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U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ISIL AFTER TERROR GROUP SEIZES RAMADI AND PALMYRA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

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U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ISIL AFTER TERROR GROUP SEIZES RAMADI AND PALMYRA

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 12 o'clock p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order. After recognizing myself and Ranking Member Deutch, who came 7 minutes before me today, for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then move immediately to the witnesses for their opening statements.

And without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation of the rules.

And the reason we are zooming right along is because—for the audience, thank you, and for our witnesses—at 1:30 approximately we will have the first series of votes and there are 15 votes.

So I don't think we want to keep you guys waiting for about 3 hours. So thank you very much.

The chair recognizes herself for 5 minutes. It is time that we dispense with the administration's charade that our anti-ISIL strategy is a success.

In Iraq, ISIL holds almost a third of the country's territory and controls major strategic population centers in Mosul, Fallujah and Ramadi.

While Secretary Carter may blame the Iraqi military for not having the will to fight in Ramadi, Prime Minister Abadi has strongly denied it and said yesterday that he is not receiving the arms and support necessary for him to take on ISIL.

In Syria, ISIL controls half the country's territory, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. ISIL's capture of Tadmur, adjacent to the ancient city of Palmyra, gives them control of a strategic crossroads and unrestricted access to Iraq's Anbar Province.

There are some success stories where we have been able to push ISIL back from its positions. But ISIL continues to spread into other areas as well. ISIL is already in Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It is also creeping closer to Jordan and Lebanon, and Syrian foreign fighters have even reached our own hemisphere in the Caribbean. ISIL and its ideology are metastasizing across the region.

Foreign fighters are pouring into Iraq, Syria and Libya. Billions of people have been displaced—millions of people have been displaced, putting strains on our allies, and there are humanitarian crises throughout the Middle East.

Our train and equip program in Syria is now only just getting off the ground, and according to the latest reports only 2,000 fighters have been identified and 400 have been vetted. Only 90 have begun training.

On top of that, this past weekend one of the Syrian commanders participating in the U.S. train and equip program threatened to withdraw 1,000 of his fighters from the program because a DoD official said he would have to promise not to attack Assad.

Incredibly, this is the same Assad who, according to press reports and the Twitter account of the U.S. Embassy in Syria yesterday, is providing advanced air support for ISIL and is actively seeking to bolster ISIL's position against the Syrian population in the moderate stronghold of Aleppo. The same Assad whose brutality the Embassy is now admitting is ISIL's best recruiting tool and who is being propped up by an Iranian regime using the Iranian Revolutionary Guard corps, its proxy Hezbollah and thousands of foreign fighters to fight on Assad's behalf. The same Assad who failed to disclose his entire chemical weapons arsenal and is using barrel bombs and chemical weapons to kill hundreds of thousands of his own people—almost a quarter of a million by last count.

And yet, we are going to make our small number of trained Syrian fighters promise not to fight this monster? Iran is also funneling Assad billions of dollars to ensure his survival and since money is fungible, these are the same billions that were unfrozen as part of the disastrous nuclear negotiations.

Our strategy in Iraq cannot and must not be separated from a strategy in Syria—one that removes Assad—and a strategy that takes on Iran. Iran will not work in the interest of the United States, no matter what dreams the administration might have.

You cannot heal sectarian tensions in Iraq while allowing Iran to exacerbate them, including through its Shi'ite militias that are said to have committed horrific human rights violations.

You cannot stop the flow of foreign fighters without getting tough on Turkey, and you cannot expect to have success with a minimal air strike campaign that refuses to deploy forward spotters to improve targeting.

Our train and equip program in Iraq is scheduled to bring together approximately 5 to 10,000 people while ISIL is gaining 1,000 recruits per month. We cannot wait a year for this program to be up and ready.

The administration has laid out some lines of effort as part of its anti-ISIL strategy, including military and humanitarian support and counter finance and counter narrative efforts that we must continue with greater energy and better efficiency.

But they do not address the fundamental miscalculations that this administration continues to make with regard to Assad and

with regard to Iran, and they do not inspire confidence that this administration has much of a strategy at all.

Beyond these basic contradictions of strategy, here are a few suggestions that I hope the administration, Congress and others consider immediately.

Destroy or neutralize Assad's air capabilities. Sanction Assad and his military officials to hasten the collapse of his regime. Sanction any entity, including the Russians and Iranians, that are propping up Assad. Listen to our military commanders who say we should at least discuss the possibility of boots on the ground, including U.S. special forces in Iraqi military units.

Also, stop telegraphing to our enemies what we are not willing to do and urge the Gulf Cooperation Council, the GCC, countries to put their boots on the ground.

Consider the best way to equip anti-ISIL forces in Iraq whether that is by directly arming the Kurds, the Sunni tribes or integrated units. And finally, the United States Congress should approve an authorization for the use of military force that goes a lot further than what the President has requested and appropriately characterizes the scale, goals, capabilities and identity of the enemy.

These are all ideas that could change our approach to ISIL from one of the bare minimum, which is what we have now, to one that is actually having a positive impact that the President claims he desires.

With that, I turn to my friend, the ranking member, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thanks to our witnesses for appearing here today to help us understand what happened in Ramadi and how it affects the international effort to combat ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

ISIS fighters have been on the outskirts of Ramadi for nearly 1½ years. While Iraqi security forces have maintained fragile control over most of the city, there have been new heavy fighting in areas under ISIS control for months.

In the midst of a sandstorm, ISIS fighter detonated a series of bombs that, as the New York Times described it, allowed it to take advantage of a pause in air strikes and overwhelm Iraqi forces.

While it would be a mistake to compare the fall of Ramadi to the swift fall of Fallujah or Mosul, nonetheless it was a serious setback with devastating consequences for the innocent civilians of Ramadi, the morale of Iraqi troops and for U.S. and coalition strategy.

The capture of Ramadi was further compounded by ISIS' seizure of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra the following day. The fall of Ramadi, unfortunately, gave ISIS a public relations win.

It now holds the capital of Anbar Province, the largest Sunni province in Iraq. This is why now more than ever it is critical that the Iraqi Government ramps up its outreach to Sunni tribal areas and pushes ahead with Prime Minister Abadi's stated goals of an inclusive government and society.

The United States should be actively engaged in advising and supporting Prime Minister Abadi in these efforts, and while the popular mobilization forces and other Shi'ite militias have been effective on the battlefield, the Abadi government must have an active strategy in place to ensure that these militias do not exploit the areas they help defend or liberate.

In the days after Ramadi fell, Secretary of Defense Carter made the bold assessment on national television that Iraqi troops have no will to fight. For years the U.S. has invested heavily in the training of Iraqi forces.

So why does it continue to appear at least that Iraqi forces are dropping their weapons and running? Is this an accurate portrayal of what occurred in Ramadi despite months of reinforced U.S. training? I hope our witnesses will speak to that.

The administration does have a strategy to combat ISIS but I have to question how it can be effective against a group that seems to constantly adapt.

This conflict needs a comprehensive strategy that doesn't just defeat ISIS on the battlefield but also cuts off its funding and its propaganda machine, and I am unsure as to whether we are being successful in those areas and I hope our witnesses will speak to that as well.

The victories in Ramadi and Palmyra just weeks ago gave ISIS the appearance of having momentum on its side. Now, in Syria yesterday ISIS advanced on opposition-held territory north of Aleppo.

Reports from opposition leaders claim there seem to have been coordination with the regime with Assad's air force striking in what seemed to be a supportive ISIS ground campaign, and I would welcome our witnesses' assessment of these claims and, if true, what that means going forward.

Now, I have admittedly been frustrated by what seems to be a lack of attention to the Syrian front of this conflict and we will never effectively degrade and destroy ISIS if we don't simultaneously deal with the problem of the heinous Assad regime, which opened the space for ISIS' rise to begin with.

Part of this conflict is a result of sheer lack of governance. In many areas, ISIS is filling a void in terms of services and security.

We have heard time and time again that in many parts of Syria people have aligned with ISIS not because of ideological agreement but because it was the only group offering them protection.

The international community needs to focus greater attention on a long-term solution, and I was pleased to hear General Allen's comments yesterday that there is no place for Assad in a long-term Syria solution.

I am concerned with the growing chorus of frustration with the U.S. that we hear from the Syrian opposition, and while our train and equip programs are now slowly advancing, the question is are we being as effective as possible in supporting the Syrian opposition.

And finally, I would like to take just a remaining moment or two to remind everyone, the American people and the international community, of the devastating—the devastating humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria. The people of Syria continue to suffer under Assad's barbarity—barrel bombs, chlorine gas attacks, ongoing brutal repression.

In Iraq, the number of displaced people grows daily as ISIS moves in on new territory. Women and children are at extreme risk of violence and we continue to hear reports of hundreds of people slaughtered in days.

We have to remember that real—that the real and grave consequences that this conflict is having on innocent civilians.

Madam Chairman, I know that you share these concerns. I thank you for your continued commitment—your continued commitment to drawing attention to the humanitarian aspect of this devastating conflict.

It is one that must continue to be at the forefront of all of our discussions and I would thank—offer thanks again to our witnesses for appearing here today.

I look forward to your insights and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch. I will recognize members for 1 minute for their opening statement, starting with Mr. Issa of California.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks for bringing this distinguished panel before us today.

I am going to be particularly interested in hearing from Dr. Spence. Fact is, we are dealing today with a policy that he was at the center of and is intimately familiar with.

This is not some sort of hypothetical. We have been fighting a war—we have been fighting a war that is in fact fighting against a tide.

We have continuously found ourselves siding with organizations like the Maliki government, one in which the Shi'a are perfectly happy to repress the Sunni but not willing to fight to protect the Sunni from extremism.

The Sunnis, on the other hand, are perfectly willing to allow others to fight for them but they certainly are not in a position to remove a Sunni extremist group only to be, again, held hostage to a government that still has former Prime Minister Maliki in many ways as the puppeteer of that regime.

The fact is that when Ash Carter, rightfully so, said that we do have an inherent problem, I began looking and saying when did we have that problem last.

And answer was the last time we had this problem we were backing Chiang Kai-shek over Mao Zedong, and the reality is we are not picking the sides at this time in Syria or Iraq in a way in which we can find a path with active support to a solution that the American people can believe in.

And I look forward to asking each of the witnesses a series of questions. I thank the chairwoman for her indulgence.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Issa. Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Madame Chair.

I, really, have one significant question that I would like each of you to address, if you could, and what I would like to know is is this fight or struggle against ISIL—in your opinion, is it going to require the United States to put more troops in harm's way.

That is my question. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Ms. Frankel.

I now would like to introduce our expert witnesses. First, we are pleased to welcome back Dr. Michael Rubin, who is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

Dr. Rubin is a former DoD advisor on international security affairs and a senior editor of the Middle East Quarterly. Dr. Rubin

was also a lecturer at Johns Hopkins University as well as a senior lecturer at the Naval Post-Graduate School. Welcome, Dr. Rubin.

Second, we welcome Dr. Anthony Cordesman, the Arleigh Burke chair in strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Previously, he has served as the director of intelligence assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as well as director of policy and planning at the Department of Energy. Welcome, Dr. Cordesman.

And last but certainly not least, we also want to welcome back Dr. Matthew Spence. Dr. Spence is a senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for International Affairs.

Formerly, he served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East and has served in the White House as special assistant to the President and director of international economics at the National Security Council.

Welcome, gentlemen, and we will start with Dr. Rubin.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL RUBIN, PH.D., RESIDENT SCHOLAR, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. RUBIN. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, honorable members, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I have submitted in my written testimony detailed analysis and recommendations, but as time is short, please allow me only to highlight a few key points.

Suffice to say the U.S. strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy the Islamic State has not succeeded. Any comprehensive strategy will combine the diplomatic with the military.

There is a correlation between Turkey's visa policies and those nationalities which travel to the Islamic State. Moroccans and Tunisians either do not need visas to enter Turkey or can get them on demand.

Algerians, however need visas. While several thousand Moroccans and Tunisians have traveled to Syria, only a handful of Algerians have, though Algerians fight for the Islamic State elsewhere.

A low-cost high-value reform would be for Turkey to end visa waivers or visas on demand for those under the age of 40 from countries which provide the bulk of Islamic State recruits. Drying up the flow of recruits across the Turkish-Syrian frontier is essential.

The Iraqi army does fight. They fought in Ramadi for months before losing. They regained control in Baoji. That the Islamic State can deploy hundreds and even whole parades shows a lack of U.S. intelligence and/or unwillingness to use air power to maximum advantage.

The Iraqi military must maintain its qualitative military edge. If U.S. authorities do not believe it wise to provide weaponry to the Iraqi army, then they must substitute air power, special forces and trainers to assist Iraqi forces.

While it is essential our allies be armed, some seek advantage from the crisis to strengthen their own political hand vis-à-vis rivals.

Under Prime Minister Abadi, Baghdad has supplied both light and medium weaponry to the Kurdistan regional government including MRAPs.

The Kurds have also imported weaponry directly from Iran, Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria. According to the State Department, the Kurds have anti-tank missiles that Baghdad does not have but needed in Ramadi.

Alas, the Kurds still distribute weapons to peshmerga based on political loyalty to the Kurdistan Democratic Party rather than to areas of greatest need. This puts Kirkuk at risk.

The United States must coordinate deliveries through Baghdad but monitor their distribution both from Baghdad to Kurdistan and then from Kurdish authorities to the front where needed.

Rather than exacerbate divisions by providing weaponry on an ethnic or sectarian basis, U.S. equipment should be designated for Iraqi army units which incorporate Iraqi diversity.

Providing weaponry directly to Iraqi, Kurdistan or Sunni tribes empowers hardline pro-Iranian factions and undercuts Abadi and his more moderate allies across the Shi'ite spectrum.

We cannot look a gift horse in the mouth. The group with the greatest success against the Islamic State have been the Syrian Kurds.

They are not perfect but they are secular, tolerant religiously and generally ethnically as well and a relative haven for women's freedom. Washington should not treat Syrian Kurds as pariahs simply out of deference to Turkey, which has proven itself an unreliable ally at best.

The long-term cost of Iranian military presence in Iraq is greater than the gain derived from Iranian personnel battling the Islamic State. Iranian units exacerbate sectarianism.

Still, the United States must differentiate between Iranian-backed militias and Shi'ite volunteers. Not every Shi'ite is an Iranian puppet. But painting them all with the same brush risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

U.S. diplomats should work with the Iraqi Government to create the bureaucratic reforms necessary to implement bottom-up administrative federalism in liberated districts. This involves changes in administrative law and procedure rather than constitutional amendments.

U.S. officials must not incentivize sectarian violence by rewarding it even as they try to bolster the central government's delivery of services across ethnic and sectarian lines.

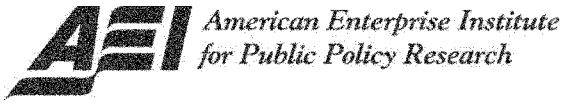
We must recognize that the motivation for the Islamic State is ideological and not based in petty political grievances. That recruitment and residence of the Islamic State reaches from Malaysia to Morocco illustrates this.

It is not all about Baghdad. Unless and until there is bipartisan consensus to do what is necessary to defeat the Islamic State before it targets the American homeland and until there is an authorization for the use of military force that empowers rather than restricts American forces combating the Islamic State, then it would be unfair to American servicemen to put them in harm's way.

Likewise, it would be dangerous to conflate the mission to defeat the Islamic State with a very different peacekeeping mission afterwards. That is a mission about which we seldom talk.

And with that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rubin follows:]



Statement before the

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

"U.S. Policy towards the Islamic State after its Seizure of Ramadi and Palmyra"

Michael Rubin, Ph.D.
Resident Scholar
American Enterprise Institute

June 3, 2015

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Honorable Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on an issue so important to U.S. national security.

On September 10, 2014, against the backdrop of the Islamic State (ISIL, ISIS, Daesh)'s murder of American journalists, President Barack Obama addressed the nation. "Our objective is clear," he declared, "We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy."

Recent Islamic State victories in Ramadi, the capital of the al-Anbar province, and in Palmyra, a central Syria town straddling strategic crossroads and home to ancient ruins, show that almost nine months later, the U.S. objective is not on track to being met. Talk of an offensive against Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, common just a few weeks ago, now seems fantastic. Indeed, it seems more likely that the Islamic State will move this summer against Kirkuk, an oil-rich and multi-ethnic city in northern Iraq or try to strike at pilgrims or shrines in the Shi'ite holy city of Karbala, than retreat from Iraq as American policymakers hoped just a few weeks ago.

Clearly, the President's stated strategy is not working. Questions to consider are why, and what policies could strengthen the fight against the Islamic State.

A Strategy Based on False Assumptions

First, the theories upon which the White House bases its fight against the Islamic State and other militant Islamist groups are often wrong. False assumption lead to ineffective strategies. In his September 10 address, Obama declared, "Now let's make two things clear: ISIL is not 'Islamic.' No religion condones the killing of innocents. And the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim. And ISIL is certainly not a state."[1] Secretary of State John Kerry likewise opined that the Islamic State is neither "a state nor truly Islamic."[2] Both the president and the secretary may seek to deny the religious basis of the Islamic State so as to avoid antagonizing Muslims, but their concern is misplaced and counterproductive. The religious exegesis underpinning the Islamic State's actions is both real and legitimate, even if it is a minority interpretation which many Muslims eschew. To deny the religious basis for the Islamic State is to ignore the battle of interpretation which underpins Islamic State actions and more moderate Muslims' efforts to counter such extremism. It is not the place nor is it helpful for any American president, secretary, or diplomat to serve as an arbiter of what true Islam is or is not. For the sake of setting American policy, we must take our adversaries at the word.

Second, the United States wastes time debating terminology. Lt. Gen. James Terry, commander of Combined Joint Task Force- Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S. mission to defeat the Islamic State, declared, "Our partners, at least the ones that I work with, ask us to use [the Arabic acronym *Daesh*], because they feel that if you use ISIL, that you legitimize a self-declared caliphate."[3] Put aside that *Daesh* is simply the Arabic acronym for *al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham*, literally the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria." There is conceit in such concern. No militant Islamist considers the United States

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[1] "Statement by the President on ISIL," The White House, September 10, 2014. https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1

[2] John Kerry, "Remarks at 3rd Annual Transformational Trends Policy Forum," U.S. Department of State, November 17, 2014. http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/11/234156.htm

[3] "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Lt. Gen. Terry in the Pentagon Briefing Room," The Pentagon, December 18, 2014. http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=5559

an arbiter of their religion. Debate about what to call the Islamic State does not advance victory. Rather, it is a distraction, one that costs lives by substituting political correctness for progress and bureaucratic machination for battlefield success.

Third, the White House and State Department continue to interpret the rise of the Islamic State through the lens of grievance. With regard to the Islamic State, a center pillar of U.S. policy has been to pressure Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's government to provide Iraq's Sunni community with greater concessions and power. This may be comforting to diplomats, because if grievance rather than ideology motivates terrorists, then diplomacy can resolve such grievances. But if the reason for the Islamic State's existence is perceived injustice in Baghdad, then why has the Islamic State spread so rapidly outside of Iraq in Libya, the Sinai Peninsula, and perhaps Yemen as well? Scapegoating former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki or his successor for the current instability suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of what motivates the Islamic State.

Is Baghdad to Blame?

Indeed, while there is much to criticize with regard to governance in Baghdad, some of the demands the U.S. government makes on Baghdad are counterproductive to the broader fight against the Islamic State. Take, for example, calls to reintegrate former regime elements into the Iraqi political structure. The reported death of Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, Saddam Hussein's deputy, on April 17, 2015, while fighting alongside the Islamic State highlights how the Baath Party has effectively merged with the Islamic State. The two ideologies are not opposite. The idea that Baathists were secular ignores the post-1991 evolution of the party (as well as State Department reporting on the Fedayeen Saddam who executed educated women in the years before Operation Iraqi Freedom on the grounds that they had acted against Islam). Indeed, Baathism and the Islamic State are united both by their embrace of tyranny and their sectarian hatred of Iraqi Shi'ites.

Scapegoating Baghdad is easy, but such blame distracts from the larger problem: There is a vacuum of leadership in the Sunni Arab community in Iraq which the Islamic State's rise has only made worse. Too many Sunni politicians, tribal leaders, and former regime elements sought to utilize the Islamic State as a wedge against Baghdad in order to extract greater political concessions. Essentially, they played with fire and their constituencies got burned. Should the central Iraqi State be forced into retreat, the loyalty former constituents have toward leaders that gambled with their lives will be tenuous at best. Further, Islamic State control over some Sunni constituencies means Sunni leaders in Baghdad elected to represent those communities have had little or no ability to communicate with their constituents for over a year.

It is easy to talk about support for Sunni Arabs, but identifying their leadership is a Sisyphean task. The chief demands of almost every would-be communal leader is that Baghdad should not work with or recognize any competing leader. If the United States wants to resolve a chronic sense of political grievance in Baghdad, it is essential to help the Sunni Arabs build grassroots support and cross-communal coalitions rather than simply forcing sectarian quotas on the Iraqi government. It is also essential to recognize that the basis for Iraqi instability is a refusal by so many Sunni leaders to accept an end to their own minority dominance over Iraq.

Some Sunni leaders might be trying to manipulate the United States in order to reinstall themselves into power, but that does not mean that the Sunni Arab community does not have legitimate concerns regarding Shi'ite (or Kurdish) dominance. American reliance on Iran and Iranian-backed proxies exacerbates the problem. The best way to assuage these concerns is to minimize rather than encourage

the role of Iranian forces in Iraq. After the defeat of the Islamic State, there is a possibility of cross-sectarian consensus. Former regime officials, Sunni tribal leaders, and Shi'ite government officials are all willing to acquiesce to greater empowerment over daily affairs at a local level. Administrative federalism—devolving down to a district or sub-district level most decision-making with regard to resource allocation could ease concerns.

Ironically, one of the problems Iraq faces in its fight against the Islamic State might be too much generosity toward Iraqi Sunnis. The Iraqi government continues to pay salaries of state workers and civil servants in those communities under Islamic State control. Baghdad's logic is both to assert sovereignty and blunt hardship. But the Islamic State taxes inhabitants and money is fungible, so such funds can augment the Islamic State's coffers.

With regard to arming Sunnis separately, or in order to punish the central government for perceived transgressions, the United States cannot be more sectarian than the Iraqis. Some Sunnis do serve alongside their Shi'ite compatriots in the Iraqi Army. That integration is what must be rewarded; it is to these units that American aid and assistance should go.

The Problems and Possibilities of a Kurdish Strategy

Given the paralysis in Baghdad and recent gains by the Islamic State, some policymakers have revisited the idea of supplying weaponry directly to Iraqi Kurd and Sunni Arab tribes. While well-intentioned, such proposals often misconstrue the relationship between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil, as well as intra-Kurdish rivalry. Kurdish representatives repeatedly tell Congress that the Kurdish *peshmerga* do not have weaponry to fight the Islamic State and suggest that the Iraqi central government does not distribute the weaponry which it receives from the United States. Therefore, they argue, the United States should send weaponry directly to the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil.

Such a narrative borders on deliberate falsehood. It is true that the United States does not send weaponry directly to Erbil, preferring instead to work through the Iraq central government, in which Kurds are amply represented. Iraq's president is Kurdish, and Kurds also hold a deputy premiership and the finance ministry among other portfolios. Baghdad has continued to supply Kurds with their share of weaponry; and shortages affect *both* Baghdad and Erbil. With regard to some capabilities, the Kurds are better off than Baghdad. The Kurdistan Regional Government has imported weaponry directly from Iran and several European states.[4] In fact, in the wake of Ramadi's fall, a senior State Department official acknowledged the Kurdish Regional Government had anti-tank weaponry in its own arsenal which the Iraqi government lacked and had repeatedly requested so as to disable the truck and bulldozer bombs which the Islamic State used to such great effect.[5]

Nor will provision of arms directly to the Kurdistan Regional Government necessarily translate into their use against the Islamic State. For weeks prior to the Islamic State's assault on Sinjar, Yezidis had petitioned the Kurdistan Regional Government for *peshmerga* reinforcements and, upon receiving a

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[4] Isabel Coles, "Iran provided weapons to Iraqi Kurds," Reuters, August 27, 2014; "German weapons delivery heads to Iraqi Kurdistan," DW, September 25, 2014; Ernesto Londoño, "Kurds in N. Iraq Receive Arms From Bulgaria," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2008; and "Hungary to Send Weapons to Kurdistan Region," KurdPress, September 15, 2014.

[5] "Background Briefing on Iraq," Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, May 20, 2015. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242665.htm

rejection, for weaponry so that they could defend themselves. Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani's government refused to provide weaponry, leaving the largely unarmed Yezidis to their fate. Weaponry remain warehoused. History now repeats as Mr. Barzani refuses to provide weaponry to *peshmerga* in Kirkuk which has traditionally supported Barzani's Kurdish rivals. In short, just as Iraqis tried to involve the United States in tribal squabbles at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, disunity risks a similar dynamic in Iraqi Kurdistan. What should the United States do?

The Pentagon should continue to designate some of the weaponry it supplies Baghdad for the Kurdish front, but it should specify distribution of such weaponry to the units and areas that need it, so that it is not simply used to bolster one Kurdish political faction at the expense of efficiency in the war against the Islamic State.

The United States must also recognize that Iranian influence is as great in Iraqi Kurdistan as it is in southern Iraq despite the warmth ordinary Kurds show toward Americans and the gratitude which most Kurds hold for the American sacrifice in ending Saddam Hussein's reign. For the Kurdish leadership, cooperation with Iran is more a matter for the brain than the heart, just as cooperation with Saddam Hussein once was. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is as active in Sulaymani and Erbil as it is in Basra and Baghdad. The United States should continue to work with the Kurds, but not embrace the simplistic and inaccurate narrative which describes Kurds are pro-Western and Shi'ites as agents of Iran. Rather, all Iraqi communities including the Kurds will be Machiavellian in their approach to and interaction with both Washington and Tehran. Excessive trust can be lethal.

Perhaps the greatest American oversight with regard to Kurds involves Syria. To date, no group has had more consistent success against the Islamic State than the Popular Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG), a Kurdish militia affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD). Boycotted by the Turkish government and the Syrian government, and fighting radical Islamists simultaneously, these Syrian Kurdish *peshmerga* have carved out a federal entity in northeastern Turkey which they call Rojava. Like Iraqi Kurdistan, it protects freedom of religion and plays host to tens of thousands of displaced Arabs. I visited Rojava last year and saw schools and a judiciary functioning, municipal trash pickup, and other signs of normalcy. Yezidis from Sinjar have turned to the YPG for protection against the Islamic State rather than the Iraqi Kurdish *peshmerga* because it is less compromised by politics, nepotism, and tribal concerns.

It is inexcusable that the United States would turn a blind eye to the only stable, secure, and secular region in Syria when the only alternatives are the Islamic State, a Syrian opposition that is moderate by no measure other than comparison to the Islamic State, and Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime. Deference to Turkey because of Ankara's fear of Kurdish autonomy or because of Turkey's previous struggle against Kurdish insurgency should not be reason to sacrifice secured territory to the Islamic State.

The State Department suggests that they will not work with Rojava until Syrian Kurds accept the opposition umbrella group assembled in Istanbul. The problem with this demand is two-fold: First, the Istanbul-based opposition has little real influence inside Syria. Secondly, it refuses to acknowledge Syrian federalism. The Kurds in Syria, however, having fought too hard to defend themselves, are as loath to subordinate themselves again to Damascus, as Iraqi Kurds have been to Baghdad.

Has Turkey Become "Pakistan on the Med"?

Turkey has become the weak link in both Western and Arab efforts to counter the Islamic State. Most foreign fighters traverse Turkey to enter Syria. The support offered by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Turkey intelligence agency (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) to militant factions in Syria often contradicts assurances offered by Turkish diplomats to their American counterparts. U.S. policy must be based on reality rather than on an illusionary memory of the ally that Turkey once was.

In April 2015, Turkish authorities arrested 17 Turkish soldiers and issued warrants for five more who had in January 2014 intercepted a truck carrying weaponry to the Nusra Front in Syria.[6] Rather than reward those who stopped an arms shipment to an Al Qaeda-linked faction, the Erdoğan government instead punished them. Leaks of MİT documents suggest many more Turkish weapons convoys reached their intended recipients.[7]

While Turkish authorities will sometimes detain a Westerner traveling to Syria, these arrests are the exception rather than the rule. In the late 1990s, Turkey largely sealed its border with Syria; it could do so again if it so chose. That said, the breakdown of foreign fighters in the Islamic State suggests a simple, no-cost policy prescription that Washington should demand and that Turkey could implement if it was sincere in its efforts to stem the flow of foreign radicals into the Islamic State: Thousands of Moroccans and Tunisians have entered Syria through Turkey, but few Algerians have. The reason is not a lack of radicals in Algeria, but rather Turkey's visa regimen: Turkey does not require visas for Moroccans, Tunisians or, for that matter, Libyans, Lebanese, and Jordanians. It does, however, require Algerians to acquire visas in advance. Hence, few Algerian radicals travel to Syria. If Turkey wanted to stop the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, it could tweak its visa rules for those countries that are the source to require visas for those under the age of 40. This wouldn't impact most businessmen, but would stop the impulsive recruit or the Jihadi bride.

Countering Shi'ite Militias

Shi'ite militias pose as great a long-term challenge to Iraqi stability and security as does the Islamic State. The Islamic Republic of Iran is not a *status quo* power, but a revisionist, ideological one. To believe that Iran acts altruistically in Iraq and does not demand anything in return is foolish and naïve.

The United States is right to be concerned about Shi'ite militias, but it should not create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Badr Corps, Jaysh al-Mahdi, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kata'eb Hizbullah remain Iranian proxies. Not all Shi'ite volunteers in the Popular Mobilization Forces (*al-Hashd al-Sha'abi*) are, however. This past autumn, I spent a week at a compound outside of Karbala in which Shi'ite volunteers answering Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani's call to arms received training. They ranged in age from perhaps 15 to 60. Most were sincere, geopolitically innocent and only wished to defeat the threat posed by the Islamic State to their country and community, although Iranian agents or their proxies did try to co-opt some or infiltrate units. Iraqi Shi'ites are largely nationalistic and most resent Iranian attempts to dominate Iraq, although some will follow the Iranian lead for ideology or more material benefit.

To treat all Shi'ites, however, as under Iran's thumb risks a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sunni refugees from al-Anbar prefer refuge in Najaf and Karbala to shelter in Iraqi Kurdistan for the simple reason

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[6] "Turkish court arrests 17 soldiers who stopped Syria-bound intelligence trucks," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Istanbul), April 10, 2015; "Arrest warrant issued for five over Syria-bound intelligence trucks case," *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 6, 2015.
[7] "More Evidence Turkey Supports Al Qaeda," *Commentary*, May 7, 2015.

that sectarian discrimination by Shi'ite communities is less a problem than anti-Arab ethnic discrimination in Iraqi Kurdistan. Americans do not visit southern Iraq with the frequency that they travel to Iraqi Kurdistan but, if they did, assumptions with regard to Iraqi sectarianism might be diminished. Sunnis occupy Shi'ite *hosseiniyehs* [congregation hall for worship and ceremonies] lining the highway between Najaf and Karbala and receive meals courtesy of the various ayatollahs' offices in the holy shrine cities. Shi'ite children attend school with supplies provided by local charities and provincial officials and are not subject to sectarian proselytization.

That said, Iraqi resilience is not reason to whitewash Iranian objectives. Tehran is far more effective with its messaging than is Washington. Iran's major theme is that the United States seeks to return Shi'ites to repression and re-empower Baathists or even Islamic radicals. Indeed, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has himself promoted the calumny that the United States created the Islamic State.[8] Recent American proposals to supply weaponry directly to Sunni tribes and Kurds plays into the Iranian narrative and not only enhances Iranian efforts to recruit inside Iraq, but also undercut moderate and Iraqi nationalist Shi'ites like Abadi whom Iranian-backed rivals now criticize as having hurt Iraq with misplaced trust in the United States. Indeed, so long as the United States resists more active assistance to the Iraqi military and its fight against the Islamic State, the more the real danger becomes not only Iranian-backed militias, but the success of harder line Shi'ite parties in the next Iraqi elections.

Will the Iraqi Security Forces fight?

From the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom until September 2012, the United States spent approximately $25 billion to train the Iraqi army. Some of the most prominent American generals led the effort and spoke of its success.[9] Pentagon assessments often exaggerated the numbers of competent trained forces. Just as during the Cold War-era "zero defects" policy, perhaps they felt that acknowledging failure might undercut both mission and promotion. *Peshmerga* failures in and around Mount Sinjar suggest U.S. officials cannot simply blame sectarian discord; after all, U.S. forces also trained the *peshmerga* which last year performed as poorly but are far more homogenous in their ranks.

While there should be a public accounting of the training mission failure, it is also important not to bash Iraqi forces unfairly or undercut them while they are under fire. To suggest that the Iraqi army did not fight at Ramadi ignores months of the Iraqi army defending Ramadi prior to the Islamic State breaking its line. Had the United States contributed air support at a crucial time in the battle, Ramadi might not have been lost. Its loss was as much a U.S. political decision as an Iraqi military failure.

As the Iraqi army lost Ramadi, it once again seized Beiji, a city that has changed hands several times. This highlights another point with regard to the fight against the Islamic State: Given the Iraqi Army's capabilities, Stalingrad is much more likely than shock-and-awe. The Iraqi counteroffensive will not be clean and it will not be pretty. Cities will be destroyed and human rights violated. Diplomats should do all they can to mitigate this, but outside observers must hold their nose unless willing to provide air support and capabilities necessary to give the Iraqi army a qualitative military edge and the ability to strike with precision.

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[8] "Remarks in a Meeting with Participants in the World Conference on Extremism and Takfirism from the Perspective of Islamic Scholars," Khamenei.ir, November 25, 2014.

[9] Jim Garamone, "Training the Iraqi Security Forces, Tough, but Worth it," American Forces Press Service, January 10, 2015.

There is an unfortunate tendency in Washington to navel-gaze, and assume that the United States and Iraq are alone in the sandbox. Unspoken during Prime Minister Abadi's trip to Washington was that he was giving the United States right of first refusal on the military relationship. If the White House plays hardball or attaches onerous conditions, he might as easily cast his lot with Tehran or Moscow. Should the United States seize the opportunity and continue to arm the Iraqi security forces, then they provide not only potential military capability, but also enable Abadi to peel Iraq further away from Iranian domination.

What Should the U.S. Military Posture Be?

The question American policymakers must consider is whether the United States can afford to let the Islamic State win. A lesson both of the pre-9/11 era and the rise of the Islamic State is that ceding territory to terrorist groups poses a grave risk to U.S. national security. If the Iraqis are not capable of victory on their own, withdrawal from the theater simply allows the cancer to metastasize. Reliance upon the Iranians under the current regime simply swaps one flavor of terrorism for another. While the Obama administration might be cautiously optimistic with regard to rapprochement with Tehran, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has not bought into the process and remains committed to a more militant interpretation of the Islamic Republic's ideology.

American airpower successfully augmented the capabilities of ground forces to liberate the Mosul Dam. Many military analysts argue that airpower is not enough. It may not be, but the frequency of sorties against the Islamic State is an order of magnitude less than that used in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. That the Islamic State can hold parades of men and equipment in newly-conquered territory suggests either an intelligence failure or a lack of American resolve.

Should the U.S. insert ground forces to embed in Iraqi units to mentor or call in airstrikes and so augment the fight against the Islamic State? This might be necessary, but U.S. troops should never be inserted without a real and true consensus. American troops in harm's way cannot afford to be subject to campaign-year political winds and public opinion polls. Any American deployment must also have the support of an Authorization for the Use of Military Force, which allows rapid reaction and is designed to offer full flexibility rather than restrict and constrain military options. To send forces in with their hands tied both demoralizes and undercuts what may be necessary for victory. This is all the more important as both the United States government and public must also be prepared for any downed aircraft or captured American serviceman to face the most barbaric outrage.

While some military analysts argue that 25,000 to 30,000 American forces may be necessary to roll the Islamic State back and recapture Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul, it is also essential to consider what might happen upon those cities' liberation. The danger of mission creep is high, especially if those forces are then called upon to occupy and protect such liberated territory. That said, basing American forces in Iraq if only as trainers and mentors, will help Iraq maintain its independent space vis-à-vis Iran and enable both better intelligence and more rapid reaction during crises.

The fight against the Islamic State will be long. There is no magic formula or short-cut. Still, the United States does have actions it can take at a low cost and other actions which may look good at first glance, but can actually worsen the situation.

- U.S. diplomats should demand that Turkey revise its visa policies to end visa waivers or visas on demand for those under the age of 40 from countries which provide the bulk of Islamic

State recruits. Drying up the flow of recruits across the Turkish-Syrian frontier is a necessary first step to any strategy to defeat the Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria.

- The United States must coordinate arms deliveries through Baghdad, but monitor their distribution both from the central government to the Kurdistan Regional Government, and then from Kurdish authorities to the front where needed, regardless of intra-Kurdish political consideration.

- Rather than exacerbate Iraqi divisions by providing weaponry on an ethnic or sectarian basis, U.S. equipment should be designated for Iraqi army units which incorporate Iraqi diversity. Providing weaponry directly to Iraqi Kurdistan or to Sunni tribes empowers hardline, pro-Iranian political parties and factions, and undercuts Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and his more moderate allies.

- Syrian Kurds should be partners rather than diplomatic pariahs. Their links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) may be of concern to both Turkey and U.S. diplomats, but Turkey and the PKK are actively in peace talks, and Syrian Kurds have proven themselves both political and on the battlefield. The United States should support the Syrian *peshmerga* and recognize the reality that whoever wins in Damascus, Syria's future is federal.

- The United States should consider the long-term cost of any Iranian military presence in Iraq to be far greater than the short-term gain derived from Iranian personnel battling the Islamic State. The Iranian track-record suggests American assessments of their military prowess to be exaggerated. The United States should consider Iranian Qods Force members in Iraq or Syria to be hostile combatants and inciters of sectarian strife.

- The United States must differentiate between Iranian-backed militias, which are a source of instability and destructive sectarianism, and Shi'ite volunteers. Not every Shi'ite is an Iranian puppet, but painting them all with the same broad brush drives volunteers putting their lives on the line to defeat the Islamic State them into Iranian hands.

- U.S. diplomats should work with the Iraqi government to create the bureaucratic reforms necessary to implement bottom-up, administrative federalism in sub-districts, districts, and provinces liberated from the Islamic State. Fortunately, these involve more changes in administrative law and procedure rather than the more difficult process of constitutional amendment or change.

- U.S. officials must avoid incentivizing sectarian violence by rewarding it with political empowerment even as they try to bolster the central government's efficiency and delivery of services across ethnic and sectarian lines. A grievance-based approach to the Islamic State ignores its rapid growth from Malaysia to Libya.

- The Iraqi military must maintain its qualitative military edge over the Islamic State. If U.S. authorities do not believe it wise to provide weaponry to the Iraqi army, then they must utilize U.S. airpower and perhaps Special Forces operators and U.S. army trainers and mentors to assist Iraqi forces.

- Unless and until, however, there is bipartisan consensus to do what is necessary to defeat the Islamic State before it spreads further or targets the American homeland and until there is an Authorization for the Use of Military Force that empowers rather than restricts American forces combatting the Islamic State, then it would be unfair to American servicemen to put them in harm's way. Nor does re-deployment of forces back to Iraq to defeat the Islamic State substitute as a strategy to keep order once Iraqi and any allied forces drive the Islamic State from major population centers.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Dr. Rubin.

Dr. Cordesman.

STATEMENT OF ANTHONY H. CORDESMAN, PH.D., ARLEIGH A. BURKE CHAIR IN STRATEGY, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mr. CORDESMAN. Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

It is possible to focus on the immediate issue——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Move your microphone a little bit closer. Thank you.

Mr. CORDESMAN. It is possible to focus on the immediate issue in Ramadi, and yet when I look at Tikrit I am not sure that it was any more of a victory.

If you lose the population, if you lose the city as a functioning area, if essentially you have liberate a desert that simply has buildings in it, you have not achieved a goal and I think both are a warning of—or you used, Madam Chairman, repetitively the need for a strategy and for a recognition that no one defeat or issue here is critical. The problem is to have some consistent way of dealing with this over a period of years.

Yes, I think we need to look beyond ISIL and al-Nusra and focus on the broader problems and tensions in both Iraq and Syria. I think it is clear you can't have a successful strategy in western Iraq that doesn't deal with the problems in eastern Syria.

We cannot ignore Iran and focus on the nuclear issue to the exclusion of the other threats that are affected here. Frankly, the train and assist mission, to me, has been too limited, badly focused and too distant from the front and the need to actually work with combat forces from the start, repeats mistakes I have seen in other wars and it is an area where we do need change.

The air campaign is one where at least publically we have not been able to explain either what we are doing or what its focus is and it certainly seems to be too limited to achieve a key level of effectiveness.

We don't seem to be able to explain the weapons flow that actually reaches Iraqi troops or the problems that our train and assist group has in working with them.

But having said all of that which affects the short-term goal, what bothers me on the basis of what happened in our previous war in Iraq and in Afghanistan is if you do not have a strategy which is public and a real strategy, if you do not have requirements to report on the progress you have in meeting that strategy—whether it works, what it costs and whether it is successful—you go on from incident to incident without ever really being able to assess what you are doing or demonstrating you have a coherent plan to deal with it.

We don't have the equivalent of a 1230 report coming out of the Department of Defense. We have no meaningful reporting coming out of the Department of State.

After some 50 years in the United States Government, I have never seen a more meaningless report on the structure of a war than came out of the so-called lead inspector general on Inherent Resolve.

It is, as a public relations exercise, inept. And what I am suggesting is that as you react to this defeat, there are some concrete steps you can take. You can't legislate strategy but you can insist that one be reported on.

You can demand that that strategy be explained in terms of some form of net assessment. You can call for milestones, estimates of resources, progress reporting and real measures of effectiveness.

You can create the equivalent of a special inspector general, as you did in terms of Iraq and the Afghan war. You can force regular outside and independent reporting on where we are going and you can have that assess the costs and the measures of effectiveness.

These are measures which, I think, may be longer term than the more immediate suggestions I made in my written testimony.

But, quite frankly, if we go on with even less understanding, transparency and responsibility than we managed to have in reporting on the Iraq war and the Afghan war, I don't think that any reaction to one defeat or one set of problems is going to be relevant.

We simply have to establish a basis for a strategy, transparency and credibility.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cordesman follows:]

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Statement before the

House Committee on Foreign Affairs,

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

"CREATING A STRATEGY FOR IRAQ, SYRIA, AND THE WAR AGAINST ISIL: A NEED FOR CHANGE, INTEGRITY, AND TRANSPARENCY"

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A meaningful strategy is not a set of concepts. It is a detailed plan, with a clear net assessment of the situation, an examination of the available options and their relative cost benefits and risks, an explanation of why given options are chosen, a plan of action that sets clear milestones and calls for specific resources, meaningful metrics and measures of effectiveness, and a review cycle that ensure the strategy and plan to implement remain valid or are changed to reflect emerging realities.

A meaningful strategy is not a public relations exercise. It must be honest in its analysis and in its objectives. In the case of ISIL and other Islamic extremist groups, Iraq, and Syria, a meaningful strategy must provide a meaningful and in-depth explanation of the course of the fighting, a realistic assessment of the problems the United States faces and in the uncertainties in its plans for reacting. It must be honest about the risks the U.S. faces and the fact it might take years for even the best option to succeed.

The Need for Transparency, Integrity, and Content

History has also shown that such a strategy – and reporting on its progress -- must be as transparent as possible. Whenever such transparency is lacking, politics and spin come to dominate. The default setting in government reporting is to avoid independent review and criticism, and claim success. From Vietnam to the present, the resulting history of far too many U.S. military efforts has become a history of failed strategies defended by exaggerated claims of success.

This is now all too true of what have become "failed state wars" in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. These are wars that we are not winning, and where our current efforts seem too weak, and too uncoordinated with our allies and partners, to be effective. They show that the United States cannot shape an effective military effort without providing the level of transparency, integrity, and content that allows informed debate over what it is doing, that shows it has chosen effective options and has a workable strategy, that justifies the risk to those it sends into the theater of conflict, and proves its efforts deserve the support of the American people and the Congress.

The Obama administration has talked about transparency since the beginning of its first term, but the reality so far has been to steadily cut the content and objectivity of its reporting when things go wrong. It has tended to confuse establishing a policy with implementing one and actually shaping the realities on the ground. Public reporting has spun events, and downplayed risk and problems to the point of lying by omission, and failed to report on the full nature and effectiveness of U.S. actions. Far too much of what has been said in recent years has made the "Vietnam follies" look like models of integrity and depth.

We need regular, honest, and comprehensive reporting on the course of our wars. We also, however, need Congressional legislative requirements that force that reporting to occur, and hearings and Congressional reviews that do more than focus on five minute media visibility exercises for committee members. We need Congressional action that goes beyond vague calls for "strategy," or even vaguer partisan attacks that are designed to target the coming election or promote a particular Republican presidential candidacy.

The risks of failure and making inadequate efforts in all of our current military interventions – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen – are now all too great. There need to be "whole of government" reports that fully assess both what is happening in each war – and the adequacy of our current efforts and future plans. These reports need to have real content and a full range of metrics on at least a quarterly level. They need to be subject to outside expert review and meaningful congressional hearings.

They need to have the kind of objective in-house review and criticism that can only come from groups like the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) and Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR). The in-house efforts of the new Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations called "Operation Inherent Resolve" – and the Inspector Generals of State, DOD, and USAID – have already proved to be an ineffective disgrace.

The Need for a Broader Strategy, Focus on Iraqi Unity, and Tying Action in Iraq to Action in Syria

Iraq and Syria have become case studies in the need for more effective strategies, transparency, and independent review. The United States has reached a point in the war against ISIL – and the struggle to bring some kind of stability to Iraq and Syria – where it needs to focus on the full range of challenges it faces. It needs to understand that it is not fighting one enemy in ISIL or simply Islamic extremism, but dealing with a two-failed states that are deeply divided, have long had inadequate governance, face massive problems with corruption and mismanaged economies, and which face acute demographic pressures that would cause major employment and economic development problems even if they were at peace.

Iraq began to fall apart with the 2010 election and the struggles that kept Nouri al-Maliki in power. Maliki increasingly used the Iraqi security forces to maintain and expand his power base, and to support his Shi'ite faction at the expense of national unity. He appointed leaders on the basis of loyalty rather than competence and tolerated steadily higher levels of corruption. He sidelined the Sunni Sons of Iraq, and increasingly used the security forces to suppress peaceful opposition. These problems were compounded by cuts in the role of U.S. forces and training efforts before newly formed Iraqi forces were ready to operate on their own, efforts to impose U.S. systems that Iraqis had not successfully absorbed, and other problems in the train and assist effort.

By late 2013, the level of casualties in civil fighting had returned to the 2008 level, and the level of tension between Sunni and Shi'ite and Arab and Kurd had reached the crisis point. World Bank and Transparency International reporting show that Iraq's governance had deteriorated to the point of becoming one of the most corrupt governments in the world, and Maliki's use of the military and police had reached the point where protest turned into hostile Sunni opposition in the area around Fallujah and Ramadi.

ISIL entered Iraq at a time of sectarian and ethnic crisis and low-level civil war, and did nothing meaningful to heal Iraq once ISIL expanded into Anbar, and took Ninewa and Mosul. Maliki's resignation in August 2014 did bring a far more unifying figure -- Haidar al-Abadi -- to power, but has left a legacy of sectarian and ethnic tension at every level

that has proven extraordinarily difficult to heal, and security forces that will take years to rebuild – if some way can be found to bring a new degree of unity to Sunni and Shi'ite and Arab and Kurd. It also has opened Iraq to steadily growing Iranian influence, made Iranian backed Shi'ite militias as powerful as the Iraqi armed forces, and created major new problems in terms of the growth of separate Kurdish forces, and Kurdish seizures of disputed areas and oil fields.

Syria is one of the most brutal civil wars in modern history. Sectarian conflict between a ruling Alawite minority and a Sunni majority, repression and failed development under Assad, major demographic pressure, and a weak economic base have exploded into a conflict where well over 7 million Syrians are displaced persons in Iraq and nearly 4 million are refugees in a country where the CIA estimate the population is under 19 million.

What began as moderate call for reform in 2011, and then moderate rebels that seemed to be on the edge of gaining power in 2012, is now a national civil war. The rebels are now almost all Islamist factions fighting a vicious and repressive government force backed by Iran and Hezbollah. ISIL is only one extremist neo-Salafi rebel groups. The Al Nusra Front is arguably equally or more powerful, and the last moderate factions the U.S. gave military backing were defeated in late 2014 and early 2015. There is no real Syrian economy and no pool of oil wealth to match Iraq. Syria has become a failed state by every critical dimension, and its recovery will probably take a decade when – and if – some level of stability and security is established.

These challenges are highlighted in maps and charts that measure the scale of the problems shaping the wars in Iraq and Syria in the graphs, maps, and trends summarized in the report on *"Failed State Wars" in Iraq and Syria: The Strategic Challenges* provided with this testimony. These data highlight the fact that a U.S. strategy that focuses on ISIL alone is doomed to failure. The U.S. is not simply fighting ISIL. It is dealing with a range of extremist movements as well as a much broader ideological struggle for the future of Islam.

Degrading ISIL will not be enough if the Al Nusra Front or other extremist movements come to dominate much or all of Syria on a lasting basis, or if Iraq effectively splits into a hostile and unstable Sunni Arab minority region, a Shiite dominated east, and a Kurdish dominated Northwest. No diplomatic bargain can cover up the reality of the repression and cruelty of the Assad regime in Syria, and driving ISIL out of western Iraq will not bring peace or stability if Iraq's Sunnis do not benefit from some form of recovery and reasonable degree of power sharing and the nation's oil wealth. Any outcome that does not offer equity to Iraq's Kurds will not only leave the nation divided, but also create a broader Kurdish problem in Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

The U.S. may be able to implement a strategy that focuses on Iraq, but this is questionable at best. At a minimum, no kind of lasting "victory" in the form of some reasonable degree of stability and security can occur in Iraq – or any of our other wars in failed – without effective national unity. The U.S. is not just fighting ISIL, the al Nusra Front, or Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula or a broader range of extremist and terrorist movements.

It is engaged in conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen where no favorable outcome is possible without success in what has become armed nation building. The usual counter insurgency (COIN) mantra of "win, hold, and build" will be meaningless unless the Iraqi central government succeeds in reaching out to Iraq's Arab Sunnis, and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) can be better integrated into some form of federalism.

The United States needs a civil-military and whole of government strategy for Iraq. If the U.S. does not link its strategy in Iraq to progress in helping Iraq go from failed state to something approaching a real nation, U.S. strategy will be too limited to succeed. Iraq will remain trapped into trying to contain the struggles and violence of its parts. No matter how degraded ISIL may become, Iraq will still be driven towards Sunni Islamic extremism and/or dependence on military support from outside Arab Sunni states in the West, Shi'ite dependence on Iran in the east, and a constant "Kurdish problem" in the north that spills over into Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

At the same time, the United States cannot support an Iraq strategy that secures Iraq, recovers Mosul and the west, and offers some lasting form of stability, and leave eastern Syria under the control of hostile extremist movements. Simply degrading ISIL is not a strategy if some mix of hostile Sunni forces has a de facto sanctuary just across the border.

The United States needs a civil-military and whole of government strategy for Syria, and not just for Iraq. It cannot simply wait, hope for some acceptable form of "burn out" and/or negotiation, and treat undefined and unstructured efforts at containment as the less attractive alternative. There may be no good alternatives, but the United States needs to determine this openly and at least show it is pursuing the least bad alternative, is doing its best to work with its allies, and fully understands the consequences of failing to link Iraq and Syria.

It should be clear from the outset, however, that the U.S. must not repeat the devastating mistakes it made in Afghanistan and earlier in Iraq. The U.S. must make it clear at every point that it will support Iraqi and Syrian efforts with limited amounts of aid, but will not try to transform either country either in terms of trying to make their security forces over in American models, or transform their economies and governance. The flow of military and civil aid money and personnel must remain limited, the U.S. should focus on World Bank and broader international efforts at development, and it must only help to the extent that Iraq and Syria clearly show that they can help themselves.

Nations must shape their own destinies in their own way and largely with their own resources. Nation building – armed or not – can be aided from the outside. It cannot be shaped or accomplished from the outside.

Iran: The Enemy of Our Enemy is Not Our Friend

A U.S. strategy must also deal with Iran, and be realistic about Iran's efforts to expand its influence in the region, the role of its al Quds force, and its support of the Hezbollah and other Shi'ite factions like the Houthi. In some abstract world where nations made decisions on the basis of rational bargaining, Iran's leadership would see that its best

security lay in a strong, independent, and united Iraq. It would see the advantages in an Iraqi democratic government that inevitably reflected the power of Iraq's Shi'ite majority but also provided the security that only equity and unity can provide, and that acted as a bridge between Iran and better relations with the Arab Sunni nations in the region.

Some Iranian officials almost certainly see this need. The fact is, however, that the Supreme Leader, Iran's hardliners, key elements in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the leadership of its Al Quds force do not. At best, they are still pursuing a policy of competing with the United States for military influence over the Iraqi military and police, Shi'ite militias, and even influence over Iraq's Kurds.

At worst – and "at worst" now seems more likely than "at best" – Iran's leaders are seeking an Iraq where Iran has dominant influence at the end of a war that the United States may have helped to win, but lacked the political visibility and presence on the ground to get the credit for. They seem willing to accept the risk of a divided Iraq where the more populated and oil rich areas near Iran are dependent on Iran, even if this means an alienated Sunni population in Iraq and even more stress between Iran and its Arab neighbors.

The United States cannot have a strategy in Iraq that does not address these issues more openly, or ignore Iran's role in Syria. It cannot continue to let Iran control many of the "facts on the ground" by preventing the U.S. advise and assist mission from moving forward and helping Iraqi combat units, from keeping that advise and assist mission and the U.S. air campaign too small to be effective, and by failing to openly support some broader forms of political reform and unity.

The U.S. may well have to openly confront Iran when its actions seek to expand Iranian influence and undermine or weaken Iraq's unity. One key area is the need to confront over the need to keep Iraq's Shi'ite militias tightly controlled, avoid revenge, and support Iraq's Sunnis. Another is its support of elements that rival or oppose Prime Minister Abadi's efforts to bring unity, support Sunni leaders and forces, and give Iraq real independence.

The U.S. also needs to carefully consider what kind of strategy could unite Syria into a functioning state or divided sections that would leave Syria independent and functional without some major faction or part dependent on Iran or as a source of constant sectarian tension within the region. A division of Syrian into a Sunni region and a largely Alawite section would risk creating a permanent source of religious tension and conflict, as well as place an Alawite controlled area on Syria's coast and next to Lebanon, creating another source of tension with Lebanon. A unified Syria cannot be a Sunni Syria without making the Alawites a threatened and hostile minority and dependent on Iran, as well as linking Iran and the Sunni Arab states to a continuing source of sectarian tension and hostility,

Just as it is impossible to have an ISIL strategy without an Iraq strategy -- or an Iraq strategy without a Syria strategy- it is impossible to have strategy for ISIL, Iraq, or Syria without an Iran strategy. This does not mean the U.S. should demonize Iran or fail to work with Iranians where there is a common interest. It does mean openly competing

with the "worst case" Iranians, and not sacrificing Iraq for the nuclear negotiations. It does mean that the U.S. does need to support Iraqi forces more actively and more quickly as long as they are tied to Iraqi efforts that can help bring unity to the country, and aggressively seek to close the gap between
Sunni and Shi'ite and Arab and Kurd.

U.S. aid must remain conditional, but if the Abadi government continues its efforts to defeat ISIL, heal Iraq's divisions, and most towards civil recovery, the U.S. must make it clear that Iraq does not need to be dependent on Iran.

The Need to Send Train and Assist Teams Forward

At the same time, there are two areas where the U.S. needs to take immediate action if it is to have the opportunity to develop and implement a broader and more effective strategy. One is to make major changes in its train and assist mission. Another is to give more teeth to its air campaign.

The train and assist mission is particularly critical because the U.S. really does not have a ground option in Iraq. Even if the U.S. had the domestic support to send in major ground combat units, the end result would be a nightmare. U.S. forces would be caught in the middle between Shi'ite and Sunni and Arab and Kurd.

Major U.S. combat forces would require a massive support and basing presence, and every element of such a return of U.S. forces would be a major source of provocation not only to Iran but many of Iraq's Shi'ites. Iraq's Sunnis would divide, as well as have factions that sought to use U.S. forces to serve their own interests. The same would be true of the Kurds. The U.S. could not move west in Iraq – or help Iraqi forces secure Iraq's borders with Syria, if this is even possible – without confronting ISIL and Islamist factions in Syria. The U.S. would effectively be repeated the mistakes of Xenophon, and laying the groundwork for writing a new version of the *Anabasis*.

At the same time, the U.S. cannot rely on Canada and covert Special Forces efforts to create an effective train and assist mission, and it cannot rely on the effort it now deploys. A recent State Department background brief has stated that the administration is reevaluating sending a larger and more effective train and assist movement forward to aid Iraqi forces. It also touches on the slow progress of the effort to train moderate Syrian rebel forces.[i] It does not, however, indicate that the White House is taking action.

The key challenge in making the train and assist mission effective does not lie in providing Iraq with more weapons or with forward air controllers – although both steps are necessary. The U.S. needs to act upon a key lesson from Vietnam – and from all past train and assist efforts. Generating or rebuilding forces in the rear is not enough, and is an almost certain recipe for failure. New or weak forces need forward deployed teams of advisors to help them actually fight.

Insurgents cannot be allowed to have a massive intelligence advantage on the ground, to learn the weakest links in the government forces and their defense, attack them, roll-up

the weaker units, expose the flanks and position of the better units, and then force them into what as best is partially organized retreat.

It is also important to remember that no one can create effective combat leaders and forces from the rear. New and weak units need to have a small, but experienced team of combat leaders embedded with them. New combat leaders and units need months of on-the-ground help in getting the essentials of combat operations right. Modern forward air control is critical, and the use of drones can make it effective far beyond the line of sight, but so are human intelligence, and the constant assessment of tactics, defensive positions, and patrol activity.

Forward deployed train and assist teams – usually Special Forces or Rangers – are necessary to spot good combat leaders and warn against weak, ineffective, or corrupt ones. They are needed to provide intelligence backwards that static or inexperienced Iraqi leaders and units cannot. They are needed to be a voice for active patrolling. At the same time, they needed to be a second voice when resupply, reinforcement, regrouping, and relief are truly needed. Someone has to bypass the barriers, rigidities, and sectarian/ethnic prejudices in the chain of command and send the right signals to the top. The Iraqis cannot do this yet.

Forward deployed train and assist teams are needed to encourage effective civil-military action in cases where the Iraqi unit has a different ethnic or sectarian bias or simply thinks in tactical terms rather than how to create a local capability to hold, recover, and build at both the military and civil levels.

These teams are needed now! They have been needed in Iraq and Afghanistan from the start. The same is true of a larger and more aggressive air campaign to support them and the overall efforts in both Iraq and Syria. There are times when support from the rear is enough. Several thousand years of military history is a warning that there are no times when leading from the rear is adequate in actual combat.

Raising the Level of Air Support

The other area where the U.S. needs to immediately take more effective action likes in the use of air strikes. The State department background brief referred to earlier describes the defeat of the Iraqi forces in Ramadi as the partial result of what is in many ways a more effective ISIL bombing effort that the U.S. mounted. It notes that: [ii]

> "Over the course of 96 hours in Ramadi, and what we've been able to collect looking at different things, about 30 suicide VBIDs in Ramadi and the environs of Ramadi. Ten of them, I've been told, had the explosive capacity of an Oklahoma City type attack."
>
> "…the attacks over the weekend in Ramadi were just quite devastating in terms of ISIL attacks. And you can go see them, and I have some pictures in my – there was an armored bulldozer which knocked over the T-wall perimeters, which then was the first explosion. They then had an armored dump truck, an armored Humvee, and you can see what they do. They weld these things so they're totally impervious to a lot of weapons systems that the Iraqis have to try to take them out. It was one of – I have to say it was one of Abadi's main demands when he was here. He needed a weapon system to defeat suicide VBIEDs. And we made the decision immediately while he was here to get 1,000 AT4 anti-tank systems to Iraqi Security Forces. And those are going to be

> arriving fairly soon. And that's specifically, as I understand it – I'll defer to experts on this, but that's specifically a kind of close-in weapon system for a VBIED that is coming in your direction. The Peshmerga have been using them to good effect and we're getting 1,000 to the Iraqi Security Forces."

The air data in the document on "*Failed State Wars" in Iraq and Syria: The Strategic Challenges* show that the U.S. has flown some 14,210 strike sorties and 4,844 intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance sorties in Iraq and Syria between the start of the air campaign in August 2014 and April 30, 2015. It also flew 5,072 airlift and air drop sorties, and 9,237 refueling sorties. This is a total of 19,054 strike and ISR sorties directly relating to air strikes, and 33,363 sorties of all kinds.[iii]

Only 3,270 sorties, however, actually released a weapon. This is roughly 1 in 4 strike sorties, 1 in 6 strike and IS&R sorties, and 1 in 10 ten sorties of all kinds. Peak weapons releases have varied sharply by month, but reached a peak of 2,308 in January 2015 and then dropped back to 1,685 in April 2015.[iv] The unclassified data on the key targets is uncertain, but most (80% or more) seem to have been flown in close support of active ISIL operations in areas like Kobane, Bajii, and the Mosul Dam areas where there was little risk of killing civilians and relatively few seem to have been "strategic" in the sense they struck at ISIL directly. [v]

As an article by Eric Schmidt in the *New York Times* notes,[vi]

> The air campaign has averaged a combined total of about 15 strikes a day in Iraq and Syria. In contrast, the NATO air war against Libya in 2011 carried out about 50 strikes a day in its first two months. The campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 averaged 85 daily airstrikes, and the Iraq war in 2003 about 800 a day. American officials say targeting is more precise than in the past, so fewer flights are needed. A major constraint on the air campaign's effectiveness, critics say, has been the White House's refusal to authorize American troops to act as spotters on the battlefield, designating targets for allied bombing attacks.

While Iraqi criticism of U.S. air efforts is uncertain and often seems designed to excuse Iraqi failures, the same article notes that reaction times are often slow and inadequate, and the number of strikes is not sufficient to halt even ISIL movements that are not shielded by civilians, [vii]

> One army commander in Salahuddin Province, of which Tikrit is the capital, said he had passed along a long list of potential targets, including weapons caches, training centers and the homes of local Islamic State leaders. "The least important 5 percent of them were targeted," said the officer, who was not authorized to speak publicly and did not want to be identified as criticizing Iraq's ally. "We also asked the U.S. coalition to attack ISIS convoys while they were moving from one place to another, but they either neglected our requests or responded very late."
>
> …American officials say they are not striking significant, and obvious, Islamic State targets out of fear that the attacks will accidentally kill civilians. Killing such innocents could hand the militants a major propaganda coup and alienate the local Sunni tribesmen, whose support is critical to ousting the militants, and Sunni Arab countries that are part of the fragile American-led coalition.
>
> …many Iraqi commanders and some American officers say that exercising such prudence with airstrikes is a major reason the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or Daesh, has been able to seize vast territory in recent months in Iraq and Syria. That caution — coupled with President Obama's reluctance to commit significant American firepower to a war the White House declared over in 2011, when the last United States combat troops withdrew from Iraq — has led to persistent complaints from Iraqi officials that the United States has been too cautious in its air campaign.

> Iraqi officials say the limited American airstrikes have allowed columns of Islamic State fighter's essentially free movement on the battlefield.
>
> "The international alliance is not providing enough support compared with ISIS' capabilities on the ground in Anbar," said Maj. Muhammed al-Dulaimi, an Iraqi officer in Anbar Province, which contains Ramadi. "The U.S. airstrikes in Anbar didn't enable our security forces to resist and confront the ISIS attacks," he added. "We lost large territories in Anbar because of the inefficiency of the U.S.-led coalition airstrikes."

The AFCENT claims about the effectiveness of the strikes that did launch weapons are surprisingly vague. The *New York Times* refers to killing 12,500 fighters without any indication of what this means or its credibility – and the count seems very high for the number of ISIL forces engaged. [viii]

USCENTCOM does not provide a body count, and provides a strange metric of exactly 6,278 targets damaged or destroyed as of May 8, 2015, which includes 77 tanks, 288 HMMWVs, 427 staging areas, 1,779 buildings, 1,415 fighting positions, 152 oil infrastructure targets, and 2,140 other targets. These numbers have often been surprising static over time, and it is far from clear what value damaging a building, staging area, or fighting position really has, much less hitting 2,140 "other targets," which make up more than a third of the total.

Various background briefs do indicate that the U.S. tied such air support to Iraqi efforts to limit the role of Shi'ite militias, build up Sunni and Kurdish forces, separate military efforts from Iran's al Quds force, and create a more unified Iraq. This kind of conditionality should remain a key part of U.S. support of Iraq. At the same time, however, the rules of engagement seem to have set so many limits on the risk of killing or hurting civilians that they became nearly paralytic in striking at ISIL targets where they could imbed civilians and use them as human shields.

The end result is an air campaign that is strong on total sorties flown (and cost), and weak in terms of both overall combat power and strategic effect. It is not the kind of air campaign that can build Iraqi morale, deal with the collapse of weaker units, destroy key ISIL and al Nusra cadres, and cover the period in which Iraqi forces must be rebuilt or provide the kind of force necessary to support a more effective strategy in Syria. If the U.S. wants to limit Iranian influence, increase its influence in Iraq and Syria, buy time for Iraqi force development, and put real pressure on ISIL and Al Nusra, it is going to have to do more.

The U.S. also needs to rethink the steady rise in limits to its rules of engagement, and restrictions on the use of airpower, and limits in its strategic communications in describing what it does. The U.S. cannot afford to make avoiding all civilian casualties a strategic objective. It ends in making human shields a constant in every form of irregular and potentially conventional war as well. It also ignores the grim realities of war.

There is nothing humanitarian about saving a small number of civilian lives and opening whole towns and cities up to prolonged occupation by threats like ISIL. There is nothing humanitarian about prolonging wars, producing far higher net casualties, and adding to the massive totals of displaced persons and refugees. The horrors of war are not shaped by a single target or moment in time, but by the cumulative impact of a conflict. There

also is nothing cowardly about using force at a distance to strike at forces that butcher minorities, civilians with different religious beliefs, and prisoners of war.

Creating a Conditions-based U.S. "Train and Assist" and Air Effort

Calling for an adequate train and assist effort and air campaign, and the creation of an effective linkage between the U.S. strategy for fighting ISIL and a U.S. strategy for Iraq and Syria does not mean the U.S. should offer a blank check or open-ended support for Iraq or expanding the U.S. role in Syria beyond the point where there is strong allied support and a high probability of success.

There is no point in reinforcing failure. There is no point in repeating the mistake in Vietnam of trying to replace host country forces with U.S. forces, even if they win every tactical battle but cannot achieve lasting strategic and civil-military success. U.S. efforts should be conditions based. They should be clearly linked to Iraqi efforts a building unity, including Sunnis in the security forces, and reducing the divisions between government and Pesh Merga forces

Here, the same State Department background brief referenced earlier describes what could be an effective Iraq *response if the necessary resources are provided and the U.S. enforces the necessary conditions for support*:[ix]

> "…Iraqi political response has been encouraging. Prime Minister Abadi, who is an engineer by training, he immediately wants to get to the root of what exactly happened, what went wrong, what do they need to defend against these suicide VBIDs, what do they need to correct some of the deficiencies in the security forces, and whatever happened on – particularly on Sunday. And he's been looking at it in terms of really fixing it at the root of what exactly happened."
>
> "…they released a seven-point program yesterday which we very much support. It's focused on mobilizing tribal fighters in Anbar, with a streamlined delivery mechanism for weapons – that's something we've been working on for some time, but that's something that is starting to move. And we're going to use this – this particular challenge to really accelerate it."
>
> "…Recruiting into the Iraqi Army and specifically in their program they released yesterday, they talk about the 7th Iraqi Army Division. That's the really depleted Anbar-based division that we're working with all the way out at Al Asad Air Base in western Anbar province. They talked about recalling the Iraqi police from Anbar. There's about 24,000 police in Anbar who left their posts some time ago; they've issued amnesty for those police and asked to recall them. And anyway, we think this is a pretty good – a good program in terms of thinking about how to claw back what was lost in Anbar."
>
> "The Iraqi parliament today completed a second reading of the national guard law, which is also very important. And why this is important is because the model of the new government of how to stabilize Iraq is a much more decentralized model, much more autonomy in the provinces. And Abadi actually in the wake of this crisis called together all the governors and talked about decentralization, the importance of the governors taking responsibility in their areas as powers are devolved to their areas, and the national guard is a provincial-based security force.
>
> The tribal mobilization, which is kind of the bridge to the national guard, is designed to collect the – what will be the foundation of a national guard. So the Iraqis have already allocated resources, and there's a list of weapons that are approved for about 8,000 of the tribal fighters in Anbar, which will be ultimately the national guard. But that will take some time to get in place. But they're moving forward with that."

> "… In the Iraqi plan that they put – they released yesterday, there's also – they mentioned the stabilization funding mechanism, and they've approved the stabilization fund with the United Nations, which is pretty important, because what we found as we've been going forward here is that the Iraqis – the government remains pretty cash poor. It can't access capital markets. It can't do things to flood resources into areas that are cleared, and that's remained a real problem. So this new funding mechanism that they've established with the UN is designed specifically to get at that problem, for kind of quick-hit projects as soon as areas are cleared, which is necessary. And also the humanitarian response, which is just massive, and making sure that the UN programs – because the UN teams in Iraq are doing an incredible, heroic job – are funded, and that's something that the coalition will be helping out with as well."

More broadly, however, the U.S. should openly assess the risks inherent in both increasing its efforts in relatively limited ways, and in shaping the broader strategy necessary for any form of lasting success. The U.S. should not use military force without publically stating the reasons it feels it can succeed in spite of the uncertainties and risks involved. It must go beyond spin and slogans, and justify and explain. It must also set clear conditions for continuing such efforts once they begin, and never pursue limited wars with limited objectives when the risks exceed the cost-benefits.

The United States needs to fully assess the level of effort, aid, and support the Iraqi government will need to make this work. It needs to develop a clear strategy for Syria and justify and explain it, rather than issue empty statements about training token levels of rebel forces. The Administration must present a clear plan, clear milestones for action, clear criteria for ongoing support, and regular open-source reporting and measures of effectiveness. It must revise a strategy and plans when things go wrong, and even end U.S. support if the chances of success drop below a critical level.

Providing forward train and assist teams, more airpower, and an adequate U.S. military and civil effort, will also mean more U.S. casualties and costs. However, as noted earlier, the "butcher's bill" in war is determined by the total cost over time, not the losses and costs at any given moment. Not providing the right kind of train and assist mission can mean defeat -- or extending the fighting for years. It can expose other Americans to attack over a far longer period of time, produce higher net casualties, and result in far higher net costs in dollars than decisive action. It can also empower a wide range of violent extremists and other conflicts.

The Administration and the Congress must go beyond the meaningless budgeting in the OCO budget, and empty, specious reporting in a recent Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations report on "Operation Inherent Resolve."[x] It is time both the Administration and the Congress open showed they had assessed the risk and cost–benefits of what is being done, and took meaningful responsibility for their actions.

And yes, sustaining an adequate effort may mean the Obama Administration will have to leave office encumbered by ongoing wars. It may well mean the Congress must face the 2016 election having supported a demanding, expensive, and uncertain military. However, it is time the President's White House team learned that losing wars by default and inaction is scarcely a better historical record. It is also time that the Congress learned that calling for a strategy means insisting on actually getting one, using the power of the purse to make it effective, and taking responsibility on a bipartisan basis.

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[i] Special Briefing, Office of the Spokesperson, Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing on Iraq, Washington, DC, May 20, 2015, **http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242665.html**.

[ii] Special Briefing, Office of the Spokesperson, Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing on Iraq, Washington, DC, May 20, 2015, **http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242665.html**.

[iii] AFCENT, http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airpower_30_April_2015.pdf.

[iv] AFCENT, http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/Airpower_30_April_2015.pdf.

[v] BBC; http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034, May 20, 2015

[vi] Eric Schmitt, U.S. Caution in Strikes Gives ISIS an Edge, Many Iraqis Say," *New York Times*, May 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/with-isis-in-crosshairs-us-holds-back-to-protect-civilians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share.

[vii] Eric Schmitt, U.S. Caution in Strikes Gives ISIS an Edge, Many Iraqis Say," *New York Times*, May 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/with-isis-in-crosshairs-us-holds-back-to-protect-civilians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share.

[viii] Eric Schmitt, U.S. Caution in Strikes Gives ISIS an Edge, Many Iraqis Say," *New York Times*, May 26, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/middleeast/with-isis-in-crosshairs-us-holds-back-to-protect-civilians.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share.

[ix] Special Briefing, Office of the Spokesperson, Senior State Department Official, Background Briefing on Iraq, Washington, DC, May 20, 2015, **http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/05/242665.html**.

[x] Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, April 2015, https://oig.state.gov/system/files/oir_042915.pdf.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Dr. Cordesman.

Dr. Spence.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW SPENCE, PH.D. (FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE)

Mr. SPENCE. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today about the situation in Iraq and our strategy to combat ISIL.

I value talking regularly with you in my role in the Department of Defense and I appreciate to continue to have that candid dialogue in my personal capacity now.

The ISIL threat is complex and the situation is rapidly evolving. I will summarize my statement with the following three areas. First, let me briefly outline how I view the current strategy to counter ISIL.

Second, I will offer some reflections about what happened in Ramadi and what we can learn from it. And third, I will share a few thoughts about how we can adjust the current strategy, given the rapidly changing battlefield environment.

Quite frankly, the enemy is adapting and learning and we must as well. The events in Ramadi in the past weeks have created an extremely serious situation. We must learn from ISIL's successes in Ramadi and adapt to new conditions on the battlefield.

But we also cannot view Ramadi as the sole referendum on a long-term strategy to combat ISIL. The causes of ISIL's rise are deep and complex. It is a tenacious and adaptive enemy. It operates in a joint battlefield between Iraq and Syria.

Combatting ISIL, therefore, requires a joint strategy toward Iraq and Syria. Taking on ISIL and Iraq alone will not accomplish our objectives.

We need to think regionally as well as strategically, and Iran plays a complex role both fighting ISIL on its own while also pursuing a broader destabilizing agenda in the region.

That is why combatting ISIL requires a long-term campaign that will take several years and we are in the first year of what was designed as a multi-year campaign.

Now, let me offer some context, if I may. Last June, ISIL moved across Iraq with unprecedented speed and stunned the world with its military victories. The underlining causes of ISIL's success, however, were more than weapons and battlefield tactics.

Assad's brutality and the conflict in Syria created chaos that allowed ISIL to seize territory. The border between Iraq and Syria became, effectively, meaningless.

The Iraqi Government alienated large segments of the Sunni population and was not governing effectively and lacked the required senior professional military leaders to direct Iraqi security forces.

These political conditions will not change overnight and they cannot be changed with military force alone. That said, recognizing that military force alone cannot effectively address ISIL does not mean that military power does not have a significant role. It does.

There are many elements to the United States strategy—trying to work on the terrorist foreign fighters, the ideology and the terrorist funding. I will just focus briefly on what I see are three elements of the military aspect of the strategy.

The first part of the strategy is political. As I said, ISIL thrives on corruption, alienation, weak governance and the ensuing political chaos. No amount of soldiers we could deploy, even the best trained Americans and Iraqis, can fill the vacuum of poor governance.

The Iraqi governance must take the lead in designing, executing and maintaining military operations. America cannot be more committed to Iraq's success than Iraq is.

Second, however, a key part of our military efforts must be the use of unique and powerful American and coalition military capabilities.

We must use unique U.S. and coalition military capabilities to gain an advantage over ISIL. We should not be fighting a fair fight against ISIL and we should use our unique capabilities from the air.

The accommodation of U.S. and coalition and partner air power with Iraqi and peshmerga ground operations has pushed back Iraq and has made a difference. We need to be doing more with our air power, however.

And then finally, because air power alone cannot create the conditions on the ground to combat ISIL, a third and key element of our strategy must be focusing on building the capacity of the Iraqi security forces, peshmerga ground forces as well as local fighters in Syria.

Now, that said, I want to briefly recommend a few adjustments to our strategy, and in recommending those adjustments I briefly want to recommend four principles to keep in mind.

First, our effort should be built around sustainability. Will additional U.S. support create the incentives for the Iraqi forces to own the fight?

Second, we must balance any support the United States provides against the risk to American service members. Third, we cannot view Iraq—view ISIL in isolation in Iraq. Coalition forces cannot fight Iraq—ISIL in Iraq only to allow them sanctuary in Syria. And fourth, the United States must support and maintain the international coalition.

Given that, if I may, I both recommend adjustments in each of the areas I mentioned before. First, in training, forward-deployed U.S. special forces, advisors within Iraqi units should be used more.

Such forces have been deployed in al-Assad airbase in western Anbar. U.S. special forces can be deployed in eastern Anbar as a platform for working with Sunni tribes in the east. Embedding U.S. forces can help inject energy into leadership development of new and weaker Iraqi commanders and help stand them up more quickly.

It was the failure of unit leadership in Iraq, the failure of that type of leadership, which is necessary for good organization and good morale, which I think explains some of what we saw in the recent weeks.

Second, in U.S. unique military assets we must make better use of air power, expanded target sets for U.S. and coalition aircraft, should we need it. Now, this must be done carefully to minimize civilian casualties.

However, we should consider deploying forward American and coalition air controllers to targeting and expediting air strikes. We must surge in better weapons to take on the large suicide truck bombs which caused such devastation that we saw in the past weeks.

And then finally, politically, the United States and coalition forces must press the Iraqi Government harder to more actively enlist Sunni fighters in this campaign.

In conclusion, Madam Chairman, what I would say is Iraq and Syria show us what a tremendous adversary ISIL is. They are adapting quickly. They are learning.

We must be more nimble with them. This is what I recommend now. But as the situation evolves, we should not fail to look at more bold options as things have adjusted to adjust to the realities of what the enemy is doing on the battlefield.

Thank you for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Spence follows:]

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you inviting me here today to speak with you about the situation in Iraq and our strategy to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). I valued talking regularly with many of you in my role at the Department of Defense, and I appreciate being able to continue that candid dialogue in my personal capacity.

As you well know, the ISIL threat is complex and the situation is rapidly evolving. I will focus my remarks on three areas: First, let me outline how I view the current strategy to counter ISIL. Second, I will offer some reflections on what happened in Ramadi and what we can learn from it. And third, I will share a few thoughts on how we can adjust the current strategy, given the rapidly changing environment. The enemy is adapting and learning, and we must as well.

The Current Counter-ISIL Strategy

The events in Ramadi in the past weeks were significant. Ramadi is the capital of Iraq's largest Sunni majority province, which shares borders with Jordan and Syria. The United States has lost roughly 1,300 troops in the effort to secure Anbar province since 2003.

We must learn from ISIL's successes in Ramadi, and adapt to new conditions on the battlefield. But we also cannot view Ramadi as the sole referendum on a long-term strategy to combat ISIL. The causes of ISIL's rise are deep and complex. ISIL is a tenacious and adaptive enemy. ISIL also operates in a joint battlefield between Iraq and Syria. Combatting ISIL, therefore, requires a joint strategy toward Iraq and Syria. Syria is enormously more difficult and complex than Iraq, but taking on ISIL in Iraq alone will not accomplish our objectives. That is why combatting ISIL requires a long-term campaign that will take several years. We are only in the first year of what was designed as a multi-year campaign.

Let me offer some context. Last June, ISIL moved across Iraq with unprecedented speed and stunned the world with its military victories. The underlying causes of ISIL's success, however, were more than weapons and battlefield tactics. Asad's brutality and the conflict in Syria created chaos that allowed ISIL to seize territory. The border

between Iraq and Syria became effectively meaningless. The Iraqi government alienated large segments of the Sunni population, was not governing effectively, and lacked the required senior professional military leaders to direct Iraqi security forces. These political conditions will not change overnight, and cannot be changed with military force alone.

A strategy to combat ISIL's battlefield power requires several elements: addressing the underlying political causes of the enemy's success; appropriately deploying unique U.S. military power and assets; and, importantly, focusing on the need to strengthen local forces that must do the front line fighting against ISIL. The United States must lead, but this cannot be America's fight alone. Lasting success requires a coalition that empowers Iraqis and Syrians to take the fight to ISIL themselves, and an inclusive Iraqi government that is worthy of our sacrifice.

The Administration's efforts have focused on fighting ISIL on multiple fronts. The United States has used sanctions to go after ISIL's sources of funding, social media to combat its recruitment efforts, intelligence and diplomatic efforts to stop the deadly flow of foreign fighters, and diplomacy to build a global coalition against a terrorist threat.

To be clear, recognizing that military force alone cannot effectively address the ISIL threat does not mean that military power does not have a significant role to play. It does. The Department of Defense's efforts have focused on denying ISIL territory, and building the capacity of local Iraqi and Syrian forces to fight ISIL directly.

To understand what these efforts have produced, and what adjustments may be needed, let me describe three key elements of the U.S. military effort.

The first part of the strategy is political. ISIL thrives on corruption, alienation, weak governance, and the ensuing political chaos. No amount of soldiers we could deploy – even the best-trained Americans and Iraqis – can fill the vacuum of poor governance. An inclusive and effective Iraqi government is needed to give Sunnis, Shias and Kurds a stake in their nation. The Iraqi government must take the lead in designing, executing, and maintaining military operations. America cannot be more committed to Iraq's success than Iraq is.

That is why America's military involvement in Iraq was contingent on the formation of an Iraqi government committed to inclusion and to leading the fight against ISIL in Iraq. Prime Minister Maliki was not that partner. We have a different situation with Prime Minister Abadi.

While the political situation in Iraq today is far from perfect, Prime Minister Abadi has taken steps toward political inclusion and building a more effective Iraqi state. He replaced ineffective political generals in the Iraqi Security Forces with professional military leaders. He filled the long vacant post of Defense Minister with a Sunni, who has shown needed leadership.

In the immediate aftermath of Ramadi, Prime Minister Abadi has responded in ways that the previous Iraqi government frankly did not. Abadi worked with his entire national security cabinet—Shias, Sunnis and Kurds—to identify what went wrong in Ramadi, how the Iraqi government could rapidly address the military gaps revealed in the fight, while also developing a new program to win back Anbar. The government released a seven-point plan that focused on mobilizing tribal fighters in Anbar and streamlining the weapons delivery process. This is a very different situation from Mosul one year ago, when the Iraqi government did not respond and address the failures, which allowed ISIL expand further and gain momentum.

Prime Minister Abadi must of course do more. Outreach to the Sunnis is far too slow. The National Guard must be formed more quickly. Sunnis must be given a stake to feel included in the government. As the U.S. government must continue to press the Iraqi government on these issues, we must also be realistic about our available partners. The United States has a stake in a unified and effective Iraqi government, not a splintered Iraqi state, and must deliver our support to Iraqi fighters with that long term goal in mind.

The second part of the strategy relies on using unique U.S. and Coalition military capabilities. We must use unique U.S. and Coalition military capabilities to gain advantage over ISIL. The combination of U.S. and Coalition partner air power, with Iraqi and Peshmerga ground operations, has pushed ISIL back and forced ISIL to change tactics. U.S. and Coalition partners are advising and assisting Iraqi security forces to plan and execute operations from brigade headquarters, while air strikes soften ISIL targets to buy time and space for Iraqi forces to wage a ground fight and reconstitute their ranks.

As of May 28, U.S. and Coalition forces have conducted a total of 4,225 airstrikes – 2,580 in Iraq, and 1,645 in Syria, damaging over 6,200 ISIL targets. That includes an estimated 36,321 sorties in support of operations in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Coalition forces from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom have participated in air strikes. In Syria, coalition forces have included Bahrain, Canada, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE.

This combination of U.S. air power supplementing the local ground campaign was effective in Kobani, for example, where Peshmerga forces retook the city from ISIL forces in January of this year. It has also started to have an impact in concert with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In Baiji, as the Chief of Staff of Operation Inherent Resolve pointed out recently, when ISF forces maneuver in and around the city, they forces ISIL into more vulnerable positions and increases the number of ISIL fighters Coalition airstrikes are taking off the battlefield. From September 2014 to April of this year, the U.S. military estimated that ISIL has lost 25 to 30 percent of the populated territory it once held in Iraq.

Airstrikes alone cannot address the challenges in Iraq or Syria – success requires capable local partners fighting on the ground. Iraqis must fight for their own country.

That is why the third, and key, element of the strategy must focus on building the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces, Peshmerga ground Forces, as well as local fighters in Syria.

To support Iraqi government efforts to reconstitute and strengthen its security forces, the U.S. government has mobilized an international effort to train and equip Iraqi, Peshmerga, and Sunni forces. There are two lines of effort within this program. Under an advise and assist mission, U.S. and Coalition military advisors are partnering with Iraqi and Kurdish forces to help plan current and future operations. More broadly, U.S. and Coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq in its efforts to strengthen and reconstitute Iraqi Security Forces by training and equipping fighters from 12 brigades – 9 Iraqi Security Forces and 3 Peshmerga - so they are better equipped to launch offensive operations over the coming year.

Last June, in response to an emergency request from the Government of Iraq to provide Kurdish Peshmerga forces supplies they desperately needed, the United States mobilized a Coalition resupply effort to Kurdish fighters. Eleven countries have supported the ongoing effort. To bolster Kurdish defense capabilities, U.S. and Coalition partners have conducted more than 55 airlift missions to provide more than 3 million pounds of equipment to include over 35 million rounds of ammunition (bullets, grenades, mortars) and 22,000 weapons (AK-47s /RPGs/mortar tubes) to Peshmerga forces.

Given these principles, how should we view this strategy, in light of the events in Ramadi?

Events in Ramadi

Events in Ramadi are an undeniable setback. Beyond the immediate territory seized, Ramadi contributes to a perception that momentum is on ISIL's side. This is a powerful recruitment and propaganda tool for ISIL.

But Ramadi should be viewed in perspective. Ramadi had been under siege for 18 months, and ISIL has controlled some 50 percent of the city for nearly a year. Ramadi was a hotly contested part of Iraq. Iraqi units fought for over eight months with uneven resupply. Iraqi forces were also faced with ISIL's devastating battle tactic of massive suicide truck bombs. These are brutally effective, both psychologically and operationally, and even caused difficulty against brave American forces fighting in Iraq before 2009. There is no silver bullet solution to suicide truck bombs. That is why they are ISIL's battlefield tactic of choice.

What can we learn from Ramadi? Ramadi puts in sharp relief the need for more effective training, and more effective arming of Iraqi fighters. One U.S. defense official estimated the ISF had a 7 to 1 advantage over ISIL troops. Any military leader will tell you that that sort of numerical advantage should tilt the odds in favor of the larger force. Instead, we saw ISF forces leave Ramadi—whether they fled or not, they did not stay to fight. Why?

The key to success is the quality, not just the quantity, of the Iraqi forces. Building an effective Iraqi Security Force depends on developing effective leadership, at both the unit and organization level. Weak leadership creates confusion, low morale, and a lack of will to fight. That is what we saw last June in Mosul, and that is some of what we saw in Ramadi a few weeks ago. Ramadi revealed a failure of unit leadership, as well as ineffective MEDEVAC and resupply. Iraqi forces have fought bravely in the past. They need strong leadership, and resupply to succeed.

Improving the morale and the capacity of senior leadership within ISF units has been a core focus of the Coalition training mission. This must intensify.

That said, leadership training is hard and takes time. Several of the Iraqi units in Ramadi have not fully completed the Coalition training. In the past two weeks, the lack of training led to confusion on the ground and loss of command and control. Some Iraqi units were ordered to retreat. Others thought the entire force was withdrawing, and therefore left the city. Command and control is central to effective military operations, and must be a central part of training Iraqi forces.

Adjustments to the Strategy

In the coming months and years, we should expect ISIL to continue to adapt, learn, and develop new ways to confront Iraqi and coalition forces on the battlefield. America's strategy must evolve as well.

In evaluating specific options, we should keep several principles in mind. First, our efforts should be built around sustainability. Will additional U.S. support create the incentives for the Iraqi forces to own the fight? What is the scope and duration anticipated for additional U.S. commitments?

Second, we must balance any support the U.S. provides against the risks to American service members. American military forces are the best in the world. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to carefully consider the second and third order effects of any of our actions. What are we committing American forces to, and are there sufficient resources to sustain their efforts? Congress must commit to funding and authorizing these efforts with sufficient flexibility.

Third, we cannot view the fight against ISIL in isolation in Iraq. Syria and Iraq are a unified battlefield. Coalition forces cannot fight ISIL in Iraq, only to allow them sanctuary in Syria. We must continue to lead and support the long and difficult efforts to train moderate Syrian forces. In addition, we must focus on the role that Iran plays in this conflict, fully appreciating the scope of Iran's nefarious influence and ambitions in Iraq, Syria, and beyond.

Fourth, the United States must support and maintain the international coalition against ISIL. The fight cannot become the United States against ISIL. Any efforts must occur within the context of the international community acting together and coalition

contributing in material and meaningful ways. For example, the United Sates must continue to work with Turkey to stem the flow of foreign fighters and weapons into Syria.

Given the events in Ramadi and these principles, we should consider several additional steps.

First, forward deploy U.S. Special Forces advisors with Iraqi units. Such forces have been deployed in Al-Asad airbase in Western Anbar. U.S. Special Forces can be deployed in Eastern Anbar as a platform for working with Sunni tribes in the East. Embedding U.S. forces can help inject energy into leadership development of new and weaker Iraqi commanders, and help them stand up units more quickly.

Second, given the inherent pace of training effective Iraqi fighters, greater U.S. and Coalition military assets will need to help fill gaps in capabilities on the battlefield. ISIL has shown itself to be a formidable fighting force in conventional battle. We should expand target sets for U.S. and Coalition aircraft. This must be done carefully to minimize civilian casualties, which are not only tragedies but provide propaganda victories to ISIL. To improve targeting, we should consider deploying forward American and Coalition air controllers to improve targeting, and expedite air strikes. In addition, we must surge in better weapons, given the weapons that ISIL is using – such as anti-tank weapons against the VBIED threat.

Third, the U.S. and Coalition forces should press the Iraqi government to more actively enlist Sunnis in the fight against ISIL. A key element of this is expediting the formation of the National Guard. Engaging the Sunni tribes in the fight will take time, but the Iraqi government must move faster here.

We must view these efforts as part of a long game to provide needed resources to fight ISIL, while strengthening a central government structure in Iraq. The United States does not have an interest in undermining the Iraqi government. We need the Abadi government as a partner, and there is not a better alternative now. At the same time, if the Iraqi government cannot or will not get needed equipment into the hands of Iraqi fighters more quickly, we must look for other options to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the campaign against ISIL occurs in an incredibly difficult and complex environment: deep Sunni and Shia rivalries, instability in Syria, imperfect local partners, and an aggressive and strong enemy in ISIL. To be sustainable, a strategy must enlist local partners. And working through partners is imperfect. Working through and training others produces results less quickly than if we were fighting ourselves. But we must balance the risk to our service members and the view of what happens when U.S. forces were to withdraw.

That is why combatting ISIL requires a long-term campaign to achieve lasting and sustainable results. But the fact that this effort will take years does not mean that we must not adjust and evaluate our efforts along the way. We should continue to question and challenge our assumptions, and not hesitate to consider new and bold actions as changing facts on the ground require.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Excellent recommendations. Thank you to all of our panelists. I will begin the question and answer period.

I wanted to ask our panelists to comment on today's New York Times article that says Assad's forces may be aiding the new ISIS surge:

> "Building on recent gains in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State militants are marching across northern Syria toward Aleppo, Syria's largest city, helped along, their opponents say, by the forces of President Bashar al-Assad. . .
>
> "The rebels complain that the United States has refrained from contributing air support to help them fend off simultaneous attacks by the government and the Islamic State."

And the article continues:

> "The Twitter account of the long-closed United States Embassy in Syria made its strongest statement yet about Mr. Assad's tactics.
>
> "'Reports indicate that the regime is making air strikes in support of ISIL's advance on Aleppo, aiding extremists against Syrian populations,' the Embassy said in a series of Twitter posts.
>
> "In another post, it added that the government war planes were 'not only avoiding ISIL lines but actively seeking to bolster their position.'
>
> "Neither American officials nor Syrian insurgents have provided proof of such direct coordination, though it has long been alleged by the insurgents."

Dr. Rubin, what do you make of that?

Mr. RUBIN. I would say that President Assad makes Machiavelli look like Mother Teresa. You know, when I am in the region often times I hear the conspiracy theory which is pervasive that the Americans are behind the Islamic State, and this is a conspiracy theory which has been pushed forward by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of Iran on numerous occasions.

The way I counter this is to remind people that before the United States began air operations in Syria the Islamic State was still centered at Raqqah. The Syrian air force, under the command of Bashar al-Assad, had dominance over the skies of Syria, and rather than take on the Islamic State he preferred to drop barrel bombs on Syrian civilians.

So I fully concur that we may have a situation in which Bashar al-Assad is acting in a way that might not appear at first glance logical or that Bashar al-Assad may not be as committed to defeating the Islamic State as some people would like to argue.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

And to our other witnesses, I wanted to ask you what are the dangers of—if the administration again relies on Russia or Iran in the fight against ISIL this time. Because just yesterday, Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken held a press availability with Prime Minister Abadi and the French Foreign Minister following a meeting of some of the coalition partners in the fight against ISIL.

He was asked a question by a reporter about how the U.S. may have told Iraq that Baghdad will be able to buy weapons from Rus-

sia and Iran, and it just seems like—is that the right message we should be sending or what should we be doing in respect to relying on Russia and telling Baghdad it is okay to rely on Russia and Iran? Dr. Cordesman.

Mr. CORDESMAN. Let me begin by saying first Iran has provided weapons and aircraft to Iraq. Russia has provided weapons, and Iraq is a sovereign country and if it chooses to use its own money to buy weapons from other countries these are not some things where we can do more than attempt to influence the situation.

What would bother me much more seriously is exactly what is the strategy we are using to arm and develop the Iraqi forces, how well does the train and assist mission actually work in ensuring the arms get there or even to the training base because there have been major problems simply in getting low-level training ammunition into rear area training activities.

We are not going to be able to limit all of these things by asking them not to go to other suppliers. The real issue, I think, is are we going to provide an effective timely flow and one that gives us the kind of influence and leverage that can help push them both toward unity and military effectiveness. I think that is the key issue.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Dr. Cordesman.

Dr. Spence.

Mr. SPENCE. Madam Chairman, I think sound strategy requires looking two steps ahead. In the near term, Iran is fighting ISIL and we have a shared enemy.

In the longer term, Iran has a more destabilizing agenda both in Iraq to have control of large parts of the Iraqi state, and in Syria as well, and we should be under no illusions of what a long-term partnership with Iran would do.

So in the near term, as Dr. Cordesman said, there is a reality of the funding that Iran and weaponizing that Iran is conducting.

However, as we do this we need to look at the steps ahead would be—what the consequences will be if we knowingly allowed Iran to get a type of foothold in these places with its larger destabilizing region has.

Ultimately, what we need to do is make sure we have more stable and effective governance not just when ISIL is driven out but there is something strong to put in place in the vacuum that will be left when ISIL is gone.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, gentlemen. Mr. Deutch is recognized.

Mr. DEUTCH. Hardly. Hardly. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Dr. Spence, let me follow up on that last point, which is what is going to be there when ISIL is gone. Can you—in your, I think, rightful efforts to look two steps ahead what should that look like?

Mr. SPENCE. You know, Congressman, I think it is enormously difficult and it is different in Iraq and in Syria. I mean, the basic principle is there needs to be an inclusive government that both Sunnis as well as Shi'a or Alawites feel a stake in the central government that they don't need to turn to some other non-state actor.

Executing that is very hard. I think in Iraq what it looks like in large parts is trying to enlist local fighters to fight against ISIL in the areas where they are.

They have an incentive, they know the area better and we need to have these types of Sunni fighters who have an incentive to stop ISIL from murdering their families but also be brought into some larger structure in the Iraqi Government.

So I think it is largely recruiting local fighters. In Syria, it is much, much harder because as imperfect a partner as Abadi is, even though he is taking good steps, we have the opposite of that in Syria.

Of course, we have an enemy in Assad, and I think that is why as slow as the train and equip program in Syria is moving that is why trying to recruit and train and find some Syrian fighters to get some victories in villages in Syria that we have been trying to work with and create some good government can also provide the military muscle to provide both governance as well as some stable sense of state authority so there is a real alternative between the devil of Assad and the other devil that is ISIL.

Mr. DEUTCH. Can we really be successful in our train and equip in Syria if the focus—if we are training and equipping only to take on ISIS when Assad continues to drop barrel bombs and chlorine on his own people?

Mr. SPENCE. You know, it is hard. I mean, I think in any event the most immediate threat to American interests still are ISIL. But the longer cause that allowed ISIL to take place is, of course, Assad.

Now, part of the issue that we face is, you know, the program that is authorized by Congress is not authorized to take on Assad.

You know, one of the purposes of the program is to create the conditions to create a political settlement to do that. The issue we face right now, I think—before we were to openly take on Assad in a military way we need to be very clear about what happens on day two and the years that would follow.

And right now I think we need to do more work to strengthen the opposition to do that before we would have a concerted effort right now to go after Assad. I think it is an issue of timing and sequencing.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right. Dr. Rubin, in—as we assess what to do in Syria we don't want to be in a position, do we, where we succeed in pushing back ISIS only to be left with an al-Qaeda-backed government there?

Mr. RUBIN. That is correct. And within—you can't allow a safe haven to develop anywhere. Terrorists love a vacuum and ungoverned spaces are a chief problem both in Iraq and in areas under ISIS control and in Syria.

One of the problems in Iraq post-liberation of territories seized by ISIS is going to be the leadership of the Sunni community and the problem is the Kurds have a definite leadership.

The Shi'ites have a definite leadership. Saddam Hussein cut off the Sunni leadership at its knees and it never really has redeveloped. Some in the Sunni leadership have tried to gamble with the Islamic State, assuming they could use it as a wedge against Prime Minister Maliki. They failed. They have lost support.

The question is what strategy do we have to build this up, because at this point when the Sunnis go to Prime Minister Abadi

their chief demand is not to listen to any of the other Sunni groups who are going to Prime Minister Abadi.

Mr. DEUTCH. Dr. Cordesman, in Iraq do you—can you comment on Secretary Carter's assessment of Iraqi forces and whether it is an accurate assessment to suggest that perhaps they don't have the will to defend themselves?

Where does the truth lie? If there is any truth to that then what is it ultimately that we can hope to accomplish, if that is the case?

Mr. CORDESMAN. First, I think there is a will to fight, depending on the unit. Part of the problem is that under Maliki you used the military forces essentially as a political weapon to suppress opposition and against the Sunni population.

The legacy is what happened that virtually destroyed a good part of the Iraqi army. Rebuilding that, we have said, will take several years.

Now, one of the units in Ramadi actually held together quite well for a long amount of time. It eventually simply was worn out and one of the problems you have when you talk about the will to fight is you need to look at the order of battle.

Remember, they are on the scene—that is, the Islamic State or ISIL's forces. They know the weaknesses in the local Iraqi forces. If they can smash through or in, go around the better units, take advantage of the weaker units or the police, they can disrupt and shatter a defense over time, and they have done that.

But it is also true if you want the will to fight you need a government that can get ammunition and reinforcements there on time. The problems are not simply forward.

They are just as serious throughout the entire structure of Iraqi defense and if we don't really find a way to advise and assist to deal with the broad operations you are going to have unit after unit, unless this changes, which runs out of ammunition, isn't reinforced in time, isn't pulled out and is exhausted, and you are going to find this repeated.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch.

Votes have been moved up from the scheduled time so I will ask our—the rest of our members to limit their question and answer period to 4 minutes so everyone can get a shot at it.

Mr. Issa.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have 32 prepared questions. Would you all agree to receive them and respond for the record?

Mr. RUBIN. Yes.

Mr. SPENCE. Yes.

Mr. ISSA. Let the record reflect that all witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Dr. Spence, with my remaining time, what I would like to do is I would like to go through a couple of items that are not in that long list and one of them is you were both in two different major roles in the administration at a time in which the administration rejected safe havens in Syria either to deal with the plight of Syrians going to Lebanon or into Jordan or into Turkey.

Do you regret that? A yes or no is fine.

Mr. SPENCE. No, I don't right now. No.

Mr. ISSA. So you think it is fine that in fact Lebanon is essentially more than 25 percent Syrian refugees, Jordan is maintaining huge amounts of refugees and, in fact, our situation with Turkey is one in which we depend on a Turkish Government that is at best marginal in their real support for deterring ISIL while in fact they continue to insist that we overturn the Assad government as a precondition of full cooperation.

Isn't it time that we begin looking at having territory within Syria in which we control it, he is denied ability to fly, even if it is not to overturn the Assad government but rather to have a safe haven in which we can prepare Syrian troops to take on ISIL?

Mr. SPENCE. I think—you know, in response to your question I think a few things. I think, first, I am extremely concerned about the refugee situation, about the neighbors, and I think——

Mr. ISSA. The Lebanese appreciate that. Send them a couple billion dollars. Answer the question because I am deeply concerned that a failed strategy continues to be used in Syria, one in which we say we are going to take out the Assad government but we don't, but we are perfectly willing to destabilize that government so that ISIL in fact can grow faster than any of the troops that we want to prepare to cause a regime change.

Mr. SPENCE. Well, Congressman, I think the issue that we need to focus on is what is the best way of accomplishing this end goal that you are talking about and that is both minimizing the damage in refugees that comes to the countries in the region.

In Lebanon, for example, it is not just 25 percent ISIL refugees. Over half of the country could be refugees. That is enormously concerning.

The concern I have about safe havens and what would happen if Assad immediately fell is what would the results be if it happened right away and how do we sustain it.

Mr. ISSA. So it is your position, as someone who just left the administration, that Assad falling from government today would be adverse to our best interest?

Mr. SPENCE. I am not saying that. But I am saying is before the United States were to take action to push Assad out we need to think very carefully about what comes in Assad's——

Mr. ISSA. So it is your—during your tenure at National Security and your tenure, obviously, at Defense do you believe we could have diminished or eliminated Assad's military supremacy over his own troops in his own country?

Mr. SPENCE. I think we were doing a fair amount to do that. I think the goal needs to be it is not just the fall of Assad. It is what comes in Assad's place.

Mr. ISSA. So would you say—would you say that we used efforts to diminish and eliminate his air supremacy? From my reports, his helicopters, very easy targets for performance aircraft, are not in fact on a daily basis targets that we go after and certainly not his air bases. Isn't that correct?

Mr. SPENCE. I think there are a number of things that we did to reduce the fighting power of Assad, both——

Mr. ISSA. No, that wasn't the question. Assad's ability, as the chairwoman said, Assad's ability to punish their own people and often their own people and not ISIL was never diminished.

Assad's ability to rain down terror from the air continues today, a capability that I am sure you agree, Doctor, we had the capability to diminish and we did not and currently do not.

Dr. Cordesman, perhaps you could weigh in on this. I don't think Dr. Spence is going to give me the answer I would like.

Mr. CORDESMAN. I don't know if I can give you the answer you would like. But I think that we do have the ability to put far more pressure on Syria and its use of force than we have exercised.

From the start, I think we exaggerated their capabilities and willingness to react to that pressure, and certainly it isn't just outside refugees. You have got 7 million displaced people in the country without homes or jobs.

Mr. ISSA. Or safe havens to live in.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. CORDESMAN. More than half the population.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Dr. Cordesman.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. We all strive to please Mr. Issa but it is an impossible task.

Mr. Higgins of New York is recognized.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

You know, coalition forces met recently and the conclusion was that our strategy is going to continue as it is.

You know, you look at Ramadi and Palmyra and the fact that ISIS troops are far outnumbered by coalition forces. You look at the chaos in Iraq with a fighting force that just doesn't seem to be up for the task.

How does this strategy that is in place—how does it succeed? Dr. Rubin.

Mr. RUBIN. The strategy which is in place does not succeed and on September 10th, 2014, the President laid out a goal which was to degrade and destroy the Islamic State. It is clear that that strategy is not working.

Mr. HIGGINS. Dr. Cordesman.

Mr. CORDESMAN. In all fairness, we have said this would take two to 3 years and it would take us more than a year to train even 9 to 12 Iraqi brigades.

But if this strategy is ever going to work, it is going to work far too slowly. It is far from clear that it is going to have anything like the political and civil effects that are necessary and it is a strategy for Iraq that doesn't seem to have any strategy for Syria, because if you are training 5,000 people 90 people at a time, I, frankly, don't see the point.

Mr. HIGGINS. Dr. Spence.

Mr. SPENCE. I think—I think both the strategy will take time by the ways we are executing it. So, first, I think there, of course, is a role for American significant military power that must be used.

But second, if you are going to be working through local partners, which I think is the sustainable way to do it, training local partners takes time.

I mean, the genius of America's military is not the technology we deploy but it is the leadership, our tactics and how our men serve

in combat, and training that leadership at the unit level takes time and is extremely difficult.

Mr. HIGGINS. Late last year there was an announcement that Prime Minister Abadi had agreed to or came to an agreement with the Kurds that they would receive $1 billion for their peshmerga and they would receive 17 percent of national oil revenues in perpetuity.

It seemed to be a good start to the new administration in that he appeared to be the Prime Minister developing a strategy for a coalition to defeat ISIS in Iraq. What happened there and where is the peshmerga in these fights?

Mr. SPENCE. So I think the peshmerga in these fights have, I mean, a few things. I think, first, a key part of the strategy needs to continue to be encouraging Abadi to reach out both to the Kurds as well as Sunnis in the way that he takes steps to do it and push him to follow through on those commitments.

I think on arming the peshmerga what the international coalition did in July was try to mobilize an enormous effort to provide large amounts of equipment and training and that has been flowing to Kurdish fighters and I think that is part of the reasons why we have seen Kurdish fighters able to be effective on the ground in some very, very difficult fights.

Mr. HIGGINS. Dr. Rubin.

Mr. RUBIN. I want to reemphasize the point that the Kurdish regional government has not been fully truthful when they say that they have not received weaponry from the Iraqi Government.

If they have not received enough weaponry it is simply because the Iraqi Government also has not received enough weaponry. The bigger problem that undercuts Kurdish peshmerga effectiveness is that the weaponry which the Kurds do have does not always make it to the place of greatest need.

It is more distributed on the basis of political patronage. We certainly see this in and around Kirkuk, which seems to be the next target for the Islamic State.

But because Kirkuk voted the wrong way in the Kurdish elections they are simply not getting the weaponry from the Kurdistan central government.

Mr. HIGGINS. I yield back my time.

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

Mr. Wilson of South Carolina.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Madame Chair, and thank you for having this very important hearing and each of you we appreciate you being here today.

I particularly appreciate, Dr. Rubin, the American Enterprise Institute. I well remember nearly 2 years ago right here, as our President was falsely claiming that radical Islam was on the run, that the threats to American families was being diminished, that Dr. Kagan was here with a map clearly showing that there was a spread of threats across North Africa, Middle East and Central Asia, and what he projected at that time, sadly, has come to effect. And so we really appreciate AEI presenting information to us.

I am particularly interested in the Kurdish regional government that we have worked with for many years—the Kurdish regional government of Iraq.

You are indicating that they have not been properly using the equipment received, but yet I was sincerely hoping that we could continue, obviously, to be working with them for the mutual interest that we have and that has been in place for decades and with the no-fly zone, on and on.

So how can we work with them and encourage their active and very capable involvement?

Mr. RUBIN. Thank you, Congressman, for your kind words. I would say simply trust but verify, and we don't want to get into a situation anywhere in Iraq where we are used as a foil for unrelated political rivalries.

So it is essential that we simply don't insist that the Kurds get the weaponry but we go the extra step and suggest that once they do get the weaponry they have to show that it is being distributed on the basis of military need and if that involves American advisors in the various war rooms to help second guess those decisions, so be it.

Mr. WILSON. Well, thank you very much for that insight.

Dr. Cordesman, my whole time being here—I was elected in 2001 so I have not forgotten 9/11. It is on my mind all the time, that where there are safe havens for terrorists anywhere in the world that the American people and American families are at risk of a murderous attack again.

We saw the attack of Osama bin Laden from a cave in Afghanistan but a greater threat over the last year it is inconceivable to me that the city of Mosul, a city of nearly 1 million people, has been under the control of ISIL.

How great a threat and as a launching place is it that such a city be under their control?

Mr. CORDESMAN. I think the issue is much broader. As long as they are a growing proto state which extends into both Iraq and Syria they have the ability to attract foreign volunteers, to train them, potentially to use them.

As people they can use in Europe or the United States to conduct acts of international terrorism. But right now, the odd aspect is they are so caught up in dealing with the al-Nusra front, Assad and the Iraqi Government that it is a threat which may well become far more serious in the future.

The oddity, I would say, is as we look at Yemen, in spite of what has happened there, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is still a critical issue.

If you look at al-Qaeda in that map which, as Dr. Kagan presented to you several years ago, and you combine it with the ISIL map, it has expanded into many other areas.

Those don't have the same internal pressures for conflict and in many of those you may find the threat changes and becomes more serious to us or other states.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madame Chair.

Dr. Cordesman, in your written testimony you speak about or write about the need for a civil military and whole of government strategy for both Iraq and Syria, and you speak about it being

largely the responsibility of these individual nations to determine their own destiny.

And you, I think, accurately recite a whole series of challenges including deeply divided societies, inadequate governance, massive corruption, mismanaged economies, demographic pressures that make a challenging context even in times of peace.

In light of that, is our reliance on a strategy that focuses on training and equipping the Iraqi army, the peshmerga, the Shi'ite militia—does that have a real possibility of success in any event or are there things we should be doing differently that might produce a better outcome?

Mr. CORDESMAN. In the case of Iraq, I think the problem is we aren't doing either one particularly thoroughly. You can do serious damage to the Islamic State and to extremism using force.

But I think that if you are going to deal with Iraq's civil problems you need to work very carefully with every element you can in Iraq to move them toward unity, to overcome the kind of problems and divisions that have grown between Sunni and Shi'ite and Arab and Kurd.

One of the things that I think is very discouraging and one thing that you might want to conduct hearings on is the idea that what we need in Baghdad is a normal Embassy that does not put real pressure for this kind of unity on the Iraqi Government.

I would want to see exactly what the strategy and the efforts are, whether there are things we could do to encourage federation or reform without attempting to dictate it, and I have not seen any indication of that, at least in public terms, and being reassured in broad terms doesn't help me.

In the case of Syria, the issue is far more difficult. One way or another we have the al-Nusra Front, the Islamic State, Assad and perhaps some very small groups of Islamists which are more moderate.

It has never been explained to me why training 5,000 volunteers a year is going to have any impact on this situation, civil or military, and as was raised earlier, we are talking about essentially 11 million people, refugees or IDPs.

So we either have some civil strategy for Syria and a military strategy or we have a nightmare where anything we do militarily does not bring stability or security.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. I just have 1 minute left so I want to ask Dr. Rubin. Thank you, Doctor. Dr. Rubin, can you just speak briefly about the Kurdistan-Iran relationship?

You know, we kind of view the opportunities that exist with the Kurds to be a panacea. So I would like to hear, and also what more can we be doing to persuade Turkey to really take seriously their responsibility to stem the flow of foreign fighters and really close their border?

Does that continue to be a resource or pathway for most of the foreign fighters into the region?

Mr. RUBIN. Thank you very much. Firstly, make no mistake, on the ground many Kurds are pro-American. For that matter, many Iraqis are—non-Kurdish Iraqis are also pro-American.

However, the Kurds have a history of abandonment. While Americans tend not to have extensive historical memory, Kurds do re-

member 1975 and 1988, both periods in which they feel that they were betrayed by the United States.

On top of that, Iran is their neighbor and a major Iranian influence operation is that you can like the Americans better but you are always going to have live next to us and that Iranians do tend to exert that pressure a great deal.

When I go to both Iraq and Baghdad, Basra and Kurdistan, Gerbil and Sulaymaniyah I am told, jokingly, that Qasem Soleimani was there 2 weeks ahead of me in each of those cities including Kurdistan.

The danger is that the Americans have let their card down when it comes to Iraqi Kurdistan and we don't recognize the—just how deeply they have been penetrated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps and the Quds Force.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. Meadows.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Dr. Spence, let me come to you. You talked about this 3-year strategy, you know, that the success is going to take about 3 years and that is what the administration has said. This is going to be a longer-term strategy.

So when originally we came up with this 3-year window of success in our fight, was it contemplated at that particular time that ISIL was going to expand their capabilities and acquire all this other new territory? Was that part of what we assumed was going to happen?

Mr. SPENCE. Congressman, what I would say is that even though there is a longer-term strategy, we need to have interim report cards.

You can't just wait to see what happens at the end of 3 years and, of course, to answer your question directly two things that at the Defense Department we are particularly concerned about are, first, denying territory and safe haven to ISIL, meaning they should not be expanding territory.

And then second, to what degree are we building the capacity to the partners doing the fighting.

Mr. MEADOWS. Agreed.

Mr. SPENCE. So the first question I am very, very concerned about——

Mr. MEADOWS. So they are expanding territory. So I guess our strategy is not working is what I am saying. The American people believe it is not working. So do you have a different opinion?

Mr. SPENCE. The way I would—the way I would put it, just very candidly, is there will be places where ISIL has expanded and there are places where ISIL is also in retreat. This is not a homogenous fight. Iraq is not homogenous where ISIL can have control.

So to be very blunt, what happened in the last weeks was a significant setback. We should make no bones about it and we should be very honest about what happened.

It was only a setback because this was an area where we had Americans fight and die before. It is in a hugely important part of Iraq. Also, it creates a sense of momentum. If more of that happens then it becomes very positive.

Mr. MEADOWS. Well, and that is what I am seeing is momentum, but part of that is a direct response to our anemic air strikes, our anemic support and, I guess, when are we going to get serious about it.

And I say that because under sworn testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee we heard testimony that basically that 75 percent of our sorties that are going out are coming back without deploying, you know, their missiles or bombs and so they are coming back.

The other troubling aspect for me is is during a 29-day conflict with Gaza and Israel they were able to put almost 3,000 missiles into Israel and yet here we are, the most powerful nation in the world, and we, over a 4-month period, did less than 1,000 air strikes in a much larger geographic region.

So how is that going to create the fear of the American military might if we are being anemic?

Mr. SPENCE. So I think—I don't think we are being anemic now with American air power. That said——

Mr. MEADOWS. Well, less than 15 flights a day. I mean, you get more flights coming in over the National Mall here than you do in Syria and Iraq. So how can you say that it is not anemic?

Mr. SPENCE. Look, we have had—the sheer number of sorties and weapons dropped in the territory and the ISIL targets that have been taken out have been significant.

Now, as I said earlier, I do think we should do whatever we can to make sure that we are expanding the target list and look very carefully to make sure that we are making the best use of air power.

So as we think about forward-deployed air controllers, American as well as coalition forces, I think this is something we should seriously consider balanced against, of course, the risks to the U.S. services.

Mr. MEADOWS. All right. Dr. Rubin, let me go very quickly to you because what we see is with Turkey contributing to the ISIL can you speak to that—our strategy with regards to foreign fighters coming in? And I will yield back and let you answer.

Mr. RUBIN. Yes, thank you, and thank you also to Representative Cicilline. I didn't get to this part of your question because of time.

Basically, I would argue that Turkey has become Pakistan on the Mediterranean where they are willing to say one thing publicly and quite—and do quite another issue.

I gave one item in my testimony both oral and written, which should be a no-brainer on the part of Turkey, to be a cost-free option to test whether Turkey is sincere or not.

But look, Turkey, in the late 1990s, sealed their border with Syria. So the argument that they cannot seal their border with Syria is nonsense. They simply do not want to.

And even if the June 7th election leads to a coalition government—and it is not clear that the election will be free and fair—over the past 10-plus years President Erdogan and his party have completely shifted the Syria policy, if you will, to the MIT—to Syria's intelligence unit.

So even under a coalition government we are still going to have the problem continue unless there is some serious pressure on President Erdogan to stop the nonsense.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Meadows.

Mr. DeSantis.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you. I thank the witnesses and I would just say that the Ramadi setback was something that does resonate with me because I know the number of people who fought and died and were injured driving al-Qaeda and Iraq out of Ramadi.

That was one of the most dangerous places in the world in 2005–2006. I was deployed in that area. By the time we left in 2008 it was peaceful. And so to see it go back is something that hurts.

Dr. Cordesman, to what extent is Iran supporting the Iraqi forces right now?

Mr. CORDESMAN. Quite frankly, I think you would need to get that answer at a very sensitive level of intelligence. But several things are clear. The Quds Force is active. They have provided, for example, SU–25s.

Now, they were Iraqi originally until Saddam flew them to Iran. They have provided significant numbers of weapons. They have certainly trained and equipped the militias, some of which are seen as more moderate than others. So you have a very active role and they are forward.

So when you have Iraqi troops move forward there are often Iranians present in small numbers. It is not a matter of volunteers who are dominating any aspect of military operations.

I think that they have a significant political influence and they certainly are tying their military actions to trying to give themselves visibility.

In looking at what they have done and said, they also often, at least quietly, are saying our air power is ineffective—we are not really serious about training—you can't trust us, and they can split the message up between one focused on Shi'ites and other factions.

They are also present in the Kurdish area and we should have no illusions that this is only something that affects the areas under the Iraqi Government control.

Mr. DESANTIS. Dr. Rubin, what do you—what is your view on the extent to which Iran is influencing and directing these anti-ISIL operations in Iraq?

Mr. RUBIN. Well, let me put it this way. Iran will take credit for any success that occurs. They are trying to infiltrate. I would respectfully disagree a bit with Dr. Spence that in the short term any benefit can be derived from Iranian actions inside Iraq.

Iran is not an altruistic power and if the problem—if you are willing to accept that the problem is based in grievance and not simply ideology and if the grievance has to do with sectarianism, then the Iranian-backed forces are the most sectarian forces there.

That said, there is a silver lining if we choose to take advantage of that. Under Prime Minister Maliki, there was a political purge to concert the more pro-Iranian members into Iraqi army units and they were the ones who fared particularly poorly in Mosul.

So this idea that we can derive even military benefit from Iranian prowess, to me, is overstating in the extreme.

Look, we have an interest in defeating the Islamic State. The Iranians have an interest also in the Islamic State. But arsonists and firefighters both have interests in fires. It doesn't mean we are on the same side of the issue.

Mr. DESANTIS. And what about the nuclear agreement or pending agreement? This has, obviously, unnerved a lot of Sunni gulf states to see the United States essentially tilting toward Iran.

How does that play just kind of on the street and for the average Sunni Arab in al-Anbar province, I mean, if they see the forces as being infiltrated by Iran, they see the U.S. tilting perhaps toward Iran? It just seems like that we are driving them into the arms of ISIS.

Mr. RUBIN. Not only are we driving them into the arms of ISIS, but we are going to make the situation far worse down the line.

The Khatam al-Anbia, which is the economic wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps, controls about 40 percent of the Iranian economy. When the Iranians derive this $50 billion to $100 billion in relief after any nuclear accord, that money isn't going to flow into ordinary Iranians' coffers.

I used to live in the Islamic Republic. I can give you any number of anecdotes. But for the sake of brevity that is going to directly to the Iranians.

Now, between 2000 and 2005 the price of oil doubled, the European Union trade with Iran almost tripled and under the reformists—the so-called reformists—that hard currency windfall went almost exclusively into Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile capability.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Dr. Rubin, and thank you, Mr.——

Mr. DESANTIS. Yeah. Sorry.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. But votes have started. So our wrap-up question and answer period will be led by Dr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate it.

Dr. Spence, you were talking about an inclusive government in Iraq. Is that possible in Iraq?

Mr. SPENCE. Yes, I believe so.

Mr. YOHO. You know, what I see is when Saddam Hussein was there, there was a unified Iraq because he ruled it with an iron fist. But what I see today, and talking to the experts, you have the Sunnis loyal to the Sunnis, Shi'a loyal to the Shi'a, Kurds loyal to the Kurds.

To be able to be under one unified government I am not seeing that work and I know that was one of the strategies of being able to build these forces that were going to, you know, all be loyal to the Iraqi flag the way we see unity and loyalty to the American flag.

I don't see that happening. What do the people of Iraq want? I mean, the different tribal cultures—you know, the split up of the cultures there—what do they want?

Mr. SPENCE. They want much of what most of us want. They want to be represented. They don't want to be pushed out. They don't want to have fear for their lives and their basic needs.

Mr. YOHO. I mean, we all have the basic rights of we want better for our children, a better life, and we want certain basic freedoms.

But yet, do they see that working together in a unified country made up of different factions or different cultures?

Mr. SPENCE. I think there have been—it is hard to do but there have been some steps taken to your question exactly about what has been done to outreach more. So when Prime Minister Abadi came in he took some immediate steps to reach out to the Sunnis, which Maliki simply had not done.

He appointed, for example, a Defense Minister who is a Sunni, which is a critical form—a critical post to have had. He fired some of the most political generals who really weren't leading at all.

Even after what happened in Ramadi he called his full cabinet—his national security cabinet together where it was both Kurds and Sunnis and Shi'a to talk about what they need to do necessarily.

Within the Iraqi Parliament a bill for a national guard, which would not just have Shi'as fighting, has passed a second reading. So steps have been taken to bring some of these fighters in. It is hard, but things have been done and I think we just need to push more to happen.

Mr. YOHO. Well, I have seen that and you are talking about that national guard made up of different groups. We tried that with the Iraqi security forces and they folded like cheap suits.

Dr. Cordesman, what is your opinion on that?

Mr. CORDESMAN. I don't think that the security forces universally fold. I think some of them have been exhausted. Better units, for example, were sent in to Ramadi—not rotated, not supported and not reinforced.

Mr. YOHO. Dr. Rubin, how about you?

Mr. RUBIN. I have talked to Iraqi insurgents and I have talked to Shi'ites. The one area of consensus in which they have is a support for administrative federalism and by that I mean while Baghdad would have control over foreign policy and defense, all other decisions would be based on the district or sub-district level, not based on ethnic divisions, although oftentimes those will coincide.

Mr. YOHO. Is that long term or is that just to get through the crisis we are in now?

Mr. RUBIN. That is long term.

Mr. YOHO. All right. Let me ask you this about Syria, if we can pivot to Syria.

Where is the U.N.? Has there been a resolution from the U.N. that comes out and denounces Assad and denounces the civil war and Assad for having a civil war, for the hundreds of thousands of people that have been genocide there, destabilizing not just his country, the surrounding countries, the whole Middle East and basically the world?

When you have 7 million refugees, where is the U.N. coming out and saying, we are done with this—we are doing an ultimatum—you need to get your country under control in a time period and the world—the nations of the world stand up? Has that been done, and why not if not?

Mr. RUBIN. When you ask the question where is the U.N. the answer is usually in a five-star hotel.

Mr. YOHO. Right.

Mr. RUBIN. But the real problem with regard to the United Nations on this is it is infused with cultural and moral equivalency. It is not there to solve problems. It is there to avoid solutions.

Mr. YOHO. Well, and I think they do very well at that. And, you know, and then I question why are we there—why are we with the U.N. and where is the rest of the world, because what Assad is doing is bad, you know, for everything I just mentioned and I think the biggest thing is the humanitarian crisis and the strife he has caused in that country to his own people.

This has gone on long enough. I would wish the world community would come up and say, this is it—you are done and it needs to have a regime change.

But then I worry about who is going to fill that void because as we all know, nature abhors a vacuum and I am out of time. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Dr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. I got to go do my constitutional duty and vote.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you to our panelists, and before we adjourn I would like my wonderful congressional interns to stand up and take a bow. We are singlehandedly keeping all of these juvenile delinquents off the streets.

Thank you, guys, and with that our subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:19 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

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

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

May 27, 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 by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, June 3, 2015

TIME: 12:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy Towards ISIL After Terror Group Seizes Ramadi and Palmyra

WITNESSES: Michael Rubin, Ph.D.
Resident Scholar
American Enterprise Institute

Anthony H. Cordesman, Ph.D.
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Matthew Spence, Ph.D.
(Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Middle East 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 SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Middle East and North Africa* HEARING

Day *Wednesday* **Date** *June 3rd* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *12:00PM* **Ending Time** *1:19PM*

Recesses [*0*] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

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

TITLE OF HEARING:

U.S. Policy Towards ISIL After Terror Group Seizes Ramadi and Palmyra

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps Chabot, Wilson, Issa, DeSantis, Meadows, Yoho, Clawson, Deutch, Higgins, Cicilline and Frankel.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

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.)*

None

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE *NA*
or
TIME ADJOURNED *1:19PM*

Subcommittee Staff Director