with our airpower, ISIL can suffer.

7 We're also working hard to build the capacity of our  
8 partner forces on the ground. Since we began our efforts,  
9 we've now trained and equipped more than six brigades and  
10 provided training to more than 13,000 Iraqi personnel --  
11 Iraqi army, Kurdish peshmerga, and counterterrorism service  
12 personnel -- and we have more in the pipeline. As Secretary  
13 Carter said in July, however, training for the Iraqi army  
14 has been slowed by a lack of trainees coming into the  
15 training sites.

16 Over the last several weeks, we've had better  
17 participation from Iraqi units at the training sites, and  
18 Iraq has actually expanded the pool of units that are  
19 eligible for training. Some of the units we have trained  
20 are now participating more directly in the fight in areas  
21 such as Ramadi, and early indications are that they are  
22 performing well in combat missions. But, as you all know,  
23 they face a difficult fight ahead, and strong leadership of  
24 these forces is going to be essential.

25 Our forces on the ground at al-Assad and Taqqatum

1 Airbases, are involved in advising and training Sunni tribal  
2 fighters in Anbar Province, both through providing direct  
3 training and also through train-the-trainer type of  
4 assistance with the Iraqi Security Forces. And, in terms of  
5 equipping these Sunni tribal fighters, we've recently  
6 delivered a battalion's worth of equipment to Iraqi  
7 officials working with us there on those two airbases to  
8 distribute the equipment to fighters. We're also now  
9 overseeing the distribution of the Government of Iraq's  
10 equipment to these Sunni tribal fighters from these bases.  
11 So, through these kinds of efforts, we now have more than  
12 4,000 Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar Province.

13 We're also still in the early stages of our train-and-  
14 equip program in Syria. This effort, I think it's important  
15 to highlight, is just one element of what we're trying to do  
16 in the larger campaign in Syria, which includes an  
17 increasing number of airstrikes as well as supporting  
18 partner forces on the ground, like the Syrian Kurds, the  
19 YPG, Sunni Arabs, and other local forces, such as Turkomans,  
20 for example, to try to put pressure on ISIL in northeastern  
21 Syria. These efforts have substantially rolled ISIL back in  
22 this area, and have had significant impacts on ISIL's  
23 freedom of movement and supply lines.

24 As of September 15th, our train-and-equip program, the  
25 specific program we have, we're now currently training more

1 than 100 fighters, and we have additional recruits in the  
2 pipeline. This number is definitely smaller than we had  
3 hoped for, in part because, as the Chairman and others have  
4 noted, we put our trainees through a very rigorous screening  
5 process to meet standards that are very appropriately laid  
6 out in U.S. law. We've closely aligned all of our efforts  
7 in all of these areas with our 62-country coalition. And,  
8 as an example of how we're doing that, Turkey's recent  
9 decision to provide us access to bases at Incirlik and  
10 elsewhere has enabled us to expand the fight and is  
11 strengthening the cohesion of our efforts in Syria.

12 Before turning to General Austin, I want to address  
13 Russia's involvement in Syria. We're closely tracking  
14 Russia's recent efforts to deploy additional military  
15 equipment and personnel to Syria, and we're in close touch  
16 with our allies and partners about these developments. Both  
17 Russia and Iran have continued to support, politically and  
18 militarily, the Assad regime, which has systemically  
19 murdered its own people and helped create the conditions of  
20 the current conflict and the rise of ISIL. What we need in  
21 Syria urgently is a political solution to the conflict  
22 through a transition away from Assad. And any actions that  
23 empower the regime to escalate the conflict are unwelcome  
24 and would be destabilizing and counterproductive.

25 This is clearly a very difficult challenge that we

1 face. We're not going to solve it quickly, but we have the  
2 right components in place to advance our objectives, and  
3 we're dynamically adjusting our campaign to a rapidly  
4 changing battlefield. Achieving a lasting defeat against  
5 ISIL is going to require continued commitment, strong  
6 leadership from us and the global coalition, as well as  
7 commitment and sacrifice from local forces in Iraq and  
8 Syria.

9 Thank you.

10 [The prepared statement of Ms. Wormuth follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: General Austin.  
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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL LLOYD J. AUSTIN III, USA,  
2           COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND

3           General Austin: Good morning, Chairman McCain, Senator  
4           Reed, and distinguished members of the committee. I want to  
5           thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to  
6           provide a current update on the progress achieved over the  
7           past year in support of the ongoing campaign to counter  
8           ISIL, or Daesh, in Iraq and Syria.

9           I'm pleased to appear here this morning alongside Ms.  
10          Christine Wormuth. Ms. Wormuth is widely respected  
11          throughout the Department of Defense, and we are most  
12          grateful to her for her continued and strong support of our  
13          efforts at CENTCOM. I'll join Christine in making a few  
14          brief opening comments, and then we're prepared to answer  
15          your questions.

16          Before providing a brief update on the counter-ISIL  
17          campaign, I did want to quickly address an important issue.  
18          As the Chairman mentioned, there is an ongoing DOD IG  
19          investigation looking into allegations concerning the  
20          processing of intelligence information by CENTCOM's  
21          Intelligence Director. Because the allegations are  
22          currently under investigation, it would be premature and  
23          inappropriate for me to discuss this matter. What I will  
24          say is, I welcome the DOD IG's oversight, and, once the  
25          investigation is complete, based upon the findings, you can

1 be assured that I will take appropriate actions.

2 Again, I cannot speak to the specifics of the  
3 allegations; however, I would like to take this opportunity  
4 to provide some clarity with respect to how we use  
5 intelligence products in the critical work that we do.

6 Because of the nature of our mission at CENTCOM, we do  
7 have, and rely on, a robust intelligence enterprise to  
8 support the Command. There are over 1200 seasoned  
9 intelligence professionals that make up that enterprise, and  
10 they do exceptional work. And, as a commander, I greatly  
11 value and seek their input and insights. I use the  
12 assessments that they provide me to -- together with the  
13 inputs that I receive from a variety of sources that include  
14 my commanders on the ground who I talk to almost every  
15 single day, and I consider this broad range of inputs when  
16 making my decisions.

17 You know, there's been a lot of speculation in the  
18 media about the allegations made to the DOD IG; and one in  
19 particular, I believe, should be addressed and corrected for  
20 the record. Some have expressed concern that CENTCOM  
21 intelligence reports are sent directly to the President.  
22 This is not accurate. As the Office of the Director of  
23 National Intelligence put out to the media last week, and I  
24 quote, "None of the combatant commands are permitted to  
25 engage directly in the President's daily brief process.

1 Rather, reports are produced by the combatant commands and  
2 funneled through the DIA to ensure that all substantive  
3 deliberations and final contributions are appropriately  
4 coordinated," end of quote.

5 Again, I cannot comment on the specific allegations.  
6 We will need to wait for the DOD IG to complete its  
7 investigation. But, I did want to provide this additional  
8 clarification.

9 Ladies and gentlemen, with respect to the ongoing  
10 operations in Iraq and Syria today, despite some slow  
11 movement at the tactical level, we continue to make progress  
12 across the battlespace in support of the broader U.S.  
13 Government strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.  
14 Key to the enduring success of the military campaign is  
15 sustained pressure on ISIL, both from the air and on the  
16 ground. And the approach that we adopted relies on  
17 indigenous forces to create and sustain this pressure while  
18 also curbing the flow of foreign fighters and cutting off  
19 the enemy's ability to resource himself.

20 In recent months, Iraq's Security Forces have  
21 experienced some setbacks. And this is to be expected in  
22 the early stages of a fight as complex as this one. But,  
23 overall, enabled by coalition airstrikes and our advise-and-  
24 assist in building partner capacity efforts, the Iraqis  
25 continue to make progress.

1           In northern Iraq, the Kurdish peshmerga have performed  
2 exceptionally well, and the Kurdish Arab coalition in  
3 northeast Syria is also achieving substantial effects. In  
4 fact, over the past several months, they've retaken more  
5 than 17,000 square kilometers of terrain from the enemy.  
6 And the effects that they have achieved serve to create  
7 significant opportunities that, if pursued, could prove  
8 devastating for the enemy. The intent of the military  
9 campaign is to degrade and ultimately defeat the enemy  
10 through our own actions and by enabling and supporting the  
11 efforts of our coalition partners and the indigenous forces  
12 in Iraq and Syria. And again, progress is being made, and  
13 this is evidenced by what we see happening in the air and on  
14 the ground in both countries.

15           I would also point out that the progress reflects, in  
16 large part, the many contributions made by our coalition  
17 partners. The 60-plus-nation coalition represents the  
18 strength of this campaign, and we remain grateful for their  
19 strong support. Success in this campaign will require the  
20 continued support of our coalition partners along with the  
21 support of other elements of the U.S. Government and the  
22 international community. More importantly, it will require  
23 that the Iraqis do what is necessary to address their  
24 political challenges. And national reconciliation is  
25 absolutely essential to the success in the counter-ISIL

1 campaign.

2 We said at the outset that the military campaign to  
3 counter ISIL would take time. And it will take time. And  
4 we should expect that there will be occasional setbacks  
5 along the way, particularly in the early stages. We also  
6 need to keep in mind that we are supporting and enabling  
7 this effort. Our partners, not us, are in the lead. It is  
8 taking a bit longer to get things done, but it must be this  
9 way if we are to achieve lasting and positive effects.

10 Fortunately, amidst all the -- amidst the many  
11 challenges that exist in Iraq and Syria, we find  
12 opportunities and we remain confident that our actions in  
13 pursuit of these opportunities will continue to produce  
14 positive results in the coming days.

15 Mr. Chairman, Senator Reed, members of the committee, I  
16 want to thank you once again for the strong support that you  
17 show to our servicemembers, our civilians, and their  
18 families. They are truly exceptional, and they are making  
19 important and lasting contributions to the overall effort.

20 Again, we appreciate your support. And I look forward  
21 to answering your questions.

22 [The prepared statement of General Austin follows:]

23

24

25

1 Chairman McCain: Well, thank you, General Austin and  
2 Ms. Wormuth.

3 I must say, I've been a member of this committee for  
4 nearly 30 years, and I have never heard testimony like this.  
5 Never.

6 General Austin, on September 9th, 1 week ago, Chairman  
7 Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the  
8 fight against ISIL was, quote, "tactically stalemated" with  
9 no, quote, "dramatic gains on either side." So, obviously,  
10 you and the outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
11 have a very different view of what the situation is.

12 And so, with all this progress that you're citing and  
13 -- how long do you think it's going to take for us to defeat  
14 ISIL and to restore stability in Iraq and Syria?

15 General Austin: Sir, it will take years. And if I may  
16 --

17 Chairman McCain: Take years. Okay.

18 General Austin: -- if I may comment on the Chairman's  
19 comments?

20 As I spoke to the Chairman yesterday -- and we did talk  
21 about this issue, and I -- when I took -- went back and took  
22 a look at what he said, he also said ISIL's future is  
23 increasingly dim as more nations join the anti-ISIL effort.  
24 And, although it is tactically stalemated, with no dramatic  
25 gains on either side, ISIL will move at the speed of its

1 governance, not at the speed of its military capability.

2 And I agree with the Chairman, sir, on the issue of -- there  
3 haven't been any dramatic gains on either side.

4 Chairman McCain: Dramatic? Yeah, that's different  
5 from, quote, "tactically stalemated," please, General.  
6 That's what -- Chairman Dempsey. And Chairman Dunford said  
7 exactly the same thing. So, there's clearly a disconnect  
8 between your view and that of our outgoing and incoming  
9 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

10 So, really, in your view, everything should remain as  
11 it is. For example, do you think we should have a no-fly  
12 zone in Syria?

13 General Austin: That's a policy decision, and --

14 Chairman McCain: Would you recommend a no-fly zone in  
15 Syria?

16 General Austin: I would not recommend that at this  
17 point, sir.

18 Chairman McCain: Would you -- not at this point, 4  
19 years later -- would you recommend telling -- setting up a  
20 buffer zone in Syria, where these refugees might be able to  
21 come and be protected from the attacks and slaughter of  
22 Bashar Assad?

23 General Austin: It will take a ground force to be able  
24 to protect refugees if we do that, sir.

25 Chairman McCain: Would you support a buffer zone,

1 which would then protect some of these refugees who are  
2 being barrel-bombed and slaughtered by Bashar Assad?

3 General Austin: I don't see the force available to be  
4 able to protect them, currently, sir, so I would not  
5 recommend that at this point in time.

6 Chairman McCain: So, we wouldn't be able to shoot down  
7 Bashar Assad's aircraft as they barrel-bomb and slaughter  
8 innocent men, women, and children. Is that correct? We  
9 don't have the capability to protect them.

10 General Austin: We clearly have capability, yes, sir.  
11 We do.

12 Chairman McCain: But, you wouldn't recommend such  
13 action.

14 General Austin: I would not recommend a buffer zone,  
15 at this point, sir.

16 Chairman McCain: I see. So, basically, General, what  
17 you're telling us is that everything's fine, as we see  
18 hundreds of thousands of refugees leave and flood Europe, as  
19 we're seeing, now, 250,000 Syrians slaughtered, as you see  
20 more and more Iranian control of the Shi'a militia that are  
21 the only ones that are really doing the fighting besides the  
22 peshmerga. As I say, I have never seen a hearing that is as  
23 divorced from the reality of every outside expert and what  
24 you are saying.

25 Does the massive flow of refugees from Syria have any

1 effect on what you think we should be doing in Syria?

2 General Austin: Sir, I want to be clear that I believe  
3 that this is a horrible tragedy, and this is a thing that  
4 the entire international community is going to have to  
5 continue to work together on. And so, there's always -- we  
6 would hope that, as these refugees continue to be  
7 disadvantaged, that we see more countries joining in to  
8 assist in the --

9 Chairman McCain: So, you would not -- you would not  
10 support a policy that would help protect these refugees from  
11 being slaughtered by Bashar Assad with his barrel bombs?

12 General Austin: Sir, I -- it's always in the best --  
13 our best interest to help protect civilians. But, again, I  
14 would not recommend a buffer zone, at this point in time.

15 Chairman McCain: So, everything is really going well.

16 General Austin: No, sir, that's not --

17 Chairman McCain: Well, then if things aren't going  
18 well, and we have had, quote, "setbacks," and the Chairman  
19 of the Joint Chiefs of Staff says it's tactically  
20 stalemated, and you think everything is going well as --  
21 pursuing the strategy and tactics on the ground that we are  
22 --

23 General Austin, I respectfully disagree. I  
24 respectfully, fundamentally disagree. This is an abject  
25 failure. The refugees are the result of it. This is a

1 result of leaving Iraq. And you were there at the meeting  
2 when Maliki told Senator Graham and I that, if the others  
3 agreed, he would agree to keep a residual force there. And  
4 we never gave him the forces that we wanted to leave behind,  
5 which then set in train the departure of U.S. completely  
6 from Iraq and set the table for the catastrophe that we are  
7 seeing.

8 This is -- as I say, I have not attended a hearing that  
9 is so grossly distorted as the view of a terrible and tragic  
10 situation as I have seen from the witnesses. And, by the  
11 way, Senator Graham and I predicted every single thing that  
12 is happening now. And I predict that, unless we do  
13 something different, it will remain, as General Dempsey  
14 said, stalemated, which means tragedy.

15 Senator Reed.

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

17 Both Madam Secretary and General Austin, about a year  
18 ago or more, there was real concern that, essentially,  
19 Baghdad could fall into -- to ISIL, that they were virtually  
20 unstoppable. And, at this point, your assessment of the  
21 security, at least at Baghdad, has that been improved?

22 General Austin: Sir, it has been greatly improved.

23 Senator Reed: And, going forward now to one of the  
24 fundamental issues is -- and I think it's related to the  
25 comments that both you and General Dempsey have made -- is

1 -- who is -- who will have the advantage, going forward, in  
2 terms of the use of time? ISIL or Iraqi forces supported by  
3 the United States? What's your view on that?

4 General Austin: Sir, I think, clearly, it's the Iraqi  
5 forces supported by not only the United States, but the 60-  
6 plus-nation coalition.

7 Senator Reed: Now, one of the things that has been  
8 suggested at -- but -- not only suggested, but recommended  
9 strongly to the Iraqi government is they create a --  
10 national guard units, Sunni units as well as others, but  
11 formally allied with the government; and that legislation is  
12 bogged down in their parliament. Is that accurate?

13 General Austin: That's correct, sir.

14 Senator Reed: So, we are -- you know, we could do  
15 more, essentially, if the Iraqis were willing to make some  
16 changes, in terms of their policies. For example, we could  
17 at least contemplate the use of advisors with these National  
18 Guard -- Iraqi National Guard units -- to be brokers, in  
19 terms of distributing equipment, as well as tactical advice.  
20 Is that something that's possible if we get cooperation?

21 General Austin: It's clearly possible. Yes, sir.

22 Senator Reed: Is it something you would consider if it  
23 --

24 General Austin: Yes, sir, it is.

25 Senator Reed: Yeah. And one of the factors, too --

1 and it's -- this is a constant source of inquiry -- is that,  
2 in fact, recently the Iraqi parliament, I think, rendered a  
3 scathing report about Prime Minister Maliki's leadership, or  
4 lack of leadership, effectively sort of suggesting that  
5 whatever he said couldn't be trusted. Is that, you know,  
6 your estimate of his role of leading up to this crisis, in  
7 fact over many years?

8 General Austin: Sir, what we saw from the former Prime  
9 Minister was increasingly sectarian behavior and a number of  
10 bad decisions that led to the atrophy of his security  
11 forces. So.

12 Senator Reed: And, in fact, according to this report,  
13 as I've seen in the media, that they attribute most of the  
14 blame for the disintegration of the Iraqi Security Forces at  
15 Maliki's doorstep, at no one else. Is that at least  
16 accurate for their -- the feeling in Iraq?

17 General Austin: I'd say it's primarily his  
18 responsibility. And those who he appointed in key leader  
19 positions enabled that, as well.

20 Senator Reed: In terms of your campaign plan, the  
21 sense I have is that you have tried to exploit the area  
22 where we have the most interest against ISIL, and that's  
23 Iraq, while maintaining as much pressure as possible in  
24 Syria. Is that the general outlines of the campaign plan?  
25 So that we would expect -- and, frankly, of us -- agree --

1 we -- I don't think anyone's seen the progress they'd like  
2 to see, but the first progress would essentially come in  
3 Iraq, and then would lead to a better position against ISIL  
4 in Syria. Is that accurate?

5 General Austin: It is, sir. And, in Iraq, there is a  
6 government for us to work with initially. There were some  
7 forces for us to begin -- to begin to work with. And, of  
8 course, we had access to things that could enable us to get  
9 our -- to get the work done. And our shaping operations in  
10 Syria enabled our work in Iraq, and are still enabling it.

11 And as we get increasing resources, we're able to  
12 increase the tempo in Syria. And so, I think we'll have  
13 greater effects, going forward.

14 Senator Reed: And just, finally, any general comments.  
15 Because one of the recent developments is the fact that  
16 Turkey now is allowing operations out of Incirlik. They  
17 also seem to be much more cooperative, in at -- operational  
18 sense. What do you expect, in the next, say, 6 months, that  
19 will translate to on the ground?

20 General Austin: I think it'll translate to a lot more  
21 pressure on key areas in Syria, sir, like the city of Raqqa,  
22 which has long been a -- an ISIL stronghold. And so,  
23 because of that access, we'll have the ability to increase  
24 the pace and focus on key places in Syria. So, that'll  
25 certainly shape things in Iraq.

1           Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Madam Secretary and  
2 General.

3           Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

4           Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5           General Austin, when Senator Carter was here before  
6 this committee in July, he testified that there were only  
7 about 60 Syrian fighters that had been trained in our train-  
8 and-equip program, and reinserted. We've heard reports  
9 about the attacks on those individuals when they were  
10 reinserted back into Syria. Can you tell us what the total  
11 number of trained fighters remains?

12          General Austin: It's a small number. And the ones  
13 that are in the fight is -- we're talking four or five.

14          Senator Fischer: A New York Times report on September  
15 6 indicated that, among the lessons learned from that  
16 experience, was that these fighters should be returned to  
17 Syria in larger numbers than the 60, obviously larger than  
18 the four or five that are there. Do you agree with that?

19          General Austin: I agree with that, Senator. Whenever  
20 that's possible, it is in our best interest to make sure  
21 that we have an element that can protect itself. And also,  
22 it can go in and combine efforts with other elements that  
23 are on the ground.

24          Senator Fischer: How do you plan to achieve that? How  
25 are you going to increase the number of fighters when we're

1 looking at the really tough security screening processes  
2 that are in place now? How are we going to achieve that?  
3 And how long will that take? And you mentioned earlier  
4 about increasing resources. I took that to mean increasing  
5 the number of fighters that you would place in Syria, and  
6 the effect they would have. So, what's the time period  
7 we're looking at, here, and how are you going to do it?  
8 Because I don't think it's been at all successful yet.

9 General Austin: I -- and I certainly agree with you  
10 that this is -- this -- the new Syrian force program has  
11 gotten off to a slow start. But, I think it's important to  
12 remember that this element is designed to be a complement to  
13 all the other things that we're doing. So, we're going to  
14 use, and we are using, every tool that we have available to  
15 us in our inventory. Our strategy is -- or our approach is  
16 to utilize indigenous forces to complement our work from the  
17 air on the ground. As we --

18 Senator Fischer: It's -- if I can interrupt you on  
19 that point, I'd -- and I'd like to get back to your answer.  
20 When you say to "complement the work on the ground with  
21 airstrikes" -- did I hear -- did I just hear you say that?

22 General Austin: That -- the -- they have to work in  
23 tandem. The --

24 Senator Fischer: So, if they're going to work in  
25 tandem -- there's a new article out today. Are we going to

1 change strategy? Because -- I think it's in Foreign Policy  
2 Today that -- it says the United States is drawing up a new  
3 plan that's going to send these trained fighters into Syria  
4 that are going to help direct airstrikes. Is that report  
5 correct?

6 General Austin: I would just say that -- ma'am, we'll  
7 continue to look at the best ways to -- the best means to  
8 employ these forces as we go forward. And we'll capitalize  
9 on lessons learned.

10 And again, it is really about the full complement of  
11 indigenous forces that we have available to work with. As  
12 we mentioned earlier, the YPG, or the Syrian Kurds, and some  
13 Arabs and Turkomen, have done tremendous work in northeast  
14 Syria, and they have pushed ISIL back from the border.  
15 They're currently somewhere around 40 kilometers or so north  
16 of the capital -- the -- ISIL's capital city of Raqqa. And  
17 they'll continue to pressure ISIL. So, the new Syrian force  
18 is additive to that effort.

19 Senator Fischer: So, with the fighters that we're  
20 training and equipping, is it still the goal to have about  
21 12,000 of them there? Is that still the goal? What's the  
22 expectation, then, for them?

23 General Austin: Well, we certainly won't -- at the  
24 pace we're going, we won't reach the goal that we had  
25 initially established for ourselves, but the -- the overall

1 goal is to make sure that we have enough mass to be able to  
2 get work done on the ground. And whether it's YPG elements  
3 or other elements that are able to help us, you know, we can  
4 still achieve, and are achieving, the same effects. It's  
5 not aspirational. We're actually doing this today. And I  
6 think that's lost on a lot of people.

7 Senator Fischer: And is the strategy changing for the  
8 work on the ground that you're asking for these fighters?

9 General Austin: We continue to look at the best means  
10 to employ them. And we will do what -- ma'am, what you  
11 would expect us to do, and make adjustments as opportunities  
12 present themselves.

13 Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you, sir.

14 Chairman McCain: General, I'd -- just to follow up,  
15 there's an -- Foreign Policy says, "Anxious to avoid another  
16 damaging setback for the training effort, the White House  
17 and the Pentagon are looking at attaching small numbers of  
18 fighters to larger established forces in northern Syria to  
19 ensure the rebels are better protected on the battlefield by  
20 more numerous experienced troops." Can you confirm or deny  
21 that that option is being looked at?

22 Ms. Wormuth: Senator --

23 Chairman McCain: Okay.

24 Ms. Wormuth: -- we are reviewing the way forward with  
25 --

1 Chairman McCain: I'm asking if that option is being  
2 considered.

3 Ms. Wormuth: We are looking at a range of options.  
4 And one of the options is --

5 Chairman McCain: I am asking -- look, I'm not asking  
6 you to come before this committee and obfuscate. I'm asking  
7 you a direct question. Is the Pentagon looking at that  
8 option? Yes or no?

9 Ms. Wormuth: We are looking at that option as --

10 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much.

11 Ms. Wormuth: -- well as others.

12 Chairman McCain: Thank you very much.

13 Senator Nelson.

14 Senator Nelson: General, it's my understanding that  
15 General Dempsey recently said that if the U.S. really seized  
16 control of the campaign against ISIS, we can speed up ISIS  
17 defeat, but that it would come at a great cost to our  
18 servicemembers, and that another group with another name and  
19 ideology would just be back in a couple of years. Isn't  
20 that what you and -- understand General Dempsey to have  
21 said, and that you have reaffirmed that here today?

22 General Austin: Yes, sir, it is. I think it's  
23 important that the people in the country and in the region  
24 take ownership and work to put in place lasting solutions.  
25 And if we don't do that, we will be back in another 2 or 3

1 years.

2 Senator Nelson: And because of that campaign against  
3 ISIS, it must be won by our coalition partners and the  
4 Iraqis, not just us.

5 General Austin: That's correct, sir.

6 Senator Nelson: Would you care to read that statement  
7 again for clarity in your response to the Chairman's  
8 question that General Dempsey had said, in its full context?

9 General Austin: Yes, sir.

10 [Pause.]

11 General Austin: Sir, what the Chairman said was:  
12 ISIL's future is increasingly dim as more nations join the  
13 anti-ISIL effort. He further stated that, although the  
14 fight right now is tactically stalemated, with no dramatic  
15 gains on either side, Iraq will move at the speed of its  
16 governance and not at the speed of its military capability.

17 Senator Nelson: Mr. Chairman, I have the transcript  
18 here in front of the committee. I would like to reinsert  
19 this transmit of General Dempsey, with your permission.

20 Chairman McCain: Absolutely. And along with that, we  
21 will include the assessments by General Keane, General  
22 Petraeus, the architect of the surge, and all others who  
23 observed this debacle.

24 Senator Nelson: Of course.

25 Chairman McCain: Of course.

1 [The information referred to follows:]  
2 [COMMITTEE INSERT]  
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1           Senator Nelson: General, give us your assessment that  
2 Russia is building up the military base and sending soldiers  
3 and weapons into Syria to prop up Assad -- under, I might  
4 say, the guise of fighting ISIS.

5           General Austin: Sir, we are witnessing a buildup of  
6 forces in Syria by Russia. As you know, they have been  
7 there all along, but they are increasing their footprint.  
8 What they've stated is that they're -- they want to focus on  
9 helping to counter ISIL, as I understand it. That's left to  
10 be seen. And, as you know, Russia is not very transparent.  
11 And so, we really don't know what their true intentions are.  
12 But, the introduction of -- potential introduction of  
13 additional capability and operations utilizing that  
14 capability could increase the friction in that battlespace  
15 significantly.

16           Senator Nelson: General, the Senate defense  
17 authorization bill calls for 30-percent reduction in  
18 headquarters staff across the Department of Defense,  
19 starting with a 7-and-a-half-percent cut in fiscal year  
20 2016. What impact will that cut have on your ability to  
21 conduct operations? And what is CENTCOM, if you want to  
22 submit for the record, planning to do to make that cut?

23           General Austin: Sir, if you take a look at what's  
24 going on in our region currently, you know, from Pakistan,  
25 Afghanistan, to Yemen, to Iraq and Syria, and to increased

1 tensions in other places throughout the region, it's clear  
2 that we have a very active region. And so, in order to  
3 manage the things that we need to manage and work with our  
4 partner nations in the region, we need an appropriate staff  
5 to be able to do that. I fully understand and appreciate,  
6 you know, the pressure that the departments -- Department is  
7 under, in terms of, you know, the reduction of the top line  
8 on the budget. And so, we have to do what we can do and  
9 need to do to tighten our belts. I appreciate that. But,  
10 it makes it increasingly difficult to get things done.

11 Senator Nelson: Thank you, General.

12 Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte.

13 Senator Ayotte: I want to thank the Chairman.

14 I want to thank both of you for being here today, and  
15 for your service.

16 I wanted to follow up and ask about -- General, I  
17 believe you testified about the effectiveness of the Syrian  
18 Kurds right now in Syria, in pushing back ISIL. And are we  
19 providing support and weapons to the Syrian Kurds? And what  
20 assistance are we giving them, given that, as I heard your  
21 testimony -- when Senator Fischer asked me -- we only have,  
22 as I understand it, four or five of U.S.-trained Syrian  
23 fighters in this fight. So, what are we doing to support  
24 the Syrian Kurds if they are effectively pushing back ISIL  
25 on the ground?

1           General Austin: We are providing them a tremendous  
2 amount of air support, which is what they wanted most. As  
3 you will recall, ma'am, these -- this is the element --  
4 well, a portion of this element were the folks that hung on  
5 at Khobani -- valiantly. And it was doubtful, at that  
6 point, as to whether or not they would be able to survive in  
7 that environment and continue to do things. Well, they  
8 continued on, and they increased their size and activity,  
9 and they've made a significant difference in the northeast  
10 part of the country.

11           And so, what they've asked from us over time is  
12 sustained airpower, sustained strikes. And they have  
13 benefited from those strikes. And because of their  
14 aggressiveness, they've made a tremendous difference in the  
15 northeast.

16           Senator Ayotte: So, just to be clear, they haven't  
17 asked for arms? And how does Turkey -- how is Turkey acting  
18 on the ground, here, in terms of, obviously -- first of all,  
19 I want to know: What have the Syrian Kurds asked for that  
20 we haven't given them? I understand the air support. But,  
21 also, how do you view Turkey's role in all of this?  
22 Because, as I see it right now, this four or five U.S.-  
23 trained fighters -- let's not kid ourselves, that's a joke.  
24 And so, if they're the only force on the ground doing  
25 something right now, what more can we do to help them?

1           General Austin:  They -- up to this point, they have  
2 not asked us for arms, but it doesn't mean that they won't,  
3 ma'am.  I think -- and, of course, you know, as we go  
4 forward, there are things that we can do to continue to help  
5 -- as they try to get supplies into northern Syria, work  
6 with the Kurds in the -- in northern Iraq to help make sure  
7 that we have lines of communication that facilitate that.  
8 And we're doing that.

9           They will also need to partner with Syrian Arabs in the  
10 area.  And they're doing that.  And we are working with  
11 Syrian Arabs, developing relationships, as well.  And so, I  
12 think it's a combination of all of these forces that's going  
13 -- that are going to make a difference, going forward.

14           And again, we expect our footprint with the new Syrian  
15 forces to grow over time.  And --

16           Senator Ayotte:  So, can you help me on Turkey, what  
17 role Turkey is playing, or not playing, here, that we would  
18 like to see Turkey play?

19           General Austin:  As you know, Senator, Turkey has just  
20 recently come onboard and given us access to their bases,  
21 which is a tremendous capability.  It shortens the legs of  
22 our -- that our fighter pilots will have to fly.  It allows  
23 us to be more responsive.  And they also are flying strikes  
24 in our formations, and focused on elements -- ISIL elements  
25 in Syria, thus far.  And so, they are adding value.  And

1 what we've asked them to do, as well, is to continue to  
2 tighten up, or abate, the flow of foreign fighters and  
3 lethal accelerants coming across the border.

4 Senator Ayotte: So, I want to ask, before we leave,  
5 what role is Iran playing right now in Syria? How much  
6 support are they providing for the Assad regime? How do we  
7 evaluate their significance in fueling this conflict? And  
8 also, their support for Hezbollah, what has -- what role is  
9 Hezbollah playing, in terms of supporting the Assad regime?

10 General Austin: Well, we know that Iran has been  
11 instrumental in providing support to Syria throughout. And  
12 we see, increasingly, that they would like to provide --  
13 they want to provide more support. What that will mean in  
14 the future, I don't know. But, they are active in Syria.

15 Senator Ayotte: So, perhaps if they had more cash and  
16 money, they might -- they would like to provide more support  
17 to the Assad regime.

18 General Austin: That would be -- my assumption would  
19 be that that would be the case.

20 Senator Ayotte: I wanted to also ask with -- as -- are  
21 issues with these trained fighters -- are we going to  
22 provide -- if they're under attack -- I guess we've got four  
23 or five of them, but if, for some reason, we were able to  
24 get more of them trained, what are we going to do to support  
25 them or protect them?

1           General Austin: Oh, we will provide air support and  
2           ISR to -- overwatch and air support to protect them. And,  
3           with the first class that we put in, we did -- we have done  
4           that already. So, we are committed to doing that, going  
5           forward.

6           Senator Ayotte: Thank you.

7           Chairman McCain: Senator McCaskill.

8           Senator McCaskill: I'm worried, like the rest of my  
9           colleagues -- and there have been a number of questions on  
10          this already -- about the train-and-equip mission. And, you  
11          know, there's good news and there's bad news about America's  
12          military. The good news is, is if you give them a job, they  
13          figure out a way to get it done. The bad news is, sometimes  
14          you give them a job and they are not willing to say when  
15          it's not going to work. At what point in time, General  
16          Austin, do you envision us admitting that, while all good  
17          intentions and on paper all of the work was done, but the  
18          job of finding willing fighters that can be screened  
19          appropriately when you have the vast majority, who feel  
20          victimized by the current situation in Syria, are running  
21          for the exits? At what point in time, and what is the  
22          discussion ongoing, about the \$600 million you're requesting  
23          for next year? That seems very unrealistic to me, in terms  
24          of a request. If, at this juncture, we've successfully  
25          completed five to six, and I believe you said -- I -- the

1 last information I had, Ms. Wormuth, was 100 -- you said  
2 "more than 100." What is the number?

3 Ms. Wormuth: Senator McCaskill, it's between 100 and  
4 120 --

5 Senator McCaskill: Okay.

6 Ms. Wormuth: -- basically.

7 Senator McCaskill: So, we're counting, on our fingers  
8 and toes at this point, when we had envisioned 5400 by the  
9 end of the year. And I -- I'm just worried that this is one  
10 of those instances where the good news about our military is  
11 dominating, "We can do this. We can do this," and the  
12 practical realities of this strategy aren't being fully  
13 embraced.

14 General Austin: Thank you, Senator. You know, I  
15 absolutely agree with you, we have the finest troops in the  
16 world, and they will figure out a way to get the job done,  
17 one way or the other. And again, what our Special  
18 Operations Forces have done in northern Syria is -- they  
19 didn't wait for the new Syrian force program, or train-and-  
20 equip program, to fully develop. At the very outset, they  
21 began to engage elements like the YPG, and enable those  
22 elements. And they are making a difference on the  
23 battlefield. So -- and there are tens of thousands of the  
24 YPG out there that are, right now, fighting ISIL. So,  
25 because the new -- the Syria train-and-equip program is

1 slower getting started than we'd like for it to be, that  
2 doesn't mean that we're not creating effects on the  
3 battlefield.

4 Senator McCaskill: I just want to make sure, General  
5 Austin -- I mean, I know the Chairman feels strongly about  
6 the success of the surge, and there was a lot of incredible  
7 American heroes that were part of that surge. But, the  
8 other part of the surge we don't talk about as frequently is  
9 that we paid a lot of people. We paid a lot of people to  
10 help us during the surge. Is this money that we're setting  
11 aside for train and equip, would it be better off in direct  
12 compensation to some of that YPG force?

13 Ms. Wormuth: Senator McCaskill, can I try to address  
14 this a little bit?

15 As General Austin said, we are reviewing the program,  
16 and we're looking at a range of options. Our train-and-  
17 equip program is part of a broader effort that we're  
18 prosecuting with the YPG, with the Syrian Arab coalition,  
19 and so on. And we're looking at how to have our train and  
20 equip program effectively enable those other efforts. And I  
21 think, as we go forward and look at what our options are,  
22 we'll absolutely want to look at the resources we've  
23 requested for the next year, and how that fits in.

24 But, the forces that we are training, while right now  
25 are small in number and clearly are not going to reach the

1 numbers that we had planned for, are nevertheless getting  
2 terrific training and very good equipment, and, as such,  
3 will be able to really be force multipliers of those other  
4 groups on the ground that have been very effective, like the  
5 Syrian Arab coalition --

6 Senator McCaskill: I just --

7 Ms. Wormuth: -- for example.

8 Senator McCaskill: If we end up at the end of the year  
9 with us bragging about the difference between 100 and 120,  
10 it's time for a new plan.

11 Ms. Wormuth: And I certainly do not mean to be  
12 bragging. We -- the program is much smaller than we hoped.

13 Senator McCaskill: Yeah.

14 Ms. Wormuth: We're not bragging.

15 Senator McCaskill: I don't have much time left, but I  
16 want to just -- I know -- understand from your testimony,  
17 General Austin, you can't comment about the IG investigation  
18 into this accusation that people are putting pressure on  
19 intelligence analysts to change the tenor of their reports.  
20 It's a serious allegation that strikes at the core of our  
21 government, in terms of our ability to oversee and make  
22 decisions around the use of our military.

23 I want to say -- at the end of this investigation, when  
24 you can discuss it, I want to just put on the record that I,  
25 for one, am going to be watching very carefully about any

1 potential retaliation against any of the men or women that  
2 may have come forward with allegations. They're -- it is  
3 incredibly important that whistleblowers be protected in  
4 this space. And, depending on what the investigation finds,  
5 I understand that maybe there -- you know, there are other  
6 factors I'm not aware of, but I just wanted to put on the  
7 record that I will be paying very close attention to how  
8 these whistleblowers are treated in the aftermath of this  
9 investigation.

10 General Austin: I absolutely share your concern,  
11 Senator. And you have my -- I will assure you that we will  
12 do everything within our power to ensure that the  
13 whistleblowers remain protected and that there is no  
14 retaliation. This is absolutely important.

15 And again, you know, we need oversight by organizations  
16 like the IG, and so we welcome that, and we'll -- going to  
17 cooperate fully, and we'll make sure that we abide by the  
18 spirit of this investigation.

19 Senator McCaskill: Thank you.

20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman McCain: Senator Sessions.

22 Senator Sessions: Thank you, Chairman McCain. And I  
23 think the grim nature of your remarks are justified.

24 Ms. Wormuth, how long has it been since we've had this  
25 train-and-equip program in effect?

1 Ms. Wormuth: Senator, we started -- we started the  
2 actual training earlier this spring.

3 Senator Sessions: Well --

4 Ms. Wormuth: So, we started the program in December,  
5 when we got authority from Congress.

6 Senator Sessions: Right.

7 Ms. Wormuth: We spent time putting together --

8 Senator Sessions: So, you have to --

9 Ms. Wormuth: -- the training --

10 Senator Sessions: -- say we started in December.

11 That's when it was authorized and funding --

12 Ms. Wormuth: Yes, sir.

13 Senator Sessions: -- is provided. And we have to  
14 acknowledge, this is a total failure. It's just a failure.  
15 And I wish it weren't so, but that's the fact. And so, it  
16 is time to -- way past time to react to that failure.

17 I just would say, the whole idea that we've got to wait  
18 for the locals to take ownership and to take the lead and do  
19 this kind of activity without any leadership support  
20 sufficient from the United States or our allies is also a  
21 failure. They're not able to organize well. Mosul has  
22 fallen. There's a -- divisions within Iraq that make it  
23 very difficult. So, I just wish it weren't so, but I'm  
24 afraid that's the reality we are dealing with.

25 We now have, I believe the U.N. says, 4 million

1 refugees, 7 million displaced persons. It's obvious to me  
2 that this is a humanitarian catastrophe. We need to deal  
3 with it in an honest way. And the most effective and honest  
4 way is to keep people as close to home as possible. If they  
5 can't stay in their homes because of violence and war, then  
6 they ought to be kept as close to home as possible.

7 I talked to a senior European official recently, and he  
8 told me that this refugee crisis is the greatest threat to  
9 Europe since World War II. And I don't see any plan to make  
10 it any better.

11 General Austin, we've got to consider creating safe  
12 zones within Syria. I understand there are some places in  
13 Syria now that refugees can stay. And we're going to have  
14 to keep -- we can't have millions and millions of people  
15 walking into Europe. This goes without -- it's hardly worth  
16 discussing.

17 So, I am really worried about this, and wish that we  
18 could -- we'd already done much better. By being so slow to  
19 act initially, this is what has resulted. And now the  
20 situation is far more grim than it should be, in my opinion.

21 General Austin, I do tend to agree with you that a  
22 defeat of ISIL is not the end of the problems in the Middle  
23 East. We've gotten a spasm of extremism that witnesses have  
24 told us may be going on for 50 years. Would you agree with  
25 that?

1 General Austin: I absolutely agree, Senator.

2 Senator Sessions: One victory here doesn't mean it's a  
3 total victory. There'll be another problem somewhere else  
4 as long as this ideology is out there.

5 General Austin: Yes, sir.

6 Senator Sessions: And I just believe, Miss Wormuth,  
7 that we need a strategy, a understood strategy, bipartisan,  
8 in this Congress, with our allies around the world, to  
9 confront this long-term, multi-decade threat to the western  
10 democratic order and to try to help protect people in the  
11 Middle East from this disaster.

12 So, I want to ask you, Do we have a strategy of that  
13 kind that our allies and the United States and Congress and  
14 Republicans and Democrats understand and agree on?

15 Ms. Wormuth: Senator, I think -- we have a strategy to  
16 defeat ISIL, ultimately, in the Middle East, where -- it's  
17 largely in the Middle East, but it's obviously spreading to  
18 other areas. There are other dynamics in the Middle East,  
19 obviously, that are a part of this. There's the broader  
20 Sunni/Shi'a sectarian conflict that has gone on for decades.  
21 There are the fact that many of the governments in that  
22 region are not very representative and have internal  
23 policies that don't give much freedoms to their people, so  
24 they're -- part of -- that's part of what's creating --

25 Senator Sessions: Well --

1 Ms. Wormuth: -- the problem in the Middle East --

2 Senator Sessions: I know.

3 Ms. Wormuth: -- as well. And a big part of our  
4 relationships with these countries is talking to them about  
5 the importance of more democratic approaches.

6 Senator Sessions: Well said, in one sense. However,  
7 does that mean that we don't support the King of Jordan?

8 Ms. Wormuth: Jordan is --

9 Senator Sessions: No, I'm just asking rhetorically,  
10 okay?

11 Ms. Wormuth: Uh-huh.

12 Senator Sessions: No, we've got to have a more  
13 realistic policy than that.

14 I was just reading Henry Kissinger's book on order, and  
15 he, just last night, hit the part about George Kennan and  
16 the containment strategy that maintained Western unity, free  
17 world against the communist totalitarians. And it went on  
18 for 50 years almost, ended up when he was successful. This  
19 is the way it was expressed. Soviet expansionism, according  
20 to Kennan, was real and inherent. The conflict was inherent  
21 in the two ideologies. It's incompatible, totalitarian  
22 communism and constitutional democracy. I -- and he said it  
23 -- but it could be, quote, "contained by an adroit and  
24 vigilant application of counterforce at a series of  
25 constantly shifting geographical and political points,"

1 close quote. And I don't sense that we have any such  
2 strategy. And I'm sorry we don't. And I think, also, that  
3 radical Islam, Shari'ah Law, is part -- essential component  
4 -- is incompatible with constitutional democracy, and we  
5 need to work better.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman McCain: Senator Shaheen.

8 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

9 Thank you both for being here.

10 Since Senator Sessions' comment about communism and  
11 containment is a good segue into my first question, which is  
12 for Ms. Wormuth: Why do you believe that, 4 years into this  
13 conflict, that Russia is deploying materiel and increased  
14 shipments to the Assad regime and really setting up shop in  
15 Syria in a way that they haven't over the last 4 years?

16 Ms. Wormuth: Well, Russia has certainly been a  
17 supporter of the Assad regime for some time. And I think  
18 Putin has spoken more publicly about the role Russia has  
19 played to date. I think part of what may be happening, part  
20 of Putin's calculus may be, that Assad's regime has been  
21 under greater threat in the last several months, as ISIL has  
22 advanced in places like Padmorf -- or Palmyra, excuse me --  
23 and Tadmor. So, Putin may be nervous about the stability of  
24 the Assad regime, and may be trying to shore it up.

25 Senator Shaheen: Well, given that, how do we assess

1 the possibility that the Assad regime might fall?

2 Ms. Wormuth: I think, at this point, the -- the  
3 assessments I've read are that the regime actually still has  
4 considerable strength, in terms of its military forces.  
5 It's still the most powerful military force on the ground.  
6 And the support it receives from Iran and Russia remains  
7 significant. So, there have certainly been battlefield  
8 losses that are concerning, but -- and we are looking at,  
9 obviously, how to deal with -- we are planning and thinking  
10 about the potential for a significant retrenchment. But, I  
11 think the assessment right now is that the regime is not in  
12 imminent danger of falling

13 Senator Shaheen: So, if Russia deploys air defense  
14 systems in Syria -- maybe this is a question for you,  
15 General Austin -- are we concerned that they'll threaten our  
16 -- or -- our coalition aircraft?

17 General Austin: That -- if they're trying to operate  
18 in the same space, Senator, that possibility is clearly  
19 there.

20 Senator Shaheen: And how are we thinking about  
21 responding to that?

22 General Austin: Well --

23 Senator Shaheen: For either of you.

24 Ms. Wormuth: I think we're still in the early stages  
25 of what exactly Russia is doing. But, one -- at the

1 diplomatic level, we're making very clear that deployments  
2 that are going to shore up the regime draw out the conflict,  
3 are counterproductive and destabilizing, and that if this is  
4 really about Russia trying to join the fight against ISIL,  
5 then we would expect the kinds of military capabilities they  
6 deploy to be consistent with that.

7 Senator Shaheen: So, how are we making that clear to  
8 Russia?

9 Ms. Wormuth: Well, there are a number of channels,  
10 but, in particular, Secretary Kerry speaks to his  
11 counterpart very regularly and has been making that point  
12 very clear. And then I would say, on the military side --  
13 and I'm sure General Austin can elaborate on this -- if, in  
14 fact, it gets to a point where we see Russian aircraft  
15 operating in that area, we would, I would imagine, need to  
16 set up some sort of deconfliction mechanism so that we can  
17 continue our counter-ISIL campaign there.

18 Senator Shaheen: General Austin?

19 General Austin: And we know how to do that, Senator.  
20 And, you know, my utmost concern is protection of my -- of  
21 our troops. And we're going to make sure that we have the  
22 ability to protect ourselves at all time. And, you know,  
23 there are, on occasion, Syrian aircraft that are flying in,  
24 you know, spaces that are not too distant from where we're  
25 operating, but we're able to make sure that, number one, we

1 maintain vigilance and, number two, we keep the -- you know,  
2 the battlespace -- we work in the battlespace in such a way  
3 that we avoid conflict, avoid encounter, if at all possible.

4 Senator Shaheen: So, I appreciate that that has been  
5 our policy, to date. Given the total failure of our ability  
6 to influence the outcome of the Syrian civil war, are we  
7 assessing whether we should take a different response with  
8 respect to Assad? And engaging with the Syrian troops?

9 Ms. Wormuth: I think we continue to look -- we  
10 continue to believe that what would be the best solution is  
11 to get a political transition and get Assad out of the  
12 government while retaining the governance structure so that  
13 you don't have a situation of chaos on the ground.

14 Russia, with its relationship with the regime, could  
15 potentially contribute to helping find that solution. That  
16 would be a valuable contribution from Russia, as opposed to  
17 --

18 Senator Shaheen: Well, it would be, but there's no  
19 incentive, at this point, for Russia to do that --

20 Ms. Wormuth: I think --

21 Senator Shaheen: -- is there?

22 Ms. Wormuth: I think they --

23 Senator Shaheen: What's the incentive?

24 Ms. Wormuth: I think their incentive would be to have  
25 -- they want, more than anything, a more stable Syria, and

1 they are quite fearful of ISIL, as well. I mean, they have  
2 many, many Chechens in Russia. They are just as concerned  
3 about foreign fighter flows from ISIL as we are. So, I  
4 think Russia does have an interest in having a more stable  
5 Syria. And a constructive way for them to engage would be  
6 to work with us, and other countries who would like to see a  
7 transition there, to try to come up with a diplomatic way to  
8 make that transition happen.

9 Senator Shaheen: Well, I certainly think that would be  
10 a positive outcome, but it's not clear to me that we've seen  
11 any action, in the last 4 and a half years, to suggest that  
12 Russia's going to play a more positive role.

13 Thank you.

14 Chairman McCain: Senator Rounds.

15 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 General Austin, thank you for your service.

17 In both Syria and in Iraq, we have displaced  
18 individuals that clearly are part of the discussion on the  
19 worldwide stage, individuals moving into Europe. I'm  
20 curious, in terms of the numbers right now -- and this would  
21 be a question for either of you -- but, do we have an update  
22 on the total number of individuals who are displaced between  
23 Syria and Iraq that you can share with us this morning?

24 Ms. Wormuth: I believe, Senator, that it's around 4  
25 million. It's a very large number. I mean, there are more

1 than a million --

2 Senator Rounds: No, that would be in -- from Syria.

3 Ms. Wormuth: I thought it was from Syria and Iraq.

4 But, for example, there's more than a million refugees in  
5 Turkey right now. There are many hundreds of thousands, if  
6 not a million, refugees in Jordan. So, the neighboring  
7 countries are already hosting very large numbers of  
8 refugees: Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

9 Senator Rounds: Before we're done, could you maybe  
10 just check and see if the numbers that you're providing are  
11 --

12 Ms. Wormuth: Happy to do that.

13 Senator Rounds: -- are up to date? What I'm curious  
14 about are the number of individuals displaced both in Syria  
15 and the number of individuals who are displaced in Iraq, but  
16 still perhaps in Iraq.

17 Ms. Wormuth: We can get you that right now.

18 [INFORMATION]

19 Senator Rounds: Thank you. I would appreciate that.

20 General, the reason for my question is that the -- it  
21 would appear that, as this number is a significant number,  
22 most certainly they are part of any concern with regard to  
23 military operations, regardless of where you're at, and our  
24 desire not to do more harm than good in what we provide.  
25 And yet, at the same time, one of our expectations is that

1 we're doing ongoing air operations throughout the area. We  
2 don't want to get into areas where we're going to actually  
3 cause more damage. And yet, right now you're challenged  
4 because you really don't have the forward air observers that  
5 would make it more efficient than what you've got today.  
6 Can you share with us a little bit about what you're doing  
7 to try to improve that situation, and how you would like to  
8 see that handled?

9 General Austin: Sir, we routinely use all of our  
10 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, UAVs  
11 and manned aircraft, to make sure that we understand what's  
12 going on on the ground before we employ weapons. And we are  
13 diligent in our efforts there -- not overly cautious, to the  
14 point where we -- we're not able to take advantage of  
15 opportunities to engage the enemy, but we are very, very  
16 mindful of, you know, the possibility of committing civilian  
17 casualties there.

18 Senator Rounds: But, at this time, sir, it's fair to  
19 say that we're not using any of our own forward air  
20 observers yet at all. We don't have any forward air  
21 observers on the ground at all.

22 General Austin: That's correct, sir. Our JTACS are  
23 operating in the command centers. Now, what that does is,  
24 it allows the JTACS to have visibility over, you know,  
25 what's going on in the target area, but it also enables him

1 to gain visibility of where the friendly troops are. And  
2 this is one of the biggest challenges that we encounter  
3 throughout this battlespace. In a lot of cases, the folks  
4 we're trying to help don't have a good handle on where their  
5 people are, and that slows down the -- you know, our ability  
6 to engage.

7 Senator Rounds: Currently, when you are training  
8 individuals in Iraq, and those who want to fight, back in  
9 Syria -- we understand, and I think there's -- I don't think  
10 there's anybody out here that's disagreeing with the fact  
11 that we're not on schedule for getting the number that we  
12 want to have trained. Is that -- that is a fair assessment  
13 yet, in terms of the number of individuals that we want to  
14 have trained that are both Iraqi nations and Syrian  
15 nationals.

16 General Austin: I'm sorry, sir. I'm struggling with  
17 my sign, there.

18 But, you're right, sir. We would like to see a lot  
19 more forces available to be trained. And we're encouraging  
20 the Government of Iraq to recruit those forces, bring them  
21 onboard so we can get them into training centers. And what  
22 we've discovered -- not discovered, but we knew this, going  
23 in -- is that those forces that have been trained by us are  
24 doing pretty well on the battlefield.

25 Senator Rounds: Fair to say, though, General, that one

1 of the problems we've got, particularly with Syrian fighters  
2 is -- is that, in our ability to actually discern which ones  
3 we can use and which ones we're not using, based upon our  
4 review of their background and what they intend to do -- if  
5 they want to go in and fight Assad, basically it's  
6 eliminating them from being part of our team. Fair to say,  
7 at this point?

8 General Austin: That's correct, sir. We're focused on  
9 countering ISIL.

10 Senator Rounds: Thank you.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman McCain: Senator Hirono.

13 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Both of you have testified that our very strict vetting  
15 process has resulted in far fewer fighters to -- for us to  
16 train. Does this mean that we're turning away thousands of  
17 potential fighters?

18 Ms. Wormuth: Senator, I would say two things. One,  
19 because the authority we have focuses our program on  
20 fighting ISIL, there are a number of individuals who might  
21 like to receive training from the United States -- or  
22 equipment, for that matter -- but, they want to fight the  
23 regime. And that's not the focus of our program. And then,  
24 in the other -- the other way the standards affect the  
25 recruiting pool is, obviously we want to make sure that we

1 have confidence in the people we bring into our program, and  
2 that we can give them equipment and trust them to use that  
3 appropriately, trust them to fight on the battlefield in a  
4 way that's consistent with the laws of armed conflict. And,  
5 in many cases, people who might be interested in  
6 volunteering don't meet those standards or are younger than  
7 -- young -- you know, are under the age of 18, for example,  
8 or who are otherwise not medically qualified.

9 Senator Hirono: So, is one of the assessments that  
10 you're doing is to review whether or not we're being  
11 unrealistic and -- regarding the kinds of factors that we  
12 want you to take into consideration before you will train a  
13 particular individual? Is that one of the areas that you  
14 are looking to, which may require congressional action?

15 Ms. Wormuth: We certainly are looking at our  
16 recruiting and screening process all of the time. Even  
17 before, frankly, the first class was reinserted, we were  
18 looking at how to speed up our recruiting process and speed  
19 up the screening process. We are looking at the kinds of  
20 criteria that we have in place, but I think our view is  
21 that, right now, our criteria are very consistent with the  
22 requirements that Congress gave us. And if we were to  
23 loosen them, for example, I think we would absolutely have  
24 to come back to you all and ask for --

25 Senator Hirono: Well, and that is my question, whether

1 or not you're seriously considering asking us to reevaluate  
2 the criteria that Congress established.

3 Now, I know we're talking today a lot about what's  
4 going on on the ground, but our concern is also -- and you  
5 mentioned this in your testimony, that you're looking for  
6 more effective ways to counter ISIL's very effective  
7 messaging campaign. There are concerns about ISIL's ability  
8 to motivate lone wolves who will take action without ever  
9 having direct contact with ISIL. And so -- taking actions  
10 in our country as well as elsewhere -- so, what are some of  
11 the effective ways that you are countering ISIL's messaging  
12 strategy?

13 Ms. Wormuth: I think we are taking some steps that are  
14 effective, but we need to do more. Part of what -- we have  
15 been working, for example, closely with a number of  
16 countries in the coalition to identify communicators inside  
17 of those communities who have credibility with Muslim  
18 populations and who will be able to lay out a compelling --  
19 compelling reasons why ISIL's theology is completely  
20 bankrupt. So, we've been working with governments to  
21 counter violent extremism, we have been working to get our  
22 messages out about military successes that we have more  
23 effectively. But, a lot of it is working with the private  
24 -- sort of the private sector and civil society to try to  
25 get the right kinds of messengers to speak to these kinds of

1 groups. It's a very challenging part of our effort, and I  
2 think we need to do more there.

3 Senator Hirono: I completely agree with that, because  
4 -- I do think that the lone-wolf phenomenon and the problem  
5 is one that we really don't have a very good handle on.

6 General, I think you mentioned that you thought that  
7 there were signs that Iran would like to be more active in  
8 supporting Syria, and possibly that, because of the  
9 agreement and their getting their hands on more money as the  
10 sanctions get lifted, you said you saw some signs of that,  
11 that Iran would like to do more. So, what are these signs  
12 that you were referring to? Because we know that Iran is  
13 already supporting Syria. So, you know, are you expecting  
14 that they're going to put billions more into their support  
15 of Assad?

16 General Austin: They are already supporting Syria. So  
17 --

18 Senator Hirono: Yes.

19 General Austin: -- you're exactly right.

20 As things become more dynamic in Syria, and the regime  
21 is increasingly challenged, it's my assessment that Iran  
22 will want to continue to try to shore them up in a greater  
23 way.

24 Senator Hirono: And it's not as though our country is  
25 going to just stand by idly while Iran proceeds with that

1 kind of a program, correct? We're not going to just sit  
2 there --

3 Ms. Wormuth: No, certainly --

4 Senator Hirono: -- while they do that.

5 Ms. Wormuth: -- not. I mean, we absolutely are very  
6 focused on countering Iran's malign activities in Syria as  
7 well as the broader region. We have sanctions of our own  
8 that are in place to try to block arms, for example, going  
9 to countries. We have interdicted, or worked with folks in  
10 the coalition to interdict, weapons going from Iran to the  
11 Houthis, for example. And we would continue to try to use  
12 those kinds of tools to limit Iran's ability to support the  
13 Syrians.

14 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

15 Chairman McCain: Senator Lee.

16 Senator Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this  
17 important hearing.

18 And thank you, Secretary Wormuth and General Austin,  
19 for taking the time today to answer our questions. It's  
20 deeply appreciated.

21 It's been 1 year since President Obama announced to the  
22 world that the United States would undertake a strategy to  
23 degrade and defeat ISIS in order to return some semblance of  
24 stability to Iraq and create an environment that could lead  
25 to a negotiated end to the civil war in Syria.

1           It was my belief that President Obama's overall goal  
2           and the strategy he outlined to achieve that goal may have  
3           been beset from the outset by some flawed assumptions, some  
4           contradictions, and perhaps an excessive reliance on  
5           political forecasting in a region of the world that is  
6           anything but easy to predict. Now this, compounded by a  
7           string of recent events, is why I think it may be time for  
8           us to reassess the way the United States views this conflict  
9           and chooses to respond to it. And I think we need to start  
10          by making clear-eyed threat assessments and prioritizing  
11          U.S. national security interests.

12          General Austin, what's your assessment of the most  
13          significant threats that the conflict in Syria and Iraq pose  
14          to the security of U.S. citizens and our freedoms? In other  
15          words, at the end of the day, what needs to be accomplished  
16          for the U.S. Government to fulfill and to perform its  
17          constitutional duty to protect the people of the United  
18          States and our interests?

19          General Austin: This is -- thank you, Senator -- this  
20          is a transnational threat. And if left unchecked, it will  
21          continue to expand and to try to take up or occupy territory  
22          and governing. And in doing so, it will try to erase  
23          international boundaries, it will try to do a number of  
24          things that will cause tremendous pain and suffering  
25          throughout the region. It will also export terror -- my

1 belief, it will export terror to other parts of the world,  
2 and particularly to places like our homeland. We see the  
3 beginnings of this in this lone-wolf activity that we talk  
4 about. We also see what -- we are concerned about  
5 individuals who go into Iraq and Syria and fight as a part  
6 of this effort, and return -- or potentially return back to  
7 our homeland, and bring those skills back with them.

8 So, this is a -- it is a threat to us, and I think the  
9 threat will continue to increase.

10 Senator Lee: Now, the administration's strategy is to  
11 create an environment in Syria that will be likely to lead  
12 to a negotiated settlement of the civil war, and result in  
13 the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power in Damascus. In  
14 your professional military opinion, General Austin, and  
15 given your knowledge of the region, what level of pressure  
16 would need to be leveraged against Mr. Assad and his  
17 supporters in order for them to capitulate, especially as  
18 many Alawites and other minority groups view some opposition  
19 groups as a threat to their survival? And how much  
20 investment would need -- would be needed from the coalition  
21 countries in order to provide security and stability in a  
22 hypothetical post-Assad Syria?

23 General Austin: I think that Assad would only be  
24 willing, as you have stated, Senator, to come to the table  
25 to negotiate a settlement if he feels like he is threatened.

1 And as things continue to develop in the country, you know,  
2 we see a number of elements -- al-Nusra Front, others that  
3 are fighting the regime, ISIL -- you know, their efforts  
4 come together and place increasing pressure on Assad. He is  
5 losing -- he still has significant capability, but he's  
6 losing capability every day.

7 Now, the wildcard is when countries like Iran, or  
8 potentially Russia, would -- could possibly move in and  
9 shore him up. It could extend things for a bit of time.

10 Now, in a post-Assad environment, we have to consider  
11 that there are a number of elements there that will continue  
12 to be there and will continue to fight. Al-Nusra is one of  
13 those elements. If there are remnants of ISIL there,  
14 they'll continue to fight. So, it will require some sort of  
15 stability force to go in and make sure that, whatever the  
16 transition government looks like, it has the ability to do  
17 its job. So.

18 Senator Lee: Thank you, General Austin.

19 I see my time's expired. Thank you, Chairman.

20 Senator Reed [presiding]: Thank you.

21 On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me recognize Senator  
22 Kaine.

23 Senator Kaine: Great. Thank you, Senator Reed.

24 And thanks, to our witnesses.

25 I'm going to start with a compliment, but then I'm

1 going to revert to form of everybody else on the committee  
2 and express some major concerns.

3 The complement was, I was in Irbil, Baghdad, Kuwait,  
4 Jordan, and Turkey in late June and early July, and I was in  
5 President Barzani's office, in Irbil, and he said, "If  
6 President Obama had not started the bombing campaign on  
7 Mount Sinjar on August 8th, we would not be here today."  
8 And he meant "we," the Kurdish people in Kurdistan. He  
9 wanted us to extend our thanks back to the administration  
10 and Congress. And I also saw a joint operations command at  
11 the airport in Irbil with a very close coordination between  
12 U.S. forces and the Kurdish peshmerga that was very  
13 impressive.

14 However, everywhere else I traveled -- to Baghdad and  
15 to the other parts of the region -- it seems like there's  
16 major problems. The effort to retake Ramadi that was begun  
17 in mid-July is apparently not going that well, and in Syria,  
18 absent some successes in the Kurdish area near Khobani, has  
19 been very, very disastrous.

20 I was not an original supporter when Senator McCain  
21 raised the idea of a no-fly humanitarian zone, in the fall  
22 of 2013. I listened to General Dempsey tell us why that was  
23 not a good idea, and I generally agreed with him. But, by  
24 the time Senator King and I went to Lebanon, in February of  
25 2014, and saw a million refugees already into Lebanon, I

1 became converted. When Senator McCain pushed the idea of a  
2 humanitarian zone first, there was only about 750,000 Syrian  
3 refugees in Turkey. There's now 1.8 million. It will be 2  
4 million soon. There's 4 million -- the number is 4 million  
5 Syrians have fled outside the country, and there are 7.8  
6 million internally displaced Syrians in the country. And  
7 they could easily leave the country, as well. A  
8 humanitarian zone in northern Syria would be very difficult  
9 to do, but I think the benefit of that, compared with 4  
10 million and then climbing to -- it could be 6, it could be  
11 7, it could be 8 million refugees, some of whom could be  
12 very, very dangerous, leaving the country -- I think we  
13 would have been wise to do it when Senator McCain suggested  
14 it, and I think we would be still be wise to do it. And,  
15 from having met with a number of Syrian refugees in  
16 Gaziantep, Turkey, an awful lot of those who fled the  
17 country would go back if they felt that there was a place  
18 where basic needs would be met and they would be safe. So,  
19 I would encourage that. That's not your decision to make.  
20 I would encourage that -- the administration.

21 Let me talk about the -- General Austin, you said, a  
22 second ago, in response, I think, to Senator McCain's  
23 question, that you thought the war would -- the war against  
24 ISIL would go on for years. Is that correct?

25 General Austin: Yes, sir, it is.

1           Senator Kaine: Just editorial comment. I don't think  
2 "go on for years" and "the chances of success of ISIL are  
3 dimmed," I don't think those are compatible statements.  
4 That was a quote from Chairman Dempsey, that ISIL's chances  
5 of success are dimming, the war going to go on for years. I  
6 don't think those are really compatible statements.

7           It seems like the ISIL threat is expanding  
8 geographically. We're talking heavily about Iraq and Syria  
9 here, but there is ISIL presence in Libya that we're paying  
10 attention to. There's ISIL presence in Afghanistan, largely  
11 disaffected Taliban who are moving over and claiming  
12 allegiance to ISIL. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to  
13 ISIL, not yet threatening the United States, as far as I  
14 know. There may be some ISIL presence in Yemen. Is that  
15 correct?

16          General Austin: That is correct, sir, there is.

17          Senator Kaine: So, the potential battlefield against  
18 ISIL is expanding. And we're actually, maybe, engaging in  
19 some new activity. My understanding -- General Austin, you  
20 indicated we have undertaken airstrikes to support trained  
21 Syrians in Syria, when they have been threatened by al-  
22 Nusra, correct?

23          General Austin: That's correct, sir.

24          Senator Kaine: And we are also prepared, as of a  
25 change in policy from early August, to undertake airstrikes

1 to protect those Syrian fighters if they fall under threat  
2 and attack by the Assad regime?

3 General Austin: That's correct, sir.

4 Senator Kaine: Now, I tactically completely agree with  
5 that, but I've got to ask, What is the legal predicate for  
6 the United States undertaking military action against forces  
7 of the Assad regime?

8 Ms. Wormuth: Senator, our determination is that, as  
9 you know very well, we can defend against ISIL and al-Nusra  
10 under the 2001 AUMF, and, if our forces are attacked by the  
11 regime in a -- particular circumstances, we could -- the  
12 President could exercise his Article 2 rights under the  
13 Constitution.

14 Senator Kaine: If our forces -- if the U.S. is  
15 attacked --

16 Ms. Wormuth: I'm sorry. If --

17 Senator Kaine: -- Article 2 comes into play.

18 Ms. Wormuth: I meant our forces, meaning the T&E  
19 forces that we've trained.

20 Senator Kaine: Yeah. I will just say, I have not seen  
21 an interpretation of Article 2 -- ever -- that would allow  
22 the United States to undertake action under Article 2 to  
23 protect others' fighters. I just -- you can take action  
24 under Article 2 to protect the U.S. The President doesn't  
25 need to ask anybody's permission for that. But, to

1 undertake action to protect others' fighters, I've never  
2 seen an interpretation of Article 2 that would do this.

3 The last thing I'll say, Mr. Chair, and set aside,  
4 there's a lot more criticism that I would get into here and  
5 that a lot of us have, but I worry that Congress is  
6 criticizing you as if we were editorial writers. We've got  
7 a lot of opinions. We're acting like fans in the stands.  
8 We still have not authorized this war. We still have not  
9 authorized this war. I believe it is being carried out in  
10 violation of basic legal principles, because Congress has  
11 not done what Congress is supposed to do. We can be fans in  
12 the stands and throw all the criticisms we want, but we are  
13 in the 14 month of an undeclared war that is based upon a  
14 legal justification that's specious, in my view. But,  
15 Congress has allowed it to happen, completely giving up  
16 their Article 1 responsibilities. And now that we've been  
17 told that the war is going to go on for years, my question  
18 is, just to my colleagues, How long are we going to allow a  
19 President to wage an executive war without a congressional  
20 authorization? I think we're afraid to touch this.

21 So, we can criticize this all we want. And we'll have  
22 many more hearings like this over the course of a number of  
23 years. And I'm sure we'll have critical things to say.  
24 But, if we're not willing to do our constitutional duty, I  
25 mean, why are we here? We're not fans. We're supposed to

1 be the owners of this team.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3 Senator Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine.

4 On behalf of the Chairman, I would recognize Senator  
5 Cotton.

6 Senator Cotton: If that's the question, I will say the  
7 answer is: Wars are not won with paper resolutions, they  
8 are won with iron resolution. And that is clearly lacking  
9 in our strategy right now against the Islamic State.

10 General Austin, Ms. Wormuth, thank you for coming.  
11 General Austin, in particular, for all the thousands of  
12 troopers you represent, for your service and their service.

13 I want to speak briefly about the reports that there  
14 may have been some efforts to cook the books about our  
15 performance in the campaign against the Islamic State. I  
16 know in your opening statement you acknowledged this,  
17 acknowledged the problem. There is ongoing investigations,  
18 to include with the IG. But, you have an ongoing challenge  
19 in your intelligence reporting and the way that affects your  
20 operations as well as the command climate. So, putting  
21 aside the IG investigation, could you just tell us what  
22 steps you're taking to confront those challenges that you  
23 face on a daily basis?

24 General Austin: I have recently and continue to  
25 emphasize, Senator, to all of my subordinates, that my

1 expectation is that I get candid and accurate intelligence  
2 assessments, you know, from my staff. I've also emphasized  
3 to my entire command, as I have in every command that I've  
4 had, that the welfare of my people is extremely important to  
5 me. And so, you know, I care about my people. My  
6 expectation is that they have a climate that's conducive to  
7 providing for a good, healthy, sound work environment for  
8 them.

9       Senator Cotton: Thank you. I mean, I would have to  
10 say, too, as someone who regularly consumes intelligence  
11 community products on the Islamic State and our campaign  
12 against them as a member of this committee and a member of  
13 the Intelligence Committee, I was very surprised to hear  
14 allegations that books are being cooked, because those  
15 products are not painting a very pretty picture of how this  
16 campaign is going.

17       General Austin, I want to move now to events in Syria,  
18 and, in particular, Russia's military buildup. Published  
19 reports have said, in the last couple of weeks, to include  
20 admissions of senior Russian officials, that Russia is  
21 sending aircraft there, air defense systems, armored  
22 personnel carriers, main battle tanks now, in addition to  
23 life support systems, like modular housing, that are clearly  
24 designed for a large and continued presence. How many  
25 airstrikes are -- is the coalition conducting on a daily

1 basis right now in Syria?

2 General Austin: We're conducting, overall, about 24 or  
3 so airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, and about a third of those  
4 are in Syria. So.

5 Senator Cotton: What efforts, if any, do we have  
6 underway to deconflict this battlespace now that we have  
7 hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Russians running around with  
8 air defense systems and battle tanks and personnel carriers?

9 General Austin: Well, we continue to -- from a  
10 military perspective, we continue to look at what the  
11 possibilities for encounters are, Senator. And we have --  
12 we make sure that we have measures in place to ensure that  
13 we don't have an inadvertent encounter with either Russia --  
14 a Russian aircraft or a Syrian aircraft.

15 Senator Cotton: Do our pilots have to have 100-percent  
16 positive identification that there is no Russian on a target  
17 before they can strike that target?

18 General Austin: Well, we've not -- the Russians, to my  
19 knowledge, have not started operations, as of this point, so  
20 we've not had to encounter that yet. But, clearly, these  
21 are things that, from a tactical perspective, that we will  
22 continue to work and think through. So.

23 Senator Cotton: Assad's other main supporter inside of  
24 Syria is Iran, and specifically the Revolutionary Guard  
25 Corps and the Quds Force, which has been present in Syria

1 for years. Do our pilots have to have 100-percent positive  
2 identification to -- that there is no Iranian forces on a  
3 target before they strike that target?

4 General Austin: Our pilots have to have 100-percent --  
5 well, they have to have certainty, Senator, that there are  
6 ISIL targets there that'll be engaged. And since, as you  
7 know, we can see what we're shooting at or what we're  
8 engaging, this is not an issue. So.

9 Senator Cotton: Ms. Wormuth, there was a report  
10 recently in the media that Russia offered, in 2012, to help  
11 the West remove Assad from power, and that the United States  
12 declined that offer because we believed that Assad would  
13 fall of his own accord. Is that an accurate report?

14 Ms. Wormuth: I don't believe that's an accurate  
15 report, but that's obviously from several years ago, and I  
16 wasn't in this position at that time. So, I don't believe  
17 it's accurate, but we're -- I don't believe it's accurate.

18 Senator Cotton: Do you believe that Iran and their  
19 proxies can be a partner in the fight against the Islamic  
20 State in any way in Iraq or Syria?

21 Ms. Wormuth: No, not really. I mean, we're not  
22 cooperating with Iran right now in Iraq, for example. We  
23 are deconflicting for -- you know, as you know well, they  
24 certainly have a role with the -- some of the Shi'a militia  
25 on the ground, some of the popular -- the popular

1 mobilization forces. But, we are not cooperating, and I  
2 don't see Iran as having a productive role in either Iraq or  
3 Syria.

4 Senator Cotton: Thank you. I would agree, given the  
5 fact that their militias in Iraq had to rely on U.S.  
6 airpower, and now they appear to be relying on Russian  
7 forces in Iran to back up their hapless efforts, that they  
8 aren't going to be a partner. And trying to rely on Iran to  
9 defeat the Islamic State is like trying to rely on gasoline  
10 to put out a fire.

11 Senator Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

12 On behalf of the Chairman, Senator King.

13 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

14 General, I just want to touch, for a few moments, on  
15 the intelligence issue. I consider this extremely grave, a  
16 grave issue, because if we don't have reliable intelligence,  
17 as policymakers, and if the President doesn't have reliable  
18 intelligence, we can't make good policy. And this keeps  
19 happening. I mean, this goes back to the Bay of Pigs,  
20 Vietnam, the Iraq War. And this allegation is -- these  
21 allegations are extremely serious, and I hope you will -- I  
22 understand we have an IG investigation, but, as a commanding  
23 officer, I would hope that you would just be all over this.

24 And I want to ask you a direct question. Have you ever  
25 ordered, suggested, or hinted to any of the intelligence

1 command that they should sweeten the intelligence reports in  
2 order to portray a more positive view of the success of our  
3 efforts in Iraq or Syria?

4 General Austin: Absolutely not, Senator King.  
5 Absolutely not.

6 Senator King: Well, I just hope that you will just  
7 stay on this, because, as you know better than any of us, if  
8 you don't have good intelligence, you're not only going into  
9 the battle blind in -- if it's cooked intelligence, you're  
10 going into the battle with one hand tied behind your back.  
11 So, I just -- I am extremely concerned about this issue.

12 This is a question for the record. You used the term  
13 "progress" in your statement a number of times, progress  
14 here and progress there. Not now, but for the record, I  
15 would like a very specific list of what you consider  
16 "progress," where we are -- where we are succeeding.  
17 Because, generally, it doesn't look like that. It looks  
18 more like a stalemate. And I think, again, we should have  
19 this information. And I know some of it is in your  
20 testimony, but I'd like, if you could, just a one-pager on  
21 where you think progress has been made.

22 [INFORMATION]

23 General Austin: Be happy to provide that, sir. We'll  
24 get that to you right away.

25 Senator King: Thank you. And I think, from a broad

1 question of policy -- and this comes off of a lot of the  
2 other discussion we've had -- Assad and ISIS are evil twins.  
3 ISIS largely came into existence in reaction to Assad. And  
4 in retrospect -- and, like Senator Kaine, I was one who was  
5 very reluctant about getting involved -- but, in retrospect,  
6 the longer we've left Assad there, it has created a  
7 situation, both a humanitarian crisis and a situation, that  
8 has allowed al-Nusra and ISIL -- ISIL didn't even exist when  
9 we first started having these hearings -- and it's allowed  
10 them to -- it's given them an enemy and an opportunity to  
11 make hay with the population.

12 So, a strategy that ignores Assad -- and, for example,  
13 trains troops to go into Syria to only fight ISIL, but not  
14 Assad, I just think in -- I'm -- I think we now need to  
15 recognize that that's not a logical strategy. And part of  
16 good strategic thinking is that you modify your strategy  
17 according to the -- according to changed circumstances. And  
18 the circumstances are -- and you mentioned he's losing his  
19 capabilities every day. I'm sorry, General, I've been  
20 hearing that at every hearing since 2013, "Assad is about to  
21 go, he's about to collapse." And I know you didn't say that  
22 today, but we've got to find a strategy that allows us to  
23 move Assad aside in some way, working with the Russians, if  
24 necessary, or the Iranians, if necessary, because he's the  
25 irritant that's keeping this thing stirred up.

1           And then, finally, in terms of our troops, the  
2           fundamental problem, it seems to me, is we're not going to  
3           defeat ISIS with just airpower. Everybody knows that.  
4           We're trying to rely on a weak force in Iraq and no force in  
5           Syria. How do we refine this strategy, General? And you  
6           know that we -- in order to root them out of Mosul, Iraq, or  
7           anyplace else, you're going to have to have troops on the  
8           ground. We don't want them to be Americans. How do we  
9           break through this? Clearly, the train-and-equip is just  
10          too little, too late. Your thoughts.

11          General Austin: We're going to need a greater  
12          commitment from the partners that we're enabling, Senator.  
13          You know, again, if the Iraqis make the commitment to put  
14          more troops through the train-and-equip program, we'll get  
15          them trained and equipped, and we'll get them into the  
16          fight.

17          Senator King: Are there signs that the Iraqis are  
18          willing to do that? Do they want Mosul back?

19          General Austin: I think so. I certainly think so.  
20          They want to stabilize Anbar first, and then take on Mosul.  
21          But, yes, I believe that.

22          Senator King: Ms. Wormuth, give me some thoughts on  
23          the overall strategy here.

24          Ms. Wormuth: Certainly, Senator. I was going to say,  
25          in terms of getting more Iraqis into the fight, they are, as

1 I said, increase -- they're opening the aperture, in terms  
2 of which units they're putting into our training sites. So,  
3 that's going to help, I think, create additional troops on  
4 the ground.

5 Senator King: I'd like specific numbers on that, by  
6 the way, for the record.

7 [INFORMATION]

8 Ms. Wormuth: Certainly. Certainly.

9 And they are -- we see them starting to now plan ahead,  
10 in terms of which units are going into the training  
11 pipeline, which, again, I think indicates a greater sense of  
12 urgency on their part.

13 And on the Syrian side of the ledger, I would say it is  
14 clearly harder to find partners on the ground on the Syrian  
15 side of the ledger. But, one of the things that we didn't  
16 envision a year ago was the partnership, if you will, that  
17 we have of our airpower with the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian  
18 Arab coalition that are operating with them. That group, on  
19 its own, won't be enough, but we are continuing to look for  
20 opportunities like that, even as we review our own train-  
21 and-equip program.

22 Senator King: Well, I would join in Senator Kaine's  
23 remarks that I really think you need to rethink a strategy  
24 about a safe zone, a no-fly zone, some protection from  
25 Assad's barrel bombs. This is some -- I hate it when the

1 Chairman's right, but he's been talking about this for 2  
2 years, and I -- in retrospect, I think he was right. We've  
3 allowed this to just -- the atrocity to go on too long, and  
4 it's impacting us, it's impacting the rest of Europe. And I  
5 really think that there should be a rethinking of the  
6 nonintervention strategy, not on -- not in terms of troops,  
7 but in terms of airpower in order to level the playing  
8 field, bring pressure on Assad and the Russians, so that we  
9 can get a negotiated agreement. Because it doesn't seem to  
10 be a prospect now.

11 Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

12 Senator Reed: Thank you.

13 And again, upon -- on behalf of the Chairman, Senator  
14 Tillis.

15 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

16 Ms. Wormuth, you made a -- in your opening statement --  
17 I'm -- apologize that I had to step out; I had to go to a  
18 Judiciary Committee meeting -- but, you made a comment in  
19 your opening statement that I want to focus a little bit of  
20 time on through a series of questions that -- hopefully, I  
21 can get brief remarks.

22 You said that ISIS is not 10 foot tall. The reason  
23 that I have a concern with that kind of statement is that it  
24 kind of -- it's reminiscent of characterizing them as the JV  
25 team. They are a very serious threat.

1           Before I go forward, General Austin, I neglected to do  
2 what I always do when I see people in uniform. Thank you  
3 for your service. I know you guys are a part of the  
4 solution.

5           But, when we say that ISIS is not 10 feet tall, they  
6 are the richest threat group of this kind in human history.  
7 Through the seizure of assets for the Iraqi National Bank, I  
8 think they seized some \$820 million. Last week, we just had  
9 a memorial for 9/11. It's estimated that the 9/11 attacks  
10 cost about \$500,000. Through that one asset seizure, if my  
11 math is right, that equates to about 1600 9/11s, having the  
12 resources to strike that kind of damage in our homeland, in  
13 the Middle East, in Europe, and other places. I think that  
14 we need to recognize them as one of the single greatest  
15 threats that we have today. Of course we have Russia and  
16 North Korea, Iran. But, they're at the front line for  
17 people that we have to take seriously. And we have to  
18 figure out when we're making progress and when we're not.  
19 That leads to my questions.

20           Do you feel like you're over your -- over the last 24,  
21 36 month, whatever time horizon, General Austin, makes sense  
22 to you -- does ISIS control more or less territory, or do  
23 they have greater or less influence in other areas that are  
24 emerging as potential strongholds for ISIS in the future?  
25 More or less?

1 General Austin: Less in Iraq.

2 Senator Tillis: What's the net? Because we know  
3 they're expanding elsewhere. We know they're changing  
4 jerseys in Afghanistan from al-Qaeda and other groups and  
5 Taliban into ISIS. We've got them operating in other areas.  
6 So, what's the net? More or less?

7 General Austin: It would be more if you consider --

8 Senator Tillis: Okay.

9 Do they have -- if you were to compare their resources  
10 -- their economic resources over the last 24 or 36 months --  
11 do they have more or less dollars to support their terrorist  
12 operations?

13 General Austin: Less. We have targeted their  
14 resources. I think -- they make money, as you know,  
15 Senator, off things like oil collection --

16 Senator Tillis: Antiquity sales, kidnappings --

17 General Austin: Right, right. And so, we have long --  
18 I have said, on a number of occasions, not only do we have  
19 to stop the flow of foreign fighters, but we have to take  
20 away this enemy's ability to finance the --

21 Senator Tillis: Okay.

22 Another measure. I'm trying to come up with this  
23 concept of a dashboard so that when we have the next  
24 committee hearing meeting, I can ask you the same series of  
25 questions and see where the trends are. Do they have more

1 or less influence -- are they -- I -- they seem to be  
2 winning on social media, in terms of reaching out to people  
3 in the homeland, reaching out to people in Europe. About 6  
4 hours ago, it was posted that some 15-year-old girl murdered  
5 her mother in Europe, was convicted of murder as a result of  
6 being radicalized by some of the social media presence.  
7 Have we stemmed the tide on their continued expansion of the  
8 use of social media to radicalize people internationally and  
9 in the homeland?

10 Ms. Wormuth: I think they do have a more effective  
11 counter-messaging campaign at this point.

12 Senator Tillis: Yeah.

13 Ms. Wormuth: That's an area we need to --

14 Senator Tillis: And it seems --

15 Ms. Wormuth: -- work on.

16 Senator Tillis: -- to be growing. It doesn't -- it  
17 seems like, again, in terms of trends, the ground that  
18 they're taking, the places they're heavily influencing,  
19 social media -- I mean, this is a -- an organization that is  
20 trending in the wrong direction against the greatest  
21 superpower that's ever existed.

22 I want to go back to chemical weapons. Do you think  
23 that -- there's been reports -- I want to -- I only want to  
24 talk about confirmed reports -- do you think that their use  
25 of chemical weapons have increased over the last 24 months

1 or are beginning to see evidence that they're being used in  
2 certain areas in Syria and Iraq? More or less?

3 Ms. Wormuth: Senator, given that they had no apparent  
4 use of chemical weapons at the outset, there have been --

5 Senator Tillis: So, now there's more.

6 Ms. Wormuth: -- some indications --

7 Senator Tillis: Okay.

8 And then, the last question I have is how we're working  
9 -- I understand that most of the problem has to deal with  
10 the fact that Iraq has failed to do what they need to do to  
11 engage the Sunni population, but they haven't done it. So,  
12 over the course of the last 24-36 months, has the Sunni  
13 population been more or less inclined to side with ISIS  
14 where the conflicts are arising in Iraq?

15 Ms. Wormuth: I think we've seen considerable outreach  
16 from Prime Minister Abadi --

17 Senator Tillis: Has it worked?

18 Ms. Wormuth: -- to the Sunni community. There are now  
19 4,000 Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar that we didn't have 6  
20 months ago.

21 Senator Tillis: So, you feel like we're winning, in  
22 terms of engaging the hearts and minds of the Sunni  
23 population?

24 Ms. Wormuth: I think we're bringing more Sunni tribal  
25 fighters into the fight.

1 Senator Tillis: Okay.

2 General Austin: I would agree that they're less  
3 inclined to -- in Iraq -- to side with ISIL. They've seen  
4 what ISIL brings to the table. And most of the Sunnis don't  
5 want that, going forward. But, they do want to be included  
6 in the Government of Iraq. So.

7 Senator Tillis: And I think that they should be if  
8 we're going to have a long-term strategy that has productive  
9 engagement.

10 Thank you very much. I'm sorry, Ranking Member, for  
11 going over my time.

12 Senator Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis.

13 Senator King has requested an additional question.

14 Senator King --

15 Senator King: Not a question, Mr. Chairman.

16 I want to submit for the record an extraordinary speech  
17 by Robert Gates in 1992, when he was head of the CIA, on the  
18 danger of the politicization of intelligence. It's  
19 prescient and brilliant, which is not surprising, coming  
20 from Robert Gates. And I just want to submit it for the  
21 record.

22 Thank you.

23 Senator Reed: Without objection, so ordered.

24 [The information referred to follows:]

25 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

1           Senator Reed: On behalf of Chairman McCain, let me  
2 thank the witnesses and adjourn the hearing.

3           Thank you.

4           [Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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