

PREPARED JOINT STATEMENT OF

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**Before the Senate Armed Services Committee
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Chairman Levin, Ranking Member McCain, and members of the committee.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our ongoing efforts involving Iran.

The Obama administration considers the challenges posed by Iran to be among the top national security priorities facing the United States. To address this concern we have developed a strategy based on two central objectives. First, we are working to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Second, we are countering Iran's destabilizing activities and support for extremists in the Middle East and around the world.

For the past year, the primary thrust of the administration's strategy has been focused on diplomacy and, specifically, the pursuit of a dual-track strategy of engagement and pressure. Unfortunately, despite the President's genuine and extensive efforts at engagement, Iran has so far failed to respond constructively. However, this

approach has been successful in demonstrating to the international community that it is Iran and not the United States that is standing in the way of dialogue, and it has helped build greater international consensus as we use the pressure track to try to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

The focus of our testimony today is to lay out for you the part that the Department of Defense plays in the administration's strategy towards Iran. The Department's primary focus continues to be enhancing regional security cooperation with our Middle Eastern partners. This focus not only reassures anxious states in the region, but also sends a clear signal to Iran that pursuit of nuclear weapons will lead to its own isolation and in the end make it less – not more – secure.

DoD is also working actively to counter destabilizing Iranian activities by strengthening the capacities of vulnerable states in the region. In Iraq and Lebanon our efforts to develop the capacity of security forces and improve governance have weakened Iran's proxies. Meanwhile, we are working closely with the Iraqis on conducting counterterrorism operations, sharing intelligence, and interdicting arms shipments to counter Iran's influence in Iraq and throughout the region.

Finally, through prudent military planning we continue to refine options to protect U.S. and partner interests from Iranian aggression, deter Iran's destabilizing behavior, and prepare for contingencies – all while reducing the risk of miscalculation.

Reassuring our Partners

In other words, for the present, the U.S. military is in a supporting role, helping quietly to build confidence with regional partners through normal military activity, while supporting the diplomatic strategy. Iran's nuclear and missile programs represent a significant threat to Israel. In the face of this threat, we continue our efforts to ensure Israel's Qualitative Military Edge, and are working closely with the Israelis to develop multi-layered ballistic missile defenses.

In the wider region, the cornerstone of our approach is USCENTCOM's Regional Security Architecture. For a number of years, we have worked with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as other partners in the region, to develop a common architecture that includes bilateral and multilateral security initiatives such as a regional network of air and ballistic missile defense systems, shared early warning, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy, building partner capacity, and hardening and protecting our partners' critical infrastructure. These efforts have gained greater traction with the region's growing concerns about Iranian activities. USCENTCOM also maintains a robust exercise schedule in the region and a sizeable force posture and presence, which reaffirm our commitment to our partners.

We also maintain a robust schedule of bilateral interactions beyond the purely military sphere. Through the Gulf Security Dialogue, the State Department and DoD in tandem are strengthening political-military relationships in the region and focusing on regional perspectives and common security interests while encouraging multilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, and the regional reintegration

of Iraq. We also conduct regular bilateral defense engagements during which security challenges of common interest are discussed and efforts to address these challenges are synchronized. Moreover, senior leader engagements highlight the valued relationships and common interests we share with partner nations. In the last two months alone, Secretary Gates, Chairman Mullen, and General Petraeus have all traveled to the region.

Ultimately, all of these defense activities continue to support U.S. diplomatic efforts by signaling to our partners the U.S. Government commitment to the region's security.

Countering Iranian Destabilizing Activities

Beyond reassurance, we are also actively countering Iran's destabilizing activities throughout the region. We just witnessed a round of successful national elections in Iraq. Nationalist parties and coalitions won a significant share of votes while parties Iran most preferred performed less well. Early Iranian attempts to dictate the quick formation of the new Iraqi government were rejected and the Iraqi public has made clear that they will not accept Iranian interference into their internal affairs and candidates whom they see as too closely aligned with Iran and its regional agenda. The growing capabilities of the Iraqi security forces, as well as their continued willingness to combat terrorist and militant organization, including groups backed by Iran, is another sign that Iraqi nationalist identity is a significant counter to destabilizing Iranian interference.

These elections are the latest in a series of strategic setbacks that Iran has suffered in its efforts to establish dominance over the Iraqi political system. Other successes include: the Iraqi-led “Charge of the Knights” operation in 2008 that drove Iranian-backed militias out of Basra; the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement and Strategic Framework Agreement in November 2008 that embody the shared U.S. and Iraqi commitment to a long-term partnership between sovereign states; and the January 2009 provincial elections in which parties that were seen as too closely aligned with Iran suffered significant setbacks.

Going forward, we expect that Iran’s ability to influence Iraqi domestic affairs will be constrained by a combination of four trends: enhancements in Iraq’s security, governance, and economic capacities; Iraqi nationalism; recognition among the leading Iraqi political forces of the value of a strategic relationship with the United States; and progress in reintegrating Iraq into the broader region.

In Lebanon, we are working with our partners to strengthen national institutions and support efforts to extend government authority throughout Lebanon. Central to this work is the bolstering of the Lebanese Armed Forces as a national, non-sectarian force that can effectively counter terrorism, secure Lebanon's border, and implement all Lebanon-related United Nations Security Council Resolutions (1559, 1680, and 1701), and exert government control throughout Lebanon’s territory. Effectively implementing these resolutions requires ending Iranian support for Hezbollah and undermining Hezbollah's terrorist goals and militant presence in Southern Lebanon and

beyond Lebanon's borders. Neither of these is attainable without strong Lebanese institutions, effective Lebanese Armed Forces, and a sovereign, stable Lebanese state.

In Afghanistan, Tehran's influence and activities have not been as obtrusive as in Iraq. Indeed, we and Iran share the stated goal of a strong, stable, prosperous Afghanistan, but Iran's actions do not necessarily match its rhetoric. Iran is playing a double game in Afghanistan. It combines rhetorical and material support for the Afghan government with a continuing amount of material support to insurgents that impedes U.S. and Allied efforts to stabilize the country. Iran's historic, cultural, and economic ties with much of western Afghanistan, its religious affinity with Afghanistan's minority groups, and its extensive border result in Iran's having a critical stake in Afghanistan's future. Tehran generally sees the Taliban as an enemy and does not want to see them back in power, but nevertheless has provided limited lethal assistance to the Taliban to hedge against increased U.S./Western presence on its eastern border. As ISAF troop levels increase, and as the Afghan government expands its capacity, we will be better positioned to protect against any substantial challenges from Iran in Afghanistan in the near term. However, we recognize that, going forward, Iran's interests will continue to play a significant role in the regional balance that affects Afghanistan's stability.

Prudent Planning

It is the Department of Defense's responsibility to plan for all contingencies and provide the President a wide range of military options should they become necessary.

As both the Secretary and the Chairman have stated, military options are not preferable. This Administration is committed to a multifaceted diplomatic strategy to resolve all our issues with Iran. But as the President has stated we do not take any options off the table.

Conclusion

Iran is a serious threat to U.S. national security both because of its nuclear program and its destabilizing activities across the Middle East. The administration remains committed to a diplomatic strategy of engagement and pressure. The Department of Defense is doing everything it can to support this policy, by reassuring our partners in the region, addressing Iranian destabilizing activities, and conducting prudent planning.