

**Opening Statement for Senate Committee on Armed Services Confirmation Hearing  
(Statement as Delivered)  
July 31, 2007**

Chairman, Senator Warner, distinguished members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here with General Cartwright as you consider our nominations for chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I appreciate your time and all the support this committee provides our brave men and women and their families.

I'm also grateful to the president and to the secretary of defense for their confidence.

And I appreciate the love and support of my wife Deborah, here with me, and that of our two sons, Jack and Michael, both of whom serve on active duty in the Navy.

Finally, I'm thankful for the opportunity and privilege to continue to serve.

Should you confirm me, please know that for the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and their families, who have and are performing so nobly and sacrificing so much, I will represent them with the full measure of my effort: to listen, to learn and to lead.

Mr. Chairman, I realize the war in Iraq weighs heavily on your mind, as it does on the minds of the people of this great country. It weighs heavily on mine.

In a moment I will share some thoughts about that conflict. But before I do, let me outline what I believe will be my three overarching challenges as we look into the future.

The first challenge is the defense of our national interests in the Middle East. Iraq and Afghanistan, for sure, the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, Sunni-Shia rivalries, the rise of Islamic militants, the resurgence of Al Qaida, Lebanon, all threaten to tear at fragile seams and all bear directly on the safety of the United States.

I'm especially concerned about the increasingly hostile role played by Iran.

I support diplomatic efforts to counter Iran's destabilizing behavior and hope their leaders will choose to act responsibly. But I find their support for terrorism and their nuclear ambitions deeply troubling.

My second challenge will be resetting, reconstituting and revitalizing our armed forces, particularly the ground forces. There is strain. We are stretched.

Though recruiting and retention figures in general remain good and morale is still high, I do not take for granted the service of our people or their families, and I worry about the toll this pace of operations is taking on them, our equipment and on our ability to respond to other crises and contingencies.

I'm committed to achieving a two-to-one troop rotation as soon as possible. I'm committed to making sure our wounded warriors come home to the very best medical treatment possible in the very best medical facilities we can provide. I'm committed to providing the equipment they need, specifically and urgently right now more MRAPs quickly to the fight, and to make sure broken equipment gets fixed and worn out equipment gets replaced faster.

The U.S. military remains the strongest in all the world, but it is not unbreakable. Force reset, in all its forms, cannot wait until the war in Iraq is over.

And my third challenge is the proper balancing of strategic risk for the future.

Current operational commitments are creating significant demands on the force. I worry that with all the focus on Iraq -- which is certainly appropriate -- the nation might lapse into complacency about our still-mounting global responsibilities.

The longer, larger war on terror -- and I believe it is a long war -- will likely take our troops to places we do not now foresee and will demand of them skills they may not yet possess. At the same time, we must stay ready to deter if possible and defeat if necessary threats from regional powers who possess conventional and in some cases -- in some cases nuclear capabilities.

How we stay engaged around the world, which we must do, how we build and maintain partnerships, which we must do, will largely determine our ability over the long term to do so for the nation all that it expects of us. We must rebalance our strategic risks carefully and as soon as possible.

Let me now turn to Iraq, for you have a right to know where I stand.

I believe the surge is giving our operational commanders the forces they needed to execute more effective tactics and improve security. That is happening. Security is better; not great, but better.

I believe security is critical to providing the government of Iraq the breathing space it needs to work toward political national reconciliation and economic growth, which are themselves critical to a stable Iraq. Barring that, no amount of troops and no amount of time will make much of a difference.

I look forward, as I know you do, to hearing from Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus in September. I believe prudence dictates that we plan for an eventual drawdown and the transition of responsibilities to Iraqi security forces, and we need to do that wisely.

I understand the frustration over the war. I share it. But I am convinced that, because security in Iraq is tied to security in the region, and because security in the region bears directly on our own national security, we must consider our next moves very carefully.

As you know, the Joint Chiefs are completing our own assessment.

I plan to again visit the theater myself in the near future to better understand conditions on the ground.

We are a military at war, Mr. Chairman, and war is ugly and messy and painful.

Our troops are fighting with honor. They are sacrificing bravely and greatly, sometimes with their own lives. Two short weeks ago, I pinned a Silver Star on a young man, a Navy SEAL, who risked his life to save that of a comrade.

I'm inspired by the opportunity, the privilege to continue to lead men and women of our armed forces through what will surely be, beyond Iraq, a protracted campaign that will define the quality of American life for generations to come.

Whatever our tasking may be in the future, we are obliged to the American people to defend them and their interests, to make sure we are ready in every way, across every military mission, to do their bidding. We must be able to win both wars and the peace that follows.

Should you confirm me as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you'll have my unmitigated and unwavering dedication to that task.

Thank you.