

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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Introduction

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the posture of our forces and strategic priorities within the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) areas of responsibility (AORs). It is my honor to appear alongside Commander, USCENTCOM Admiral Brad Cooper and Commander, USAFRICOM General Dagvin R.M. Anderson.

My remarks today will focus on the Department's approach to posture and strategy in these two theaters and how that is guided by the principles in our 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS). The NDS is based on the principles of Peace through Strength and America First foreign policy – flowing from the conviction that a government's first duty is to its own citizens. Our strategy has four succinct lines of effort. First, we will defend the U.S. homeland. Second, we will deter China in the Indo-Pacific region, through strength not confrontation. Third, we must increase burden sharing with our allies and partners, especially in those areas where they have direct national security interests. Finally, to achieve all of this, we must supercharge the U.S. defense industrial base.

Our strategy is America first. The United States must and will prioritize theaters and challenges with the greatest consequence for American interests and where only American power can play a decisive role. Our adversaries must understand, without doubt, that the United States possesses both the capability and the political will to use decisive force to protect its vital interests and to safeguard the security and prosperity of the American people.

As the NDS lays out, we aim to work with and support our allies and partners around the world to deter threats, set conditions for peace, and to pursue mutual security interests.

Regarding the Middle East, President Trump has made clear that the United States seeks a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East, one defined by commerce and not chaos. This needs to be a Middle East where our allies and partners step up and lead in taking responsibility for their own security.

Operation EPIC FURY is an example of this strategy in action. The President initiated Operation EPIC FURY in direct response to the Iranian regime that waged a one-sided war against America for 47 years that threatened allies and partners and caused thousands of American casualties. Across every domain—land, air, sea, and cyber—the U.S. Joint Force delivered synchronized and layered effects to disrupt, degrade, and destroy Iran's ability to conduct and sustain combat operations. The Secretary has noted that although Operation EPIC FURY was historic for its complexity, lethality, and precision, it also had a laser-focused mission – scoped to our interests and the defense of our people and our allies.

President Trump also seeks to redefine the United States' relationship with Africa, transitioning from an aid-focused relationship to a trade- and investment-focused relationship favoring partnerships with capable, reliable states intent on achieving common interests. Our Department will take a resource sustainable approach to counterterrorism and stand ready to take direct

action against Islamic terrorists in Africa who are both capable of and intent on striking the U.S. homeland, while empowering African and other partners to lead efforts to degrade and destroy terrorist organizations throughout Africa.

The remainder of my testimony will demonstrate how our approach to the Middle East and Africa is a direct and integrated execution of the four lines of effort from the NDS.

U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND (USCENTCOM)

The Department's strategy in the USCENTCOM AOR is rooted in flexible realism, empowering regional partners to take the lead in their own defense while the United States serves as a security integrator, provides critical support in certain areas, and maintains the ability to act decisively to protect our interests.

Confronting Iran and its Proxies

Iran has been the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. Despite the success of Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER, the Iranian regime continued to rapidly build out its missile and drone stockpiles as a conventional shield for its nuclear ambitions. Iran's array of ballistic, cruise, anti-ship, and other missiles posed a direct threat to and were used to attack U.S. forces, commercial vessels, and civilians, as well as those of our allies and partners. On February 28, under the direction of President Trump, DoW launched Operation EPIC FURY to eliminate these threats to core U.S. national interests from the Iranian regime. Our Gulf and Arab partners were critical to this effort, providing access, basing, and overflight permissions that were necessary to U.S. operations to disrupt, degrade, deny, and destroy Iran's ability to conduct and sustain combat operations. In Yemen, despite President Trump compelling the Houthis to a truce via Operation ROUGH RIDER, the Houthis maintain strike capabilities. We continue to work with partners to monitor and sustain pressure on Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In Lebanon, DoW continues to press the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to accelerate their work to disarm Hezbollah.

Israel

Israel has long demonstrated that it is both willing and able to defend itself. It is a model ally, and we have an opportunity now to further empower Israel to defend itself and promote our shared interests, building on President Trump's historic efforts to secure peace in the Middle East, like the Abraham Accords. For example, through Israel's Operation ROARING LION, Israel executed thousands of sorties against Iranian targets.

Gaza

In Gaza, the Department is leaning in to support the momentum from the President's historic 20-point peace plan. USCENTCOM moved with historic speed to establish the Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) to enable partner contributions to the Gaza effort, to include the International Stabilization Force, without deploying U.S. military personnel into Gaza.

Egypt and the Levant

Egypt plays an integral role in preserving U.S. freedom of movement through the Suez Canal and is an inaugural member of the Board of Peace. Jordan remains a vital partner in defeating terrorist organizations and is also supporting the President's 20-point peace plan for Gaza. DoW is building the capability of the LAF to degrade Hezbollah, and in September 2025, approved a Presidential Drawdown Authority package of \$14.2 million to provide the LAF with key capabilities.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf

Across the Gulf, our partners are increasingly shouldering more of the burden for their own defense by acquiring and fielding U.S. defense equipment. The Department is placing a strategic focus on enhancing their air and missile defense capabilities to advance a regional integrated architecture. Following the 12-Day War, the Department established combined command posts and a Middle Eastern Air Defense – Combined Defense Operations Cell to improve partner coordination. Our Gulf partners also serve as key enablers for U.S. operations by providing access, basing, and overflight permissions, and are generously funding the Board of Peace.

As Iran indiscriminately targeted its neighbors in response to Operation EPIC FURY, our Gulf partners stepped up to lead in their own defense and help defend U.S. civilians and military personnel in the region. Gulf partners demonstrated significant air defense capabilities in response to Iranian attacks, collectively intercepting thousands of Iranian missiles and UAVs. U.S. forces embedded in partner air operations centers across the region supported coordination, deconfliction, and synchronization of air defense efforts. Our efforts, enabled by decades of partner investment in foreign military sales, joint training and exercises, and information-sharing, highlight how the Department is empowering Gulf partners' sovereign defense to counter Iranian attacks and safeguard regional stability.

Robust foreign military sales, training, exercises, and regional integration efforts with our Gulf partners are also allowing us to outcompete China and counter the expansion of China's influence in the region. The U.S.-Saudi Strategic Defense Agreement, signed in November 2025, reinforces our longstanding partnership and ensures the United States remains the partner of choice for Saudi Arabia as it modernizes its military. Our intent is to ensure the United States remains the partner of choice in the defense realm and that our partners' engagement with Beijing does not negatively infringe on our interoperability or strategic alignment.

Iraq and Syria

Both Iraq and Syria are at pivotal moments. The ISIS threat has been successfully reduced to a level that Iraqi and Syrian forces can manage with scoped and targeted U.S. assistance. After over a decade of excellent work by the Coalition, Iraq can lead the fight against ISIS in Iraq, and the Department of War has transitioned to a bilateral security relationship with Baghdad.

In February, Iraq took custody of thousands of ISIS detainees for detention and prosecution. However, the dominance of Iran-backed Shia militias in Iraqi politics and society continues to be a major source of concern. Syria has exited from a long civil war and, thanks to President Trump's leadership, has the option to pursue peace and reconstruction. The new Syrian government has demonstrated some level of willingness and capability to address ISIS threats, although more remains to be seen on this front. As the Department adjusts its posture in the region, we continue to monitor and destroy ISIS remnants and ensure that ISIS can never use Syria as a platform from which to launch operations against the U.S. Homeland.

Central Asia and Afghanistan:

The Department's counterterrorism cooperation with Central Asian States neutralizes threats before they reach the U.S. homeland. This is critical, as demonstrated by the arrests of ISIS-affiliated Tajik nationals in the United States. Exercises like USCENTCOM's "Regional Cooperation" build our partners' collective capacity to defeat these threats. The Department also continues to prevent terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan to protect the U.S. homeland by engaging in counterterrorism operations through Operation ENDURING SENTINEL. This Administration has streamlined the process for conducting direct action against terrorist targets, enabling the Department to conduct decisive counterterrorism action that addresses the threats in real time. The Department also works closely with its partners to maintain pressure on these terrorist groups and counteract terrorist recruitment efforts.

The Department's targeted investments enhance our partners' territorial defense. With Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan emerging as regional leaders, our partners are increasingly eager to cooperate with the United States to generate regional security and contribute to international missions.

Defense Industrial Base:

The success of our flexible realism doctrine depends on the innovation and growing capacity of our defense industrial partners. The recent operations in USCENTCOM are a powerful case study. The speed and precision of Operation EPIC FURY, Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER, and Operation ROUGH RIDER were enabled by the advanced capabilities developed by our industrial base. We will continue to look for opportunities to partner broadly across the USCENTCOM AOR to leverage partner capital investments through foreign military sales and bilateral armaments cooperation to expand our production capacity in ways that further U.S. interests.

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND (USAFRICOM)

The same philosophy of flexible realism and partner-enabled security also directs our efficient-footprint approach in the USAFRICOM AOR. Our model relies on African forces leading security efforts on the ground, with targeted U.S. support. As the center of Islamic terrorism has shifted from the Middle East to Africa, this partner-centric approach is critical to our first line of

effort: defending the U.S. homeland by confronting dangerous regional affiliates of global terrorist organizations at their source.

East Africa

In East Africa, the Department of War has sustained its counterterrorism operations. In Northern Somalia, without committing ground forces, DoW has provided key enablers and air support to the Puntland Defense Forces. The result of this approach is a significantly degraded ISIS-Somalia with reduced ability to plan external operations, including against the United States. In Southern Somalia, the Department showcases our third line of effort of burden sharing. Our longstanding operations in the region are an opportunity to apply this concept with operationally independent partners like Turkey, Ethiopia, and Kenya. These nations confront the threat of al Shabaab for their own national security interests, and DoW investments concentrate on these proven partnerships, providing unique enablers and logistical support to extend their operational reach.

West Africa and the Sahel

The Department seeks to replicate this partner-leveraged model in West Africa and the Sahel. There, DoW is working closely with capable partners to address intelligence gaps, facilitate information sharing, and degrade the capabilities of terrorists. To advance burden sharing, DoW will work with African partners such as Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Côte D'Ivoire, and Cameroon. The Department, in accordance with the President's directive and in partnership with Nigeria, is targeting terrorist groups associated with attacks on Nigeria's Christian and vulnerable populations and is working to strengthen the Nigerian armed forces so they can better protect their citizens and lead regional counter-terror efforts. We will enable these partners to act as security exporters who can independently deliver regional stability and advance shared interests.

North Africa

In North Africa, we also emphasize burden sharing, expecting our European allies and capable African partners to take on a greater role in ensuring the stability of North and West Africa. Major Non-NATO Allies Morocco and Tunisia are among our most capable partners on the continent, demonstrating both the will and capability to address the shared threat of Islamic terrorism emanating from the Sahel.

Across Africa

Our activities across Africa are fundamental to deterring China through strength, not confrontation. DoW prioritizes countering Chinese activities that have a direct impact on U.S. forces' ability to execute a denial defense along the first island chain. China is pursuing a global logistics and basing network to project military power and is actively considering additional facilities in multiple African countries. The PLA Support Base in Djibouti, for example, has enabled a persistent regional presence, and intelligence collection from any additional PLA logistics network would support China's situational awareness of U.S. and allied activities. Our

intent is to ensure the United States remains a preferred defense partner to African nations and that Chinese engagements do not negatively impact DoW interests. We will not achieve this goal by chasing China's overtures across the continent in a bidding war for influence. Rather, DoW offers African partners a superior value proposition; a real partnership, which protects U.S. interests and improves our partners' regional security.

Finally, none of these efforts are possible without supercharging the U.S. defense industrial base. In support of this mission, we will support interagency efforts across Africa to increase U.S. access to the critical minerals and other natural resources necessary for the revitalization of our defense industrial base.

Conclusion: A Confident and Forward-Looking Strategy

In conclusion, the Department of War's posture in the USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM AORs is a coherent and integrated execution of our National Defense Strategy. Guided by the philosophy of flexible realism, we are defending the homeland, deterring China, fostering partner-led security, and facilitating the industrial base build-out necessary to do it all.

The Department of War is confident in this strategy, in our superb service members, and in our ability to defend this nation.

Thank you.