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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
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FOR

“Hearing on Growing the Abraham Accords”

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Chairman Wilson, Representative Manning, and distinguished members of the House Sub-Committee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Thank you for inviting me to submit this statement for the record of today’s hearing on growing the Abraham Accords. I am pleased to join my fellow panelists, Ambassador Daniel Shapiro and Mr. Rob Greenway, for this hearing on expanding the Abraham Accords. I am joining you today in my capacity as a former Commander of US Central Command and currently as a Distinguished Fellow with the Middle East Institute. MEI is the oldest think tank in the US, whose sole focus is promoting more robust relationships and understanding between the United States and the Middle East.

To be sure, the Abraham Accords were signed after my retirement and departure from command. As was the decision to include Israel in the US Central Command’s designated area of operations. It was my view at the time, and it remains so today, that these accords and the decision regarding Israel were timely and essential steps in promoting stability and security across the region. In both cases, these actions represented the maturing of the political and security situations in the area. I remain extraordinarily supportive of both of these initiatives and consider them to be platforms we should build on to protect our overall national security interests better – in the region and globally. As noted in a recent report by The Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) – “the United States has a fundamental interest in strengthening the Accords and helping ensure they achieve their full political, economic, and security potential.”

Less than 36 hours ago, I returned from travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It was my second trip to the region since my retirement from active duty in March 2019. These trips have left me with three impressions which, in my view, are germane to the issue we are discussing today.

The first impression is that US leadership in the region remains critical. While our force posture has changed due to policy decisions that have focused our attention and resources against the pacing challenge presented by China – the US remains an indispensable partner to nearly all of our friends in the region. They look to the United States for our leadership, world-class capabilities, and values-based approaches. Moreover, we are the preferred partner who shares long-term interests and a strong desire to promote prosperity and security. Initiatives like expanding the Abraham Accords are clear examples of things we can and must do to promote stability in a critically important region where we retain enduring interests. By “expanding” the accords, I mean not only adding new partners, such as Saudi Arabia, to the arrangement but also using this unique platform as a way to align interests and efforts for a more unified and coherent approach to our common adversaries and as a way to pursue and solidify fundamental changes in security, partnership, cooperation, and ultimately promoting prosperity across the region.

My second impression from the region is the importance of continuous dialogue. The Middle East is an area with deep, underlying tensions which, when left unattended, will work against the better interests of those who live in the region and those who retain vital National security Interests there – like the United States. It is an area prone to misperceptions and failed expectations, and the only way through this is by effective communication and relationship building. We should not strive for perfection; there is no such thing as a perfect relationship between partners. But what we must have is open dialogue and a framework to interact and operate that minimizes miscommunication while at the same time promoting better interaction in areas of common interest. While our American dependence on natural resources from the region is not the same as at the time of the Carter Doctrine, we retain solid interests. The area remains vital for global commerce. Therefore, we should promote better relationships and more substantial cooperation and collaboration among our regional friends. The Abraham Accords are doing this today with Bahrain and the UAE in the Gulf and with Sudan and Morocco in other areas. Not only do we see more vital interaction between Governments, but we are now also seeing more clearly where the opportunities lie for better cooperation in the security arena.

My third impression is the need for a sense of urgency to move forward in the region. Saudi Arabia is a good example. There is profound and palpable change due to its 2030 Strategy – one that I could see and hear. It is not only noticeable, but it is accelerating. We should be encouraging them. In addition, our adversaries and strategic competitors are operating with a sense of urgency. Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear capability and is doubling down on its malign influence activities across the region. Chinese influence is also apparent, and they continue to maneuver effectively in the spaces left behind by the US to promote their economic and political objectives. These activities and others like them can undermine critical interests of the United States and our partners – interests like the free flow of commerce, non-

proliferation, stability, and favorable influence for the United States. In an era of rising Great Power competition, our partners seek the United States to play its role. Today, that role is unlikely to be manifested by large US military formations and long-term deployment across regional military bases. It is more likely to be pursued through improved security cooperation efforts, partnership, shared awareness and responsibility, and greater resilience among our friends and partners. The best tool against these factors is not just better equipment and more US troops on the ground – it is, in fact, strong relationships, effective communication, and trust. As a former boss of mine reminded us often – you cannot surge trust in times of crisis. It must be nurtured and developed beforehand. The Abraham Accords are an essential hedge platform to promote better understanding, shared interests and responsibilities, and common expectations that lead to better trust. But these are all things that we must pursue with a sense of urgency. Competing effectively against actors like China is not limited to our activities in the Indo-Pacific. Global competition means we must compete wherever our interests are at risk. It is time to get going in the Middle East, where a favorable balance of power supports our interests. The US-backed and brokered Abraham Accords are an essential tool that we must wield now to its fullest.

There will be obstacles to expanding the Abraham Accords and pursuing meaningful progress under its rubric – there always are in this region. Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon and its continued efforts to sow instability and chaos across the region with its proxies and surrogates will continue to frustrate our efforts and pose real threats against our interests. In addition, resolving the Palestinian situation remains an essential bell weather for many in the region. As we have seen recently, it will continue to resonate strongly in and out of the area. And, of course, Geo-politics will play a role as well. Our efforts and those of our allies to support Ukraine against an unprovoked invasion by Russia as well as China’s posturing against Taiwan will have impacts in the region that will challenge our goals and objectives. These two actors will also look for ways to exert influence to support their objectives in the Middle East. Expansion of the Abraham Accords may take some time, particularly with countries like Saudi Arabia. Still, we must pursue these and other initiatives favorable to our interests with a sense of deliberateness and urgency.

The United States has a critical role in overcoming these and other obstacles. But, first, we must be willing to lead and use our inherent attributes to bring parties together to expand and truly operationalize the Accords in a way that allows for real change and progress. We can do this by being a leader and a convenor – bringing others together and helping work through the issues with candid communication and trustful dialogue. And finally – we must do this by recognizing the importance of acting now to strengthen and solidify emerging alignments and seize near-term opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Once again – thank you for the opportunity to speak with the sub-committee today. I look forward to joining my panel colleagues in answering your questions and bringing more attention and understanding to what I believe is one of the most significant opportunities to promote stability in this region. A region where we have made extraordinary sacrifices and expended significant national treasure and where we have and will continue to have enduring interests that are important to our security and prosperity.

Very respectfully,



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