

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed**  
**Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**  
*(As prepared for delivery)*

**Room SDG-50**  
**Dirksen Senate Office Building**  
**Tuesday, July 7, 2015**

**To receive testimony on the United States Counter-ISIL strategy**

Secretary Carter, General Dempsey, welcome.

This morning's hearing is an important opportunity for this Committee to hear from the Administration regarding its strategy to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL. It follows up on the Committee's hearing in May with outside witnesses regarding the counter-ISIL strategy.

ISIL, with its violent, extremist ideology and brutal military capabilities, poses a clear threat to the stability of the Middle East, Africa and beyond, and a threat to U.S. and partners' interests in those regions and the homeland. ISIL's campaign to establish a caliphate threatens to create a breeding ground for training extremist fighters, attracting foreign fighters intent on returning to Western countries to carry out attacks, and inspiring others in the United States and elsewhere to commit violence. The American people recognize the threat posed by ISIL, but at the same time are appropriately wary, after nearly a decade and a half of U.S. military involvement overseas, about being drawn deeper into a seemingly intractable Middle East conflict.

As part of the Administration's whole-of-government strategy, the Department of Defense has the lead for 2 of the 9 lines of effort against ISIL, and plays a supporting role for the efforts of a number of other departments and agencies. This committee has provided essential resources to the Department to implement that strategy through funding for Overseas Contingency Operations, including the President's request for both the Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Funds and a billion dollars for the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund. However, the severe cuts mandated by sequestration puts at risk the ability of the civilian departments of our government, including the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Aid, Department of Homeland Security, and Treasury Department to carry out fully the other 7 lines of effort that comprise our counter-ISIL strategy. The effect of sequestration could be that the U.S. government is having to fight ISIL with one hand tied behind its back. The success of the strategy depends on getting both our military and civilian departments the necessary resources.

At this committee's hearing in May, several witnesses called for expanding the U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Syria in response to ISIL's seizure of the Anbar provincial capital of Ramadi, and ISIL's gains in Syria. The President's announcement last month of an additional 450 U.S. troops to be deployed to Iraq to train and assist Iraqi security forces begins to address the critical need to bring local Sunni tribes into the fight against ISIL. We will be interested in hearing from our

witnesses what additional steps they would recommend for expanding the presence of Sunni fighters in the Iraqi security forces and to ensure that Kurdish peshmerga receive expeditiously the weapons they need for the counter-ISIL fight.

In many respects, the current challenges in Iraq result from two intersecting forces: the rise of ISIL, and the deterioration of the Iraq security forces and complementary governmental capacities. Many of the factors and personalities forming ISIL can be traced to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Planning for that war failed to account for deep-seated sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia within the region, which gave rise to grievances that fueled the rise of ISIL. In addition, many of the factors contributing to the deterioration of Iraq security forces can be traced to the actions of Prime Minister Maliki, in particular his replacement of competent military leaders with cronies loyal to Maliki.

Iran's role in Iraq and the broader region must never be forgotten either. Many of the aforementioned actions by Maliki were at the behest of Iran, and Iran's influence on Iraqi political decision making can be seen even prior to the 2008 visit of the Iranian President Ahmadinejad to Baghdad. Today, Iran has its own military's boots on the ground in both Iraq and Syria and it continues its support to its proxies. We must keep a close eye on Iran and assess carefully their interests at the tactical and strategic level.

As we work with the Coalition to counter the threat of ISIL, it will be useful to obtain your perspective on these and other factors as we endeavor to reshape our policies.

Ultimately, though, one of the key lessons from the Iraq war is that no amount of U.S. or coalition military assistance or boots on the ground will lead to the lasting defeat of violent extremism if the underlying political causes that allow such extremism to arise and thrive are not addressed. In Iraq, the Abadi Government must continue to take substantive steps to govern in a more inclusive manner, address long-standing grievances of Iraq's sectarian and ethnic minorities, expand the integration of Sunnis and Kurds into Iraq's military and political structures, and disarm Iranian-backed Shia militias.

In Syria, moderate and extreme elements of the opposition have made tactical gains against ISIL and the regime, but ISIL remains the dominant force in western Syria. Absent a moderate opposition that is willing to and capable of taking territory from ISIL and holding it, any change in the status quo is unlikely. Bolstered by critical outside assistance, the Assad regime remains in the seat of power in Damascus, but has ceded territory in recent months. Despite these territorial shifts in the ground battle in Syria, a defeat on the battlefield is not the most likely end to the battle in Syria. A political solution that addresses grievances and a broad range of constituencies in Syria is the only pathway to a sustainable solution.

When I met with military and political leaders in Iraq earlier this year, they emphasized that U.S. and coalition forces are at the beginning of a multi-year campaign against ISIL. They stressed the need for strategic patience. I hope our witnesses today will provide their perspective on just where we are in that long fight and what to expect in the coming months and years.

I look forward to your testimony this morning.