

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

WRITTEN STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF  
GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA  
CHAIRMAN  
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SYRIA HEARING  
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Chairman Levin, Senator Inhofe, distinguished members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the evolving situation in Syria.

The conflict in Syria remains tragic – for the people of Syria and for the region.

I know you are familiar with testimony by numerous officials from across government who have come before the Senate on this subject. So, I will focus my opening remarks on the subject of the military instrument of national power as it could relate to Syria.

Our military focus has been on preparedness. We have deployed Patriot missiles to defend Turkey as part of a NATO mission. We are sharing information and conducting planning with our close partners. We have conducted our own internal planning for a wide range of contingencies. And we are well-postured within the region to respond if called to action.

When called, our responsibility has been and always will be to provide the Secretary of Defense and the President with options. Some options involve military force. The decision to use force, especially lethal force, is not one that any of us takes lightly.

In weighing options, we have a responsibility to align the use of force to the intended outcome. The use of military force does not always affect the underlying dynamics driving the conflict or result in a sustainable outcome.

We also have a responsibility to articulate risk – not just risk to our forces but to the mission we may be assigned and to our other global responsibilities. Some options may not be feasible in terms of time or in opportunity costs without compromising our security elsewhere.

Before we take action, we should be prepared for what comes next. The use of force—especially in circumstances where ethnic and religious factors dominate—is unlikely to produce predictable outcomes. To be clear, this is not a reason to avoid intervention in conflict. Rather, to emphasize that unintended consequences are the rule with military interventions.

In cases where a direct threat to our homeland is unclear—or where it is assessed to be a future rather than an imminent threat—we should act when possible in concert with allies and partners to share the burden and shape the outcome.

That said, I would note that the Armed Forces of the United States can do very nearly anything asked of it provided that we have the support of the American people and the resources necessary to fulfill the mission.

Thank you for your support of America's sons and daughters in uniform. I look forward to your questions.