

TRANSCRIPT | ADM. FALLER AND GEN. TOWNSEND AT SASC

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WITNESSES:

GENERAL STEPHEN J. TOWNSEND, USA, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES
AFRICA COMMAND

ADMIRAL CRAIG S. FALLER, USN, COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN
COMMAND

INHOFE: Well, Senator Hirono says it's time we start, and so we're going to start.

Good morning. The committee today has received testimony from the -- the command SOUTHCOM and -- and AFRICOM. This is a very significant meeting because we have -- in my narrow view we have the two coms that never were adequately resourced -- I really believe that -- compared to the threat they we're facing. We have two great heroes here. We have General Steve Townsend, a commander of the U.S. AFRICOM, and Admiral Craig Faller, commander of SOUTHCOM.

This committee's top priority is to ensure the effective implementation of the National Defense Strategy. That's this, and we have been adhering to this to the letter, as near -- in -- in a very bipartisan way. The -- we identify the -- the -- the competition with China and Russia to where the problem is. That's some of the people really (ph) sensitive to until we came out with this document. China and Russia's growing influence isn't limited to Europe and Indo-Pacific, and both countries clearly view Africa and Latin America as critical battlefields to fulfill their global ambitions and challenge the United States.

This is particularly evident in Africa. Over the last 20 years I've conducted some -- I think we're over about 160 African country visits, working with that continent. I can tell you that it's no coincidence that China established the first overseas military base in Djibouti. You know, that's the first time that they've done it. They've always done it in their own city limits before, but now it's Djibouti, and now they're as far south in Africa as Tanzania and all over the country. I visited Djibouti last February and saw firsthand what they are doing there, and they are active there.

Elsewhere, China is using the cash and debt to trap countries and to force them to put their infrastructure, and potentially, their sovereignty on sale.

At the same time, Russia is using its military, mercenaries and weapons -- weapons sales to buy influence, exploit Africa's natural resources and to prop up leaders sympathetic to Russian interests and hostile to the United States.

While the NDS is -- states that competition with Russia and China should be DOD's top priority, it makes clear that we must maintain pressure on radical terrorist groups like Al Qaida and ISIS. Today, more than a dozen terrorist groups with ties to Al Qaida and -- and ISIS are operating across Africa. Many of these groups have ambition to attack Americans and our partners. Without sustained pressure, the threat posed by these groups will grow.

In SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility, China and Russia are pursuing similar strategic -- strategy by using economic and military means to expand their access and influence right here on our own hemisphere. China

has increased its naval deployments by the region by 70 percent over the last five years, and China -- Chinese companies currently have over 50 active port projects in this region, and there are more on the planning board.

INHOFE: Russia props up oppressive regimes in places like Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua that are hostile to the United States. They're also deploying advance military assets to the region, including strategic bombers and warships. At the same time, much of the drugs that are poisoning American cities -- cities are coming from Latin America, and these drugs are trafficking -- trafficked by illicit networks.

And I'd say in my opening statement that in both of these coms I've been pretty outspoken as a conservative, and one has really been concerned, because they don't seem to get the attention that some of the other coms do. If you look at Africa, you have a total of 6,000 people there and how much are you going to get accomplished with 6,000 people? And look at CENTCOM, how much is that? 75,000 actually. And PACOM is even bigger than that.

So if the object here that, you know people are talking about and (inaudible) same place is to reduce and to reposition people, you're talking about the two areas where there aren't enough people to reposition. And that's a narrow view, but that's mine.

Senator Reed?

REED: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And I welcome our witnesses.

But first, let me extend my condolences of the families of the brave Americans who were killed in action in the attack on the Kenyan air base earlier this month, as well as those who are recovering from those wounds. And also extend my condolences to the families of the two airmen who were recently killed in Afghanistan.

And thank you to witness for appearing here today. Both of you are leading commands during challenging times, and we thank you for your continued service. Please also extend our gratitude to the servicemen and -woman who, under your command, continue their outstanding service to the nation.

There is currently an effort underway to review U.S. force posture around the globe in an effort to ensure that the Department of Defense funding and forces are allocated in line with the National Defense Strategy. We understand that AFRICOM is the first combatant command to go through the review process and that SOUTHCOM will shortly follow.

While it is wise and, in fact, necessary to take a hard look and methodical look at our investments in military activities around the globe, it would be strategically unwise to disengage with either Africa or Latin America in an effort to generate small, near-term budgetary gains. Given the relatively small number of forces under consideration, such a move would not generate the type of savings necessary for meaningful NDS investments and would likely come at a much higher cost in terms of increased long-term security risks.

Our competitors recognize that investing in Africa and Latin America is in their long-term interest, as evidenced by Chinese and Russian military and economic activity that continues to grow across these continents year by year.

General Townsend and Admiral Faller, I look forward to hearing your assessments regarding where and how U.S. interests are best served in the AFRICOM and SOUTHCOM areas of operation, including where we may be able to gain efficiency without undo risk to the U.S. interests and where you believe it will be strategically responsible to do so.

As you both note in your testimony, Latin America and Africa are beset by a vicious cycle of challenges that our competitors are seeking to leverage to their advantage. Countries with weak democratic institutions and rampant

corruption are being overtly wooed by Chinese and Russian investments and covertly manipulated through information operations and a flood of disinformation.

We are not only competing globally for influence and access, we must also work to ensure that new forms of military and economic colonialism do not take root in those regions. I'm especially concerned about Chinese economic intentions and whether our partner countries are positioned to defend themselves against China's predatory lending practices.

As you well know, the problems we face and the security solutions required are multi-dimensional. They do not lend themselves to geographic or bureaucratic boundaries, and require well-resourced and well-integrated whole-of-government solutions. Continuing to restrict development aid, rebuff partners and allies, and constrain multilateral efforts, as the administration is repeatedly endeavored to do, all but ensures that present challenges in places like Latin America and Africa will continue to expand and travel to America's doorstep.

REED: I'll be interested in your views on the importance of investing in diplomacy and development to support the long-term stability in these regions, as well as your assessment of the impact of (inaudible) force reductions in the interagency and international partners we coordinate with and depend upon to advance our objectives.

Gentlemen, thank you for your service and thank you for your testimony.

INHOFE: Thank you, Senator Reed.

We'll go ahead and start with opening statements and we'll start with you General Townsend. If you just -- your entire statement will be made a part of the record. You may proceed.

TOWNSEND: Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed and distinguished members of the committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

It's a privilege to be a part of and to lead America's finest men and women at U.S. Africa Command, an exceptional team dedicated to protecting America and advancing her interests on the African continent.

I'd like to take a moment to honor the memories of three exceptional Americans, U.S. Army Specialist Henry Mayfield Jr., Mr. Bruce Triplett and Mr. Dustin Harrison, who lost their lives in the service of our nation on January 5th, at Manda Bay, Kenya.

To their families, our thoughts and prayers are with you. Your loved ones died while protecting the American people from the very real threat of Al Qaida and al-Shabaab terrorist groups.

I'm here this morning with my battle buddy, shipmate and friend Admiral Craig Faller to discuss shared challenges and opportunities in both our areas of responsibility while we further joint readiness -- readiness of the joint force and our ability to fight across the globe.

AFRICOM is critical to maintaining this ability, as Africa over-watches a global crossroads with strategic choke points and sea lines of communication that are essential to global commerce and critical to U.S. operations in the world.

Our future security, prosperity -- and prosperity rests on strategic -- this strategic access in times of crisis and ensuring these waters remain free, open and secure.

U.S. AFRICOM is engaged in an ongoing blank slate review. In concert with the Department of Defense, we've developed a prioritized list of objectives and actions to protect the homeland and secure our strategic interests in Africa while ensuring the American taxpayers' investments are in the right areas.

Africa is key terrain for competition with China and Russia, who are aggressively using economic and military means to expand their access and influence. I believe Africa offers America a competitive edge over China and Russia and we should take advantage of it.

We will grow more efficient to contribute to higher defense priorities and refocus resources to global power competition, but we cannot take pressure off major terrorist groups like Al Qaida and ISIS.

These groups and many others remain an inconvenient reality in Africa. While we should not try to confront each one, we should remain resolute in confronting those who threaten Americans and the American homeland, like al-Shabaab, the largest and most violent of Al Qaida's branches.

Today, AFRICOM does that with a light and relatively low-cost footprint by supporting African and international partners who are leading these efforts.

In my first six months of command, I've learned that small investments, a few troops and a few bucks, can go a long way and make a real difference in Africa. Our whole-of-government and partner-centric approach acts as a force multiplier to address Africa's many complex challenges.

TOWNSEND: What AFRICOM accomplishes with a few people and a few dollars on a continent three and half times the size of the continental United States is a bargain for the American taxpayer and low-cost insurance for America in that region.

A secure and stable Africa remains an enduring American interest. U.S. AFRICOM stands ready to protect and advance American interests and respond to crises in Africa.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for your continued support to our armed forces. I look forward to your questions.

INHOFE: Thank you, General Townsend. Admiral Faller?

FALLER: Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, Senators, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am honored to be here with my shipmate and good friend General Steve Townsend.

We also thank you for the steadfast support you provide to our men and women every day at SOUTHCOM. And it's -- I'm truly grateful for the honor and opportunity to lead them.

I'm with Ambassador Jean Manes, our civilian deputy commander, former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, and Sergeant Major Zickefoose, command sergeant major for SOUTHCOM, truly the eyes and ears of our command.

The Western Hemisphere is our shared home. It's our neighborhood. And we're connected to the nations there in every domain, sea, air, space, land, cyber and, most importantly, culturally and with values.

Over the last year I've had the opportunity to visit our partners and see firsthand the opportunities and challenges that directly impact the security of our hemisphere. I've come to describe the challenges of vicious circle of threats that deliberately erodes the security and stability of this region and the United States of America.

This vicious circle is framed by systemic issues of young democracies with weak institutions, rampant corruption, exploited by trans-national criminal organizations, often better funded than the security organizations they face; external state actors that don't share those values, China, Russia and Iran; and violent extremist organizations. They're trying to advance their interests at the expense of U.S. and partner nation security.

In fact, the a-ha for me over the last year is the extent to which China is aggressively pursuing its interests right here in our neighborhood. This vicious circle can be seen most acutely in the tragedy that's Venezuela.

The human suffering of this once thriving democracy has driven 5 million people to flee to neighboring countries like Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile and more. These countries are dealing with this and the strains to their health care, education and social services are palatable.

Colombia alone spent \$2.5 billion, a significant part of their GDP over the last two years, just to support the migrants.

While Russia, Cuba and China prop up this illegitimate Maduro dictatorship, the democracies of the world look for a way to get the Venezuelan people what they deserve, a free and prosperous Venezuela.

The only way to attack this vicious circle is as a team. In this neighborhood, a little goes a long way, and our partners are willing to contribute. But we need the right and focused, persistent military presence, which might take the form of security force assistant brigades or small teams of special operation forces or marines to conduct specialized training; or our National Guard forces forging long-term relations via a state partnership program; or our maritime forces, where presence at sea establishes sea control and attacks these trans-national criminal organizations, as we've recently done with the deployment of littoral combat ship USS Detroit.

Deployments like the United States Naval Ship Comfort show the best outstretched hand of America, and that mission treated over 70,000 patients and extended our enduring promise as a trusted partner to the neighborhood.

Security cooperation is a critical tool in a region with willing partners who thrive given the opportunity. International Military Education and Training, IMET, is a small investment that yields long-term returns. It builds lasting, trusted relationships. As I speak, half of our nation's chiefs of the defense are graduates of IMET programs.

Finally, our people, our greatest asset. Joint Interagency Task Force South, JIATF South, in Key West, our southernmost base in the continental United States, holds significant strategic value in defending against a wide range of threats to national security, U.S. national security.

We're taking steps to improve the resiliencies of that headquarters building, and to improve the quality of life of our military and civilian personnel who struggle in one of the country's most expensive economies. At our headquarters in Miami we're also working to address the cost of living and housing concerns that create hardships for our families.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. SOUTHCOM team appreciates the support of Congress, and you continue to place trust and honor in us, and we won't let you down. I look forward to your questions.

INHOFE: Well, thank you, Admiral Faller. We -- the comments I made in that opening statement, I'm very sincere about, because a lot of people don't realize, when they look at all the coms that we have around, did we ever have the right resources relative to the threats that are posed?

And so I'm going to ask you each the same question, which I've worded very carefully, because we hear from so many people who are not aware of the threat to our national security that you would find in SOUTHCOM and -- and in Africa, "Why does it really matter, in terms of our national security?"

And I'm going to start with you, Admiral Faller. You've -- you've touched on it. I know you believe in it. But the question would be, why should the American people care what China and Russia are doing in Africa and Latin America?

And specifically, how does what they are doing threaten our national security?

I know the president's very interested in this. He wants to make sure that we're not -- we don't have resources in places that don't have a direct threat on our national security. I'd like to have you restate what the direct threat is out there to our national security, in your (inaudible)?

FALLER: Senator, this region matters. It's -- it's the cultural values. It's the extensive interaction we have in trade. We have a positive trade balance with -- with the region, but that's eroding. And we are the number one trading partner. China's fast catching that -- catching us in that regard.

Panama Canal, strategic access; two-thirds of the traffic that goes through that has an economic direct tie to the United States.

I look around the region and I see China working on multiple port deals, I.T. infrastructure, dams, mining, logging, fishing, including a significant illegal fishing, illegal mining and illegal logging. And I look at the port access that they're pursuing in El Salvador, Jamaica, Bahamas.

I ask myself the question, "Why would China want to buy an island and lock up a 99-year lease for most of the coast of El Salvador, right here within a two-hour flight of the continental United States?"

They're trying to achieve positional advantage right here in our neighborhood. And that's alarming and concerning to me. And it drives the sense of urgency with which I -- I look at this competition.

INHOFE: Yeah, you know, the terrorists that are out there, and it's -- we're not really talking about just locally there, even in El Salvador and the rest. You are the door to this country, right through your area, and I think you've stated that very well.

And the same thing to you, General Townsend, you know, we have -- I think I may not have mentioned this in the opening statement, but when -- if you're looking for places to save, it -- I can't see that you'd find it there. I mean, you have a total of about 6,000-6,500 people in the continent. Of that, most of those -- 4,000 of those are in Djibouti and that's -- that's -- of course, they have other missions outside of the continent of Africa. But it gives you -- when you go to West Africa, you've only got -- what? --1,200-1,300 people.

Now -- and so it's not like the other continents, with 75,000, 80,000 and 100,000 people. And what you're trying to accomplish is to reduce our footprint around the world.

So -- and specifically in -- in Africa, talk about how that directly affects our national security.

TOWNSEND: Thank you, Chairman.

So you asked why should America care for -- about Africa?

For a lot of the same reasons that Admiral Faller talked about America caring about South America although it's a little bit more geographically distant.

The strategic access that America needs the Africa continent rests on the fact that it's that global crossroads that I talked about in my opening statement. There's also tremendous natural resources there, to include rare earth minerals that America needs.

There's also a burgeoning population there and that's -- there's good news -- good and bad news with that. It's a potential -- tremendous potential opportunity for the future. Also significant risk.

I think that in the past, maybe we've been able to pay less attention to Africa and it'd be OK for America. I don't believe that's the case for the future.

As far as the threats go that you asked about, China and Russia are every bit as busy in Africa today for the same reasons that Admiral Faller talked about them being busy in South America. They are acting on their own behalf for positional advantage, and Russia, in particular, seeking extractive -- pursuing extractive ventures. So China and Russia are seeking to counter the strategic access that we need for American security and American prosperity.

Secondly, the violent extremist organizations that are on the continent, both in the east and in the west, some of those groups threaten the American homeland today. Some of them will potentially be a threat in the future years.

INHOFE: Yeah. And I appreciate that.

And I'm glad you mentioned in your opening statement the IMET program, because, you know, China realizes what we've done with that program, how -- how well that has served us and so they're now emulating that. They actually had a meeting in Beijing -- I think they had all 52 countries represented there -- talking about how they were going to expand that program, put more money in it. And that -- you're watching that I'm sure very carefully throughout your whole area.

TOWNSEND: Yes, Chairman.

INHOFE: OK, good.

Senator Reed?

REED: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you again, General Townsend and Admiral Faller.

I think it could be safely said that both of your COCOMs are conducting economy-of-force operations. Is that right, General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: That is what we're doing; both of us.

REED: Admiral Faller?

FALLER: We are -- we are at a very low level of force, sir.

REED: Right.

And we have to do that, but we have to do it smartly and wisely. That means cooperation and collaboration across our government and also collaboration with other governments.

And, General Townsend, the French are now conducting significant operations in the Sahel part of Africa. If we drew down, what signal would that send and what practical consequences might that have for their cooperation in the fight?

TOWNSEND: Senator Reed, so as you pointed out, the French are the lead international partner in the Sahel region of West Africa. They have about 4,500 troops there that are engaged in active operations, every day, to counter the threat that's there, the threat that comes from both Al Qaida groups and ISIS groups there.

That threat is very serious, and that threat is on the advance. And I think the French would say -- in fact, they have said publicly recently -- that their efforts are not having the desired effect that they need.

We are supporting both the French and the larger international effort there. There's a significant European effort there. Our position, the position of the Department of Defense is that the Europeans need to step up and do more in the -- in the Sahel to help the French. The French are calling on Europe to step up and do more. I absolutely think that is the right thing to do.

And as -- but as we see the violent extremists advancing, if we were -- if we were to withdraw support from the French precipitously, then that -- that would not go in a good direction.

So I think what we have to do is we've got to synchronize our support and the removal of support if we -- if we decide to do that, with the arrival of European support...

(CROSSTALK)

TOWNSEND: ... there's a chance there that the French can offset that.

REED: What you're saying is, it wouldn't be particularly coherent if we're telling the E.U. to step up support of France as we reduce our support?

TOWNSEND: I think there's certainly a timing issue there, Senator, absolutely.

REED: And Admiral Faller, following up the point that the chairman made -- which I think is an excellent point - - programs like IMET are just absolutely critical. And in your A.O., China is aggressively pursuing these IMET options.

You indicated that (inaudible) in certain countries -- I think it was El Salvador -- there's one IMET slot, that the U.S. offers, and 50 that the Chinese offers, is that...

FALLER: Recently, an example was provided along those lines, where they've come in and analyzing how many folks we would (ph) send to Carlisle, this particular -- and they -- they were going five times over that to their war college in -- in China, which they've copied from our program and translated into Spanish.

And we've talked to the students that come back from that, to get a sense for the quality and the approach. It's all based off of the U.S. doctrine.

REED: And it has to be pointed out that the IMET program is funded by the Department of State. So one of the critical programs we're talking about is not within DOD, which, again, suggests that this whole-of-government approach.

We have to look not just at funding for your COCOM, but are we putting the money into the State Department, are we putting money into AID, are we putting money into various programs that will allow you to conduct a much more efficient economy of force operation. Is that fair?

FALLER: That's -- that's an accurate statement. We really depend on that IMET, Senator.

REED: And going back to -- to Africa, General Townsend, you indicated that the extremist threat isn't (ph) all through the continent, but in -- my sense is that al-Shabaab and others are still contemplating sort of projecting power outside of Africa, which is a much more critical threat to the United States. Is that fair?

TOWNSEND: Senator, that's accurate.

REED: Yeah. And so we're going to continue to focus on that threat to the United States, particularly?

TOWNSEND: I believe we should.

REED: The -- finally, I think, again, the issue here is maintaining appropriate force and also maintaining the coordination within our government and with our allies. And I would -- you're pursuing that, and I think you should continue to do so. Thank you.

INHOFE: Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Rounds?

ROUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, first of all, thank you for your service to our country. I'd like to begin by just talking a little bit about the disinformation and influence operations, which Russia has used successfully in a number of different instances but specifically what plans and actions that you have and your team have created to address the technological advances and the changing character of war, to ensure that America maintains a strategic advantage in your areas of operation.

FALLER: The disinformation campaign that Russia has been on is truly about, in all instances, painting the United States in an inaccurate light. One example is reporting that I was on the border of Venezuela about to lead an invasion force. Another example was they twisted it just enough in an article in R.T., to say that I had said something that was at odds with the vice president of the United States, which was just completely baloney.

Their largest by volume, outside of their Russian-language effort in social media, is in Spanish. You have to ask, what's the national interest of Russia in that disinformation here in our neighborhood and around the world? And -- and it's concerning to us.

We've countered within our means in information operations, military information support, a strong partnership with State Department, and alignment in messaging, information with some increased authorities in cyber to -- to go after them and put the truth out and try to -- try to make a dent in that space.

But more needs to be done, clearly, and more should be done to take advantage of machine learning, those types of skills that the department's embarked on, to really get after to thwart (ph) their disinformation campaigns.

ROUNDS: General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Senator, not unlike SOUTHCOM, you know, we see the same kind of disinformation campaigns. And not just from Russia, but from other actors such as Iran. Recently, Iran announced that I was killed at the engagement at Manda Bay. I'm glad to hear that that's exaggerated.

There's fairly low-tech warfare in Africa overall, but we do see armed UAVs -- unmanned vehicles, armed now, being provided by multiple actors, China, Turkey, et cetera. We also see sophisticated air defense systems.

We also see technologies that have, I think, even greater impacts, like the Chinese smart city technologies, where they're coming in and in the interest of public safety and security, they're offering to equip African cities with camera systems, surveillance systems all over, facial recognition technologies. And of course we know that all of those systems are reporting back to China first, before they report to the African country where they're -- where they're established.

So I think that the -- the growth of high tech is a concern, certainly, in Africa.

ROUNDS: Thank you.

I think part of the challenge we have is, is sharing that -- look, the propaganda has never really quit from our adversaries. They understand its value, they're very good at it. They simply advanced to using social media and

other means to literally (ph) bend things their direction. And in doing so, they influence individuals who really, in many cases, share the same values that we share in this country.

ROUNDS: The IMET program has been mentioned several times here, and I think it's critical that we continue to be able to have communications and relationships with what is, in many cases, perhaps one of the most stable forms -- or one of the most stable parts of any one of these -- these nations' governments, and that is their military. While their -- their -- their civilian leaders come and go, in many cases they have a stable force of professionals.

And the question is, is do they find and do they understand the way that we do business to be appropriate and a better way than what our advisories offer them?

And I'd like to just to, once again, add -- offer each of you the opportunity to talk a little bit about IMET, at this time, in which I think some people question whether or not it is a valid program and how critical it is and how inexpensive it is for us to continue to have that relationship with the militaries from the different countries.

FALLER: The -- the value is in the building of trust. You get to know your shipmate, your battle buddy. You share experience and doctrine.

Recent example, in El Salvador, the new president came in, favorable connections to the United States, appointed a new chief of defense and minister of defense. The minister of defense is a Naval War College grad. Chief of defense is an Army War College grad. You can sit down around a roundtable and have a serious conversation without stilted talking points about the real challenges and opportunities and the complexity of making progress.

And that's just one of many examples I could cite, Senator.

ROUNDS: Thank you.

TOWNSEND: Senator, just like Admiral Faller's explained, IMET is invaluable to us. You know, I think it's a -- it's a long-term way to influence a government and a military, by training those people who grow up to be the chief of defense, and that same kind of thing is found in Africa as well.

I think they seek out the United States as their preferred partner for a number of reasons, not the least of which is our competence and capability, but also our values. That's part of that. And I think that's a strong thing that is imparted through IMET.

ROUNDS: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: Senator Shaheen?

SHAHEEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, Admiral Faller, let me begin by adding my condolences to those that have been expressed already for the servicemembers lost in the month of January.

I want to particularly call out Captain Ryan Phaneuf from Hudson, New Hampshire, who was an airman lost in Afghanistan earlier this week. I know that all of New Hampshire mourns his loss and the loss of everyone, and sends condolences to all of the families.

So thank you.

I want to begin, Admiral Faller, with where we are with drug interdiction. When you were here last year, you -- we talked about the drug interdiction efforts, which are still so important to states like New Hampshire, where we have a huge opioid epidemic still and are seeing heroin now coming into the country.

So can you talk about what progress has been made and the role that the USS Detroit has played in improving interdiction efforts?

FALLER: Senator, as we have discussed, the deaths due to the narcotics overdoses, drugs is -- it's too many and it's a national security challenge. And those pathways that they come through, just as easily are used by terrorists and other illicit materials. And -- and we -- we can't do enough to get after that challenge to right here (ph) our neighborhood and how it erodes communities across the country.

Over the past year we've focused on building our partners to get them more into the game. Fifty percent of our interdictions last year were partnered-enabled in nations like Colombia, that have stepped to lead their own exercises and operations, recently an Orion (ph) operation, where we had many metric tons, which was lives saved here. Eighteen nations participated, Colombian-led, and all we did with the U.S. was participate. That's a key effort and we've got to do more there.

In our own efforts, intelligence-sharing is key, human intelligence -- human intelligence and intelligence surveillance, recognizance from platforms, we -- we need more intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance. And our human efforts were -- were funded, but they were funded above our -- our core budget in an unfunded requirement. So the key area to look at and how do we get more efficient, but also apply leverage there.

And then finally in our platforms, we -- we depend on ships. At the end of the day it's got to be a Coast Guard cutter. And our Coast Guard performed brilliantly, supplying more ships that they've even promised through the allocation process. And our Navy stepped up this year with the USS Detroit.

We need more ships. We think the number of Navy ships would be about three to sustain the presence and pressure. The pressure matters on these nations and that pressure's got to be at the source, in coca eradication and at the street here in the U.S.

Colombia has made progress at that source. I eradicated cocaine with the Colombian chief of defense on the Ecuador border. They've made progress and -- and the result has been that deaths are down, but still too many. And we had a -- almost a record year in interdictions, but still not enough.

SHAHEEN: Good. Well, thank you for those efforts, and we hope that we can continue to do more to support them.

This question is really for both of you. We've now, for the last two and half years, had the Women, Peace and Security Act in effect. DOD has made significant progress in implementing that. We just put \$4 million for gender advisors into the 2020 Defense budget.

Can you talk about the successes that you've seen both in SOUTHCOM and AFRICOM because of the effort to better integrate women and be able to appeal to those women in Africa, the women in Latin America, who we need to address if we're going to be successful?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator.

So, you asked me about Women, Peace and Security at my confirmation hearing six months ago, and I told you I didn't know much about it, but I'd look into it. And I was able to actually attend one of these forums.

So, at AFRICOM, Women, Peace and Security is integrated into every event that we do. And we see some advantages here. It's not just about promoting the role of women in the armed forces, but it has an impact across their societies as well.

So, it's -- it's integral to everything we do. And we've had a communication symposium, which I was fortunate enough to attend. We've had female intel officer training program. And there's a seminar that's about to kick off in Flintlock exercise that we're about to start. Those are just some examples. And we try to integrate some of that into every event.

SHAHEEN: Good. Thank you.

FALLER: Similarly we integrate it in every event, Senator.

Recently Ambassador Manes and I were in Colombia. We did a roundtable with some key women warriors from the Colombian Army. We had the chief of defense from Colombia, their chief of the army, their chief of the air force. And in that audience of -- of women, there was about 50 of them, were nine sergeant majors -- command sergeant majors. And I'll tell you what, they were getting after it. And it was motivating.

Afterwards, chief of the Colombian army came and said, "Hey, can you do some more of that with us?" because it really brings out the competitive spirit, the reason why we're better when we're integrated and stronger when we're integrated.

SHAHEEN: Well, thank you both very much. I think it's a very important model for us to show to the rest of the world, particularly in developing countries in Africa and Latin America.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

ERNST: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I would second that, thank you, Senator Shaheen, for those words.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today. We truly appreciate your efforts in some challenging regions that often aren't hitting the headlines of our newspapers every day. So thanks to you, thanks for your teams.

Sergeant Major, good luck to you on retirement as this upcoming. Still think Nebraska or Iowa is a great place to go.

Admiral Faller, I was -- thank you for sitting down with me the other day. I really do appreciate that. We had a great discussion and I'd like to go a little more into IMET. You've heard a number of my colleagues just talking about how important it is.

We had an Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee hearing just a while back and you were able to visit with us about the importance of IMET at that particular subcommittee meeting. And it has been in the press a lot lately. We all acknowledge that we can do better in vetting.

But strategically, can you talk to what that means for our partners strategically and what it does to assist not only those countries but the United States as well?

FALLER: The United States military education system is our strength and like the education system in our country. Our train (ph) education is sought after and valued and it builds stronger partners that know and trust us, and the relationships that go with that last a lifetime.

And -- and just an example -- an example of that comes up time and time again. I have a deputy -- I have a director, a Colombian brigadier general, is a full director our of exercise division of our headquarters. He's a graduate of Leavenworth, Carlisle, the Pathfinder School, the Advanced Army Armor School and the Rangers -

- Ranger School. He's an honor grad at Ranger School. And -- and the Colombians value that, as do our partner nations.

And so we can use more IMET. Our budget is about \$10 million a year for 20 democratic countries. Secretary of Defense Esper visited SOUTHCOM last week. A priority of his is to seek more money. He's seeking a 50 percent increase in the IMET budget. We could spend that 50 percent increase in IMET next year, in our school houses and Western Hemisphere Institute for Security at Fort Benning, game-changer. The Inter-American Air Force Academy in Texas. These are school houses that we don't think a lot about, in addition to Carlisle, Newport, Maxwell with the Air Force and Marine Corps University. But all these school houses work together to make a difference in strengthening the hemispheric security.

ERNST: Yes, thank you.

Yes, General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I couldn't say anything better than Admiral Faller just did.

ERNST: Yes, thank you.

Now, I do appreciate that. And, of course, our state partnership programs as well. Iowa is partnered with Kosovo, and I know a number of those officers that I worked with a decade ago, I've seen them rise through the ranks and we continue to stay in close contact.

But those partnerships are very, very valuable. So, thank you.

Admiral Faller, I want to talk a little bit about the immigration missions that we see between SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM. Obviously there's been a lot of attention on our southern border and what has continued to happen with drug cartels, whether it is weapons crossing the border, whether it's the drugs that Senator Shaheen just talked about.

ERNST: All of that is very concerning, but what I'd like to focus on in just the minute and a half that I have left is also the issue of human trafficking. So not only do we have illegal drug trade wreaking havoc across Iowa, a lot of our rural communities, but Iowa wrestles a lot with the serious problem of human trafficking. And the Polaris Project in 2016 dubbed Des Moines, Iowa, as one of the top 100 human trafficking sites in the United States. And that's not something we are proud of.

So could you describe the resourcing and coordination challenges that exist when you're trying to address the threat between these different areas of responsibility between SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM?

FALLER: SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM work very closely together. General O'Shaughnessy and I traveled to Mexico -- Mexico City. We sat down with the head of their army and their navy to talk about how do we improve information-sharing, how do we get after these ungoverned spaces that are spawning instability into North America and beyond and South America, Latin America, Caribbean, and how do we help the Mexicans share information with Guatemala. It was a very productive meeting. We came up with tangible steps to do that. And then we went to Guatemala City the next day and had that same level of conversation with those nations to try to forge more coordination.

At the heart of getting after these wicked problems that created instability here including the human trafficking is sharing intelligence, building trust, breaking down barriers, understanding and then ensuring that the right agency -- law enforcement agency, other agencies have the information they need to make an impact and so that's a key element of what we're doing as we move ahead and we take that into exercise program which is also a similar element. We are adequately resourced to do this but we are carefully looking at how we can become more efficient as we move forward.

ERNST: Very good. Well, please let us know if there's anything additional that we, as Congress, can help with. Gentlemen, thank you very, very much for your service for our country. Thank you.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

KAINE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. I want to add my comments of support for the families of Colonel Voss and Captain Phaneuf. Colonel Voss, though a Guam resident, was based out of Joint Base Langley in Virginia and thinking about his family all those that you mentioned.

Admiral Faller, I want to start with you and Venezuela. There's an article that was in The Wall Street Journal a couple of days ago that I'd like to put into the record and the title of it is unnecessarily provocative. The title is, "How Putin Outfoxed Trump in Venezuela." I don't think the title is a fair characterization. I think the article, though, is very, very good. And basically, if I were going to title the article, I would title it, how the U.S. underestimated the difficulty of what we were trying to do in Venezuela.

I think the U.S. has done a number of good things. I think the Trump administration has, I could pick a few faults but generally done good. But the core of the article is how we really underestimated how hard it would be.

And I just remember this last year when we were talking about it here and in the Foreign Relations Committee. There were sort of some real blue-sky scenarios that were being painted by the administration about how Maduro's about to collapse. And I went to Colombia and visited in Colombia and then went to the border in Kukata in March, and everything I was hearing from the Colombians and everybody down there is this isn't easy. It's going to be really, really hard.

They were exactly right about how difficult it was going to be and here on Capitol Hill we were getting blue-sky scenarios from the administration about the imminent collapse of the Maduro government and we just got it wrong. On the intel side, we just -- we just got it wrong.

And I -- and one of the things that's galling in the article is one of the reasons it's so hard is not just our adversaries; Venezuela is propped up by Iran, and Cuba, and China, and Russia, the UAE, Turkey, India. Allies of ours have helped them evade U.S. sanctions and have helped prop them up, and they're one of the reasons why the Maduro government has had some lasting power.

And so I guess I just really want to caution all of us on matters like this. These are tough situations and we can do everything right and still find it very hard to accomplish what we want. And that's not our fault but we need to be very wary of blue-sky scenarios and being told that we'll support this person and things are likely to work out our way. We're in for the long haul in these situations and I'll tell you, Admiral Faller, I'd love to talk to you further.

We've done European Reassurance Initiatives and Asian Reassurance Initiatives. It might be time to do an Americas Reassurance Initiative. I don't really like the title because reassurance already sounds defensive -- like, no, no, no we're really interested in you. I don't know that we have to be defensive about it but we need to have a comprehensive whole-of-government diplomacy and military and economic trade focus on the Americas because while we're focusing elsewhere, I know where our adversaries are focused. They're focusing in our own backyard.

General Townsend, I want to ask you a question. There was a recent study of some challenges within the special operations community. And while it was special operations-focused, a number of the areas of the study dealt with items in AFRICOM. There's a comprehensive review that SOCOM put out last week looking at a variety of cultural and ethical challenges in the special operations forces and -- including some that led to scandals and many took place in AFRICOM.

One of the themes was extremely high operational tempos caused problems and here was the finding, quote, "A trend of disaggregation at the individual and small team levels risks employing forces where operational requirements misaligned with the FORGEN validation standards."

I've been on the committee seven years. I think what that means is we had forces deployed and teams in sizes that lacked the oversight or the ability to do the missions they were assigned. Now I think the recommendations are largely for SOCOM but because SOCOM operates within combatant commands, what responsibility do you think that the COCOMs have in making sure that the forces that are provided to you are appropriately resourced and led?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. I'm familiar with the study and I'm familiar with the conclusions of it and I agree with what that study talks about. And as you're aware, most of the forces operating on the African continent today are special operating forces, not exclusively but a lot of them.

This phenomenon, you mentioned correctly, does not just apply to special operating forces. Over the course of this war we have disaggregated formations time and time again and separated small teams from their higher echelons of command and leadership.

KAINE: Some of the recommendations here or findings are a little bit like the study about the McCain and Fitzgerald instances in the -- in the Pacific. I mean there's some similar challenges about high OPSTEMPO and other things leading to the problems.

TOWNSEND: Right. So I think that at the COCOM level, we absolutely need to do whatever we can to keep teams together and not disaggregate them. I'm a firm believer in this. I've been a commander who has my team disaggregated and scattered all over, so I'm a believer in keeping team integrity in every task that we can.

Also, actually a part of our blank slate review process that we're undergoing with the Department of Defense is to look at how we can reduce the operational tempo, particularly of soft forces but all forces. Reduce the operational tempo so it's not just about trying to redirect resources but it's to return some resources to home stations so that they're -- soft operational tempo is still stretched. Even though it's now reaching of a dwell of about one year deployed for two years at home, the goal is one-to-three and there's some work to be done there.

KAINE: Thank you very much.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

MCSALLY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, I represent Arizona and on January 5th, Dustin Harrison from Tucson was killed by Al-Shabaab terrorists at Manda Bay in Kenya. His wife, Hope, and his two-year-old daughter, Heaven, are back home in Tucson, grieving the loss of her husband and father.

Now, I was a part of the team to stand up AFRICOM as my last assignment in the military, one of the more challenging assignments I had, so I'm aware of the challenges you have on the continent. But some articles about the situation there was that it was a woefully-undefended perimeter or surprisingly-sparse security, you know, given the level of assets, air assets and others that you have there. And I know an investigation's ongoing and I don't want to put any more of our servicemen and women into harm's way. But what can you share about what's happening today to make sure an attack like that is not happening -- or the risk is not going to happen now and in the future, and what can I share with Heaven and Hope to -- to make sure that others are not going to be in a similar risk?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. As -- as I mentioned in my opening statement, I also offer our condolences. Those family members are in our -- are in our thoughts and prayers for our fallen comrades.

Also, as -- thank you for pointing out there is an investigation going on, so I don't want to get in front of that, and as -- and, you know, you've worn a uniform so you know that frequently, what we think we know at the start of an event is not what actually we discover after we've thoroughly investigated it.

So -- but there are some -- early conclusions, and it was -- I think it's self-obvious we were not as prepared there in Manda Bay as we needed to be. Al-Shabaab managed to penetrate onto that airfield. A lot of people don't know, but the base where our troops live is not where the airfield is. But they were able to get access to that airfield, kill three Americans and destroy six aircraft there. So we weren't as prepared, and we're digging into that to find out why that's the case.

But -- and since that event we have -- there's about 120 infantrymen there on the ground now who are securing that place, and they've been working hard since 6 January to put in the appropriate level of defenses. So I'm confident that by the time they're done Manda Bay will be much more properly-defended.

We're not just stopping there, though. We're looking across the continent...

MCSALLY: (inaudible)

TOWNSEND: ... because I think that we viewed, and the Kenyans viewed Manda Bay as a safe area. The Kenyans have family housing there for their military.

MCSALLY: Right.

TOWNSEND: It's a resort area. So al-Shabaab has shown their reach and their -- the danger that they pose, and I think we need to take that seriously. And so I'm looking with a -- a clear eye at every location in Africa now.

MCSALLY: Great, thank you. I was a J-33 in -- in that assignment, you know, running our counterterrorism operations. One of the challenges we had at the time -- this was back, you know, 2007 to 2010 -- we saw al-Shabaab growing. We saw the training camps. We were watching hundreds, thousands of fighters being trained. At the time they were a lawful, legitimate target, but the Obama administration felt like they weren't a real problem or a risk so we couldn't take them out.

Last year I think there were 67 strikes conducted in Somalia. Can you share what the impact of those strikes are? And is it whack-a-mole, or what is the strategy here going forward in order to address this growing terrorist threat in East Africa?

TOWNSEND: So there's an international effort there that supports the Somali government.

MCSALLY: I know. We've been talking about that for a very long time.

TOWNSEND: Yeah. And the Somali National Army, and so our role is in support of that. So the two major tasks that we're doing is helping to train part -- a specific part of the Somali National Army, the Danab, or special light infantry units, and we're also doing our counterterrorism strikes. They're meant to help the international effort and the Somali effort, but they're also meant to protect America.

I don't believe that it's whack-a-mole. What we do is we keep an eye on al-Shabaab every day, and we're looking for ways to reduce their capacity wherever we can. And so that effort to disrupt and degrade al-Shabaab and their leadership -- and their mid-level leadership and higher-level leadership is a critical part of what we're doing.

MCSALLY: Great, thanks.

Admiral Faller, I'm out of time but I'll submit some questions for the record, specifically about the drug flow coming up from your AOR to our country through my state, Arizona, and the latest tactics that the cartels are using and how we're countering them. But I'll have to submit those for the record. Thanks.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

KING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to talk in a few minutes about China and Russia and their activities both in Latin America and in -- in Africa. But Admiral Faller, since we've sitting here, eight Americans have died of drug overdoses in the last hour, 67,000 people a year, one person a day in Maine. What's going on with China and Russia are threats. They're indirect threats. They're important, but we're talking about Americans dying. And you and I have talked about this in the past. I've heard from you and from other national security officials that we are picking up -- we are interdicting about 25 percent of the drug shipments through the ocean to North America that we know of -- 25 percent of what we know of. To me -- we're talking about allocating resources around the world for all kind of threat. This is a direct threat killing Americans, and we don't have enough ships. I don't get it. Where do we -- when do we get to interdicting the ships that we know are carrying drugs into this country to kill our people?

FALLER: It's a national security crisis (inaudible).

KING: Absolutely.

FALLER: It -- it's actually worse statistics than you mentioned. It's 25 -- we detect 25 percent. We're only interdicting nine percent, and to interdict, we need greater partner capacity, as I mentioned in the answer to Senator Shaheen. We also needed assets. At the end of the day, you've got to be on the field to compete. When the playing field is twice the size of the U.S. (inaudible)...

KING: Well, who do we need to talk to to get those assets? The secretary of defense? The president? The vice president? Who -- where -- where do we go? I mean, it's -- it's -- it's infuriating that we know what's coming, we know it's out there, and the -- the phrase I got was, "We have far more targets than we can action." That's a euphemism for, we are woefully falling down on this responsibility.

FALLER: Well, the Coast Guard stepped up in a big way that -- our U.S. Navy needs (ph) to have readiness challenges that has them stretched globally, and that has impacted their force allocation to us, so...

KING: Is it people or ships? Do we just need more -- more ships, more armed...

FALLER: It's not just ships, Senator; We need the intelligence, so we need the intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance assets. We have about 20 percent of what our -- our -- our need is there. And then -- and then that then turns into the ability to interdict. We also need our steady funding and our security cooperation so we can help our partner nations help themselves. So it's -- it's pulling this together in a full-court press beyond ships that we can work together with partners and in our interagency and get the "W" back in front of whole-of-government, Senator.

KING: Well, my -- I appreciate that, and I know that you're working on this, but I just hope you'll keep pressing, you know. If -- if you have to say, "There's this really obnoxious senator that's on my back and I've got to do something," that's -- that's fine. I've -- I can fulfill that responsibility quite adequately.

Let's talk about China for a minute.

By the way, these -- these charts, to both of you, are -- are very helpful. It really graphically indicates what's going on.

It seems to me, China's following a sort of a two-track strategy in these -- in both Africa and South America. One is what I call debt imperialism. They're getting these small countries in debt to them, and then they've got their hooks into them. General, is that sort of -- part of what you're seeing, seeing happening in Africa?

TOWNSEND: That is exactly what we're seeing. We're also seeing a new, more sophisticated development in that. So the -- the debt trap diplomacy has now become known on the continent. Most African leaders are wise to it. I actually would commend our State Department for helping get African leaders more savvy about what the Chinese are doing with some of these debt trap loans.

The Chinese are adapting, though, and evolving their presentation and they're becoming more sophisticated about it. So I'm a little bit worried because they're -- they're getting smarter about it.

KING: Well, that -- that's a concern.

But the other -- the other thing is a sort of a more direct -- I think, Admiral Faller, you used the word, positional - - positional advantage. Just looking at your chart, Jamaica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Chile, Belize ports, ports. I mean, that's a strategic advantage.

Whatever happened to the Monroe Doctrine? I mean, we're -- we're allowing an adversary, I won't (ph) say an enemy, but an adversary -- to establish significant positional advantage within our hemisphere. Admiral?

FALLER: Senator, it's not just the ports, it I.T. infrastructure, it's space stations, it's cyber, it's safe cities, as General Townsend mentioned. And that China's figured out that the nations in Latin America and the Caribbean are cash-strapped. So instead of trying to do arms sales, they're coming in with significant gifts.

I could cite \$17 million in one country in South America, \$20 million in a Caribbean nation. These are one-year gifts of -- of trucks and boats and I.T. infrastructure, well beyond uniforms and PME. And that is alarming to me, as they build not just debt but dependency. And we're trying to build trust and teams.

KING: Maybe our motto should be, beware of Chinese bearing gifts and telecommunications equipment. Thank you very much, gentlemen. I appreciate your testimony.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

CRAMER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank both of you, both for your service and for being here today. I want -- I'm going to ask each of you to elaborate on the topic that Admiral Faller just brought up in response to that -- to Senator King's first question.

Because each of you and-or your predecessors have commented of the challenge, given the mass geography that you're responsible for, each of you, the challenges in ISR, Admiral, that you just raised. Are you getting the assets that you've asked for? Are you getting the assets you need? If not, why not, if you know?

And then, to put even a finer point, perhaps -- or an additional point on that broader discussion that I want you to have with me -- on December 20th with the signing of the NDAA, of course, we began the process of standing up the sixth military -- the military branch in Space Force. And whether ISR, whatever, but Space Force seems to me to fit right into this.

And what I'm wondering about is, I know it's early but we -- time is short. Have you been invited into the discussion or inserted yourselves into the discussion of how to best man, train, equip a Space Force to -- to assist you? And then maybe even elaborate a little bit on your partner countries and what role, if any, they could play.

And I'd ask each of you -- Admiral to go first, and then General Townsend.

FALLER: Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. And key point -- key part of our intelligence picture and -- is a global demand, and we're short in this hemisphere.

I mentioned we were meeting 20 percent of our goal, a good chunk of that 20 percent is using the Department of Homeland Security, Customs Protection and Border -- CBP assets. So it's a team effort. The DOD portion, that's probably closer to about 8 percent. And so it's key.

We recognize the global challenges and we do the best we can with what we have. I think there are some advances in machine learning and -- and artificial intelligence that we can use and should pursue, and we're going to work that.

With respect to Space Force, we have excellent coordination with General Raymond and his team. And it's a key interest, like cyber, in every nation that we deal with.

Fundamental to this is information-sharing in the space realm, and space agreements that we're working with nations like Brazil, Chile and other countries, that will help counter China's efforts in that realm and continue to ensure that we have positional advantage. We can't work fast enough in that arena, Senator, but we're working as hard as we can.

CRAMER: Thank you.

TOWNSEND: Senator, on your question about -- excuse me -- resources, I would say that my command is -- with one exception, is pretty adequately resourced for what we're -- the task we're given to do today. As small as those resources are, I think it's adequate.

With the exception of ISR, that you mentioned, and I know that every combatant commander that sits here in front of you will say the exact same thing. Admiral Faller briefed his level of resourcing; we're at about 25 percent of our known validated requirement for ISR.

You mentioned the Space Force. So interestingly enough, I just met with General Raymond yesterday. We were discussing about, you know, the development of his new force, and we're in constant contact with the Space Force and Space Command. They've recently deployed some folks to our headquarters to assist us, you know, with space.

Everything we do, of course, on the continent has ties to space. And not only on our side, but on our adversaries' side as well. I recently got a briefing, the Chinese have somewhere between 13 and 16 pieces -- facilities, space facilities on the African continent, and the Russians have five or six. So they're also very investing heavily in space infrastructure on the African continent.

CRAMER: Thank you both.

And with that, I yield my time.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE)

PETERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And gentlemen, I thank you for -- for your ongoing service as well. You both highlighted, in -- in your written testimony, the National Guard State Partnership Program and how that works to ensure bonds, both at junior level and senior levels with militaries in your region.

In the last four years, the Michigan National Guard has completed 19 events with Liberia, one of their state partnership counterparts. And they have also planned another 20 events, coming up in this next fiscal year. I

had the opportunity to see some of that firsthand in 2017 when I was in Liberia. And I know that the partnership certainly helps build relationships in West Africa as well as other places around the world.

So my question to both of you is, how are you leveraging State Partnership Programs in your area of responsibility? And when I look at the amount of money we're spending -- roughly \$3 million in each of your areas -- maybe give us a sense of what you're doing, is that adequate resourcing? If not, what would be adequate and what would you do with it?

PETERS: General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator.

The state partnership program is a fantastic resource for us. And I didn't have a good appreciation for it until I took this job. And one of the first conferences I went to, all of the -- at the time -- 14 partnerships were present with their National Guard partners from the United States.

It's very responsive. It's very flexible. What I like about it is the states and the countries do a lot of things, sort of, below the radar, and it's a constant kind of presence.

We now have 15 partnerships in Africa. We've just added Rwanda and Nebraska. That's the new one, and we're -- the next one in the queue we're working up towards is Ethiopia. These countries want these partnerships. They talk to their counterparts on the continent that have them and they realize the value of it. So I can't say enough good about the state partnership program.

PETERS: Are they resourced enough?

TOWNSEND: You mentioned -- we have \$2.9 million, about \$3 million that you mentioned. I think they're probably adequate right now. I don't -- what I haven't done is I haven't done an analysis to see, if we add Ethiopia, do we get more money or is that another -- is that another mouth to feed from the same \$2.9 million?

I've got to look into that. I don't know the answer to that, and I'll get back to you on that.

PETERS: Right, thank you.

Admiral Faller?

FALLER: Similar extremely positive experiences -- the habitual relationship that aligns itself very well and the year-after-year touches that build friendships, the training that's provided, the equipment. Most of our exercise support for our major exercises comes from state partnerships. And -- and that's something that we depend on as our force provider. So it's a game-changer for us.

We added Brazil and New York this year, and it was a -- it was a big deal for the Brazilians and the New York National Guard.

In terms of the funding levels, we're seeking to see -- to get a Guard partner rep established in every embassy as part of our embassy country teams. And we're working through the funding with respect to that. And we think there's an opportunity for some additional state partners within our headquarters to augment our force and to increase the understanding of how we can leverage partner expertise.

Cyber is a particular area where some states are excellent in cyber, and how do we better leverage that?

So I would have to get back to you on a level of funding, and so I'll take that for the record. But the -- the authorities piece is also an area, too, so we can use the -- the flexible authorities.

One quick story: the -- and recently in Colombia -- and we have Oklahoma, the state -- it's not a state partner of Colombia, but the Oklahoma Guard has surged ISR support for six months, and to help augment Colombia in getting after FARC dissidents, ELN and narco-traffickers, some tremendous successes with their MC-12s (ph), with just 30 Guardsmen and one contractor's support -- low cost, high payoff.

PETERS: All right. Thank you.

I have a very little time, so I'll try to be -- just a quick answer from each of you. We understand the -- climate change will have a significant impact on security issues across the -- across the planet. The Army War College just recently put out a report suggesting the challenges of climate change.

In the brief time we have left, is there one specific concern related to climate change in your area that you think we should be focusing on?

General, you want to start?

TOWNSEND: Yes, I think probably desertification, that we see expanding south from the Sahara into the Sahel, and water management, I think. Water is going to be a huge point of friction on the African continent in the future.

FALLER: Recently, in Central America -- and we look at the impact on changes in weather to the coffee and the white corn and things like that. So we're really focused on how do we work with whole of government to support the stability necessary so people can stay home and find jobs?

PETERS: Thank you.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

TILLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here. I am -- I was struck by some of your comments. I think even Senator King's comments led me to, kind of, aggregate -- you accomplished so much with few people and few dollars.

Admiral Faller, you said, "We do the best we can with what we have." I've heard "adequate" used several times, and "probably adequate" used one time.

So when we have this discussion about why aren't you doing more, I always wonder whether or not you all should just put a mirror down there and say, "Because you're not giving us the resources to say 'more than adequate,' thinking strategically, doing more, anticipating threats."

To a large extent, the graphics were great, but what we're trying to do is catch up with a pace in China and against China, and in Africa and South America, where it looks like we're -- we're losing -- the gap is narrowing and in some points we're trying to catch up.

Is that an adequate statement?

FALLER: The -- we see our competitive advantage narrowing to our -- in this hemisphere. And we've got to maintain that competitive advantage, and across all the elements of national power and, you know, focus in the military.

So, you know, what does it take to do that? Certainly, a more efficient use of resource we have, leveraging other things -- I mentioned artificial intelligence a couple times. But, at the end of the day, any athletic competition I've ever been in or anything I've ever done takes a person to compete. So zero in any math equation is either zero or unsolvable. So we've got to be present to make a difference.

TILLIS: General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I think that our competitive advantage is not eroding in some cases; they have an advantage. So there's -- there's some areas we're just not going to out-compete China in.

One example is spending money in large amounts on the African continent to build infrastructure. We're not going to build bridges and dams and railroads and stadiums and -- and palaces, like they're doing.

So we have to -- we have to rely on our strengths. And I think our -- our interagency and our military have a lot of those strengths.

So I think that we also don't have to compete everywhere in Africa. We have to pick and choose where we're going to out-compete...

TILLIS: And if I have time...

TOWNSEND: ... China.

TILLIS: ... I'm going to -- I'm going to ask a little bit about that. I mean, we all have to take a look at what's happening around the globe. When all of a sudden, we see the threat of Iran in the Middle East, we have to redeploy assets there, it's got to come from somewhere.

ISR is something that's desperately needed across the board. I've had several discussions with your predecessors, Admiral, and they say the thing that's most frustrating to them is they have enough intelligence to know there's a lot of stuff moving across the border killing American citizens and there's not a damn thing they can do about it. You just don't have the resources on the water or on the ground to do it.

And I really do believe, if you take a look at the number of people who are dying from narco-terrorism, it's remarkable to me, the hundreds of people who die every day in this country. If that was a terrorist organization doing that anywhere in the world, we would stand up a capability and rain down hell on them. But it's happening every single day.

I want to ask you a question because I'll run out of time. As you're looking north of your area of responsibility and into the southern border of Mexico, how much better are we getting at securing that border so you're limiting the pathways that these drugs, guns and -- and victims of human trafficking?

How -- are we starting to tighten and make any progress there, within your area of responsibility? And any comments you can give on Mexico's contribution would be appreciated.

FALLER: We certainly look at the security as it requires its own defense, so border security's almost like a goal line stand -- you need your linebackers and your halfbacks as you move down. So I think the pressure has worked.

We've seen some positive indication but clearly given the migrants that have recently -- migrant caravans that have recently come up, the connection between those caravans and transnational criminal organizations and narco-trafficking and the political instability -- clearly more needs to be done and it's got to be those nations stepping up, the partners have to step up and our whole of government efforts sustained in a way to get after sustainable security. It takes time to get some of these efforts up.

We saw Ambassador Maynes (ph) make progress in El Salvador but it was sustained, whole of government efforts.

TILLIS: And finally, General Townsend, you wake up in the morning, what are the -- the top three things that worry you most about your job?

TOWNSEND: I think the first one is another event like the Manda Bay, an attack where we're just not looking -- looking for it. Then I think what Al-Shabaab might do next, that we're not tracking on out of East Africa. And then just making sure I can do right by the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of AFRICOM.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

MANCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all, especially for your service but thanks for being here to bring us up to speed. Admiral Faller, I want to talk about Guantanamo just a little bit because we talked about deficiencies and the things that you're trying to do there to get more accountability.

My goodness, when it's costing \$13 million per inmate -- \$13 million -- what type of efficiencies do you think you can do to cut into that and how can we better operate and don't you think it's time we look at repositioning these -- these prisoners, that would be more cost effective to the American taxpayers? West Virginians can do a lot with that \$13 million, I can assure you on that one. So any thoughts you might have on Guantanamo, what direction we should go policy for the long term? And then in the short term, efficiencies?

FALLER: Senator, the safe (inaudible) legal treatment of those detainees is a top mission of ours. We've got a significant Guard force aligned at that mission set, some 1,800. As part of this combatant command zero slate review (ph), we're going to take a hard look at if there's a -- a better way, a more efficient way to conduct that mission set. That review is ongoing, I'll report out to the Secretary of Defense soon.

I believe that we ...

MANCHIN: Let me just ask this question. I know -- and -- and I don't -- I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir, but have you all looked to see if -- if we're capable and able -- I understand we have quite a few detainees in the United State prisons and some of our hardened facilities -- that it'd be more effective and efficient -- and I'm not saying I -- that -- geopolitical ramifications of this thing, we've just got to get -- get more cost effective here and do the common sense thing. I can't explain this back home.

FALLER: As -- as we look at our review, we're looking at different models on how we -- what we can learn from. As to whether we would move that detention facility, that's a policy decision ...

MANCHIN: Oh, I understand -- I understand that.

FALLER: I -- I just want to note, Senator, that, you know, we remind our team every day that Cole -- USS Cole, 9/11, and, you know, I know we were all, you know, deeply committed to ensuring that we do right by that and - - and the United States needs the capability to deal with ...

MANCHIN: How many new prisoners have you brought into Guantanamo lately -- this last year? How many new prisoners have we brought to Guantanamo?

FALLER: Sir, we have currently 40 and that number's remained steady.

MANCHIN: So we haven't put any more there?

FALLER: We're not increasing that.

MANCHIN: We're not increasing at all? Where are we putting them? Our combatants -- we -- when we capture these combatants, where do we put them?

FALLER: The detainees that are being taken off the battlefield in other -- in other areas are being dealt with by separate -- different ...

MANCHIN: It's not a \$13 million per person you don't think, do you?

FALLER: I don't know the cost in other areas, sir.

MANCHIN: I'm sorry, sir, on that. Let me -- and -- and General Townsend, if I can go to you. Just give me a comparison basically of where we are troop wise. I think we're up to 80,000 in the Middle East -- deployment, we're up in the 80,000, how much ...

TOWNSEND: I -- I don't know the exact number ...

(CROSSTALK)

MANCHIN: OK, AFRICOM, where are you in AFRICOM?

TOWNSEND: Today on the continent, we have about 5,100 U.S. service members and about 1,000 DOD civilians and contractors.

MANCHIN: So we can say it's quite disproportionate, right?

TOWNSEND: There's a difference.

MANCHIN: With extreme organizations -- when Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda and many more, and the thing that basically -- the amount of manpower you have, dealing with what -- the influence of China now, you've got your hands full there and it looks like we're spread pretty darn thin, not being able to stop this in -- in Africa with what we see coming, cause it's not getting any less intense there and less violent and less threat to the United States of America but most of everything we have is going towards -- is going towards the Middle East and also on fighting the drugs that are coming to this country and money going for different things besides the front line of defense as far as stopping the drugs coming into our country.

Are you being hampered by the amount of resources you're able to -- to -- to call on?

TOWNSEND: Senator, I -- as I mentioned previously, I think that the task we're given today, we're adequately resourced with the exception of ISR and I think that the defense-wide review that all of the combatant commands are participating in ...

MANCHIN: So in order to do the mission, you think you're -- you're -- at 5,100 plus, you're in good -- good shape?

TOWNSEND: To do the task that we're assigned today, that's right. And I think the defense-wide review will potentially decrease the tasks that we have to do.

MANCHIN: You think the task could change -- I mean ...

(CROSSTALK)

MANCHIN: ... very mobile, what's happening, too.

TOWNSEND: The task we're assigned will change.

MANCHIN: Yes, and by that, it could change as far as the demand on resources, right?

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

PERDUE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for your career and for willingness to hang in there and -- and take up these responsibilities. As I see it, the world right now has four naval pinch points, you guys own two of them -- the Suez Canal and Panama Canal -- Malacca Strait, I would argue, is one and now the South China Sea.

I'm concerned about what -- in -- now let's talk about Suez just a minute. If -- if you look at what Russia has done in Syria with Latakia and Tartus and now when they're talking about it in Berbera, down there in Djibouti where we have a -- a -- a base and then now the Chinese have a base there, it's pretty obvious that Russia's increasing their -- their operational tempo in Africa.

General, tell me a little bit -- cause one of the things I worry about most, I've been listening to this stuff for a while here and the thing that I see beginning to develop is the opportunity that Russia and China join together in an area where we're under-deployed and it creates a real strategic challenge for us.

Russia and China are members of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization, along with India and Pakistan, four nuclear powers. But in Africa, it's one of the few places where I can see, other than the Arctic, that they have the potential to really come together and create a real headache for us.

Would you share what Russia's doing in your AOR and -- and how we should be thinking about it as we look toward the NDAA this next year?

TOWNSEND: Yes, Senator. So I -- we provided some handouts there ...

PERDUE: They're very helpful.

TOWNSEND: ... that kind of lay out graphically what Russia is doing. You can see it's -- it's quite a bit.

PERDUE: Yes, sir.

Dramatically increased, wouldn't you say, over the last three years?

TOWNSEND: They have. They have.

So I think Russia's goals are predominantly for their benefit, for extractive resource extraction. They also want to position, particularly in northern Africa, particularly in Libya. They want a position on NATO's southern flank there.

They also, I think, want to thwart, you know, what we're trying to do and present themselves as a great power alternative to the United States.

What I see them doing in -- as with China, though, we're not really seeing a great level of cooperation, with one recent exception. There was an exercise a couple of months ago in South Africa called Exercise Mosi, where the South Africans, the Russians and Chinese navies conducted an exercise on the very southern tip of the continent.

That's the first visible sign of cooperation that we've seen. We're not seeing that in great measure, but they're -- they're all over the continent, and they're doing mostly resource extraction.

PERDUE: One of the things we don't talk about here -- this is a follow-up real quick, and I need to get Admiral Faller about South America with a couple of questions -- but what are our NATO allies doing in Africa to help us stand up to the -- to the requirements that we're trying to fulfill in -- in your AOR?

TOWNSEND: Senator, as you're aware, NATO itself is not greatly active, but our...

PERDUE: I should have said...

TOWNSEND: ... our members...

PERDUE: ... the members of NATO. Thank you.

TOWNSEND: Our NATO -- members of NATO are very involved. In fact, in West Africa the -- we're a tertiary supporter of the French, buttressed by several other European countries there. In East Africa, in Somalia, it's the European Union that's keeping the AMISOM African forces in the field by paying for their -- paying for their sustainment in the field.

So the European partners are doing quite a bit. I believe there's room for them to do more. And I think our government has recently called on Europeans to do more. So has France, by the way.

PERDUE: I'm really concerned. You guys -- your charts are great. The \$145 billion -- already invested in Africa, and a plan to get to \$250 billion in South America within the next five years, by China alone. We put -- I think these numbers are actually (ph) correct. We in \$8 billion of aid into something called Power Africa. And I'm making a point with this. And we attracted something like \$46 billion of foreign direct investment to back that up.

So we've -- we've employed over \$50 billion with only aid (ph) of our seed money. Leverage is a big part of this with our allies, and we've got to continue to do that. And you guys are right in the middle of that.

Admiral, with regard to South America, 40 -- 56 ports, they've already invested in. I'm worried about two things right now, directly. In Argentina, the Georgia National Guard is a partner down there. And you, in our meeting yesterday, talked about this a little bit. But tell us a little bit about the -- the PLA, China's PLA, managing that space station in Argentina?

And then, secondarily, what is the up -- the up-tempo mean in the Panama Canal zone that China has really undertaken just in the last -- since you've taken over in that AOR?

FALLER: As you state, beyond economic, China seeks to take their soft aims and -- and turn them into hard -- hard-power targets. And it's in space; it's in cyber; it's in port access; it's in access generally.

They signed into the previous Panama administration some 40 agreements for access, influence, including I.T. in Panama. Fortunately for us, the current team in Panama, the administration there, has -- has changed policy and has -- has recognized the threat that that could have on their sovereignty.

We look up into the Caribbean, and in one Caribbean nation, China has built a road across the country, 1,200 acres of access granted for Chinese use. The equipment was brought in under less than -- under dubious circumstances. They parked it right next to the embassy so we could be reminded of that. And now they get to collect the tolls for 50 years on that road. And those are just three quick examples of what we see with Chinese influence.

So pivot and look into Venezuela, where China, Russia, Cuba are working alongside each other to block the forces and voices of democracy, particularly in cyber.

PERDUE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

JONES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General and Admiral, for being here. I apologize for being late. Demands on our time these days are a little bit overwhelming.

General Townsend, first let me just say that I join my colleagues in sending condolences to you and the families of those killed and injured in the attack on Manda Bay. I especially want to point out the -- and send our condolences to the family of Army Specialist Mitch Mayfield, who was a valued soldier in the First Battalion of the 58th Aviation Regiment out of Fort Rucker, Alabama. It's an amazing group down there, and he was certainly part of that amazing group.

Admiral, I want to go back to something that I think you may have touched on briefly with Senator Shaheen, concerning the USS Detroit and the littoral combat ships that are being used around. That ship was not made in Alabama. Well, we have a lot of the LCSes made down at Austal down in Mobile and -- that are employed around the world.

And I'd like, if you could, tell me a little bit more about how the LCS has been helpful in the operations in your area and how you might -- is it possible to use, or would you want additional LCSes and -- or other vessels like the EPF to help in this -- in your area of expertise?

FALLER: So the counter-narcotics mission demands platforms for end game, working with law enforcement, to take both the detainees that we gain intel from and the drugs off -- off the streets here in the U.S.

Detroit's had success in that endeavor. They have unmanned aerial vehicle Fire Scout embarked, along with a helicopter. That's a great force package. We've also used the Detroit in a freedom of navigation operation off the coast of Venezuela, in waters that Venezuela claims that international law does not recognize. Detroit did a magnificent job sailing close to the coast of Venezuela and providing that intelligence and reporting back to us.

So the ships are multi-mission. The ships are capable. Unfortunately, it had a rocky start. I think the kinks are being worked out. The Detroit's performance since November has been above standards in all manners of reliability. And we welcome the deployment of the next littoral combat ship to the region. We could use more of these ships that are well suited for the kind of missions in this hemisphere.

JONES: Great. Well, thank you very much.

And as -- as a former U.S. attorney, I'm -- you know, I'm acutely aware of the drug problem that we have in this country and the importation of drugs, and I'd like to do all we can. And I'm -- I have been concerned about the administration's diverting some resources to what I think would be more appropriate for interdiction. But that's for another case, another discussion.

I believe Senator Kaine may have mentioned an American Reassurance Initiative, and I want to give you a chance to talk about that a little bit more, Admiral. There's been discussion for years about developing a Western Hemisphere Security Initiative, but so far we've just not been able to -- to get it down.

Can you tell us what the status of the those conversations is and what impact that may or may not have on the future in your area?

FALLER: Senator, proximity matters and this is our neighborhood and when you can fly to Central America, shorter flights than Washington, D.C. from Miami is -- it's telling of how closely connected we are.

And we've -- there's been various doctrines over the years. We had the Good Neighbor Policy for FDR. We've had the Monroe Doctrine. It think there's been discussion by others and think tanks and Senator Kaine has mentioned it, I think there might be a big idea for this hemisphere, where we take -- we pull together the whole-of-government efforts necessary to recognize that these interior lines, in military speak, this neighborhood matters. China and Russia certainly recognize that.

And to the extent that it takes resources, some of that resources is just our time and attention. And a little goes a long way. If it was a stock, it'd have a great P/E ratio and you'd want to invest in it for the future. And the investments we've made are sound, I think we need to stay the course and look to where we can smartly increase and focus those investments. And big idea associated with something like, as you mentioned, the Western Hemisphere initiative might be a way to start.

JONES: Great. Well, thank you, sir. And I would like to encourage you to stay in touch with my office about it. We're right there in Alabama, right there on the Gulf of Mexico, so it is closer to us than a lot of folks. And my office is more than willing to help initiate those discussions or help develop those. So stay in touch and let us know. So, thank you very much to both of you for your service and for being here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

HAWLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, General, thank you for your service, thank you for being here today.

Admiral, let me start with you. My state of Missouri has been deeply affected by the drugs coming into this country from Latin America. Your testimony has provided examples of certain Latin American countries who are stepping up their effort on the counter-narcotics front. I'm interested in who is maybe not pulling their weight.

Can you give us some examples of places where countries could be doing more but are not doing so -- have refused to do so, whether that's a result of corruption or other reasons?

FALLER: These transnational criminal organizations, \$90 billion they took in last year to fuel instability across the region. They have ungoverned territory in countries across the region that -- and that bridges over into the NORTHCOM AOR. And it's something we look at to the extent that we influence and leverage and put pressure on our partners to do more.

Unfortunately, the worst offender of the whole lot is not a country that we cooperate with right now and that's Venezuela. And we look at Venezuela, where the Maduro regime's being propped up by Cuba, Russia, and China, and we see that narco trafficking that has increased substantially in the air and over land from Columbia into Venezuela. And then it becomes extremely difficult to track as it leaves in commercial -- privatized shipping, private airplanes.

And so we look at countries stepping up. And I think the international effort on pressuring Maduro and that illegitimate regime is a focus area where we can do more.

Within the Central American countries I'd call out Panama, the relationship Missouri Guard has with them, they've stepped up. Costa Rica's stepped up. You've got another blight of no Democracy in Nicaragua, which is another problem site. El Salvador has done more. Guatemala's done more. Some others can do more, they're working on it, but they -- there's certainly more effect that we can have from some of our partners.

HAWLEY: Thank you, very much. That's very helpful. General, let me turn to you. Secretary Esper has called on our European allies to do more in the Sahel. And he has said recently that additional contributions by our European allies, and I'm quoting him here, "could offset whatever changes we make as we consider next steps in Africa." I'm wondering if you agree with that, first, and then I'm going to ask you to elaborate. But do you agree with that statement from the secretary?

TOWNSEND: I do agree with the statement that European contributions could in many ways offset what we're doing there.

HAWLEY: Could you -- could you give us, just on that point, General, some examples -- specific examples of ways you think our NATO allies could contribute more in the Sahel than they currently are doing?

TOWNSEND: Well, the -- sure. The French have called on their European neighbors to contribute more forces to the effort there, trying to directly confront the violent extremists groups there in the Sahel, specifically Mali, and Niger, Burkina Faso. And I think that's something they can do and should do.

Also, we're providing some support that European countries have, specifically NATO allies have a capacity to do. Airlift is one thing we're supporting the French forces with, air refueling for French fighter aircraft is another thing and these are capacities that are resident in many European countries that they could provide. And I think our Department is going to lead an effort to try to get some European partners to do some of those things and offset the support we're providing right now.

I think they don't have the capacity to do some of the more technical types of support. We do some technical intelligence type of support that is fairly exquisite and I -- there's not a lot of countries that can do that at that same level, but they can off -- mitigate a lot of the support that we provide.

HAWLEY: Thank you very much.

General, let me ask you about China. I'm very concerned by the PLA's presence in Djibouti. Do you worry that the PLA could use its forces there to contest our ability to transit the Bab al-Mandeb or adjacent waterways in a future crisis?

TOWNSEND: On a daily basis, I don't worry a great deal about the Chinese presence in Djibouti at their base but the potential is there. So we keep an eye on it, we're not blind to that. But there is a potential there in some future crisis that they could potentially use that base there to cause problems.

HAWLEY: Let me just ask you, in your assessment, what should we be doing now to assure our access to that maritime chokepoint in a future scenario?

TOWNSEND: I think we're doing that to a great extent and that is competing, making sure that those countries that are there, Djibouti being one of them, Somalia being another one. Those countries prefer the United States as a strategic partner. What -- I'm not saying that they shouldn't interact with China or Russia at all. But to what -- what I want is at 2 o'clock in the morning, when the secretary of State calls a head of state in Africa and says America needs to come in tonight, they say yes to us and they don't say yes to the Chinese or the Russians.

HAWLEY: My time has expired. Admiral, I want to ask you a few questions about the Chinese activity in your AOR. I'll submit those for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

GILLIBRAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Townsend, General Ismail Qaani, who assumed the position as the head of Iran's Quds Force after Soleimani's killing, has vowed to strike back at the United States and has called on Hezbollah to exact further revenge. The Voice of America reported earlier this month that Iran may seek to strike back in Africa, citing the rise of Iranian military influence on the continent and the potential of softer targets.

What have you been doing to ensure the safety of our service members and American citizens in Africa? And second, how have plans to reduce U.S. forces in Africa accounted for the possible increase in future terrorist activity? How well equipped and trained are local forces in Africa?

TOWNSEND: Senator, to your first question, we are following those reports. There's intelligence reporting that comports with that. That both the Quds Force and Lebanese Hezbollah I think are looking for opportunities to strike back at America wherever, and we think one of those places is certainly Africa. We're watching and listening carefully for that. We're not taking any specific measures yet, don't really have a good enough picture to take actions but we are watching and listening for that.

Then on your second question, they -- the -- the quality of African security forces varies widely depending on where we're talking about in Africa. So some are exceptionally good and others are not so good. And you know, the partners that we work with, trying to get them all to a level where they can at least be self-sufficient would be the ideal, they could handle their own security threats on their own.

GILLIBRAND: We -- I took a codel a few years ago and we did stop in Chad to assess our support and how well they were doing to support Nigeria. Do you have any thoughts about how that relationship is developing? Is it moving forward or is it retreated?

TOWNSEND: I think that relationship is pretty sound. There's a multinational joint task force that operates there. All those countries around the Lake Chad Basin are operating there. Chad has recently re-deployed some forces from Nigeria, but that was part of a scheduled move not some sort of breakdown in the relationship or the partnership there in the joint task force so I think that that group is still -- is functioning.

GILLIBRAND: OK. Earlier this month the Al-Shabaab launched an attack on Manda Airfield, killing an American service member and two contractors. The New York Times reported that Al-Shabaab used the attacks as a message to African forces that American troops would abandon them just as they did with the Syrian Kurds.

At the same time, an African Center for Strategic Studies report stated that the activity of Africa's extremists groups has doubled since 2013.

How has the decision to withdraw support from Syria impacted the resolve and trust of our African partners?

TOWNSEND: I don't know that our decision to withdrawal from Syria has affected their calculus. That has not come up in any discussions I've had with African leaders. But, you know, the thing that they're all -- always looking for is can we count on you as a partner. And -- but I haven't heard that they're looking towards our withdrawal from Syria as some indication.

GILLIBRAND: And have you -- do you have any plans at this point or any strategies to reduce our forces in Africa and what do you think the impact of those reductions could be in our counterterrorism efforts?

TOWNSEND: So we're engaged in this blank slate review process with the Department of Defense and I think that's a necessary and a good process to do to make sure that our resources are always pointed at our highest priorities.

We've made some presentations to and recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. He's still in a decision cycle and I don't want to get in front of his decision about what may happen with our troop presence on the continent.

I will say that there are threats to America that will emanate from the African continent, both global power or great power threats as well as violent extremists organizations.

GILLIBRAND: A quick question, in my remaining time, on China. Both China and Russia have been making large economic investments in both Africa and Latin America in order to expand their influence around the globe.

When we were in Africa, they were investing in Djibouti and doing a huge investment in the airfield there. This is yet another example of how the battle for world leadership this century cannot be fought by just spending more

money on weapons. Instead, we have to learn lessons from the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and build lasting relationships and partnerships.

What role do your COCOMs play in any whole of government coordination aimed at aligning all of our levels -- levers of power towards a common goal in your respective AORs?

FALLER: With the -- what you cite about China and Russia, it's so key, Senator. We're -- we're -- we're seeing it in Cuba, 90 miles from Key West, where China and Russia are working alongside, certainly not for the U.S. national interest or for any partnerships in the hemisphere.

But our partnerships, our mil-to-mil partnerships are key, and working with our partners to build strong institutions -- it's these institutions that do the right thing and have trust and respect the rule of law and human rights.

And we have a Human Rights Office in -- in SOUTHCOM that we -- we staff to work on these sorts of things that are part of professionalism and -- and part of trust building.

TOWNSEND: Senator, I'd just say that our whole of government -- we -- we are -- our level of resourcing is such that if we want to get anything done for America on the African continent, we have to do it as a whole of government, working with Department of State and a -- USAID. That's just in our DNA in AFRICOM, how we operate every day.

GILLIBRAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

COTTON: I want to talk about the biggest and the most important story in the world, the Wuhan coronavirus. This coronavirus is a catastrophe on the scale of Chernobyl for China but actually it's probably worse than Chernobyl, which was localized in its effect. The coronavirus could result in a global pandemic.

While you were all sleeping overnight, the number of diagnosed cases in China increased by 30 percent. Now, let me be clear, that's not new cases, that is just newly admitted cases. It is probably several orders of magnitude higher than that.

Also while you were sleeping, China now has its entire border with Russia closed, 2,600 miles -- Russia has closed that border. El Al has shut down travel between Israel and China. Air France has shut down China -- between -- travel between China and France. And that's in addition to all of the other countries that have already shut down travel.

From what we know so far, and there's still many unknowns, this virus could have both a long incubation period, as long as 14 days, and individuals could be contagious while asymptomatic, which was not the case with SARS in 2003.

Furthermore, from some cases, it appears the virus could be aerosolized, which means it doesn't require the kind of contact that you have with, say, a married couple kissing each other or a family living in close quarters in a hotel or apartment, but rather the distances we are all sitting apart right now.

Yet China is still lying about all of this. They've been lying about it from the very beginning and you don't need their history of lying about SARS in 2003 -- though it is relevant here -- you just have to see what's happened over the last two months.

We now know that the first case manifested no later than -- no later than December 1, even though China didn't reveal it to the WHO until a month later on December 31st, when they continued to hide it from their own citizens and they continued to say that it had been contained inside of Wuhan. Today, it is in every single province in China.

They also claimed for almost two months until earlier this week that it had originated in a seafood market in Wuhan, that locals had contracted it from animals in, say, bad soup or steak tartare. That is not the case. The Lancet published a study last weekend demonstrating that of the original 40 cases, 14 of them had no contact with the seafood market, including patient zero.

As one epidemiologist just said, that virus went into the seafood market before it came out of the seafood market. We still don't know where it originated. Could've been another seafood market, could've been a farm, could've been a food processing company.

I would note that China -- that Wuhan also has China's only biosafety level four super laboratory that works with the world's most deadly pathogens to include, yes, coronavirus. Now, look at China's own actions. They have quarantined 60 million people -- 60 million, more than the entire population of our West Coast. They've shut down schools indefinitely, class is canceled nationwide indefinitely. Hong Kong, a part of China, has basically shut down all travel from the mainland.

That's why it is essential that we immediately stop all travel on commercial aircraft between China and the United States. Make exceptions, of course, for American citizens to come back, as we just brought back yesterday, allowing essential trade to flow as long as crews on ships and aircraft are not allowed to go into the general population in America, and making exceptions, of course, for medical personnel to go into China, to try to get a handle on this.

It is essential that we take those steps and essential that we get to the bottom of China's deceit and incompetence on this measure. And gentlemen, I -- I raise this with you because you're responsible in your combatant commands for some countries that have the most fragile public institutions, to include the most fragile public health institutions in the world.

So I ask, even though as of this morning there are not yet confirmed cases of coronavirus in your combatant commands, though I suspect there will be soon, what is your assessment about the ability of the governments in your combatant commands to handle a potential global pandemic like this. General Townsend?

TOWNSEND: Thanks, Senator. So there are not in -- that I am aware of any confirmed cases, as you mentioned, but there are some suspected cases. The first suspected -- reported suspected case I heard of is in Djibouti, which you would imagine with a significant Chinese presence there.

So the -- the capacity of African nations to deal with this problem varies widely. For example, in Eastern Africa, Central East Africa there's -- they've been dealing with Ebola and they've been dealing with Ebola largely on their own and doing a pretty good job of it, so I think capacity there. But anywhere else in Africa is probably not to that degree.

COTTON: Admiral Faller?

FALLER: The Venezuela crisis has already strained the social services of many of the nations, as -- as you're aware, Senator. We had to deploy the hospital ship Comfort twice in one year to (inaudible) deployment 12 different nations and in one five-day span, it can do the equivalent of a whole month for a region of some of the major countries.

So I would be extremely concerned, like General Townsend -- the capacities vary widely but in many cases they're strained and to the limit. I'd be very concerned if we saw this spread.

COTTON: Thank you. As a -- as a defensive measure, I just say again it is essential that we shut down all commercial air travel immediately between the United States and China. As an offensive measure, because that probably won't stop it entirely and because if it becomes a global pandemic, we have to deal with countries with

very limited capabilities here, we need a Manhattan Project level effort to work with our best research scientists and laboratories in this country to develop a vaccine as quickly as possible.

INHOFE: (OFF-MIKE).

END