

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

**Room SH-216
Hart Senate Office Building
Thursday, July 9, 2015**

**To consider the nomination of General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC
to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff**

I want to join the Chairman in welcoming General Dunford this morning, and to take this opportunity to thank him for his outstanding service to this nation. During his 38 years of military service, General Dunford has served with distinction, and I am confident he will continue to do so if he is confirmed as the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Finally, I also want to welcome his family – his wife, Ellyn, and his sons, Joe and Patrick. I want to thank them, and also his daughter, Kathleen, who is not able to be here today, for their sacrifices and their support.

Last week, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dempsey, released the 2015 National Military Strategy. In his forward, General Dempsey states that the current “global security environment is the most unpredictable” he has seen during his military service and that “global disorder has significantly increased while some of our comparative military advantage has begun to erode.”

Without question, the United States faces a wide range of challenges around the world. If confirmed as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you will be advising the President and the Secretary of Defense, on these complex international issues facing our national interests.

Possibly the gravest and most complex issue for the next Chairman will be countering the security threat from ISIL in Iraq and Syria and its spread beyond the Middle East region. As the President said earlier this week, our counter-ISIL campaign will be long-term and employ all elements of American power, including military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic.

If confirmed, General Dunford, you will be responsible for advising on the U.S. military’s role in supporting our broader counter-ISIL campaign, including denying ISIL safe haven, and building the capacity of local forces to counter ISIL, with training, assistance and air support from the international coalition. The success of these efforts will ultimately depend on a broader, complementary effort to address the conditions that gave rise to ISIL and allowed it to thrive. I look forward to hearing your views on the situation in Iraq and Syria and your thinking on most effective role the military can play in supporting efforts on the diplomatic front.

Regarding Iran, while there remains no clear outcome to the P5+1 negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program, no matter what happens, the Department of Defense will play a key role in reaffirming our shared priorities with our partners in the region, confronting common threats, and working to de-escalate or, where possible, resolve crises.

General Dunford, if confirmed, you will also bring invaluable experience to oversight of the Department's missions in Afghanistan, where you have led U.S. and coalition forces with distinction. While the Afghan security forces have fought courageously against Taliban attacks, more needs to be done to build the Afghan forces' capabilities and deny any safe haven for extremists. The next Chairman will play a critical role in the President's review later this year of the size and footprint of U.S. forces in Afghanistan for 2016 and beyond

Another security challenge going forward will be deterring additional Russian aggression toward Ukraine and its European neighbors and reinforcing the Minsk ceasefire accords. Congress has made clear its support for military assistance for Ukraine, including defensive weapons, to help the Ukrainian people defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will be interested in your views of the security situation in Ukraine and what additional steps you would recommend for assisting Russia's neighbors in protecting themselves from the kinds of hybrid warfare tactics employed in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

Our men and women in uniform remain this Committee's top concern, and I know they remain yours as well. Our armed forces are nothing without its people, and the Department continues to juggle the twin goals of providing a high quality of life through fair pay and compensation, and exceptional service through adequate levels of training and equipping. In my view, it is incumbent on Congress and the nation to provide a sufficiently sized, trained, and equipped military, of the necessary quality of character and talent, to meet national defense requirements. Sometimes that means making hard choices, especially in the budget constrained environment we find ourselves.

To that end, as you well know from your time as Commandant, the Department and Congress have for several years considered various proposals for changes in compensation and health care to slow the growth of personnel costs so that those savings can be redirected to buy back readiness and modernization shortfalls. I would be particularly interested in your views on such proposals and the impact if such changes are not enacted.

During consideration of the FY 2016 NDAA, this Committee had a robust debate on how best to fund defense programs. I have repeatedly stated that sequestration is a senseless approach to addressing our nation's fiscal challenges, and it undermines our nation's military readiness. Defense budgets should be based on our long-term military strategy, not sequestration-level budget caps. Even a one-year increase in OCO spending does not provide DOD with the certainty and stability it needs when building its five-year budget. As a consequence, this instability undermines the morale of our troops and their families – who want to know their futures are planned for more than one year at a time – and the confidence of our defense industry partners we rely on to provide the best technologies available to our troops. I hope you will share your thoughts on this topic with the Committee today.

General Dunford, thank you, again, for your willingness to serve our nation. I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you.