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THE ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY TO CONFRONT ISIS

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BEFORE THE

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THE ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY TO CONFRONT ISIS

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 8:30 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing will come to order. This morning, the committee continues its examination of the threat that is posed to the Middle East and to the United States by ISIS. And one of the things we are trying to do here is to look at the administration's strategy to destroy this brutal terrorist organization and assess the proposed authorization of military force to be used. They have sent an authorization to us.

The goal of ISIS, I think, are pretty clear. It is to wreck everything and every person in its path to establish a caliphate and then fight to expand that caliphate. ISIS affiliates are growing in power and presence throughout the region. In the last few weeks, we have seen attacks in Yemen. We have seen attacks in Tunisia and Libya. What is less clear is the administration's approach and its determination to tackle this threat.

Many of you know that for some time some of us on this committee have been pushing the idea of hitting ISIS from the air. We went through many months of ISIS going town by town in Syria, and many in Iraq, without the use of U.S. air power against ISIS. As a consequence, ISIS ended up taking many major cities across the region and ended up taking the Central Bank of Mosul. If we count the number of sorties against ISIS to date, there are 2,959 that have been flown. If you compare that to the 116,000 air strikes during the First Gulf War when Iraq moved 40-some divisions into Kuwait, you get an idea of the difference in magnitude between the way this has been conducted versus the very real deterrence that we utilized in the past.

We also have the fact that at least among the Canadian forces, their spotters are forward deployed so they can hit their targets when they call those targets in. With the U.S. forces, our forces are not forward deployed, so when you call in an air strike, you are not forward deployed to do it. There is some question about how effective that is going to be.

Most Americans would be puzzled to learn about a lot of this and I think the piecemeal attacks that the Obama administration has

been systematically using here has been squandering our air power advantage. At least one observer tells us that is the case. Adding to the problem, the regional forces on the ground these air strikes are supposed to be supporting are badly under supplied. After 7 months of fighting, this committee is still receiving troubling reports from the Kurdish Peshmerga and visits from the Kurdish representatives about how outgunned their men and women are on the front line. Now 30 percent of their battalions are female and those women are fighting against ISIS. They are fighting with small arms and they have yet to receive the artillery, the long-range mortars, and the anti-tank weaponry that they have repeatedly asked for.

This morning, Ranking Member Engel and I are reintroducing legislation to allow U.S. arms to be sent directly to the Kurds. They are strung out on a 500 plus mile front against ISIS. These brave fighters, these women and these men and these battalions, need better equipment to defeat ISIS and we can't allow Iran, through its influence over Baghdad, to continue to prevent that type of weaponry from coming from the center. So we should provide or we should sell it to them directly.

And the Sunni tribal fighters who would be central to this fight are yet to trust Baghdad, as you know. Strong local police and provisional national guard forces are desperately needed to protect Sunnis in Anbar Province and elsewhere. Into the void on the ground in Iraq have stepped Iranian-backed Shi'ite fighters, the leading force behind the recent Tikrit offensive.

Senior U.S. officials have put this development in positive terms. The reports indicate that U.S. intelligence and air power will now support this Iranian-backed mission. The Washington Post wisely cautioned in an editorial this week, "the growing power of the militias with their brutal tactics, sectarian ideology, and allegiance to Iran's most militant faction has become as large an impediment to the goal of stabilizing Iraq" as ISIS. Shi'ite militias taking on ISIS may serve the immediate interest of killing jihadis, but it is hard to see how empowering Iran's proxies is in the short, medium, or long-term interest of an inclusive Iraq or stable Middle East.

The fear that many of us have is that Sunni Iraqis who have been tortured by ISIS, will get the same brutal treatment by their Shi'ite militia "liberators" and that would fuel endless conflict.

To see how this is viewed in the region with respect to Iran being on the march, the other day the Iranians boasted that they had taken four Arab capitals. Well, in taking Yemen, you have set off a situation now where the Saudis and others are reacting, a 10-nation coalition is reacting and the Saudis are making preparations to hit that Iranian proxy on the ground. We know that Quds Forces and other Iranian agents have helped organize and toppled that government and now that the Iranian regime is crowing about it, other countries in the region are taking action and this is complicating the circumstances here. In other words, Iran is very much complicating the ability of the region to get some stability.

Political reconciliation in Baghdad must be central to U.S. policy. The committee will be interested to learn what the administration is doing to press Prime Minister Abadi to ensure he doesn't become former Prime Minister Maliki, a disastrous sectarian.

And we will hear today, our U.S. strategy is focused on Iraq first. That is what we will be told. But until the meltdown of Syria, where General Petraeus termed a "geopolitical Chernobyl" is capped, until that meltdown is capped, "it is going to continue to spew radioactive instability in extremist ideology over the entire region."

Last fall, Congress voted to authorize training and equipping the Syria opposition forces, but to our great frustration, that is still not up and running and when pressed on the path forward in Syria, most administration officials seem to suggest we can figure it out later. Our slow action is creating a crisis of confidence among our allies.

Our witnesses are here to explain the President's strategy and when the committee returns in April, we plan to hear more from the Secretary of State and Defense about the President's AUMF request.

I will now turn to the ranking member for his opening statement.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing. General Allen, General Fantini, General Olson, welcome. We are delighted that we have such a distinguished array of generals to really speak with us this morning. Thank you for appearing here today and thank you for your tireless service to our country.

The main purpose of this hearing is to get an update on the progress of the anti-ISIS coalition and the significant challenges that remain. But we must also address the elephant in the room, in my opinion, the need for a new authorization for the use of military force or AUMF.

As I have said again and again, this committee and this Congress have an important role to play in our foreign policy. I believe that is the case with our negotiations over Iran's nuclear program and the same must hold true when it comes to our effort against ISIS. Congress needs to play its part. And I will resist any attempt to marginalize Congress fulfilling its constitution role.

By passing the new AUMF, our service members, the brave men and women in uniform risking their lives against this enemy would feel the full support of Congress. Our coalition partners would see that the American Government is united in our commitment to degrade and destroy this enemy. Congress would reassert the important role we are empowered to play by the Constitution. And we, as lawmakers, would show that Congress doesn't shrink away from the tough decisions because if we do, we are sending a message that Congress may put itself on the sideline the next time a crisis arose and the time after that and the time after that. That is simply unacceptable.

The language sent to us by the President with the AUMF isn't perfect, but I believe it is a good start. So let us work together to craft a bipartisan AUMF. Let us tailor it to the needs of our troops and this mission because everything we are dealing with today is taking place under the shadow of this vital unfinished business.

I know that we are talking a lot about Iran these past days as an impending agreement, the deadline for one is rapidly approaching, and talk about an AUMF seems to have faded in the back-

ground. But I really believe that that is something that cannot fade in the background. It is something that we have to tackle and this is the committee to do so. And we will do so.

Generals, we look to you for leadership in clearly explaining our strategy to degrade and defeat ISIS to this committee and to the American people. In my view, the international coalition has made some real progress, conducting military operations and advising our partners on the ground, working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, cutting off funding sources for ISIS, taking steps to stem the flow of foreign fighters and pushing back against the toxic message of ISIS propaganda. This strategy is making a real difference. ISIS is losing ground. Much of its top leadership has been taken out. Obviously, we still have much more to do.

Thanks to our training, Iraqi security forces are improving so that they can better deal with the ISIS threat. Regional partners are playing a bigger and bigger role and the coalition is holding steady. But we are still facing a lot of challenges and I would like to touch on some of those today.

First of all, I am concerned about Iran's growing foothold in Iraq. The Iran-guided operation in Tikrit has faltered, but Shia militants, including some fighters trained by Iran's Quds Force are playing a more influential role in Iraq. What are their intentions? And how do our own plans take these elements into account?

Secondly, I am struggling to see the path forward in Syria. I think you know that I view our efforts to aid the opposition is too little, too late, and far too slow. Two and three years ago, I was yelling that we should be aiding and abetting and providing weapons to the Free Syria Army. What has happened now 3 years later is these forces are barely hanging on. They have been focused in fighting the Assad regime and that would be hard enough, especially with inadequate weapons and training. But they also have to face off against ISIS and other battle-hardened groups like the Nusra front. They need more training and equipment as quickly as we can get it to them.

And lastly, what more can we do, what more can we do to support the Syrian people? More than 200,000 Syrians have already perished in this war. Nearly 10 million have been driven from their homes. This crisis has spilled over borders into Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. This is a humanitarian catastrophe. Assad has blood on his hands and the Syrian people desperately need relief.

So gentlemen, I look forward to covering these issues with you. I thank you again for your courageous service and I say again that it is past time for Congress to give you the support you need for this vital mission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Engel. This morning, we are pleased to be joined by senior representatives from the Department of State and Defense. General John Allen is the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. He was appointed on September 16, 2014 by President Obama. General Allen is a retired U.S. Marine four star general, former commander of coalition and U.S. forces in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2013. During his combat tour in Iraq, he played a critical role in the awakening movement in Al Anbar Province.

Brigadier General Michael Fantini is the Middle East Principal Director for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Previously, he served as commander of Kandahar Air Field.

Brigadier General Olson is with us. He is the Deputy Director for Middle East Joint Staff's Strategic Plans and Policy at the Department of Defense and previously he served as the deputy commander for Marine Forces Central Command. Brigadier General Olson, as I understand, you will not be giving oral testimony, but will be available to answer any members' questions. So we thank you for that, sir.

Without objection, the witnesses' full, prepared statements will be made part of the record and members will have 5 calendar days to submit any statements or questions of you or any extraneous materials. So we would ask that you would summarize your remarks and we will begin with General Allen.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOHN ALLEN, USMC, RETIRED, SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY FOR THE GLOBAL COALITION TO COUNTER ISIL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

General ALLEN. Esteemed members of the committee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to update you on the progress of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. More broadly, let me thank you sincerely, the members of this committee, for the tremendous support that that you have been giving our men and women in uniform and also our diplomats in the Foreign Service at far-flung posts and stations around the world who have served our country so well. We are deeply grateful for the support of this committee in that regard.

I returned to Washington this past week after a 10-day visit to coalition capitals, where I met with partners in Rome and Ankara, Baghdad and Berlin, and finally in Brussels, where I briefed the members of the European Union and North Atlantic Council. My engagements in each of these stops reinforced my confidence in the coalition strategy to counter ISIL across the informational, physical, and financial spheres in which it operates. In the territory ISIL has lost, in the increasing financial strain on the organization, and in the diminished morale and increased desertions of its fighters, we are clearly degrading its capabilities. The allure of the so-called caliphate is under direct assault.

To date, the coalition has conducted nearly 3,000 air strikes, I believe, in fact, went over that number last night, against ISIL territories; more than 1,600 in Iraq and nearly 1,300 in Syria. We have taken out ISIL's fighters, many of its commanders, as well as the infrastructure, support to its terror infrastructure and facilities, including 20 training camps and over 200 oil and gas facilities. Since the coalition campaign began, ISIL has lost more than a quarter of the populated territories it held in Iraq.

Because we lack the same kind of partners on the ground in Syria, the situation there is more challenging and complex. Still, we are working closely with regional partners to establish sites for training and equipping vetted, moderate Syrian opposition elements, in order to train approximately 5,000 troops per year for the next 3 years.

Syrian opposition groups to counter-ISIL continue to make strategic gains, expanding west and east from Kobani in retaking territory from ISIL. Coalition air strikes against ISIL in Syrian territories continue to degrade ISIL's sanctuary and limit its freedom of movement and military capabilities, as well as its capacity to resupply its efforts in Iraq.

In Iraq, coalition air power has supported many Iraqi Security Force-led operations, and we are actively supporting training of Iraqi forces at four camps where nine Iraqi Army and three peshmerga brigades are being trained and equipped.

The coalition is planning to build on this initial success, as well as prepare to meet a set of critical challenges in the months ahead. As ISIL is defeated in population centers and the military forces must move on to other objectives, there will be an immediate need for policing and public security efforts to set the conditions for essential service delivery.

Populations that have fled the fighting will need shelter, assistance, and security until they can return home. In many cases, facilities have been destroyed or made insecure by improvised explosive devices. Providers will need to rapidly assess and respond with basic medical care, water, electricity, and other municipal services.

As a successful stabilization effort begins with fair treatment during military operations, we applaud Iraqi leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, who publicly called for the protection of civilians and warned against acts of revenge and recrimination, or abuse. I might digress by saying it is worth reading his 20 point Code of Conduct that he issued last month with regard to the fighters in the field to liberate Iraq. It also means protecting the schools, hospitals, and water treatment facilities and securing antiquities and libraries. These measures begin the process of reunifying Iraq and building trust between liberated communities and the Government of Iraq.

These critical stabilization efforts were at the center of my consultations last week in Baghdad. On the first day of meetings, we heard from the Iraqis about the need to plan for IDP returns, support IED removal, and provide services and expertise to assist with stabilization efforts. On the second day, a team of experts and coalition members met with their Iraqi counterparts and discussed Iraqi plans in greater detail. Throughout my meetings, I emphasized that Iraq's stabilization efforts will be the most important signal of the intentions of the Abadi government to fulfill its goal of rebuilding an Iraq for all Iraqis.

We know from experience that these essential services are delivered more efficiently and effectively when they are sequenced and planned early on with military and civilian cooperation. We also know this: Stabilization operations require significant resources.

We, as a coalition, will work together to assist and support Iraq as we are able to, but we do not have the resources to support all of Iraq's needs. Nor can money alone, whether from the Iraqi budget, from a trust fund, or from any number of partners, achieve full effectiveness without appropriate prioritization, planning, and sequencing.

From Baghdad, we traveled to Berlin for the first meeting of the coalition's Stabilization Working Group. There, under the leader-

ship of German and Emerati Governments, we convened more than a dozen coalition partners to identify specific areas where the coalition can support the Iraqis and establish a shared understanding of what we hope to achieve.

The Working Group on Stabilization is just one of five coalition working groups coordinating coalition activities on specific lines of effort, including military support, counter-finance, counter-messaging, and efforts to stem the flow of foreign fighters.

Among coalition members, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters is an urgent concern and rightly so. Partners are working together to make it more difficult for their citizens to fight in Syria and Iraq through criminal justice reform, enhanced border control, and better intelligence sharing. Eighteen coalition partners have passed new Foreign Terrorist Fighter legislation over the last 6 months in order to stem the flow of fighters traveling to the region. More action is being contemplated. In fact, just this week, the Italian Government broke up a ring of smugglers of foreign fighters operating between Italy and Albania. The CT operation flowed from the use of information as a result of our coalition actions, and prosecution of those individuals will flow from legislation as a result of our Coalition actions.

We must continue to improve how we harmonize border and customs processes, track potential and actual fighters en route to the battle, and share intelligence with partners. This kind of information sharing and creative thinking between partners is also vital in meeting a related and similarly urgent challenge: Constraining ISIL's access to financial support.

Here, the coalition has made gains in synchronizing practices to block ISIL's access to banks, both in the region and globally. This includes stemming the flow of private donations and limiting ISIL's financial options by restricting its ability to generate oil revenues. We are now expanding these efforts to counter ISIL's access to local and informal financial networks.

There is also broad consensus among partners in the Coalition's Counter Finance Working Group, which met for the first time in Rome last week, that we must closely examine any financial ties between core ISIL and terrorists linked to ISIL throughout the region.

We are also beginning to better prepare ourselves to counter ISIL's violent messaging. Last month, the President announced the creation of a new Joint Online Operations Center with the UAE, where we will collaborate with regional partners to take on ISIL in the online information space. Efforts like these, to counter violent messaging, or to take on ISIL's recruitment capabilities and efforts to generate revenues, will endure long after we defeat ISIL, and will support long term U.S. counterterrorism goals.

The United States and coalition partners are also supporting the United Nations' efforts to provide food aid and supply critical assistance to protect vulnerable women, children, and men and attempt to limit the suffering caused by ISIL's excessives and advances.

Ultimately, the best way to protect vulnerable communities from ISIL's barbaric campaign of death and terror is to degrade and de-

feat the organization, militarily and ideologically, over the course of several years.

The President has outlined a framework for the authorities he believes will be necessary to pursue this campaign with his formal request of the Congress for the authorization of the use of military force against ISIL. The AUMF request foresees using our unique capabilities in support of partners on the ground instead of through the long-term, large-scale deployment of U.S. ground forces. At the same time, the President has asked for the flexibility to fight an adaptable enemy, one that hopes to expand its reach and capabilities well beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria.

As the President has said, the world needs to know we are united in the effort against ISIL. We are strongest as a nation when the administration and Congress work together on issues as serious as the use of military force. A new AUMF will prove that we stand united against this threat. A powerful message of support for our leadership with our allies and our coalition and a powerful message of defeat for ISIL.

Taking the fight to ISIL also requires our close coordination with this committee and with the Congress, so that we can constantly evaluate our tactics and strategy, and that we are resourcing them appropriately.

This hearing presents an opportunity to continue that very important dialogue with the Congress and coordination and consultation. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Engel for calling this hearing and permitting us to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of General Allen follows:]

Testimony to The House Foreign Affairs Committee
Special Presidential Envoy for the Counter-ISIL Coalition
General John R. Allen
Thursday, March 26, 2015

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to update you on the progress of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

I returned to Washington this past weekend after a ten-day trip to Coalition capitals, where I met with partners in Rome and Ankara, Baghdad and Berlin, and finally in Brussels, where I briefed members of the EU and North Atlantic Council. My engagements in each of these stops reinforced my confidence in the Coalition strategy to Counter ISIL across the information, physical, and financial spheres in which it operates. In the territory ISIL has lost, in the increasing financial strain on the organization, and in the diminished morale and increased desertions of its fighters, we are clearly degrading its capabilities. The allure of the so-called Caliphate has been shattered.

To date, the Coalition has conducted nearly 3,000 airstrikes against ISIL terrorists; more than 1,600 in Iraq and nearly 1,300 in Syria. We have taken out ISIL's fighters, many of its commanders, as well as the infrastructure that supports its terror, including 20 training camps and over 200 oil and gas facilities. Since the Coalition campaign began, ISIL has lost more than a quarter of the populated territories it held in Iraq.

Because we lack the same kind of partners on the ground in Syria, the situation there is more challenging and complex. Still, we are working closely with regional partners to establish sites for training and equipping vetted, moderate Syrian opposition elements, in order to train approximately 5,000 troops per year for the next three years.

Syrian opposition groups in the counter-ISIL campaign continue to make strategic gains, expanding west and east from Kobane in retaking territory from ISIL. Coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Syria continue to degrade ISIL's sanctuary and limit its freedom of movement and military capabilities, as well as its capacity to resupply its efforts in Iraq.

In Iraq, Coalition airpower has supported many Iraqi Security Force-led operations. And we are actively supporting training of Iraqi forces at four camps where nine Iraqi Army and three Peshmerga brigades are being trained and equipped.

The Coalition is planning to build on this initial success as well as prepare to meet a set of critical challenges in the months to come. As ISIL is defeated in population centers and the military forces must move on to other objectives, there will be an immediate need for policing and public security efforts to set the conditions for essential service delivery.

Populations that have fled the fighting will need shelter, assistance, and security until they can return home. In many cases, facilities have been destroyed or made insecure by IEDs. Providers will need to rapidly assess and respond with basic medical care, water, electricity, and other municipal services.

A successful stabilization effort begins with fair treatment during military operations. We applaud Iraqi leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who publicly called for the protection of civilians and warned against acts of revenge, recrimination, or abuse. It also means protecting the schools, hospitals, and water treatment facilities and securing antiquities and libraries. These measures begin the process of reunifying Iraq and building trust between liberated communities and the Government of Iraq.

These critical stabilization efforts were at the center of my consultations last week in Baghdad. On the first day of meetings, we heard from the Iraqis about the need to plan for IDP returns, support IED removal, and provide resources and expertise to assist with stabilization efforts. On the second day, a team of experts and Coalition members met with their Iraqi counterparts and discussed Iraqi plans in greater detail. Throughout my meetings, I emphasized that Iraq's stabilization efforts will be the most important signal of the intentions of the Abadi government to fulfill its goal of rebuilding an Iraq for all Iraqis.

We know from experience that these kind of essential services are delivered more efficiently and effectively when they are sequenced and planned early on with close military and civilian cooperation. We also know this: stabilization operations require significant resources.

We, as a Coalition, will work together to assist and support Iraq as we are able, though we do not have the resources to support all of Iraq's needs. Nor can money

alone, whether from the Iraqi budget, from a trust fund, or from any number of partners, achieve full effectiveness without appropriate prioritization, planning, and sequencing.

From Baghdad, we traveled to Berlin for the first meeting of the Coalition's Stabilization Working Group. We convened more than a dozen Coalition partners to identify specific areas where the Coalition can support the Iraqis and establish a shared understanding of what we hope to achieve.

The Working Group on Stabilization is one of five Coalition Working Groups coordinating Coalition activity on specific lines of effort, including military support, counter-finance, counter-messaging, and efforts to stem the flow of foreign fighters.

Among Coalition members, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters is an urgent concern and rightly so. Partners are working together to make it more difficult for their citizens to fight in Syria and Iraq through criminal justice reform, enhanced border control, and better intelligence sharing. Eighteen Coalition partners have passed new Foreign Terrorist Fighter legislation over the last six months in order to stem the flow of fighters traveling to the region. More action is being contemplated.

We must continue to improve how we harmonize border and customs processes, track potential and actual fighters en route to the battle, and share intelligence with partners. This kind of information sharing and creative thinking between partners is also vital in meeting a related and similarly urgent challenge: constraining ISIL's access to financial support.

Here, the Coalition has made gains in synchronizing practices to block ISIL's access to banks, both in the region and globally. This includes stemming the flow of private donations and limiting ISIL's financial options by restricting its ability to generate oil revenues. We are now expanding these efforts to counter ISIL's access to local and informal financial networks.

There is also broad consensus among partners in the Coalition's Counter Finance Working Group, which met for the first time in Rome last week, that we must closely examine any financial ties between core ISIL and terrorists linked to ISIL in other regions.

We are also beginning to better posture ourselves to counter ISIL's violent messaging. Last month, the President announced the creation of a new Joint Online Operations Center with the UAE, where we will collaborate with regional partners to take on ISIL in the online information space. Efforts like these, to counter violent messaging, or to take on ISIL's recruitment capabilities and efforts to generate revenues, will endure long after we defeat ISIL, and will support long-term U.S. counter terrorism goals.

The United States and Coalition partners are also supporting the United Nations' efforts to provide food aid and supply critical assistance to protect vulnerable women, children, and men and attempt to limit the suffering caused by ISIL's advances.

Ultimately, the best way to protect vulnerable communities from ISIL's barbaric campaign of death and terror is to degrade and defeat the organization, militarily and ideologically, over the course of several years.

The President has outlined a framework for the authorities he believes will be necessary to pursue this campaign with his formal request to Congress for the authorization of the use of military force against ISIL. The AUMF request foresees using our unique capabilities in support of partners on the ground instead of through the long-term,large-scale deployment of U.S. ground forces. At the same time, the President has asked for the flexibility to fight an adaptable enemy, one that hopes to expand its reach and capabilities well beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria.

As the President has said, the world needs to know we are united in the effort against ISIL. We are strongest as a nation when the Administration and Congress work together on issues as serious as the use of military force. A new AUMF will prove that we stand united against this threat.

Taking the fight to ISIL also requires our close coordination with this Committee and with Congress, so that we are constantly evaluating our tactics and strategy, and that we are resourcing them appropriately.

This hearing presents an opportunity to continue that process of coordination and consultation. I want to thank you again for the invitation to speak with you and look forward to taking your questions.

Mr. SMITH [presiding]. General Allen, thank you very much for your testimony. We now go to General Fantini

STATEMENT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL MICHAEL FANTINI, USAF, MIDDLE EAST PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

General FANTINI. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, members of the committee, thank you for having me here today. I will briefly describe our efforts that we are undertaking to counter ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

As General Allen mentioned, the U.S. strategy to counter ISIL is a whole of government effort, supported by a broad international coalition. It includes multiple lines of effort across the government to counter this threat. The Department of Defense has lead responsibility for denying ISIL safe haven and building partnership capacity. This means conducting strikes against critical ISIL assets and supporting our partners on the ground, principally the Iraqi security forces and vetted Syrian opposition.

Under the denying safe haven line, to deny ISIL safe haven, the coalition has conducted approximately 3,000 air strikes including more than 1,600 in Iraq since August 8, 2014. Additionally, over 1,200 strikes have occurred in Syria since December 23, 2014. We have taken out ISIL's fighters and commanders, more than 1,000 vehicles and tanks, over 200 oil and gas facilities, the infrastructure that funds this terror, as well as over 20 training camps, and more than 2,000 fighting positions, checkpoints, buildings, and barracks in both Iraq and Syria. As a result of this effort, the coalition has arrested ISIL's momentum, degraded its ability to mass and maneuver forces, and pressured or eliminated its leadership cells, and disrupted its command and control and supply lines. Overall, we have put ISIL on the defensive in Iraq.

Under building partnership capacity, countering ISIL will not be possible without our local partners in the lead. To build partnership capacity in Iraq, the U.S. and coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq in its efforts to strengthen and reconstitute the Iraqi security forces by assisting with training, equipping, and advising the Iraqi security forces. This includes Kurdish fighters as well as Sunni tribes. Last summer, we stood up our "advise and assist" team to partner with local forces, and earlier this year, we began training Iraqi security and Kurdish forces at four sites across Iraq. I was able to visit Taji site recently and see firsthand the partnership that we have undertaken with the Iraqi forces. With the help of Congress, the Iraq Train and Equip Fund will enable us to train and equip the 12 brigades, to include three peshmerga brigades and 9 Iraqi brigades that was mentioned by General Allen as well as tribal and Sunni forces.

Under the Syria train and equip, in addition to our efforts in Iraq, we are working with our coalition partners to build the capabilities of the moderate Syrian opposition, with training of the first class set to begin later next month in April. The goal is to train vetted Syrian recruits to defend the Syrian people; stabilize areas under opposition control; empower trainees to go on the offensive against ISIL; and promote the conditions for a negotiated settle-

ment to the end of the conflict in Syria. Our partners in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and others have offered strong support to host and quickly stand up the program. U.S. forces in the region strengthen our partners' abilities to fight terrorism locally, but it will be Iraqi forces and Syrian fighters who will secure the gains against

ISIL and inflict a lasting defeat.

We look forward to working closely with you and we will continue to keep you and your colleagues informed. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Fantini follows:]

Brig Gen Mike Fantini
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Opening Statement
March 26, 2015 0830

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, Members of the Committee, thank you for having me here today. I will briefly describe efforts we are undertaking to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

As General Allen mentioned, the U.S. strategy to counter ISIL is a whole of government effort, supported by a broad international coalition. It includes multiple lines of effort across the government to counter ISIL. The Department of Defense has lead responsibility for denying ISIL safe haven and building partner capacity. This means conducting strikes against critical ISIL assets and supporting partners on the ground—principally the Iraqi Security Forces and the vetted Syrian opposition—so that they can go on the offensive against ISIL.

Denying Safe Haven

To deny ISIL safe haven, the coalition has conducted over 2,900 airstrikes against ISIL including more than 1,600 in Iraq since August 8, 2014 and over 1,200 in Syria since September 23, 2014. We have taken out ISIL's fighters and commanders, more than a thousand vehicles and tanks, over 200 oil and gas facilities, the infrastructure that funds their terror, over 20 training camps, and more than two thousand fighting positions, checkpoints, buildings, and barracks in Iraq and Syria. As a result of this effort, the coalition has arrested ISIL's momentum, degraded its ability to mass and maneuver forces, pressured or eliminated its leadership cells, and disrupted its command-and-control and supply lines. Overall, we have put ISIL on the defensive in Iraq.

Building Partner Capacity in Iraq

Countering ISIL will not be possible without local partners in the lead. To build partner capacity in Iraq, U.S. and Coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq in its efforts to

strengthen and reconstitute the Iraqi Security Forces by helping train, equip, and advise Iraqi Security Forces – to include Kurdish fighters. Last summer, we stood up our "advise and assist" teams to partner with local forces, and earlier this year, we began training Iraqi Security and Kurdish forces at four sites across Iraq. I was able to visit Taji recently and see firsthand the partnership that we have undertaken with the Iraqi forces. With the help of Congress, the Iraq Train and Equip Fund will enable us to train and equip twelve Iraqi brigades, to include three brigades of Kurdish forces, and nine Iraqi Army brigades, as well as Sunni tribal forces.

Syria Train and Equip

In addition to our efforts in Iraq, we working are with our coalition partners to build the capabilities of the moderate Syrian opposition—with training of the first class set to begin later this month. The goal is to train vetted Syrian recruits to defend the Syrian people; stabilize areas under opposition control; empower trainees to go on the offensive against ISIL; and promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to the end of the conflict in Syria. Our partners in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and others have offered strong support to host and quickly stand up the program. U.S. forces in the region strengthen our partners' ability to fight terrorism locally, but it will be Iraqi forces and Syrian fighters who will secure the gains against ISIL and inflict a lasting defeat.

We look forward to working closely with you and we will continue to keep you and your colleagues informed. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. Let me begin first of all, General Allen. From a purely military point of view, is the current military strategy to defeat ISIL deficient in any way?

General ALLEN. Well, obviously, as the strategy unfolds, we know it is a long-term strategy. We will keep a very close eye on the progress. We will evaluate the resources against our expectations, again, as the strategy unfolds. As I watched the pieces of this come together with respect to the training, with respect to our enabling, with respect to our fire power and fire support provided to the Iraqi security forces, it seems to be unfolding in a manner which I think will be successful in Iraq. So we will keep a close eye on this and obviously, we will remain in close consultation with the Congress on the issue of resources.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you if I could, 2 days ago, I chaired a hearing on the increase of anti-Semitism in Europe and Ambassador Ronald Lauder, who was obviously a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO policy testified. He is also the President of the World Jewish Congress. And he said there were "thousands of young European Muslims that have left to fight with Islamic radicals in Iraq and Syria. And there is a real fear that they could return bringing the bloodshed with them. Some have already returned and we have seen the consequences." He referred to increased attacks on Jews throughout Europe especially where radical Muslim elements appear.

To what extent is the administration examining the threat of returning Muslim extremists from the United States, a threat not just to Europe, but also to the United States? I noticed in your testimony, General, you talk about how the coalition members are trying to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters. You made a very cursory reference to some of the things. I know you can expand upon it. You mentioned 18 coalition partners have passed new foreign terrorist fighter legislation and so on. But this is a rear guard, the likes of which I think we have never seen before. Your thoughts on that and what can we do to mitigate the threat here in the U.S.?

General ALLEN. You have put your finger on one of the greatest threats ultimately of ISIL as it exists today. It is a threat to Iraq. It is a threat in Syria. It is a threat in the region. But the return of foreign fighters is a direct threat to our homeland. Not just our homeland, but the homelands of our partners as we have seen tragically in such places as Ottawa and in Sydney and in Paris, Copenhagen, and Brussels and other places. So you are correct. This is a real issue for us. That is why there is, in fact, not just a working group, but an entire line of effort within the U.S. strategy as well to stem the flow of foreign fighters. And it begins by dealing with issues at home where we have encouraged, through best practices and consultation and the exchange of information, nations to work with at-risk populations at home, with clerics and teachers, with family members, with tribal leaders in our coalition partners' homes.

Mr. SMITH. Is there recognition, if I could interrupt, among our partners that Jews are at heightened risk?

General ALLEN. Absolutely. This is, of course, an issue. The anti-Semitism that has arisen from this, this is an issue. The Jewish population is at risk. But more broadly than just the Jewish popu-

lation, it is the security of these countries, so they are fixated on this, gentlemen.

Mr. SMITH. If I could, many of us have noted with a great deal of dismay the President's earlier dismissal of ISIS as a JV team or the equivalent of, and we have seen this happen on a number of fronts. I held a whole series of hearings on Boko Haram and tried desperately to get the administration to declare Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Went twice to Nigeria. Went to Jos where a fire bombing was occurring in churches. It was as clear as the nose on my face that Boko Haram had more of a regional terrorist mindset. And we seem to have not adequately assessed the scope, tenacity, and lethality of the threat. And as part of this coalition of the 60, is Nigeria a part of that?

Again, to my dismay and shock and many others, all of a sudden we walked away, last December, from helping the Nigerian Government combat the very real threat that they are facing with training, with vetted, Leahy vetted individuals. It all can be done as a matter of political will, if you might speak to that.

And finally, very quickly, because I am almost out of time, General Dempsey had pointed out that the security of the Iraqi forces and the Iranian support, I should say, is a positive thing in military terms. He then said that we have got to think what happens when the drums of ISIL stop beating and what about this idea that we need an inclusive government in Iraq? That seems to me to a very far-away dream, not likely to happen. But if you could speak to the Boko Haram especially.

General ALLEN. Boko Haram is obviously a great concern. It has put its hand in the air to be what they call distant province of the caliphate and they have ultimately established a relationship. So I certainly commend your having held hearings on this issue because it is a very serious issue. Nigeria is not a member of the coalition, but I am traveling to nations around the world and trying to explain the nature of ISIL and the nature of this threat of local franchises expanding.

Mr. SMITH. If you could look to include them as well as other countries in Africa with al-Shabaab and all the other threats that are being faced, we would deeply appreciate it. I yield to Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Smith. I want to talk a little bit at the beginning about Iran. We are negotiating a deal with them. They continue to be a bad actor all over the Middle East and Yemen.

It appears that the Iraqi security force is with the help of outside militias including Shia militias. We are making gains in Tikrit. What has been Iran's role in this operation and what is the United States' current role in this operation?

General ALLEN. I don't think we have a full and complete picture on Iran's role. There seems to have been some organizational support to the Shia elements in the Popular Mobilization Force, potentially some direct fire support as well. How much command and control they were exerting as opposed to how much the Shia militia elements, the PMF, were exerting, I think remains ultimately to be determined.

The U.S. role with regard to Tikrit has to be considered in the larger U.S. role across all of Iraq. But your question is an impor-

tant one. As we watch the operation unfold in Tikrit, we continued our close relationship with the Combined Joint Operations Center. Our conversation with the Iraqi military leaders and political leaders continued. As the operation unfolded, Prime Minister Abadi and members of the Iraqi security forces requested U.S. and coalition support for the final phase of the operation ultimately to liberate the city of Tikrit. I don't want to get into a lot of the operational details, to the benefit of the enemy, who is listening to what we are saying, it began by the provision of information and key intelligence. But as I think Mr. Engel, you saw last night, a large number of well-targeted and precise air strikes went in and are beginning to support the Iraqi security force operations that are unfolding right now. That is, I think, where we would leave the level of operational detail.

The United States is deeply involved in this operation now. And we are deeply involved because it is consistent with our relationship with Iraq, overall inside Iraq, but it is also specifically as a result of the request of the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi security forces to assist them in Tikrit.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, is it in the United States' interest to save what I would call a failing Iranian strategy? I worry about Iran's role in Iraqi military operations because what does that portend for the political future of Iraq?

General ALLEN. I don't believe at all that we are in our efforts at this moment saving or attempting to salvage a failed Iranian strategy. The intent, of course, is to support the Abadi government and to support the Iraqi security forces and the liberation of a not insignificant urban center and population center with the idea ultimately of driving Daesh out of the province of Salah ad Din.

I recently met with senior leaders from that province and last week across Iraq met with senior Iraqi leaders, and they are very keen on our role, our role across Iraq, our role in the restoration of Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty. They are also very keen on our role now to support the Iraqi security forces in the final assault on Tikrit and the liberation of that population center and that aspect of Salah ad Din province.

Mr. ENGEL. Let me turn to the AUMF because I think that is very important. The administration sent an AUMF. I was one of the few people who thought it was a good AUMF. I didn't look at it as a finished product. I looked at it as a jumping off point and I thought it provided some very important things.

Now some in Congress have called for a broad AUMF that would allow for U.S. ground troops. Let me ask you about that. How would the introduction of U.S. ground troops be perceived in the countries in the Middle East and by our other coalition partners? Would a large deployment help or hinder our ability to achieve our goal of degrading and defeating ISIS?

General ALLEN. That is an important question. As I try to respond to questions like that, I always try to start by saying the operational environment will clearly dictate the recommended or the decision making with respect to what the force will look like. If it is a major emergency, one that requires some significant number of troops, then that operational environment, I think will be one that is clearly discussed with the Capitol Hill and our congres-

sional partners, obviously to ensure that we are all of one mind on this issue.

Absent a specific emergency or absent an operational environment that would seem to require a large infusion of American troops, I think we have learned now over many years in the region that the presence of foreign troops from outside that region often ultimately creates a reaction within that region that is focused on those foreign troops, that may have, in fact, a destabilizing effect.

We also are actually quite good at training indigenous forces and employing very precise special operations forces, either in support of indigenous forces or if necessary, in terms of direct action. So there are many options for the Commander in Chief, whoever that will be. There are many options that can be discussed and consulted with the Congress. But I think we now know after many years of experience in the region, that the presence of large numbers of ground forces can sometimes have the reverse effect of our intention, which is to stabilize. It can sometimes destabilize the social fabric. So we need to be very conscious of that. That is why I think the AUMF is important in that it gives us the ability to empower and enable and support indigenous, national forces, to achieve the goals which otherwise foreign ground forces might have to undertake. And it is a very important question.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Thank you very much.

General ALLEN. Yes, Mr. Engel.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much and I would like to thank our witnesses. Thank you all very much for being with us today.

General Allen, your last point about large deployments sometimes actually destabilize rather than stabilize the situation was very well taken. And I hope that my colleagues understand the significance of that point. And to the degree that you have outlined a strategy that does not require a large deployment of American troops on the ground is something that I think we should all take very seriously, take a look and see, make sure—see how it works. Because this is a strategy that does work in the long run.

Let me ask you about letting the—mobilizing the local forces which is what you are outlining for us today. You were involved with the Anbar province and the efforts there.

General ALLEN. Deeply involved, sir.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So are the Sunni tribal forces that enabled you to succeed there, are they currently involved in the struggle against ISIL?

General ALLEN. Of course, Anbar remains, as you know, sir, a very contested area at this particular moment.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is correct.

General ALLEN. And I have met with many of the sheikhs of Al Anbar. Some of them have their tribal sons in the fight right now. Without exception, however, the sheikhs that I have met from Al Anbar have said that when the opportunity presents itself, they will, in fact, join the Iraqi Government to oppose ISIL.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. General, weren't these forces that you were talking about the most effective forces that we had when we actually had a large deployment there? Weren't they actually the best

forces? And what you are telling me now is those forces are not at play. Isn't that correct?

General ALLEN. Well, I like to think that the Marines were the best forces that we had, but I take your point.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I second that.

General ALLEN. The environment was really dramatically different at the time. It was a contested area where once the tribes were properly supported by us, they were able to turn on the enemy.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me, General, pardon me, my time is limited here for questions.

General ALLEN. Of course.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. However, let me just note for the record that looking from a distance, it seems to me the reason why these tribal forces that were so important to your success with an earlier strategy are not at play now is because the administration is insisting on a strategy that is based on keeping Iraq together rather than working and deploying the forces within that region into the fight against ISIL.

General ALLEN. If I may comment?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, sir.

General ALLEN. I have been to Al Asad Airbase just recently where I saw U.S. and coalition special operators training the tribal forces. It is the full intent of the Iraqi Government to leverage and they now have about 7,500 or so tribal fighters on the payroll to leverage the tribal fighters ultimately to do much of the same thing that we were successful in doing in '07. It is an intent of the Iraqi Government.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I understand it is their intent, but the fact is that these tribal leaders don't trust the intent of the Iraqi Government and because of this—and by the way, I wouldn't either, if I was in their spot.

What about the Kurds? You mentioned that there are Kurdish fighters that you were very high on, level on. Then you mentioned, of course, the Sunni tribal leaders that we are talking about. Where are the Shi'ites? Isn't this really the problem is that when we come down to it, the Shi'ites are not doing their part in this?

General ALLEN. That is a really important question, and it is a bit complex. I am going to take a stab at it, recognizing the time.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, sir.

General ALLEN. Last year, when Daesh entered Iraq, ISIL entered Iraq, and we began to see the route and ultimately what looked like the potential loss of Baghdad and points south, the Grand Ayatollah Sistanti called for the rallying of all Iraqis to the flag. Not Shia, but all Iraqis to the flag, ultimately to help to defend the country. At the time, for obvious reasons, many of those individuals who were able to get to the flag frankly were the Shia elements. And they were organized in something called the Popular Mobilization Committee of which we see in the field today, Popular Mobilization Forces.

They are not Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq. They are not Kata'ib Hezbollah with close ties to Iran. I think we need to be very nuanced in how we look at them because these are organizations that were filled last year with young men that came from the tribes in the south.

They were teachers one day, and they were fighters the next day. They were bakers one day. They were infantrymen the next day. They came to defend their country. The fact that they were organized in Shia organizations and there are about 80,000 of them or so, the fact that they were organized in Shia organizations has been ultimately to stabilize the situation and then participate conceivably in the counter offensive.

It is not an intention, sir, that these groups remain permanently established and it is the intention, ultimately, of the Iraqi Government that elements would be subsumed under the national guard concept or they would be disbanded and go home. They have already ceased paying about 20,000 of them to go home. So the Shia are, in fact, involved here as an irregular force in a military organization that has played a role.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Has played a role, but again, underscoring the basic point that we just went through, these are not the ultimate fighters that we have to rely on, are really the Kurds and the Sunni tribal people. I believe in the strategy that you have set out. I believe it will work, but only if we are not hampered by the idea that we are going to keep Iraq which was an artificial entity created by the British a long time ago, make that our number one goal rather than defeating ISIL which is what supposedly our goal is.

Thank you, General, very much and I thank all of you very much.

Mr. SMITH. The Chair recognizes Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to continue this line of questions about the Shia and Iran and Sistani's Popular Mobilization Forces. And I want to actually start with the news about our strikes in Tikrit. The coverage in The New York Times today included a paragraph that said, "if the Americans did not engage, they feared becoming marginalized by Tehran in a country where they had spilled much blood in the last decade, the official said speaking on the condition of anonymity."

If you could speak to the strikes in Tikrit, the air support that the United States is providing. Is it different than the support we have provided in the past? And is it being offered in part because there were concerns about being marginalized by the Iranians and in answering that question that gets to the broader point of the again, same article, the preponderance of the 30,000 fighters on the Iraqi side are the members of the militias fighting alongside the Iraqi soldiers and policemen. Of those 30,000, how do we, General Allen, following your last response, how do we view it in a nuanced way to distinguish between the Iranian-backed militias and Sistani's Popular Mobilization Forces?

General FANTINI. Congressman, I think the answer to your question is no. We work by, with, and through the Iraqi Government, and so through the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqis came back and asked for support and we adjudicated that decision to the highest levels and decided to engage there. It is within the Iraqi interest and the coalition's interest to be successful in Tikrit because we don't want to have another success for Daesh or ISIL.

And we anticipate that the support that we are providing the Iraqi security forces with the minister of defense, with the Ministry of Defense in charge of the command and control of that operation that we are in a position that we can provide that support to be successful.

General ALLEN. With regard to the command and control, there is a difference between the role of the traditional Shia elements that are aligned directly with Iran and supported directly by Iran, and those elements of the PMF that have provided a larger force posture and a larger force generation capability. They are not—they don't intend to be or are not intended to be a permanent part of the Iraqi security force entity. They are viewed as a temporary organization that has played the role ultimately of blunting and halting the forward progress of Daesh. As we continue to build out the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces across the board, we can provide you, I think, significant detail about the forces that are engaged right now in Tikrit. It is actually quite encouraging.

To give you a sense of when the PMF elements are going to be in play and when they won't be in play and as we continue to force generate the regular forces, they will play an increasing role ultimately in the counter offensive, ultimately to liberate the populations.

Mr. DEUTCH. General Allen, are you confident that the Iraqi people view this action in Tikrit as one taking place against ISIS by the United States through air strikes and Iraqi security forces, or is it viewed as one that is a combination of U.S. air strikes and Iranian Shia-backed militias?

General ALLEN. That is a good question. During my time on the ground just last week there, I made an effort to meet with the provincial leadership in Salah ad Din Province, in which Tikrit is the largest population center.

At the time, the leadership in Salah ad Din and even recently, have talked about focusing on the liberation of Tikrit and have applauded the role of American forces in supporting the central government and the Iraqi security forces and liberating Tikrit from Daesh. My sense is that on the ground in Salah ad Din their view is that the United States, as we have done in multiple other places in Iraq, is providing the kinds of information and support to command and control and ultimately fire power that will facilitate the Iraqi Government and Iraqi security forces in accomplishing the mission of defeating Daesh and liberating this population center.

So my sense that at least the Sunni leadership, key Sunni leadership, the Speaker, the Vice President and others, but also the Sunni leadership of Salah ad Din have been clear that they support the role of the United States in this particular fight, sir.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Chairman, I just hope that translates then down to the Iraqi people as well. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mo Brooks.

Mr. BROOKS. I pass.

Mr. SMITH. The Chair recognizes David Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for being here, General. You said, General Allen, in response to a question, you said I think we will be successful and you said in

Iraq sort of emphatically. And it caused me to wonder whether you had a different assessment with respect to the region or outside of Iraq.

General ALLEN. The pieces as we have assembled them in Iraq, I foresee those pieces achieving the strategy that we have laid out for ourselves which is ultimately to facilitate the Iraqi Government's restoration of the territorial integrity of Iraq and the sovereignty of the country.

With respect to Syria, obviously, that situation is going to take longer. The training and equipping program, with the great support of the Congress, is just beginning to receive trainees and begin the process formally of training elements of the new Syrian army. And as those elements are introduced into the battle space, as we continue the work of working closely with the Syrian moderate opposition. I just met the president of the Syrian Opposition Coalition last week. There is not the clear partner in Syria that there is Iraq. There is not the governmental entity in Syria that there is in Iraq. And so it is going to take more time, obviously, and we are going to have to evaluate that strategy as time goes on.

Mr. CICILLINE. General, according to a recent human rights report, a Shia militia destroyed a Sunni village they had retaken from ISIS which was methodical and driven by revenge, according to the record. It indicated that dozens of other villages were similarly targeted. And considering the increasing efforts to combat ISIS by Iranian backed Shia militia sort of building on Congressman Deutch's question, how can we monitor Iranian retaliatory actions and will the Shia militias' punitive actions cause Iraq's disenfranchised Sunnis to view ISIS as really their only protectors and what are we doing to mitigate that and also what are the implications for fostering reconciliation between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish communities in Iraq because of Iran's involvement?

General ALLEN. It is an extraordinarily important question, both yours and Congressman Deutch's. There have been excesses. They have been horrible. We saw very quickly that the Iraqi Government condemned those excesses, and the Iraqi Government has initiated investigations into those excesses, ultimately to hold those who perpetrated them to be accountable.

That is an important first point. Those excesses have been condemned by the Iraqi Government. Those excesses have actually been condemned by the Grand Ayatollah Sistani and it was part of—because of that, it was part of the reason for his issuance of the 20 Point Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct which would be recognizable to all of us in uniform as something that would be admirable to be followed by anyone who is involved in combat operations. That is what I would say is the first part.

The tribes, the Sunni tribes that I still remain in close contact with, I just had a conversation with one just this morning, a sheikh, have made it clear that they are willing to give this government in Iraq a chance. Prime Minister Abadi has reached out to the sheikhs. He has reached out to the tribes. Unlike his counterpart who, in fact, victimized the Sunni tribes and victimized the Sons of Iraq, he has also established in an unprecedented way, relations with the Sunni governments in the region. He has been to visit the King in Jordan. He has developed a close relationship

with the Turks. He is going to be invited ultimately to visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia very shortly. He and his government have had close relations.

There is a regional relationship with the Sunni governments. There is an outreach through his own government, through his national security advisor and through his own personal actions, to the Sunni tribes in an effort not just to recruit them into the fight against Daesh, but also to establish the mechanisms and the environment in which reconciliation can occur.

I speak frequently with the sheikhs of these tribes and there isn't one of them who sees ISIL as, in some form or another, an alternative to the central government in Baghdad. There just isn't any. That may have been an issue last year. It may have been an issue in and around the invasion by Daesh in June 2014. But among the tribes with whom I have long relations and the sheikhs with whom I maintain contact, there isn't a one of them that sees the presence of Daesh in Iraq as preferable to the central government. In fact, they have told me that they believe that Prime Minister Abadi and this government in Iraq is something that they can give a chance to.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, General. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Randy Weber.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Allen, how many of those tribes and sheikhs are there?

General ALLEN. I will take the question, sir. There are many. In Anbar, I think we tracked in '08 there were as many as 60 tribes and subtribes. There are multiple tribal confederations, the Shammar Confederation, the Dulaimi Confederation, the Zobai. There are multiple tribal confederations.

Mr. WEBER. How many of them do you stay in contact with? You said you have talked to a number of them?

General ALLEN. I have talked to 10 or 12.

Mr. WEBER. 10 or 12, okay.

General ALLEN. And they have significant populations.

Mr. WEBER. Okay, and earlier you said that Grand Ayatollah Sistanti had a Code of Conduct, I believe that had 20 items on it?

General ALLEN. Twenty points, yes, sir.

Mr. WEBER. Twenty points. Where do you——

General ALLEN. I will leave one with the committee.

Mr. WEBER. Perfect. Do you view—what do you think the chances are that when this is all said and done, however long that takes that Iran winds up with the spoils of the country of Iraq and that actually, they will be in charge?

General ALLEN. I don't think that that is going to be the case.

Mr. WEBER. You do not?

General ALLEN. I do not think that is going to be the case. In the end, Iraq is an Arab country. And while a large element of the Iraqi population shares a confession within the faith of Islam with the large population in Iran, they are a different people.

Mr. WEBER. What percentage of the fighters would you guesstimate is Iranian Guard or Iranian and then let us go to Shia and Sunni and even the Kurds? Can you divide that up for us?

General ALLEN. No, I can't. We will take the question. The preponderance, the majority of Shia militias now in the battle space are of the Popular Mobilization Force I described before. Some smaller number of them are the direct Iranian-allied Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and that type of group. But we can provide you, I think, some pretty good fidelity on that. And then of course, our focus is the Iraqi security forces, their counterterrorism service, and the training of the tribes as well.

Mr. WEBER. Would you guesstimate that that is the total force of 100,000 or 200,000 or what would you guess the fighting number?

General ALLEN. I will ask my military colleagues to get you the number.

Mr. WEBER. Okay. General Olson?

General OLSON. Congressman, there is about 90,000 fighters in the ministry of peshmerga. There have been as many as 80,000 mobilized in Grand Ayatollah Sistani's call to arms for Shia militia, some of whom have been enrolled as Popular Mobilization Forces, some of whom have not. And for Iraqis under arms, there is a significant Shia population in the Iraqi armed forces, both the counterterrorism services, and the regular armed forces. About 80 percent of the Iraqis in uniform are Shia.

Mr. WEBER. And what number would you put on that?

General OLSON. I will have to get back to you with an exact number of the Iraqis under arms.

Mr. WEBER. Would you guess 10,000 to 80,000?

General OLSON. It is upward to that, sir.

Mr. WEBER. It is upward to that.

General OLSON. I can get a number for you.

Mr. WEBER. And what is our current guesstimate on ISIL forces in Iraq?

General OLSON. The numbers vary, sir. I would defer to Intelligence Committee colleagues about their best guess estimate of the current figures. I have seen figures as high as a couple dozen thousand. I have seen figures much lower than that. I think that is a better question that we can back to you with a detailed classified answer.

Mr. WEBER. Okay. And are you guys watching the budget negotiations up here? It is okay to admit that you are watching them.

General OLSON. My portfolio on the Joint Staff does not include being mindful of budgetary restrictions.

Mr. WEBER. Do you feel like you have enough to—well, first of all, how many—we don't call them boots on the ground. I think we call them advisors. But how many advisors do we have in Iraq?

General OLSON. The total force in Iraq is a little bit upwards of 3,000 uniformed Americans. They are divided between the efforts of building partner capacity, advising and assisting the Iraqi counterparts and then providing the basic security and life support that come with that.

Mr. WEBER. Are you confident that we have enough money in the budget to prosecute this war now and the next 2 to 3 years?

General OLSON. Currently, the operations are being funded through a level that is appropriate for our current level of effort.

Mr. WEBER. Okay, and if you could come to us with an AUMF, would you want it for 3 years or longer?

General OLSON. Chairman Dempsey has testified that the current AUMF is sufficient to support the strategy as designed.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Weber. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Florida, Lois Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for your service to our country.

I have a couple of questions. First relates to the underlying conditions that led to the rise of ISIL. Would you agree that ISIL is not the cause of the turmoil in the region, but a symptom of much deeper problems. I would like to get your opinion. Is it unstable governments, poverty, desperation, radical religion? I would like to get your take on that.

And secondly, I think the American public somehow thinks that you can simply get rid of ISIL by bombs or dropping drones and could you just explain the difficulty of their assimilation, let us say, into population and so for the terrain?

General ALLEN. One of the, I think, real benefits of the counter ISIL Coalition which numbers at 62 entitles now, countries and entities, is the recognition that Daesh is, in fact, not the disease, it is the symptom of something bigger. And that broad recognition includes the base societal factors that have given rise to the attractiveness of an organization like this. And they are societal issues. There are political issues, inclusiveness, participation, social issues associated with economic opportunity, the ability ultimately to have the opportunity to put food on the table for families. And often the result of the absence of all of those or some of those in these countries and among these populations have created the conditions of despair and desperation which has made those populations susceptible to radicalization and then recruitment.

Ms. FRANKEL. Excuse me, General, I assume there are efforts being done to try to respond to those conditions.

General ALLEN. I think so. We just had this week, in fact, we ate dinner together the other night with the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, where I personally saw because we are beginning to see the emergence of the potential for ISIL and we have the presence of the Taliban which is its own entity, where we have seen, I believe, some real progress with regard to the underlying issues that gave rise to some of these organizations: The rights of women and the opportunity of women to have a far more prominent role in society, the dedication to institutions of democracy, and to build capacity within those institutions, all of which, of course, has stemmed from the security efforts that we have put into the building of that force which is holding now. So that country is a good example as are other countries in the region. It is a good example of how they are attempting to address and embrace an absence of capacity, whether it is social or economic or human rights or democratic institutions or governmental institutions. An absence of capacity, as I said before, the combination of which has given rise to despair and radicalism and extremism and then violence.

Ms. FRANKEL. Which sounds to me why Syria is so difficult because there really is no government there to work with at all.

General ALLEN. Syria is very challenging, ma'am.

Ms. FRANKEL. And could someone just respond to the question about how ISIL has integrated into the society? They are not standing in a corner waiting to be bombed, so if you could just maybe explain the difficulty of rooting them out.

General FANTINI. Yes, ma'am. ISIL is an ideological entity that through the use of terror is able to co-op to the society. And that is why when we look at the number of strikes that we have done to halt ISIL and put them on the defensive, it is very precise and we have done it with forethought with the understanding that this conflict is not a major force on another major force, more traditional if you will.

From a counterterrorism perspective, we are in a counterterror fight and when we engage a target, we want to ensure we engage the enemy and don't create more enemies by hitting the wrong target if you will. And so that is why it will take time and the fact that we have conducted over 3,000 strikes in the 6 months has positioned us to continue to push for success as we move forward, but it is a very challenging environment and a distributed enemy. Our coalition tactics engender the support of the society and the government and that is how we will continue to pursue. Yes, ma'am.

Chairman ROYCE. [presiding.] We will go now to Mr. Salmon.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you. I just ask for any of your thoughts on Clapper not designating Hamas and Iran now has threats to our national security. I was kind of shocked that in his most recent report that they are not included in the threats to our national security and I am curious about your thoughts.

Also, when it comes to dealing with the fight against ISIL, we are also seeing Iran and its allies continue to invade other countries and become more of a threat to our national security. So this muddled mess, one day the Shi'ites are our allies and the next the Sunnis are our allies. Depending on what country, if you are dealing in Yemen, the Iran-backed forces are our enemy and they are a problem, but yet when we are fighting against ISIS, they are our allies. It is a very confusing mess. And for us in Congress to end up developing an AUMF, it becomes very, very complicated and I am just curious of your thoughts on that.

General ALLEN. Confusing mess is actually a good term for the environment that we find today in the region. It is a very difficult environment. It is one that is characterized by long term social difficulties as we explained to Congresswoman Frankel. It is one where there have been long-term insurgencies and destructions of the social fabric that have been leveraged by political entities within the region. Iran has been prominent in that. It is a state sponsor of terror. It has been a disruptive influence for a very long time and I think that we haven't in any respect changed our view that Iran is one of the central destabilizing influences throughout the entire region. Not just in the context of its destabilizing of our partners and allies in the region, but certainly as a direct threat to our ally Israel as well.

So Iran remains a state sponsor of terror. We still perceive it to be. I don't think that there has been any back peddling by the administration in that regard.

Mr. SALMON. Why did Clapper then leave them off of the list?

General ALLEN. I don't know. I don't know that he did, sir. We will do some research on his comments to ensure that we provide the clarity that you desire on this issue. I am not going to speculate here. I didn't see his comments. So you deserve an answer and we will get you one. But Hamas and Hezbollah remain FTOs, foreign terrorist organizations, and have been duly designated by the U.S. Government and remain on that list, sir. Nothing has changed in that regard.

Mr. SALMON. Okay. The other question I would have is why has the administration not designated additional Shia militias or their leaders under Executive Order 13438 blocking property or persons who threaten stabilization efforts in Iraq since the onset of operations against ISIS?

General ALLEN. I can't answer that. We will get an answer for you, sir.

Mr. SALMON. Okay, that would be really helpful. I will yield back the balance of my time.

General ALLEN. Thank you for the questions.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. I thank the congressman for yielding and we will go to the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Alan Grayson.

Mr. GRAYSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Olson, trying to piece together information from public sources, it appears to me that we are spending roughly $1 million for every ISIS fighting that U.S. forces kill. Does that sound right to you?

General OLSON. The figure that we understand for the operational costs per day is about $8.5 million.

Mr. GRAYSON. But am I right to think that we are spending approximately $1 million for every single ISIS fighting that U.S. forces kill?

General OLSON. I haven't done the math, sir.

Mr. GRAYSON. All right, let us assume for the sake of the argument that that is correct. Does it make sense, does it make sense for us to be deploying the most powerful military force that the world has ever seen and spend $1 million to kill some man standing in the desert 6,000 miles from the closest American shore holding a 40-year-old weapon? Does that make sense?

General OLSON. The military strategy as designed provides U.S. support to a coalition that will degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIL.

Mr. GRAYSON. What about you, General Fantini? Can you think of ways that we can spend less than $1 million and still keep America safe for every gentleman standing in the desert 6,000 miles away when we kill?

General FANTINI. Congressman, I can't address the math that you are presenting. I don't know if that is accurate or not. From the perspective of continuing with the strategy of developing local forces, to enable those local forces with coalition support, to degrade and defeat ISIL, I would submit that that is a worthy expenditure of resources.

Mr. GRAYSON. Well, let us talk about that. You, of course, are all very, very familiar with what General Powell said about what makes for a good, effective war and what doesn't. General Powell said that we need a vital national security interest that is pursued

by a clear strategy. We need overwhelming force and we need an exit strategy.

So let us start with you on that, General Allen. What is our exit strategy?

General ALLEN. The exit strategy is an Iraq that ultimately is territorial secure, sovereign, an ISIL that has been denied safe haven, and ultimately has been disrupted to the point where it has no capacity to threaten at an existential level the Government of Iraq and the nation of the Iraqi people. And it ultimately ends up in a state that does not permit it to threaten the United States or our homeland.

Mr. GRAYSON. General Allen, that doesn't sound like a strategy to me. That sounds like a wish list. You certainly understand the difference between a strategy and a wish list.

General ALLEN. And I do and the strategy, in fact, has a whole series of lines of effort that converge on Daesh to prevent it from doing the very things that I just mentioned.

Mr. GRAYSON. But what is our strategy?

General ALLEN. Strategy is to pursue a series of lines of effort from defense of the homeland to the stabilization of the Iraqi Government to the countering of the Daesh message to the disruption of its finances to the impediment of the foreign fighters to the empowerment of our allies to the leadership of a coalition ultimately aimed to the defeat of Daesh. That is a strategy.

Mr. GRAYSON. But none of those are exit strategies, right?

General ALLEN. There is no exit strategy for this. This is about dealing with Daesh. This is about defeating Daesh. The success of the strategy is not about exit. The success of the strategy is about empowering our partners so that they can ultimately restore the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of a country and deny Daesh the ability ultimately to do that.

If you are looking for an exit strategy with respect to our presence in Iraq, when we have successfully concluded that aspect of the strategy, we have said from the beginning that our forces will redeploy. The Coalition has said from the beginning that our forces will redeploy. So if that is the term that you are seeking in terms of an exit strategy, then I would say that is the mechanism by which we redeploy our forces from Iraq.

But the strategy is oriented on an effect that we hope to achieve with respect to Daesh.

Mr. GRAYSON. General Olson, you will agree that we are not using what Colin Powell would have considered to be overwhelming force, correct?

General ALLEN. We are using an appropriate level of force——

Mr. GRAYSON. Which isn't overwhelming force, right? Not as Colin Powell would see it, right?

General ALLEN. I don't want to speak for General Powell. I believe that the resources that we are applying to the strategy to achieve our ends through matching ways and means are appropriate for the strategy as designed.

Mr. GRAYSON. General Fantini, yes or no, are we using what you would consider to be overwhelming military force?

General FANTINI. Congressman, I would submit that American air power against an AK–47 could be construed as overwhelming.

I agree with General Olson that the use of the resources and the force applied to support our coalition partners to enable these ground operations are appropriate for the strategy and for success in this fight that will take a clear eyed and long-term commitment. And we have stated at least 3 years.

Mr. GRAYSON. My time is up. Thank you all very much.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Grayson. There is just one vote on the floor, so we will keep this hearing moving. Some of the members have left to cast that ballot and they will be back. And those members waiting to ask questions, if some of you want to vote and then come back, we will work right through.

Empowering our partners is sort of the theme, General Allen, that you have used successfully in the past with the Anbar awakening. One of the real questions here though is which partners end up stepping up to the plate and will they do more harm than good? And I am speaking right now of the militias, the Iranian led or encouraged militias here because that is my concern in all of this.

Many of our partners in that theater are already frustrated about our Syria policy. We hear from these Ambassadors in the Gulf states and through the region. And I wonder how much longer the Sunni states will stick with the coalition once these Shia militias go on the rampage. And that is the part I am concerned about.

In some areas, these Shia have burned and bulldozed thousands of homes in Sunni villages. You see the reports in the front pages of the papers about some of the atrocities committed. And this is our concern about the Iranian trained and equipped fighters stepping into Iraq. I will just give you what I recently heard about the breakdown. This is how General Dempsey described the Tikrit operation. A thousand Sunni tribal folks, a brigade of the Iraqi security forces, that would be about 3,000, well, that is what we want to see happening. But then approximately 20,000 of the Popular Mobilization Force which in this count seems that they are Shia militia. And so given that some of those militia are the same militia that in the past attacked U.S. forces during the height of the Iraq War and some are known to have targeted these Sunni Iraqi citizens during the same period.

Given Iran's involvement in this, how do we reconcile their role, then and now? And to what extent are Iranian forces on the ground taking part directing these militias? I see some of it in the interviews and certainly coming from the region. The Iranians are trumpeting this.

General ALLEN. Prime Minister Abadi has been pretty clear, very clear actually, that it is not his intention that there be developed in a parallel security structures in Iraq. To that extent, the Popular Mobilization Forces have generally been organized in a manner that ultimately they will either be disbanded or will be subsumed under the national guard organizations once the national guard legislation is passed and they become a reality.

I think your question and your concern is very well placed. We are attempting to ensure that we understand what it is that the Iranians have done and what they have not done with respect to the militias in general and with regard to Tikrit in particular. And you are also correct that there are elements of these militias which are the ones that we have seen before that we saw during our pe-

riod of time in Iraq in large numbers, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and others that have the potential of creating a long-term security problem for the central government in Iraq.

So we are watching this closely. We are working closely ultimately with the central government on the assimilation of those Popular Mobilization Forces, those Shia elements that came forward in the aftermath of the attack on Iraq last June to try to preserve the integrity of Iraq. And ultimately, it is the intention of Prime Minister Abadi that those forces either be disbanded or go home.

The longer term issue, your question I think implies we are going to have to deal with Kata'ib Hezbollah and those elements that are directly supported by the Iranians over time. And I think that is a security issue that the Iraqis are going to have to address. And I think that their time will come as this campaign continues to unfold.

Chairman ROYCE. Yes. I think some of this talk about Iran being a very successful regional power, long term, if it does this nuclear deal, the choice of words here by the administration, I think is concerning to others on the ground who have noticed the Iranians were bragging the other day about four Arab capitals now being under their control and talking about maybe taking a fifth, you know? And this kind of rhetoric coming commensurate—of course, I am bothered by 3 days ago the "Death to America" quote from the Ayatollah. And in the middle of all of this, pushing the envelope and saying we control four Arab capitals now and we are on our way to controlling a fifth and we are talking about Saudi Arabia. And they are trying to support a low-level insurgency among the Shia there.

I think the Sunni tribes will be central to this fight in terms of turning back ISIS. And they have been squeezed between the terror of ISIS on one hand and the brutality of the Shia militia on the other. And because of your experiences on the ground in Anbar during the awakening and the fact is that helped turn the tide, I just look at the resources and the capabilities that were deployed then versus what we are doing to work with them now. And we have got to do more, I think, to fully engage the Sunni tribes in this struggle against ISIS as an alternative to having Iran bringing in as they are doing, you know, today in Syria and in Lebanon and Yemen and frankly trying to do in Saudi Arabia and trying to do in Bahrain as we know to the extent that you can succeed at this, I think it is going to be essential.

General ALLEN. I agree with that 100 percent, Chairman. The unfolding of the counter offensive in Iraq needs to liberate large numbers of the Sunni population, numbers that have really very few options with respect——

Chairman ROYCE. My time has expired. I need to go to Mr. Meeks, but he has enough time to make that vote.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Generals, I want to thank you. What I appreciate is I think is what I am hearing is some honesty in the sense that I hope we are playing, even if it is short term or having short-term pain for long-term gain. You know, when we were in Iraq we thought that after the shock and awe just a few days later that it was all over and we then were

in Iraq another 10 years. And from what I am hearing from you, we know that it is going to be a long-term fight. This is complicated. And we are going to have at least, I think you are saying at least 3 years. And I hope that then means that a lot of these regional entanglements that we try to figure it out because unfortunately have to run out, but I am told that yes, some of our troops on the ground, if you have troops on the ground that is not going to help. It could exacerbate the situation. In larger numbers, right, in large numbers. We have our special forces in training and doing what we have to do in that regard and bringing them together. Because in my estimation it is going to take everybody in the region working together and not just the United States by ourselves. And it has got to take the cooperation of a number of individuals in the region.

So with that in mind, my questions would be, I have two-fold. One is with reference with Qatar and them and are they cooperating with us? There have been some differences in their approach to Syria which complicates things and whether or not they are able, have the ability or the desire to cut off the financing to the terrorists and what their authority is.

And the second question then would be in reference to Turkey and whether or not they are cooperating with us in the region and how they add in because it is very important, I think, that we have those two countries intricately involved with us if we are going to really win this thing. So those are my two questions.

General ALLEN. Mr. Meeks, you are 100 percent correct in your observations on both of those. They are both critical to the outcome. In the case of Qatar, the Emir has recently visited here. He has reinforced something that we have heard in the last couple of years which is that Qatar has taken measures to begin to stem the flow of donations that come from Qatar and obviously the enormous wealth that many of the individuals have there. Not the government, but individuals to stem the flow of that money ultimately to organizations like Daesh or other organizations. The Emir has been clear on that issue. We have seen, in fact, that that money has diminished, whether it still flows in any form or not, I can't answer today. But Qatar has been very clear that it does not intend to tolerate the funding of those kinds of organizations. That is a positive trend with regard to Qatar and it is also a very positive public statement by the Emir.

It is also important to understand that Qatar has flown air operations with us as on the wing of U.S. Air Force aircraft in Syria. Qatar also hosts Al Udeid which is one of our largest air bases in the entire region. The forward headquarters with CENTCOM, the combined air operations center for the region, and the headquarters, forward headquarters of our Special Operations Command in the region. So Qatar is a very important partner, not just in dealing with Daesh, but also dealing and helping us to continue as a platform for preserving regional stability.

With respect to Turkey, Turkey is an old friend of the United States and we are an ally through our relationship with NATO. I have been to Ankara now four times in the last 4 months where we have had a number of conversations with the Turkish leadership, one of which specifically late one evening with the Prime Min-

ister resulted in the Turks, my direct conversation with the Turkish leadership resulted in the Turkish decision to permit the peshmerga to reinforce the defenders of Kobani by moving through Turkey to do that.

Turkey has made a series of additional decisions ultimately to expand its support to our coalition efforts. We continue to have productive conversations with Turkey. We have more to cover, more ground to cover in terms of how Turkey might participate, but it is not just in the military context. Turkey is now co-leading the Coalition Working Group on stemming the flow of foreign fighters. It is in Turkey's interest to do that and they have embraced that as a responsibility within the coalition.

So we will continue to work very closely with both of those countries and as your question implies, they are critical to the outcome.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, General.

General ALLEN. Yes, sir. Thank you.

Mr. ZELDIN [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Meeks. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I wanted to start off by thanking all of the generals who are here for your service to our country, dedicating your entire life to protecting our freedoms and liberties, being responsible for making critical decisions that not only impact the welfare of the men and women under your commands, but also their families back home. So thank you for a lifetime of service to our country.

I was in Iraq in 2006 with the 82nd Airborne Division and toward the end of that year, General Petraeus was taking over part of this surge strategy, was taking over all of the surge strategy and I remember a counter insurgency model coming out at the time where a lot of his vision for what we need to do in Iraq was articulated really in written form. You can find on the internet.

He would say things like "Give flexibility to local commanders so they can adapt to changing circumstances." Trying to tackle the conflict of Iraqi military and law enforcement in many cases not even showing up to work. How do we embed forces to ensure that they are going to be there in the morning?

My first question is and I apologize if it was answered while I was away, who is in charge on our side on the ground in Iraq?

General OLSON. United States Central Command is ultimately responsible for the campaign, in the campaign fund that has been written. There is a three star general who is the commander of the Joint Task Force, combined Joint Task Force for Operation Inherent Resolve. He is headquartered in the Central Command AOR.

On the ground in Iraq is an American two star commander who commands the joint combined land forces effort there.

Mr. ZELDIN. General Austin is the three star?

General OLSON. General Austin is the four star Central Command.

Mr. ZELDIN. The four star, right. Okay, so who is the two star?

General OLSON. Major General Funk.

Mr. ZELDIN. Major General Funk. Now so I remember——

General ALLEN. The 82nd is coming in behind by the Big Red One, by the way.

Mr. ZELDIN. Good decision. As far as Major General Funk goes, or the three star that is over him, whose vision? One of the things

in my analysis and the analysis of others is who is in charge and are they being given the flexibility and resources they need to accomplish their mission?

When the President sent the authorization for the use of military force, the Congress accompanied with that was a five paragraph letter from the White House to Congress. And in one of those paragraphs it is indicating an understanding that the use of special operations, the use of ground operations would be important. The White House was careful not to word it where, you know, specifically saying it was going to be U.S. special forces or U.S. ground operations. But one of the things in my analysis of whether or not we are actually going to be able to defeat ISIS is that we are driving the recommendations from the ground up.

When you have a very talented two star or three star or four star with multiple combat tours, a lot of combat experience, they understand the enemy. They understand the government, the culture. Without their hands being tied behind their back, they are able to say exactly what we need to do to defeat ISIS. Is that two star, does he have the flexibility he needs? In his mind, if he wants to send an Army Ranger Unit or Marines or Navy Seals or Delta Force or Green Berets to do a night mission in Syria or some part of Iraq, when they come under the cover of darkness. They take out a high-value target or they get very important actionable intelligence, does that two star have the ability to execute that kind of a mission?

General OLSON. Being cautious about operational security, what I would say, Congressman, is that the chain of command has been empowered both by the chairman and by the Central Command commander to make the appropriate recommendations for what we need to do to carry out the strategy.

Mr. ZELDIN. So when Secretary Kerry was here, one of my colleagues, Mr. Grayson, was trying to interpret whether or not the authorization included offensive operations. The Secretary's initial response indicated that it did not authorize offensive operations. With my question, he had the opportunity to clarify it that it did not involve—he was not referring to kinetic air strikes. But the one thing that was left unanswered from that back and forth due to a lack of time, was whether or not the authorization for use of military force allows for the use of U.S. special operations forces to be able to conduct that kind of a mission. Does the authorization for use of military force the President gave to Congress, does that authorize that commander on the ground to execute that kind of a mission?

General OLSON. The President's transmittal letter included examples of things that are not enduring offensive ground combat operations such as rescue operations involving U.S. or coalition personnel. The use of special operations forces to take military action against ISIL and their leadership, i.e., counterterrorism, or the use of U.S. forces in situations where ground combat operations are not expected or intended such as intelligence collection and sharing, missions to enable kinetic strikes, or the provision of operational planning or other forms of advice and assistance to partner forces.

Mr. ZELDIN. So just so I understand, General, and my time is expiring, just so I understand, would that commander on the ground

be authorized—if Congress was to pass this authorization for use of military force, will that commander be authorized to conduct that special operations mission to take out a high-value target?

General OLSON. Again, Congressman, within the bounds of OPSEC, the commander will be able to make the recommendation for the appropriate military operation to match the appropriate means to the appropriate outcome.

Mr. ZELDIN. Thank you, General. At this time I would like to recognize Mr. Sherman of California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. We are talking about the AUMF. Keep in mind the President has total power to deploy our forces outside combat areas for training. The President has under the War Powers Act the right to engage in a series of ground operations lasting 60 or 90 days per operation without any act of Congress. And then finally, unless we repeal the 2001 AUMF, the President has total power to do just about everything he wants against not only al-Qaeda, but organizations once affiliated with al-Qaeda which the President has concluded includes ISIS.

Our focus is on ISIS because they have forced us to focus on them through not only their territorial acquisitions. After all, the Houthi have had some territorial acquisitions, but because of their gruesome YouTubes. They are the only group in the Middle East that has, in effect, asked us to bomb them. We have obliged.

Another area where we—well, I think the Shi'ite alliance is more dangerous than ISIS. They have killed far more Americans including the Marines in the 1980s in Beirut. They have conducted operations on every continent, including Hezbollah, conducting operations in Buenos Aires and of course, they are trying to develop a nuclear weapon.

So the total destruction of ISIS is probably not available to us, but even if it was, we would have to ask who is going to fill that ideological, that territorial and that cyber space. And I am not sure that we would see an improvement in the Middle East.

I would like to focus just a second on Yemen. I will ask General Fantani, are we assisting the Saudis in the military actions they are taking by air over Yemen?

General FANTINI. Congressman, yes, we are. We are providing enabling support to the GCC and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Mr. SHERMAN. And do we know whether former President Saleh is in the country of Yemen? Do we know whether current President Hadi is in the country of Yemen?

General FANTINI. Sir, because of the classification of——

Mr. SHERMAN. Do we know in a way that you can disclose in this room?

General FANTINI. No, I would not feel comfortable answering that.

Mr. SHERMAN. General Allen, we have all seen the World War II movies. The French Government in exile didn't exactly send checks and money to those living under Nazi occupation, but in Iraq we have got the government in Baghdad paying people in Mosul. The money then goes to ISIS to the extent ISIS wants the money. They can grab as much of it as they want. But my concern here is does the Iraqi Government generate from facilities that it

controls such as Mosul Dam electricity which then goes into ISIS-occupied areas?

General ALLEN. I will take that question, sir. There has been some work on the Mosul Dam just recently and I want to make sure I get you the most——

Mr. SHERMAN. We saved the Mosul Dam. We, of course, got no credit from it in the Iraqi press or from the Iraqi people. At any time in the last few months has the Iraqi Government allowed electricity to go——

General ALLEN. Yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. They have.

General ALLEN. That is correct.

Mr. SHERMAN. Does ISIL pay for it or do they just charge the civilians for it?

General ALLEN. No, they don't pay for it, obviously.

Mr. SHERMAN. So while we are bombing ISIS, we are giving them free electricity or rather Iraq is giving them free electricity, sending them money gratuitously, it is an unusual way to wage a war. One suggestion I made at the last hearing, I would like to run it by you, is should there be a change in the color and design of Iraqi currency so as to make invalid and worthless the currency that ISIS was able to seize? Now this will anger those who are corrupt, those who are evading taxes, pretty much those in control of the government in Baghdad.

Is there serious discussion of making all that currency that ISIS seized worthless by doing a currency replacement?

General ALLEN. Sir, you have posed these questions before.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes.

General ALLEN. They are, I think, very important questions, actually for how we would envision this counter offensive ultimately. What I would ask is you permit us to either come to you in a closed session or permit us to provide you a classified response.

Mr. SHERMAN. I look forward to getting the classified response, but this isn't sources and methods of intelligence. This is what color will the currency be? But you are right, we wouldn't want to disclose those plans in advance.

General ALLEN. That is correct, sir.

Mr. SHERMAN. I look forward to getting an answer to these questions which as you note I have been posing for quite some time and I yield back.

General ALLEN. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE [presiding]. And General Allen, if we could plan on doing that after we return here in the House, how much time do you think it would be necessary for you to access that information so that we could have a briefing with the members of the committee?

General ALLEN. When you return from your—we could do that pretty quickly, if you come back, sir.

Chairman ROYCE. That would be my request.

General ALLEN. It would be helpful, I think, as well, to update you on how the Tikrit operation has unfolded.

Chairman ROYCE. We have appreciated the prior briefings.

General ALLEN. Yes, sir. Be glad to do that.

Chairman ROYCE. I would follow up on that. We go to Mr. Darrell Issa.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Olson, Marines are pretty straight forward and so I heard your answer to the earlier question when asked does a two star have the ability to perform X, Y, or Z combat mission, you answered the chain of command has the ability to beg for the opportunity through the chain of command. You answered, do I have the ability to ask? Is that correct that you have the authority to ask was your answer to do—you have the authority to do?

General OLSON. The commander on the ground's mandate in Iraq right now is to advise and assist and build partner capacity.

Mr. ISSA. Right, so he has the ability to ask.

General OLSON. Yes, sir. He does.

Mr. ISSA. Okay, I just want to make sure that we got that sort of clear that they really don't have combat command authority. What they have is the ability to go up the chain of command and ask, something similar to the way Vietnam was fought where you had to go practically back not just the Pentagon, but to the coffee table in the White House sometimes before you could get a go ahead.

Do you think that is the way the war should be conducted? In other words, do we need to in short order provide our combat leaders, whether they are in an assisting role or quite frankly it is air strikes and targets of opportunity and so on, the normal ability within a combat arena to make decisions based on predetermined if then rather than almost always having to go up the chain which can cause a target or an opportunity to disappear?

General OLSON. The way I would characterize the strategy is that we are executing by, through, and with our Iraqi partners.

Mr. ISSA. Okay, we are executing by, with, and our Iraqi partners are Shia partners who are on the ground with Iranian operatives, correct?

General OLSON. We are not directly advising or assisting any force that is not under the control of the Government of Iraq.

Mr. ISSA. Right, but if Shia zone individuals under the control of Iraq with Iranian operatives next to them call for a strike or assistance, ultimately you are responding as an Iraqi response, correct? I don't want to get too far in the weeds, but we will just take-you know what? I think I will give up on that because I think the Associated Press has made it clear you are doing it.

So let me get back to this committee's primary jurisdiction, the use of military force. Currently, the President is asking to retain one and get rid of one prior use of force. Additionally, he wants world-wide ability to go after ISIL, correct? ISIL, ISIS, Daesh, depending upon what name you want to use. That is essentially what it is. Just tell me if I am wrong?

General FANTINI. That is accurate, Congressman, in terms of geographic limitations.

Mr. ISSA. So that begs the real question. In Yemen today, the President is currently, and I think appropriately, assisting Gulf allies led by Saudi Arabia in trying to stabilize the situation which Iran-backed dissidents, not dissidents, Iran-backed opportunists, the Houthis, are in fact, trying to take that country by force, turn

it into a Shia-controlled nation similar to Iran. That is not in the use of force request. It would not be covered. Is that correct?

General FANTINI. Yes.

Mr. ISSA. Okay, so as we speak we are, in fact, in a situation which we have combat operations support that is likely to need—it certainly doesn't fall under the normal global war on terrorism, as a matter of fact, unless I missed my prep for this. We just took Hezbollah and Iran effectively off the terrorist list, didn't make them good guys, but took them off the list. And we now are in a situation in which we are using them in Iraq, maybe not as directly, we are using people in Iraq, we are using people in Syria that are formerly on a terrorist list. We are then fighting them in Yemen and the President has not clarified under what authority he plans to do that and for how long. Am I missing anything there?

General FANTINI. Sir, I think first, we believe that Hezbollah still remains on the list. Number two, you highlight an excellent point. It is an extremely complicated environment. And we are pursuing this counterterrorism strategy with the precision strikes to halt ISIL and additionally as you highlight to support our Gulf partners as best we can because of the threats in the region.

Mr. ISSA. My time is expiring, but based on the fact that we have essentially but two distinctly different groups, ISIS, Sunni extremists, and a myriad of Shia extremists in different areas, mostly if not all backed by Iran. We are now as a committee being asked to consider the authorization for use of military force only against half, well, in fact, we would have to rely on vague past authorizations for the future and we do not have a plan for situations like Yemen.

So I will close with don't you believe that any authorization use of military force has to envision the ability and a plan to deal with the fact that in some places we have two enemies, ISIS and Iranian-backed groups, and that we will be effectively on the ground fighting them in places such as Syria and that there currently is no new authorization for that. Shouldn't there be an authorization for that or shouldn't it be included in the authorization that we are being asked to render to the President?

General FANTINI. I believe the intent of the AUMF was to afford the geographic flexibility, as well as the flexibility to respond across the globe to these types of threats. The issues that are associated with Yemen, I would estimate further need to be adjudicated in terms of exactly what the Houthis truly mean in terms of—or what they truly represent in terms of their affiliation and to ISIS, Daesh, and the Shia challenges within the region.

Mr. ISSA. So General Clapper, former General Clapper's list, worldwide threat assessment did not list Iran or Hezbollah where they were near the top at the last time. I just want to make sure the record is clear. We know they are still a terrorist, a nation backing terrorists. We know Hezbollah is still a terrorist organization. But they dropped from the list and I always assumed that there are too many good people double checking things for that to be a clerical error.

So Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your indulgence. I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Yes, and we are going to go to Mr. Grayson for questions and then we are going to go to Mr. Jeff Duncan.

Mr. GRAYSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General Allen, how many countries have we asked to provide air support in the sense of offering to actually execute strikes against ISIS in either Iraq or in Syria? How many questions have we asked for that kind of support?

General ALLEN. Well, when we talk to—I just have to—we would have to CENTCOM on that.

Chairman ROYCE. You know what I am going to suggest here is a second round of questions, but first let us go to Mr. Jeff Duncan and then we can come back to our second round. That is probably the most efficient way to do it.

Mr. GRAYSON. Certainly, Mr. Chair.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you.

Mr. DUNCAN. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to reset the clock here, I hope.

First off, General Olson, I was appalled when I heard about elements of the State Department asking the United States Marines to leave their weapons behind to be destroyed in Yemen. I told Secretary Kerry in this hearing a couple of weeks ago never to disarm the United States Marines ever again. And I apologize that that happened. And that is how I feel about it. I want to make sure that the men under your command have the weapons to defend their colleagues and defend this nation and our liberty.

So thank you all for what you do.

I visited Iraq in November 2012 on CODEL McCaul. And I will say that General Austin executed the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq in a very professional manner. And I am a huge fan. His goal was to not lose another American life in our withdrawal. But while we were there, we were concerned about the premature withdrawal of U.S. forces. I say premature because there was a lot of uncertainty about the readiness of the Iraqi security forces, the readiness of their border security. There was concern that Iran would fill the void after U.S. troops left. ISIS wasn't on the radar screen then but al-Qaeda was. And al-Qaeda was still in Iraq and I believe al-Qaeda was just waiting for the U.S. forces to leave to fill that void.

So I disagree with letting the enemy know a time line of when American troops are going to withdraw from any theater. There is a 3-year deadline in the AUMF which I disagree with. I want to—I personally want to make sure that we give commanders the ability, the commanders on the ground the ability to do their job, the ability to, with the rules of engagement, to defeat the enemy.

But we still have a lot of threats in the region and we have seen what happened in Libya. We now see what is going on with terrorism in Tunisia, training elsewhere in North Africa, what is going on in Yemen, the Iranian-backed Shia militia there just opposing a legitimate regime in Yemen. We still have AQAP, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, Hamas, Abu Sayyaf and a lot of other terrorist organizations around the globe. I am concerned that they are all going to join forces. We are already seeing that with Boko Haram.

Let me ask what are we doing with the Kurds? This question may have already been asked, General Allen, but how do the Kurd-

ish militia play into our overall goal? Because they are the only ones doing the heavy lifting in Iraq right now on the ground in my opinion with air support and I appreciate that, but how do they fit in to this dynamic?

General ALLEN. Well, the Kurds play a very important role. They are a force for stability. They are an example of an area where the social factors and the relationships between and among the people within the Kurdish element of the Iraqi population have been able to achieve a level of stability and prosperity that are an example for the region. So the Kurds play a very important social role, I think, both for Iraq, but more broadly for the region.

At a military level, peshmerga and Kurdish forces have been successful, as you correctly point out, through the use of coalition air power in recovering all of its previous holdings and then a bit more. In that respect, without getting into specific operational plans, with regard to the counter offensive, my very strong suspicions are that the peshmerga and the platform of Kurdistan or the KRG will play an important role ultimately as the counter offensive unfolds in the North and in the Northwest. So we would anticipate that they would play an important role in that.

Mr. DUNCAN. I think they should. I have been impressed. Did any of the weapons from Libya make their way to Syria and then in the hands of ISIS, specifically MANPADS or any of that?

General ALLEN. Let me take that question and come back to you with a classified answer, please.

Mr. DUNCAN. Okay. Let me—my time is about up, so I will let you answer that question or we can answer it in a classified.

General ALLEN. I prefer to answer that in a classified environment.

Mr. DUNCAN. Let me ask you about Yemen. How does Yemen play in this scope of combatting ISIS? Is ISIS part of the driving force in Yemen or is it a completely different group? Are they interconnected? And I will expand on that because I mentioned all the other terrorist organizations around the globe. How does that fit in to what we are trying to do here to defeat this enemy?

General ALLEN. We have three principal forces at work. We have the Houthis which are a Shia element that is in some form or another supported by Iran. We have the regime which is failing and we have al-Qaeda which has been a problem for some period of time, AQAP it is often called, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Those three forces are in contention at this particular time, obviously, to restore the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the state.

So to your point, at this juncture, al-Qaeda which is not ISIS, in fact, they are at odds with each other. Al-Qaeda is the principal Sunni element, extremist element that is on the ground in Yemen. The Houthis are the Shia element on the ground with regard to Yemen. And then we have the state which we still support.

We are calling on all parties, obviously, to come to an agreement that supports the central government and it is a central government that the Saudi-led 10 nation coalition is now supporting with military operations. So those are really the three contending parties at work.

Mr. DUNCAN. Wouldn't you agree the Arab Spring combined a lot of those different Shia Sunni elements?

General ALLEN. I think the Arab Spring was a catalytic effect that created instability in Yemen in particular.

Mr. DUNCAN. Right.

General ALLEN. One of the realities, I know, with respect to Yemen is that as the Houthis grew in prominence and capability, it drove Sunni elements into the arms of al-Qaeda. It is a very real issue. And al-Qaeda, of course, by virtue of its Sunni dent is by no means an ally of the Sunni states in that region that we support as well. So that is one of the reasons that Yemen is so important to us in terms of dealing with the dynamics there. And Yemen, of course, geostrategically is located at the southern end of the Bab-el-Mandeb which is the exit of the Red Sea which is a major shipping region.

So Yemen is a very important area for us geopolitically, and of course, our long-term relationship with the central government is important to us.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, General Allen.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Chairman. I would ask for a classified hearing as well.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Duncan, we will do exactly that. As a matter of fact, we will incorporate those together.

Mr. Duncan, do you think that makes sense to you?

General ALLEN. Let me just say, Chairman, this is about ISIL. We will come ready to talk about ISIL, but tell us what you want and we will make sure we have got the right people in the room.

Chairman ROYCE. I will work with Mr. Duncan and others to submit those questions in advance, General, in addition to what he has already raised today.

General ALLEN. Great.

Chairman ROYCE. Before the committee.

General ALLEN. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. We will go now to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, our chairman emeritus.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, gentlemen, for your service to our country. Thank you very much.

Brigadier General Fantini, you testified that the Syrian opposition train and equip program is set to begin later next month. In the past the administration has said that the purpose of this Syrian opposition train and equip was to have the forces fend off ISIL, not to go on the offensive.

What will the mission be and will it include fighting Asad's forces and will the Syrian opposition fighters be Leahy vetted?

General FANTINI. Congresswoman, yes to Leahy vetting. The vetting process is very rigorous and essentially continuous.

To your question of—I am sorry, can you repeat your first question?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Yes, will it be to fend off ISIL?

General FANTINI. Oh, pardon me.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Or will it be not go on the offensive or what exactly will the mission——

General FANTINI. The mission is to train and equip to defend their territory, provide security in their territory, counter and engage and go offensive toward ISIL.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. It will be to go on the offensive against ISIL?

General FANTINI. Eventually, right. But that won't be until we can develop enough combat power that they see the conditions are right to move. But it is a counter-ISIL force, not a counter regime.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And one of the most important issues that this committee and the entire Congress can consider is the AUMF, the authorization for use of military force. But ISIL isn't the only threat that we and the people of the region face. And if we are going to defeat ISIL, we need a comprehensive approach that addresses ISIL, al-Nusra, other terror groups that are fighting in Syria and Iraq, Assad and Assad's allies which include Iran, the IRGC, and Hezbollah.

Does the AUMF give the authority to use force against Assad's regime, al-Nusra, Hezbollah, any other fighter, actor fighting in Syria and Iraq or is it just limited to ISIL and anyone fighting with or alongside that terror group?

General FANTINI. I think it does not give the authority to use force against any regime. It is a complicated battle space in the Syrian area. But we believe that the AUMF, the combination of the 2001 and this new AUMF would afford and provide the authority and the flexibility for our forces and friendly forces to the U.S. Government to be successful.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And General Allen, it was reported in the news earlier this week that Hezbollah is preparing a major offensive against ISIL while the Lebanese Armed Forces, the LAF, may not participate in Hezbollah's offensive against ISIL. There is certainly going to be some level of coordination with Hezbollah and as a result, the patron of the terror group which is always Iran.

What can you tell us about Hezbollah's alleged planned defensive? Are there any known ties between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces? Can you confirm that any intelligence we share with the LAF will not be shared with Hezbollah? Can you confirm that Iranian generals and tanks are being used in the Iraqi campaign in Tikrit? And can you confirm if the United States is on any level directly or indirectly coordinating our efforts against ISIL with Iran?

General ALLEN. Your last question I can confirm that we are not coordinating with Iran. And there is no intention to. To the other specifics of your question, you deserve a specific answer. Let me take that, please, and come back to you with the details that you have asked.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I look forward to that because we want to work with our allies, but if those allies are sharing information or they are in cahoots with terror organizations, we end up unknowingly doing more harm than good in getting valuable information and intelligence to our enemies. So I know that you will be handling that in a careful manner.

General ALLEN. Yes, ma'am. That is a very important question. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much and thank you for your service again, gentlemen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. We go to Ted Yoho of Florida.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I think that is a great idea having that classified briefing and I look forward to being there.

Generals, General, General, and General, I appreciate you guys being here in the service to our great country. Without the service of you and the leadership of you guys and the military, our service men and women, we would not appreciate the liberties and freedoms we experience every day. And we don't ever want to forget that. So thank you.

You being the experts and I am glad to see the step up in the sorties because when this first started, there was only like single digits in the beginning a month, going on to degrade ISIS in the beginning. And I am glad to see you have stepped that up. And you being the experts, the recommendation as far as a tactic that we should pursue to reduce and zero out ISIS to where it is no longer a threat, and I look at Nazism where you had nation states and nation leaders, this is more of an ideology without a nation state. What is your recommendation? Can we pursue it with what we are doing and I am glad to see the Coalition that is building up and we had a classified briefing with you and you were telling me how you were doing some of the——

Chairman ROYCE. Remember, it was a classified briefing.

Mr. YOHO. Right, and we shouldn't talk about those things.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, sir.

Mr. YOHO. So I won't. That is why I look forward to the next one. Can it be done with what we are doing without U.S. assistance in your opinions?

General ALLEN. Well, U.S. assistance is being applied, sir.

Mr. YOHO. How much do we need of U.S. assistance? I know we need to have some in there. With that coalition, if we are directing it and kind of strategizing or as President Bush would say the strategery, how much can we rely on the coalition partners?

General ALLEN. That is a really important question. The coalition partners in ways that I think we should all be very proud of, have stepped up to the plate in many areas that are obvious. Some of their airplanes are flying and dropping ordnance every day. Some of their trainers are training, some of the special operators are risking their lives just by being in the battle space. Those are obvious ways in which the coalition has stepped up. There are other ways that are less obvious, but really important as well in combining their capabilities with us to go after Daesh's finances, to squeeze its ability to have operational flexibility.

Mr. YOHO. And we have cooperation with all these other countries doing that same thing, correct?

General ALLEN. We do and it is actually quite impressive. It is foreign fighters. It is counter finance. It is counter messaging. It is building stabilization capabilities. It is quite impressive.

Mr. YOHO. I guess the question I have is how do you break that ideology? Why do people want to get into that? How do you break that? And I know we can do it militarily and you guys, nobody is better than what you guys do than you. But on the diplomacy side, thinking about that because what I see and this goes back to read-

ing stories to my kids, The Cat in the Hat with the green spot that you couldn't get rid of. You put it here, you could try to get rid of it. It pops up over here. And that is what I see ISIS doing with all the different countries it is going into because of that ideology that people are bringing into. From a diplomatic standpoint, is there anything that you would recommend we do differently?

General ALLEN. You said countries that ISIS is going into. I think it is a very interesting point. What we are discovering is that it is less about countries that ISIS is going into than it is the movements locally are seeing an opportunity to leverage a relationship with ISIS to accomplish their own objectives.

Mr. YOHO. And that is what I mean.

General ALLEN. And that is a really important point. Because it gets to the larger issue here. This coalition has come together to deal with Daesh as a symptom of a bigger problem. But the coalition has also evidenced real interest in getting after the broader underlying factors that give rise to this. So it is about political capacity. It is about democratic process. It is about human rights. It is about the rule of law. It is about economic opportunity. It is about having a hope of being successful in your lives. And in many of these countries, many of these countries where we find organizations like Ansar Bait al-Maqdis in the Sinai Peninsula or Boko Haram or Abu Sayyaf in the jungles of the Philippines it is because they have no hope. People have no hope and they are easily susceptible to radicalization and ultimately recruitment for the purposes of extremism in these kinds of groups.

So the coalition is really seeking to understand what these underlying factors are so that as individual states and as a coalition, we can begin to move toward resolving some of those underlying factors that have given rise to organizations like Daesh or Boko Haram.

Mr. YOHO. I have got one more question that I will submit and I am out of time. And I thank you for your service and your direction. You are our best hope. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Thank you, Dr. Yoho. Mr. DeSantis of Florida.

Mr. DESANTIS. Good morning. General Allen, how many U.S. service members were killed when we were in Iraq by Iranian-backed forces and Shi'ite militia?

General ALLEN. I will have to get that number for you. It is not insignificant.

Mr. DESANTIS. At least hundreds at a minimum.

General ALLEN. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. And I have seen estimates by one of your colleagues that said maybe up to 1500.

General ALLEN. We will get the number for you.

Mr. DESANTIS. And Qasem Soleimani, the Quds Force commander, he was involved in directing a lot of those operations during that time period. Is that correct?

General ALLEN. That is correct.

Mr. DESANTIS. So we know that Qasem Soleimani is now directing some of these Shi'ite militia who are fighting ISIS. I know it has been discussed about our air strikes and how that may be

working with the Shi'ite militias even though we are not doing it explicitly.

My question is if we were conducting air operations would somebody like Qasem Suleimani be a target?

General ALLEN. We don't at this time intend to target it.

Mr. DESANTIS. And why is that?

General ALLEN. We are in this to assist the Iraqi Government in dealing with Daesh. That is the reason that we are there, not to go to war with Iran. I think it is very important for us to keep that in mind. I will just leave it there.

Mr. DESANTIS. When the Shia forces are clearing areas, how are they interacting with the Sunni population who is left behind? Are they oppressing them or are they trying to have a unified country?

General ALLEN. That is a very important question. We have seen reports of massacres and atrocities. Those reports are under investigation. They have been condemned by us. They have been condemned by the Iraqi Government. They have been condemned by Grand Ayatollah Sistani. But I was just in Iraq last week and as Tikrit was kicking off and we did know that there were Shia elements that were part of the clearing force, I met with the Sunni leaders from Salah ad Din, the province in which this is undergoing, under way, and specifically asked the question, what do we know about the potential repetition of these kinds of atrocities, or these kinds of acts?

At the time, they were satisfied that this was not happening. But they also recognized that in the end when you transition from a clearing operation to a holding operation so that the clearing force can keep on going, the holding force has to look like the population or derive from the organic of the population that ultimately is going to be held. To that extent, the Minister of Interior, Minister Ghabban, has asked for assistance in helping to recover the Sunni police of the three provinces, Salah ad Din, Ninawa, and Al-Anbar, ultimately to follow behind the clearing forces to become the hold force on top of the Sunni population so that we don't end up with that dynamic of a Shia irregular clearing force sitting on top of and holding a Sunni population. The Iraqis are very conscious of that.

Mr. DESANTIS. In fact, a Sunni Arab who sees the alternative to ISIS to be oppressed by the Shia, they are going to be more likely to want to side with Sunni backed terrorist groups if they don't think there is a future for them apart from being oppressed by Shi 'ites. Do you agree with that?

General ALLEN. In the abstract, I would, but I think that there have been measures that this government has taken to Iraq that fundamentally give the Sunnis and the Shia an opportunity to coexist inside the government, inside Iraq, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abadi.

That is why a Shia Minister of Interior, by the way, is very interested in reconstituting the Sunni police of the Sunni provinces. I think that is a very positive thing.

Mr. DESANTIS. I do, too. Do you believe that Iran has provided arms to the Government of Iraq or any of its affiliates?

General ALLEN. I will take the question. I don't—we will take the question. I want to give you the answer you deserve on that.

Mr. DESANTIS. And if they are, we do have authorities on the books, both at the U.N. and under U.S. law that I think would be implicated. So if you can let us know what the status of that is and then if we do think that Iran has been doing this, then what would the administration's response be, I would definitely like to know that.

General ALLEN. Thank you for the question. We will take it.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, General. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. DeSantis. And we will recognize Mr. Smith for 3 minutes. We are sorry about that, but our witnesses have until 11 a.m.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you for the second round, Madam Chair.

General Allen, as you know, as all of you know, all of us now, President Obama touted Yemen as a significant success story, yet today it is imploding, rapidly imploding so much so that there has been an intelligence loss of U.S. information, according to several news outlets, including the LA Times. And I was wondering if you could tell us how serious that breach might be? Is it serious? The intelligence services of Yemen were just overrun and apparently the files were not destroyed fast enough. That could have an impact, certainly on our fight against ISIS, but also on all issues relevant to the war on terror.

And also while I deeply appreciate and I am encouraged by your statement by the allure of the so-called caliphate has been shattered, it is hard to make predictions. I would hope that the word diminished might be used because every time we think we are making progress, some other moving part comes to bear. So I just offer that unsolicited as I hope it is shattered, but I am very concerned that it has not been.

You also testified about disrupting the flow of foreign fighters as an urgent concern. I asked you about that earlier, but I wonder if you might elaborate very briefly on what new best practices are being contemplated so these killers, these terrorists, who become hardened in this battle don't return to the United States and of course, to Europe, to kill Americans and to kill Europeans?

General ALLEN. To your first point on the intelligence, potential intelligence lost, we will take the question. Obviously, the answer would be classified. So we will want to come back to you with that. It is a very good question.

With regard to foreign fighters, the commitment by the coalition, I think, has been very impressive in that regard. We are not where we want to be because that momentum was developed before we began to build our own momentum against it. But it operates at several different levels. It is countries adopting their own legislative approaches, as I just described. The Italians will be prosecuting these traffickers of foreign fighters under legislation that is derived directly from Daesh and directly from our coalition activities. So we are beginning to see countries across the region, we are beginning see the activities of the EU helping to create a unity of purpose and vision on this issue. We have seen and will continue to see best practices being applied on border control measures, the sharing of information and intelligence, the sharing of personnel name, passenger name records. And that will improve over time.

We all, of course, are nations, especially the Western European states and along the United States and Canada, are states where privacy is an extraordinarily important aspect of who we are as a nation and our population.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, General Allen. I know that since your time is limited, if you could finish that thought.

General ALLEN. Well, we will continue the best practices associated with working with indigenous populations and at risk populations to reduce the attractiveness of Daesh and similar extremist organizations, legislative approaches, individually, and across the entire effort, the coalition, and also to strengthen the work of the Counter Foreign Fighter Working Group which is chaired by The Netherlands and Turkey. And we will be meeting next week in Ankara for the first time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to build on a question that I asked before about the AUMF. Finding the right AUMF language is obviously difficult. Finding one that can pass Congress is difficult. Republicans and Democrats have each attacked what the White House sent up for different reasons, for polar reasons.

How important is it for Congress to pass a new AUMF and what would be the consequences if we did not do so? And how would our troops and our coalition partners view such a development if we did not do so?

General ALLEN. A very important question, Mr. Engel. There are, as you know, three major areas of discussion within the AUMF and we obviously welcome the robust conversation associated with those which is the size of the force that could be committed, the nature of the force, the duration that that force might be committed, and where that force might be committed. So those are all issues that deserve a very thorough conversation and coordination.

But there is a fourth area that is really important about the AUMF and that is that whatever it looks like at the end, wherever the administration and the Congress have ultimately agreed that this should—whatever the measure should be fulfilled, a strong bipartisan support of the AUMF is an extraordinarily important outcome of this because it reinforces the reality and the appearance of American strategic leadership and it also sends a very clear message to Daesh that its days are numbered. That is why the AUMF is so important. We will deal with the issues about the size and the duration and the location and that is an appropriate platform for us to have the kind of conversation with the Congress that the American people deserve.

But an approved, with a strong bipartisan vote of an improved AUMF preserves and strengthens America's strategic leadership and also puts Daesh on notice that its end is in sight.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, General. I couldn't agree with you more. I want one final question about Syria and about Assad. In an interview with "Foreign Affairs," Syria President Assad asserted that any fighter not working with the Syrian military should and I am

going to quote him, "be fought like any other illegal militia fighting against the Syrian Army."

So when the U.S. trained Syrian opposition fight is reintroduced back into the battlefield, will Assad target these fighters and obviously this isn't a hypothetical, it is a real situation which Members of Congress need to have information on. Will the U.S. or other members of the coalition target Assad?

General ALLEN. I would like to present that comment or the answer to that when we have the closed session if we may. It is very much on our minds, obviously.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. Engel. We now to Mr. Rohrabacher who is recognized for 2 minutes and then 2 minutes for Mr. Sherman and then our witnesses will have to depart.

Mr. Rohrabacher is recognized.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I have got 2 minutes, let me just note that I did some work in Vietnam in 1967. I was not in the military, but my father was a retired lieutenant colonel in the Marines. And when I got back I was dismayed and I remember talking to him about what a confusing mess that was in Vietnam and which to parrot your words we used earlier to describe the challenge that you face.

And my father told me, he said, "Well, if you think that is a confusing mess, you should have seen what it was like when I landed the first DC–3 into the Pusan perimeter." So we have faced these confusing messes before. It was important for us, as my father described, had we not been successful in Korea, Japan would have been neutralized. It would have changed the whole nature of the Cold War and the Soviets may have won.

I think what we are doing right now to confront Daesh will either basically eliminate our deal with a challenge that is of that magnitude because if we don't and if President al-Sisi does not win in Egypt, does not overwhelm those people who are trying to destroy him and replace him with a caliphate government and if you folks don't succeed, we may have a world in which a huge chunk is controlled by radical Islamists who want to destroy Western civilization. So we wish you success. I believe that the strategy of using insurgencies as we did in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance works. Your success in Anbar Province reaffirms that.

I would hope that our commitment to assist the Iraqi Government in this challenge does not get in the way of successfully implementing that strategy that we know that will work. So thank you all very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. I know that we will get into it in closed session, but I will reiterate that I am confused that on the one hand we tout the failure of ISIS to provide governance, their inability to provide for the people under their control and then at the same time the Iraqi Government helps them provide governance with free electricity, sending salaries, etcetera.

What I want to deal with in open session is whether the AUMF should include Assad or whether it should be limited to ISIS? Now in the absence of ISIS and before the beheadings, this country wanted to have as little military involvement in the Middle East

as possible. Now Americans see this as a problem that we have to confront, but we have to confront it carefully.

On the one hand, we have to go after ISIS for what they have done. On the other hand, there is this war between Shi'ites and Sunnis and it is not our role to be on one side of that or the other. The most evil element of the Shi'ite alliance is Assad. He hasn't beheaded anybody on YouTube, but he has killed close to 200,000 innocent people.

Should, and General, I realize there will be others at the State Department that will give us some input on this, but should the AUMF authorize the President, should he wish to, to go after not only ISIS, but also to go after Assad, perhaps not with the goal of destroying either, but at least confining mowing the grass of both of these evil elements?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. We have 10 seconds.

General ALLEN. The answer is that this—at last if the State Department permits me to speak about this, the AUMF was submitted as a counter Daesh measure. It does not envisage provisions to deal with Bashar al-Assad, but that is an important and a separate conversation to be had, but in the context of the provided and draft legislation, that is about Daesh.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Mr. ISSA. Madam Chair, I would ask unanimous to then have just 1 minute to plant a question so it could be dealt with later?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Yes, Mr. Issa asked for unanimous consent to put something on the record and make a statement.

Mr. ISSA. Very quickly, Generals, when we go into classified session in 2 or so weeks, the President has called for regime change in Syria. He also has refused to participate in a no-fly or a buffer zone even for humanitarian relief in Northern Syria. As a result, Turkey is very well known not cooperating with us in providing the normal air cover that would shorten our distances for attacks both in Syria and in Iraq.

So during the classified session, I would ask that you be prepared to provide us with the information on what is going, what the impediments were, what the logistical changes would be if we were to come to an agreement with the Turks to provide that no-fly zone and a buffer zone and the humanitarian relief in Syria rather than the millions that are in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and even a few scattered around Europe. So if I could ask and get an agreement that you would include that in the material brought to the classified briefing, that would be helpful to me.

General ALLEN. I would be glad to.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Issa, and we certainly appreciate the time of our witnesses today. These are critical issues. We look forward to following up when we return, particularly in the area of the Tikrit mission and Iran's role. And with that, Chairman Royce's committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:05 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

March 24, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Thursday, March 26, 2015

TIME: 8:30 a.m.

SUBJECT: The Administration's Strategy to Confront ISIS

WITNESSES: General John Allen, USMC, Retired
Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL
U.S. Department of State

Brigadier General Michael Fantini, USAF
Middle East Principal Director
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
U.S. Department of Defense

Brigadier General Gregg Olson, USMC
Deputy Director for Middle East
Joint Staff Strategic Plans and Policy
U.S. Department of Defense

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *03/26/2015* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *8:35am* **Ending Time** *11:05am*

Recesses [ ] (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Edward R. Royce, Chairman; Rep. Chris Smith; Rep. Lee Zeldin; Rep. Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

The Administration's Strategy to Confront ISIS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

none

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

SFR - Rep. Gerald Connelly
QFR - Chairman Edward R. Royce
QFR - Ted Yoho

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *11:05am*

Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Edward R. Royce, CA
X	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
X	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Joe Wilson, SC
	Michael T. McCaul, TX
	Ted Poe, TX
X	Matt Salmon, AZ
X	Darrell Issa, CA
	Tom Marino, PA
X	Jeff Duncan, SC
X	Mo Brooks, AL
	Paul Cook, CA
X	Randy Weber, TX
X	Scott Perry, PA
X	Ron DeSantis, FL
X	Mark Meadows, NC
X	Ted Yoho, FL
X	Curt Clawson, FL
	Scott, DesJarlais, TN
	Reid Ribble, WI
X	Dave Trott, MI
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
X	Tom Emmer, MN

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Eliot L. Engel, NY
X	Brad Sherman, CA
X	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Brian Higgins, NY
	Karen Bass, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
X	Alan Grayson, FL
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Alan S. Lowenthal, CA
X	Grace Meng, NY
X	Lois Frankel, FL
	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
X	Joaquin Castro, TX
X	Robin Kelly, IL
X	Brendan Boyle, PA

Statement for the Record
Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia

A still-young 21st century has already seen two of the three longest wars in U.S. history. This experience has conditioned the U.S. to be wary of open-ended military commitments, but it remains to be seen if we have learned the lesson of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. An ill-defined mission with no clear mandate and conflicting objectives is hardly a formula for military or political victory.

Though the assertion of Congressional prerogative is long overdue, the discussion in Congress regarding an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) appears to have completely stalled. The President has submitted to Congress a draft AUMF against ISIL. As the committee of jurisdiction, it is incumbent upon the House Foreign Affairs Committee to initiate a robust and transparent debate in Congress regarding the authorities and limitations appropriate for an such an AUMF.

This discussion would allow the U.S. to reassert its leadership in the fight against ISIL and meet emerging challenges that may have long-term ramifications on our relationship with Iraq. We must remain vigilant that we are not creating a vacuum to be filled by outside forces that will not prioritize long-term peace and stability in Iraq.

The U.S. could only watch as the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), built with $25 billion of U.S. funding, withered away before a sweeping offensive launched by ISIL. Many saw the utter collapse of the ISF and ISIL's subsequent control of Iraqi towns and cities as indicative of a more fundamental problem facing post-war Iraq, namely sectarian strife.

Harsh criticism was leveled against Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki after it became apparent that he was susceptible to Iranian influence and had fomented sectarian tensions by gutting effective military leadership in favor of his Shiite allies. This precipitated his departure from government and Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi's inheritance of an Iraq divided along sectarian fissures.

On Wednesday, it was reported that the U.S is preparing to support Iraqi operations in the city of Tikrit. Under the reported operation, U.S. airstrikes would support the ISF and Shiite militias. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has characterized these militias as "Iranian trained and somewhat Iranian equipped."

We have seen Iranian backed militias commit human rights abuses against Sunni populations elsewhere in Iraq. This should raise troubling questions about the cost of victory in Iraq and the country's political future. We have already once witnessed a crisis of leadership in Iraq forced by the mishandling of sectarian tensions. Hopefully, we are not forcing Iraq into the arms of an unhelpful conspirator in the interest of expediency.

However, we are not without effective partnerships in the fight against ISIL. The U.S. is arming partners in affected areas like Iraq, where $1.6 billion in Department of Defense funding has been split between the ISF ($1.23 billion), the peshmerga ($354 million), and Sunni tribal fighters ($24 million). It is worth noting that the Chairman and Ranking Member have introduced legislation to give arms directly to the peshmerga rather than directing all assistance through Baghdad. I support this legislation and believe this strategy warrants a discussion wherever we have a reliable partner who is not receiving the assistance they require.

Our strategy must prioritize effective partnerships. The President's budget requests funding for three train and equip (T&E) missions in the fight against ISIL, the global Counter-terrorism Partnerships Fund, the Iraq T&E authority, and the Vetted Syrians T&E authority. We are also conducting airstrikes against ISIL alongside 8 other countries in Iraq and 4 partners in Syria.

Coordinated military action supported by an international coalition is one component of what must be a comprehensive strategy to diminish ISIL. The President's budget includes a request for $3.5 billion to counter ISIL. This must include empowering partners, stemming the flow of foreign fighters, coordinating an ambitious humanitarian relief effort, cutting off ISIL's financing, and combatting the sophisticated propaganda it deploys to recruit and incite further violence.

We should welcome a broader discussion about our strategy and objectives in the fight against ISIL. Congressional action on an AUMF could provide an effective vehicle for that debate. The President has taken the welcome step of transmitting a draft AUMF to Congress. Congress must meet this challenge. To demur once again would continue a 60-year pattern of Congress abrogating its constitutional duty.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
General John Allen and Brigadier Generals Michael Fantini and Gregg Olson by
Representative Edward R. Royce
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 26, 2015

Questions for Department of State

Question 1:
There has been a fair amount of criticism, both here and with partners abroad, of the President's plan to defeat ISIL as it appears to be not just "Iraq first" but "Iraq only." Can we really defeat ISIL in Syria and support stability in the region without addressing the issue of Asad and his regime?
Answer:
Even as we partner with the more than 60 Coalition members to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (or "Da'esh") in Syria and Iraq, it is clear that the Asad regime's brutalization of the Syrian people has aided and abetted the rise of such violent extremist groups. Not only has Asad lost all legitimacy, but we firmly believe there cannot be a stable Syria under his leadership, and we are therefore committed to a genuine political solution that ensures his exit. A negotiated settlement consistent with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué is the only way to sustainably end the conflict.

To that end, we are working with the moderate Syrian opposition and allies to advance conditions for a political solution. DOD's Train and Equip program, which is scheduled to begin this Spring, aims to help appropriately vetted members of Syria's moderate opposition: (1) defend the Syrian people from attacks by ISIL and secure territory controlled by the Syrian opposition; (2) protect the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria; and (3) promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.

We also support efforts to restart meaningful dialogue on a political track aimed at a solution based on the Geneva principles, including efforts by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. We continue to work with the moderate Syrian opposition, including the Syrian Opposition Coalition, so that they can effectively participate in a negotiation for a political transition. Additionally, the United States continues to sanction and diplomatically isolate the Asad regime while encouraging our allies to do the same.

Question 2:
To what degree did Iranian-backed Shia militias participate in the assault on Tikrit? Instead of the Iraqi Security forces relying on Shia forces to liberate predominantly Sunni areas, what can be done to better train and equip Sunni forces?
Answer:
The air strikes we conducted in support of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operation to retake Tikrit, a predominantly Sunni city, are a prime example of our commitment to support the Government of Iraq in its efforts to defend all Iraqi communities threatened by the scourge of ISIL. Additionally, through a combination of funding and authorities, including the $1.6 billion Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF), the U.S. and our Coalition partners are building the capacity and effectiveness of Iraq's forces. This includes the training and equipping of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces as well as approved Sunni tribal forces. It is also important to note Prime Minister Abadi's recent trip to the al-Habbaniya military base to oversee the distribution of weapons to Sunni tribal fighters. I would defer to the Government of Iraq regarding further details of its operations.

Question 3:
Gen. Allen testified that the U.S. does not "have a full and complete picture on Iran's role" and that "we're going to have to deal with Kata'ib Hezbollah and those elements that are directly supported by the Iranians over time." What efforts are being made to better understand Iran's role? How will you respond to Iran's growing influence in Iraq?

Answer:

We work closely with colleagues in the interagency and utilize every tool available to us to understand Iran's role better not just in Iraq, but also throughout the region. Many of these efforts remain classified. For additional details, I, or someone from my staff, can provide you with a classified briefing.

Question 4:

Who is currently providing security and other essential government services in areas newly liberated, such as those around Tikrit? Please be specific as to who is currently doing so as opposed to those who you hope will fill the role in the future. Can you give us an update on their performance? Does the makeup of these forces reflect the same ethnic makeup of the communities they are expected to protect and police?

Answer:

The fight for Tikrit and the surrounding Salah ad-Din Province is clearly an important battle, but what is even more critical is the engagement's aftermath. PM Abadi has affirmed his government's plan to turn primary security responsibility and governance over to local authorities as soon as ISIL is cleared and areas are safe for civilians to return. Whenever possible, the Government of Iraq coordinates with local officials and local police prior to security operations to ensure an orderly transition of authority and to prevent human rights abuses by all sides.

As Iraqi forces continue to mount offensive operations, they must do so under central government command, with concerted efforts to protect local populations and secure the human rights of all Iraqi citizens as mandated under the Iraqi constitution. Although leaders acknowledge some of the challenges that will be faced within communities after they are liberated, Prime Minister Abadi and Ayatollah Sistani have demonstrated a commitment to ensure that abuses do not occur in current and future operations, such as Tikrit. This is not only out of respect for human rights, but also reflects their clear recognition that there can be no lasting victory over ISIL without the protection of civilians and efforts to govern in an inclusive manner that respects the rights of all Iraqi communities. PM Abadi has stressed that our fundamental strategy is to turn over security and stabilization to local communities of the newly liberated provinces. Sunni tribes from Salah ad-Din Province are playing an important role in liberating Tikrit, holding cleared territory, and will continue to play a role in local security and in stability. I would be happy to offer what additional information we have about this in a classified setting.

Question 5:

Why have none of the Coalition's Arab members – with the exception of Jordan – conducted airstrikes targeting ISIS in Iraq? Why have none of the Coalition's Arab members provided personnel for the advice and assist mission, either for Iraqi or Syrian forces?

Answer.

There are 62 members of the Coalition who provide active military support. Their capabilities are used to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria, as part of a comprehensive campaign. On September 22, 2014, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain, and Qatar were among the first countries to launch air strikes against ISIL as part of the Global Coalition. Through consultations with the Arab states and Iraq, the Coalition determined that these Sunni-majority states would focus on ISIL targets in Syria as a way to avoid exacerbating sectarian tensions in Iraq while other countries focused on striking ISIL targets in Iraq. Jordan received permission from the Iraqi Government to conduct air strikes on ISIL targets in Western Iraq, after the Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kassasbah, was brutally murdered by ISIL.

For the same reason, the Arab States are not participating in the Advise & Assist mission inside Iraq. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan are supporting Department of Defense's (DOD) Syria Train and Equip (T&E) program. The program will rely on coalition trainers, planners, and other billets, the details of which DOD is still finalizing. Several Arab states have provided weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment to Iraq.

Question 6:
What actions could the United States take to secure greater Turkish participation in the fight against ISIS? Why is the Administration reluctant to implement a buffer zone or a no-fly zone in Syria, as Turkey has requested?
Answer:

Turkey is a NATO Ally and valuable partner in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. We appreciate Turkey's contributions to Coalition efforts, including its increased measures to restrict the flow of foreign fighters and oil smuggling and its agreement to host train and equip activities for the moderate Syrian opposition. We also recognize Turkey's generous humanitarian support in hosting nearly 2 million refugees from Syria and Iraq. We continue to discuss with Turkey how we can do more together to counter Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The United States continuously evaluates our strategy in Syria with the aim of defeating ISIL and working toward a negotiated political transition in Syria in accordance with the Geneva principles. As the President and Secretary Kerry have said, Asad has lost all legitimacy, and his regime's brutality against the Syrian people has helped violent extremists recruit support.

We continue to discuss with Turkey and other allies various options for supporting the moderate Syrian opposition, but have no plans now to implement a buffer zone.

Question 7:
Given the critical role being played by the Peshmerga in halting the ISIS offensive in the north and now rolling back those gains, why are the Iraqi Kurds only receiving a relatively small portion of the weapons and other military supplies that the U.S. provides to the Iraqi Security Forces?
Answer:

In coordination with the Government of Iraq (GOI), we have organized a coalition effort that to date has provided nearly 50 million rounds of light and heavy ammunition; 25,000 hand grenades; 72,000 mortar rounds; 58,000 anti-tank rounds; and more than 37,000 rifles to the Peshmerga. Thousands more rounds of ammunition and additional weapons have been identified for donation and are being prepared for delivery. This is in addition to the more than 300 tons of arms and ammunition that the GOI itself provided and delivered to the Kurds. The GOI also directed 25 of the MRAPs we delivered this past January to go to the Kurdish forces and an additional 15 MRAPs with mine rollers should be delivered to Erbil this month. We delivered 1,000 AT-4 anti-tank systems to the Peshmerga in March. Over 1,500 Peshmerga have been trained at building partnership capacity sites and almost 500 more are now in training. In addition to the military support, we have also provided humanitarian, economic, and diplomatic support to our Kurdish partners.

We have strongly supported our Kurdish partners, including through a robust campaign of airstrikes against ISIL targets in northern Iraq, ongoing intelligence sharing to include targeting and ISR support, as well as equipment and training as supported by the Iraqi central government.

The Peshmerga have been successful in recovering territory taken from ISIL. We will continue to evaluate the needs of all of Iraq's security forces, including the Kurdish security forces, to ensure that they have the necessary weapons to defeat ISIL.

Question 8:
The U.S. previously had great success partnering with Sunni tribal forces, particularly in Anbar province. General Allen testified that "Prime Minister Abadi has reached out to the sheikhs. He's reached out to the tribes" and the Iraqi Government now has "about 7,500 or so tribal fighters on the payroll." How were these fighters selected? Which sheikhs has Prime Minister Abadi reached out to? Are these sheikhs and fighters representative of the Sunni community as a whole? Will these fighters receive U.S. training? Are they the same sheikhs and fighters that the U.S. previously had success in working with?

Answer:

Prime Minister Abadi has already shown, through words and actions, that he can move beyond the sectarian politics of the past and will govern in a more inclusive manner. Through outreach to a broad range of Sunni tribes across Iraq, he is seeking to implement a key tenet of his National Plan – de-centralization and local autonomy consistent with the Iraqi Constitution – that will allow communities to assist in ridding their areas of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and ultimately play an important role in providing for their own local security. It is also important to note Prime Minister Abadi's recent trip to the al-Habbaniya military base to oversee the distribution of weapons to Sunni tribal fighters. These forces are selected by tribal leaders; vetted, approved, and paid by the Government of Iraq (GOI); and trained at U.S., Coalition, and GOI sites across Iraq. In some cases, these forces have ties to tribal leaders the United States worked with in previous years. To date the Government of Iraq (GOI) has enrolled, paid, and trained thousands of tribal fighters – with many more in training now – and some have already taken part in joint operations with the Iraqi Security Forces against ISIL.

Question 9:

What percentage of the fighters would you guesstimate is Iranian Guard or Iranian? And then let's go to Shia and Sunni and even the Kurds? Can you divide that up for us?

Answer:

It is very difficult to obtain accurate and timely information to answer this question in detail, due to a variety of constantly changing factors on the ground. These include: the pace and scale of U.S. and Coalition training efforts, which include Sunni tribal forces and Kurdish Peshmerga; the gradual reconstitution of the Iraqi Security Forces; the Iraqi Government's program to mobilize thousands of Sunni tribal fighters; and the participation of Shia Popular Mobilization Forces. Morever, it is important to distinguish between the PMF, many of which are composed of Iraqi nationalists who have volunteered to defend their country, and some elements within the PMF, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Al Haq, which are more problematic – because they may not answer to an Iraqi chain of command. The PMF is a recognized state institution, which has legal authority and is part of the Iraqi budget, and. the Government of Iraq is working to separate Iranian proxy groups from other Iraqi volunteers in an effort to limit Iran's influence and gain increased control over the security forces operating in Iraq.

The ground picture is constantly in flux. However I would be happy to offer what additional information we have about this in a classified setting.

Question 10:

Rep. Weber also asked: "General Allen, how many -- how many of those tribes and sheikhs are there?"

Answer:

We estimate there are at least 60 tribes and sub-tribes in Anbar Province as well as multiple confederations of tribes. There are multiple tribal confederations with significant populations representing a broad range of tribes and sub-tribes in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad-Din, Diyala, and Baghdad Provinces. It is important to note that in many cases, Sunni tribes in Iraq are divided among themselves, with some members of a single tribe working alongside ISIL while others are directly opposed, in many cases fighting alongside the Iraqi Security Forces.

Question 11:

Does the Iraqi government generate [electricity] from facilities that it controls, such as Mosul Dam…which then goes into ISIS-occupied areas?

Answer:

The Government of Iraq (GOI) is responsible for providing electricity to all parts of the country, including some areas that are under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The GOI is reportedly sending up to 500 megawatts of electricity to the city of Mosul, which is Iraq's second largest city,

hosting a population of nearly two million people before ISIL's seized control and many residents fled. Any benefit from this amount of electricity will mostly accrue to the remaining people living in Mosul, and will ease the GOI's eventual recovery and stabilization of the city.

Question 12:
Do you believe that Iran has provided arms to the Government of Iraq or any of its affiliates?
Answer:

Iran is providing significant military support to the Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi Shia volunteers and militias, and Kurdish forces in the form of weapons, combat advisors, training, intelligence, artillery support, and a handful of airstrikes. Iran is seeking to leverage and publicly highlight its military support in the counter-ISIL campaign to gain influence in Iraq.

Iran has channeled most of its support to Iraqi Shia groups that are part of the Popular Mobilization Force (PMF). However, it is important to distinguish between the PMF, many of which are composed of Iraqi nationalists who have volunteered to defend their country, and some elements within the PMF, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Al Haq, which are more problematic – because they may not answer to an Iraqi chain of command. The PMF is a recognized state institution, which has legal authority and is part of the Iraqi budget, and. the Government of Iraq is working to separate Iranian proxy groups from other Iraqi volunteers in an effort to limit Iran's influence and gain increased control over the security forces operating in Iraq. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraqi's most influential Shia religious figure, has also emphasized the need for these volunteers to fall under the control of the central government.

We recognize that Iraq and Iran share a long physical border, and that as a result, Iraq and Iran will inevitably have a relationship. It is Iran's choice as to whether it will step up and play a constructive role in Iraq and the region, as we and the international community have consistently urged, or whether it will take actions that increase sectarian tension and instability. We have made clear that we believe strongly that Iraq's sovereignty must be respected, and the government of Iraq must focus on strengthening its internal political and security institutions in an inclusive way.

Questions for Department of Defense

Question 1:
Why isn't the Coalition conducting a higher volume of airstrikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria? Would a robust deployment of US Forward Air Controllers--operating forward, rather than at Joint Operations Centers--greatly improve the effectiveness of the campaign, by coordinating airstrikes and close air support in a more timely and coherent fashion than indigenous forces are able to do? Why aren't Forward Air Controllers operating forward?

Question 2:
Why did the UAE suspend its air operations from late December to early February? Did the UAE have a legitimate concern over the Coalition's search and rescue capabilities? If so, has this deficiency been corrected?

Question 3:
Some sources indicate the UAE withdrew from the operation in protest over the Coalition's failure to arm and equip Sunni Arabs in Iraq's Al Anbar province. Have the UAE or other Coalition partners raised this issue?

[NOTE: Responses were not received from the Department of Defense to the above questions prior to printing.]

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary General John Allen by
Representative Ted Yoho (1)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 26, 2015

Question 1:

In Yemen, an Iranian-backed Shia militia just deposed the legitimate, pro-U.S. government. Given the scope of Iranian support for Shia militias in Iraq, what is to prevent them from engineering a similar takeover there?

Answer:

Following the partial disintegration of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the takeover of the city of Mosul by ISIL in June 2014, the preeminent Shia spiritual leader in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani, issued a decree calling for all "able-bodied" men to volunteer to rid the country of the ISIL threat. The decree, coupled with panic over ISIL's rapid advance and its commission of mass atrocities, prompted tens of thousands of Shia volunteers to heed Sistani's call and join the fight against ISIL. The Iraqi government established a Popular Mobilization program under the National Security Advisor in an attempt to regulate and organize these disparate volunteers under an official umbrella. In addition to these volunteers, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) also includes pre-existing Shia militias, influenced and supported by Iran. To date, the PMF have made extraordinary contributions and sacrifices in Iraq's fight against ISIL.

While Iran-backed militias continue to exist in Iraq, they do not make up the majority of the PMF, which is viewed in Iraq as an indigenous, patriotic force coming to Iraq's defense during an existential national crisis. Assertions that the PMF are subservient to Iran have been met with rebuke by Iraqi officials. Iraqi leaders also see the PMF as part of the ISF, incorporated into legislation under the 2015 National Budget law and intended to serve as the basis for a future Iraqi National Guard (NG) upon passage of NG legislation. Importantly, the PMF includes a growing number of Sunnis, largely tribal forces fighting ISIL in coordination with the U.S. military and ISF. The National Budget explicitly stipulates that all provinces outside Kurdistan – both Sunni and Shia – will be represented in the PMF in proportion to their population.

Historically, Iraqi Shia have been skeptical of Iran and have strongly opposed perceived attempts at Persian domination. Recent comments by Iranian leaders belittling Iraq's sovereignty in the context of the counter-ISIL campaign have prompted fierce backlashes from Iraqi politicians, religious leaders, and the populace. Grand Ayatollah Sistani, Prime Minister Abadi, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs each issued strong remarks critical of Iran's disrespect for Iraqi sovereignty.

As Shia-majority countries and neighbors, Iran and Iraq inevitably share close ties in religion, culture and trade and have an interest in a cooperative relationship based on mutual interests. It would be a mistake, however, to lump Iraq's Shia majority together with Iran. Although Iran continues to provide support to its proxies in the PMF, we assess the majority of these fighters continue to consider themselves Iraqi first, making a takeover of the Iraqi state by Iranian proxies a remote possibility.

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