



News Transcript

Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Carter and Gen. Dunford in the Pentagon Briefing Room

Press Operations

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph F. Dunford

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER: Listen, thank you. Can everybody hear me? Thanks for -- for being here. The chairman and I really appreciate your being here, look forward to talking to you, both of us, this morning.

I'll start. I just had the solemn honor of laying a wreath at the African-American Civil War Memorial here in Washington, honoring the 200,000 African-American soldiers and sailors who served in the U.S. Army and Navy during the Civil War. Their service helped to end the Civil War and free over four million slaves, and their legacy stands as a reminder of the true price of freedom for us all. And this was an important signification of the end today of Black History Month.

I also want to note that this week marks the 25th anniversary of our victory in the Gulf War and express my admiration and thanks to the veterans of that war and their families. As we remember the contributions of the fighting men and women in that war, our thoughts are also always with our service members of today who serve in the same theater.

Last month, I outlined our strategy to deliver ISIL a lasting defeat in a speech to some of those service members when I spoke to the soldiers from the 101st Airborne at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I described to our troopers the three key objectives of our campaign. First, to destroy ISIL and its parent tumor in Iraq and Syria and collapse its two power centers in Raqqa and Mosul. Second, to combat the metastases of the ISIL tumor worldwide. Third, to protect the homeland.

Many of the troops I spoke to at Fort Campbell last month are now rotating into Iraq to assume the train, advise and assist mission which soldiers from the 82nd Airborne have been fulfilling so effectively. Because of our strategy and our determination to accelerate our campaign, momentum is now on our side and not on ISIL's. Our partners on the ground in Iraq have re-taken Ramadi and are making gains in Anbar, while at the same time, we're making operationally significant strides in our campaign to dismantle ISIL in Syria.

In the last few days, capable local forces supported by the United States have reclaimed Shaddadi, a critical node for ISIL training and logistics, as well as for its oil enterprise. As our partners take control of Shaddadi, I believe we will learn a great deal more about ISIL's criminal networks, its criminal enterprise and what it does to sustain them.

By encircling and taking this town, we are also working to sever the last major artery between Raqqa and Mosul, an operation critical to dissecting ISIL's parent tumor into two parts in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, we're bombing ISIL's banks as well as oil wells they've taken over or coerced others into operating on their behalf. We're also using cyber tools to disrupt ISIL's ability to operate and communicate over the virtual battlefield.

As we continue to pursue ISIL's lasting defeat, Secretary Kerry has shown great determination in pursuing the diplomatic and political track in Syria, which included the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement last week. If properly implemented and adhered to, we believe this cessation can lead to an overall decline in violence and hasten the delivery of humanitarian aid. It could be a first step towards an end of the civil war and the suffering of the Syrian people.

We're constantly monitoring the situation on the ground and we will see in coming days if all parties back commitments they have made in words with their actions. Let me also make it crystal clear, there is no cessation of hostilities in the counter-ISIL campaign. These operations continue unabated, as I mentioned -- and as I mentioned earlier, they're being accelerated across both Syria and Iraq.

When Chairman Dunford and I testified before Congress last week, we described how we intend to back out our accelerated operations against ISIL with increased funding in our 2017 budget submission, requesting \$7.5 billion, which is 50 percent more than last year. And as I described in my budget testimony, ISIL is one of five challenges that we must address as part of the department's mission to defend this country.

Two of the other four challenges reflect a return to great power of competition; one challenge is in Europe, where we're taking a strong and balanced approach to deter Russian aggression. The other challenge is in the Asian Pacific, where China is rising -- which is fine, but behaving aggressively, which is not.

Meanwhile, two other longstanding challenges pose threats in specific regions. North Korea is one; that's why our forces on the Korean Peninsula remain ready, as they say, "To fight tonight." The other is Iran, because while the nuclear accord is a good deal for preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, we must still deter Iranian aggression and counter Iran's malign influence against our friends and allies, especially Israel.

We don't have the luxury of choosing which threat we may face next, but we do have the ability to set the course for how best to prepare for the future. A common theme across our budget is that we, in the Pentagon, have to innovate and think outside our five-sided box.

And that's why I'm continuing my effort to rebuild bridges between the Department of Defense and some of our nation's most innovative industries, enhancing ties that will strengthen this department and our nation's security.

This will be a key theme of my trip to the West Coast, that begins this evening. Over the next few days, I'll be discussing two technologies, cyber security initiatives and a lot more with some of the top minds in the tech world.

I'll also be meeting with some of our troops, who are using advanced technologies to keep us safe and prepare for every challenge on the horizon.

One command that helps me and the chairman think through each of the five challenges that we now face is our special operations command. And I want to congratulate Lieutenant General Raymond -- known as Tony, Tony Thomas on his nomination by President Obama to assume command at Special Operations Command.

As I mentioned last month at Tampa, the current SOCOM commander, General Joe Votel, will soon take command at CENTCOM.

General Thomas has big boots to fill, but he has proven himself a -- as a soldier, special operator and leader, time and time again over the course of his illustrative career.

The president, Chairman Dunford and I have complete confidence in his capability to assume the vital, worldwide responsibilities of SOCOM.

So, I want to thank General Thomas, General Votel and their families for their continuing service, and I hope the Senate will act quickly on their nominations.

I also want to express my deep thanks to General Lloyd Austin for his inspired leadership as commander of CENTCOM during an extraordinary time and throughout his remarkable career. And finally, I want to note that later today, President Obama will present the Medal of Honor to Senior Chief Petty Officer Edward Byers, who visited my office last week with his wonderful family.

And by the way, I hope you will take the time to watch the ceremony later today -- in fact, later this morning. It was remarkable honor for me to speak to such an understated guy, a Seal who willingly used himself as a shield for the hostage he was rescuing, exhibiting a tenacity to disarm an assailant, but the composure to assess the situation and ask about the hostage's condition during the whole fight.

For the rest of his life, Ed Byers will be justifiably looked up to by every special operator who goes out on another mission, that most of the mission will never know about, but whose valor allows all of us to dream our dreams and build better lives for our children. He and his fellow warriors are the reason the chairman and I get up each and every day.

And with that, let me turn it over to the general.

GENERAL JOSEPH DUNFORD: Okay, thanks, Mr. Secretary. And good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's good to be with you this morning.

Let me begin by echoing the secretary's comments about the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who served in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, this being the 25th anniversary, and also to recognize Tony Thomas' leadership, to congratulate him as he is nominated for special operations command, and most importantly, to recognize the courage of Senior Chief Byers, who, as the secretary said, will receive his award in a minute.

Just one other thing before taking questions. There is one other individual I would like to recognize this morning, and it's a soldier who served for 37 years. This week, John Campbell will turn over the Resolute Support mission. I will have an opportunity to recognize him in person here, later this week.

But just want to recognize his 18 months in the leadership position at Resolute Support in Afghanistan, under very difficult conditions. And I would just tell you that we are fortunate to have had him during this critical period of transition, and also recognize his sacrifice of his family as well, who have been without him for the last 18 months.

So with that, I'm prepared with the secretary to take your questions.

SEC. CARTER: And I'll amend to that and we're going to have an opportunity to recognize J.C. He has done a superb job.

Bob.

Q: Mr. Secretary, I actually, have a question for you. Mr. Secretary, you mentioned with regard to the counter-ISIL campaign that momentum as said, is now on our side. One of the big challenges looming ahead of course is Mosul.

Have there been some movements by the Iraqis to move some troops up closer to Mosul. I'm wondering if what your current thinking is about whether the U.S. role will have to be something closer to the fight when it comes time to take Mosul, in term of, you know, something beyond what they did, or is Ramadi more the model where the U.S. is continued with this current approach?

SEC. CARTER: Well, I will start and then ask the chairman to pitch in. We do -- out of working with the Iraqi forces to prepare forces for the envelopment and ultimately the seizure of Mosul, absolutely. We expect it to be like Ramadi in the sense that the Iraqi security forces under the control of the government of Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi, will be in the lead, but we will be enabling them.

And to just get to your specific question, will we do more to enable them as they go north? Yes, we fully expect to do that. And when we have the opportunity, the time, the place and the strategic effect that only then, yes.

That only the United States can do -- we've indicated a willingness to do more and I expect that we will have opportunities to do that as we move north.

GEN. DUNFORD: Just very quickly Bob. I mean, where we are in the process, you know, the Iraqis have developed their plan. And so they have provided that to General MacFarland. And now there is a process going on where General MacFarland is looking at the Iraqi plan, working with the CENTCOM to make recommendations as to what we can do and the secretary has called it before, capability enhancements, things that accelerate the campaign.

I, like the secretary, think we would do more in Mosul than Ramadi just because of the order of magnitude of the operation up there in Mosul would indicate to me that we would have more U.S. support in Mosul than we did in Ramadi. And I will certainly defer to make those recommendations to the secretary sometime in the near future.

But I'd also, just on Mosul, say that the operations against Mosul have already started. In other words, you know, we're isolating Mosul, even as we speak, the same thing with Raqqa. So it is not something that will happen in the deep, deep future.

People have confused maybe when would Mosul be secure with when will operations start. I would tell you both, both in terms of the cyber capability as the secretary spoke about as well as operations to cut the line of communications and begin to go after some of the targets in and around Mosul, those operations have already started.

Q: May I ask a better question for General Dunford on a different topic which is Afghanistan which you mentioned in your opening statement.

Given the Taliban's resurgent activity in -- on Helmand and these attacks over the weekend and in Kabul and the corner of province, I wonder if you think the trendlines are headed in the wrong direction and are you considering the possibility that toward the end of this year, you will need to keep more American troops there doing more than you currently planned?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yes, Bob what I would say is in many ways what happened to this summer wasn't that surprising when you think about the difficulty and the political transition over the last two years. I mean, when we looked at this in 2013, we assumed a certain progression, a ministerial capacity, core-level capabilities, the intelligence enterprise, special operations and aviation.

And, any of the assumptions we made in 2013 didn't obtain. The aviation capability is not developing as fast as we would've wanted to. And frankly, many of the Afghan forces were tied up, focused on supporting two major elections and a difficult political transition.

So, I would say that this summer probably, we have lessons learned. One is, I mean, the Afghan forces at the end of the day, were resilient, but

they still do have those capability gaps that have been identified and we're certainly looking at that right now and I will be prepared to make recommendations to the secretary as to how we can incorporate the lessons learned from 2015 into more effective operations in 2016.

But it would certainly be premature now to talk about force levels or capabilities or those kinds of things. But again, the key thing is that we will benchmark the recommendations on the lessons learned in 2015 and what we assess to be the environment of 2016.

David?

Q: I would like to see if I could pin you down a little bit on your statement that you are prepared to do more in Mosul.

Are you talking about more of the same, in other words, greater numbers of advisers? Or are you talking about qualitative change and specifically are you talking about putting advisers closer to the front line and are you talking about using forward air controllers to call in strikes?

And also, if I could ask you to be more specific on the cyber attacks that you're launching against ISIS.

SEC. CARTER: Let me -- let me start on the first one and then ask the chairman on both of them. With respect to the first one, I think we're talking about both, we're talking about more of the things that we did in Ramadi, but we are talking about additional things of the kind that we've offered previously but that weren't necessary in the case of Ramadi but might be helpful -- might well be helpful as Iraqi forces move north. And that includes, in addition to directly enabling Iraqi forces, some things like logistics and bridging and there are a whole lot of capabilities. So we fully expect to be doing more and differing in both scale and the kinds of things that we're doing.

With respect to cyber, I think you're referring to our use of cyber which we have talked about generally. In the counter-ISIL campaign in -- particularly in Syria to interrupt, disrupt ISIL's command and control, to cause them to lose confidence in their networks, to overload their network so that they can't function, and do all of these things that will interrupt their ability to command and control forces there, control the population and the economy.

So this is something that's new in this war, not something you would've seen back in the Gulf War, but it's an important new capability and it is an important use of our Cyber Command and the reason that Cyber Command was established in the first place.

Let me ask the chairman --

GEN. DUNFORD: The -- I mean, the secretary said that we'd have both, you know, an increase in quantity and quality. I would say on the -- on the quantity side, as I mentioned, the operation in Mosul is much bigger than Ramadi, and frankly, the training of the forces that are going to conduct operations in Mosul has already started. So we're already working with them.

But I think back to the theme of lessons learned like Afghanistan, we look at Ramadi, we've worked with the Iraqis very closely to take a look at the lessons learned, and there's a couple of things we want to do. One is we want to position ourselves to most effectively support combined arms for the -- for the Iraqis as they conduct operations, and the second piece is we want to make sure that we have uninterrupted flow of logistic support.

So when I -- when I make a recommendation to the secretary, it will really -- that's where the qualitative changes would be made. We take a really hard look at the lessons learned in Ramadi, say how do we best posture U.S. forces to enable what is an Iraqi operation, but how do we best posture up force is to make to combined arms are effectively delivered when and where the Iraqis need them to maintain momentum going into Mosul and then to make sure that they have the logistics support necessary to continue operations without what we would describe as an operational pause.

So that's where I think that both qualitative and qualitative discussion into play. It isn't fundamentally different than what we are doing in Ramadi, it's doing the things we were doing in Ramadi better, which is train Iraqi forces, provide combined arms and provide logistics support.

So the broad functions that we'll perform will be much the same. This still is -- and I would -- put an exclamation point at the end of the sentence -- this still is an Iraqi operation, but how we provide enabling support, I think, will be informed by the lessons learned. And I suspect there will be some changes. I certainly have seen some things we can do better.

Q: Can I follow up on just one point?

SEC. CARTER: Phil? Sorry, go ahead, David.

Q: (off-mic.) We get a list of airstrikes that you've conducted against ISIS, can we add to that now a list of cyber attacks?

SEC. CARTER: Probably not. I think we can describe some of the effects there, but because the methods we're using are new, some of them will be surprising and some of them are applicable to other challenges that I described, other than ISIL, that we have around the world. David, it'll probably be as usual, but we'll be -- we'll tell you what we can tell you, but not in a way that compromises operational security.

I think we can describe the effects that we're seeking and some of the effects that we achieve.

Q: Have you achieved effects so far?

SEC. CARTER: We have. We have. But we're learning more and we're accelerating this, just as we're accelerating everything else we're doing both in Syria and Iraq, whether it be the air war, the ground war, the cyber war we're looking to accelerate as well.

Anything that you can add?

GEN. DUNFORD: David, you know, the secretary has talked a lot about physically isolating ISIL. In other words, isolating Raqqa, isolating Mosul, keeping the lines of communications between the two being separate, dividing Iraq and Syria up, making life difficult for the -- for the -- for ISIL. I think conceptually, that's exactly the same thing we're trying to do in the cyber world. In other words, we're trying to both physically and virtually isolate ISIL, limit their ability to conduct command and control, limit their ability to communicate with each other, limit their ability to conduct operations locally and tactically.

But I'll be one of the first ones arguing that that's about all we should talk about. Most importantly, we don't want the enemy to know when, where and how we're conducting cyber operations. We don't want them to have information that will allow them to adapt over time. We want them to be surprised when we conduct cyber operations. And frankly, they're going to experience some friction that's associated with us and some friction that's just associated with the normal course of events in dealing in the information age. And frankly, we don't want them to know the difference. So they -- it's to our advantage to maintain the element of surprise with regard to conducting cyber operations.

SEC. CARTER: Phil?

Q: I wanted to ask you a quick question on Syria. If the cease-fire does not hold, and there's some signs now that it won't, is there any point at which Syria's civil war affects your strategy combating ISIL? You've -- there's been an attempt to try to distinguish these two things, but at what point -- is there any point at which what happens in the Syrian civil war affects what you're doing there?

SEC. CARTER: Well, what we're hoping, obviously, with the cessation of hostilities is that humanitarian assistance can be provided. That's the principal objective here and it may -- that may, and I certainly hope we all do hope, that that leads to a furthering of the political resolution of the Syrian civil war.

The Syrian civil war is -- was one of the causes of ISIL in the first place, so it is important that that be resolved. But in the meantime, it -- we're -- it's not going to get in the way of our accelerating the counter-ISIL campaign. So it has -- the events there having no effect on our counter-ISIL campaign, as I said, there's certainly no cessation of hostilities there. But it is -- it would be very desirable this, which is just the cessation of hostilities now were to lead to the conditions for a resolution of the Syrian civil war.

(CROSSTALK)

GEN. DUNFORD: I mean, the political process and our operations against ISIL come together in the future anyway. I mean, the theory -- the case is we -- we can dismantle, meaning reduce the capabilities of ISIL and all the things I spoke about a minute ago, but at the end of the day, a lasting peace in Syria is going to -- is going to require addressing the grievances associated with the civil war and a political process that leads to transition.

So from my perspective, what we're doing on the ground against ISIL, again, dismantling their capability, but the facts on the ground are in support of the overall political process, which is the solution in Syria.

Q: Secretary, what is the current status of any efforts by the U.S. and coalition nations to confront ISIS in Libya? Would -- does that plan call for airstrikes only? There were recent photos of U.S. special operations forces on the ground in Libya. Were they assessing the possible allied forces they could find on the ground? And does it require, for any kind of sustained air campaign against ISIS, to have a viable government in place in Tripoli before the U.S. and the coalition would launch --

SEC. CARTER: Let me start with that last part first, because that's the key, which is try to get a government in Tripoli that can win the support of all of the many factions in Libya, so that Libya isn't a kind of disordered state that provides fertile ground for ISIL to spread.

Now, one thing that the Libyans -- they disagree among themselves a lot. The one thing that is very true is that they don't like foreigners being there. They don't like foreigners who come into their territory, that's where ISIL is. They don't like foreigners who come in and take their oil, foreigners who come in and try to dominate their people.

So we fully expect that when, which we hope is soon, a government is formed in Libya, it will welcome not just the United States, but the coalition. And I should say here that Italy in particular, being so close, has offered to take the lead there, but we have already promised that we will strongly support them. And so I hope that's part of the future there.

But in the meantime, to get to the other part of your question, we're going to protect ourselves against ISIL in Libya, as everywhere else, and as you probably know, we have taken some strikes there and will continue to do that.

But the important objective here is to put Libya back on the path to having a government that can give the people decent governance and hold the country together. And then, they're not going to want ISIL hanging around. The Libyans are very proud people that are not going to want a lot of foreigners marauding around their country.

And Joe, you want to --

GEN. DUNFORD: And Jim, I'm not sure I can add much more, but what I would say is that the recommendations that we have made for military campaigns, so the question of what are we exactly doing, are very informed by the priority of seeding the Government of National Accord, and not doing anything on the ground that would undermine the political transition in Libya, which we think is very important.

Having said that, and I'd foot stomp the comment the secretary made is, we have very much aware of ISIL's expansion in Libya, and the operation -- or the strike in Sabratha was designed to get after that.

And so, I think what you see is, where there is opportunity to conduct operations against ISIL, to disrupt them at this point and not undermine the political process, that is where we are. At some point in the future, if I believe we are at risk with that strategy, I will certainly come back to the secretary and make some different recommendations.

But right now, it very much is informed by a balance between wanting to contain or -- disrupt, better said -- ISIL, and at the same time, ensure that the GNA has a full opportunity to be seated.

Q: And if I could follow up, please? Does requirement to have a government in place a very tough lesson learned, after coalition forces essentially drove Moammar Gadhafi from power and left the entire country lawless and open to the spread of terrorism?

SEC. CARTER: Well, the situation now is one in which the country is divided. There are a number of different parties to aspire to being part of the government. We -- and by the way, we are not the only ones -- are trying to get them to reach a Government of National Accord. That would restore in Libya a coherent government and give the people what they sorely need, which is an end to the violence, Libyan against Libyan.

And at that point, I am certain that they'll want help and the international community will help turn against ISIL.

Tony?

Q: I have follow-ups on cyber.

I want to be clear what you're doing --

SEC. CARTER: (off-mic.)

GEN. DUNFORD: You know, I just -- Jim, I just -- I'd go to my French counterpart as a good way to -- I think it is less about the specific lessons learned just in Libya than it is broadly this, and this is what my French counterpart says, "Look, it is one thing to win the war. You have got to win the peace."

And so, if you look back at endeavors really, over the past decade-plus, ensuring that there is a political transition which leads to enduring peace and stability is critical to make the contributions and the sacrifices in combat operations meaningful.

And I think that's -- that's, I think, the focus in Libya, is to win the peace as well as win the war. And you have got to start off having a vision of what that win the peace means, even as you conduct combat operations.

Q: I just want to -- on the cyber issue.

GEN. DUNFORD: Go ahead.

Q: This is clearly different than traditional electronic warfare, where you're jamming -- you actually actively jam or try to disrupt. This is beyond that capability.

SEC. CARTER: It is -- it is beyond that. We do that, too. The two enable one another and complement each other, that is electronic warfare delivering through radio frequency means effects of the same kind and cyber.

Electronic warfare has been a long as radio has, and obviously, cyber is something new.

Q: Is this a template for operations? That PACOM, EUCOM, AFRICOM, all the commands could replicate in their regions, if in fact, they needed to use this new capability?

SEC. CARTER: Yeah, well, some of the tools, and certainly CYBERCOM itself was devised specifically to make the United States proficient and powerful in this tool of war.

And so, yes, all of the other combatant commanders are beneficiaries of CYBERCOM in the same kinds of capabilities.

GEN. DUNFORD: Tony, I'm not sure I would use the word template. I think what we are building is an inventory of tools that create capabilities that the combatant commanders can employ.

You know, I don't think -- you can't replicate what we're doing today against ISIL in Iraq and Syria elsewhere in the world. What you can do is leverage the tools that have been developed for this particular operation, for other operations down the road.

SEC. CARTER: Barbara?

Q: For both of you gentlemen, I know there is some constraints in talking about special operations forces, but you have both talked about it publicly before.

At this point -- I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary, you have -- going back to your public comments, Mr. Secretary, that the expeditionary targeting force would collect intelligence and conduct raids, in your words.

Where -- what -- as you view it right now, you have talked about this accelerating. What -- how much reliance -- what are they bringing, broadly speaking, to the table for you? Do you envision the possibility of seeking more?

And to also -- so I'm interested in your thoughts on where you stand now on looking at special operations forces. --Who's also publicly acknowledged last week that they helped in taking Shaddadi back. So there's a lot of public information out there. Very quickly, on cyber as well, in your mind, what is the trade-off on being able to track their intelligence networks? If you disrupt them, is there a risk in your mind that they simply go underground, that they go low-tech and that cyberattacks could simply drive them into an alternative strategy that might be more difficult to track?

SEC. CARTER: Okay. Let me go to -- I'm going to second the chairman's shaking of his head on specifics with respect to the expeditionary targeting force and just say --

Q: Just broadly --

SEC. CARTER: Yes, broadly speaking, it's a tool that we introduced as part of our -- the accelerated operations to conduct raids of various kinds, seizing places and people, freeing hostages and prisoners of ISIL, and making it such that ISIL has to fear that anywhere, anytime, it may be struck. The only thing I'll say is the ETF is in position, it is having an effect and operating, and I expect it to be a very effective part of our acceleration campaign. I don't have any more on that.

I'll say something about your second part of the question, that ask the chairman to pitch in. The -- as we disrupt the ISIL communications via cyber or other methods, sometimes we do drive them to other means. But it cuts both ways. Sometimes, those other means are easier for us to listen to. So by taking away some of the ways that they are used to operating, they're protected and that they regard as an information sanctuary, drives them to other, including older technologies. And so one way or another, it is a very effective tool.

We have to -- we can't allow them to freely command and control forces that are enemy forces, so it's just like any other war. We have to attack their command-and-control. This is one of the ways that -- of doing it. But it may have, actually, a beneficial effect of driving them to the kinds of communications that it's in fact easier for us to disrupt, and to get your question, listen to also.

GEN. DUNFORD: (inaudible), I would say your question about the intel trade-offs is a fair and a good question. I mean, it is something we take a hard look at, and -- and each and every time we conduct an operation, that's one of the variables we consider in whether or not you conduct an operation and how to conduct an operation. So it is -- it is a piece of it.

But at the end of the day, what we're trying to do and I think what the secretary was getting at is we're trying to make life difficult for ISIL and we're trying to stay step ahead of them. So we're trying to force them to make changes. We're trying to make them -- disrupt their communications, and then we can anticipate some of the adaptations they're going to make and be a step ahead of them, and that's -- that's what we're trying to do.

Q: Very, very quickly. So Mr. Secretary, what -- is what you're saying that as you think about this cyber strategy, some of the goal is to get them off -- I mean, you said older communications. Is the goal to get them off the dark web and back into cell phones that you can track?

SEC. CARTER: Well, I would say the goal is to not allow them to communicate and exploit the Internet for nefarious purposes and to dominate territory and people in Iraq and Syria and ultimately globally. But you were asking what other kinds of effects it may have, and it can go both ways. The chairman indicated we look at the intelligence trade-off and that can go both ways. But the objective is to make it much more difficult for them to command and control their forces.

Tara?

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I have a question for each of you.

First, Mr. Secretary, last week at the confirmation hearings of Brad Carson, Senator McCain called your force of the future initiative an outrageous waste of time. And my question is does he have a point at all in that, you know, there's ongoing military operations against ISIS in at least four countries, there's the question of security with Russia and China? Is this really the right time to be taking on such a huge overhaul of personnel?

And then I have one for General Dunford.

SEC. CARTER: Well, we need to do these things at the same time. We need to carry out operations in the present, we need to prepare for future operations, but the point of the force of the future is to -- is a recognition that the forces we're using today are the finest the world has ever known, and they are that because we have the finest people.

And what we're -- we need to do is make sure that we attract in the future in our -- because remember, it's an all-volunteer force -- that we can attract the very best and also that we can retain the very best. So that's why we look at such things as family programs, maternity leave, pay, all of these things are important to attracting and retaining the very best.

Most of these do not in fact cost very much money. That's not really the principal limitation. Now, you know, I have to say we're not a company, so we're not Wal-Mart, we're not -- we're not like anybody else in the civilian world, and we -- so we can't apply the same recruiting and retention tools

that companies do. We can learn from them, some things will be applicable, but this remains the profession of arms.

And our objective here is simply force effectiveness. We're not trying to be futuristic, we're not trying to be progressive, we're trying to make sure that we continue to attract and retain the very best. And, you know, do we have to do all these things at the same time? Yeah, we have to make investments in future technology, we have to make investments, which is what this is about, human investments, and have -- continuing to have the very best and do all the things we're doing around the world.

But those -- let's just not forget -- and that's what force of the future is all about, is that the reason our military is the best in the world is because of our people. The reason everybody likes to partner with us, exercise, train, operate with us, is they like working with our people.

And the reason that we can conduct complicated operations like the one the chairman was talking to with respect to Libya about -- and that we're doing in Syria and Iraq where we're working with local forces who, at the end have to sustain the victory. The reason we're so good at that is that we have these tremendous people, and we need to make sure that they stick with us and that we get a new generation. So that's a serious part of the preparation for future warfare.

It's not about being like the civilian world, it's not like about being progressive, it's about being serious about our future. So I look forward -- I'll be up in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee in a few weeks. This and other things I'm sure they'll want to know about. I look forward to telling them more about it, and I hope that everyone understands the logic of what we're doing and supports some of the steps we're trying to take. And it will take more. We have to take more.

Q: (off-mic.) Chairman Dunford. A few questions ago, you said that Mosul is not in the deep future, and I'm wondering if you think that both Mosul and Raqqa will be moving past the isolation phase and into a more direct operations phase before the end of the year.

GEN. DUNFORD: Honestly, I don't know. I don't know. And my point in highlighting that is that operations have already begun. There's a lot of unknowns as you -- as you start the operation. You know, what's the enemy role going to be, what's the support going to be, all those kinds of things.

And so my point is that rather than trying to project when this is over, you know, we ought to focus on setting the conditions now to isolate Mosul and make sure that we have successful operations in Mosul. So I would not at all be in the business of predicting when Mosul would be secured or seized.

STAFF: We have time for one more question.

Q: General Dunford, given the high rate at which released Guantanamo detainees return to the battlefield, are you a little concerned that these released Guantanamo detainees are going to go back to the battlefield and kill Americans again?

GEN. DUNFORD: Well first of all, no one's -- we're not releasing the detainees from Guantanamo Bay. There's a -- there's a plan that would cause them to be relocated. And from a military perspective, I'm concerned about three things. One is ensuring they're properly detained, and then, you know, with -- whether it's the military tribunal or otherwise that they're properly adjudicated. And then if they are individuals who need to be incarcerated, that they're properly incarcerated.

But there isn't any proposal that I'm aware of that changes the standard under which we actually continue to detain these individuals.

Q: Mr. Secretary, can you rule out that Guantanamo Bay will be transferred back to the Cubans? Can you rule out that possibility?

(Laughter.)

SEC. CARTER: I can rule that out? Oh, you mean the whole base. No, well, the base is separate from the detention facility there. So let me do the base first. Basically it's a strategic location, we've had it for a long time, it's important to us and we intend to hold onto it.

As the chairman said, with respect to the detention facility at Gitmo, which is what the president was speaking about last week. The point, and it is very important to repeat this, is that where the chairman started, there are people in the Guantanamo Bay detention facility whom it is not safe to transfer to any other -- okay, they have to stay in U.S. detention.

So that -- safety is the top priority, for me, for the chairman and for the president. If -- and so, there has to be an alternative detention facility created. That is what the proposal that was announced last week is about. Now, that can't be done unless Congress acts, which means that Congress has to support the idea that it would be good to move this facility and -- or the detainees to the United States.

I believe very strongly that it would and there are a number of reasons for that, but not least of which it would be cheaper and it comes out of our budget. And we have the duty of detaining them. Our people do that, our service members do that.

They do that very professionally, but it is not a duty I wish them to have. And so, if we could find a place where fewer of them have that duty, it is a good thing. So it is good if it can be done, but it cannot be done under current law. The law has to be changed.

That is the reason to put a proposal to put in front of Congress. There are those in Congress who have indicated a willingness to consider such a proposal, which is why we gave it and I hope they do and I hope they considered it favorably, because on balance, this would be a good thing to not pass on to a future administration and I really believe that. But it has to be done safely, that is the key.

STAFF: Thanks, everybody. We encourage everyone to watch this ceremony at the White House coming up at the top of the hour.

SEC. CARTER: Oh, sorry. Thanks, chairman. He and I are both going on travel. I'll start first. I'll be on a trip here in the United States this week, just for your interest. The -- I will be visiting some of our troops on the west coast.

But a principal reason for the trip out there is to continue to reinforce our links to the innovative, titan technology sector of the United States. Because even as we need to make sure that our people in the next generation are the best, as they are today, we need to make sure that our technology in the next generation is the best.

So we have to do all that at the same time. And chairman, do you now have a good way Congress mentioned time in which some of forces that are employed in the Central Command?

GEN. DUNFORD: So we're both --

SEC. CARTER: Please do watch the Medal of Honor ceremony.

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