

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

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To receive testimony on United States' Middle East Policy.
(As Prepared for Delivery)

General Petraeus, welcome back to the Armed Services Committee. This morning's hearing continues the committee's review of the policy issues confronting the United States in the Middle East. Your long resume of experience in a number of leadership positions in the United States military and as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency makes you well qualified to provide your perspective of the current situation in the Middle East and what, if any, policy changes we might urge the Administration to consider to address this rapidly changing security environment.

It has been said many times, but there's truth to it – the situation Middle East presents a deeply complex problem set and it is a near certainty that the problems there will challenge our nation's security for many years to come. And while our nation's military is playing a critical role in addressing the threats emanating from the Middle East today, any lasting solutions will require dogged diplomacy and persistent attention by our nation's civilian and military leaders, and those of our

allies and partners who share a security interest in the region.

As the committee heard at last week's hearing, the immediate threat confronting the United States, our partners, and allies in the Middle East is ISIL. ISIL's control over portions of Syria and Iraq provides this violent extremist organization a base from which to terrorize civilians and spread its poisonous ideology regionally and globally. The brutality of ISIL, coupled with that of the Assad regime and other armed elements in Iraq and Syria, has caused the collapse of stability in many areas and forced millions to flee the wanton violence. The emerging refugee crisis in Europe highlights the urgent need for the international community to focus on restoring security in the region.

The U.S.-led international coalition, enabled by the leadership of retired General John Allen, has brought together 60-plus countries to respond to the ISIL threat, including a multinational air campaign to degrade ISIL's capabilities and programs to train and equip local forces in Iraq and Syria. General Petraeus, we are interested in your views on the value of a multilateral approach to confronting ISIL. I would also be interested to hear whether you support the efforts to build and work through local forces on the ground to liberate and then restore stability to areas previously under ISIL control.

In Iraq, U.S. and partner nations are once again training and equipping the

Iraqi Security Forces, and helping to recruit Sunni tribal forces to the counter-ISIL effort. General Petraeus, given your experience on the ground in Iraq – both as an operational and strategic level commander – I look forward to hearing your assessment of the broader military campaign, but also on whether the ISF’s will to fight can be restored. Further, the Administration has rightly, I believe, conditioned our support to the Iraqi Government on their continuing efforts to be more inclusive and responsive to the concerns of Sunnis, Kurds, moderate Shias, and minorities. I would also appreciate your assessment of these political efforts.

In Syria, according to public reports the DoD-run Train and Equip Program has experienced a variety of setbacks. Many observers have been quick to criticize this program; I would be interested in your assessment of whether these are early growing pains or a cause of real concern for the viability of the larger program.

At the same time, the already difficult task of restoring security in Syria has only been further complicated by Russian President Putin’s recent provocative act of deploying Russian marines and equipment, including fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles to Assad regime-controlled areas, under the guise of joining the counter-ISIL fight. What President Putin hopes to gain from this brazen military intervention in this volatile situation is unclear.

The other major issue for the United States in the Middle East is Iran. Late

last week, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, entered the implementation phase. In the coming months, the Iranians have much work to do and the world will be watching to see whether Iran will stay true to its word. Regardless of whether you supported the JCPOA, holding Iran's feet to the fire during this phase of the agreement, I hope, will enjoy universal support.

Aside from the JCPOA, General Petraeus, Iran's malign and destabilizing activities are of critical concern. This includes the continued support and financing of the Assad regime, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Shia'a elements in Bahrain, and Shia'a militias in Iraq. Countering Iran's malign influence is an area where the Administration has made significant and notable commitments to our partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC. Among them an increase in training and exercise programs to ensure our GCC partners have the necessary capabilities to counter Iranian threats. I look forward to your assessment on these engagement efforts.

While much attention is focused on the Middle East, the United States continues to have nearly 10,000 U.S. forces deployed in Afghanistan as part of the Resolute Support mission. A critical decision will have to be made in the next few months regarding the size of U.S. forces to be retained in Afghanistan during 2016 and beyond. We would welcome your advice on what nature and extent of that commitment should be, and on the continuing importance of ensuring that

Afghanistan does not once again become a safe haven for terrorists.

Lastly, we must not forget that al Qaeda - especially its affiliate in Yemen and adherents in Syria – remains a transregional threat to the United States and our interests around the world. General, we would be interested in your thoughts on what more must be done to pressure al Qaeda's senior leaders and prevent the group's murderous plots from coming to fruition.

Thank you again for joining us today, I look forward to your testimony.