

Senator James Inhofe
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DWG: -- Thank you Senator for doing this and we look forward to talking to you about all the issues that you cover.

If I may, I'll start. And folks, let me know if you'd like to ask a question. As soon as I'm done doing this, I'll have the list and start putting numbers next to names.

Senator, how about we start with the vote at the end of January on a non-binding resolution about the troops in Afghanistan and Syria. You, under the leadership of Senator McConnell, you along with the vast majority of the Senate voted on this resolution which probably wasn't too popular with the White House.

Can you talk us through your decision? What were the reasons you voted for the resolution, which I think 76 Senators voted for it, something like that. Can you take us through the reasons why you voted for it, and where do you think that issue with the troops in those two countries goes at this point?

Senator Inhofe: First of all, I disagreed with it. I'm a fan of the President. I think everybody knows that. In fact I was with him at the very first when he was the nominee of the Republican Party, he was going to be running against Hillary, I was invited to New York and got to know him. The reason for that was Jeff Sessions had already kind of gotten in there and I'm his closest friend, so I guess he made the President think that I knew more about the military than I did. But we've had a close relationship.

I've debated this with him before. In fact before the President, before we had that resolution I was saying everything's got to be

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conditions on the ground. This is what Obama did. You don't want to do this.

Well, I found that that's the way to get his attention, when you say this is what Obama did. So I thought it was going to be all conditions on the ground.

We started off with Syria, then went to Afghanistan. And I didn't agree with it. In fact I was one of them who shared my feelings with the other individual -- oh, I've already had breakfast a long time ago. And I think at the time I was actually the Acting, when we first started talking about it. This was kind of a foregone conclusion that the President went ahead and said this and was going to try to get things going earlier than we had felt they should.

So we disagreed with him, and I'm not sure that I had a lot of influence on any of the rest of them in our conference, but it should have been conditions on the ground from the beginning for any place where we have troops.

DWG: Where do you think this issue goes from here? Do you think the troops are going to be withdrawn? Where are things?

Senator Inhofe: I hope not. He has said, and in fairness to him even though he talked about -- yes, he started off with Syria. He said we're going to be taking the troops out. But he also qualified it in a way that I actually, I didn't bring that with me, but he did make the comment that assuming things are going the way that we're anticipating, they're going to be going.

So I think to answer your question, if anyone sits down here and tells that they, anyone other than the President, don't believe anything else they tell you. I don't think anyone really knows, but I do know that he is concerned about things on the ground.

So what I think is going to happen is that we'll leave ample troops in there. He's heard from our allies that we'd be disadvantaged if we were to pull out of either place, and one of

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those allies happens to be Israel. So I think that they'll stay in there in a force that is adequate to not be the tip of the spear, but to be the thought process behind it.

DWG: I haven't got a list yet, so hands up.

DWG: Senator, Nick [Inaudible] from CBS News Hour. Thank you so much for doing this. Can I just follow up on and what you just said?

Can you be a little bit more specific about Syria? There's been talk of allies, including France, Britain, leaving some troops in Northern Syria. There's been talk of U.S. forces staying in [Inaudible]. Even if they don't stay in Northern Syria, can you give us any indication of where you believe those discussions are?

Senator Inhofe: I'm sorry, I didn't know I was vague on that.

I believe they were [inaudible]. I think particularly since they had the encouragement of some of our allies in Western Europe, European allies, that they are talking about staying also. I can't be more specific than that. I'm sorry, I don't know. But that's my belief, that they're going to stay. We're not going to high and dry get up and leave, so I think they will stay, yes.

DWG: For Afghanistan, do you understand a decision for when and how the withdrawal should be? Ambassador Khalilzad has, in part at least, while he negotiates with the Taliban, has he been empowered to make decisions about --

Senator Inhofe: I think he has, because he's been put in a position to handle the negotiations. He would not be in that position if he didn't have the power to make that.

DWG: Tony.

DWG: Thank you, Senator for your time.

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I wanted to ask a question about [inaudible]. It's something that you've discussed in the past. You want to make sure there is an appropriate level of funding. Some new reporting that I have done and some of my colleagues have done, shows the department is getting ready to send you an OCO request. Far larger than any you've seen recently. Because they're trying to get around the budget cap. They want to be BCA compliant. Basically 750 minus the cap. The OCO request is going to be around \$174 billion.

Do you think that is something you can support? Do you think you need to now perform surgery on that going into the NDAA? Where are you in terms of how the department is viewing OCO right now?

Senator Inhofe: We've got to have adequate funding. Now let's go back to build on that.

If you saw what happened, and I quite often, people are in shock when they hear this. I will use, in terms of what Obama did to the military. Fiscal year 2010 and 2015, use constant dollars, and I use 2018 dollars. In 2015 the amount of money that actually went in was \$794 billion; five years later it was \$586 billion. In other words, that huge drop. I can't think of any bureaucracy in the history of our country that has gone through something like that. Particularly something as sensitive as the funding of the military.

So we took huge hits during that time. We had to start making them up.

Well, in FY18 we did, we got up to \$700 billion; '19, \$716; now '20 that's coming up right now, if you take this book -- I'm a real believer in this, and all of you I'm sure have read this. It's good stuff. They talk about you're going to have to for this time frame, be talking about between a three and a five percent increase over and above inflation annually, and that's what we have done.

To do that, you'd be up to \$750 billion, and I think that's where

we're going to be.

Now how do you get there? Are you going to be using some OCO to get there? Yeah, you are. OCO Has been criticized time and again for people using that just to build up. I'd be guilty of that myself. I don't know how much it's going to be, but I think you're going to have an exaggerated figure there in order to get up to what we have to have to defend America.

DWG: So you believe that however the request comes over, you need, the top line is what it's all about. It doesn't matter whether it's base money, OCO money, you need the money.

Senator Inhofe: You need the money. In my opinion, you need to be at \$750. And that's consistent with what they're saying in here. I'm sure most of you were at the hearing that we had with that group. This was the best -- Look, I've been on the Armed Services Committee of the House for eight years, then the Senate for 24 years, I guess. So that's a long time. I've never seen a hearing that we've had that was better than this one. I think that was the most believable one. So the answer is yes.

DWG: Can I follow up on that?

Senator Inhofe: Please.

DWG: Have you gotten any indication from the administration on the points you've raised so far, that they will send something, a huge OCO request like that? And have you gotten indications from the administration that they are going to do what you said in the war zones and not pull out as many troops as has been indicated?

Senator Inhofe: I wouldn't want to be quoted as saying that I got that from the administration. I just know the administration, I know what has to happen in order to make up for the losses that we sustained. I believe it will. I have not, and I've had conversations with the President, but he has not told me that he's going to inflate the OCO in order to accomplish what he needs to accomplish for our military.

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DWG: And your impression about what's going to happen in the war zones. IS that derived from conversations with the administration?

Senator Inhofe: They're conversations. When you have a conversation with the administration you have, the different individuals that are there, you get a pretty good idea of what they've been saying when -- John Bolton, for example. I know pretty much, I've known him for so many years and know what he believes, and know he has some influence on the President. But that doesn't mean the President said this, I heard it and so I want you to quote me.

DWG: Defense Daily?

DWG: Thanks for being here.

I wanted to ask you about Space Force. Can you talk a bit about what is the latest you've heard from Pentagon leaders, from Secretary Shanahan about the progress there? There have been some reports drafted and [leaked] and released about the determination to at least initially put Space Force under the Air Force similar to how the Marine Corps is under the Navy. But then eventually moving to a sixth Department of State -- or of the military, I'm sorry. So just an update on how far you have gotten in those discussions with the Pentagon, and then what plans you have to hold hearings on the subject.

Senator Inhofe: I'd like to hold hearings, I've already said that publicly, that we'd like to put that together. John here, his problem is that he's, we've got too much stuff to do. That will be a time-consuming one.

But Space Force, I initially felt that it was not a good idea, because I had to have two questions answered before it would be a good idea. One is, what's going to be the cost, the relative cost? We're doing a good job now, and so I want to be sure that we're going to be able to do a better job. Secondly, is it

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really -- and I suspect the main reason, this is just me talking, not the administration. That they want to have, they're looking at our allies, and our allies are looking at China and Russia. And they are very prominent in what they're doing with, they don't call it a Space Force, they call it something comparable to that.

So we are giving the impression that we don't care that much about space because they have a Space Force or something like it and we don't. So I was suspicious that that was the main reason they wanted to do it. Not that we could do a better job, but we would have the appearance of being just as dedicated to a space force for the future as they are.

DWG: To follow up real quick, you mentioned that you'd like to have these hearings but there are a lot of pressing concerns on other topics as well. I just want to make sure I understand you correctly. So the Space Force is still something you'd want to address at some point, but it sounds like there are more important topics right now.

Senator Inhofe: I think I said it accurately, as John confirms, it's on our schedule. We don't have a date for it.

One thing you probably are used to by now is that one of the things that I've always believed in, even when Senator McCain was around, was we need to use -- we have a lot of talent and we need to use our subcommittees. Just to give you an example. Tillis is the first one I can remember who ever requested to have personnel. To me, that would be my last choice because I don't have the interest, some people do. Then you've got all the really technical stuff. You've got Mike Rounds is doing a great job. So you're going to see a lot of that.

So we're carrying on those conversations between votes and with John's group here as to when we can time these things. The first one we had -- the first one we had was actually the one that Wicker wanted. It had nothing to do with living in a coastal town, but nonetheless.

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DWG: As long as we're on space why don't I turn to Sandra Irwin.

DWG: Thank you. Has the administration indicated to you that they're planning to nominate a Secretary of Defense in any, whether it's the current acting guy or somebody else? We were told by DoD that Patrick Shanahan could start indefinitely as an Acting Secretary. We were not aware that that was possible to do that. So what discussions have you had --

Senator Inhofe: I've had a lot of discussions. I wish there was time, I'd tell you about one of them, but there isn't time and I don't want you to -- but, yeah, there is time. [Laughter].

Every weekend I do something I know Chuck Schumer's not doing. One of those is I've got 20 kids and grandkids and I cut down -- it has to be red oak, the trees, and then split them all different sizes that they all have. I was up splitting wood and I had two of my grandkids up there and they were trading back and forth. One would stay with me 30 minutes, and then the other would do it. Jonah, the 17-year-old, was up there with me, and the phone rang. It was the President. He said I want you to know I'm on my way back. You're the first call I've made since I'm on my way back from Iraq. It was when he was over there with the Air Force. So he called up to talk about that very subject.

He said what are you doing? I said I'm chopping wood with my, I lied, I said my favorite grandson. And, I mean I love them all. Anyway, he enjoyed it. He said let me talk to him. I bet he talked to Jonah for 30 minutes on this thing. And talked about my wife and all this stuff. This is a side of him you don't see.

But that call, if you wind the clock back to when that was, that's when we first had a serious talk about using names, John Kyle, all these names that went by the wayside. So I still think that's a work in progress, that we've got to get done. I don't remember in what context you were asking that.

DWG: Have you set a limit? Have you looked at how long the

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current Acting Secretary can serve as acting? Is there a cutoff date that you say the administration has to nominate someone by a particular date?

Senator Inhofe: I think you're smarter than I am, because I didn't know there was a deadline.

DWG: There may not be, but you could set one. As the Chairman, you could kind of --

Senator Inhofe: Well, you could do that, but I wouldn't want to do that just because I want to be in on who's going to ultimately get that. And I have to tell you, I liked the last one. He is really a close friend, and he has a very rare talent called humility. I'd like to have that rub off on somebody else.

DWG: Rebecca Keel, the Hill?

DWG: Last night a deal on border security was reached that is much less than what the President initially asked for. So what's your latest sense on whether he will declare a national emergency and dip into military construction funding? And if he does that, are you prepared to do anything to try to stop that?

Senator Inhofe: Well, I've already voiced myself in terms of having anything happen to degrade MILCON. I don't what the MILCON thing -- now if it's the Corps of Engineers, it turns into that. So I have voiced myself on that. But I don't know, I can't tell you where we're going to end up.

He is going to have strong feelings.

The thing that bothers me more than anything else is I was there ten years ago in the first week or so that we had Obama in the White House, and he had the House and the Senate, and he went there and he said I need \$787 billion. Oh, okay. That's fine. We'll give you \$836 billion. And they did.

Now we're talking about \$5 billion and you have all of -- why

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don't you guys write about that and let people know how ridiculous this whole issue is. In fact I think that he's actually winning on this issue now.

If it becomes necessary I think that he might do the emergency, and if he does the emergency then there are a couple of things in Title 33 and Title 10. The first one being MILCON. The second one being the Corps of Engineers. And what I voiced is, if it has to be that way, leave MILCON alone.

DWG: Do you think he heard you?

Senator Inhofe: Yes.

DWG: You were saying that in case there is some emergency, but let's wait. You can see it's being addressed, the situation on the border, all commemorative [inaudible]. What will have to happen for the Senate to go see what is going on at the southern border to get emergency?

Senator Inhofe: What's going to have to happen for the -- say it one more time.

DWG: What will have to happen on the southern border? Because so far not even the [inaudible] leaders have addressed what is going on right now in the border as a threat at all. What will have to happen for the Senate to consider it an emergency?

Senator Inhofe: First of all, you're probably talking to the right person. In the real world, I was a builder and developer. I did most of my stuff down on the border. South Padre Island, Texas. No one around this table has ever heard of.

DWG: I've been there.

Senator Inhofe: Did you misbehave? [Laughter].

Anyway, I spent a lot of time with them down there.

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When Trump was elected, immediately there was a very positive change, because it was always as if, and I think people realize that during the Obama years he was certainly not discouraging people coming in, whether it was from Mexico or from Central America, South America, the Middle East. Taking that route up through to our southern border. And then, but when Trump was elected he had a totally different philosophy. And all of a sudden people were not, this whole idea of coming across the border and then not showing up for your court date is something that came to a screeching halt.

I went down during the Obama years to some of the areas where they had the, they were putting the people that came across the border, and then we found out they were just cutting them loose at that time. So all that changed.

Once the people that were in, I don't know how many were Mexicans and how many, but they're coming across that border. Once they realized they had a President that was going to uphold the law and enforce the law, then it stopped dramatically in terms of the number of people coming across illegally, and the ones coming across for what you and I and the rest around this table would consider to be the wrong reasons. So I think that's already improved, initially.

Now we have the groups coming in such as the ones that people are all concerned with. I think the general public knows they don't want people coming in in droves. So I think they're supportive of what the President is trying to do.

DWG: -- emergency. The rules are changing. Things are working. The numbers of immigrants entering the borders are really low compared to I think [inaudible]. The Americans [inaudible] --

Senator Inhofe: What is the emergency? Is that what --

DWG: Yes. Still a sign of a declaration of emergency.

Senator Inhofe: I'm sorry. I just don't --

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DWG: He's saying why would the Senate support a declaration of an emergency when there is no emergency.

Senator Inhofe: Oh, I see. Sorry, I was having a hard time understanding.

Well, when you say there is no emergency, that's an opinion. This can be an emergency if you have the kids that are coming through here, the girls are being raped, and the people coming across the border, people who are, they're into drug trafficking, they're into a lot of these things. I consider that an emergency. Difference of opinion.

DWG: Colin?

DWG: Good morning, Senator.

The Pentagon is rolling out today its strategy on artificial intelligence. The White House released an Executive Order yesterday. The Chinese are pursuing a massive national plan to dominate AI by 2030. The [Inaudible] warned that we're falling behind and will be way behind in the next five or six years. There's like 75 million plus dedicated to AI so far. Are you going to press hard for more money? Do you think we're doing enough? Is the IC taking up the slack? Where are we?

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, but to me, and others on the committee would not necessarily agree with me, there are other things that need to be done first. Which has the priority? We know that artificial intelligence, we know that China's ahead of us. But I'd like to look at the other areas where China and where Russia are ahead of us, and it would be in artillery, for example. Any time you have the statements from our leadership saying things like General Dunford saying we have lost our quality and quantity edges. Milley, the Army, says in terms of artillery the Army is out-ranged and out-gunned by our adversaries. Moran talking about our -- we've improved on this. This is toward the end of Obama's administration. Sixty-two percent of our F-18s can't be

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deployed. These are things that need to be done.

The American people, and you'll hear me say this an hour from right now in my opening statement at our hearing that we're having. That the American people don't know the problems that we have right now in terms of, we have our peer competitors -- China and Russia -- they have a lot of things that are better than the things that we have. To me, that's the priority. And then behind that, when we get caught up there, I do think we need to do a better job.

So the answer to your question is yes, but not the same priority as our artillery, for example.

DWG: Richard, Military.com.

DWG: Senator, just to go back to military construction, the national emergency, and the Corps of Engineers. Your sense right now is that you would be against in an emergency, taking money out of military construction.

Senator Inhofe: That's correct.

DWG: You're not so much against at this point taking money out of the Corps of Engineers.

Senator Inhofe: That's correct, but keep in mind the statement that I made about how stupid this whole issue is. Going back to the Obama years.

So in that context, yes. To me that would impose a greater hardship than it would if he went after MILCON.

DWG: What would impose a greater hardship?

Senator Inhofe: If that were re, if he wanted to use the term reimbursed from MILCON as opposed to the Corps of Engineers. It's a matter of prioritizing it.

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Any time you're faced with two bad choices, one's worse.

DWG: Laura, Foreign Policy.

DWG: Thank you. I wanted to follow up on the question about the Secretary of Defense, but take it in a different direction.

As you know, Secretary Shanahan worked at Boeing for 30 years, so if he gets the nomination, what is the confirmation process? What is the posture of the hearing going through it? Will he have to recuse himself from anything that relates to Boeing, and [inaudible] different programs and [inaudible] modernization, [inaudible]. What are your thoughts on that going through?

Senator Inhofe: Since I don't think it's going to happen, there's your [headline]. I don't know. Every time someone has any kind of a background, whether it's Boeing, regardless of what company it is, there's going to be kind of a built-in suspicion and I'd say this would become very partisan and the partisanship is going to show in our committee because that's a partisan issue.

Now depending no how he answers questions, I might end up that way a little bit myself. But I don't think we're going to get to that point, but I could be wrong.

DWG: You don't think he's going to get the nomination?

Senator Inhofe: I probably shouldn't say that. [Laughter].

DWG: You already did.

Senator Inhofe: You like that.

DWG: If I can follow up on a separate line of inquiry. I wanted to ask you about the resolution on Yemen that is coming up. What are your thoughts on the resolution? Does it have [inaudible]? And what would change for the Pentagon if that were to happen?

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Senator Inhofe: If the decision --

DWG: Yemen.

Senator Inhofe: Yemen. Okay.

DWG: Does that [inaudible] have traction this time around? And if it does pass, what would be the impact on the Pentagon?

Senator Inhofe: I don't know.

DWG: You don't know to what question?

Senator Inhofe: I don't have the answer.

DWG: What are your initial thoughts? Do you think there is enough momentum now that ending full U.S. support for war on Yemen will --

Senator Inhofe: No, I think that the support was there. The lines are always drawn on that. I just think that we'll be -- the issue there is the one that was really Saudi Arabia, they were the ones that were in -- when I looked at Saudi Arabia and Israel, I had strong feelings as to what's important in that issue? And I just, I would just stay in that position regardless of what comes up. Because I've actually talked to Netanyahu about that. So I'd just, I have a bias I guess is what I'm trying to say.

DWG: Tony.

Senator Inhofe: You look unhappy.

DWG: I don't want to take up everybody's time, but I did want to clarify what you meant about, my question was about the Yemen resolution specifically. You think it was more about Saudi Arabia. So what do you mean? Do you mean that you think the U.S. should continue support for the Saudis and Emirates --

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Senator Inhofe: I think yes, they should continue the support.

DWG: But we should cut spending on other issues.

Senator Inhofe: That's correct.

DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Tony?

DWG: One clarification and then one other question.

You mentioned John would likely, stories about the OCO being inflated potentially. I want to get a sense of clarity. If that 2020 OCO budget comes in at a seemingly inflated rate over the \$69 billion you guys approved this year, you would not favor that? How would you view that?

Senator Inhofe: I'm concerned about what ultimately gets in. Whether it's, without drawing the distinction between OCO, you know, you can interpret that any way you want to, and yet it is real and we have a lot of people who have looked at that. We know what the 69 is. We know what the 174 is. But my concern is that we get to the point where the ones that I really respect think that we ought to get as is reflected in this commission report. And how it's blended between OCO and budget.

It's important to me, but so long as we've reached the point where we're increasing, that increase between three and five percent above inflation is achieved, and to do that you've got to get up to round 750 for the fiscal year '20.

DWG: Okay.

F-35. One of your priorities is you wanted to triple F-35 production. Lockheed is still having problems delivering the plane on time. Five years in a row they've missed their monthly schedule.

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Is your support unqualified? Or do you need to see some improvement --

Senator Inhofe: Let's keep in mind now, the 35 is in a lot of different countries. It's on the market. It's working. People are satisfied with it. And I think that it's good.

And by the way, I wasn't talking about tripling it this year or anything like that.

DWG: I know that, but over the FYDP.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah. Then I think that it's moving along -- I remember so well the F-22. And we started off with I think it was 750 F-22s and ended up with 87 or something. 187. And now we're paying dearly for it. That's the one thing that we really need right now, our allies need and all that. The closest thing to that is the 35.

So I think it's still got some problems with it, but to answer your question I'd have to say yes. Yes, we would want to increase that. We may not be quite to the perfection stage before we would do that. But I don't know of anything else that is going to take the place of the F-35 in our inventory.

DWG: I need to press you though, because it just started the initiative. Combat testing, IOT&E and [Lingo]. It's supposed to prove whether it's effective or suitable. That's not going to be done until the end of next September. Do you think it's prudent to increase quantities before the test is done and the results are in?

Senator Inhofe: Yes.

DWG: Well what if it turns out to be a major flying lemon?

Senator Inhofe: That's kind of a what-if. I don't believe that's going to happen. I think there are going to be the normal type of deficiencies as it's being developed, and we don't have

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the luxury of time to wait, in my opinion. So I'd say yes.

DWG: Otto?

DWG: Senator, obviously we're not going to see the full budget until late in March. That's a month and a half later than usual. The HASC, people are already concerned about getting an NDAA in time. What's your view? Are you going to have to accelerate? Do you think the NDAA will be later than you would like?

Senator Inhofe: We don't want it to be later. We did a good job last year, and I think we'll do a good job this year. We have, I would like to have everybody, the appropriators out there busier than they are right now. And I think that they will be that way. And I think that we'll hear some things even this week, talking about how far behind we might be.

In the meantime, if we set up, first of all, we have to do authorization before appropriation is going to come anyway. So if we can do authorization, which is that's what we do, we actually have a date that's the deadline. What's the date right now, John?

John: Sir, we should be on the [inaudible] Floor by the end of June.

Senator Inhofe: By the end of June, and that's what we are anticipating doing.

DWG: Do you think you can make that? Are you going to have to have fewer hearings? How are you going to make that date?

Senator Inhofe: You probably know this, in the last two weeks we've had these posture hearings in anticipation of that happening.

Look, we're busy. We're doing a lot more than a lot of the other committees are doing, and we're having the posture hearings. Those who are participating in that, there's going to be another

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one 30 minutes from right now. And that's actually not a posture hearing, that's a [tromba] hearing. But nonetheless, we are doing our posture hearings.

DWG: The details, to give the authorization, specific numbers and that sort of thing, you need to have some more details, and that's going to be the hard part of putting together the details on programs if you haven't seen the detailed budget until the end of March.

Senator Inhofe: That's going to make it difficult. But again, that's the first thing we want to do is do the authorization. Maybe we can steer them a little bit.

DWG: You're going to push the appropriators to move, because --

Senator Inhofe: It might have that effect. Yeah. [Laughter].

DWG: Zack, Center --

DWG: I wanted to follow up on Colin's question related to the new roll-out of artificial intelligence strategy that's coming today.

You talked about your priorities being sort of making up for some of the shortfalls that have happened from limitations on funding in the last ten years. Those are areas where you can go to defense contractors, and if you have more money you can plug those holes. When you look at cyber or artificial intelligence, you need Silicon Valley, you need the commercial sphere to work with the Pentagon. There's been this increased tension related to programs like Project Maven or other things like that where programmers seem to be hesitant about working with the military or working on systems that might be involved in the taking of life.

Do you have any concern about the U.S.' ability to maintain a technological edge because of that tension? And how do you think that the Pentagon can do a better job of making sure they get

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access to the technology they need?

Senator Inhofe: I think that both Russia and China are in a better position than we are -- I think they're ahead of us in this area. And so I don't think it's a matter of going to a contractor and saying we need more of this or we need, because I think they are, that's one of the areas where they are ahead of us. One of the bullets here would indicate that.

So the technology's going to have to increase. We're going to have to get where we do some things better than they're doing. I was in the South China Sea not long ago. Our allies over there are watching what, in this case it's China, what they're doing, and one of the quotes I'm going to be using at the hearing in just a few minutes is what they're saying, what China is now rubbing our nose in it and just, because they know that they are in some areas ahead of us technologically and they are in a position to make our allies -- I mean our allies in that part of the world. The Philippines, Guam. They're watching what we're doing and they're watching -- right now they have 3,200 acres of created land in the South China Sea. No one thinks it's legal, but nonetheless they're doing it anyway.

Then the quotes that I'll use this morning in the hearing just show that they believe that they are ahead of us, and this is something that is concerning.

Look, they are ahead of us in some of these areas, so I think we've got some areas we need to catch up.

DWG: And how do you do that?

Senator Inhofe: Well, you have to spend more money on research and all these things. I'm not sure how you do that, but that's, we need to do it.

DWG: Jeff Sullivan, Voice of America.

DWG: Senator, thank you very much.

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Back to Syria for a moment. As the SDF and other U.S.-backed forces are closing in on the last strongholds of the Islamic state there's the question of all the Islamic state prisoners. If you believe the SDF, anywhere from 800 to possibly 3,000 foreign fighters that they're holding plus women and children. Efforts to get countries, the countries or origin to take them back have not one so well.

What have you heard from the administration and what are your feelings about what should be done with them? And is sending them to Guantanamo Bay something that you see as a possibility?

Senator Inhofe: That would be something that gets everybody really hysterical. But yeah, we've got a great asset over there, and we need to be using that asset. You've heard all the debates, and I remember I used to use the debate that our prisoners over there in Guantanamo Bay, in GTMO, are being treated better than our troops that are over there doing the policing work.

Now that's one that should not be taken off the table. It's one that should be, one of the options they're using.

Another option is to try to encourage those countries to take them back. I know that effort is going on right now. Where we're going to end up, I don't know.

DWG: One follow-up, on border security. In the Worldwide Threat Assessment that was published just a couple of weeks ago, it warns that the pressures in terms of economy, crime, corruption in Central and South America that are causing some of these migrants to try to cross into the U.S. illegally, that those pressure are only going to likely increase over the coming years.

If that's the case, are the plans for border security that people have been talking about right now, like the wall, is that going to be sufficient? Or does there need to be a more far-reaching policy or strategy that looks further ahead at the pressures that

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are creating the migrant crisis in the first place, or at least according to the intelligence community, likely to increase the crisis?

Senator Inhofe: I think it's just the obstacle that is placed there by a type of wall, and of course you know that's not going to be done overnight and right now we've got over 4,000 troops down there. That's going to be a part of the effort to take place.

So I don't know that -- I'd say you've got to have a border, and one that's hard to penetrate, and they've already done so much now just by not allowing people to come over to make their case. So I think that's -- we just need to have a physical border. I don't know why that even becomes debatable. You look at the three different borders in Arizona. They've had a reduction in the upper 90s of crime, problems there. That gets things done. That's what the President wants to do. That's what I'd do first, rather than try to, the systemic problems and negotiate with those. Just stop people from crossing the border.

It's working, by the way, in some of the areas out in California. They get right up to the border and they're not able to really accomplish what their intent is. There are as many people going back as there are coming this way now. So something's working.

DWG: Amy, Air Force Magazine.

DWG: Thank you.

The [inaudible] have repeatedly said that steady budgets are absolutely critical to [inaudible] --

Senator Inhofe: Can you talk a little bit louder?

DWG: Sure. The service chiefs have repeatedly said that steady budgets are absolutely critical to improving readiness. Do you think there's a risk that with the late roll-out that there may be a rolling-back of some of the latest gains that they've been

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able to --

Senator Inhofe: You mean gains that were made as a result of the increase in resources that are being put in there?

DWG: Yes. The increase in resources. But also the stability of knowing that those resources are there and on time.

Senator Inhofe: Well, yeah. I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, but yeah, the assurance that that's going to happen is a deterrent, the same as if it's already happened.

DWG: Are you, how concerned are you that we could start to lose some of those readiness gains we've already made?

Senator Inhofe: And what would cause us to lose that? I'm --

DWG: We're a month and a half late on budget roll-out right now, and who knows where that's going to go from here on out. Those delays have an impact, a trickle-down impact throughout the department.

Senator Inhofe: Well, and they have a trickle-down impact, but we're going to get back on schedule.

DWG: Just a follow-up. [Inaudible] from Stars and Stripes.

On Syria, there's even been reports of troops being pulled out by April. Do you see troops leaving Syria by April? Or this year?

Senator Inhofe: I don't know how many, if there are troops that are pulled out, how many of the troops that are in there right now would be pulled out. I don't think anyone else, if they know, I think that I would know because we've had discussions. I know that a lot of people don't like what the President did. I didn't like or express that initially, but I just don't think anyone's going to be able to say today how many troops would be coming out and when they're going to be coming out.

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DWG: Do you see it happening this year, though?

Senator Inhofe: Come on. I would say yes, if you're talking about now, the new year.

DWG: 2019.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, yeah. Probably so.

DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Going back to the Western Hemisphere and the situation in Venezuela, do you think it's possible that the U.S. may [inaudible] military intervention? Or do you think it's out of the table right now?

Senator Inhofe: I don't think it's out of the table right now, I think that it could happen. I mean you've got a guy down there that is killing everybody. You could have him put together a base that Russia would have in our hemisphere, and if those things happen it may be to the point where we have to intervene with troops and respond. We can't allow this to take place.

I remember so well when Nicaragua was going through this, and the same thing with Cuba. If we had not taken any of the steps at all, I don't know where we'd be. We probably would still be fighting in Honduras.

I think that it depends on where they go and if they decide that they're going to open up things so that Russia or some other, it could be Cuba, probably Russia, would actually have armaments there that would be a threat to our country, yeah, we'd have to not go to war, but have to use force.

DWG: Tony?

DWG: I need to ask you again, this came up a couple of times on Shanahan. You were artfully ambiguous, but I want to press you here.

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Do you think the President's going to nominate a new SecDef?

Senator Inhofe: Do I think he's going to nominate one?

DWG: You have insight that we don't.

Senator Inhofe: My insights are just more opinions than insights, and I'd say yes.

DWG: And why do you think that?

Senator Inhofe: Well, because right now we don't have one. We have a temporary.

DWG: What does the label of Acting, what kind of a problem does that pose to a Secretary coming up to the Hill to plead for a budget that is already --

Senator Inhofe: It's kind of the same way that the Acting Director of the EPA, when Andrew Wheeler was in that position as opposed to being in a position of being the direct individual with the title.

DWG: But does Acting, does that impose a burden on the Secretary though in terms of whether his word is seen as credible?

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, I think so. I think it does. We need to have a Secretary of Defense. And this is, so I anticipate we will. And I have to say yes. If you're an Acting you don't have the force that you should have of the office.

DWG: Do you plan on calling Mattis up for a hearing? You had hinted at that when he resigned.

Senator Inhofe: No. I consider Mattis to be a very, a really close personal friend of mine and has been for a long period of time. He has that characteristic that's so uncommon that I've already mentioned, humility, and certainly background and

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knowledge. So we don't have any plans for that, no.

DWG: Ellen.

DWG: Just a quick follow-up. The President has said that he prefers to have Acting people in some of these positions to have flexibility in personnel. How do you read that comment? Do you think that means he wants to just keep having an Acting Secretary? Or is he really going to nominate somebody?

Senator Inhofe: I think he's going to nominate somebody.

I'm getting into a little bit of trouble with my hearing.

DWG: Senator, do you think Mr. Shanahan should be that nominee?

Senator Inhofe: I'm not going to comment on that.

DWG: Does Mr. Shanahan share the humility that you --

Senator Inhofe: No.

DWG: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Good luck with the hearing. And thank you for finding time for us.

Senator Inhofe: You bet.

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