

STATEMENT OF  
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST, SOUTH ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA,  
AND COUNTERTERRORISM  
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Thank you Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee. It is an honor to testify before you today, alongside my State Department colleague, to discuss the Department of Defense (DoD) role in U.S. security cooperation in the Middle East.

The interim National Security Strategy (NSS) released earlier this year set out the broad parameters for how the United States will engage abroad to protect Americans at home. In particular, it calls for “doubling down on building partnerships throughout the world, because our strength is multiplied when we combine efforts to address common challenges, share costs, and widen the circle of cooperation.”

In the Middle East, the interim NSS calls for working with U.S. partners to deter Iranian aggressive actions and threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity, disrupt al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks and prevent an ISIS resurgence, address humanitarian crises, and for a redoubling of efforts to resolve complex armed conflicts that threaten regional stability. Finally, the NSS specifically makes clear that military force is not the solution for the region’s perpetual instability and lack of security.

Consistent with the interim NSS, the Department of Defense is working to ensure that the full suite of security cooperation authorities, programs, and resources provided by Congress are implemented as part of a whole-of-government approach in which the State Department is in the lead for U.S. policy in the Middle East. Security cooperation programs and activities are a critical pillar in the Administration’s focus on partnership, based on the acknowledgement that the U.S. cannot achieve its objectives unilaterally. DoD programs reinforce diplomacy, and the U.S. emphasis on dialogue and political processes – coordinated with partners – to wind down

conflicts. DoD utilizes security cooperation authorities and programs to expand the capabilities of willing U.S. security partners, respond to urgent security needs, and invest in the institutional growth of partner forces to share the responsibility for reinforcing regional security.

Over time, the U.S. goal is to partner with self-reliant, capable, and accountable partner forces who work alongside the United States to achieve mutual objectives, based on a shared view of the threats to regional stability and security. U.S. support through security cooperation to partners is also designed to ensure that the U.S. maintains access to key areas and facilities, both to support the defense of our partners and also to respond to potential contingencies.

For the Department, security cooperation includes several categories of activities, to include: transfer of defense articles and services; military exercises; military education and training; and institutional capacity development efforts such as security sector reform. Within each of these categories, there are opportunities and requirements for the Department to demonstrate and impart core U.S. values such as support for a rules-based international order, respect for the rule of law and civilian control of the military, and commitment to fundamental freedoms.

The Department conducts assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) of its security cooperation initiatives to inform decisions about security cooperation strategy, policy, programs, and resources. The Department is building its capacity and processes to design, develop, and implement AM&E to track progress through the development of front-end assessments and performance monitoring of security cooperation initiatives. In addition, the Department conducts independent strategic evaluations to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of SC programming.

Global U.S. security assistance, including in the Middle East, is subject to the Leahy law vetting procedures. Screening for compliance with human rights standards is integral to the Department's review and prioritization of International Security Cooperation Program (ISCP) funding recipients. In addition, DoD offers courses via the Institute for Security Governance (ISG) to build institutional capacity such as Defense Governance, Civil-Military Relations, and Civilian Harm Mitigation. Additionally, courses are offered by the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) include Military Justice, Defense Support of Civilian Authorities, and Human Right and Law of Armed Conflict.

In the Middle East, security cooperation activities and programs provide critical opportunities for the United States to advance long-term objectives for the region. As Israel moves into U.S. Central Command, military exercises and U.S.-convened professional education programs provide opportunities for the United States to expand on last year's normalization agreements by encouraging relationship-building between the Israeli and Arab militaries. Given the shared regional threat of Iran-supported unmanned aerial systems across the region, U.S. security cooperation programs can be used to encourage shared regional defense initiatives. While the U.S. seeks to remain the security partner of choice in the Middle East, improved integrated regional security among partners is key as the United States right-sizes its posture in the region and seeks to counter the influence and appeal of strategic competitors.

Security cooperation programs are a key element of competition with Russia and China. In the Middle East, building the capacity of U.S. is critical to reducing their vulnerabilities to aggression and coercion – and improving their ability to defend their sovereignty, their interests, and the free and open international order. One critical tool in countering U.S. competitors is to provide security cooperation and assistance, such as superior training and equipment, which meets partners' security needs. As the U.S. works alongside partners to address violent extremism, maritime threats, and more, we nurture strong relationships that serve as an effective counter to China and Russia. This includes professional military education, coordinated with the Department of State, which helps develop these relationships with young military leaders in the United States and the Middle East.

In the Middle East, many security cooperation programs are focused on maritime and border security, air and missile defense, counterterrorism, and institutional capacity building. In the Levant, the primary border security and terrorist threats emanate from Syria and Iraq. The robust partnership between the United States and the Kingdom of Jordan is an example of what sustained security cooperation can achieve with a reliable partner. Jordan is today an important counter-terrorism partner and key contributor to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, in large part due to efforts by the United States to build Jordan's defense capabilities and to promote interoperability with the United States over many years.

In the Gulf region, DoD supports the Department of State's efforts to secure a peaceful settlement to the war in Yemen. Additionally, the Department of Defense utilizes security cooperation authorities to bolster Saudi Arabia's air defenses in the face of ongoing cross-border

attacks from Yemen. U.S. security cooperation is designed to support the defense of Saudi Arabian territory through the provision of training, equipment, and early warning intelligence. In Oman, State and DoD's security cooperation collaboration is bolstering Oman's border security, maritime security, and counterterrorism capabilities. In Bahrain, U.S. security assistance programs are assisting Bahrain to increase its maritime security capabilities.

In Iraq, U.S. security assistance strengthens Iraq's counter-terrorism capabilities and bolsters Iraqi forces as they work to maintain a secure, stable, and sovereign Iraq. Programs focus on professionalization of Iraqi forces, border security, and increasing interoperability with the United States and NATO.

Cooperation with Congress is critical in authorizing security cooperation programs, and in maintaining effective oversight. Thank you for Congressional bipartisan leadership in supporting the U.S. security partnerships in the Middle East region, and in exercising robust and necessary oversight and monitoring to ensure that how we use security cooperation resources remains aligned with U.S. objectives and continues to be in the interest of the American people. I look forward to working with Congress as the Department takes up the continued and important cause of strengthening U.S. partner forces to mitigate threats to U.S., Coalition, and regional interests in the region.