

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SD-106
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Thursday, February 26, 2015**

**To receive testimony on worldwide threats
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and I would like to join you in welcoming our witnesses. As they know too well, we currently face an alarming number of complex and varied national security challenges from many corners of the globe. Our witnesses' views on and assessments of these challenges are critical to the work of this committee.

Last week, I traveled to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq and had the opportunity to meet not only with the leaders in these countries, but also with U.S. civilians and uniformed personnel who are ably serving the United States.

In Iraq, our military commanders stressed that, despite the setbacks that extremist fighters have suffered, ISIS remains capable militarily and continues to consolidate its power in the region, including through the coercion of local populations. Coalition airstrikes have enabled local security forces, including Kurdish peshmerga and the Iraqi government's newly enlisted Shia militias, to begin to regain ground from ISIS. But concerns remain about when Iraqi security forces will be ready to launch a counteroffensive to retake Mosul, and about Iran's growing influence inside Iraq. I look forward to hearing the witnesses' views on Iraq, and the capabilities of both the military and the new government.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban remain resilient despite coming under pressure on both sides of the border. The challenge for U.S. forces in Afghanistan will be to keep the counterterrorism pressure on the Taliban even as we build the capacity of Afghan special operations forces to ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a haven for Al Qaeda and other terrorists. We would be interested in our witnesses' views on the Taliban threat for the 2015 fighting season, the possibility of Pakistan-supported reconciliation talks, and the significance of reports of a growing ISIS presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On Iran, the diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon are ongoing, and the end of March is the next point at which we will assess Iran's intent with regard to its nuclear program. I hope the witnesses will provide us with an update on the intelligence community's

thinking with regard to the negotiations and our assessment of Iran's activities in the region under the two possible scenarios – deal or no deal.

In Syria, coalition airstrikes have enabled Kurdish fighters to regain control of Kobani and expand outward, but ISIS remains a formidable force. General Nagata will begin training the moderate Syrian opposition in the coming month and – if successful – these forces could over time assist the coalition to promote the conditions for a political settlement. Just last week, at a regional chiefs of defense conference, the U.S. and Turkey signed a key agreement to allow training of these forces to begin in Turkey once recruits are identified. I am interested in the witnesses' views on the potential of the Syria training initiative and the challenges it will face.

In Europe, the post-Cold War international order is under threat from a Russia that seeks to intimidate Ukraine and other neighboring countries through the creation or perpetuation of frozen conflicts and increasingly aggressive military activities. Your assessment of the size of Russia's military buildup and President Putin intentions would be of interest to the committee.

We face a different, but no less complex series of challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. The recent cyber attack on Sony by North Korea illustrates the unpredictable and coercive nature of that regime and demonstrates that even a relatively small and weak rogue nation, taking advantage of our unparalleled dependence on electronic networks, can reach across the oceans to cause extensive damage to a U.S.-based economic target, through cyberspace. Furthermore, while Chinese cyber attacks are not as public, they are just as problematic, and continue to pose a challenge to our national security. We would be interested to know whether we can expect more attacks of this nature, and what we can do to make our systems and our nation more resilient in the future.

Finally, we have a threat closer to home, and that is sequestration. It is a threat that jeopardizes not only our national security, but our public safety, health, transportation, education, and environmental resources as well. As we receive testimony today on the current and future threats to our national security, we here in Congress must be mindful of the necessity to find a balanced and bipartisan solution that includes a repeal of sequestration.

Thank you again for appearing today, and I look forward to hearing from you on these and many other important issues.