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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST
U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST
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Good morning Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It's an honor to appear before you with DASD Stroul to discuss U.S. Security Assistance to the Middle East. Let me make it clear at the start, as Secretary Blinken has repeatedly said, that the State Department is fully committed to partnering with Congress on these issues, and we welcome the opportunity to engage today.

At a time when our strategic competition with the People's Republic of China is our foremost foreign policy challenge, and in an era when so many of the problems we face – problems like climate change and the COVID pandemic – are global in scope, our engagement in the Middle East is all the more important. Increasingly complex global challenges demand strong partnerships because we cannot act alone. Because we face global problems whose consequences shape security at a regional level. And because America's leadership matters.

Security Assistance as a tool of diplomacy

The Department of State leads America's foreign policy through diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance, by advancing the interests of the American people, their safety and prosperity. Our goal is to find diplomatic solutions to conflict, and we have started by reinvigorating and reinvesting in our alliances and partnerships around the world. President Biden has pledged to lead with diplomacy, because it's the best way to deal with today's challenges, and security cooperation and security assistance are among the many different tools we can use to advance diplomacy. Security cooperation improves partner countries' interoperability with U.S. forces and enhances their ability to meet their own legitimate defense needs, thereby contributing to regional security.

By equipping and empowering our partners to address shared security concerns, we can help share the burden of addressing today's crises, while promoting resilience, innovation, and shared prosperity for the future.

Our security assistance and arms transfers to the Middle East, as to any part of the world are a function of our foreign policy, which is why Congress has placed these authorities with the Department of State. In applying the security cooperation toolkit, the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs seeks to build the capacity of allies and partners to contribute to regional stability and security and advance human rights and democracy, which in turn contributes to American security – and which also carry vital humanitarian implications in the region.

Strengthening and standing behind our allies, working with like-minded partners, and pooling our collective strength to advance shared interests and deter common threats

In the Middle East, we are working to disrupt international terrorist networks, deter Iranian aggression, and support our partners' and allies' territorial defense.

The United States continues to maintain our ironclad commitment to Israel's security, helping to maintain its qualitative military edge in the region consistent with U.S. legal requirements and long-standing policy. At the same time, we will continue efforts to advance relations between Israel and its neighbors, and we underscore our strong commitment to a negotiated two-state solution as the best path to reach a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Jordan's stability and security are priorities for the United States, and we have provided Jordan with assistance for more than 50 years. We have supported the Jordan Border Security Program, an integrated border security surveillance, detection, and interdiction system since 2009. All of these funds support provision of equipment and other assistance Jordan urgently needed to respond to transnational threats along its border and participate in Global Coalition operations. Jordan is the third largest global recipient of Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and these funds support provision of equipment and other assistance Jordan urgently needs to rapidly respond to transnational threats along its border and participate in Global Coalition operations against al-Qa'ida, ISIS, and their regional and global affiliates. The provided FMF helps Jordan increase cooperation on border and maritime security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism. The financing has allowed Jordan to also contribute to U.S. operations, and this interoperability with our forces is critical to our national security and ensures that we don't risk the lives of U.S. men and women.

We are recalibrating our relationship with Saudi Arabia, as the President has directed, to make clear that our interests cannot be separated from our values, and we also remain committed to helping the Kingdom defend itself from continuing cross-border attacks from the Houthis in Yemen, supported by Iran. Alongside our important work with Saudi Arabia on regional security and counterterrorism, the President has been clear that the U.S.-Saudi strategic partnership must reflect the values and interests the United States brings to that partnership, and we are prioritizing human rights in our bilateral engagements. When this Administration came to office, we found some of our partners in the region entrenched in a years-long war in Yemen. From day one, this Administration has worked to end the conflict in Yemen, and the first step we took towards doing so was to suspend two munitions sales that the previous Administration had notified to Congress. Those sales remain suspended under a policy of ending U.S. support to offensive operations of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen. At the same time, this Administration recognizes that Saudi Arabia faces significant threats to its territory, and we are committed to working together to help Riyadh strengthen its defenses. More broadly, the Secretary appointed a special envoy to focus U.S. diplomatic energies on bringing the war to a close, through aligned efforts with the UN envoy and regional states, including the Saudi government. Thus the administration's efforts on Yemen include but also extend above and beyond ending weapons sales for use in offensive operations.

As we sharpen our focus on our strategic competition with PRC and Russia, we will need partners in the Middle East to work with us to ensure stability in the region.

When the United States looks at the region today, we see substantial opportunities to advance our objectives. Our presence and relationships with Middle East partners help prevent efforts by

Russia and China to extend their influence into the region. The PRC, in particular, has rapidly become more assertive. It is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system. Russia remains determined to enhance its global influence and play a disruptive role on the world stage. Both Beijing and Moscow have invested heavily in efforts meant to check U.S. strengths and prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world. Regional actors like Iran continue to pursue game-changing capabilities and technologies, even as they threaten U.S. allies and partners and challenge regional stability. We need to focus on shoring up America's core strengths – our people, our economy, our national defense, and our democracy – to meet the strategic competition with China and Russia that is going to shape our future.

We will work with our regional partners to deter Iranian aggression and threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity; disrupt al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks and prevent an ISIS resurgence; address humanitarian crises; and redouble our efforts to resolve the complex armed conflicts that threaten regional stability. But we do not believe that military force is the answer to the region's challenges; the use of military force should be a last resort. Diplomacy, development, and economic statecraft should be the leading instruments of American foreign policy.

I want to reiterate that we are committed to advancing the security of our partners across the Middle East. Security cooperation—including security agreements, Foreign Military Sales (FMS), exercises, training, and exchanges—are integral components to the overall U.S. regional strategy that improve interoperability with the U.S. partner nations' forces to meet their legitimate external defense needs and deter regional threats. However, I also want to assure that we constantly closely scrutinize every part of our security cooperation relationships, and will also not hesitate to adjust or recalibrate them to better serve our national security interests.

Addressing the crises of today while promoting resilience, innovation, competitiveness, and truly shared prosperity for the future.

We also see, in the Middle East, a region transforming – petrostates becoming diversified economies, boycotts becoming partnerships. One such example is the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE makes significant contributions to promote regional security and de-escalation across the Middle East and is an outstanding counterterrorism partner to the United States.

The Biden-Harris administration is committed to security cooperation with the UAE, including through transfers of some of our most important technology. While the projected delivery dates on these sales would be several years in the future, we anticipate a robust and sustained dialogue with the UAE to ensure that any defense transfers meet our mutual strategic objectives to build a stronger, interoperable, and more capable security partnership, that will protect the security of our technology and that will comport with our values.

As you know, in recent years, the UAE has come under intense scrutiny about their compliance with end use requirements, to include deployments that impact areas of conflict, and alleged unauthorized retransfers. The Department continues to work closely with the UAE, to include seeking additional reassurances to establishing effective joint procedures of operation and

oversight to address these concerns. The UAE has demonstrated its willingness to open dialogue and cooperation with the USG and we continue to assess that they can be a reliable partner. And, again, we stress the importance of interoperability and burden sharing so that our men and women in uniform do not have to carry the risk of every load. And, again, we stress the importance of interoperability and burden sharing so that our military forces always have the advantage of operating as part of a coalition.

Human rights/rule of law as a national security priority

Just as our assistance can contribute to the national stability of partners, it can also, if not properly managed, imperil human security. A key part of arms transfer decisions is our efforts to ensure U.S. origin equipment is not used to perpetrate human rights violations and to minimize the risk of civilian casualties by our partners. As part of the arms transfer decision analysis, we closely scrutinize the human rights track record of recipients and consider whether supplemental civilian harm mitigation measures, such as training, advising, or other supporting capabilities, should be required as a component of an arms sale, or whether the transfer should take place at all. We insist that our partners take steps to comply with international law, including the laws of armed conflict. When U.S. origin assistance or equipment is used contrary to these goals or when potential violations occur, we will evaluate the full range of consequences. Our aim is to de-escalate regional tensions and create space for people throughout the Middle East to realize their aspirations while still providing critical defensive capabilities. Region-wide, we are continuously examining and prioritizing how we can ensure our security cooperation relationships are consistent with our values, including a reinvigorated focus on civilian harm mitigation efforts. The United States consistently urges our partners to comply with their obligations under international law, to implement measures to reduce the risk of harm to civilians, to take appropriate measures when such casualties occur, and to draw lessons from operations to reduce the risk of harm to civilians. The Department also remains committed to the principles of the Leahy Law, as a tool to promote accountability in foreign security forces and to ensure that security assistance goals are in-line with our values.

For example, I believe decisions about our support to Egypt's security must be informed, framed, and bounded by our values. We have deep concerns regarding human rights violations in Egypt, and we will continue to raise these concerns with Egyptian officials at the senior-most levels. This is a key element of strengthening our strategic partnership with Egypt. We will continue to work with Egypt to improve their ability to advance shared security interests, including counterterrorism, and border and maritime security. At the same time this Administration consistently raises concerns about policies challenging democratic governance, the need to protect a robust and independent civil society, and the fundamental importance of human rights which are, and will remain, an essential element of any arms transfer decision to Egypt, and I would note that Egypt has taken steps to work on practical ways to conduct military operations that mitigate the risk of civilian harm.

It is the goal of this Administration to create policies informed by American interests, including human rights.

And finally, on that last cause I identified: promotion of an open international order that reflects our values and advances our interests. Partners are aware that security assistance and sales from the United States come with high expectations – and that the U.S. review process takes time. Why? It is because we press and hold accountable our allies and partners to reduce civilian casualties. To adhere to the laws of armed conflict. To respect human rights. To enhance their security sector governance processes. To understand when there is no military solution to a conflict. To prevent military technologies from falling into the hands of bad actors. To build transnational connections that enhance peace. These are not “strings attached,” Mr. Chairman, these are the values we believe are inseparable from our national security and that have underpinned our own stability and prosperity, and which we believe will strengthen our partnerships to build peace and security in the region over the long-term. And yes, we are unique in that respect – no other nation’s assistance is designed as intentionally to address the root causes of challenges facing the region. But we also realize that these values also help make us safer and make our partners safer. We see those roots in our values as a benefit, not a hindrance, for our foreign policy and for our security assistance.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.