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Committee on Armed Services

Job No. 1709835-001

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE POSTURE OF UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND AND UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

Thursday, May 14, 2026

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m., in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Ernst, Scott, Banks, Moody, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Peters, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, and Slotkin.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI

Chairman Wicker: We convene publicly after a classified session on the posture of U.S., Central Command and U.S. Africa Command. At the outset, I want to thank Admiral Cooper and General Anderson for their distinguished service to their country as well for their candid testimony during the closed session.

Let me start by addressing the situation in the Middle East. Throughout Operation Epic Fury, Admiral Cooper commanded our highly trained and courageous men and women in uniform as they executed an exceptional military campaign. That campaign has rendered the Islamic Republic of Iran a shadow of its former self. The effort has not been without significant losses, though. And certainly, we continue to honor the memory of the 14 servicemembers who lost their lives in this campaign, as well as the approximately 300 servicemembers who have been injured.

Since 1979, Iran's clerical regime has chosen to make the United States its number one enemy. The motto of Iran's ayatollahs has never been "God Bless Iran" or "Long Live Iran." They have chanted "Death to America, Death to Israel." The regime states its murderous goals plainly. The entire foreign policy of Iran revolves around killing others rather than building for its people.

As part of Iran's war of choice against the United States, the regime has directed its terrorist proxies to kill hundreds of American servicemembers, take dozens of Americans hostage, and assassinate senior American officials, including attempts on the life of President Trump. It has also developed a nuclear and ballistic missile program that aimed to hold multiple continents, and dozens of U.S. partners, at risk.

Every American President since Carter has had to deal with the consequences of Iran's war on the United States. Yet rather than dealing with the problem, successive Democrat and Republican administrations sought so-called "de-escalation" with Iran. This often afforded Iran the time and resources to develop its nuclear program, the ballistic missile program, and global terrorist infrastructure.

I commend President Trump for recognizing that the Iranian regime cannot be appeased and for directing action to defeat this threat. Doing so will not be easy. The Iranian regime is deeply ideological and insists that it is winning even when it is losing by every conceivable metric. I look forward to Admiral Cooper sharing his assessment of how close we are to destroying Iran's military capabilities. I would also like to hear what he needs from Congress to ensure our men and women in uniform have what

they need to finish the job.

Failing to complete the Iran mission would send our adversaries a dangerous signal about our nation's wherewithal and resolve. It would send it that erroneous message to Iran and other adversaries around the globe.

As we have seen, the nature and scope of the threats we face transcend geographic boundaries. This is particularly true as we look to Africa. That is where General Anderson comes in. The continent is not a distant concern for American national security. Rather, it is an arena of growing strategic consequence, defined by converging threats from adversarial nation states like China and Russia, radical Islamist terrorism, and instability driven by weak governance.

China and Russia recognize the strategic importance of Africa. China is leveraging economic coercion, debt diplomacy, and military basing to support President Xi's global ambitions. Through its mercenaries and other proxies, Russia is destabilizing fragile states and extracting resources in order to bankroll its malign activities in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world. I look to General Anderson to provide his assessment of Chinese and Russian objectives in Africa and to update the Committee on how Africa Command is addressing the threat posed by these nefarious actors.

The terrorist threats across Africa remain persistent, adaptive, and dangerous. Increasingly, Africa is becoming the epicenter of global terrorism. Al Qaeda and ISIS senior leadership now reside in Africa, and their terrorist affiliates are expanding in size, capability, and geographic reach, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa. Their murderous ambitions are not confined to that continent. These groups remain intent on killing Americans around the world. Yet, significant shortfalls in key military capabilities, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, complicate our ability to track these groups and the threat they pose.

So we look to General Anderson to let the Committee know how these resource shortfalls are impacting his ability to combat the terrorist threat, and where this Committee can be helpful.

I have noted in my remarks, Africa is of increasing strategic importance to American national security interests. This is precisely why a dedicated combatant command for Africa is indispensable. Africa Command was established in 2007 because the United States recognized that these challenges require sustained and dedicated focus. This Committee remains committed to ensuring Africa Command has the authorities, resources, and strategic support necessary to protect American interests across the

continent.

With that I turn to my partner and colleague, Ranking Member Reed.

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

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, thank you for your dedication and service with great distinction over many years. Thank you. And also I express the concerns of all of us, or the hopes of all of us, that you convey our congratulations and appreciation to the men and women that you lead in your areas.

I want to also begin by expressing my deepest condolences to the families of the servicemembers who we recently lost in the Middle East and Africa. We owe them our greatest respect and gratitude.

Admiral Cooper, we are 75 days into this war with Iran, and I am concerned the President does not have a credible strategy to win. Every member of this Committee shares the goal of preventing Iran from having a nuclear weapon, but there is no purely military solution to this problem. Instead, every President over the past 50 years has used diplomacy, sanctions, and international cooperation to, to this point, successfully prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. President Trump tore up the Iran nuclear deal and instead of negotiating a new deal unilaterally took our nation to war.

More than a dozen servicemembers have lost their lives

and hundreds more have been wounded. We have suffered significant damages to our bases, dramatically expended our munitions stockpiles, and sustained billions of dollars of damaged equipment. The Strait of Hormuz is still closed, despite attempts to escort commercial ships.

While Secretaries Hegseth and Rubio have said Operation Epic Fury is concluded, it is unclear what objectives have been accomplished. Iran's regime is intact, its nuclear material remains in place, the majority of missiles and launchers have reportedly been recovered, Iran has demonstrated its ability to shut down the Strait, and most importantly, or certainly of equal weight, American families are bearing real costs at the gas pumps and the grocery store for a war that they did not want and Congress has not authorized.

Admiral Cooper, the military forces under your command have performed with exception skill and bravery, and that is attributable to your leadership and your chain of command. The firepower that we have brought to bear in Iran has been formidable, but we have not yet, I think, articulated a clear strategy going forward, and this is continuing to hamper our objectives.

I think everyone on this Committee would love to see these peace negotiations succeed, and I would be the first one to applaud significant results achieved through

diplomacy. But one of the issues we are facing, and we have talked about it in the closed session, is at every turn we are not receiving the information that we are legally entitled to. We have not seen the legal justification for this operation, nor the execute orders, and the Administration's explanations for cost and the path forward have shifted constantly.

This week, the President said that the ceasefire is on life support, and it leaves us with the fundamental question: where are we and where are we going, and I hope you can touch on that, Admiral Cooper.

There are two other concerns at CENTCOM I would like to address. First, we withdrew all of our troops from Syria, and this has created some adverse consequences, in my view. Our modest military footprint there produced significant returns, including a very reliable partner in the Syrian Democratic Forces, a sustained counter-ISIS mission, which we conducted, and a degree of leverage in a strategically important area of the world. And we gave that up very quickly when we withdrew, and if you could provide some understanding of the current situation I would appreciate it.

Second, the ceasefire in Lebanon is fragile, and Israel's continued air strikes and demolition operations to the south are eroding it. The Lebanese Armed Forces are

one of the few genuine stabilizing instruments we have left in the region, and we should be seriously investing in it. And again, Admiral, I would like to know what resources you need to make this partnership successful, our partnership with the Lebanese military, in displacing Hezbollah and establishing a reliable government.

General Anderson, I am concerned by discussions about whether AFRICOM should be maintained as an independent combatant command, the same concerns, I believe, that the Chairman has. That fight should be not necessary, and it really, I think, reveals a misunderstanding of the continuing importance of Africa, in so many different ways. If we were to merge AFRICOM with EUCOM I think that would be a mistake. It would signal to our allies and adversaries that Africa is not a priority for the United States. Russia and China are not making that mistake. Russia's Africa Corps has expanded steadily across numerous countries, and China continues to build ports, infrastructure, and relationships across the continent. Both nations are filling a space that America has created for them, by our disengagement. And General, I would ask you to share your views on the current security situation and how you are working with allies and partners to address the political and economic instability in Africa.

Finally, I would note that the dismantling of USAID

has made this situation worse. More than $12 billion in annual assistance to Sub-Sarahan Africa is largely gone. This has translated directly into instability, radicalization, and openings for our adversaries. The Administration's "From Aid to Trade" slogan in Africa may be a reasonable, long-term aspiration, but it is not a near-term substitute for what has been lost, and our partners on the ground know it. I would like to know what authorities and support you need from this Committee to effectively partner with vulnerable nations in Africa to keep us from losing more ground to China and Russia.

Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, thank you for your leadership, your outstanding service, and I look forward to your testimonies. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Admiral Cooper, you are now recognized for your opening statement, sir.

STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL CHARLES B. COOPER II, USN, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

Admiral Cooper: Thank you very much. Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and thank you all in this Committee for your very steadfast support to the United States military and to our men and women deployed today.

I am pleased to be sitting here today with my good friend, the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, General Dag Anderson, and I am joined by Fleet Command Master Chief Lateef Compton, our Senior Enlisted Leader at Central Command.

Events in the Central Region have shown how quickly the course of history can change. In just the last few years, decades-old features of the strategic landscape, once thought immutable, have been upended, bringing both challenges and opportunities. I strongly believe that every success that we have starts and ends with our people. In just the last 7 months, America's sons and daughters serving in CENTCOM have played key roles in world events, implementing the President's 20-point peace plan in Gaza, degrading the ISIS threat in Syria, preventing what I would characterize as an ISIS crisis by conducting a historic prisoner transfer to Iraq, creating the most integrated and

effective air defense architecture ever seen, which was decades in the making, and most recently, addressing the Iranian threat.

The performance of our warfighters and Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, often referred to as CJTF-OIR, is particularly noteworthy. In January, responding to a rapidly deteriorating security situation, they have executed an extraordinary transfer of more than 5,700 ISIS prisoners, all terrorists, from Syria to Iraqi custody. Their effort prevented a mass prison break that risked large-scale ISIS reconstitution and acute risk to the American homeland.

In parallel, OIR has maintained relentless pressure on ISIS remnants in Syria, most recent Operation Hawkeye Strike, removed over 50 ISIS terrorists, and 100 terror infrastructure targets from the battlefield.

U.S. Central Command was created in direct response to the threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and I am the 16th CENTCOM Commander to deal with the Iranian problem set. For 47 years, the Iranian regime has terrorized the region and made hostility to the United States a core tenet of its rule. Their hostile, lethal track record against the United States is well documented, but I do not know that it is always well understood.

Here is a datapoint. In just the last 30 months prior

to the commencement of Epic Fury, Iranian-supported terror groups have attacked U.S. troops and diplomats more than 350 times, the equivalent of an attack more than every third day, killing 4 U.S. servicemembers and wounding nearly 200 more.

After more than 2 years of Iranian attempts to leverage October 7, 2023, to tear the region apart, at the direction of the President United States Central Command initiated Operation Epic Fury. In less than 40 days, CENTCOM forces achieved our military objectives. Most notably, we degraded Iran's ability to project power outside its borders and threaten the region and threaten our interests.

As an example, we can all remember April and October of 2024, hundreds of Iranian ballistic missiles and drones raining down in the Middle East. Today, Iran can no longer attack with that mass and scale, and further, with 90 percent of its defense industrial base destroyed, Iran will not be able to reconstitute those weapons for years.

We also all watched Iran spend decades and billions and billions of dollars arming proxies. Today, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis are all cut off from Iran's weapons supply and support. This result was not foreordained, nor was it brought by chance. It is the culmination of months of careful planning, built upon

decades of experience.

These results also do not come without cost. We honor the memories of the 14 servicemembers who paid the ultimate sacrifice during Operation Epic Fury and the 2 soldiers and the 1 civilian killed in Palmyra, Syvia. They represent truly the very best of all of us.

As I sit here we are clear-eyed. The situation in front of us is very complex. High-stakes negotiations continue. Our job is to be ready, and we are. I testify today on behalf of the 50,000-plus service men and women deployed to the Central Region. It is a great honor and privilege of a lifetime to serve as their Commander, and thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Cooper follows:]

Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. General Anderson.

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STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAGVIN R.M. ANDERSON, USAF, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND

General Anderson: Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide you an update on U.S. Africa Command. I am joined today by Command Sergeant Major Garric Banfield, our Senior Enlisted Leader, and I am proud to sit beside my friend from U.S. Central Command, Admiral Brad Cooper. We both appreciate your unwavering support to our nation's warfighters.

Before I start I would like to recognize the service of First Lieutenant Kendrick Lamont Key Jr., and Specialist Mariyah Collington, who lost their lives in a tragic accident during African Lion, and are returning home today. I would also like to express my appreciate to our allies and partners, particularly Morocco, who stepped forward when it mattered most.

Africa sits at the crossroads of global commerce and security, bringing the strategic terrain between the Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. It is the world's supplier of critical minerals for advanced defense systems and home to 12 of the world's 20 fastest-growing economies. By 2050, it will account for a third of the global working age population.

Today, the epicenter of global terrorism is in Africa.

ISIS leadership is African. Al Qaeda's economic engine is in Africa. Both of these groups share the will and intent to strike our homeland. Their affiliates, once isolated nodes, now show increased connectivity. Just as concerning is the nexus between Al Qaeda's Al Shabaab and the Iranian-sponsored Houthis.

AFRICOM is prioritizing willing and capable partners. We support partners with capabilities that only the U.S. can bring -- ISR, targeting, precision strike. These efforts have driven ISIS leaders in Somalia underground, disrupting their command and control of the global ISIS network. In West Africa, Al Qaeda affiliate JNIM has demonstrated increased capacity to control key terrain in the Sahel, most notably by strangling fuel supplies around population centers. The capture of a capital city would provide Al Qaeda with all the trappings of a nation state to sponsor global terrorism.

With a 75 percent reduction in our regional posture over the past decade, compounded by the drawdown of our allies, we struggle with an intelligence black hole, and without sufficient indicators and warnings we risk being blind to the gathering dangers and threats in the region. AFRICOM's lack of expeditionary capabilities and diminished force posture compromise our crisis response. In a crisis we can always surge assets, but you cannot surge trust.

Our reduced presence on the continent also allows disruptive actors to drive the agenda, undercutting American interests. China views Africa as its second continent, securing control over critical minerals and infrastructure, potentially boxing us out of resources that energize our industrial base. Africa also serves as Putin's purse, where Russia exploits instability to extract resources, to include human lives, to fuel its war machine.

To contend with these threats, AFRICOM must think and operate differently. With less than 1/10th of 1 percent of the Department's budget, we must maximize every taxpayer dollar to deliver an outsized return on investment. AFRICOM continues to leverage low-cost, high-yield activities to amplify our impact on the continent.

Programs like the International Military Education and Training and the State Partnership Program are reliable force multipliers that forge enduring relationships with African militaries and are proven models for cost-effective burden sharing.

The AFRICOM exercise program is emerging as a battle lab to test and validate new technologies on behalf of both the Joint Force and our African partners.

And finally, AFRICOM is focused on the critical convergence of security and economics. Our efforts span all elements of national power as we coordinate closely

with State, Commerce, Energy, and Treasury. The Department's new Economic Defense Unit has been an invaluable partner.

To defend the homeland and promote U.S. interests and ensure effective crisis response, AFRICOM needs targeted investments in layered, non-traditional ISR, innovative force protection, programs that are able to enable willing and capable partners, the opportunity to conduct experimentation of emerging technologies, and the ability to respond to crisis at the time and point of need.

Africa is a continent of opportunities, not only crises. With the continued support of this Committee, I can assure you that every dollar you authorize for AFRICOM will contribute directly to the security, safety, and prosperity of the United States.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Anderson follows:]

Chairman Wicker: Well, thank you very much. Let's get right into Iran, Admiral Cooper. And I think one of the basic questions is, was this exercise of ours, was this operation of ours a war of choice or a war of necessity. Let me get your military perspective. Did Iran have enriched uranium up to 60 percent prior to Operation Midnight Hammer?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, they did.

Chairman Wicker: And is there a civilian use at all for uranium that is enriched to 60 percent?

Admiral Cooper: There is not, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: Is it fair to say that Iran's nuclear breakout time has been set back then, thanks to Operation Midnight Hammer and Operation Epic Fury?

Admiral Cooper: Without talking specifics, that is accurate, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: All right. And has Iran ever been willing to curtail its ballistic missile programs, through negotiations?

Admiral Cooper: They have not, sir.

Chairman Wicker: And then perhaps you can explain in some detail to what extent Operation Epic Fury has set back Iran's ballistic missile program. To what extent you can tell us in this open setting.

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, Senator. Thank you very

much for that question. Our military mission in Operation Epic Fury was crystal clear from the very outset and remained steady through. The mission was to degrade Iran's ability to project power on its neighbors and U.S. interests. It had three key components -- degrade Iran's ballistic missiles and the defense industrial base that supports it; degrade Iran's drones and the defense industrial base that supports that; and degrade their Navy and the defense industrial base that supports that. In each of those categories we met all of the achievements. Each of those systems were significantly degraded.

If I gave you just a couple of examples, the defense industrial base for their drones and their missiles and their Navy were degraded by 90 percent. They have about 10 percent left. For the Navy, my military assessment would be that the Navy will not begin to rebuild for 5 to 10 years. Many of you serve in states that build ships. It is complex. It is particularly complex when you do not have an industrial base to build it.

My professional perspective on this also is that Iran would not return to the same level of Navy that it had for a generation.

Chairman Wicker: Now this 10 percent of drones left, are they exquisite, or are they sort of relatively inexpensive drones we have been hearing about?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for this question. I would like to use the opportunity to mythbust on drones.

Chairman Wicker: Okay.

Admiral Cooper: The days of $3,500 drones that we saw in the last couple of years, particularly in the fight against the Houthis in Yemen, those days are behind us. Today we face an increased threat from drones that are highly sophisticated. They are jet-powered. They have high-end sensors. They have electronic warfare. They have signals intelligence. So those days of using high-value defense that shoot down cheap targets are behind us.

Quite the contrary, what we have been doing lately is using our own low-cost, one-way attack drones, attacking Iran, making them use higher-end, more expensive weapons.

So I can confidently tell you we have flipped the cost curve in many ways. Always work to be done, but I like where we are in this regard.

Chairman Wicker: Okay. And, you know, there has been a lot of talk about part of the negotiations being giving up the nuclear ambitions. But almost as important to me is the support of terrorist proxies. So has Iran ever been willing to end its support for the terrorist proxies -- Hamas, Houthis, Hezbollah?

Admiral Cooper: They have not, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: So to what extent has this exercise,

this operation, denied Iran resources for funding terrorism?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, this has been a significant priority from the outset, and as we sit here today there are no resources and equipment that are flowing from Iran to Hamas, Hezbollah, or the Houthis. Those transfer paths and methods have been cut off.

Chairman Wicker: To the extent that that source of support has been cut off, what are the other sources of support that these terrorist groups can look to?

Admiral Cooper: I think some of those pieces are best discussed in a more classified environment. But I think the key element of this is the main supplier of resources and training, for decades and billions of dollars, and we have seen all this before our very eyes, those pieces have been completely cut off today.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. We will take another round, but at this point I recognize the Ranking Member.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Cooper, is Iran militarily still able to inflict significant damage on infrastructure of the surrounding countries in the Persian Gulf?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this environment what I would tell you is their capabilities have been dramatically

degraded. That certainly does not mean that they do not have anything left. But the large-scale volleys that we have seen over the last couple of years, Iran is no longer capable of executing those.

Senator Reed: This would be less large-scale volleys than directed attacks on critical infrastructure, which would set back petroleum production, or petroleum distribution, I would say, even if the Strait of Hormuz is opened. Does that capability still exist?

Admiral Cooper: Capabilities across the board inside Iran still exist at a degraded scale. We have also planned accordingly for each of these scenarios, if necessary, to deal with them from a defensive perspective.

Senator Reed: So would you characterize Iran as no longer a threat?

Admiral Cooper: Iran has a significantly degraded threat, and they no longer threaten regional partners or the United States in ways that they were able to do before. Across every domain they have been significantly degraded.

Senator Reed: But they can still threaten their partners?

Admiral Cooper: It is a very large country. They retain some mineral capability. That is correct and that is accurate.

Senator Reed: Thank you, sir.

Admiral Cooper: We have accounted for that from the defensive perspective.

Senator Reed: General Anderson, what has happened is that the Administration recalled over 30 career Ambassadors overall, 12 in Africa. The United States has only 14 confirmed Ambassadors. In other words, 40 ambassadorial posts in Africa are vacant or filled by charge d'affaires. Is it essential to your work to have fully functioning embassies with Ambassadors?

General Anderson: Senator, we work very closely with all the embassies across the continent to pursue and further American interests, so that relationship with these embassies is critical for AFRICOM's effective engagement.

Chairman Wicker: But what about the Ambassadors?

General Anderson: Yes, sir. So the Ambassadors do enjoy access. I think that is important to have Ambassadors in place because the hierarchical nature of many of the African countries is that if you are not an Ambassador you do not always get access. So there is obviously benefit to that. And we coordinate with them quite closely when we engage.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, sir. You are combatting one of the most sophisticated information warfare operations we have seen in a long time, from Russia. What can we do to improve your ability to

withstand this information operation and also to engage in something on the same level by the United States?

General Anderson: Yes, sir. I appreciate the recognition of this concern because our adversaries are very active in the information domain, as you highlighted Russia. I also say China is also very active in these domains. They use this to undercut not only our interests but undercut and disrupt the democracies that are in Africa. And this is an area that I have talked to several of the leaders across especially Coastal West Africa. They are very concerned about the Russian propaganda that is destabilizing their democracies.

For me, we have a limited budget that we are mostly in a reactive mode to respond to issues. What would be beneficial, as one of the few entities that looks across the entirety of the continent, is a consistent budget that would allow us to campaign in the information space. We coordinate very closely with the State Department and others on this and work with the embassies, but our ability to look across the continent and highlight these things I think is an area where we could be of benefit to the American interests.

Senator Reed: Thank you, sir. Admiral Cooper, one more question. Do we still maintain a relationship with the Syrian Democratic Forces?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, we do have a nascent relationship with them, in the context of evacuating the more than 5,700 ISIS prisoners from predominantly northeast Syria to Iraq. A small number of prisoners, mostly chronically ill, and with multiple amputees stayed in the primary prison known as Hasaka, and SDF today is serving as the guards.

Senator Reed: Just a follow-on question, do you detect any kind of resentment to our rapid departure from the SDF?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have had a longstanding relationship with the SDF. The ceasefire that they have in place today with the Syrian government remains in effect, and we remain engaged.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Admiral. General, thank you for your service.

Admiral, what did the Iranians attempted missile attack on the island of Diego Garcia tell us about the ballistic missile program and their intent to use it? Did it come as a surprise?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, appropriate to talk in this forum, because there is clearly a classified component to this, I think we have all heard publicly what Iran

described as their self-imposed limitations on their missile force. The execution of that particular attempted strike, which failed, was twice the distance of what they previously advertised that they said they would self-constrain themselves to.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. And as you look at the total operation, the conflict there, what lessons have you learned from that, and how have you used those lessons thus far to ensure that your command is prepared for the fight that we have today?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. Thank you very much for this. It is fair to say that we have captured thousands of lessons, mostly tactical. I think there is no military in the world that makes adjustments as well as the United States military does. And whether they were in stride tactically with a lot of support from organizations back in the United States or they were more at the operational level, we took a very hard look inward to see where can we improve our defenses.

Force protection and protecting our people is my number one priority. We focused on that first. We made a significant number of adjustments to enhance what was already a very effective air defense umbrella. And that is where we are predominantly focused, as well as putting ourselves in the position to meet a wide range of

contingencies going forward.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir. General Anderson, ISIS is on the rise in Africa, and you have been very, very clear about that. How is your command working with our partners in order to address that?

General Anderson: Senator, you are correct. ISIS is putting a concerted effort into its establishment on the continent. We have been working very closely with willing partners who have been willing to address this threat.

Two examples of that. In northern Somalia, working with the Somali and the Puntland forces there to go up into those mountains. What has been key there to putting pressure and isolating the ISIS leadership there is the partner's ability to stay in those mountains. So our partnership provides them the intelligence, some training, and some limited logistics that allow them to stay is helping isolate that leadership node in Somalia.

We have also been working very closely with Nigeria, who has, in the last few months, opened up with a very positive engagement, with intel sharing and ability to go after and target some of these terrorist threats that are in northern Nigeria. So that has been a positive area that we have seen, as well.

We would like to reestablish some pragmatic relationships in the Sahel, where ISIS also has a strong

hold, where they are currently holding an American hostage, in order to gain better access. And that is an area we need to continue to improve, to work with those partners for intel sharing and an understanding of what that threat is there.

But we are working very deliberately with our partners to address these common threats.

Senator Fischer: Do you feel that you are appropriately resourced to address these threats?

General Anderson: We have the minimum necessary resources in order to address the threats. In order to do this, because of the size of the continent and the complexity of those threats, in order to thwart these we have to shift resources and that entails taking some risk in those other areas in order to address the primary efforts.

Senator Fischer: I would like to have you address some of the connections that we see with the drug cartels, with the terror groups. Can you elaborate on those, especially with regards to the Central and South American cartels?

General Anderson: Yes, Senator. That is an area that is emerging that is causing us great concern. Two points to that. Recently there was an interdiction based on some intelligence that we were able to provide, that the Spanish

interdicted a shipment of cocaine that was 35 tons of cocaine. That is about a billion dollars of street value. We believe that is the largest interdiction in history. That came out of South America. It was transiting along the west coast of Africa towards another location that I could talk about in a classified environment.

And so we are seeing more of that drug trafficking coming in, and the terrorist organizations are helping transit that. They are getting payments through that, and there is a symbiotic relationship that that money then comes back to our hemisphere, to those drug cartels, but also helps provide fuel for those terrorists.

Another area that I think is important to highlight is that in the last 18 to 24 months we have assisted, or at least tipped off, many partner nations to drug activities and labs in their country. In this time, 11 of the 12 drug labs that have been interdicted have had Mexican cartel members on site, to include the largest drug lab that had ever been disrupted in South Africa. There were Sinaloa Cartel members on site. So they are actually doing production now in Africa as well as the transit of that across the continent.

So we are watching this develop, and it is of concern as this fuels both the terrorists and the cartels.

Senator Fischer: What is the destination of those

drugs?

General Anderson: Those drugs are destined for the Middle East, for Europe, but we are also seeing them then come in through the northern route, back into America. As we have applied pressure on the southern border they are finding other means to bring those drugs into our nation.

Senator Fischer: Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for being here. Thank you for your extraordinary service in a difficult time. General Anderson, I want to express my condolences to you and your team and the families of First Lieutenant Kendrick Lamont and Specialist Mariyah Collington. The Army has lost two young patriots, a dedicated man and woman, and I am certain that the recovery mission was difficult. And I want to commend your team for bringing closure to their families.

Admiral, there has been public reporting that Iran continues to have as much as 70 to 75 percent of its missiles and launchers available to threaten shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. Does that reporting conform roughly with your estimate as to Iran's continuing strength?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for the question, and first thank you for your time these past few days. It

has been meaningful and very much appreciated.

I think it is appropriate in this forum not to discuss specific intelligence assessments. What I would say, from my perspective, is the numbers that I have seen in open source are not accurate. I think what also is not taken into consideration, it is more than just the numbers. It is the command and control that has been shattered, it is the significant degradation and capability, and it is the lack of any ability to then produce any missiles or drones on the back end. I think we have to take a holistic look at that, and that is what we have done.

Senator Blumenthal: But regardless of what the numbers are, Iran continues to pose a significant threat to shipping because it has missiles and fast boats and other assets that are available to attack shipping in the area. Correct?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, in each of those cases their capabilities have been significantly degraded. If I just use my own professional experience, in 100 transits through the Strait of Hormuz you would typically see 20 to 40 fast boats, and lately we have seen 2 or 3. So the degradation means it has been significant, but some residual capability does exist.

Senator Blumenthal: With respect to the threat that remains, your forces were successful in Project Freedom in

enabling ships to go through the Strait. Correct?

Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

Senator Blumenthal: And Project Freedom was stopped for what reason?

Admiral Cooper: Sir, I think I will look back a couple of days ago on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee. I think he characterized it well. The situation in the Strait of Hormuz is rather complex these days, and I would offer just these quick points.

First and foremost, the United States controls, via our blockade, which I would be happy to talk about, the overall flow of commerce going into and out of Iran. The Iranian capability to stop commerce has been dramatically degraded through the Strait, but their voice is very loud, and those threats are clearly heard by the merchant industry and the insurance industry. Those are factors. There are certainly factors in energy. And on top of all that --

Senator Blumenthal: And I apologize for interrupting but I am going to run out of time, as you understand. I think the point that I want to make here is that Project Freedom could be started again, and the voices of the Iranians, large as they are, could be contradicted or reduced in impact if Project Freedom were ongoing and the

world could see that shipping was going through the Strait. Am I off-base in that view?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, there is a wide range of contingencies that we are prepared to execute, and I would defer to the policymakers on anything having to do specifically with the Strait of Hormuz, particularly during this time of sensitive negotiations, where it is front and center in the negotiations.

Senator Blumenthal: And have you seen any progress in those negotiations?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would refer to the diplomats and the team engaged in the negotiations.

Senator Blumenthal: Let me ask you, in the time that I have left, one of the objectives that President Trump articulated at the beginning of this war, which, in my view, could not be accomplished with bombing, was to secure the enriched uranium. Would you agree that taking possession of that uranium would require boots on the ground and significant casualties for United States forces?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this particular forum I think it would be highly inappropriate, given the classified nature of any contingencies, to talk about the nuclear program.

Senator Blumenthal: Well, let me just finish by making the observation that you have, I think, sought to be

forthcoming to the Committee, in the classified setting where we had an earlier conversation with questions and answers. My view is that the vast majority of what you told us should also be told to the American people. They deserve to know. And our adversaries know a lot of what we know. The ones who really do not know are the American people, and they deserve more information, which is not a criticism of you. It is of the system which causes the withholding of this information, and the Administration, which has refused to provide figures as to the cost of the war and other details that are relevant and important for the American people to know. So I am hopeful that we can have a way to make more information available to the American people. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Admiral Cooper, during the brief time Project Freedom, before it was closed off again, can you say in this setting whether or not our services were able to open the Strait?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for this. Very much appreciated. As has been publicly highlighted, the first two ships to flow from the Arabian Gulf, from the western part, into the east through the Strait of Hormuz were U.S.-flagged vessels. That was successfully executed. And U.S. Navy destroyers then came into the Arabian Gulf, operated for a number of days, and then as you subsequently

saw, float out of the Arabian Gulf.

Chairman Wicker: Okay. Senator Blumenthal's question presumed that you could give, in public, your judgment as to whether the United States is capable of doing that again.

Admiral Cooper: Senator, there is a military component of this and there is also a policy component that I believe to the policymakers --

Chairman Wicker: From a military standpoint, we could do that again, could we not?

Admiral Cooper: We just did it last week.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Ernst, I believe.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and gentlemen, thank you for being here today and to your teams, as well. We truly appreciate your service and dedication to our nation. And I also want to acknowledge the loss of the two individuals in Morocco, and thank our Moroccan partners, as well, for their contribution in the recovery efforts.

I do want to recognize, Admiral Cooper, those that we have lost during this current operation, or the former operation, Epic Fury, as well as the two Iowa National Guardsmen that we lost in Syria this last December. We have also more than 380 who have been wounded in this fight. So for all of those servicemembers that have given

so much and to their families, they will not be forgotten.

The operations that have been conducted against Iran and its proxies across the Central Command AOR would not have been possible without some really tremendous partners in that region. And we have seen a large burden borne by Israel and Jordan. We have seen assistance coming from Bahrain and UAE, who has taken a significant amount of incoming fire, Saudia Arabia, Qatar. They have not all been passive bystanders. They have been actively engaged. They have contributed to every line of effort, and we appreciate them contributing to our successes. We cannot overstate what their basing access logistics, their networks, and intelligence cooperation have meant operationally to us.

So, Admiral Cooper, what is the one, maybe two, things that you want all of us to understand as we walk out of this hearing knowing about what our allies have assisted with in this fight?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, first thank you for the question and thank you for your leadership, and thank you for all that has been done by the great men and women from your state. They have played an outsized role, so thank you for that.

Senator Ernst: Thank you.

Admiral Cooper: In terms of our partners, I think a

key feature is we have enhanced mil-to-mil relationships across the board in the Middle East. As we sit here right now we have five specific partner nations who are not just conceptually side-by-side by literally side-by-side with the United States in defense -- the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Over the course of Epic Fury they defended themselves and they defended Americans.

In addition to those key allies, everything that we have accomplished would have been impossible without the Kingdom of Jordan, and clearly we were operating very closely with the State of Israel. I think that group, in particular, should be commended. They did not just execute missions. They served side-by-side with Americans and protected Americans.

Senator Ernst: Thank you. And this takes years to develop those friendships, those relationships, the mil-to-mil work that you do. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: It does. There is the mil-to-mil work. There is the friendships. It is all about bringing these together. And the air defense umbrella that has been created has been in concept for the better part of a decade and a half, now fully realized.

Senator Ernst: And again, I just want to reiterate that we have such tremendous partnerships with so many of

those nations, and we thank them for that.

I will move to AFRICOM now, General Anderson. Over the past couple of years the U.S. has been withdrawing forces from a number of countries, including Niger, Mali, and Chad. And Russian's African Corps has moved in to fill that vacuum. Where we do not exist, others will. But just a few weeks ago they retreated from Kidal, Mali under fire. They had surrendered to the very militants that they were sent to defeat.

So we have some really interesting dynamics going on in that region, and AFRICOM is left with the responsibility for a lot more high-risk, high-threat posts than any other combatant command in the world. So walk us through, just very briefly, what AFRICOM cannot do today that it could 5 years ago.

General Anderson: Senator, I think there is one very poignant example that I can use very quickly, is that 5 years ago I was the Commander of Special Operations Command in Africa. Philip Walton was taken hostage in Niger and transported by bandits, being prepared to be sold to terrorist organizations. We were able to identify him in 24 hours. We were able to pinpoint his location within 48. He was rescued in less than 96. That was largely due to the access that we had, also the partnerships and the relationships that we enjoyed.

Today, Kevin Rideout is on day 205 of captivity, largely because we do not have the access that we had before and the relationships that are necessary, and that posture reduction has been difficult. And he was also taken out of Niamey. Unfortunately, he was then sold by the bandits to ISIS and is being held there today.

Senator Ernst: Thank you for that. And Mr. Chairman, I just want folks to understand the lack of presence that we have in AFRICOM and that exact difference. So thank you, General Anderson, for a very, very specific example of what a lack of presence has meant. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Ernst. There is a proposal for substantially more funding for your command. Is that right, General Anderson?

General Anderson: Senator, that is correct. The presidential budget significantly increases our budget and addresses some of these key concerns.

Chairman Wicker: Well, that one example you just gave, would that be addressed by these proposed additional funds?

General Anderson: Not entirely, Senator, because the access and relationships are what were key there. But we do, because of this, because of that lack of posture, we need more investment in expeditionary capabilities, and that is being addressed in the proposed budget. But those

relationships that the Senator highlights and maintaining those relationships are absolutely critical because you cannot surge trust in a time of need.

Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, you and I have gone back and forth about unfunded requirements. So I guess your testimony is that that is not a matter of funding. It is just a matter of relationships.

General Anderson: Senator, that is a matter of relationships. The funding that we would ask for that would help us is the contingency of response ability, expeditionary, but also some targeted programs to work with key partners who are willing and able to address the threat, to increase their capability and capacity to do that. So those are the investments. Those are all included in the proposed budget. So right now I do not have many needs.

Chairman Wicker: Very well. Very well. Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to our witnesses, President Trump's decision to unilaterally take the United States into a war with Iran is deeply unpopular in Virginia. We are a very pro-military state, a very pro-military state. And as I have traveled around Virginia and talked to Virginians the unpopularity sort of gets crystalized into have we learned nothing from 25 years of

war in the region. Fourteen thousand American troops and contractors died in the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, more than 65,000 injured, $8 trillion spent. And Virginians who have watched their friends and family repeatedly deployed over the last quarter century have grave concerns about what was accomplished, and was the sacrifice worth it.

Our troops sacrifice so bravely. Chief Warrant Officer Robert Marzan, one of the 14 who have died in Epic Fury, Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Our forward carrier strike group just returned, longest post-Vietnam deployment of any carrier. Our folks sacrifice. They want civilian leaders to make the right decisions about whether and when and how they should sacrifice, and there is deep concern that in this instance the decision is a wrong one.

Part of it is a failure to really grapple with history. In the hearings in this Committee I have heard over and over again, and I have heard the President and Secretary of Defense talk about Iran's bad actions since 1979. And everything that has been said about Iran's bad actions are true.

But there is a lot of the story that folks do not talk about. History did not begin in 1979. Iran and the United States were allies in World War II. One of the pivotal events in World War II is the Tehran Conference, where

President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin met in Tehran to guarantee Iran independence, stable borders, and sovereignty. Iran loved the United States.

The United States led a coup to topple the democratically elected government of Iran in 1953, during the Eisenhower administration. The United States propped up a dictatorship, the Shah of Iran, trained the secret police, the SAVAK, that tortured, exiled, imprisoned, killed Iranians by the thousands. And 26 years after that there was a revolution, in 1979, and yes, then it was "Death to America." The U.S. funding a dictatorship and toppling a democratically elected government led to an Iran that has been very hostile, and all the events my colleagues have talked about since then are accurate.

But just as Iran seized our Embassy in violation of international law, then the United States funded Saddam Hussein for Iraq to wage war against Iran in the 1980s, killing hundreds of thousands of Iranians. And just as Iran funded proxies that bombed a Marine barracks on our Embassy in Beirut, the U.S. Navy shot down an Iranian civilian aircraft in 1989, killing 290 civilians. And the U.S. invaded Iran's next-door neighbors to topple their government, and then, yes, Iranians attacked U.S. troops, a raid near their border, and we have attacked and killed their leadership.

I am not saying that Iran is good. Iran is horrible, horrible to its neighbors, horrible to people outside its borders, and even worse to its own people. But if you ignore the history of the back-and-forth between the U.S. and Iran, you will not get this right. If more war between U.S. and Iran were the answer, we would have found the answer sometime between 1953 and now.

Here is something I think it is important for my colleagues to know. We did look for a path, a diplomatic path, to end this hostility that has been going on since 1953, and President Trump tore up a diplomatic deal, over the advice of his Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, and many of us said at the time, if you do this, it is likely to lead to Americans dying. If you make diplomacy impossible, you will make war inevitable. And I believe the troops who have been killed in Epic Fury would be alive today if the United States had not decided to abandon the diplomatic deal.

Admiral Cooper, and to my colleagues on the Committee, here is something that is pretty amazing, that we should not settle for. The Administration is refusing to allow members of this Committee to see the OLC opinion stating the legal case for war. We have always had the ability. We are Armed Services members. We are being asked to fund a $1.5 trillion budget, but our request to the DOJ to see

the OLC opinion justifying this war, they have refused to allow members of the Armed Services Committee to see it. U.S. Senators, appropriators, we are not allowed to see it. What are they hiding? If they will not allow us to see the legal rationale for the war, what are they hiding?

And Mr. Cooper, I will just conclude and say I hope we might, as a Committee, whatever our agreements about the wisdom or the legality of the war, I hope we might, as a Committee, agree that we should at least, in a classified setting, be able to read the legal opinion upon which this entire 76-day war is based. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Wicker: Yes. Thank you, Senator. You have made a statement that raises questions that these two witnesses are unable to answer, because you have raised policy questions. So just for the benefit of those listening in, we have had the civilian leadership before this Committee to answer questions like that, and these two gentlemen would have to decline. If you had stated that in the form of a question they would have to decline to answer, because that is a matter of policy.

Who is next? Senator Moody, you are recognized.

Senator Moody: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for being here today, Admiral Cooper, General Anderson. Thank you for your leadership to the men and women of CENTCOM and AFRICOM. Thank you for everything that you

have done over the course of your careers and are continuing to do to serve our country. And I see there are so many men and women with you, behind you, to support these efforts today, to speak with us, to meet with us, to answer our questions. I know a lot of preparation goes into that, so I thank you, as well.

Admiral Cooper, the fight you are leading certainly, with CENTCOM under your command, I am always proud to say that that is based in my home county in Florida, Hillsborough County, Florida. That is where I was born and raised. It has been there since 1983, 43 years of commanding operations, like we are involved in today. So I am proud to have you here, sir.

Florida is so involved, from SOCOM, Space Forces Centra, Patrick Space Force Base, Cape Canaveral. We are both the command hub and launchpad for most all conflicts. We are proud to be that, proud to be a stakeholder in everything that is done within the military. So on behalf of all the servicemembers in Florida, civilian and their families, we want to say thank you to them.

You know, I am the newest member of this Committee. It is always interesting to me to her the different perspectives from other members on this Committee. You would think, from some of the questioning previously, that the United States willy-nilly abandoned all diplomatic

efforts, did not think through that, there was no justification. I am wondering if you could tell me, Admiral Cooper, what is your background working with CENTCOM in all of the leadership positions you have held?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, first thank you for the question and thanks for your time yesterday, and thanks for your leadership. Thousands of Floridians are serving in the Middle East today, and they are serving honorably and well.

Senator Moody: But what specifically has been your roles with CENTCOM?

Admiral Cooper: I have been focused on the Middle East for the last 5 years, 3 years of which were serving in Bahrain as the Fleet Commander, and then about 16 months as the Deputy Commander prior to my current position.

Senator Moody: And how long have you been familiar with Iran and its leadership and its attacks against the United States?

Admiral Cooper: I have studied it or been a part of it for the better part of three decades, and particularly, acutely in the last 5 years.

Senator Moody: And leading up to February 28th, months prior to that, what was jarring to you that you saw different than what it had been for those many decades that you have been involved?

Admiral Cooper: I think it is important to note just in the 30 months before Epic Fury commenced, Iran and its proxies had been attacking U.S. servicemembers and diplomats about 350 times.

Senator Moody: Can you repeat that?

Admiral Cooper: About every third day, Iran and its proxies attacked American servicemembers 350 times in the Middle East.

Senator Moody: I do not think that Americans were aware of that, in the 30 months, that they had attacked Americans or their servicemembers 350 times. Does it surprise you that I would say that, that I do not believe an everyday American going to work knew that?

Admiral Cooper: It is disappointing, but between the actions of proxies in Iraq and Syria as well as the Houthis, that is simply the fact of what happened.

Senator Moody: And in the months leading up to that decision, that very serious decision on February 28th, what were your concerns regarding the proliferation of missiles or the ability of the United States to do anything if that nuclear threat escalated?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, in this venue what I would say is since our number one priority is to prevent a nuclear-capable Iran, I have always, every day, focused on that problem. But what we saw in the weeks and months

leading up to Epic Fury was an increase in the production capability of ballistic missiles, which presented a very significant risk, both to the partners and ourselves, and this is why it was part of our military objectives, to eliminate those missiles and equally, if not more importantly, eliminate the ability for Iran to generate any more --

Senator Moody: In those couple of months leading right up until that you saw a dramatic escalation in that ability on Iran's part?

Admiral Cooper: That is correct. Starting in about November and December you started to see an increase in Iran's capability and intent to produce more ballistic missiles.

Senator Moody: And if we could not have neutralized that threat diplomatically, does there come a point where that is not an option anymore, where there may be a slippery slope where we cannot get back to our ability to be effective to quell that threat?

Admiral Cooper: Without crossing into classified lanes, the short answer is yes. Iran had a large-scale capability to produce ballistic missiles, beyond which could potentially be defended. I think that is a very important point. The second point is that capability has been virtually eliminated.

Senator Moody: And I believe I heard you say at this point you believe Epic Fury has satisfied its mission?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, we met every military objective for Epic Fury.

Senator Moody: And what is the difference between where we were on the 28th of February and right now?

Admiral Cooper: If I used a couple of examples, the Iranian Navy went from harassing throughout the region and being a regional power to having no Navy.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Moody. Senator King.

Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, you used the word "mythbusting" a few minutes ago, and I have to do a little mythbusting. It is sort of common rhetoric today that no administration prior to this one has confronted the threats of Iran. In fact, the most effective confrontation with the threat from Iran, the nuclear threat, was during President Obama's administration, with the JCPOA. I would point out that at the time that President Trump tore up, unilaterally tore up the nuclear agreement with Iran, Iran had zero highly enriched uranium.

As you know, today one of the focuses of this whole enterprise is 400 kilograms of highly enriched uranium that is in place in Iran, that was produced since the unilateral

dissolution of the JCPOA. The idea that nobody ever confronted this problem is just not true. And we are now confronting a problem that was created by the abandonment of the JCPOA, which is the most comprehensive nuclear control agreement ever and the most highly inspected by the International Atomic Energy agency in world history. So we are confronted with a problem now that, in many ways, this Administration created in 2018, by abandoning this agreement.

Let me move on. Do we have any clarity now as to who is in charge in Iran? Do we know who has the power to negotiate and make agreements?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, the negotiations themselves are held via diplomatic channels, and I would really refer to the diplomats to address that. But clearly from a military perspective their command control was significantly fractured as a result of our strikes in Operation Epic Fury.

Senator King: And command and control is another way of saying their leadership. There is a communications difficulty. Is the IRGC in charge at this point?

Admiral Cooper: The IRGC is exercising significant authority.

Senator King: General Anderson, talk to me about the loss of soft power in Africa, our abandonment of USAID and

what has happened with the Chinese and the Russians that, my understanding is, are now filling that gap in addition to the other aggressive actions that they are taking.

General Anderson: Senator, I would say that we look at all facets of national power and how to bring those to bear on the continent in order to provide security outcomes.

Senator King: Taking one facet of our national power off the table, unilaterally, for no apparent reason, at the whim of Elon Musk.

General Anderson: Senator, we work very closely with State, with Commerce, and with Energy in order to look at the security requirements on the continent. I have a Foreign Service Commercial Officer joining my staff this summer, along with a liaison from the Department of Energy, in order to look at economic opportunities --

Senator King: But it is fact, is it not, that we have essentially left all of the role that USAID played on the continent, that is gone. That is a yes-or-no question.

General Anderson: Senator, there are still aid programs that are active on the continent. They are much reduced from what they were before.

Senator King: Much reduced. That is a fair way of stating it. You mentioned earlier that Al Qaeda and ISIS have resurged in Africa, and the term "epicenter" has been

used several times, of world terrorism. You said they have the will and intent to attack the homeland. My question is, do they have the capacity? Are they developing weapons, strategies, other ways to take that will and intent and turn it into something of imminent danger to the American people?

General Anderson: Senator, that is the exact issue that is my top concern, is to have the assets necessary to provide the indication warnings to know and to be able to identify when they shift that will and intent to having the capacity and capability. That is something that is very difficult for us to ascertain in the Sahel right now, given our limited posture.

Senator King: That was going to be my follow-up question is do we have the capacity to determine their capacity, and it sounds like you just said we do not have the capacity that we should have or need.

General Anderson: Senator, that is why, in the President's budget, we have asked for additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and why we are also looking at a layered approach to look at everything from surface to space, to look at commercial assets, to look at emerging technologies, open source as well, and use these technologies, especially artificial intelligence, in order to fuse these multiple different

types of layered ISR in order to gain that understanding and illuminate this black hole of intelligence in the Sahel.

We cannot sustainably afford to do that solely with airborne ISR, so we have to look at a multifaceted approach. There are some very promising emerging technologies that we are looking into, that are affordable and sustainable and that also can work with our partners. Because one of the key points to this is this is not necessarily ours to action, so having the intelligence that we can share with partners, so they can then action those on a mutual threat is going to be key to our future. But being able to understand that is number one priority of the command and we are looking at investing with emerging technologies.

Senator King: And I think as you have testified, if they take over the capital of Mali, that is a very dangerous moment.

General Anderson: That would be a game-changer, I believe, in how they would be viewed internationally and what traction they would bring to other adherents.

Senator King: Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: How would that affect Americans, General?

General Anderson: Well, I think that would then give

momentum to these terrorist organizations to have the will and intent, and it would allow them to then start moving towards the capability and capacities that Senator King just mentioned. So that, then, I think poses a threat in the long term to the United States as they continue to develop this. We know that they have not given up this intent, and it is just a matter of having the time and space to develop them.

Chairman Wicker: And it would be Vladimir Putin that would be happiest about this. Is that correct?

General Anderson: What, sir?

Chairman Wicker: It would be President Vladimir Putin who would rejoice at such a contingency. Or would it be Xi Jinping?

General Anderson: I cannot speak for what either one of those leaders would believe, but I would think that they would be able to parlay that to their interests.

Chairman Wicker: Well, who is financing this contingency, if it were to happen?

General Anderson: The terrorists?

Chairman Wicker: Yes.

General Anderson: Through lots of illicit materials. So it is not necessarily directly from a state actor. They are working with, as I mentioned earlier, the narcoterrorists trafficking. They are doing this through

kidnap for ransom. They are doing this through other illegal smuggling. They even have their own taxation networks in the territories that they control, where they generate millions of dollars.

Chairman Wicker: And before I turn to Senator Scott, with regard to the funds that we are not spending anymore on USAID, but have been supplemented elsewhere, in terms of dollars, let's talk in terms of U.S. dollar equivalence, how does the food aid, health aid, and development aid that we are currently delivering in your jurisdiction compare to what China and Russia are doing?

General Anderson: Senator, I do not have those exact numbers. I would have to get back to you on those, as those are often in other departments, other agencies within the government. But we can look into that for you and look at what that comparison is.

Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, if you would then supplement that on the record for us, because I do not know the answer either. Senator Scott.

Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. I thank both of you for your service and all the men and women that work for you.

Admiral Cooper, I know this is not a classified setting, but can you talk a little bit about what other countries have done to help us either with intelligence or

with military capabilities, and I do not know whether you want to do this or not, something that you would have liked to have done more?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think the most prominent seven countries that have been most helpful and served side-by-side are five of the six GCC countries -- UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Also indispensable in our efforts has been the Kingdom of Jordan and clearly Israel, with whom we conducted the strikes. We are always eager to expand partnerships. There are a couple that I think I could address in a classified setting that were less than stellar.

Senator Scott: Okay. And do you feel like we have been a great partner to them in helping build up their capabilities over the last 20 years or so?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it has been an excellent two-way street, and if I look at mil-to-mil relationships it has been very strong. I would simply highlight the result of years of effort and collaboration and partnership, but our partners, literally side-by-side with patriot defenses, with our partners defending Americans, I think that sends a good signal and says a lot.

Senator Scott: I think Senator Wicker asked you some questions about drones. We had a meeting the other day and an individual came in and said that Ukraine is building

five million drones a year. And so they probably are ahead of most people because they have had to, because of the war they are in.

Can you talk about are we where we need to be with drone technology? Are we using it everywhere we can? Are we where we need to be with regard to drone defense capabilities? Can you just talk a little bit more about that?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. First I would say that the Secretary's and the Department's focus on drone domination, drone dominance, has really kickstarted our capabilities and flowed more capabilities into the region much faster than we had seen before, and many of those capabilities have now been proven in combat. I think in a classified setting I would like to tell you what that looked like. But as we sit here today we have drone capabilities in the air, on the sea, and under the sea, as a result of this initiative.

Senator Scott: Do you have any feel for whether the impact you have had on Iran is impacting their ability to help Russia in their war against Ukraine?

Admiral Cooper: I think it is best to discuss that in a classified setting. Clearly Iran and Russia have had a years-long relationship, particularly when it comes to drones.

Senator Scott: So what are you most proud of? What are you most proud of that you have accomplished since you have had this role?

Admiral Cooper: Absolutely number one, two, and three, I am most proud of the men and women who executed an extraordinarily complex mission, the first major combat operations that the United States has seen in a generation, establishing, in my mind, the latest, greatest generation of American warriors.

Senator Scott: Same question, General Anderson. What are you most proud of that you have accomplished so far?

General Anderson: Senator, I think I would agree with Admiral Cooper that it is the men and women with a very small footprint with a very small amount of resources punched way above their weight class and have outsized impacts on the continent. What we just did in African Lion in Morocco was significant, in our largest exercise on the continent, of bringing over 40 nations together, to include over three dozen African countries and nations as far away as Brazil and Japan. That ability to convene is one of the great powers of the United States, and it differentiates us from many others.

So I am proud of the fact that we can do that and that we cannot just pursue our own readiness but actually bring multiple nations together to address common threats.

Senator Scott: Thanks to both of you, and thanks to all of the men and women that work for you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator. We have Shaheen and then Hirono.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, thank you to both of you for being here and for your service.

I wanted to pick up on Senator King's questions about the closing of so much of our foreign assistance in Africa, General Anderson. Senator Wicker asked what we are seeing in terms of China. I have a couple of examples that I think are worth pointing out how much that has meant in terms of China's ability to make inroads. Because China has actually eclipsed Russia as the largest weapons exporter to sub-Saharan Africa, which I am sure you are aware of, and 70 percent of all African armies now operate vehicles from the PRC, as opposed to the United States. Beijing is looking to expand military grants, training, and joint exercises between the PRC and African countries, and we do not have the kind of foreign assistance soft power that we did before the elimination of USAID.

But you mentioned, General Anderson, that you have taken on a Foreign Commercial Service Officer, which I think is a really interesting idea, and as you are aware, I am sure, at INDOPACOM, Admiral Paparo has really used this

to good advantage, coordinating with the State Department, with the Development Finance Corporation, with the U.S. Trade Development Agency, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, to identify potential projects to work on in that AOR.

So can you talk a little bit more about how you are identifying development projects and whether you need any other authorizations from Congress or support for this effort from us so that you can help implement the kind of coordination that is going on in INDOPACOM.

General Anderson: Senator, yes, I very much appreciate your interest here, because this is an area I think is emerging on the continent. With the demographics on the continent and the growing economies, being able to identify the intersection of security and economics is absolutely vital. All of the agencies you mentioned are ones that we are coordinating with to make sure that those investments go into the continent and have the greatest effect, but they are also informed by what are the security implications.

Sometimes it may not have the same economic return, but that return may come in security, and that is where we come in, is being able to convene some of these different agencies as well as private industry to be able to articulate what those security concerns are, what those

implications are. And then also the fact that we are able to execute exercises and other things around the continent helps go into the calculus of those investments and buy down some of that risk. So that is what we are looking to develop.

Senator Shaheen: Do those agencies routinely check with you if there is a major project that they are looking to fund in Africa?

General Anderson: Historically, no, and that is why we are standing up a very small unit within the headquarters in order to have that point where they can help facilitate these discussions, because often they did not know where to have them.

Senator Shaheen: And is that something that Congress can be helpful with in terms of trying to encourage that sort of coordination?

General Anderson: I think there are ways that encouraging that coordination would be very helpful in being able to articulate this across the committees that oversee these various agencies and understanding how that interrelation of national power can come together, that it is not always the military lever that produces a security outcome, but being able to have that dialogue I think would be critical.

The other area that I think would be very helpful also

is incentive structures that help energize our industrial base, to help produce the equipment that our partners want. They would much prefer to buy U.S. equipment, but often our systems take so long and are so long to deliver, because often the incentive structures are not there, that they turn to China out of necessity, not because of desire. They often see that as inferior equipment, and they would much prefer to buy American. We need to incentivize our industrial base to meet that demand.

Senator Shaheen: Yeah, I agree, and as you know it is an issue, not just in that respect but in a whole lot of other areas in terms of the challenges with the industrial base.

Admiral Cooper, one of the things that has gotten a fair amount of attention in recent weeks have been President Zelensky's working with some of our allies and partners in the Middle East in response to the war in Iran on the expertise that the Ukrainians have developed to address counter-drone responses. Can you talk a little bit about what you are seeing with respect to that and whether our allies and partners find that kind of support helpful from the Ukrainians?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think most significantly adopted a large number of tactics, techniques, and procedures that Ukrainians have passed to us, that have

help us defend Americans, and all of our partners are working with Ukraine in some way, shape, or form. I would really defer to them to talk about it. But are they more effective as a result? Yes.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I give my questions I want to again take a moment to highlight the true cost, both for the military and everyday Americans, of the President's illegal war with Iran and summarize how we got here.

Thirteen brave U.S. soldiers have been killed, and more than 400 have been wounded. The DoD is now estimating that this war has cost over $29 billion and costing more every single day. The continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which somehow caught the President by surprise, is historically contributing to the growing affordability crisis that Americans are facing. And negotiations are at a stalemate, but it is becoming clear this President's plan is to attempt to secure an agreement that looks very similar to the 2015 JCPOA, which my colleague, Senator King, referred to, which this President recklessly tore up in 2018.

As you recall, the JCPOA, which was an agreement that also included countries -- not just us -- it included

France, the U.K., Germany, China, and Russia, and the JCPOA put limits on Iran's nuclear program with a rigorous inspection and monetary program run by the IAEA, all of which was tossed out by President Trump.

And while that agreement did have a sunset clause, what we should have done was work diplomatically with our allies to extend it. Instead, here we are, engaged in another endless war in the Middle East, no end in sight, that is driving up costs, undermining military readiness, and alienating our allies, with neither a clear rationale for starting the conflict, which the President originally said, "Oh well, maybe there will be reduced regime change," and now he seems to have landed on preventing a nuclear capable Iran, which is exactly what the JCPOA was intended to do.

Admiral Cooper, did the President ever explain to you why he tore up the JCPOA?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, that is a policy matter that I would not have expected anyone to discuss with me.

Senator Hirono: He never explained to you why he tore up the JCPOA? He either explained it to you or he said -- I am not asking you for the actual conversation, but did he happen to explain to you why he did something which led to the very nuclear crisis that we are now confronting, regarding Iran and their enriched uranium?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I was in a completely different assignment when this occurred 8 years ago.

Senator Hirono: So apparently the President did not have a discussion with anybody. In fact, it was a unilateral decision that he made.

Now, you have vast experience, Admiral, in the Navy, et cetera, and before we attacked Iran did it cross your mind that Iran may close the Strait of Hormuz?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, as you know, one of my responsibilities as the combatant commander is to generate a wide range of options with associated risks and opportunities, and present those to the Secretary and to the President. I think it would be inappropriate to talk about what those specifically are.

Senator Hirono: Well, I am just asking --

Admiral Cooper: Although we always make them very comprehensively.

Senator Hirono: Excuse me. I am asking whether with your experience the thought that should we attack that they would close the Strait of Hormuz, did that cross your mind?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I have transited through the Strait about 100 times. I think of the Strait of Hormuz virtually every day.

Senator Hirono: So is that a yes, that you are very aware that the Strait of Hormuz -- the very thing that

happened, that that was something that you contemplated happening. I hope that is the case, because with your experience I have to conclude that you contemplated that possibility.

So you did mention that our diplomats are engaged in the negotiations. Who are those diplomats?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would refer to the White House with who specifically is engaged.

Senator Hirono: Well, apparently the diplomats are Jared Kushner, who I do not think even works for our country, and Mr. Steve Whitlock, who happens to be, I don't know, I don't think he has a lot of experience engaging in these kinds of negotiations. So here we are. The JCPOA, which was a very intense, the results of very intense negotiations among many countries, and for us to act as though the idea of a nuclear Iran is just something that occurred to President Trump and not to his predecessors is pretty ridiculous. And, in fact, we had in place a regime that was intended to do that very thing, which was to prevent a nuclear Iran. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator Cotton.

Senator Cotton: Gentlemen, thank you for your appearance and your service to our nation and many thanks to all of the troops that you represent.

Admiral Cooper, some critics of Operation Epic Fury have referred to it as another "forever war." In your opening statement, in the third sentence, in fact, you say, "Since 1979, the Iranian regime has terrorized the region." Is it fair to say the only forever war here is the war of terror that Iran has waged against the United States and the civilized world for 47 years?

Admiral Cooper: I would agree that that was a sustained effort by Iran.

Senator Cotton: Okay. Let's take a look in context, since my Democratic friends have wanted to talk so much about the JCPOA, about not just Epic Fury but about Midnight Hammer, as well. So where we stand today, in mid-May, versus where we were not even a year ago, 11 months ago. Based on your extensive military experience, do you believe that Iran posed a significant threat to the United States 11 months ago, before Operation Midnight Hammer and Epic Fury?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, they attacked U.S. forces 350 times in the 30 months preceding Epic Fury.

Senator Cotton: Do you believe that absent Midnight Hammer and Epic Fury, do you believe that threat was likely to continue to grow?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir, I do.

Senator Cotton: Is Iran now less of a threat than it

was 11 months ago?

Admiral Cooper: They are significantly less of a threat.

Senator Cotton: Is it fair to say that the Iranian regime is still a revolutionary terrorist regime, even after all the deaths of their senior leaders?

Admiral Cooper: They are.

Senator Cotton: Yeah. Is it fair to say the revolutionary terrorist regime no longer has nearly as much military capability to act on its revolutionary terrorist intentions?

Admiral Cooper: That is fair, and I think it is also fair to say across every element of national power they have been significantly degraded.

Senator Cotton: You state in your opening statement that "CENTCOM forces systematically dismantled what Iran spent four decades and tens of billions of dollars building." How long do you assess that it will take them to get back to where they were in terms of their military and other capabilities, just 11 months ago, before CENTCOM dismantled it all?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would assess that the drone and missile force will take years to reconstitute. The Navy likely will not get back to its previous size for a full generation.

Senator Cotton: Is that why you say in your opening statement that "CENTCOM assess Iran can no longer project power across the region nor pose a persistent threat to the United States or our partners than it did prior to Operation Epic Fury"?

Admiral Cooper: They certainly cannot do it at the level mass that we all saw, with hundreds of missiles and drones raining across the Middle East. That does not mean they do not have any capability, but that broad power projection capability no longer exists.

Senator Cotton: And the whole world saw that just in a number of days, after the beginning of your operation. Correct? And I think it was a near 90 percent decline in Iran's attacks on the United States and its neighbors in the region.

Admiral Cooper: That is correct. Early on the attacks were in the hundreds, and they went to the teens.

Senator Cotton: Okay. I know that there has been a lot of questions about the Strait of Hormuz. To be clear, the Strait of Hormuz was never part of our objectives, but we knew, as anyone who looks at a map would know, that Iran has the power to temporarily close the Strait of Hormuz. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: That is accurate, Senator.

Senator Cotton: Is it fair to say that the United

States and our partners have the power to permanently open the Strait?

Admiral Cooper: Without getting into specifics, we have the military power, yes.

Senator Cotton: Could you talk to us a little bit about what the blockade, in the meantime, has done to Iran?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. The blockade was implemented within 24 hours of presidential direction, based on a plan that we had on the shelf. The blockade itself is designed to prevent any commerce from leaving Iranian ports, going to global distribution, and any commerce from coming around the world going back into Iran. There has been zero trade going into or out of Iran in the last month.

Senator Cotton: And just finally, what is Iran's current ability, since it retains its revolutionary terrorist ambitions, to support its terror proxy network in the region versus where it was just 11 months ago?

Admiral Cooper: As we sit here today, they are unable to resource and supply Hezbollah, Hamas, or the Houthis. Chapter to be seen of what that looks like in Iraq. The new Prime Minister wants to distance himself from Iran, but we will see. That is what he is committed to. We will see what that looks like.

Senator Cotton: So they cannot support their

terrorist proxies. They are years and years away from reconstituting, if at all, their missile and drone forces and their nuclear program, and they are a generation away from rebuilding their Navy. It seems to me like a little bit better position than we were relative to Iran under Barack Obama and Joe Biden's disastrous nuclear deal. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator Slotkin.

Senator Slotkin: Thank you, gentlemen, for being here, and thank you for what you are doing. I am going to direct my questions to General Cooper -- I am sorry, Admiral Cooper, excuse me -- and I am going to give a good pass to my fellow Michigander, from Ypsi, Michigan. We are happy to see you in service. Thank you for what you are doing, and you are always welcome back home when you retire.

I feel like whatever feelings I have about the imminence of the threat from Iran, or not, we want our military to come through this war as successfully and safely as possible. I am interested in making sure we get out of this quickly and safely. And I have actually no doubt that with all the firepower we have used in this war that we have degraded their nuclear capability, their ballistic missile capability, their terrorism capability,

and as someone who served three tours in Iraq I saw that terrorism up close and personal.

But it is hard to say sitting here, with the Strait of Hormuz closed, and every American feeling a deep, deep spike in the price of gas, and that we are only in the beginning of that, that we cannot say we are overall better off until that Strait is opened.

And while I believe we could, militarily, open the Strait, it seems to me that the Iranians have strategic geography. They have the ability, even though it is degraded, to project power onto things like the oil infrastructure in places like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or anywhere they want, further hurting the world economy, the United States.

Is that correct that while militarily we may be able to physically open the Strait, that they still retain the ability to affect infrastructure in the region, and therefore kind of have a veto power over the world economy right now?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, from a military perspective I would characterize Iran as having a remnant capability across multiple domains. In terms of veto power I would defer to policymakers for that characterization.

Senator Slotkin: Sorry. Can they strike oil infrastructure across the Persian Gulf?

Admiral Cooper: They have a very moderate, if not small, capability to continue strikes. And we, of course, accordingly, have prepared for such a contingency.

Senator Slotkin: Okay. But if we have the power to militarily open the Strait and their threat is, quote, "moderate or small," why wouldn't we just do it?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would defer to policymakers in this particular matter. The Strait clearly is in the middle of the negotiation being undertaken now.

Senator Slotkin: Yeah. It just seems to me that they still certainly have, it may be diminished power, but if the United States military is not physically opening the Strait right now it is because the Iranians do have the real capability to effect strikes, or drone strikes, into the Gulf countries, affecting their oil infrastructure and sending the price of oil worldwide even higher. So it may be diminished but it is a real capability, unless I am missing something.

You know, I am very sensitive about the way that countries like Russia or China may be enabling the Iranians to target and kill American forces or to provide intelligence on their locations in real or near-real time. Is it fair to say that the Chinese are providing intelligence to the Iranians to help them target U.S. forces?

Admiral Cooper: I think it is best to talk about anything regarding intelligence in a classified manner. What I can say is the Iranian military is largely made up of Russian and Chinese equipment.

Senator Slotkin: Okay. It feels like either Chinese government and/or Chinese companies are helping and aiding and abetting the Iranians in providing that information. I understand we do not want to go into the details, but some of this is out in open press.

I would just say I personally feel like that crosses a Rubicon. Any time we have another country providing that kind of intelligence to an adversary, I think that should play very heavily in our calculus, in our conversations. I know the President is with the Chinese government right now, but I hope that no matter what party we are from, that is just a Rubicon. We all believe once you cross it we are in a very different conversation. I hope that is playing out in Beijing. I yield back, Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Banks.

Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Cooper, any update at all on activities in Afghanistan, increased activity from ISIS or any other groups that concern you? Anything at all that you can tell us?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, thank you for the question. Afghanistan remains on the forefront of what we are

watching in terms of terrorist activity. I think best to address that in a classified forum. For right now our partnership in the region are suppressing that threat.

Senator Banks: Can you give any update at all, for the record?

Admiral Cooper: No.

Senator Banks: It remains an area of concern for CENTCOM? You are tracking, paying attention to it? We are not completely ignoring Afghanistan.

Admiral Cooper: It remains an area of concern. We are paying close attention to a variety of partnerships. We are suppressing any threat.

Senator Banks: Thanks. Thank you for your leadership. I mean, I think this is an incredible moment. You are doing an incredible job when it comes to Iran and degrading their military, their defense industrial base. You cite in your testimony that the U.S. has, quote, "delivered a long-term rollback of Iran's ability to project power in the region and beyond," end quote, damaging or destroying over 85 percent of its ballistic missile, drone, and naval defense industrial base and 82 percent of its air defense missile systems. That is pretty damn good. That is a strong statement, and I am proud of your efforts.

The NDS talks about the concept of simultaneity, in

which our adversaries could undertake simultaneous aggression across multiple theaters. Does Operation Epic Fury's degradation of the Iranian military and defense industrial base reduce the problem of simultaneity?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it remains to be seen what happens going forward with Iran, but what I think we have seen is a combination of ability for the United States to project power and influence and defeat an adversary very quickly, 38 days. The effects on other theaters, I think I would really refer to U.S. European Commander and the Pacific Commander. But clearly the United States is agile, and we can move from theater to theater, very quickly.

Senator Banks: Can you unpack this concept of simultaneity, explain it to us?

Admiral Cooper: The United States has significant capacity. We have forces deployed around the world, addressing a variety of issues. We are focused today largely on Iran, but clearly General Anderson is actioning key and critical matters in Africa. We are doing it in Europe, we are doing it in Asia, and we are doing it in South America, all at the same time.

Senator Banks: And we are able to do that at the same time, effectively.

Admiral Cooper: That is how the United States

military rolls.

Senator Banks: You also write in your testimony that Iran's ability to reconstitute its military capability will, quote, "depend in large part on decisions we and our partners make." What should we be doing to press our advantage?

Admiral Cooper: I think there is a policy component to this, Senator, and potentially a legislative component. There are a restricted number of countries -- there is a finite number of countries that historically had trade with Iran. Addressing those countries and what they are trading, how they are doing it and what that looks like I think is something we should take a look at. Because if they do not have the parts, they are not going to build the weapons.

Senator Banks: Well put. I was very proud to see the LUCAS drones deployed and used in CENTCOM. The Indiana National Guard played a really important role in testing the LUCAS drone at Camp Atterbury in my state. What, if anything, can we extrapolate from the performance of our LUCAS drones in other conflicts?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. The LUCAS drones were the United States' first opportunity to use our own one-way attack drones against an adversary. I remember well the training that happened at Camp Atterbury. I was watching

it like a hawk. That training has produced additional capability that we have now employed against an adversary, very effectively.

Senator Banks: What else can we learn from it?

Admiral Cooper: Well, there is a lot more to be learned from it. I would love to take it in a classified setting, and particularly where we are right now, vis-à-vis Iran. I think I would just like to keep that in a classified setting.

Senator Banks: For more than a month our warfighters in the Middle East were hammered by small drones. How can we ensure that does not happen again if combat operations resume?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, Senator. A little bit of a mythbuster on this. Iranian drones are significantly capable in the days of $35,000 Walmart-like drones. Those things are behind us. Iran has a very capable drone force. We have very capably defeated it.

Senator Banks: Good. Well put. Thank you very much. That is all I have. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Kelly, and then Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, thank you both for being here today. Admiral Cooper, I want to start with you. I have

got questions for both of you, but I want to talk a little bit about the civilian harm mitigation team at CENTCOM. My understanding is that you have gone from ten down to one as part of a Department-wide reduction in CHMR, that their role is to try to minimize harm to civilians when we are conducting combat operations. Is that correct, you have gone from ten to one?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. That is the billet but there is a larger component to this. Over a course of years, we have gone from a compliance to civilian casualties in risk mitigation being just part of the culture. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of people who are involved in this process.

Senator Kelly: What did those nine individuals do who were removed from their jobs?

Admiral Cooper: They are now integrated in other capacities. They are retained in other capacities in the joint, what we would call joint --

Senator Kelly: But what were they doing when they were part of the civilian harm mitigation team?

Admiral Cooper: They were playing a key role in helping us move from compliance to culture on CIVCAS, focusing on it every day, which they continue to do.

Senator Kelly: So by your estimates how many civilians have been killed or injured over the course of

this war?

Admiral Cooper: The investigation on the one incident that we have had after more than 13,000 strikes is still underway. We will certainly be transparent, and we will get that when we can. This is a matter that I am passionate about. I would like to use the occasion to invite you, other members of the Committee and your staffs to Tampa to take a look at what our targeting process looks like.

Senator Kelly: If you were to find out that there was an error in the targeting process, would you reinstate some of those people that were removed from that team?

Admiral Cooper: Sir, that is a hypothetical. I am always looking to organize to purpose, and we will just see what the investigations show.

Senator Kelly: Are you taking any additional steps now because of the civilian casualties to date?

Admiral Cooper: We have taken additional steps. Our additional steps have been very proactive throughout Epic Fury. Our staff specifically warned the Iranian people more than 100 times about the threat of them being used as human shields. I personally warned the Iranian people on March 8th, 11th, and the 23rd that they had the potential to be human shields, and that communication was very effective. So again, we are moving not just targeting, but

a proactive measures to minimize.

Senator Kelly: All right. Thank you for doing that. General Anderson, so China and Russia continue to expand their influence across Africa, we discussed this, with misinformation, disinformation, across many African countries. You requested $94 million for information operation activities. You were promised -- and this is in fiscal year 2026 -- you were promised $25 million from the Department. You ultimately received only $19 million.

Can you talk about the difference between having $19 million to do that job and $94 million, like, what are you able to do if you were fully funded? General Anderson, I get it. I mean, we see this stuff all the time. The amount of misinformation that comes from the Chinese and the Russians, it is a huge problem. But if you could just explain to us a little bit about what you could do if you had the full request.

General Anderson: Senator, I think the key point there is right now we are in a reactionary mode to propaganda and to other information operations, to what we can do at the moment. What the fuller funding would do, especially if it is consistent over time, would allow us to build an information campaign and address these issues across the continent. We are one of the few organizations that looks across the entirety of the continent, and can

understand how these propaganda and misinformation play across borders.

We work very closely with the State Department, U.S. embassies on this to make sure our messaging is key, but what this would allow us to do is help coordinate that messaging across regions and across the continent to highlight the issues that come with this misinformation, especially as much of it is destabilizing the democracies across the region.

Senator Kelly: Do you ever feel like we should be countering some of their disinformation with disinformation of our own?

General Anderson: Sir, I think the most powerful tool we have is the truth. What America brings is very unique. We are still a beacon of hope and light in the world, and I think we should be willing to talk about who we are. This is America's 250th anniversary. There is a long history on the continent that is, I mean, it is good and bad, but there is a lot of good that we can talk about, of what America brings.

The fact that John C. Robinson founded the Tuskegee Airmen, 2 years later founded the Ethiopian Air Force, and then went on to found Ethiopian Airlines, which is now the pride not only of Ethiopia, but Africa, it is not a story that is well known, but that is a tie that we have had

between the aviation communities for years. There are multiple stories like that across the continent that we need to propagate and talk about.

So I would say we should focus on the goodness and the positivity of engaging with America and worry less about the disinformation that our partners put out. But we have to engage in this environment. We have to be active in the information space.

Senator Kelly: So you got about 25 percent of the requests. So if you got the full amount you could put more out there, positive stuff that the United States is doing. And I know these are challenging times with resources even beyond what DoD has, USAID, and others. But do you think that that would be sufficient to counter Chinese and Russian misinformation?

General Anderson: Senator, I think information operations is one of the lower cost investments that we can make that have outsized return and help amplify the limited resources we have in the military side and highlight the benefits that those provide, and being able to talk about that broadly, I do think has outside proportion. So, small investments can have large impact. And this is an area of information where I think we can make a lot of gains, even despite our smaller physical presence, that can highlight the totality of what the United States brings.

Senator Kelly: I 100 percent agree with you, General, and we should really look into get you the resources you need to do this job. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: General Anderson, I 100 percent agree with you. Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Gillibrand: Admiral Cooper, we had Secretary Hegseth here a week or so ago, and we did not get satisfactory answers about Iran. So what is your mission in Iran right now?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, with Epic Fury now formally ended per the President's notification, we shifted our mission to a blockade mission the following day, and we are implementing that mission in accordance with international armed conflict. That is our main mission today, as well as to be ready for a broad range of contingencies.

Senator Gillibrand: And do you feel that President Trump's declaration that we have obliterated all of Iran's capabilities and their nuclear program, is that accurate?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I speak from a military perspective. We have significantly degraded their drone, missile, and naval capabilities. We have fractured their command and control. We have eliminated the large preponderance of their space program. They, by every measure, are degraded significantly across all measures of national power.

Senator Gillibrand: So what is your exit strategy to end the conflict with Iran?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, that is a policy decision.

Senator Gillibrand: And don't you have to offer the President various exit strategies so he knows how to get from A to B?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, consistent with my statutory obligations I have provided a broad range of options, along with risks and mitigations to the Secretary and the President.

Senator Gillibrand: So given your current mission, how many more days, weeks, months, years are we going to be at war with Iran?

Admiral Cooper: As we sit here today we are in a ceasefire, and the way ahead will be determined by our policymakers.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, currently we are still spending a billion dollars a day on this war with Iran, and I can tell you, from my New York constituents, they are furious about it, because a billion dollars a day could be lowering their housing costs, lowering their food costs, lowering their health care costs, lowering the cost of everyday expenses that continue to go up because of the war in Iran. With the price of gas as high as it is, the price of diesel as high as it is, it means everything that they

have to buy for their families is more expensive.

So we expect from our military leaders a plan about why and how long we are going to be spending a billion dollars a day, and I have not seen that plan or the why from President Trump or Secretary Hegseth. So I am hoping, as the military person in charge of operations, that you have a plan to end this war and to stop spending a billion a day.

Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have a broad range of plans and contingencies, consistent with my obligation to provide that advice, both to the Secretary and the President. We have done so. Decisions will need to be made by our civilian leadership, and my job will be to execute them.

Senator Gillibrand: The second concern I have, Admiral Cooper, is how we have prosecuted this war to date. We have data and information publicly available in publications like The New York Times that 22 schools have been hit, hospitals, dozens of hospitals have been hit. We have regulations, we have the law of war, we have human rights obligations, we have our own targeting requirements to avoid civilian harm and death. Have you been implementing all the laws that are required under current law to minimize civilian death?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, we have executed every

operation consistent with the law of armed conflict. The subject of civilian casualties is a particular passion of mine. We pay attention to it. We follow all the procedures and have gone above and beyond to, in my case, personally warn the Iranian people of several instances during conflict where they were being potentially used as human targets.

Senator Gillibrand: If they have been warned, how did we then bomb 22 schools?

Admiral Cooper: There is no indication that we have that that has been corroborated. Zero.

Senator Gillibrand: How many schools have we bombed?

Admiral Cooper: There is one active civilian casualty investigation from the 13,629 munitions.

Senator Gillibrand: So how do you explain the publicly available information that 22 schools have been hit and multiple hospitals?

Admiral Cooper: There is no way that we can corroborate that, no indication of that whatsoever, Senator.

Senator Gillibrand: There is no way you can corroborate or no indication of it? Which one?

Admiral Cooper: No indication.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, the indication is what is publicly available. There is an indication. Have you

investigated those claims?

Admiral Cooper: We have not.

Senator Gillibrand: Why have you not? If this is a passion of yours, if you believe that civilian casualties are not consistent with the law of war and not consistent with human rights obligations that our military regularly follows with great pride and great diligence, why have you not investigated those allegations when they publicly being made on the cover of The New York Times?

Admiral Cooper: I will be happy to take a look at each instance. Our team will be able to do that.

Senator Gillibrand: I would like a report from you, from your team, about whether there have been attacks that have resulted in the destruction of schools and hospitals, and if so, why? And how then, last, have you managed the 90 percent cut to the personnel who are supposed to avoid civilian targets?

Admiral Cooper: I am happy to provide any report, and I would invite you and every staff member here to come to Tampa to look at the process to see exactly how it works.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Thank you, Admiral.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Duckworth.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here. Admiral Cooper, the Senate received a letter from President Trump on Friday, May 1st,

stating that hostilities with Iran have ended, and you just stated here that we are no longer operating under Operation Urgent [sic] Fury. Would you say that we are still engaged in hostilities with Iran, or have they ended?

Admiral Cooper: Consistent with the President's letter, Epic Fury is complete. We are operating under international armed conflict rules in the implementation of the blockade.

Senator Duckworth: So are we engaged in hostilities with Iran? Yes or no.

Admiral Cooper: We are not. We are in a ceasefire.

Senator Duckworth: The Strait of Hormuz remains blocked, right? You are engaged in a blockade, are you not?

Admiral Cooper: The blockade is against Iranian ports, commerce going in and coming out. The last thing we would want to do is blockade the Strait of Hormuz, and as we have seen in the last week, there have been instances of ships coming in and out, including our own.

Senator Duckworth: But under international law, a blockade is an act of war. So if you are blockading, actively blockading Iran, then we are currently in an act of war with Iran, under international law. A blockade is one of the definitions of an act of war, under international law.

Admiral Cooper: Consistent with the direction we have been given, those characterizations are best done through the Department's legal counsel or the White House.

Senator Duckworth: it is not characterization. It is international law. It is listed. A blockade is an act of war.

We have now engaged -- the United States and Iranian forces are trading fire as they continue to launch missiles, drones, small boat stacks. President Trump says the ceasefire is on life support, and he repeatedly threatens to renew U.S. military strikes, and to be clear, no one is disputing the valor and professionalism of our military. But the civilian leaders are abdicating their responsibility to craft a clear strategy, and servicemembers and the American people are the ones who will suffer under this leadership vacuum.

Admiral Cooper, before operation Epic Fury began, what desired end state for the operation were you given by your civilian leadership?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I was given crystal-clear guidance. Our military mission was to degrade Iran's ability to project power on its neighbors and U.S. interests. It included three specific objectives: degrade Iranian ballistic missiles and their defense industrial base, degrade their drones and the defense industrial base,

degrade their navy and the defense industrial base. All of those were achieved, as I have discussed.

Senator Duckworth: And because they were achieved, that is why the operation ended, or did the operation end because the President said "let's end the operation"?

Admiral Cooper: Operations commencing and ending are made by civilian leadership and not a military decision.

Senator Duckworth: Okay. Well, that civilian leadership, President Trump, has provided many possible end states in only 2 months, including, in just 2 months, he said unconditional surrender and regime change in Iran, which have not happened. He has talked about, okay, operations will end when there is destruction of Iranian nuclear sites, allegedly already accomplished last summer under Operation Midnight Hammer. He has also said that Iran will never have nuclear weapons, which cannot be accomplished with only a bombing campaign. He said that his goal was to destroy the Iranian military forces and infrastructure completely, which the intelligence community assesses has not happened. And now he said that it is the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which, as a reminder, was open before the war began. So if we do not know what we are fighting for we certainly do not know how long we will be fighting.

Admiral Cooper, have you been given any timeline for

how long our forces will be in the Strait of Hormuz or near Iran or blockading Iran, whether by a timeline or a condition at end state, for how long you will be blockading Iran?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it is important, from the military perspective, that my advice related to options be provided to both the Secretary and the President. We have done that. The decisions on timeline and execution are up to our civilian leadership.

Senator Duckworth: Okay. So you mentioned the Secretary of Defense, who only talks tactics, and a President who changes his strategy on social media multiple times a day. This is who is giving you the orders. Secretary Hegseth has touted the destruction of tens of thousands of targets across Iran. He said that Iran's air defenses are "flattened," his word, and its industrial base overwhelmingly destroyed, and claims that Iran's Navy is at the bottom of the sea. Every metric that the Secretary offers is one of destruction, and destruction alone is not an end state, especially not with new public reporting that U.S. intelligence officials believe Iran has operational access to most of its missile capacity and that Iran is clearly still capable of controlling the Strait of Hormuz.

Americans are not safer, our servicemembers are at risk, prices at home are higher, and Iran has more control

over the Strait of global economy than it did before this whole thing started. The American people and our servicemembers deserve clear answers, what does "done with the war" look like and how do we get there. We have no strategy. As we saw in Afghanistan, if you do not have a sound strategy you keep doing tactics forever. This is not your fault, but this is where we are.

Admiral Cooper, have you been asked for your advice, and under what conditions would you advise deploying ground troops for any purpose in Iran?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it would be inappropriate to talk about any contingency planning in this particular forum. It is my obligations as the combatant commander to provide a broad range of options to the Secretary and to the President.

Senator Duckworth: Can you answer that question for me in the SCIF at a later time?

Admiral Cooper: I would be more than happy to talk about anything classified.

Senator Duckworth: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Kelly.

Senator Kelly: No further questions, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Sorry. I didn't mark off Senator Kelly. Senator Peters.

Senator Peters: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you both for being here. I speak for myself and I think everybody on this panel. We appreciate the incredible professionalism of the men and women in uniform and the job that they do every day, with professionalism and heroism, and thank you for doing that.

But we do have a number of questions about how we win this war and end it going forward, and those are usually political questions related to political leadership. The men and women in uniform execute those orders, and they have demonstrated that they are certainly the best in the world.

But Admiral Cooper, you mentioned that the current mission right now is basically the U.S. blockade of Iranian ships or ships that are transiting the Strait of Hormuz to Iranian ports. That is in response to Iran basically effectively shutting down the Strait of Hormuz before that.

As you know, experts across the political spectrum and multiple administrations, political administrations, have all agreed that a war against Iran, Iran's first moves would be to mind the Strait of Hormuz, to prevent tanker traffic. But despite these known risks and repeated claims that the DoD has planned -- and I am sure you have plans. I have been to the War College. I served in the Navy. There is no shortage of plans that we have -- that you have

plans to deal with the closing of the Strait. We had four minesweepers that were stationed in the Middle East that were just retired last year, and our remaining minesweepers were either stationed in Japan or not prepositioned in the region.

This is despite public reporting that we currently already have limited unmanned mine clearance capacity. And reports from The New York Times and Reuters has also indicated that Iran still has hundreds, if not thousands, of small boats that can lay mines or perform hit-and-run attacks on top of their existing land missiles and drones, which I am sure they are building at a furious pace right now to restock what they have. And this is on top of existing land missiles and drones.

The American people, as we all know, are already paying higher prices in the United States. Inflation is up as a result of chaotic tariffs that President Trump has put into place. And now, thanks to this war and the Strait's closure they are paying high gas prices that continue to rise, as well, putting a strain on family budgets.

So my question for you is, if there was advanced planning, and I am sure there was advanced planning, about the Strait's closure, why were the minesweepers not prepositioned in the region when it had been publicly reported that already have limited unmanned mine clearance

capacities? When you have a plan, usually before you execute the plan you make sure that all your assets are in place to actually execute that plan. So it is curious that those assets were not there. Why?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I think it is best to talk specific tactics and operations in a classified environment. What I can say here is we did have sufficient, and continue to have sufficient, mine clearance capability in the theater. Because it happened to not be in those four vessels that were decommissioned after decades of service is an interesting point. The support and the ability to conduct countermining comes in a lot of different flavors, best to discuss in a classified environment.

Senator Peters: And I do not mean to get into that. I understand that totally you do not want to do it. But it is clear that there is a concern about mines. We are not seeing ships go through there. Commercial companies do not want to go through the Strait so they are not going to put their ships at risk, so they do not feel safe. To me that speaks volumes as to whether or not it is safe, that there is a real concern there. And we know that the Iranians have significant capabilities to deal with that.

You know, I asked a previous question related to strategy and really talked about von Clausewitz's On War,

which is, as you know, the seminal text on strategy, that is taught in all the war colleges. And you know it better than I will ever know it. The concept of that is that in order to win a war you have got to know the center of gravity of your enemy, and you have to be focused on being able to neutralize that. What is the center of gravity in Iran? How are you planning? And that is a military decisions as to what is the center of gravity. That is the kind of advice you would give a President. What is the center of gravity?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I really would defer to our policymakers to determine what they view from a policy perspective is the center of gravity. From a military perspective, we are focused on achieving military objectives, which is exactly what our men and women have done, and they have done it extremely well.

Senator Peters: Well, as you know, every war plan has a center of gravity that you identify, and then you work around that. So the war plan that we have for Iran would have the center of gravity. Why can't you share what that is? In the past it has been, before we knew the center of gravity, the Persian Gulf War, for Iraq, Colin Powell said it was the Republic and Guard troops, Iraq's lead unit there. The Obama administration, in Afghanistan, Admiral Mike Mullen defined the center of gravity as building

Afghan government support. They made this public. They were not hiding the center of gravity. Our enemy knows what our center of gravity is, and we know what theirs is. There is no reason to keep that secret because the American people have a right to know, what is it that we are trying to accomplish. And that is outlined very clearly in that term, a part of every military plan that is put forward.

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir. I agree every war plan has a center of gravity, and those war plans are classified. I would be more than happy to talk about it in a classified environment.

Chairman Wicker: Fair enough. Senator Rosen.

Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, and thank you Admiral Cooper, General Anderson, for your service and your willingness to continue to serve our nation.

Admiral Cooper, I want to talk about the International Stabilization Force. It has been publicly reported that CENTCOM is going to play a role in the proposed International Stabilization Force in Gaza. -- we will just call it ISF, going forward -- though many questions remain on what the ISF is, when it will be deployed, and how it will operate. So can you clarify the roles of the U.S. and CENTCOM in the ISF, specifically is the vision for CENTCOM to retain command and control, or is there a timeline and mechanism for transitioning oversight to a multinational or

civilian-led structure?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, first, great to see you again, and thank you for the question. Our role can be simply defined as one of support right now. The International Stabilization Force commander, who has been designated, is also dual-hatted as the Commander of Special Operations Command Central. He has about 45 members of the Joint Force presently working for him.

We are really at the infancy of forming that International Stabilization Force. Thus far there have been four countries who have committed to provide forces. So I think as we look to the future I would be happy come back and talk on what that looks like later on.

Senator Rosen: Come back and talk to us.

Admiral Cooper: We are heading in the right direction, but we are just at the infancy of the process.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. And speaking of hitting in a direction, we need to talk about munitions sustainment, because, Admiral Cooper, according to publicly available resources the U.S. has fired at least 45 percent of its Patriot missile interceptors and more than half of its THAAD interceptors so far in Operation Epic Fury, and has had to move air defense from other theaters.

So can you talk to me about how this constrains our air and missile defense and those of our regional partners

and allies, like the Israel, UAE, and others, who are also under attack?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I have all the munitions necessary to both defend our forces as well as conduct a broad range of contingencies. Our partners also have the sufficient munitions necessary for defensive operations.

Senator Rosen: Do you have estimates about how long it would take us to replenish or rebuild our stockpile?

Admiral Cooper: I would really defer to the folks who do this on an everyday basis, both in the Department and the services.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. I am going to continue on you and then we will move over to General Anderson in a minute, because I want to just take a moment to talk about Lebanon. Because I do appreciate that you have applauded the Lebanese Armed Forces for their efforts to disarm Hezbollah. While the current effort in conflict has demonstrated the extent to which Hezbollah has rearmed, a strong Lebanese Armed Forces remains the best pathway for Lebanon through which Hezbollah can be disarmed once and for all, and we know that needs to happen.

So what can the U.S. do to support the Lebanese Armed Forces to ensure that they have the necessary capacity to disarm Hezbollah while also holding them accountable?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, taking on the disarming of

Hezbollah is a tall order. They have been funded by Iran for decades, with billions of dollars, and Hezbollah is inculcated into every fabric of the Lebanese society. I think right now our continued commitment with modest dollars to the Lebanese Armed Forces is helpful. They have, in particular, several units who can do more. I believe our commitment could be to provide the funding necessary so that they can do more.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. I am going to move over to AFRICOM now, General Anderson, because ISIS and Al Qaeda affiliates, well, we know they span the African continent. And so understanding, of course, this is an open setting, can you talk about the extent to which these franchises, that they work cross-borders, within local settings to coordinate with one another, and the threat that this poses to our priorities in the region. And do you think there is a need for a comprehensive CT strategy on the continent, and if so, could you outline again, considering it is an open setting, broadly what that strategy might include, please.

General Anderson: Yes, Senator, I appreciate the highlighting of the transnational threat that both Al Qaeda and ISIS pose. I can say in this setting that ISIS has several affiliates across the continent that are coordinating more and more, whether that is in the Golis

Mountains of Somalia or the Lake Chad basin in Nigeria, or in the Sahel, as well as Mozambique and others. So this terrorist network has to be addressed holistically. We have to look at the entirety of the network. It is not any single node anymore.

So as we look at this I coordinate very closely with Admiral Cooper, because ISIS still has a strong presence in CENTCOM's AOR, as well as Al Qaeda. As we look at this, the strategy to go after this is to work with our partners, whose willing and capable partners, enable them, first and foremost, to take on this threat. When they are unable to do that then bringing in only the unique capabilities that the U.S. can bring in order to address those threats. We have seen that in the Golis Mountains where we have been able to bring intelligence, limited ISR, some limited strike capabilities, as they have been able to disrupt their leadership network.

This need to be applied across all of these areas, so investments in additional ISR, investments in expeditionary capabilities such as a forward staging base like the Hershel Woody Williams, that allow us to move to the point of need, at the time of need. And then the force protection requirements that are necessary to protect that force in the expeditionary area.

And I would add not just the force protection as a

counter-UAS and the integrated air missile defense, which are critical, but also investments in emerging technologies that allow austere medicine, forward medicine, remote medicine, automated CASEVAC. These types of things allow us to become more expeditionary in order to get after these critical threats. And only the critical threats that pose a threat to the U.S., and then enable partners as able to address these common threats.

So it is a multifaceted strategy. I could even go into more, and I won't in this detail, but really maintaining the relationships and the engagements are equally important, and having that pragmatic approach, opening dialogue with the AES states and the Sahel again, addressing this with places like Algeria and Morocco and Libya, even, who share these concerns, building those relationships are absolutely vital because you cannot surge trust.

Senator Rosen: If the Chairman would indulge me can I have a follow-up question on the Sahel, since you brought it up?

Chairman Wicker: Yes. Why don't you do that.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. You brought up the Sahel, but last month the JNIM and local militias in Mali executed coordinated, nationwide offensive attacks, attacking Mali's capital, seizing key towns, killing the Malian defense

minister. Those these attacks were greater in scale and intensity than any other since 2012, they clearly demonstrate the attackers' ability to strike against an expansive geographical area.

So you are talking a little bit about the Sahel, but the permissive environment in the Sahel that is making these attacks possible, what more would you like to add, if you want to speak a little bit more about the stability there.

General Anderson: Senator, there are a few things I would like to add in this setting, and I can talk to you more in a classified setting, that would be highly appropriate to this.

But to your point there is no effective external counterterrorism effort in the Sahel right now. The Russians have claimed to do that, but we saw that they had to withdraw from Kidal. We are unable to defend against that threat there. They are providing some limited support, but we do not see the same Western presence. Because of that, then how do we enable the partners, the other nations that are there, how do we look at expeditionary capabilities again that we can result in this?

One of the key areas that we would need some assistance with is the authorities and ability to bring in

and experiment with emerging technologies, whether that is in the surveillance and ISR type of technologies or in other over-the-horizon type capabilities, like I mentioned with the medicine and others, in order to reach, when there is a threat that threatens the homeland, to be able to reach it and take care of it. But more importantly, continue to enable the partners to address the threats in their local areas, and a lot of that is through intelligence sharing.

I would be happy in a classified environment to talk more in depth.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you, Admiral, General. Thank you, Chairman Wicker.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Rosen, and I am glad you brought up Lebanon and Hezbollah. So I am going to take another round, Admiral Cooper, and stop me when I am wrong. On March 2nd of this year, Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to Operation Epic Fury. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

Chairman Wicker: According to Israel's Foreign Minister, Hezbollah has fired 10,000 missiles, rockets, and drones at Israel during the past 2 months. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: I believe that is correct, sir.

Chairman Wicker: And in response to these attacks, Israel initiated a ground offensive in southern Lebanon, aiming to create an uninhabited buffer zone along its northern border and to push Hezbollah north to the Litani River. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: That is correct, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: To enable this operation, the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of southern Lebanon, displacing over 1 million people and nearly 20 percent of Lebanon's population. This is also correct.

Admiral Cooper: I do not know that that number specifically is correct, but the concept of the evacuation is correct.

Chairman Wicker: While governments of Israel and Lebanon declared a ceasefire in April of this year, Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem announced that his organization would not recognize the ceasefire and would never agree to disarm. Is that correct?

Admiral Cooper: His statement, that statement is correct.

Chairman Wicker: Yeah, he made that statement. Hezbollah then continued to fire projectiles into Israel, and Israel has continued to strike Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon. That is also correct, is it not?

Admiral Cooper: That is correct, sir.

Chairman Wicker: And I think Senator Rosen would wholeheartedly agree with me that peace between Israel -- and I cannot ask questions to my friend and colleague, but I think we would both agree that peace between Israel and Lebanon would be a wonderful development, and a wonderful development for America and for Israel. But peace between Israel and Lebanon depends on the Lebanese government having both the capability and the will to disarm Hezbollah.

Has the United States provided the Lebanese Armed Forces with approximately $3 billion since 2006?

Admiral Cooper: Sir, I would have to take that specific number --

Chairman Wicker: It is a lot of money.

Admiral Cooper: -- for the record and follow up. But we have been providing aid for two decades.

Chairman Wicker: Is it fair to say that the primary goal of U.S. support for the LAF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, was to counter Hezbollah?

Admiral Cooper: Yes, sir.

Chairman Wicker: And from 2006 until 2023, is it accurate to say that Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenal grew from 2006 to 2023, from approximately 9,000 rockets and missiles to 150,000?

Admiral Cooper: As a result of decades and billions

of dollars of Iranian support, that is correct.

Chairman Wicker: Israel's Foreign Minister alleges that Hezbollah fired more than 10,000 projectiles at Israel since the beginning of March of this year. In light of the Lebanese Armed Forces' inaction, was Israel's offensive into southern Lebanon militarily necessary if Hezbollah's attacks were going to be countered? Was there another way to do that?

Admiral Cooper: Senator, I would really defer to Israel on intent and effectiveness, but just as a general statement --

Chairman Wicker: Militarily necessary, though.

Admiral Cooper: It is an option among options, of which there are a few, to deal with the Hezbollah problem.

Chairman Wicker: Yeah. I appreciate Senator Rosen bringing this up, and just would go back to the central point. It would be a tremendous achievement for Israel, Lebanon, the United States, and the Middle East if Hezbollah could be eliminated, and allow the Lebanese people and the Lebanese government to resume the happy relations that we once had and strive for between the United States and Lebanon.

Would Senator Rosen have any further questions?

[No response.]

Chairman Wicker: Then this concludes today's hearing.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony, and I would acknowledge that many of the arrows aimed at these two witnesses were better aimed at people in the civilian leadership who, according to our great Constitution and our principles dating back to George Washington, are in control of policy. And I would commend these two military veterans for adhering to that constitutional principle.

And I would inform members that questions for the record will be due to the Committee within 2 business days, and we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]