

John Rood
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Defense Writers Group

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DWG: Defense Writers Group is honored to have as a guest today the United States Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Honorable John Rood. Thank you very much for coming, sir.

I want to thank funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and from Mitre Corporation for making this breakfast possible, along with some contributions from everyone here towards the cost of the food.

There's a lot of people here today and I want to get started and give as much opportunity for others' questions, so let me do that.

I have a policy question for you, but before I ask that can I just ask you to, I think in everybody's interest, tell us where have you been lately and where are you going soon? In other words, what have you been working on that's taken you out of town and what will you be working on in the coming weeks?

U/S Rood: First of all, thanks for the invitation. It's nice to be here, and say that before the session. Hopefully I'll thank you when we're done. But all joking aside, it is nice to see so many folks that I read your by-lines and see you on camera.

It's been a busy travel period for me. I was just in the Middle East. I know Eric Schmitt was there. I saw Laura as well in Bahrain at the Manama Dialogue. That's a key event for those that aren't familiar with it, for essentially the largest gathering of security professionals in the Middle East for a defense-focused dialogue. It's very much a defense focus as opposed to foreign policy focus there.

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So I was in Manama. I also met with the King and some of the leadership from the Bahraini government. I had a chance to visit, of course, U.S. Navy 5th Fleet Headquarters there, NAVCENT as well as the International Maritime Security Construct where we've got seven countries now participating in an international activity to try to guarantee freedom of navigation in and around the Gulf as well as in the Bab e Mandeb in the Red Sea.

After being in Bahrain I was in Cairo, in Egypt for meetings with the Egyptian leadership there. The Minister of Defense and others in that country.

After being in Cairo I went out to the Sinai to see the MFO, Multinational Force there. Of course the MFO was stood up in order to implement the agreement between Israel and Egypt in the 1970s, but it's remained very active. And actually you get a feeling when you're out there also about the growth of ISIS and its capabilities in the Sinai.

I was in Iraq. I met with then Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi and the Minister of Defense and was in Irbil as well to meet with the Kurdistan Regional Government, the leadership there.

That's just my most recent trip. In the last two months I've also been to Saudi Arabia, the UAE. I was in Turkey as well to support the Vice president and Secretary of State in the negotiations of the ceasefire with the Turks. So in the last two months, six countries in the Middle East as well as a couple of regions in the Sinai and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. So a busy focus.

The Middle East is continuing to take a significant portion of my time and focus. Whether that be the concerns we have about the situation in Syria and trying to prevent the reemergence of ISIS there, or in Iraq. Activities that Iran has undertaken as well are of course well reported on in terms of their attacks and their threatened attacks. And then we've taken a lot of steps to work with allies and friends in the region to try to

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promote our interests, promote stability as well as send some deterrent messages to the Iranians.

So that's what I've done in the past couple of months.

DWG: Where do you go next?

U/S Rood: I'll be leaving later this week. I expect I may see some of you at the Reagan National Defense Forum on Friday, so I'll be out in Los Angeles or Simi Valley for that discussion.

After being at the Reagan Forum I'll go to Alaska where I'm going to see our Alaska Command up there. Understand the Arctic is an area of growing importance for us. A lot of activity up there. Of course the United States is an Arctic nation so I'll visit our part of the Arctic in Alaska. Spend some time in Alaska Command, be up at Eielson Air Force Base as well as out at Clear Air Force Base there. Eielson of course has a number of fighter squadrons and then the mission at Clear is related to warning of attack on the United States from missile or air attack.

DWG: My follow-up, turning a corner. Nuclear weapons. The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and others on the committee -- Democrats certainly -- argue that the Low Yield Nuclear Cruise Missile that is part of the Trump administration's proposal for nuclear arms modernization is a destabilizing weapon, that it would in effect accept the Russian concept that a limited nuclear war is possible. It sends a message that the United States accepts that proposal and it is therefore unwise to go ahead with.

The Chairman also has other criticisms of what he and the Congressional Budget Office estimates would be a \$1.2 trillion project over 30 years.

What's your response?

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U/S Rood: Last year of course the administration published the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review and that was a very lengthy examination across the Defense Department of how we should approach deterrence, the health of our nuclear enterprise, and given what we see occurring by potential adversaries like Russia. What we see them doing and the type of capabilities and approach that the United States needed to take.

So after that Nuclear Posture Review there were some key findings. One, the importance of the nuclear triad and refurbishing it. It's gone through a few decades of neglect, quite frankly, where those chickens have come home to roost and we now need to spend the time and effort and devote the resources, considerable resources, in order to recapitalize it, and reaffirm the importance of nuclear deterrence and the fact that it's more important than ever. In a lot of ways the environment in the strategic sphere has become more concerning.

One of the findings of the intelligence community is over the last couple of decades the United States and countries like Russia and China have been moving in opposite directions, with the United States reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons, reducing the size of our nuclear stockpile, while at the same time Russia and China moving the opposite direction, to increase reliance on nuclear weapons, feature that as part of their strategic approach, and to increase not only the numbers but the types and the type auxiliary systems.

So a lot of the capabilities that you mentioned, David, is that the Nuclear Posture Review found that the recapitalization [inaudible] pursuit of supplementary capabilities. What's important. One of which you mentioned, a sea-launched cruise missile armed with a nuclear weapon. And a second one which is a submarine-launched ballistic missile with a modified nuclear warhead to be lower yield. Both would have low yield nuclear capabilities.

It's important to mention the United States has had low yield

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nuclear weapons in our arsenal for decades. That's not new. For instance, we have them for air-delivered weapons today. Deployed. And those programs have been continued in the previous administration and the one before it, in the Clinton administration before that and so on, have pursued those programs. The Congress has authorized and appropriated the necessary funding for those programs that are low yield nuclear weapons for decades.

The part that's different that the Trump administration Nuclear Posture Review proposed was these two capabilities for a different method of delivery, based on submarines and launched by either ballistic missile or cruise missile. The ballistic missile is more advanced and it would utilize an existing submarine-launched ballistic missile, the D5, and would have a modified warhead. An existing warhead that had been modified for low yield.

That program we think is going well. The submarine-launched cruise missile, we are not as advanced in the development of that. That's still going through analysis of alternatives and other work.

The reason, to answer your question, the reason we thought those were important is what we're observing in Russia's doctrine in particular is, as I say, an emphasis on use of nuclear weapons earlier in a conflict and we thought a mistaken believe that they had the ability to perhaps use low yield nuclear weapons earlier in a conflict in a way that intended to deter the United States. For example in 2017 President Putin gave some public remarks where he noted the importance of considering early use of nuclear weapons in order to deter an adversary.

So the whole point of having a robust capable nuclear arsenal is to deter behavior by others and aggressive action. So in order to restore deterrence where we thought it might be becoming weaker than we liked, we have asked for these supplementary capabilities in order to send a signal that we have a variety of

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means that are more survivable than the existing low-yield nuclear weapons aboard aircraft that we have the ability across the spectrum of potential conflict to deter and if necessary respond to nuclear use against the United States or our allies.

So it's in that way we really think this is very stabilizing. In no way does this lower the nuclear threshold and if you look at the declaratory policy published by the Trump administration you will find nearly word for word the same as that published by the Obama administration. In terms of the cost of the recapitalization of the nuclear arsenal I would point out that recapitalization began during the Obama administration and President Obama proposed substantial increases in the funding required for the recapitalization of the nuclear enterprise. Those programs to recapitalize the Minuteman force, the submarine-based force, pursuit of Columbia Class submarines, pursuit of B-21 bombers. Those have continued.

So certainly there is substantial cost involved. I thought Secretary Mattis put it very well when he said it is expensive, but the nation can afford survival. And nuclear deterrence is critical to our future and being able to defend against and deter potential adversaries from thinking that the use of WMD or other capabilities of the United States is something that would be on the table.

DWG: Thank you very much.

DWG: Tony, Inside Defense.

DWG: A question about defense industrial base partnerships. Two of the major pegs of the National Defense Strategy say build lethality and decrease international alliances. An idea whose time seems to have come and started coming up through think tank land, it's now over at the SASC where you're going to have your hearing tomorrow, is that maybe there should be a greater international framework between the United States and its closest allies for the sharing of technology. Stuff that

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Senator Imhoff's staff might argue why protect it from the Cold War since China stole it already?

Is there a sense in the department that this is a challenge for the department, being able to partner with allies and sharing technology without major export control reform? And what can the department do about it?

U/S Rood: Partnering with allies and building their capabilities in addition to ours is critical, and as you mentioned that is essentially discussed in the National Defense Strategy which is our guiding document. I should editorialize and mention that in my government career, this is the most focused I've ever seen us about seeing a strategy guide our actions and tracing how we're spending money, how we're spending our time, how we're placing our resource around the world, personnel reform. Directly tied to that strategy.

With respect to working with allies, that's been a core competency of the United States both in terms of things in the field operationally as well as cooperative programs. Things for development, production and the like.

So I do think that is critically important because all of us are facing tight financial circumstances.

We can do that in a variety of ways. I don't know that you need to invent a global over-arching concept for that. I'd say from my time in industry as well as in government, there are a variety of ways you can do that. Sometimes countries can pool their capabilities with a broader umbrella, for instance within NATO. NATO understands the importance of mobility, of having large aircraft that can do things like surveillance. So there's the AWACS program where a subset of the alliance countries have pooled their resources to do that. Some of the other allies have done that for tanker aircraft on their own without the United States. We're in favor of those.

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In terms of technology transfer and the governing strictures for tech release, for export controls, certainly those are areas that we can continue to work on to make it easier and try to improve those capabilities. That has been something we've been trying on. By the way, it's not limited to this administration. The preceding one and the one before that and so on have worked in that field, too.

But I think we don't have to invent a new framework but we do have to be serious about where there are some of those potential barriers, making sure we can break them down, because we simply don't have the wherewithal to do everything U.S.-only. We're going to need to do some of those activities. And the way the global market has developed for technology development, increasingly you're seeing not spin out or spin-offs from government-funded research, but I don't know exactly what it's called, spin-ins from the commercial sector to the government sector. And those aren't just occurring in the United States, of course. So we want to leverage that capability elsewhere.

DWG: Because of your time in industry you're probably very familiar with some of these barriers. Are there any in particular that you think with regard to export control reform that you should ask for legislative relief on for instance?

U/S Rood: The area where we I think need to work with our colleagues in the Congress is for right and good reasons, the committees of oversight wish to be involved in looking at the arms export process. However, a number of informal processes have developed that have ended up imposing rather long delays and making us unpredictable to our allies. So there's always a comedy and a balance between the legislative and the executive branch but in some cases it's produced quite lengthy, many months or year-long delays. And that I think is one of the areas where I'd love to introduce some more predictability to the Congress. The Congress has a legitimate role in that area. The governing law they've passed, the Arms Export Control Act, understand that. But we have a shared interest in being

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predictable and more regular for our friends and allies and how we're able to move through the export control system.

DWG: Tony Capaccio followed by Laura.

DWG: A couple of Ukraine aid questions. How much of the \$250 million has been allocated now to Ukraine? Have they placed any orders on it?

And were there any new lethal aid capabilities agreed to during the November 7th defense consultations that Laura Cooper led with Ukraine that would be delivered maybe next year possibly?

U/S Rood: Certainly security assistance to Ukraine is something that remains a priority for us. We're continuing to implement that.

The first thing I want to be clear on is there are no holds on any aid and the implementing agencies are moving out to execute the funding that the Congress appropriated last year. It was \$250 million in FY19 that the Congress also extended the validity of through a subsequent appropriation for FY20.

So of that \$250 million, I understand you were going to ask about this so I called the Comptroller, our Chief Financial Officer last night. All the funding has been released to implementing agencies with the exception of \$8.5 million which remains to be executed. We're on a good path to do that. Going through the normal processes. The expectation is that that will be executed here in the next couple of months.

DWG: Have any weapons been put on order [inaudible]?

U/S Rood: Within the \$250 million, as I say, all but \$27 of -- there was \$35 million at the end of FY19, roughly. Slightly over \$35 million that was remaining to be executed. Roughly \$27 million, just a little under that, has been released to the implementing agencies. What that means is they can then put it

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on contract. Then this last \$8.5 million, as I mentioned, remain to be executed.

So of the \$250 million, a lot has been put on contract for the variety of things that were envisioned under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

DWG: Going forward, any more lethal, was any lethal aid agreed to at the November 7th consultatives?

U/S Rood: I don't want to get into the specifics of an individual meeting and what was discussed, but the simple part is that we have again, the administration has requested another \$250 million in FY20 from the Congress for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. Assuming that Congress authorizes and appropriates, then of course we'll continue that. We do envision continuing lethal aid assistance to Ukraine.

One of the items that they are in the process of acquiring of course with an FMS or Foreign Military Sales Program is Javelin anti-tank weapons, additional Javelin anti-tank weapons from those that they purchased before.

So that has gone through congressional notification at this stage. The ball is now in the Ukrainians' court to sign the letter of offer and acceptance.

DWG: Can I ask one follow-up? Restrictions. There's been some confusing reporting, restrictions on their use. The Washington Post had in their fact checker that they couldn't be used against the Russians in the current conflict or Separatists. Are there --

U/S Rood: That's not accurate. That's not accurate.

In terms of the -- the United States has provided Javelin anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. Our ask has been, and there are some requirements on technology security That is preventing the

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diversion of technology to third parties. In terms of usage out in the field there aren't restrictions on that.

DWG: They can go after Russian tanks and Separatists.

U/S Rood: Well, bear in mind, these are defensive weapons which have been provided with the expectation that they are going to be used for defensive purposes. So the intent is to deter Russian aggression. That's the reason that we have been willing to sell these to the Ukrainians. So the desire is, again, these are defensive weapons, and our aim is that they be used for defensive purposes.

DWG: Laura?

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

I wanted to ask you about Turkey. There is news that [inaudible] and Erdogan have met now on [inaudible] the NATO Summit. Could you give us a sense, broadly, of I guess Turkey's actions recently and what kind of threat that poses to the NATO alliance and how you view Turkey and what they're doing right now.

And then specifically on the S400, we understand that turkey is again testing the S400, I believe against F-16s recently. So is there anything that Turkey can do at this point to put those weapons under lock and key and get back into the F-35 program or avoid sanctions? I appreciate your thoughts on both of those.

U/S Rood: Turkey remains a U.S. ally. They remain a NATO ally. You're going to continue to see us engage very robustly with them across a range of the relationship.

There are some areas that have been well reported on that are of real concern and are friction points in the relationship, and the S400 is most certainly one of them.

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President Trump has spoken, as you say, to President Erdogan a number of times about this. HE's not the only member of the NATO alliance at the leadership level that has spoken to President Erdogan. Because the S400 is not, cannot and will never be compatible or interoperable with the NATO defense systems. And one of the principles at NATO that we of course always promoted is the interoperability of our forces to be able to fight together, to work together, to defend the alliance together.

So we've been very clear about our concerns about Turkey continuing to proceed with the S400 integration in their forces.

Of course these are sovereign decisions and we respect the ability of the Turkish government to make sovereign decisions about its future. Nonetheless, those sovereign decisions have consequences and we are very concerned about the continued pursuit of that.

So when President Erdogan visited Washington, this was a significant discussion item between the President of the United States and his Turkish counterpart. I know some members of the United States Senate spoke to President Erdogan when he was here about the concerns in the Congress in that area.

We've had follow-on meetings and discussions with our Turkish colleagues. So the short answer to your question, Laura, we haven't given up on the issue and it's something that we remain engaged with the Turks with the aim of persuading them to pursue another path. I mean there's an old proverb, no matter how far you've gone down a wrong road, it's never too late to turn back.

So I think we are going to stay engaged with them to try to resolve this in a positive way.

AS you mentioned, that has had implications for Turkey's participation in the F-35 program That will continue. But with regard to Turkey's future in the alliance, certainly Turkey's a

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valued member of the NATO alliance. We saw at the NATO meetings a number of leaders meeting with President Erdogan.

We do, I think would like the Turks to be more constructive with respect to some of the planning called Graduated Response Plans that they have linked to some of their concerns about the YPG and Syria. Secretary Esper commented on this during his trip as well.

So we'll stay engaged with the Turks along with the rest of the NATO allies on that score as well.

But I would say there are other aspects of the relationship where we're working well together. As you know, the United States maintains bases in Turkey. We have lots of interactions with our Turkish colleagues at the professional military level and those are going well.

DWG: I know when, commanders usually say the mil to mil relationships have been always strong, but it seems like lately that this S400/F-35 issue has been weighing on even those relationships.

So is there anything that Turkey can do at this point? What would Turkey have to do to fix things, to avoid things and to perhaps get back in the F-35 program? Is just deactivating the S400, is that enough?

U/S Rood: Certainly we're having these kinds of discussions with the Turkish government and I think it's probably best that I leave that inside the government to government channel about some of the specifics.

But our concern has been about the acquisition of the S400. As I said we just don't think that's compatible with possession of the F-35 and participation in that program.

It will also just be simply not interoperable with the rest of

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the NATO systems. So we think it's just not a good step that the Turks have taken.

Again, it's their sovereign decision to make these kinds of decisions, but those decisions have implications and consequences.

DWG: Dmitry followed by Steve Trimbball.

DWG: Good morning, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for doing this.

I was going to ask you about U.S.-Russian military/defense dialogue. There were two phone calls between Secretary Esper and Minister Shoygu, right? Relatively recently. Which is by the current standards incredibly [advanced]. So I wanted to ask you what is the current thinking in the DoD on whether a sustained or continuous dialogue with the Russians on those issues is necessary or useful? Whether you plan, whether Secretary Esper plans to keep doing that? What's the current thinking on that?

U/S Rood: AS mentioned, Secretary Esper has spoken to his Russian counterpart a couple of times recently. Those aren't the only interactions, of course, that we have with the Russian military. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Chairman Milley, General Milley, has spoken to his Russian counterpart, and other military officers in the United States of course engage fairly regularly with their Russian counterparts.

For example when I was in Iraq I spoke to Lieutenant General White. He has just recently interacted with his Russian counterparts. And we have essentially daily interactions in Syria with the Russian military that I would characterize as professional and constructive, focused on deconfliction of our activities. It serves both the interests of the Russian force as well as the American forces and others that we deconflict our activities to avoid inadvertent incidents or safety concerns there.

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There is a broader dialogue, of course, between the United States government and the Russian government that's important. A lot of the, reading into your question, I think a lot of the subjects that you're interested in would customarily be led by the State Department in things like a strategic security dialogue. And we have had that from time to time with the Russian government. And we do have DoD people including from my team that participate in those discussions. What's the purpose of that dialogue? Where you have the strategic security dialogue or others, there's a whole range of subjects that are discussed, arms control, stability. How do we see deterrence developments in the world?

With respect to Secretary Esper's conversations with his Russian counterpart, as you say, we've gone through a period where we hadn't had those. Thought it was important to reestablish a clear communications channel there to have the ability to communicate in time of crisis, time to communicate and discuss if there are noteworthy items of concern. But it's just thus far been an opening up to a dialogue there. My expectation is that will continue periodically as needed.

I hope that answers your questions.

DWG: Secretary Esper opened with an idea of meeting personally with Minister Shoygu if need be.

U/S Rood: I'll let him comment on that.

DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Steve Trimbball of Aviation Week followed by Eric Schmitt of the New York Times.

DWG: My questions on INF. Four months ago the treaty expired. In that time we know that production of ground-launched cruise missiles started. There was a test scheduled for an

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intermediate range ballistic missile in November. So first, I wanted to see if there was any update that you can provide on those two efforts.

Thirdly, at some point in the next year or two you'd need a foreign government to step forward and allow you to base those weapons overseas for them to have any use at all. So in the four months since that treaty lapsed, has there been any country stepping forward or engaged on that basing issue?

U/S Rood: First of all, as mentioned, the United States first declared Russia in material breach and then withdrew from the INF Treaty because the Russian government pursued both the development and then later deployed intermediate range nuclear missiles. That's the reason that we ended up in this particular circumstance. And that was recognized by all of our NATO allies as to the reason for the demise of the INF Treaty.

Since that time, as you mentioned, now without the constraints of the treaty we have begun to explore options for intermediate range missiles within the U.S. forces. We did do a demonstration test of a cruise missile and we're also pursuing exploration of a potential intermediate range ballistic missile. Those are very early in their exploration. As I say, a demonstration test, not a developmental test at this stage.

So we're going to continue pursuing our options there and examining various capabilities, but we haven't made any decisions on the specific systems to be deployed or something of that nature yet. We're not yet at that stage.

So certainly talking about deployments outside the United States would be premature at this stage.

DWG: At this point there hasn't been a demonstration of an IRBM?

U/S Rood: Say that again.

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DWG: You mentioned the demonstration of the GLCM back in August, but has there been a demonstration test of an intermediate range ballistic missile?

U/S Rood: No.

DWG: Okay.

DWG: Eric?

DWG: One of the main messages around Manama as you mentioned, General McKenzie made pretty clear in interviews that he expects there to be another Iranian attack, large-scale attack whether it's on oil facilities, maybe even desal plants.

The response from partners in the region seems to be asking the United States for even more forces to act as a deterrent which McKenzie didn't think would probably be sufficient. But also to reach out directly in some cases, as the Emirates have to the Iranians and sent delegations to Tehran to try and tamp down tensions.

In your private discussions with allies, to what extent do you feel should there be another attack the U.S. would have to basically respond on its own without the support of allies who are concerned about some kind of kinetic strike escalating into a wider conflict. And what signs are you seeing on the ground in recent weeks that the Iranians may be preparing some kind of strike?

U/S Rood: Why do you phrase the question that way about the United States responding on its own as opposed to --

DWG: No, it was a question. Would it have to, given --

U/S Rood: Oh, I see.

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DWG: -- on the part of the Gulf nations [apparently] to want to get involved in some kind of shooting war.

U/S Rood: First of all, we do remain concerned about potential Iranian aggression. Number one, the Iranians have committed a number of aggressive acts in recent months. So you have some demonstrated intent on their part, whether it were attacks on shipping with the attacks on oil tankers, the attack on the Saudi oil facilities, and the shoot-down of a U.S. UAV. So all of those things are in the recent past, but we also continue to see indications, and for obvious reasons I won't go into the details, of that potential Iranian aggression could occur. Or Iranian aggression could occur.

So with that you've seen that we have one, stepped up our messaging to note the consequences of an attack on Americans, discourage an attack on our allies in the region. You've also seen us increase our presence in the region. You were on General McKenzie's trip so you probably got some of this directly. But as you know, over the last six months we've increased our deployments in the region by about 14,000 U.S. troops. Whether that was extending the Abraham Lincoln carrier deployment and Harry S. Truman is on her way to relieve her.

DWG: McKenzie also said he didn't think those additional funds would be enough to deter a large-scale attack.

U/S Rood: What I would say is our force deployments are intended to deter further aggression.

DWG: I know but --

U/S Rood: Let me finish.

DWG: -- achieve that goal, at least in terms of a potential strike against regional partners. Perhaps against the U.S. targets, but not against other regional targets.

U/S Rood: Deterrence is always a difficult thing to measure, and it's a dynamic and ever-changing condition. But I would say we have the deployments of U.S. forces which are considerable. You're perhaps more dialed into this than some others. But just a brief recap. I mean besides the carrier battle group, cruisers, destroyers, bombers, fighter aircraft squadrons, deployment of airborne early warning capabilities, maritime patrol aircraft, hardening units -- air and missile defense units. A pretty considerable number of U.S. forces that have been deployed. And it's not only the United States who has stepped up in terms of the potential for attacks on shipping and the attacks on allies that you mentioned. We stood up the International Maritime Security Construct. Seven countries are participating in that. And since the standup of that, we haven't seen a future attack on tankers.

So to your question would U.S. deployments alone be enough? One of the benefits that we've seen in the IMSC to deter further attacks on shipping, on maritime commerce, has been the participation of allies. We recognize that we would like to internationalize the response. That's been a major priority for us, and the Secretary of Defense and others to include myself have been working on that.

We've also tried to work with others to improve the internationalization of the response in places like Saudi Arabia with additional air and missile defense assets from other allies. We're starting to see allies respond to that call as well because we think that's one of the ways beyond just the deployment of U.S. forces, that the participation and involvement of others will help deter the Iranians.

Whether that's ultimately sufficient or not, the Iranian government observes the message. Again, deterrence is dynamic. Our response is going to be dynamic. We have not made a decision that this is some plateau or a fixed point in which U.S. forces will stay. And how we employ and utilize those forces throughout the region is not going to be static either.

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We've got to be dynamic in how we're deterring.

So in response to your question. No, I'm not disagreeing with General McKenzie, but I think there's more to the response than simply saying they are deterred or they are not deterred or that will hold. I think it's going to stay a very dynamic situation.

Watch this space. I think we're going to be dynamic in our deployments and our response and how we message. In private you should know, I mean we've sent very clear and blunt signals to the Iranian government about the potential consequences of aggression. All of this is intended to produce stability and deter potential attacks.

DWG: Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal, and then Jeff Shogul, [Task and Purpose].

DWG: Would the Pentagon like to see the continuation of the Open Skies Treaty? Or do you believe that it's kind of an artifact of history that works primarily in the Russian interest? And what would it take to preserve it?

A second related question, New START Expires on February 25, 2021 and with it the monitoring inspection and the data exchange provisions. Are those monitoring and inspection provisions important for the Pentagon in terms of keeping tabs on Russian strategic forces? And would you like to see some way to preserve at a minimum the inspection regime either as part of New START or some subsequent --

U/S Rood: First on the Open Skies Treaty. The United States and the administration have not made a decision to change our participation in the treaty. We remain a party in good standing. We continue to exercise our rights and capabilities under the treaty.

We're not the only participant. As you know, there are a number of countries beyond the United States and Russia that are

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parties to the treaty and we're in regular dialogue with those allies about the Open Skies Treaty.

So at this stage there's no change in our status under the treaty and we continue to utilize it.

The Open Skies Treaty, we do receive information from it. Our allies value the participation they gain and their ability. Some of them have much more modest means to collect this kind of information than the United States does.

Switching to New START, as you point out, New START doesn't expire until February of 2021. The Treaty also contains a provision to allow for its automatic renewal in accordance with its terms for up to five years. So it's premature I think to talk about the end of the treaty. What the President has put forward, which you're probably tracking is a proposal for a trilateral discussion, negotiation with Russia and China on a replacement, a larger arms control, nuclear arms control agreement that would limit the growth of those arsenals in China and in Russia.

The Chinese government, as you know, is not presently a member of any of these kinds of arrangements and they're not a party to the New START Treaty. So we have some time. We do derive benefit from things like monitoring and inspection provisions under the present treaty, in response to your question.

DWG: And just a quick follow-up. I mean the administration has not hidden the fact that there is concern over Russian compliance with the Open Skies Treaty, and that it's certainly been looking at potentially withdrawing, at least as of a few months ago. What would the Russians need to do, what actions would they need to take for you to feel comfortable in supporting the continuation of U.S. participation of the Open Skies Treaty?

U/S Rood: As you mentioned, we have had some concerns about

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Russian compliance with the Open Skies Treaty. Regrettably, it's not the only arms control agreement where we've had some serious concerns about Russian compliance with them. Unfortunately there's a pattern across quite a few of these treaties where the Russians have not been fully adhering to their obligations.

On Open Skies, I think we've made very clear to the Russians what our concerns are, and had direct discussions with them about the areas that we regard as problematic. I'd probably leave it in terms of those private discussions with them, where we've gone through the details.

DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Jeff and then Katy.

DWG: I'm new to this subject so I apologize if you've already answered this. Can you say why you certified that Ukraine has made progress towards corruption when apparently the President had concerns about Ukrainian corruption?

U/S Rood: As you mentioned, in May I sent a letter to the Congress, to the relevant congressional committees to meet a requirement that the Congress had established in law for certification of whether Ukraine had made sufficient progress towards addressing the defense reform and corruption reform concerns that the United States had. So in May I sent such a letter, but noted and certified formally to the Congress that Ukraine had made sufficient progress towards addressing their defense reform goals and in making improvements in addressing corruption such that we in the Defense Department were meeting the certification standard to allow for the provision of the Ukraine Security Assistance Funding, the \$250 million that the Congress had authorized and appropriated.

So the key thing there is that we do thin the Ukraine has made progress in addressing defense reform. We do think they've made

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progress in addressing corruption. That letter did note additional work remained to be done and that we still had concerns about the need to address corruption, the need to address defense reform.

We're continuing that kind of dialogue directly with the Ukrainian government. We have people, as mentioned, coming from my team. We also have a Special Advisor to the Secretary of Defense who engages directly with the Ukrainian government to assist them with reform.

DWG: But it looks as though the White House and the Pentagon were on separate pages here. Can you say how does the fact that the President had concerns about corruption square with the fact that the Pentagon said that they'd made significant progress on corruption?

U/S Rood: The way I'd characterize that is that we do believe the Ukrainians have made progress in meeting their defense reform goals and made progress in working on corruption. There is more work to be done. Significant work to be done. All I can say is that's what we've been consistent in saying in our public comments and in our written correspondence with the Congress and others.

DWG: Katy and then Bob Burnstein.

DWG: Thank you for doing this.

I want you to talk a little bit about the situation in Iraq. Obviously these protests are in the Iranian influence but they're also anti-foreign influence overall. So I'm curious what the [inaudible] right now of what this means for the [inaudible] U.S. troops there. Is the department prepared for the possibility that the U.S. might be asked to leave? And then what does this mean both for sort of the security and U.S. strategy of the region overall? As it relates to both Iran and ISIS.

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U/S Rood: As you know, I was just there in Baghdad. The situation is of concern to us because of the instability in the country. Obviously the violence occurring in the protests and against the protestors is also something we've persistently expressed concerns about directly and I did directly to the Iraqi leadership. We've made no secret of the fact we'd like to see greater restraint exercised in terms of the use of violence there.

In terms of the way that's going, there is an Iraqi identity that is evident in the protests and in the reaction to them and throughout the country that's more pronounced, I think than most Iraq observers have seen in recent months and years of an Iraqi identity and a willingness and a desire to be a state that stands on its own two feet to a greater extent, and a reaction against some of the negative Iranian influence, the influence of other countries trying to interfere in internal Iraqi activities.

In terms of your question about the presence of U.S. forces. We are very clear that we are there with the permission of the Iraqi government. That is a necessary condition for United States forces to be there. Our military mission has been to assist the Iraqi forces in building their capabilities to provide training and other assistance. And secondly, to assist with the conduct of the fight against ISIS which has been very successful, as you know. ISIS at one time occupied and controlled large swaths of Iraqi territory.

The fight against ISIS is not done. There are still substantial numbers of ISIS fighters there. And the Iraqi government knows that and they really value, and I heard this directly from them, the partnership with U.S. forces, the partnership with the United States military in addressing that.

So our intention is to stay.

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Your other question was, do we plan to change the posture of U.S. forces? Not at this time in response to what's going on because our mission is we thin unaffected. Supporting the Iraq government and providing training and advising and assisting and assisting with the conduct of the fight against ISIS, we think those things are going to continue even in a future Iraqi government. But we're under no illusions that we are there with the express permission of the Iraqi government, and that's a necessary condition that would have to continue.

I do think it is a very interesting trend and noteworthy to see this expression of Iraqi identity and really sharp and negative reaction to the level of Iranian influence. It's occurring at the same time you're seeing these unprecedented protests in Iran and a reaction to the regime's activities and in part the local populace in Iran doesn't like these foreign adventures that the regime has conducted. They're not wild about the idea when there are dire economic conditions in the country that this kind of amount of money is being spent on foreign adventurism in places like Syria and Lebanon and in Iraq when the regime is unable to provide for the needs of the Iranian people at home.

DWG: When you were in Iraq you were meeting with Mahdi, but he's obviously gone now. How are the kind of conversations the department's been having with the Iraqi government -- how has that changed since Mahdi left?

U/S Rood: Of course he only resigned and his resignation was accepted by the Parliament this last weekend, so we're less than a week into that. But we of course have dealings up and down the Iraqi government. I met with the Iraqi Minister of Defense. Our military and defense officials and the Ambassador meet with a full spectrum of the Iraqi government.

The Iraqis are in the process of working through that leadership transition, as you know, with the President of Iraq under the constitution is supposed to step in on an interim basis. So we're watching that situation. It doesn't appear to be, we

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don't have a noteworthy concern about that transition as far as I know.

But in terms of the defense relationship, we do think that's going to remain and continue because we have a shared interest. We have a shared interest in the stability and the health of the Iraqi state, the Iraqi Security Forces. A shared interest in building their capabilities. And a shared interest in the defeat of ISIS. We also, by the way, have a shared interest against undue foreign influence in that country.

If I were the leadership in Tehran I'd be concerned. The trend line is very negative against their adventurism and maligned influence in Iraq. Because the Iraqi people appear to me to want to be seen as Iraqis.

DWG: Bob Burns, then Tom.

DWG: I'll take you back to Ukraine briefly. As you mentioned, you had signed the certification report to Congress in May. When did you become aware that the money was being held up?

U/S Rood: Significantly after May.

DWG: July or later than that? And when would you have inquired about it?

U/S Rood: In the weeks after signing the certification I did become aware that the aid had been held. I never received a very clear explanation other than there were concerns about corruption in Ukraine as the purpose.

But in terms of our execution, our desire as we've moved forward through this at the Defense Department, has been to work with our Ukrainian colleagues to provide the security assistance as envisioned. We've had good partnership with them. And as I said in the certification, we did note that reform, progress that we expected to see, the Ukrainians had come up to that

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level but there was more work to be done. There were remaining concerns about corruption.

DWG: The money would have been released under your certification. That was the point of the certification for that particular amount of money, right?

U/S Rood: It was a requirement under the law that we certify that and I was the person that certified it.

DWG: One last thing on that. This was a period, of course, between June and July when you had, if I'm not mistaken, three Acting Secretaries of Defense and one actual Secretary of Defense between June and the end of July. Did you as the senior policy official on this question, had you briefed any or all of them about what the situation was on the aid?

U/S Rood: The people serving in the role of the Secretary of Defense were aware of the situation, yes.

DWG: All three of them were?

U/S Rood: Which three --

DWG: Shanahan, of course in June. And then you had Esper briefly. Then you had Spencer briefly. Then you had Esper confirmed by the end of the month.

U/S Rood: So you count Esper twice as four?

DWG: No, three. [Laughter].

Anyway, the point is whether they were aware that it was being held up in July. They were aware that it was being held up for corruption reasons.

U/S Rood: Certainly the Secretary of Defense was kept apprised of the status of those things. I couldn't tell you from memory

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here whether I ever had that conversation with Secretary Spencer. I don't know. Or the particular dates or circumstances in which Secretary Shanahan was involved or not involved. The short answer, I don't know the answer specifically to your question as I sit here now. But certainly the Secretary of Defense is kept apprised of these things.

DWG: In June and July some of them at least were aware.

U/S Rood: Your question is very specific about the exact time frame and the exact people and what they knew at those exact dates and you might have noticed there's a lot of interest in the exact proper answer to these questions, so I can't tell you --

DWG: Well you were the --

U/S Rood: Yes, but I can't tell you from memory on the exact dates in June or July in which various conversations took place as I sit here right now, Bob.

DWG: But you said weeks after the certification. That's why I was wondering whether you --

U/S Rood: I'm not trying to be unresponsive to your question. I just need to be careful that I'm not inadvertently giving an inaccurate answer.

DWG: Yes, but you said --

U/S Rood: -- exact date.

DWG: I wanted to ask about, how concerned are you about Russia's influence on U.S. defense policy coming from OSD? In 2017 you had [inaudible] intermediaries [inaudible], and Trump suggesting that, you know, [inaudible] exercises in South Korea. The [known] posture on kind of alienating NATO and creating [inaudible] there that we've seen over the last several days.

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And then Syria. I want to know how did the [inaudible] for your shop, your policy SESers who have had this clear view of where U.S. military policy, defense policy has been going. And there seems to be a lot of shifting going on.

U/S Rood: You mean with respect, just so I've got your question correctly. Russian discussions with North Korea and how that affects our North Korean policy?

DWG: But then having Putin actually kind of present those to Trump in 2017, 2018 when you saw the pushback on, you know, cutting back on our military exercises. Just one example. Maybe talk about that first, but then, you know, what we've seen in Syria and what we've seen with kind of the alienation that's going on within NATO membership.

U/S Rood: So really what you're interested in is sort of Russian influence and how we see Russia affecting other portfolios?

DWG: How you're concerned, you know, you've got career professionals that have been doing this for decades, and there's a lot of about-face going on on some of the things that [inaudible].

U/S Rood: Certainly we're watching what the Russian government and President Putin are doing very carefully. President Putin is pushing a number of things that are highly maligned influence around the world, whether that's interference in elections or propping up this brutal dictatorship in Syria with Bashr al Assad. There's a number of those kinds of activities that cause us great concern.

So we from a defense perspective continue to identify Russia as perhaps the greatest near-term threat. The National Defense Strategy is pretty clear, and we continue to reaffirm our adherence to that strategy about Russia as a major concern. Their maligned activities, their challenging the international

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rules-based order, violations of sovereignty of others in places like Ukraine that Bob was talking about.

So there's no question in our mind about the challenge there and the concern and the potential threat to the United States.

In terms of the impact in places like Syria, we are concerned about the way the Russians have approached that campaign there. For example, the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons against its own people. We see Russia playing a role as a protector of the regime instead of saying that is an abhorrent act, it simply can't be tolerated at the time [inaudible]. We're concerned about their activities in Idlib and the way that they are conducting military operations with the Syrians. So certainly there's an affect there.

In North Korea, we would like the Russian government to support us, to work with us in the full, final complete denuclearization there.

The kind of exercises you're talking about, we need to conduct military training. We do work with our partners in the ROK government to do that. But we're realistic and we're knowledgeable about the fact, there's active diplomacy underway and we do try to support in the Defense Department the diplomatic effort. That is the best long-term solution in North Korea, to have a diplomatic solution and negotiated outcome.

DWG: Just one clarifier. My question was more about their influence on current U.S. policy because of the Trump-Putin relationship. You would not have seen the cancellation of exercises except for some of the I guess suggestions of Trump, Putin working on Trump after talking to [each other].

U/S Rood: I don't know if I'd agree with that in the sense that the President's had direct dialogue, of course, with Chairman Kim. They've discussed things including exercises directly, the two of them. So I'm not sure I'd agree that that wouldn't have

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occurred had, or that there would be no way that the President of the United States would know about those concerns because he's engaged directly with the North Korean leader.

But certainly we understand the importance of the diplomacy with North Korea in the Defense Department. We are supportive of it. And so we don't want to see the readiness of our forces decline. The training and the exercises we do are very important to maintaining their capabilities. But we're pragmatic and realistic about the fact that there is ongoing diplomacy and we'd like to see it succeed.

DWG: Again on the influence, also, the drawdown of U.S. forces in Syria. The President made that decision highly influenced by discussions with Turkey, you know, that might have been influenced by Russian interests as well.

I'm trying to get, are you concerned at all about some of these shifts?

U/S Rood: Well, with respect to the President's decisions in Syria, my understanding, it was influenced by quite a few factors. Again, he's the President of the United States, he's the Commander in Chief, and it's certainly valid if he wants to make those decisions and our role is to give him advice and recommendations and try to ensure that he can make the best possible decisions. But obviously if the Commander in Chief and the President makes decisions, we in the Defense Department are in an implementation role.

DWG: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for your time today. It's been a really interesting session. I hope you'll come again.

U/S Rood: Thank you, David.

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