

**Assistant Secretary of Defense Derek Chollet
International Security Affairs
U.S. Department of Defense**

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
“Extremism and Sectarianism in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon”
March 6, 2014**

Chairman Menendez, Senator Corker, members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about extremism and sectarianism in the Middle East, and how our regional defense policy addresses these challenges.

As Deputy Secretary Burns and Director Olson described, sectarianism and extremism pose grave threats to the well-being and aspirations of the people of the Middle East, the stability and security of our regional partners, and U.S. national security interests.

That’s why our regional defense strategy is centered on cooperating with regional partners to achieve a stable, peaceful and prosperous Middle East, one which promotes democracy, human rights and open markets. The historic transformation in the region we’ve witnessed during the last three years offers the United States both opportunities and challenges as we work to address our core security interests: to combat Al-Qa’ida and associated movements; to confront external aggression directed at our allies; to ensure the free flow of energy from the region; and to prevent the development, proliferation, and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

As U.S. military forces have withdrawn from Iraq and now Afghanistan, we are also addressing questions from our regional partners about our intentions in the region, and our commitments to our long-term allies. We are working hard to sustain and enhance our military capabilities in the region.

As Secretary Hagel reassured our regional partners in a speech in Manama last December, the United States has enduring military interests in this region, and we will remain fully committed to the security of our allies and our regional partners. We have a presence of more than 35,000 military personnel in and immediately around the Gulf. The U.S. Army continues to maintain more than 10,000 forward-deployed soldiers; we have deployed advanced fighter aircraft, including F-22's; we have advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets; we have fielded ballistic missile defense ships and PATRIOT batteries; and we maintain over 40 ships in the region. Our commitment to our core interests is absolute.

I would like to briefly touch on some examples on how we are working to improve the military capabilities of our partners – focusing on Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan:

In Iraq, we are deeply concerned by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) growing reach and lethality. Along with our State Department colleagues, we have been advising the Iraqi Government that the long-term strategy to defeat ISIL and achieving security and stability *must* include a political solution involving all of the people of Iraq.

While the Iraqi Security Forces have proven competent at conducting counter-terrorism and stability operations, the security situation they face is very serious. The Iraqis also have gaps in their ability to defend against external threats and in areas such as integrated air defense, intelligence sharing, and logistics. We remain very committed to working with the Iraqi Government to develop its military and security abilities.

As this Committee knows, the Iraqis are also asking for increased Foreign Military Sales of key capabilities as soon as possible. We appreciate the quick decision to proceed with the hellfire missiles notification associated with the urgent request. The Iraqis have paid about \$250 million towards the resupply, and we have been able to expedite the delivery of tank rounds,

rocket, small arms and ammunition. Those articles have either been delivered or are expected to arrive in the next few weeks.

Associated with that request, we deeply appreciate your support to move forward the sale and lease of the Apache helicopters.

Turning to Lebanon: We remain deeply concerned with Iran's destabilizing activities in Lebanon and its partnership with Hizballah. We view the Lebanese Armed Forces' emergence as the sole legitimate defense force as a critical component of Lebanon's long-term stability and development. U.S. assistance to Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces, approximately \$1 billion in assistance since 2005, strengthens the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and supports its mission to secure Lebanon's borders, defend the sovereignty of the state, and implement UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701.

Lebanon's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program is the 4th largest in the world. IMET builds strong ties between the United States and Lebanon by bringing Lebanese officers and officials to the United States to study and train alongside U.S. troops.

In terms of supporting institutional reform, the Department of Defense has just started a Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI) with the LAF. DIRI complements a U.S. whole-of-government effort supporting Lebanese security sector reform. U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) continues to provide support to the training and professionalization of the LAF while the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is funding a program to strengthen the capability and management capacity of the Internal Security Forces (ISF).

In Jordan, we are deeply committed to maintaining a strong defense partnership. And today and tomorrow, I am hosting the Jordanian Chief of Defense and his senior team for intensive meetings at the Pentagon. U.S. security assistance helps build the capacity of the Jordanian Armed Forces; promotes interoperability between our two militaries; enhances Jordan's border security and counterterrorism capabilities; and supports military education and training.

We have provided the Jordanian government with approximately \$300 million in FMF funds per year. An active joint exercise program, along with a robust exchange officer program, cements our military relationship.

We have military forces in Jordan manning a Patriot battery and F-16 unit, and assisting the Jordanians with the planning necessary to strengthen its defense.

In addition, we are providing equipment and training that will supplement the Jordan Border Security Program and improve the capability of the Jordanian military to detect and interdict illegal attempts to cross the border, and detect attempts to smuggle WMD along the border.

Mr. Chairman, members of this Committee: through these efforts in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere, the Department of Defense is keenly focused on building the capacity of our partners to fight extremism and support U.S. national security interests. And we remain committed to continuing to work with this Committee and the Congress on these critical issues.

I look forward to your questions.