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Moderator: Good morning, everybody, and welcome everyone to this Defense Writers Group. I always introduce people who need no introduction. Everybody here knows the work of Lt. General Alexis G. Grynkewich, Commander of Air Forces, US Central Command. He's going off his next assignment, one of the best jobs I think, most interesting jobs in the military.

The ground rules as always, this is on the record,. You can record for accuracy of quotes but there's no rebroadcast.

I'll ask the first question. About 13 of you emailed me in advance to get on the list. We'll go through as many of those wrapping up in an hour with the General having final comments.

So General, thank you for joining us, sir.

Grynkewich: Of course.

Moderator: You were here almost six months ago to the day, and only a few days before the terrorist Hamas attack in Israel, October 7th. And events since then have kind of flipped the Middle East on its head. I wanted to talk a little bit about your changing priorities in the mission given all of these changes, and of course working those issues back here, but speaking with your current hat, sir.

Grynkewich: Sure. It brings up a couple of thoughts that I thought I'd start with for you all today.

First off, thanks for having me back. It was about six months ago that I was here last, and it was right before the attacks of 7 October by Hamas on Israel. This will be the last time that I get to speak to you in my current role, so I also appreciate the opportunity to do that. Thank you guys for making the time to be here.

After the 7th of October our priorities did rapidly shift to focus on the emerging crisis at the time. Our objective really

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was to contain the conflict between Hamas and Israel, to deter we'd say maligned actors from taking advantage of the situation to the extent that we could, and then to prevent it from escalating across the region. We were successful in some areas and not in others, as you all know. It's been well documented.

About 170 attacks, a few more than that on our forces in Iraq and Syria in the post October 7th era, until the unfortunate death of three soldiers on January 28th at Tower 22, which resulted in a robust US response that targeted not just militia capabilities but also Iranian capabilities and reset deterrence. Deterrence of course is always a temporal cognitive effect, so we're watching it closely, keeping an eye on the intel and making sure that that deterrence is holding.

Down in Yemen a lot of focus on the Houthis and the threat that they represent to regional stability as well for us. So that's been a significant priority.

Seventy-five missiles -- cruise missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles -- that they've launched over the period since they started attacking back in the November timeframe, over 50 attacks. Fifty-five different countries were affected by this. So their narrative is that this is about Israel and Gaza and the Palestinians, but they haven't supplied a single loaf of bread to help with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, so to me this is really about the Houthis wanting to build their own notoriety and their own power base, if you will, and nothing to do with the situation in Gaza. They're exploiting the situation for their own ends might be the way I would say it.

Dozens of UAS attacks up the Red Sea against shipping in the Red Sea as well. And about 15 percent of the global trade goes through the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the southern end of it. That's a major concern. And with US commitments to freedom of navigation around the globe is something that we're tackling as much as we can.

Our role in that as AFCENT and our priority has been to degrade and attrit what the Houthi capabilities that are threatening that shipping -- and that's been the self-defense strikes that you'll see CENTCOM put statements out almost every day now that we're executing.

The last couple of things I'd say, we've got an international

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coalition that's participating in AFCENT operations to take those self-defense strikes, obviously the maritime component is doing -- Prosperity Guardian, the defense coalition that's protecting shipping in the Red Sea. None of that would be possible without those coalition partners and without our partners in the region and the support that they provide.

So as a security integrator in the region, bringing those different groups together, everyone in the region is concerned about stability. Everyone is concerned about avoiding escalation. Everyone is concerned about containing the conflict. So there are a lot of shared interests that we have with our partners, our regional partners, and that overlap has been something that we've been cultivating and working on for Middle East air defense and other purposes. And we can talk about some of that if you like.

We do continue to be focused on innovation. We were talking about it on the way in. Looking for new ways that we can solve some of the sticky problems that we've got -- enduring problems as well as the more proximate problems such as finding the things that are going to threaten shipping that the Houthis have. So our Task Force 99 continues to evaluate and experiment and working towards a fielding of actual capabilities that could do additional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance work, et cetera. So I can comment on that a little bit more.

The last thing I'll say, just in response to this. One priority that has not changed is, we certainly see the central region as central to strategic competition, and that has become more and more clear in the current crisis as you see the confluence of not only the Chinese trying to undermine our position as a security integrator, and undermine our relationships with partners in the region, but you see the confluence of China, with Russia and Iran in the Iranian supply to Russia, the collusion, the tech transfer that's going back and forth. That's something that is I think a major feature that has emerged even more strongly. I think we talked last time that I worried about that growing Iranian and Russian collusion. I think we're seeing it in spades now.

I'll stop there and let you guys go back to questions, but thanks for teeing me up there.

Moderator: Thanks for a great tour of the AOR.

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First question, Lolita Baldor of AP.

DWG: Good morning, General. Thanks a lot for doing this, and welcome back to Washington.

Grynkewich: Thanks.

DWG: Two things on Yemen. One, can you give us your latest assessment on the Houthis, on the capabilities? Just where you think they are. We're seeing what appears to be a slight dip in some of their activities lately. If you can just give us your assessment of that.

Then as you look to the possible departure of a carrier in the coming months, although maybe not [inaudible], what are your alternatives for airstrikes? Do you think you have enough capability to continue with dynamic strikes?

Grynkewich: Those are really good questions and difficult ones to answer, but I'll do my best.

On our assessment of Houthi capabilities, the challenge for us is understanding what the denominator was at the beginning. In other words, what did they have on hand to start with. We obviously know how much we have struck and we have assessments of how successful those strikes were. So it's difficult to put a percentage on it. The other complicating factor is Iranian resupply continues. So the Iranians continue in violation of UN sanctions to provide weapons in Yemen to the Houthis.

We have seen changes in their behavior. The very large swarms of UASes that they've done in the past, they're unable to sustain those regularly. I suspect they'll be able to do one as they husband their resources and prepare for something like that at some point. They certainly could. We'll do everything we can to stop that and attrit those capabilities beforehand, but it's not out of the realm of possibility.

With their anti-ship ballistic missiles, we don't know exactly how many they had before the conflict started. We know it was probably dozens, would be the way I would characterize it. They've shot now, as I said, dozens of them. So the rate of resupply is something that we're trying to understand and trying to work with other components in CENTCOM to stop.

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So I think they have lost some of their capabilities. We've certainly affected their behavior. Their pace of operations is not what it was. But the Houthis are certainly capable of still threatening in the Red Sea and we'll continue to work that.

On the possible departure, what the force laydown is, I can't really comment on what the future force structure is going to be. I'll just say that we're constantly evaluating that with CENTCOM. The carrier has done magnificent work as many of probably your organizations have reported on. But we're always looking for what the future holds and kind of doing the detailed planning for that work. So I can't really get into specifics of how we'd do that, but certainly replicating the capabilities that a carrier strike group brings will be something that we'll have to work very hard.

Moderator: Next is Chris Gordon of Air and Space Forces Magazine.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

A question on the Air Force on this whole reoptimization and all that. That's geared towards China and getting away from the Middle East model. How will that affect AFCENT if you have these six month deployments and they deploy as a unit things in a region where relationships are so important? Is this not optimal for the Middle East?

Grynkewich: That's a good question. The reoptimization that the Air Force is undergoing has a couple of different layers. One layer at kind of the higher strategic level is trying to break down the stovepipes and build integrated capabilities as opposed to the combat air forces building a capability and the mobility air forces building another one.

Years ago I did an air superiority study that many of you may remember, Air Superiority 2030. Probably almost a decade ago now. And the main takeaway of that is you really need kind of an integrated holistic approach to fielding capabilities. If your fighter is going to have a certain range, then you needed a tanker that could go certain places to extend that range. If the fighters' range is shorter, you need a tanker that could go farther. Just as a simple example, and vice versa.

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I think that is just going to help warfighting capability be developed more holistically in the future. That will be of benefit no matter where a conflict is. So even though it's optimized for China, I would say the downstream effect of -- we're pretty bad at predicting where we're going to have a conflict if we end up fighting somewhere else in the world, whether it's the Middle East or elsewhere. I think it will have a benefit.

At the lower levels there's a lot of work being done on the deployed units of action. Some of that is being a pathway to these deployable combat wings, if you heard about those. I think at AFA they've talked about them a little bit.

Those deployable combat wings will be extremely useful in the theater as well, if you have these intact teams that are able to go and open a base and operate a base and command air power. So I think from a conflict preparation perspective it's not suboptimized or optimized for AFCENT. It just is going to be a much more coherent capability for us just like it will be for the Indo-Pacific.

The rotation of the forces in the region as we shift to that model where we have been manning out of hide and in some cases have leadership teams that were in place for a year, will go to six-month rotations. That will be something that we have to work on and double down on our investment and partnerships. So we're looking at how do we supplement the rotational forces with some key positions that will be more sustained over time, whether that's at the AOC, whether there's a limited number of positions at each base something like a host nation coordination cell that we can make a year longer or longer. So we're constantly kind of evaluating what that overall structure would be.

So the optimization thing has some of those implications and we'll just have to work our way through how do we manage them.

DWG: To follow up on that last point, possibly having some permanently assigned forces. AFCENT doesn't have any permanently assigned fighter units [inaudible] permanently [inaudible]. Would that be helpful in the short term?

Grynkewich: As far as the actual forces that we have, the amount of capability that we have I think is about right for the

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situations that we find ourselves in. We're able to surge in rotational forces when we need to and we have a fairly sustainable steady state rotational posture. When you talk about assigning forces there's always a great debate about is it better to allocate forces and rotate them through or is it better to assign them to a location. Various commands have different mixes of them. I think that's probably a broader policy discussion that would need to be had.

I do think there's some readiness benefits of each approach and we'll just have to work our way through them.

Moderator: Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg.

DWG: CENTCOM in its releases about attacks on Houthi assets is an intriguing line [and] a lot of misses. We hit as they were preparing to launch. That's a preemptive strike. What elements have come together -- air, sea, space -- to allow these preemptive strikes on little old missile launchers that [inaudible]? Then I have a follow-up.

Grynkewich: We have a layered ISR collection strategy. There's been a lot of priority put on Yemen at the national level and at the component level and the CENTCOM level, so we're rapidly ingesting any imagery that we get from national sources. We're supplementing that with kind of an airborne layer of ISR. You all are aware we're flying MQ-9s down there in the southern Red Sea and so that's a layer. And of course there's all the other INTs that we put on top of that, but I won't go into detail here.

So we kind of pull all that together and then we have a small cell that fuses this very rapidly. So as tipping and queuing comes in, we can even rapidly retask assets to go take a closer look at it.

Then we're looking for the telltale signs that something is set up, something's on a launcher, something's ready to go. Sometimes that's backed up by other intelligence that we understand some of the intent behind what we might be seeing.

DWG: How does that information then get to the airplanes dropping JDAMS and [JSAUS] or whatever?

Grynkewich: That goes through our battle management C2 network,

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the overall command and control architecture includes aircraft, it includes ships, and so there's always someone who is doing the battle management function. So it will come from our dynamic cell in the Air Operation Center, get transmitted to whoever that battle manager is. So think of it like we don't have E-3s right now, but if we had an AWACS that might be where it goes or it might go to a ship that's doing that, or if an E-2 is airborne off a carrier it might go to them, and then they'll task it to the aircraft.

DWG: Everybody in the room wants to know what liaison you have with the Israeli Air Force in terms of giving them instructions no how to minimize collateral damage given the munitions they use. Do we have an Israeli Air Force official in the CAOC with you? Or do you have people in Israel directing their weaponeers?

Grynkewich: I'll answer it this way. We have robust dialogue with the Israelis. There's Air Operation Center to Air Operation Center dialogue almost daily. I talk to the Israeli Air Chief probably a couple of times a week, once a week. Our dialogue is always , one of the points we always make at all levels and you've seen other leaders well above me talk about this, is the importance of minimizing civilian harm and collateral damage.

We do not do any specific on-the-ground advising or helping them with targeting or anything like that, so our discussions are higher level encouraging them to take the actions that they need to prevent that.

Moderator: Helene Cooper of the New York Times.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

After yesterday's Syria strike what concerns do you have about Iranian proxies [inaudible] strikes against --

Grynkewich: You're referring to the Israeli strike in Damascus?

DWG: I am. And I have a follow-up.

Grynkewich: I think from a military perspective, the biggest concern that I have is does this lead to some sort of regional escalation? We're watching very carefully, we're listening to

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what the Iranians are saying in terms of how they intend to respond. We obviously are watching our intelligence sources very closely to see if we can understand how they might respond, and the risk, of course is escalation in the region. That's the main concern.

There were some Iranian statements that talked about US complicity in this. We were not involved at all. We did not know the specifics of what the Israelis were doing. So I am concerned because of the Iranian rhetoric talking about the US, that there could be, there is a risk to our forces. I don't see any specific threats right now to our forces, but we're watching that very closely to see if the pause that we've benefited from since February 2nd and 3rd were to end, that would be -- we would have to think very carefully through how we would respond to that.

DWG: On Israel's plan for Gaza and Rafah, do you have any, have you seen much of [inaudible], do you have any confidence in what they're doing? Or planning to do?

Grynkewich: No, the Israelis don't share the details of their plans with me. So I don't have any particular insight into what that might look like. You're aware of the US, the overall US position and we reinforce that in mil-to-mil channels about their needs to be a good plan that takes into account the protection of civilians in Rafah.

DWG: Expanding on that, what are the dangers of the Rafah [plan] that you see? Of any kind of Rafah effort.

Grynkewich: Again, I don't know their plans. I can't comment on the dangers of their plan. A couple of risks from a military perspective that I would see. The continued infliction of civilian harm has implications across the region. People see that, they're activated by it, and it has kind of a destabilizing effect and it allows maligned actors like the Iranians who frankly, in my view, don't really care about the plight of the Palestinian people. They just are taking advantage of that situation. It allow them to use it as an excuse. So that's the military risk that I see, is just sowing additional instability, depending on how that operation is executed.

And that has long-term implications not just for our security

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interests, but frankly, for the Israeli security in the region as well.

Moderator: Shawn Carberry, National Defense Magazine.

Moderator: Thank you. Good morning, General.

At AFA last year 7.3, you were talking about the growing complexity of the different attacks, having to defend against missiles, UAS swarms, things like that, and about the need to build defensive architecture, essentially you can plug into more or less JADC3. Can you talk about the progress that's been [inaudible] since then and sort of what you're seeing in the real world application of the technologies now that the threats been even increasing in testing that since then?

Grynkewich: Absolutely. I think the complexity of those attacks has, we've continued to see it. I'm not the European guy, but I'd say we've seen it in Ukraine, we've seen it with Houthi attacks, we've seen it with militia attacks. So the proliferation of unmanned technologies and missile technologies and the combination of ballistic cruise missiles, UAVs, all these unmanned things that can come in at different speeds and different directions does add a complexity to the overall defensive architecture.

For how we have dealt with that, it truly is a multi-domain, multi-service response that we have to orchestrate in these instances. So there's a number of different systems that we use in the joint world to do this. Some of them are Top Secret systems that pull in a bunch of different intel sources together to try to build a coherent understanding. The one that is new and that CENTCOM has really been pushing and all the components are on now is kind of the min viable product of JADC2, I would say. It's a common operating picture that pulls in feeds from everywhere. I almost think of it, if you remember the game Hungry Hippo, it is the hungry hippo of data and it's going out and it's pulling in lots of data. And then you can layer it and look at it in different ways. So it's really trying to use data centricity to build understanding.

The thing that does is it synchronizes this across the domains and components to have a coherent picture. So now my conversations or my battle caps' conversations with the NAVCENT Maritime Ops Center, they're looking at the same basic picture.

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You do have to understand the data that goes in there, what's the source of the data, how confident are you in it? But when you understand all of that you can have that common picture and now you can make real-time decisions in seconds about is a ship going to engage that, is a fighter going to engage it, do we need to call one of our partners to warn them about it, et cetera. So that's a key part of it.

With our partners we have been working vary hard to build our common operating picture, not on the same system, but I'm talking about for the US, but we have a few others that we share over the CENTCOM partner network. To the max extent possible my Air Defense Liaisons are on in our partner nation facilities and they're showing that picture to them so that they see the same thing or very close to the same thing that we're seeing. And then that allows kind of mutual support across defensive lines and boundaries and what not. So it's really the ability to have common understanding of the problem I think is essential to getting the next layers of now putting effectors on target, if you will.

DWG: What do you see as the key needs and evolutions of that going forward?

Grynkewich: I wouldn't have thought about this -- I would have thought about it, but maybe not to the extent that I do now. But bandwidth, bandwidth, bandwidth and secured access to the spectrum. That is going to be central for things like JADC2 to come together. You've got to be able to get massive amounts of data or the information that you're deriving from that data rapidly and in near real time to every actor so that they're seeing the same thing. If you can't do that because you don't have access to that bandwidth, either because you didn't buy enough or because it's being contested, then you're stuck on the side of the road and not doing anything.

Moderator: Next is Luis Martinez of ABC.

DWG: You mentioned [inaudible]. What was different about that airstrike? You're used to [inaudible] but the volume, the targeting. In your mind, what was it specifically about that that kind of impacted potentially the deterrence that we're now seeing?

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Grynkewich: Great question. I think you actually hit on it in the question what I assess the answer to be. That is, it was both the volume of the targets that we hit, I think over 85 targets, and it was what those targets were. So some things that were militia-related targets, but there were others that were IRTC related targets. So it sends a very clear signal I think to the Iranians that they have crossed a line with the death of our American soldiers at Tower 22, for their support to the militias in those attacks, and that is what reset deterrence. It was the volume and the fact that we were holding Iran directly for account to some of the targets that we went after.

DWG: And Tower 22 [inaudible], was there something there, you know, lessons learned from that incident that you've taken down since then?

Grynkewich: There's always lessons learned, whether things go the way you want them to or not. Certainly we took a close look at what our defensive architecture was, what our assumptions were about where the Iranians were willing to direct the militias to hit us. So it was in Jordan. That was new and different.

I won't get into specifics of how we might have adjusted things just for operational security reasons and to protect our forces that are over there benefiting from any adjustments we might have made, but of course we're going to look at it very closely when we have something like that that happens.

Moderator: Audrey Decker, Defense One?

DWG: I just want to ask about the sentiment from your troops that you're getting in the Middle East on US support to Israel. There was the terrible death of Airman Aaron Bushnell who died here in protest of the war. Are you seeing -- do you think that's indicative of a broader sentiment from troops that they're not really happy with the way things are going? What do you see on the ground from your troops talking about these issues?

Grynkewich: Good question. The way I would answer that, I'll give you two answers if I can. The first is our airmen and our personnel from any of the joint services that are out there are really just focused on the mission that we've been given. So

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the vast majority I think -- of course everyone has their political opinions, I'm sure. We all do. But they're focused on the mission that you've given, the military tasks at hand, being ready to execute them, being ready to defend themselves, being ready to execute whatever operation they might be called upon to execute. But I don't see widespread expressions of an opinion one way or the other on things of a political nature.

I will say that one sentiment that's very heartening to me is, just like all of us are concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, every single individual who is participating in those missions is extremely proud that they're participating in them.

I flew on a mission about a month ago, I think it was, into Gaza on one of the air drops. The crews that were there, the people who were doing the rigging, the folks that were delivering the materiel to the aircraft to be loaded, the loadmasters putting it on the airplane. Everyone was just extremely proud of what they were doing. And that's just human nature, that you want to feel like you're helping somebody. So at our bases where we're building the pallets and we're putting these things together. It's a major effort to get that stuff consolidated and then to rig it to be dropped out of an airplane. It requires significant manpower.

And you've got some experts that come in, Army or Air Force riggers and loadmasters that know how to do it. But there have been people beating down the door. Dental technicians, after they get done with their last tooth cleaning for the day that will show up and want to volunteer to help rig. Some of our Space Force personnel when they go off duty will come over and want to help rig. Some of our cops, they get done, security forces airmen who get done with their 12-hours shift guarding the gate will come over and want to help rig.

So a huge emotional outpouring I would say of people just wanting to help other human beings that they know need the assistance.

DWG: On the aircraft thing. There have been reports that people have drowned trying to swim out to get these bundles of aid. How do you guys manage that? And is there any way to land them on the beach? Or if you could kind of talk to how, is there a way to mitigate that?

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Grynkewich: We do everything we can to mitigate the risk to personnel on the ground. The way that we do that -- so one of the concerns is do you have a failed chute, and now do you have a very heavy bundle coming down to the ground at a very high velocity. So we do a couple of things to help on that. The first is, we're monitoring the drop zone. So we've got ISR overhead and we're watching it in real time. I was doing this yesterday morning, watching in real time, making sure that the drop zone was clear as we executed.

We do try to drop over the water and then count on the winds to push things ashore, and the reason for that is if there is a failed chute, it will fall in the water when you drop it over the water and not on land where people are going to be. If you get the winds wrong, though, then you can have some bundles that land in the water. We've seen that several times that has happened. Sometimes a large number of bundles, sometimes just a couple of them. But we try to message everyone and say the bundles will wash ashore. Of course people are hungry. They're going to go out and try to get them.

But the main concern we have is any of the harm that we could do to a structure, to humans on the ground if something goes wrong with the chutes and the drops. To us the least bad option is to make sure, the best option is to make sure that we're dropping somewhere where that won't happen. Where you won't have a catastrophic [inaudible].

Moderator: John Harper, Defense Scoop.

DWG: Thanks for doing this, General.

You mentioned Task Force 99. Is that organization supporting CENTCOM's operations against the Houthis in terms of providing ISR support? And then what lessons from the current conflict are you drawing that would be applicable to the work that Task Force 99 is doing?

Grynkewich: I'll work my way backwards through that one if I can.

The inventory of unmanned aerial vehicles that we have right now, MQ-9s, MQ-1s ScanEagles, et cetera, they'll come with different price points, with different capabilities and there's

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a tradeoff there. You know, more expensive, more exquisite; less expensive less exquisite. We're trying with Task Force 99 to find a way to thread the need where we can use commercial off-the-shelf technologies or things that we develop in-house to develop something that has a bit more capability than you might find on a standard off-the-shelf drone, but it doesn't cost nearly as much. And the reason you don't want the cost to be so high is so you can sustain losses when you take them. Or so that you can have affordable mass and bring volume to the fight.

Task Force 99 is working that very hard right now. They have a couple of promising technologies, I won't get into exactly what they are, but in general the task I've given them is I need them to figure out a way to flood the zone with additional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance so we can identify these threats to the maritime domain faster, better, cheaper than we can right now. They're getting really close.

DWG: Is that organization providing any ISR support for the ongoing operations against the Houthis or are they kind of doing a separate thing?

Grynkewich: Their task is to develop solutions that we can apply in Yemen or elsewhere. We have used their capabilities in the AOR, in actual combat conditions before. I won't say where it was, but we have done that before. And I intend to do it again as soon as we have the right capability to apply in the right environment.

Moderator: I'd like to use the power of the chair to follow and elevate as we spoke on the way up. I mean you are doing groundbreaking work in CENTAF about swarming drones. PACAF is doing some. Could you give a more strategic level view of the role of drone swarming in deterring China and stabilizing the Middle East? And obviously DepSecDef Hicks has adopted if not your thinking, this thinking with the Replicator program which is one of the most inventive programs. How do you assess its fate against services that really like a lot of the old weapons too?

Grynkewich: Good question. A couple of thoughts on this. When I think about the future of warfare, I think we're seeing that kind of play out in front of our very eyes right now. I see it with the volume of things that we're dealing with in CENTCOM right now. You know, 20, 30 aircraft, drone swarms coming out

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of Yemen, we've seen smaller swarms that have been used in Iraq and Syria, certainly the Iranians would have the capability to send these swarms. It would be a swarm that's not just UAVs, but probably cruise missiles and you pair it with a ballistic missile, now you have a multi-domain problem, atmospheric and exoatmospheric that you have to deal with at the same time.

I think you're seeing that play out as adversaries are attempting to use mass to overwhelm our defenses. That's really what it comes down to. It's affordable mass to try to overwhelm our defenses. I like that play. I would like to turn that around and use affordable mass to try to overcome the defenses of adversaries as well. Replicator is trying to identify which of the solutions that we have is affordable but we haven't quite figured out how to scale it so that it's mass, and make that happen. And see can industry support getting the numbers that we would need to do that?

So I think it's a fantastic initiative. The low cost technologies to get that affordable mass will be really critical in any conflict in any region in the world, in my view.

The flip side of it is, I don't think that means that some of the more exquisite weapon systems, whether they're manned or unmanned, and irrespective of domain, are irrelevant at all. As an airman, for those of you who'll be familiar with F-15 and F-16 in the '70s and '80s referred to as the high/low mix. You had some higher end exquisite capability and then you and the affordable mass of the F-16. I see the same kind of duality being required here. But you would need some exquisite say unmanned technology like the Collaborative Combat Aircraft that's able to do certain things and then you can follow that with affordable mass. You can pair it with the affordable mass.

So in my view, it's kind of an all of the above approach. If you do just one and not the other you won't really optimize the system from a warfighting perspective.

Moderator: Gordon Lubold.

DWG: Building on Luis' question earlier about the groups and their attacks falling off after you guys [inaudible]. It seems like after the commander of the [inaudible] was killed, that was a signal, Iran said okay, knock it off, to those groups. Is there an equivalent dynamic at all with the Houthis? And I

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guess my real question is, if for whatever reason Iran said to the Houthis, knock this off, what's the lag time in the supply chain? If they said okay, how much longer could the Houthis subsist without Iran's support?

DWG: There's a number of factors that would play into that.

I do think there is a similar dynamic. The Houthis are a little bit different from the militias in Iraq and Syria in that they view themselves as more independent. They're not quite as responsive, in my estimation, to Iranian direction. But if I was the Iranians I would be very concerned about what the Houthis are doing, the threat to international shipping, the risk of escalation that's coming from that.

Having said that, the Iranians are not a monolithic organization. There's pockets and different groups within the Iranian system that probably have different views and they're going to have their own bureaucratic battles about how they control the Houthis.

So from the time let's say the Supreme Leader makes a decision that says hey, we need to really chokehold the Houthis and get them to stop, when would we see that happen? I think it could take a little while. Again, because there's imperfect control of all these military groups and the Houthis in particular are difficult to control. It would take using significant leverage like cutting off supplies, cutting off advising support, intelligence support, et cetera, and for that to percolate down to the people that are doing that work is just going to take some amount of time in the Iranian system, I think. And it's going to be complex for them to do that.

Having said that, the Iranians could do it. The Houthis cannot do what they are doing without Iranian support. Whether that's them queuing them to where vessels are or sharing purported intelligence about which ship is owned by whom, which the Houthis have gotten wrong several times. They can't do what they're doing without Iranian support.

DWG: Thanks for that.

Then in terms of kind of the approach of degrading their capability, is there, there's obviously more you could do if you wanted to, not you personally necessarily, but against the

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Houthis to actually decimate their capability? Or is that like an unknown because the intel's not good enough or their capability's too high?

Grynkewich: The way I see my role here is A, execute within the authorities that I've been given, so we're going to maximize that. But the other part of our role is to provide a range of options for policy-makers to consider. So we've certainly looked at that and we articulate what are the risks and challenges of different approaches. Yemen was not something that we looked at closely as a nation for a while, so I've hinted at more ISR is always better. You probably have never heard a commander say oh, I've got too much ISR, I'll send it back. So more is always better. It's always a challenge to penetrate, especially difficult to build institutional understanding of something you haven't looked at. We see that even in AFCENT ourselves. It's not a broader criticism at all, but just internal. We haven't looked at Yemen in a while, so we've had to build that expertise very quickly.

So there are challenges to different target sets. Some are easier than others. We've certainly looked at all of that and provided options and articulated what the risk of each approach is from a military perspective.

Moderator: Felicia Schwartz, FT.

DWG: Thanks very much, General.

I wanted to ask you about this kind of perhaps at this stage long-shot effort to talk about a US-Saudi defense treaty in the context of normalization between Israel and Saudi and looking at what happens in Gaza the day after. I wonder from your perspective on the ground, whether you think it's a good idea or workable, and if you participated in any of the kind of staff work to make that happen, however long-shot it may be.

Grynkewich: I don't have a direct role in any of those kind of diplomatic negotiations. I think the way I'll answer your question is this. We have a very strong and robust mil-to-mil relationship with the Saudis, so whether there's a formal treaty in the future or not, from my perspective, that relationship goes all the way back to FDR and he laid the foundations for that. The Saudi relationship with the US has been very strong for a very long time. It is as strong today as it's ever been

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in my view. At the military to military level which is the only thing I can really comment on.

So my relationship with the Saudi Air Chief, the relationship with my commanders on the ground in Saudi Arabia with their counterparts is really good. And we do work together, thinking about mutual defensive efforts that we need to take. When we've got a base in Saudi Arabia that they are on and we're on, we're going to both defend it if we need to. So at the lower working level, the operational and tactical level, I can tell you that that very strong relationship does cascade into the kind of cooperation that you're describing.

Moderator: Kimberly Underwood.

DWG: Good morning, sir. Thank you for being here today.

You talked a little bit about the multi-domain and multi-service operations. I wanted to ask a little bit about how the integration with the Space Force is doing within the component of CENTCOM itself as it builds out service presence [inaudible] space sense. What are you relying on them for, and kind of from an asset perspective, how is their further establishment strengthening your organization?

Grynkewich: Great question. I'll tell you, I think it's going very, very well. That's kind of my top line answer to you.

SPACECENT or Space Forces Central has stood up as a separate component. It was a little over a year ago, I guess, right after Indo-PACOM stood up their component. I would tell you, they were probably acting as a component well before that. And treated independently, even though they were still part of Air Forces Central. In many ways I think because of the kind of operations that we execute in CENTCOM, they were ready very early on to take on these responsibilities.

Two big benefits. First is by elevating them to a component rather than coming through say the AFCENT commander which was the Space coordinating authority before that, they have a direct voice to General Kurilla about issues related to Space. So they're able to talk to him about things that I just wouldn't have had time to talk to them about, or it wouldn't have risen necessarily to the level. Maybe it should have, but it wouldn't have with me. So the SPACECENT commander can talk about

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electromagnetic interference on orbit that's affecting our Global SATCOM, let's say. They can talk about space weather effects that might be affecting us. They can talk about adversary actions in space that even if it's not Iranian actions that we're most worried about that could have an affect on us in the course of a broader conflict. So it's given much more visibility to space capabilities that we're all so reliant on across the Joint Force.

The second thing I'd say is you would think that as they did that there would be some regrets in terms of they come out as a separate component, maybe there's less synchronization. They are still part of the CAOC which is still the Combined Air and Space Operations Center. So Space Force personnel are on our combat ops floor. They work for the SPACECENT commander but they're tactically working day in and day out just like the always have, providing early warning, threat warning, talking about other space effects. So at the tactical level we have not disassociated them from operating kind of as a department of the Air Force or a joint combined team in the CAOC. They're still fully integrated.

DWG: And given your high tempo of operations, is there a challenge put on them to kind of get things together quickly?

Grynkewich: Have you met General Kurilla? [Laughter]. I will tell you, there is always a challenge on all of us to get things done quickly and move faster, et cetera. General Kurilla is a demanding boss and he will force us to move quickly when he sees an opportunity we need to exploit. The situation is also very demanding, as you alluded to, and we've got to be ready to exploit it right away.

I think the other thing that I'll highlight, just one additional thought I had. Our partners are very interested in Space Force and what we've done and how we've organized and how we're doing this. So one of the other great benefits of having Space Central is they are able to go out and engage now as the Saudis are thinking about what do their space capabilities need to look like? Or the Qataris or whoever. Lots of direct dialogue now with their professionals on what a true space capability means for each of these nations and what would be appropriate for them. So it's actually helped our partnerships across the region in a number of ways.

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Moderator: Missy Ryan, Washington Post.

DWG: Thank you.

I have a clarification. You mentioned earlier at a question, you said that Iran has continued to provide information to the Houthis about where ships are, if I understood you correctly. To guide their strikes for their [inaudible] hitting ships. Is there anything the US can do short of breaking that ship or whatever platform it is that the Iranians are using to disrupt that? Have you attempted to do that?

And my question is regarding Israel and Gaza. Given the US military's own experience, do you feel like you have a good sense of what the problem is with the Israeli air campaign in terms of their protocols? The administration's been very clear that they think civilians should be protected to a greater degree, but do you see this as an intelligence failure, a proportionality judgment problem, a failure to properly distinguish between civilian and military targets? What's your diagnosis there?

Grynkewich: On the first question, the Iranian support to the Houthis comes in a variety of different ways. I think how you affect that support -- not every way to effect it is going to be kinetic. There's going to be ways to encourage it. There's ways to expose it, to embarrass the Iranians that I think has an effect on them. I do continue to assess that the Iranians are not interested in a broader regional conflict. They want to take advantage of the crisis as it exists, but they're not interested in war with Israel, war with the United States or war with anybody else right now.

So to the extent that you can deter them by saying hey, we know that you're part of this, I think that's a very effective way to address them. Obviously there are other ways you can do it, that get into other more highly classified capabilities we might have that we would use. I'll leave it at that.

For the question about the Israeli air campaign, or their processes for protecting civilians, I'll give you one view and then one other factor that I think is really important.

I did go to Israel a couple of months ago. I think it was right before the end of the year, in 2023. Went to see one of their

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strike cells and observe how they were doing things. They do all the things -- it appeared to me they were doing all the things that we would do. They have no-strike lists, they know where protected facilities are, and my assessment is they were making a bonafide effort to adhere to the Law of Armed Conflict and were doing that within the context of the conflict that they're fighting from the perspective that they're fighting it with the existential threat that they see themselves facing.

So their application of LOAC is not in doubt in my mind. What is extremely challenging is their adversaries -- and we'll just talk about Hamas in particular, but they will put something that would be a valid military target right next to a protected facility, or they might put human shields right outside of it. So the Israelis are having to make judgments of proportionality distinction and necessity that are different because of the kind of adversary that they're facing in many ways.

So if Hamas was adhering to the Law of Armed Conflict, this would probably be a much clearer conflict on all sides, I think.

Moderator: [Inaudible].

DWG: Patty?

Grynkewich: Patty with [Inaudible]?

I'm wondering [inaudible]. Where you see that in everything going on [inaudible]. There was an IG report that said basically that kind of what's been going on with [inaudible] [inaudible]. Then I have a follow-up.

Grynkewich: I don't think I would use the word hamstrung. We are always having to prioritize the resources that we have against what the threats are that exist out there. As October 7th happened, as our forces are under attack we shifted a lot of our focus to force protection and using our ISR to try to detect threats that existed to our forces.

We also fully recognize that you can only do that for so long. ISIS is an adaptive organization and always has been. I think the last time we talked I probably would have said something like they're down, but they're not out. We're keeping pressure on them. We've got to keep the pressure on them to some degree to make sure that they don't reemerge.

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I think ISIS Core, broadly hit remains down. One of the dynamics that's really interesting right now is the Russian and Syrian regime counter-ISIS operations have fallen off significantly as well, so we don't see nearly as much Russian and Syrian regime activity. But we continue to work with our partners, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and have a regular base of de-ISIS operations. I think you'll see CENTCOM start talking about that a little bit, particularly with the increased focus after the attacks in Russia and in Iran over the last few months.

ISIS Khorasan certainly has proven that it has the ability to do these external operations in a couple of countries, so that is something that is very concerning to us. You know, we've said for a while now that they would have an ex-ops capability within a certain amount of time, depending on who you ask, six months, a year in. It's varied over time as intelligence assessments have changed. But now that we see some of that manifesting, we're certainly interested in focusing back and seeing what are the options that we might have to increase pressure increase understanding, and ensure that we disrupt any threats that come to the US. Again, that doesn't always mean a kinetic disruption. There's plenty of non-kinetic ways to disrupt law enforcement actions, ways to go after money, those sorts of things. We're looking at all of those across the whole team.

DWG: Another group we haven't talked about is Hezbollah. I'm wondering if you're seeing any threats to US forces in the region from Hezbollah or [inaudible]?

Grynkewich: No direct threats from Lebanese Hezbollah against US forces in the region right now that I see. The Hezbollah, very tight with Iran. Sometimes plays an enabling role to some of the other groups that are out there, so it's an indirect role that they sometimes have. I haven't seen a lot of that lately.

There is a bit of a confluence that I suspect is happening between Hezbollah and the Houthis as a conduit for some of the Iranian support as well. So that's probably the one that's closest to home in terms of a threat to US forces.

I mentioned that I don't think Iran is looking for a broader conflict. I don't think Hezbollah is either. But we do watch the situation up on Israel's northern border and southern border

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of Lebanon very closely because there is a risk of escalation there as attacks go back and forth. So far, everyone has stayed below the threshold of breaking out into major conflict, but there certainly is risk there that we want to watch very closely.

DWG: [Inaudible] escalation [inaudible]?

Grynkewich: I don't know, frankly, what would tip it. The crux of the problem I think is the range of Hezbollah rockets and what they can threaten in Israel from an Israeli perspective. So wanting to push them back in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution so they're not so close to the border, so they can't immediately threaten. And especially after the attacks of 7 October, this is seared into the Israeli mindset I would say, as it would be in anyone's. We don't need them right on our border able to hold us at risk every day. We need that buffer zone so we've got adequate indications and warning. So there's a lot of negotiations that I think has to happen to get us there. Some of those negotiations will play out in the military sphere before they start in the diplomatic sphere, I think.

Moderator: General, as we approach the end of the hour I want to give you the final minutes for any closing comments. But before you do, I want to say thanks to you and to all the airmen and women under your command for what they do to keep our nation safe. We're honored to have you twice in six months, and we hope that as you take on this incredibly important job on the Joint Staff you'll think about coming back to see us and discussing things from the J3 perspective.

The floor is yours.

Grynkewich: Thanks, I really appreciate it.

I guess what I'd want to do is close on maybe a longer term note and a positive note. One way or another we'll get through the current crisis and we'll see how that plays out. But the amount of partnership and integration that we're doing with our allies and partners in the region is really impressive to me.

So everyone knows, I think you all know that we moved portions of our Air Operation Center back to Shaw Air Force Base in Sumpter, South Carolina. We have at least 20 coalition officers

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that are sitting in Sumpter, South Carolina now as part of our Air Operation Center and they're both our typical European allies and partners that are there with us, but also regional partners who have come and joined us there. So we have the ability to bring people together. Whether it's at Al Udeid with our presence there, or if it's back at Shaw. And those partnerships, we mentioned the Saudis a little bit and the strength of the mil-to-mil partnership. I would say that replicates across the board with all of the countries in the region. And through our ability to integrate the security architecture in the region, I think we have vision where you can get to a more stable, more prosperous Middle East and manage the threats that are posed.

The other side of it is we need to do this as a nation, in my view, and continue to play a role there, and we intend to continue to play a role there. We're not leaving the region, despite what the Chinese will tell all of our partners. That we're unreliable, we're not committed to the region, et cetera. If anything, I think the current crisis has demonstrated the value of American leadership in the region to our partners.

The ability of us to continue to work with them to build interoperability, have them fly our airplanes, drive our ships, drive our tanks, et cetera, that lays a foundation for this deep and abiding relationship that lasts and displaces, frankly, the spread of Chinese and Russian influence.

So strategic competition's alive and well, and again, I think our role integrating security, particularly vis-à-vis the common threat that Iran poses to many of these countries as we manage that, just kind of brings it all together for us. But great partnership across the board.

Moderator: General, thank you for a very thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion today. Best of luck to you, sir.

Grynkewich: Thank you all.

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