

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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**To receive testimony on
United States Central Command and United States Africa Command**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing today to provide an update on the security situation and U.S. military activities in your respective areas of responsibility. Both of you are ably leading your commands during very challenging times and we thank you for your continued service.

This hearing is especially timely given unfolding events on the ground in Iraq and Syria and the reported completion of a proposed strategy to accelerate efforts against ISIS. Our assistance to partners on the ground is helping them to make steady progress in reclaiming areas of Iraq and Syria once held by ISIS – most notably in Mosul.

However, the situation in Syria seems to get more complicated by the day as different actors on the ground pursue divergent goals. Russia's continued support

for the Assad regime fuels the country's civil war, enables the abuse and killing of the Syrian population, and allows ISIS to exploit the resulting instability for its own gains. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Dunford met with his Russian and Turkish counterparts just this week to discuss deconflicting operations in Syria – a battlespace that has become increasingly complicated as U.S., Turkish, Russian, Iranian, Assad Regime, and local partner forces converge in northern Syria. General Votel, we look forward to your update on these issues.

According to public reports, the Defense Department has presented the White House with a draft strategy to accelerate progress against ISIS. While details of this strategy have not been publicly released, reports indicate that it retains many of the core elements of the strategy put in place under the Obama Administration. General Dunford has described the strategy as a “political-military plan” and a “whole of government approach” requiring important contributions from other non-DOD Departments and agencies – most notably the State Department.

This is why it is so concerning to me that the Trump Administration's budget would apparently cut the State Department by a reported 37 percent at the very time that we need a surge of diplomatic and other assistance efforts to achieve

the political conditions necessary to ultimately prevail in our fight against ISIS. As then General – and now Secretary of Defense Mattis – warned this committee “if you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition.” We can’t just keep buying bullets as the Trump Administration is proposing.

General Waldhauser, the importance of a robust interagency is perhaps of even greater importance in your area of responsibility, where you are primarily working by, with, and through partner military forces in conjunction with U.S. interagency efforts. General, as you share your assessment of current and future AFRICOM efforts in places like Libya and Somalia, I look forward to hearing the ways you are incorporating a “whole of government approach” into your planning. Such incorporation is particularly important in places like these, where conflict resolution will ultimately rely less on the military toolkit and more on generating the proper the political conditions to sustain and build upon security gains.

Turning back to the CENTCOM AOR, over the last few years there has been a persistent focus on Iran’s nuclear program – and appropriately so. We passed the one-year anniversary of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA in January, and Iran appears to be living up to its commitments under the agreement. However, the JCPOA only addressed one facet of the

challenge posed by Iran. Its destabilizing activities in the region, ballistic missile development efforts, and unprofessional and dangerous behavior in the maritime environment continue.

Sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program were successful because of the extraordinary unity within international community. We must approach the remaining challenges in a similar way if we are to be successful in changing Iran's behavior. Any new sanctions must be carefully applied in concert with our international partners so that we do not give Iran a pretext to withdraw from the JCPOA and risk reversing the progress that has been made on limiting their nuclear ambitions.

Last month, General "Mick" Nicholson, Commander of Resolute Support and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, testified that despite significant security gains and political efforts, Afghanistan is currently facing a stalemate. Further complicating the security landscape are the range of external actors, including Iran, Russia, and Pakistan who seem intent upon interfering with stability in Afghanistan. It was General Nicholson's assessment that increased troop levels for the NATO train, advise, and assist mission, as well as the continued growth in the size and capability of the Afghan Air Force, would be necessary to break the stalemate.

General Votel, the committee would benefit from hearing your assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan and what can be done to protect the hard-won progress that has been achieved and ensure that further progress is made.

Thank you both for your continued service to the nation. I look forward to your testimony.