

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator John McCain
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SD-G50
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Tuesday, January 27, 2015**

To receive testimony on global challenges and U.S. national security strategy.

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today for its second hearing in a series on global challenges and U.S. national security. I am pleased to welcome three of America's most distinguished military leaders. General James Mattis, General Jack Keane, and Admiral William Fallon have each served at the highest ranks of our military. Critically important in the context of this hearing, each of our witnesses served at the nexus of military operations and strategic national security decision-making.

After the struggles we faced in Afghanistan and Iraq, there's been extensive discussion about the role of military power in U.S. strategy around the world. This is a healthy debate, in which this committee will be fully engaged. But too often, pundits and politicians – including President Obama – have adopted a cheap fatalism summed up in the Administration's constant refrain, "there is no military solution."

Rather than stating the obvious and important point that our military cannot solve every foreign policy problem, this slogan is really an excuse to avoid taking even the most-limited military action that might shape and improve conditions for a political solution, and provide the nation with the flexibility to draw from all instruments of national power effectively to address the problem. While it may be true there is no military solution, it is just as true there may be a military dimension to a political solution. But as problems fester and go from bad to worse, the Administration then claims its inaction was justified all along given the complexities of the situation. The consequences of this reactive bystander foreign policy are on full display around the world in places like Syria and Ukraine.

I hope, with their background and expertise, our witnesses can offer their perspectives on the most basic element of strategy: matching military means to policy goals. In particular, what is the role of military power in a comprehensive U.S. strategy for a Middle East characterized by political instability as well as a daunting range of conventional and unconventional threats? And as we look at threats throughout the world, how should American policymakers use military power to address global challenges before they become crises? For example, the longer we wait to provide defensive weapons to Ukraine, the more entrenched the Russians become, and as we've seen in Georgia, the more difficult it will become to dislodge them and restore Ukraine's sovereignty.

The President was determined to turn the page on questions like these in his State of the Union address last week, but we remain stuck in a grim foreign policy chapter of his authorship.

The President recently proclaimed the success of his limited-footprint counterterrorism approach by pointing to Yemen. Yemen is now in chaos, with the government deposed by Iranian-backed militants and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) emboldened to facilitate and execute terrorist attacks around the world.

President Obama has been applying the Yemen model in the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria with predictable results. The ISIL flag still flies over major cities in Iraq, such as Mosul and Fallujah. In Syria, ISIL has significantly enlarged its territorial control since U.S. strikes began last year. And despite the President's stated goal of degrading and destroying ISIL, we have no strategy in place to accomplish it. Basic strategic questions remain unanswered: Is an ISIL-first strategy really feasible when our Syrian partners are at war with Assad, and his regime's brutality feeds their power? Can we successfully defeat ISIL without even small numbers of American ground forces in both Iraq and Syria? Does the President still believe Assad must go, and do we have a strategy to achieve that goal? How will we protect brave Syrians we send back into Syria from Assad's airpower? The fact is that President Obama's delayed and feeble response is not degrading or destroying ISIL, nor is it inspiring confidence among our allies and partners.

Underlying these conflicts is the broader challenge of Iran's malign influence in the Middle East, a problem which the Administration has no strategy to address. Iran is not just an arms control problem. And as negotiations continue over its illegal nuclear program, the Administration is silent about Iran's reckless behavior that destabilizes the region by providing weapons, funding, and training to terrorists and militant groups in places like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Gaza, and Bahrain.

There is not a military-only solution to all the world's challenges. But as we have learned again in Iraq and Syria and hopefully won't relearn in Afghanistan, the American military remains an indispensable element to bringing stability and securing U.S. interests. Military power should not be used lightly, but it should also not be used anemically or withdrawn precipitously. When we refuse to address global problems at an early stage, or remove troops too quickly, it is the men and women of our armed services who must face an even-more chaotic, challenging and dangerous environment in the future.

I look forward to each of your views on how we can bring a coherent strategy to the complex global environment we now face.