

**OPENING REMARKS OF
PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON

**MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL POLICY AND BILATERAL AND
MULTILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith and other distinguished members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about our multilateral and bilateral defense relationships in the Middle East and how these partnerships fit into our broader regional policy.

In broad terms, our strategy involves cooperating with regional partners and the international community in order to help foster a Middle East that is stable, peaceful and prosperous – and that, over time, succeeds in fulfilling the aspirations of its own people: for a greater say in their national affairs; for the broadening of human opportunity; and for the recognition of the rights and the dignity of every individual.

The continuing ripples of the Arab Spring and ongoing political transitions in many countries in the Middle East offer the United States both opportunities and challenges as we work to address core interests: combating Al-Qa’ida and affiliated movements; confronting external aggression directed at our allies and partners; ensuring the free flow of energy from the region to the rest of the world; and preventing the development, proliferation, and use of weapons of mass destruction.

In short, the greater Middle East remains a region of vital strategic importance to the United States. This is a point this Administration has made repeatedly – including in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, which affirms that “the United States will continue to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in – and support of – partner nations in and around this region.”

Even as we have undertaken drawdowns from Iraq and now Afghanistan, and initiated a rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region, we have held strong to this commitment to our regional partners in the Middle East.

At the core of this commitment are critical tools that the Department of Defense uses to achieve U.S. goals in the region: our force posture; our bilateral partnerships; our growing multilateral relationships; and our military exercises across the region. I’ll briefly talk about each of these in turn.

Force Posture

First, force posture. The most tangible sign of commitment we can make to the security of the region is the physical presence of our men and women in uniform, as well as the presence of our advanced military equipment.

Anyone – friend or foe – who looks at our presence in the Middle East will come to only one conclusion: our commitment to the Middle East is in no way eroding.

Let me give you just a few examples of that commitment.

- We have a ground, air, and naval presence of more than 35,000 U.S. forces in and around the immediate vicinity of the Gulf.
- We have deployed our most advanced fighter aircraft throughout the region, including F-22s, to ensure that we can quickly respond to contingencies.
- We have deployed our most advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to provide a continuous picture of activities in and around the Gulf.
- We have fielded an array of missile defense capabilities, including ballistic missile defense ships, Patriot batteries, and sophisticated radars throughout the region.
- We routinely maintain a naval presence of more than 40 ships in the region, including a carrier strike group, and conduct a range of freedom of navigation operations. These operations have included approximately 50 transits of the Strait of Hormuz over the past six months.

Bilateral Partnerships

I will turn now to the second tool we are using to advance our security interests in the region: bilateral partnerships.

For several decades now, we have sought to advance our security interests by investing in close bilateral ties with vital partners. We are strengthening military-to-military relationships in the region, working to enable effective local capacity, and cooperating with international and regional partners as part of a coordinated interagency approach. These bilateral partnerships are the critical enablers for advancing our interests through sustained U.S. leadership.

We use a wide variety of security cooperation activities to interact with our partners in support of these efforts. These include: State-led and DoD-executed Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programs; Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) programs; cooperative research and development and defense industrial cooperation; the State-DoD International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs; and other initiatives that build engagement with our partners, foster mutual understanding, and advance our regional objectives.

The Middle East is home to one of the most important bilateral security relationships we have anywhere in the world – and that, of course, is with Israel.

The U.S.-Israel Defense relationship remains stronger than ever. In addition to the FMF program, DoD contributes to Israeli security by maintaining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) and supporting the State Department's efforts to authorize the sale of advanced technology to Israel; conducting combined training and exercises for the defense of Israel; and supporting active missile defense efforts, to include funding for programs such as Iron Dome.

Israel faces turmoil and uncertainty from across the region. Yet, despite these immense challenges, the bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable, and our defense relationship is stronger than ever. President Obama has been unequivocal in his commitment to Israel's security, and the Department of Defense is working tirelessly in support of that commitment.

This is not just rhetoric – it is backed by concrete actions. The United States is providing \$3.1 billion dollars in FMF to Israel this year, as part of a 10-year \$30 billion dollar commitment to Israel. The President has already pledged to begin negotiations on extending this security assistance even further into the future.

The Department of Defense also continues to work in conjunction with the Department of State to ensure that Israel maintains its Qualitative Military Edge. Israel must have the ability to defeat any regional threat. To maintain this edge, the United States continues to provide Israel with the most advanced technology available – including the F-35 and the V-22 Osprey.

DoD is also committed to its support for Israel's multi-layered Missile and Rocket Defense (Iron Dome). In Fiscal Year 2013 alone, DoD provided more than \$440 million to Israel for its missile defense programs in addition to the \$3.1 billion Israel receives in Foreign Military Financing. The outstanding performance of Iron Dome has had a crucial role in the recent operation Pillar of Defense.

Finally, DoD is actively working to support the ongoing Israel-Palestinian negotiations, and Secretary Kerry's diplomatic efforts. President Obama, Secretary of Defense Hagel,

and Secretary of State Kerry designated General John Allen to play a key role in analyzing security challenges in the context of these negotiations. General Allen and his team of experts continue to meet with their Israeli and Palestinian counterparts to discuss concepts for potential security arrangements that will provide greater security for Israel and for a future independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

Another bilateral security relationship that is important to achieving U.S. goals in the region is our relationship with Egypt.

The U.S.-Egypt relationship is one of our most significant and enduring strategic defense relationships in the Middle East. For more than thirty years it has served to further our countries' joint security interests.

Egypt is an important regional actor and our security partnership with the Egyptians facilitates cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts, eases U.S. military access and critical over-flight privileges, helps improve the security of Israel, and contributes to the security of our embassy and consulate.

As the President and Secretary Hagel have made clear, we have serious concerns with the events of last July and August, and our hold on delivery of four large-scale weapon systems is a demonstration of that. The United States wants Egypt's transition to succeed, which will ensure our security relationship is maintained and our interests are protected over the long term. We continue to use our relationship with Egyptian military and civilian leaders to encourage an inclusive, non-violent transition that meets the aspirations of the Egyptian people.

Another important bilateral relationship we continue to work on is with the Government of Iraq. Since 2011, we have normalized our security cooperation with Iraq by forming the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I), under the U.S. Embassy, and reducing its size from more than 700 uniformed U.S. military personnel performing Title 22 activities to 108 personnel today.

We have been tracking the uptick in violence and the situation in Anbar very closely. We, along with our State Department colleagues and others in the U.S. Government, have been urging the Government of Iraq that the only long-term way to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is through robust cooperation with Sunni leaders and we continue to encourage the Prime Minister to address Sunni grievances. Iraq will only be secure when all Iraqis are included in the political, economic, and social life of the country.

In addition, we have provided the Government of Iraq with expedited delivery of defense articles to resupply Iraqi Security Forces fighting terrorists in Anbar, assisted with additional tools so that the Iraqis can increase surveillance capabilities, and through OSC-

I, are conducting non-operational training of Defense Ministry leadership and the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Services.

Multilateral Relationships

As important as our bilateral relationships may be, our policy in the Middle East also depends on multilateral ties.

The complexities of competing interests, internal politics and diverse capabilities among our regional partners make multilateral efforts all the more difficult. However, we have had success in regional multilateral efforts to counter piracy, combat regional extremism, establish cooperative air and missile defense, and carry out operational exercises – and we believe there is more we can do.

One recent multilateral initiative was the President’s determination that makes the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) eligible to be furnished with U.S. defense articles and services as a single entity. This designation will help us to work with Gulf Cooperation Council member states to enhance critical capabilities, including items for ballistic missile defense, maritime security, and counter-terrorism.

Building on the momentum of the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum chaired by Secretaries Kerry and Hagel this past September, we are currently working on a first-ever Defense Ministerial event with the GCC sometime this year.

Of course, multilateral relationships are especially important in contexts where our national security depends upon broad diplomatic support.

The United States continues to support United Nations (UN)-Arab League Joint Special Representative Brahimi and the Syrian opposition in their efforts to find a negotiated political solution to the Syrian crisis, and the creation of a transitional governing body within the framework of the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

We know this will be a long process and that it won’t be easy, given the complexity of all the issues and the wide gaps that exist between the parties. We will continue to work with the UN, Russia, and the international community to do what we can to help move this process forward. We will also continue to closely watch the multilateral effort to ensure the destruction of Syria’s chemical-weapons arsenal.

Another difficult regional situation that we have sought to address with multilateral engagement is the often-destabilizing behavior of the government of Iran.

Let me once again reiterate what this Administration has said repeatedly: we will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. Our strategy of pressure and engagement – a

strategy made possible by a strong, multilateral sanctions program – has created a window for diplomacy, and the Joint Plan of Action was an important first step. We are now focused on testing the prospects for a comprehensive nuclear deal based on verifiable actions that convince us – and the international community – that Iran is not trying to obtain a nuclear bomb.

The Department fully supports these diplomatic efforts, while continuing to focus intently on ensuring that the President has all options available should negotiations falter or Iran not abide by its commitments. This includes contingency planning and maintaining a capable military posture in the region that helps remind Iran that diplomacy is the preferred option of the United States, not the only option. We also remain cognizant of Iran's nefarious regional activities – such as its continued support of the Assad regime and terrorist groups like Lebanese Hezbollah – and we remain committed to addressing those challenges.

Military Exercises

Finally, the Department's military exercises help us advance security relationships in the Middle East – both bilateral and multilateral.

They include:

- Eagle Resolve, an annual multi-national naval, land, and air exercise designed to enhance regional cooperative defense efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and U.S. Central Command. In 2013, this exercise included 12 nations, 2,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, and 1,000 counterpart personnel from GCC countries.
- Eager Lion, an annual exercise designed to strengthen tactical proficiency in critical mission areas, support long-term relationships, and enhance regional security and stability by responding to modern-day security scenarios. In 2013, the exercise involved 8,000 personnel from 19 nations including 5,000 U.S. personnel from across all Military Services.
- And finally, the Mine Countermeasures Exercise – in 2013, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command hosted the international Mine Countermeasures Exercise, which included 40 nations, 6,000 service members, and 35 ships across 8,000 nautical miles, stretching from the Gulf to the Strait of Hormuz.

These exercises help reinforce multilateral ties within the Middle East and with international partners around the globe.

Thank you, Members of the Committee, for this opportunity to discuss with you the primary tools we are using to advance our security priorities in a rapidly changing Middle East. I look forward to your questions.

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