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FROM IRAQ AND SYRIA TO LIBYA AND BEYOND: THE EVOLVING ISIL THREAT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Serial No. 114–141

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/ or http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

98–599PDF WASHINGTON : 2016

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
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FROM IRAQ AND SYRIA TO LIBYA AND BEYOND: THE EVOLVING ISIL THREAT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:06 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. All right, this hearing will come to order. Today we will hear from the administration's point-man on its effort to combat ISIS. He is back before the committee again. Now this is an issue that this committee has raised repeatedly since ISIS first began its attacks and we began calling for air strikes against ISIS.

It has now been 2 years since President Obama dismissed ISIS as the JV team. Today, the administration claims its goal is to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS, but it still doesn't have a strategy to get that job done. The tide has not turned in terms of the growing influence of ISIS.

Instead, these "fighters on the back of pickup trucks," to use the President's term, have grown into a global force, a force capable of striking in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, and yes, capable of striking here at home in the United States. There are now, in terms of groups supporting ISIS, there are 50 ISIS-linked groups on the ground in 21 separate countries, and it is everywhere in cyberspace. And everywhere in cyberspace it spews that deadly message to kill.

Ambassador McGurk—just back from the front lines with Syrian Kurds—will note some encouraging developments: Ramadi in Iraq was retaken in December, and after some much-needed loosening of the rules of engagement, ISIS-controlled oil installations in Syria have been finally bombed. This is good. But these gains have been too slow to come and too limited. Every day that ISIS makes advances, seemingly unchecked, it draws recruits to plot new attacks abroad, including the United States.

Meanwhile the Iraqi Government hasn't been able to deliver as it should. The Iraqi Kurds, long denied better arms, are desperate. Sunni forces, key to any success, do not trust Baghdad as the government has failed to include them, in their view, in the government and to include them in the armed forces in a meaningful way. And across the region, the U.S. is perceived—the perception is that

we are only willing to back non-Sunnis. Now this only empowers ISIS.

Militarily, the size of the recently announced Special Operations Force to target ISIS leadership is a fraction of what past efforts have entailed. Our air strikes are still only averaging 23 a day—a fraction of what a serious air campaign looks like.

In the failed state of Libya—where militants don't face a threat from the air—ISIS has doubled in size. These 6,000 fighters are several hundred miles from Europe. They have their sights on Libya's oil, a tactic that made it the world's richest terror group, and despite years of warnings about Libya's course the administration's response has been feeble.

In Afghanistan too, ISIS is spreading. But only recently has the President lifted the rules of engagement that were preventing our troops from targeting this deadly group. Last week, U.S. air strikes finally destroyed an ISIS "Voice of the Caliphate" radio station there in Afghanistan.

So what took so long? ISIS propaganda operations are in overdrive, they are getting better every day. Yet our Government's effort to counter-message—led by the Broadcasting Board of Governors—remains in disarray.

And when it comes to Syria, tragically, the U.S. response has been downright shameful. The slaughter goes on. Train and equip failed. In December, the U.S. joined Russia to pass a U.N. Security Council resolution that required humanitarian aid and the end of civilian bombing as part of its plan for "peace talks." But rather than stand firm and put pressure on Russia to abide by this resolution, Secretary Kerry pushed the opposition to the negotiating table even as the Russian and Assad regimes intensified their bombings. The result is predictable failure.

As Syria has imploded over the years, rather than tackle the problem, the Obama administration has sat on its hands—paralyzed by a series of "what ifs." Today Assad and Russian forces have Aleppo under siege. They are relentlessly bombing U.S.-backed Sunni opposition forces that are critical to the fight against ISIS.

Just yesterday, Lieutenant General Steward, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, warned that ISIS "will attempt attacks on the U.S. homeland," in his words, "in 2016." If we are to truly defeat ISIS, and we must, the half measures and the indecisiveness must stop. I now yield to the ranking member, Mr. Eliot Engel from New York, for any opening comments he may have.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and to our witness, welcome to the Foreign Affairs Committee, Special Envoy McGurk. Brett, I have been impressed for many years by your record of service to our country and I want to thank you for it. You have notched another remarkable achievement by working to negotiate the release of five American prisoners who were wrongly held by Iran, and I join the families of these men and with all Americans in thanking you for your efforts.

Today, we are glad to hear from you about the fight against ISIS and the dynamic threat the group poses, the way the organization is adapting to challenges and growing. The United States has spearheaded a coalition of 66 partners with the goal of destroying

ISIS. Different countries play different roles: Cutting off ISIS from its finances, stopping the flow of foreign fighters, providing humanitarian support, countering ISIS propaganda, joining in air strikes, and building capacity of fighters on the ground. This shared burden prevents the United States from being drawn into another long war. We must defeat ISIS, but we cannot and should not do it alone.

Between 10,000 coalition air strikes and a relentless press of local ground forces, we have seen some progress. From Kobani to Mount Sinjar to Tikrit to Ramadi, ISIS has lost a quarter of the populated territory it once held in Iraq and Syria, and yet the reality across the region remains grim. Syrians continue to flee the Assad regime in droves. Assad has been given another lifeline by Russian's bombardment of civilian areas, attacks that continue to kill women and children. And ISIS latches on to these deplorable actions to use for recruitment and propaganda.

Iraq has also had to rely on Shia militants, Shia militias loyal to Iran. As a result, Iraq remains divided along sectarian lines as Iran gains even greater influence in Iraq. This could leave the region with the same cleavages that allowed ISIS to thrive in the first place. If we do not address the political void and sectarian tensions there will be no long-term stability.

The same themes are already playing out in Libya and Yemen. Terrorists love a vacuum. In the absence of real stability, rule of law and effective government, ISIS will fill the void. Focusing on long-running tensions in these countries will go a long way toward denying ISIS safe haven.

So today I hope we can have a good discussion on how the United States should continue responding to the threat. How can we stem the growth of ISIS? How do we stay one step ahead of them? Sometimes, unfortunately, it seems as if we are only halfheartedly going after ISIS and halfheartedly helping the Free Syrian Army and others on the ground.

As you know, for many years, 3 or 4 years, I have been calling on aiding the Free Syrian Army, and I believe that when we didn't aid them, they withered on the vine and ISIS moved into the void. I hope that we will be part of a robust campaign, not a tentative one or one that seems like we are dragging ourselves in, but a robust campaign to destroy ISIS and get rid of Assad. I understand that we cannot do it alone nor should we. We need our Arab partners and our Middle East partners and other partners on the ground, the Kurds and others, to help, but I think we have to lead and I think it is important that we do that.

So I look forward to hearing from our witness on these questions and others, and I am glad that Congress is staying engaged on this issue in various ways. Another step we can take is to push for a robust foreign affairs budget. The President sent his budget request to Congress yesterday and I hope that we on this committee will make all the needed investments to meet these challenges and all our challenges abroad. I hope we will soon take up an authorization for the use of military force, which gives the President what he needs to grapple with this threat without running the risk of another full-scale, open-ended commitment of American forces in the Middle East. If we are asking American service members to

risk their lives in the fight against ISIS, we should at the very least, I believe, do our job as well.

So thank you again, Mr. McGurk. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Engel. This morning we are pleased to be joined by Special Presidential Envoy Brett McGurk. Mr. McGurk was recently promoted from deputy to Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Prior to these assignments, Special Envoy McGurk served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq and Iran.

Mr. McGurk has been a valuable voice in the administration, pressing for a more robust U.S. role, and I appreciate that. Without objection, the witness' full prepared statement will be made part of the record and members will have 5 calendar days to submit statements, questions and extraneous materials for the record. So we would ask if you could summarize your remarks, Ambassador.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BRETT MCGURK, SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY FOR THE GLOBAL COALITION TO COUNTER ISIL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Engel, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen and members of the committee. It is a real honor to be here. I first appeared before you in this committee in November 2013 to talk about then what we knew as al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the emerging threats which we now know as ISIL. I have been back a number of times since then including shortly after the fall of Mosul. I deeply value the partnership with this committee, and I thank you for your leadership on this most pressing national security issue.

I was in Iraq when Mosul fell in the summer of 2014, and the situation then could not have been more serious and dire. Baghdad was under threat, thousands were being massacred, collapse of the Iraqi security forces—seven entire divisions—the situation seemed almost hopeless. We had to build a foundation and fight back. And that required a new Iraqi Government, a better intelligence picture, a military strategy to strike ISIL and train local forces, and a political strategy to reflect the realities on the ground.

We also had to build an international coalition from around the world, recognizing that this is a global challenge like none we have seen before, at one point with more than 30,000 foreign fighters from 120 countries all around the world. So we acted, we acted aggressively, and we are now beginning to see some results. However, while the progress is clear, which I will discuss, the challenges and threats to our national security interests remain acute. As Director of National Intelligence Clapper stated yesterday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, ISIL remains "our preeminent terrorist threat."

So how do we analyze ISIL? How do we make sense of it? Because only by making sense of it with data, analysis, and empirical underpinning can we effectively defeat it. We analyze ISIL in three main categories. First, its core in Iraq and Syria; second, its networks around the world, foreign fighters, finance and propaganda; and third, its affiliates, now of which there are eight.

I want to focus in this introductory statement on the core, and the core is really key. It is the phony, self-proclaimed caliphate that ISIL proclaims to have established, and it is one of the main magnets that is attracting people from all around the world. So let me start with some facts of what we are doing in the core.

ISIL has now lost 40 percent of its territory in Iraq, more than 10 percent of its territory in Syria, it has not won a single battle since May, and as you can see in the map that I have projected here, the green areas are areas in which since the summer of 2014 we have now taken from ISIL. But the figures, for example, 40 percent of territory, really does not matter. What is important is that this is strategic ground.

In Iraq, the iconic Sunni cities of Tikrit and Ramadi, in Tikrit, 95 percent of the population is now back in their homes in the city according to U.N. estimates. In Ramadi, it was the first test of Iraqi security forces really acting on their own to liberate that iconic city. In Syria, it is not just the data, it is what is on the map. The green, taking away the entire border area which used to be controlled by Daesh east of the Euphrates River, and that border is now green because of what happened in the city of Kobani.

I traveled to Kobani last week in northern Syria, and I was brought to the site of where we dropped supplies, where President Obama ordered an air drop of military equipment and supplies at a key moment in November 2014 when that battle was about to be lost.

I spoke with one of the commanders. He said without that air drop they would have been overrun. And it was from that air drop and working with the forces on the ground that they were able to defeat ISIL—6,000 ISIL fighters lost their lives in Kobani—and then expand their presence outward and take away that entire border from ISIL. It is a testament to the courage of some of the partners we have on the ground and also the many challenges ahead.

I was able to travel to Syria because we now have a presence on the ground in Syria and there is no substitute for this. By having a presence on the ground we have gained better insights every day, and with better insights we can act with more devastating effect. Our better intelligence picture is allowing us to eliminate ISIL leaders, including 90 senior to mid-level leaders over the second half of last year alone, including Baghdadi's key deputies, Haji Mutazz, who was his number one leader in Iraq, and Abu Sayyaf, who was his number one financier.

Our heroic special operators did a raid in northern Syria not long ago in which they killed Abu Sayyaf, and in that raid they collected more information than any operation in their history, and we learned more than we ever could have imagined about ISIL's financial networks. From there, we pooled intelligence from across the coalition from our Department of Treasury, from the State Department and the intelligence community to relentlessly uproot their financial apparatus, and that is what we have been doing.

ISIL is now cutting their salaries for their fighters by about 50 percent, and we are seeing the effect that they are having by our strikes on their trucks moving oil, on their oil platforms and on their cash storage sites.

Let me go around the map very briefly, if I could, Mr. Chairman, just to bring you into the overall campaign and how we are approaching the core. I will start at number one. Number one is a 98 kilometer stretch of border. It is the only stretch of border now that ISIL controls with Turkey. It is its remaining sole outlet to the world.

We have worked very closely with our Turkish partners, including a number of meetings with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu just in the past few months, and they are doing quite a lot. They are building berms, they are increasing patrols, they are sharing intelligence, they are setting up risk analyses, and they are conducting cross-border artillery strikes.

This is having an impact. It is much harder for ISIL fighters to get into Syria now than it was even 6 months ago, and once they are in it is much harder for them to get out. And that is our objective. They can't get in, and when they get in they will never get out because they will die in Iraq and Syria.

The impact is in the numbers from our intelligence assessments. From the summer of 2014 when the high end estimate of about 31,500 foreign fighters in ISIL, but now it is down to about 25,000. So the tide of that number is starting to turn. We know from their own publications they are now telling their fighters, don't come into Syria, go elsewhere. Go into Libya. And that is because it is much harder for them to get into Syria.

Moving to number two, Raqqa. Raqqa remains their headquarters. It remains their hub. It remains where most of their leaders are. It remains where their external plotting networks are established. That is why we are going to work with our local partners in Syria, a collection of Arabs and Kurds, to push on Raqqa and isolate them in Raqqa. And that will be ongoing over the coming months.

I will move quickly in the interest of time over to Iraq and I will skip right to number five in Mosul. Mosul will remain a tremendous challenge. There are about 1 million people in Mosul. It is a politically diverse city and to get it right we have to work politically and militarily hand in glove.

When I was in Iraq last week we met with Iraqi leaders in Baghdad and with the Kurdish leadership, including Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and others, and we have now established a joint operational headquarters in Makhmur, which is on the map here. And that is where we are going to pool Sunni fighters, Kurdish Peshmerga, Iraqi security forces with our advisors, with Peshmerga commanders, with Iraqi commanders to plan the liberation of Mosul.

This will be an integrated campaign across multiple lines of effort. It will not be a D-Day like campaign. It is not going to start on a certain date because it is already starting. We are already cutting off the road access to Mosul. We are already doing air strikes in Mosul every single day. We are already learning more about what Daesh is doing in Mosul. That is why we are striking their cash warehouse sites, for example. So the Mosul liberation campaign has already begun. However, it will be an extremely difficult endeavor and we are not going to put a timeline on when Mosul will be liberated, but it will.

Moving south, I will go to number seven which is Tikrit. Tikrit, again, an iconic Sunni city in the heart of Saladin Province, was totally depopulated by ISIL. Not only that, they killed thousands of people in a massacre known as the Camp Speicher massacre in the summer of 2014. Iraqi security forces with our help were able to liberate the city.

And most importantly, we are not just focused on defeating ISIL but what comes after ISIL and working with the coalition and an international stabilization fund that we established together with the Government of Iraq. And I give Prime Minister Abadi great credit in devolving powers, delegating powers to local leaders. We have been able to return the population to Tikrit. The U.N. reported in Rome last week at a coalition meeting that 95 percent of the citizens of Tikrit are now back.

We are building on those lessons now. I will go right to number eight on the map which is Ramadi. Ramadi was the first significant test for the Iraqi security forces since their collapse in the summer of 2014. This was an operation which was done entirely by the Iraqi security forces and local Sunni tribal fighters. And the Sunni tribal fighters in Anbar continue to grow in number and capacity. We have about 10,000 of them now, and I can discuss that in some detail, Mr. Chairman.

We have liberated Ramadi, but the city remains quite devastated from the fighting. Nearly every other home is booby trapped or has IEDs. And I met with the governor of Anbar Province and he told us very specifically what he needs. Without getting the counter-IED teams back in there to de-wire all these homes which have been booby trapped it will delay the return of the population and it is something that we are working on now quite aggressively.

I will move finally, Mr. Chairman, I can go through this map in some detail in my testimony, but I want to point out number 11. Number 11 is where you see dark red; because as we push ISIL and we squeeze them they will try to fill spaces in the soft underbelly of Syria. Palmyra they took some time ago. That has been in the news. But the little small, dark red blotches heading toward Jordan are something that we are very focused on. And Jordan, of course, is one of our closest partners in the region. We are very focused on Jordan's security.

In October, the President authorized enhanced military assistance to Jordan as part of our strategy to intensify the counter-ISIL campaign that includes almost $200 million for border security to detect and deter threats. I will be in Jordan next week with a broad interagency delegation including our overall commander of the counter-ISIL campaign, Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, to see His Majesty King Abdullah and talk about the threats to Jordan and how we are going to make sure that they protect their border.

That is a very, very brief and very quick summary of the most complicated situation imaginable, but I look forward over the next 2 hours to answering all of your questions. And I just want to close where I began in really thanking this committee for the leadership that you have shown, Mr. Chairman and the entire committee, on this issue. I value this partnership, and now that we look to accelerate the campaign over the next year I look forward to the close

partnership that I have had with you going forward. So with that I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McGurk follows:]

Testimony
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on
From Iraq and Syria to Libya and Beyond: The Evolving ISIL Threat
Witness Statement of
The Honorable Brett McGurk
Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL

February 10, 2016

Introduction

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to update you on the progress of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL over the last year. I last appeared before this Committee over a year ago in December 2014 as our international Coalition to defeat ISIL was just getting off the ground. I would like to update you today on how the pieces put in motion a year ago have positioned us now to apply significant pressure on ISIL simultaneously across Iraq and Syria, as well as globally.

I would also like to thank the leadership of this Committee in recognizing the grave threat posed by ISIL long before the fall of Mosul in June 2014. This committee had the foresight to hold a hearing on al-Qa'ida's resurgence in Iraq in November 2013, where I was honored to represent the State Department. We spoke then of the emerging threat of ISIL and the intentions of its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, long before either were household names. The support of this Committee has been essential to identifying the threat, and helping us to push back aggressively. I welcome the opportunity today to provide an update.

Diagnosing the ISIL Threat

The ISIL threat to our interests in the greater Middle East region, to our partners in the EU and around the world, and to our homeland – is significant. In Iraq and Syria, ISIL maintains a formidable force, including thousands of foreign fighters from more than 100 countries. Our ongoing campaign and diplomatic efforts have significantly reduced their ranks, and will continue to do so, but ISIL still controls territory, economic resources, and maintains networks that penetrate from Syria into Europe. Separate from the threat of ISIL, the organization continues to target civilians as a matter of policy, enslaves and forcibly marries thousands of young women, and pillages our ancient history and cultural heritage. This is an organization that must be destroyed, as a matter of our own national security, and as a matter of our common humanity and decency.

Destroying ISIL requires a comprehensive campaign across multiple lines of effort – military, economic, political, diplomatic. It also requires a careful analytical assessment of the organization. In general terms, we analyze ISIL in three component parts: First, the core in Iraq and Syria, its hub for projecting a "caliphate" and an operations center for terror around the world; Second, the networks of foreign fighters and its organization for external plotting and operations; and Third, its global affiliates, including eight emerging groups spread across the Middle East, Africa and Asia. These affiliates take direction from ISIL leadership in the core. My testimony will focus on our holistic strategy for addressing each component of the ISIL problem set.

Degrading ISIL's Core (Iraq and Syria)

ISIL is unlike al-Qa'ida or other terrorist groups in that its primary objective is to establish state-like structures in areas that it controls. This provides ISIL with vast resources, but also significant vulnerabilities – and opportunities for us to degrade its organization. Reducing the

territory ISIL controls is a necessary criterion for its defeat and essential to removing its primary recruiting pitch as a historical movement: the vanguard of a new "caliphate," flush with inevitable victory and conquest. The truth, as we are now demonstrating in Iraq and Syria, is the precise opposite.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIL has not had a significant battlefield victory since May 2015. Over a dozen major cities have been liberated from ISIL since the start of the campaign, including the key Sunni cities of Tikrit and Ramadi, the key oil infrastructure hub of Bayji, and Sinjar, where ISIL burst onto the international stage after murdering hundreds of Yazidis and enslaving thousands more. In Syria, local forces have taken back al-Hawl, along the key route connecting the two strongholds of Raqqa and Mosul, Tishreen, which connects Raqqa to ISIL's lifeline on the Turkish border, and Tel Abyad, which used to be ISIL's primary point of access to the outside world. In total, more than 40 percent of ISIL-controlled territory has been recovered in Iraq, and as we liberate territory, we are working with the Iraqi government and the Coalition to stabilize populated areas, delegating authority to local officials, and returning the population to their homes. In Tikrit alone, a city that had been totally de-populated by ISIL, more than 95 percent of the population has now returned.

Recent Visit to Syria and Iraq

Last week, I traveled to Syria and Iraq to assess the situation with my own eyes. I travel to Iraq often, but this was my first visit to Syria where we met with a diverse array of local forces now united against ISIL under the banner of the "Syrian Democratic Forces." My visit included a stop in the city of Kobani, a town that history may prove was the decisive turning point against ISIL. It was in Kobani that ISIL launched a massive assault, seeking to lock down the entire Turkish border east of the Euphrates River. By November 2014, only a few blocks in Kobani remained out of ISIL's control. Conventional wisdom held that the city would fall imminently. President Obama decided to give the defenders a chance, and ordered an airdrop of munitions and supplies. I later traveled to Ankara to coordinate with our Turkish allies and then with Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga the opening of a supply corridor into Kobani. These two events allowed the defenders to hold off an ISIL advance, and then gradually claw back ground. The battle lasted six months, cost 1,000 friendly dead, and 6,000 ISIL dead.

Walking the streets of Kobani, I witnessed first-hand the devastation from the battle, and also the resiliency of the community working to rebuild. Bodies – mostly of ISIL fighters, though also of innocent civilians – are still being found in rubble. But life is returning – schools are reopening, commercial activity has begun, and everywhere we went, the population stopped to express thanks to the United States and the international Coalition in helping to save their town from ISIL. The people of Kobani, like the people of Tikrit, Ramadi, and Sinjar, need international support to rebuild their communities, and the Coalition is helping with increased levels of humanitarian assistance. In Iraq, we have established a specialized funding facility – called the Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization – which is focused on immediate needs to return people to their homes. As citizens return to their homes, local forces continue to fight and reverse ISIL's early gains. From Kobani, for example, the SDF

has now cleared ISIL entirely from the border with Turkey east of the Euphrates, and cut off access routes into Raqqa.

From Syria, I traveled to Iraq to see Prime Minister Abadi, Anbar Governor al-Rawi, and Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Barzani, among other leaders. The mood in Baghdad had changed dramatically from my last trip only six weeks ago. This was due largely to the liberation of Ramadi from ISIL. Ramadi represented the greatest test – and success – for newly trained Iraqi Security Forces and their local tribal partners. This was a testament to the Coalition training effort, as well as our political strategy to delegate as much authority as possible to legitimate local leaders, such as the provincial governors.

Next Steps in Iraq and Syria

When I last addressed this committee nearly one year ago, we were developing a plan to apply simultaneous pressure at ISIL choke-points across Iraq and Syria. This plan required us to coordinate with a diverse array of forces on the ground and within the Coalition, as well as synchronized programs across our multiple lines of effort. We are now at a phase, I am pleased to report, where simultaneous pressure is being applied and beginning to choke ISIL in its heartland. While not divulging every aspect of our program in this forum, I can relay some of the key elements to demonstrate how the many pieces are coming together.

1. Turkey Border (last 98 kilometers controlled by ISIL)

As the map that accompanies this statement demonstrates, ISIL's only remaining outlet to the world remains a 98-kilometer strip of the Syrian border with Turkey. Our NATO ally Turkey has made clear that it considers ISIL on their border a national security threat, and the government, in part due to U.S. and international pressure, has taken aggressive measures in recent weeks to impede the flow of ISIL resources and fighters through that segment of the border. The importance of this effort cannot be overstated: loss of access to the border will deprive ISIL entirely of its only route for material and foreign fighters, including disrupting ISIL's ability to exfiltrate fighters back into Europe to conduct external operations. We know that many of the Paris attackers, for example, re-entered Turkey from this strip of border, and later flowed northward back to Europe. The town of Manbij, in particular, is a hub of foreign fighters, and connects roadways north to Turkey and southeast to Raqqa. This is why we are taking aggressive actions on both sides of the border to combat ISIL, make it more difficult for foreign fighters to enter Syria, and, should they enter, leave them no way to get out.

During the G-20 summit in Antalya, President Obama held a constructive meeting with President Erdogan about this situation and how we could work together to protect Turkey's southern border and limit the flow of ISIL fighters and material. Turkey has since undertaken a $100 million project to improve physical infrastructure along the border, erecting walls and defensive berms, installing lighting systems, and increasing patrols. We are helping with these initiatives, including through a January interagency visit to Turkey to discuss border security and related issues, as well as visits to Turkey by experts from our Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including Secretary Johnson

later this month. I recently accompanied Vice President Biden to Istanbul, where we held detailed meetings with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu, and worked out a common vision on closing the border and ensuring the ISIL threat is contained as much as possible within Iraq and inside Syria.

2. Raqqa and Eastern Syria

Raqqa continues to serve as ISIL's administrative capital. It is the headquarters for most external plotting operations, and the location – we believe – of most of ISIL's leaders. It is no longer, however, a safe haven for ISIL. To the contrary, we are putting pressure on Raqqa from multiple angles and this pressure should continue to grow over the coming weeks and months. In eastern Syria, with the help of Coalition air support, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are now in the process of isolating Raqqa. In November, the SDF took back al-Hawl, a key road junction on Highway 47 between Raqqa and Mosul. Following al-Hawl, Kurdish and Arab forces in the SDF retook the Tishreen Dam, a crossing on the route between Raqqa and the Manbij pocket, ISIL's preferred route to the Turkish border. These operations, all of which require political and military coordination, have begun for the first time to restrict the supply and access points into ISIL's heartland. Much of my visit to northern Syria last week was focused on coordinating the various strands of these operations, and ensuring their political and military coherence.

Simultaneously in eastern Syria, we have fused information gathered across multiple lines of effort to uproot ISIL's economic infrastructure. Beginning four months ago, the Coalition stepped up attacks against oil targets as part of Operation Tidal Wave II; destroying roughly four hundred oil trucks and disrupting ISIL fuel supply lines that terrorists use across Syria and into Iraq. Since November, again relying on information gleaned by State, Treasury, and the Intelligence Community, Coalition airstrikes reduced ISIL oil output by thirty percent. U.K. aircraft have played a particularly important role in targeting ISIL's economic infrastructure in this area alongside our own. Denying ISIL economic revenue and constricting its ability to transfer cash is having an impact. ISIL is now slashing its fighter salaries and increasing taxes on local populations.

3. Preparing for Mosul

We will not put a timeline on when Mosul will be liberated, but shaping operations to lay the groundwork for isolating ISIL inside the city have now begun. Kurdish Peshmerga forces two months ago liberated Sinjar, cutting off a highway that feeds Mosul from Syria. This operation was launched simultaneously to the SDF taking al Hawl, and began the bifurcation of northern Iraq from Syria – making it harder for ISIL to move material and supplies. These constricting operations will continue, and set the stage for political efforts to organize and coordinate liberation operations. My visit to Baghdad last week focused on ensuring close cooperation between political leaders, as well as Iraqi Security Force and Peshmerga commanders. Thanks to the great efforts of our Department of Defense colleagues, and our Ambassador in Baghdad, Stu Jones, there is now a joint

command center established east of Mosul to synchronize all of these efforts going forward.

Mosul will not be a D-Day like assault. Nor will we announce when key events are to take place. But ISIL will feel increasing pressure inside this city -- day-to-day and week-to-week. This slow and steady suffocation is now underway. We are killing ISIL members inside Mosul every week. We are also uprooting their sustainment network and have destroyed the cash storage sites used to pay, recruit, and train their fighters. The next phase will require close political coordination among Iraqi and Kurdish officials, security commanders, as well as local notables from Mosul and Ninewa province, and Sunni tribal leaders ready to join the offensive.

4. Ramadi and Anbar Province

Ramadi was the first major complex operation to be completed entirely by retrained Iraqi security forces and local tribal partners. Their success was attributable to a Coalition training program in place since late 2014, and critical decisions made by President Obama and Prime Minister Abadi in the immediate wake of Ramadi's fall to ISIL. In consultation with the Iraqi government, the President quickly ordered the deployment of U.S. military advisors to Taqaddum airbase – just east of Ramadi – to help strengthen the spine of Iraqi forces and plan for a counterattack. Prime Minister Abadi at the same time coordinated with local Anbari officials to re-organize the police force and replace ineffective commanders. Abadi pushed an aggressive agenda to empower local leaders, recruit tribal volunteers, boost police training, and then coordinate military operations and plan for post-ISIL stabilization, working closely their Anbar Governor Rawi. Their personal leadership was essential to the fight.

The Iraqis then proved a will to fight. Iraqi forces suffered over 1,200 casualties in the counter-attack, moving block-by-block to clear the outskirts and then the center of this iconic city. One unit defused over 2,500 IEDs during operations in Ramadi. Today in Ramadi the U.S. and Coalition have pre-positioned $7.3 million for immediate stabilization needs. The Governor of Anbar in coordination with UNDP developed a plan to use these funds to place three electricity substations in Ramadi until voltage lines can be repaired. Thirty-six generators arrived this week with more on the way. Our initial funds will also support the establishment of health clinics, provide ambulances, and repair multiple municipal water tanks and water stations. Coalition stabilization funds will make repairs to local hospitals and water treatment plants as well as provide cash grants to businesses to allow them to re-stock shelves. I spoke to UNDP Iraq Coordinator Lise Grande last week who told me Governor Rawi's advanced stage of planning for Ramadi stabilization was making a significant difference in helping to bring that city back to life.

Still, the needs are enormous. The UNDP projects that $15 million will be needed in the first phase, and $25 million in the second phase, for immediate stabilization to help bring displaced families back home. Governor Rawi stressed to me the most urgent needs were counter-IED support (without properly trained C-IED units, de-mining in Ramadi is

expected to take 9 months to a year); restoration of the city's five main bridges; medical clinics, electricity generators; and mobile housing units for displaced families.

This geographic breakdown summarizes key elements of our strategy to pressure ISIL at key points across Iraq and Syria. Over the next six months we will accelerate and enhance this strategy across all lines of effort. In Syria we will work with Coalition and Syrian partners to seal the last remaining stretch of ISIL-controlled border with Turkey, and further isolate ISIL's de-facto capital of Raqqa. In Iraq, we will help Iraqi forces clear and stabilize the Euphrates River Valley; suffocate ISIL inside Mosul; grow the size of local forces in the fight; and work to stabilize newly liberated areas. This is extremely difficult, but now doable.

Our progress will not always be linear, and we should expect setbacks and surprises. This is among the most complex endeavors imaginable, relying on a diverse array of local forces, many with competing interests or priorities, together with a broad international Coalition from around the world. For the first time, however, our strategic aspirations meet growing capacity on the ground – and we look forward to working closely with this Committee as we work to further strangle and suffocate ISIL in its core areas of Iraq and Syria.

Degrading the Networks

As we degrade ISIL's core we must also attack ISIL's wider networks – including the foreign fighter networks, propaganda and recruitment networks, and financial networks. The foreign fighter network in particular remains an acute concern to the United States and our partners.

Foreign Terrorist Fighter Networks

Our engagement with Middle Eastern and European partners is achieving results through increased information-sharing, better border security, improved counterterrorism legislation, and effective counter-messaging. Foreign terrorist fighters have been broken up and would-be or returning foreign fighters have been arrested or prosecuted in Belgium, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, and Qatar, just to name a few.

We want this progress to accelerate. The U.S. now has agreements with 50 governments to share information on terrorist identities to better identify, track, and deter travel. Over 45 countries have passed or updated existing laws to more effectively identify and prosecute FTFs.

The threat, however, remains acute – and more must be done. We are working with our interagency partners to send Foreign Terrorist Fighter Surge Teams in the first quarter of this year to certain European countries to support them in countering FTF travel. We continue to monitor networks and travel patterns through with information sharing within the Coalition. This program, fusing experts from across the Coalition, had developed a sophisticated understanding of the foreign fighter networks and how to combat them. I had the privilege of meeting with our team of experts and was impressed by the

dedication of those engaged in the constant monitoring of networks from around the globe. Their findings have led to more than 30 FBI investigations and connected dots across borders.

One such example led to a strike on an ISIL terrorist named Sifal Sujan in Raqqa. Sujan was responsible for recruiting foreign terrorist fighters. In December, Coalition airstrikes killed 10 ISIL leaders, including Charaffe al-Mouadan, an external plotter with direct links to Abdelhamid Abaoud, the mastermind behind the Paris attacks.

The external plotting network remains a further core priority for our information gathering and targeting. The death of so-called Jihadi John helped degrade ISIL's external plotting efforts, and we are working to uproot these external plotting cells before threats can materialize.

Financing Networks

Countering terrorist financing is a two-part effort. First, we work to cut terrorists off from their sources of revenue to limit their ability to make money. Second, we focus on isolating them from the international financial system so they cannot spend their money.

We are now making progress degrading ISIL's ability to benefit from energy resources. ISIL still controls over 80 percent of Syria's energy resources, infrastructure and assets and the sector has accounted for 50 percent of ISIL's revenue – or some $500 million per year since 2014. These numbers are now being reduced. ISIL oil revenues are down by about 30 percent. ISIL has since cut its fighter salaries in half, and is burdening the populations under its control with extortionist taxes to alleviate economic shortfalls.

Working closely with the Government of Iraq, we also have focused on decreasing liquidity in ISIL-controlled territory by preventing ISIL from acquiring cash. One of the most important steps to separate ISIL from its revenue was the Government of Iraq's August 2015 decision to ban and hold in escrow the distribution of government salaries into ISIL-held areas, thereby curtailing ISIL's ability to tax these funds. Recent Coalition strikes have also reduced the levels of cash in ISIL-controlled territory. Targeting of bulk cash sites in Mosul has incinerated millions of dollars under ISIL's control.

Much of this success was due to the successful raid last spring on an ISIL terrorist named Abu Sayyaf – Baghdadi's deputy and overall ISIL financial head. U.S. Special Operators recovered over seven terabytes of data in this raid: digital media, flash drives, CDs, and papers. These documents gave us tremendous insight into ISIL's financial situation and its vulnerabilities, which we are now exploiting. ISIL maintains a highly centralized management of its energy program overseen by nearly 100 members. It also carefully vets some 1,600 energy-related personnel (many of them foreign terrorist fighters) to tightly control revenue and distribution streams. Needless to say, many of these individuals are now dead – and the network is no longer able to operate in the open.

Propaganda and Recruiting Networks

Finally, we are now greatly degrading ISIL's ability to operate in cyberspace due to better knowledge of its propaganda and recruiting networks, cooperation from the Coalition, and participation from the private sector. For example, Twitter announced last week that it has eliminated nearly 125,000 ISI- related or ISIL-affiliated sites. Facebook and YouTube are similarly exercising vigilance to remove ISIL-related content from their platforms.

The State Department is now standing up a new Global Engagement Center to integrate and synchronize our communications against violent extremist groups, including ISIL and al-Qa'ida. This new center will shift our paradigm for countering violent extremist messaging. We will move away from a focus on direct messaging and toward an emphasis on empowering and enabling partners, governmental and non-governmental, across the globe. We will also plan social media campaigns to provide fact-based content and information (such as testimony from defectors) that undermines ISIL propaganda.

The Coalition is also enhancing this front in our global campaign. The counter-messaging against ISIL – which spews a false but effective religious-based message – cannot be done primarily from the United States or the United Kingdom. Muslim partners must take the lead. The UAE, for example, has now stood up the Sawab Center, a 24/7 counter-messaging platform. I visited the Sawab Center last year, and was impressed with the dedication of the young Emirati citizens engaged in this campaign. Malaysia is working to set up a similar platform to address the particular audience in Asia, which will be part of a global and networked alliance to counter ISIL on the Internet.

Any messaging campaign is enhanced by success. When ISIL was overtaking major cities, it had a successful messaging campaign – and our counter-campaign struggled. That is no longer the case. ISIL is increasingly on the defense. Its spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, is no longer touting great victories but rather seeking to explain away defeats. There will be more defeats to come – on the ground, and in cyberspace.

Degrading the Global Affiliates

As ISIL loses ground in Iraq and Syria it has sought to compensate by establishing new affiliates around the world. Most of these affiliates represent pre-existing terrorist groups (such as Boko Haram) exploiting the ISIL brand. Nonetheless, where we see clear coordination between the ISIL core in Syria and Iraq and Libya – we must focus on the threat and eliminate the connections that provide it oxygen.

Eight groups have become official ISIL affiliates over the past year, though, as noted, most existed previously as local terrorist groups and have pre-existing human and material networks. The branches in Libya, the Sinai, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen have evolved to pose threats to regional partners. The remaining four branches are in Afghanistan and Pakistan, West Africa – where it is also known as Boko Haram, and the Caucasus.

We know that ISIL has provided financial support from its base in Iraq and Syria to its branches in Libya, Sinai, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. We also know that the ISIL networks previously discussed facilitating expansion by dispatching capable individuals and funds, and promoting a dangerous transnational narrative. This makes it imperative to work as a global Coalition to identify and shut down networks running from the core to the affiliates.

The ISIL branch in Libya is the greatest cause for concern given its attacks to date in Libya and the threat it poses to our regional partners, such as Tunisia and Egypt. The President last month convened his National Security Council and directed them to continue our efforts to strengthen governance and to support ongoing counterterrorism efforts in Libya. Currently, we are supporting the Libyan Political Agreement and formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA). These steps will be important for providing a strong foundation on which the Libyans are able to fight and destroy the emerging ISIL threat to their country. Meanwhile, we are working with our colleagues at DOD and within the intelligence community to develop options for assisting the GNA as soon as it is stood up.

We also continue to monitor ISIL's attempts to establish additional affiliates, such as in Bangladesh and Somalia, and are engaging partners and host nations. There is a strong international consensus on the imperative to rid the world of this terrorist group – and while we focus on the core in Iraq and Syria we are also working to enhance the capacity of local partners to identify and eliminate emerging threats before they can materialize.

The Role of the Global Coalition

ISIL has reacted to these losses in Iraq and Syria by lashing out overseas – conducting the kinds of terrorist attacks that Beirut and Paris witnessed in November and Istanbul and Jakarta witnessed in January. These attacks have only strengthened international resolve.

Since November, the UK has extended its strikes into Syria and the Netherlands committed to doing the same last month. Canada just announced yesterday it will triple the size of its train, advise, and assist missions to help Iraqi Security Forces plan and conduct military operations. France, the UK, and Germany have deployed warships to the eastern Mediterranean. Italy, Australia, and Sweden will send more personnel to Iraq as trainers and advisers, and Germany has raised its deployment ceiling. Other Coalition partners have committed further material support to Syrian forces fighting ISIL, and training provided by the Coalition was instrumental in the December liberation of Ramadi.

Coalition members have also committed over $80 million to stabilization programs in Iraq for areas liberated from ISIL, with millions more pledged. At a recent humanitarian conference in London over $10 billion was pledged in aid for Syria. And just this month the Netherlands committed 75 million euros for immediate humanitarian relief, Japan committed $105 million for Iraq and Syria IDPs and refugees, and Norway pledged an additional $230 million in its 2016 budget for humanitarian assistance.

The barbaric attacks in Paris strengthened Coalition resolve. I was in Paris two days after those attacks with Secretary Kerry, where we met with President Hollande and the French

national security team. We agreed then to accelerate our efforts across the board, and we did – striking ISIL oil tankers, leaders, headquarters, and taking back territory. Last week, in Rome, 23 core members of the Coalition met to plan the next phases in the campaign and contributed substantial new resources from stabilization funds to police trainers. In Brussels later this week, Secretary Carter will hold a similar meeting with defense ministers to discuss the specific needs on the military side from strike aircraft to Special Forces.

Each member of the 66-strong counter-ISIL Coalition spanning every continent has found unique and meaningful ways to impact this fight. Our partners in the Islamic world, such as the UAE and Malaysia are taking the lead in counter ISIL's messaging. Elite Canadian and Australian Special Forces are playing pivotal roles in Iraq, forward deployed with local ground partners helping them to take back and defend key cities like Ramadi and Kirkuk. Italy leveraged its professional Carabinieri to provide top of the line police training to Iraqi police, enabling a local hold force to restore law and order to liberated cities. Jordan and Turkey have taken in millions of refugees, and strained their budgets to the limit in providing top of the line humanitarian assistance. Each partner has a role to play and many have made a difference in this fight.

Conclusion

These are our primary approaches in the fight to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL: suffocate the core, constrict and shut off the networks, and contain and degrade the affiliates. Thanks again to the support of this Committee; we are now making progress against this barbaric terrorist organization.

We have a long ways to go given the enormous complexity of this challenge. I look forward to working with you over the coming year, and answering your questions.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador. Briefly here, you argue, as has the administration, about the importance for local partners in ISIS-held territory. I certainly agree with that. Sunni partners are very important. So if Aleppo, which has been encircled, if that falls as the Russians pummel it and as Hezbollah and as Assad attempt to collapse Aleppo, will we have any Free Syrian Army partners left?

And then the other concern I have in terms of the Sunni population is I understand that the Shia-led government in Iraq is working to use the justice system to further push out the Sunnis. And so if the central government in Iraq is unwilling to make the reforms needed in order to create a more inclusive government and inclusive security forces, what will be left of Iraq? And what will be left of this effort to include Sunnis in our effort to put down ISIS?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a critical question and it is something that we work on every day. Not only at the local level where the fight against ISIS is going on, but also at the national level. I will start in Iraq with the Government of Iraq.

Iraq just passed a budget through its Council of Representatives with a very important provision. It is Article 40 of its budget. And it allocates 30 percent, of what he called the Popular Mobilization Forces, that 30 percent have to come from provinces that are actively fighting ISIL. And that authorizes almost 30,000 Sunni fighters enrolled in the state security services to fight ISIL. We have almost 15,000 now. And they are being paid, and they are being paid about $680 to $750 a month. And that might not sound like much to us, but the rural labor earning for an average Iraqi worker is about $36 per month.

So Prime Minister Abadi has put his money where his mouth is. It is reflected in the budget. He tells us every single day he wants to get the local Sunnis in the fight and we are helping them. When Ramadi fell, President Obama made the decision to deploy U.S. Special Forces to Taqaddum Airbase, which is on the map which I showed earlier, just east of Ramadi right in the heart between Ramadi and Fallujah. And we deployed out there immediately to work with the Iraqi security forces to get them back on their feet and to integrate Sunni tribal fighters into the fight. And that has been a success.

In Haditha, our special forces are there working with three local tribes who are now mobilized actively fighting ISIL. So we are gaining some real capacity in Iraq on the Sunni tribal fighter side.

In Syria, Mr. Chairman, you hit something on the head. Because what is happening with the Russian air strikes is that they are primarily focused on the opposition and that is happening with opposition forces we were working with to fight ISIL. And if you look on this map, just north of Aleppo you can see the extent of ISIL's western advance. We were working with local opposition forces to move east to fight ISIL and that was a very sophisticated endeavor.

But as the Russian air strike campaign has begun, particularly north of Aleppo, those fighters now peeled off that line to go fight the regime advance and this is causing real problems for the counter-ISIL campaign. And, frankly, we tell the Russians this

very clearly. You say you are fighting ISIL, but what you are doing is actually having a detrimental effect to the fight against ISIL. And this remains a very serious concern.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. I was going to ask the Ambassador also, in addition to this job as Mr. Engel pointed out, you helped negotiate the release of the Americans being held by Iran. And last year the families of these Americans sat at this table. And three of these families are overjoyed by your work, and of course we all want answers to Mr. Levinson's whereabouts.

But I am concerned that on the same day these Americans were released, the Department sent Iran a check for another $1.7 billion on top of the $100 billion that was released at that time, and I was going to ask you what you knew about that payment. I found that in politics there are rarely coincidences, and a State Department spokesman said that Iran raised this payment with you as part of the talks on the Americans and Iranian Basij commander called this $1.7 billion "ransom," in his words. And as you know, I have submitted detailed questions to the Secretary which we are anxious to receive.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, first, we look forward to answering all of your detailed questions. This is a very complex negotiation that went on for 14 months focused on the issue of prisoners. The issue of a Hague settlement was a parallel process. We have really had three areas of negotiations with Iranians, really, over the last 30 years. There has been The Hague tribunal process, and in that process over 30 years almost 4,700 private U.S. claims. Every single private U.S. claim has been adjudicated by The Hague. Those have all been settled. All that really is left is a few of these government to government claims.

And that Hague negotiation with our lawyers at the State Department who have been doing this, many of them for decades and they would be happy to come up and discuss it with you in some detail, they were negotiating with the Iranians over a number of issues at The Hague over the fall and they came to some important settlement agreements, some important agreements on fossils, on artwork, and also an opportunity opened to settle this very important issue having to do with a $400 million FMS claim. And the lawyers who negotiate this were able to close that out, which was very important, and they would be happy to talk to you about why this was in the interest of U.S. taxpayers and the United States.

We were facing substantial, substantial liability on this claim. As I understand it from the lawyers who negotiated this we were at the courthouse steps. There was going to be a judgment and it would have been potentially in the multiple billion dollars more than that we settled on.

So I think we have your questions, Mr. Chairman. I know we will be looking forward to answering those, and our attorneys, et al., who really work in this every day, will give you the details.

Chairman ROYCE. I think some of the details should have probably been shared with us during negotiations, but let me raise this last point. I have raised Libya with you. The new visa waiver law that we passed, you now have a situation of foreign fighters traveling to Libya for training.

It would be possible under that law to categorize foreign nationals who travel to Libya as not being qualified for visa-free entry into the United States, and I was wondering if you were involved in discussions with Homeland Security, or if the administration was, on that problem. Otherwise we may find some of the same challenges we found when out of Syria through Turkey to Europe we had ISIS fighters who could have taken advantage of the visa waiver program.

Mr. MCGURK. Mr. Chairman, I have not been involved in those precise discussions. I am very concerned about the situation in Libya, so I am sure that we can have the right follow-up.

Chairman ROYCE. I would like to have Libya added to that list.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. But thank you. I will go to Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In a recent op-ed in the Washington Post, former State Department officials, Nicholas Burns whom we know well and Jim Jeffrey concluded that relying on diplomacy alone will not be effective in Syria, and said that—and I quote them:

> "The Obama team would have to reconsider what it has rejected in the past, the creation of a safe zone in northern Syria to protect civilians along with a no-fly zone to enforce it."

A safe zone would allow the refugees to have a place to go where they would not be under constant bombardment by Assad or Russia. And since Assad remains a magnet for extremists, I believe that the longer Assad remains in power, the longer the coalition will be fighting ISIS in Syria. Assad's reign only exacerbates the refugee crisis, making a safe zone, I believe, even more necessary. However, Assistant Secretary Anne Patterson said at a committee hearing late last year, and I quote her:

> "There is no option on the table, nor recommended by the Defense Department that does not require a massive, massive amount of air support that would then detract from the effort against ISIL."

So let me ask you this, Ambassador. Under what circumstances would the administration consider supporting a no-fly zone, what are the challenges in establishing a no-fly zone or a safe zone, and how has Russian military involvement impacted the prospects for a safe zone or no-fly zone? Because absent a safe zone, I don't know how innocent Syrians protect themselves.

Mr. MCGURK. Congressman, it is something we look at all the time. We have actually had a number of internal discussions about the possibility of establishing some sort of no-fly zone. And you should speak with some of my DoD colleagues about the details and difficulties of actually establishing it. It has been fully looked at. But everybody would agree with you that the situation right now is totally unacceptable.

I am leaving tonight for Munich where we will have a meeting tomorrow with everybody in this international support group for Syria which includes Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, also Iran and Russia, us, everybody around the table, and there is a recognition that this situation is completely, totally unacceptable. We were

very close in Vienna not long ago, as Secretary Kerry has discussed, to a ceasefire, and we are going to work very hard over the coming days to try to put in place a ceasefire. Because so long as this conflict is going on it makes my job against ISIL all the more difficult, and the humanitarian consequences of what is happening is just truly atrocious and terrible.

So we have to get to a way to de-escalate this underlying conflict. To de-escalate the underlying conflict there has to be a political process that can ultimately lead to a transition in Damascus. The struggle we face from time to time is that the collapse of the regime in Damascus would open up a vacuum which terrorist groups are able to fill and so we want to have a political process that can lead to a transition. That is something that Secretary Kerry in particular has been working very assiduously on, but nobody can underestimate the difficulties.

We are hopeful that in Munich over the coming days we can make some progress on a ceasefire, and most importantly on a humanitarian corridor. The Russians claim that they are cutting off weapons supply corridors, but they are actually cutting off humanitarian corridors. So at the very least they need to put their money where their mouth is and open up the humanitarian corridors immediately to all of these besieged areas that the U.N. has identified.

Mr. ENGEL. Not long ago we were saying that Assad has got to go. Then we were saying that Assad has got to go before we can have these discussions. And now we are sort of hedging our bets and saying, well, Assad can sort of go at the end of them or as long as Assad understands he cannot be part of a new Syrian coalition. Doesn't it seem like we just keep backtracking and backtracking?

Mr. MCGURK. I think everybody looking at the Syria situation recognizes that so long as Assad is in power there will never be a stable Syria. Too much has happened. The crimes against humanity, everything that he is responsible for, he will never be able to govern. His writ will never extend to the rest of the country. It is completely impossible.

And in these conversations we have in Vienna, the Russians understand that. The Iranians don't seem to understand that. But it is a complete fantasy to think the Assad regime is ever going to be able to establish its writ over Syria. And so we have to have a way to have a political transition, but we do want to do it in a managed way through a political process that doesn't open up further vacuums.

But I agree with you entirely, Congressman. Assad cannot remain in power if we are ever going to get out of this incredibly difficult situation.

And as I mentioned, discussed with the chairman, it is a question what is going on north of Aleppo. In my job on ISIL, in fighting ISIL, we had some real progress to push across what we call the Mari line, and the Russian air strikes have pulled those forces to fight the regime when they are ready to fight ISIL. So what Russia is doing is directly enabling ISIL. So that is one of the reasons we are getting together in Munich tomorrow, but this will be a very difficult 3 days coming up.

But we are going to be very firm. The situation is totally unacceptable. It is causing humanitarian catastrophe. It is strengthening the regime of Assad, and all that does is fuel extremists on both sides of the sectarian divide. It fuels the Hezbollahs. It fuels the ISILs. It fuels the Nusras. So we have to come together as great powers, all of us, Turkey, U.S., Saudi Arabia, Russia, and figure out a way to settle this conflict down, otherwise it is going to come to haunt all of us.

Mr. ENGEL. I have one final question. I have been having discussions, and in fact, the chairman and I have been having discussions with some of our Sunni Arab friends, and they express to us frustration at the United States for not being more of a player that is deeply involved; that we seem to be reluctant to be involved. And they paint a picture of the fact that they are ready to come forward if we come forward. If we lead, they are ready to do it.

But they describe a reluctance on the part of the United States to get involved, and they say that they believe that Russia moved into Syria because they knew that the U.S. wasn't moving and wouldn't really be able to do anything or wouldn't be willing to do anything against the Russians. How do you answer that? They paint a picture of just reluctance on our part, of us not really leading. Of us, they would be willing to be with us, but we are recalcitrant. How do you answer that?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, in terms of the ISIL campaign, we have done over 10,000 air strikes now. We have U.S. forces on the ground in Syria. We have U.S. forces on the ground in Iraq. We welcome our partners to join us in that endeavor. And we have done some real damage to ISIL and we are looking for others to join us, to tell you the truth.

So that is something where I think we have led, and in fact Secretary Carter is meeting in Brussels today with the defense ministers of the coalition. And one of the things he is putting on members of our coalition, including a number of the Arab partners, is that ISIL is a threat to you. Saudi Arabia, one of our closest friends in the world, ISIL is in Saudi Arabia. And the Saudis are doing a lot against ISIL, but of course we want them to do more. We want all of our partners to do more.

So this is a constant discussion we have. Our interests don't always align directly with many of our partners' interests. This is something that is natural in foreign policy with our friends. But this is something that we are discussing constantly. I know Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir was here yesterday. He saw the secretary. We will see him in—I know he saw a number of you, and we will see him in Munich tomorrow to try to align our approaches.

But as a leader of the coalition, Congressman, it is something I deal with all around the world to try to get a focus on this core threat of ISIL and try to align our resources accordingly. But when it comes to the Assad regime we have to get a political process on track otherwise it is going to continue to go on, and that is why we are hopeful over the coming days in Munich we can make some progress.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Chairman Royce. Thank you, Ranking Member Engel. And welcome back, Special Envoy McGurk. It is an honor to be with you. I continue to be stunned that the State Department believes still that Russia and Iranian engagement in Syria could be a positive development. With the help of Iranian forces and Russian air power, we are seeing Assad's forces creep closer to Aleppo, as has been pointed out a strong base for the opposition, and the regime is on the brink of encircling the city in order to starve the population with Russia indiscriminately bombing residential areas.

Assistant Secretary Patterson testified to a question I asked her in November in a hearing that Assad's atrocities are a recruiting tool for ISIS and that it is not possible for us to defeat ISIS while Assad's massacres continue with Iran and Russia's help. So what steps is the administration taking to prevent a massacre of Syria's remaining moderate opposition? When will we air drop humanitarian supplies to the people of Aleppo? Is that still something that we are going to do?

And you have said to the chairman and the ranking member that Russia is a problem, but does the administration intend to take any measure to stop Russia from bombing Syria's civilians, and how can we justify asking the Syrian opposition to drop its condition that the Assad regime, Russia and Iran cease committing these crimes against humanity as a condition to continue to the Geneva talks? So I look forward to that answer.

But let me just bring up two quick points, Mr. Ambassador. I wanted to ask you about the future plans for the Iraqi Jewish Archives. Can they stay in the United States? I raise it now as I have in the past. We have worked together with you and I thank you because you have been very engaged on this with the Iraqi Government. I don't want the State Department to return these precious artifacts, the Iraqi Jewish Archives, and what is the fate of the Archives after the exhibit ends its run at my alma mater, Florida International University?

And lastly, now that Iran has been legitimized through the JCPOA, received billions of dollars in sanctions relief through which it can continue its reign of terror, what guarantees have you received from the Iraqis, and have you brought it up to protect the residents of Camp Liberty from this newly strengthened and well-funded regime in Tehran? You can give me a written response on that.

Will we be providing aerial protection, which is what the residents want now, to the Camp Liberty residents, and are we going to continue to put T-walls in place or not? But if you could answer the question about what we are doing to prevent a massacre and air drop humanitarian supplies and the role of Russia, thank you, sir.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen. I want to thank you in particular for your cooperation on the very difficult issue of the Iraqi Jewish Archives and we are very honored that they are on display in your district. And when I was the Iraq DAS I worked on this issue quite a bit. I am no longer in that role, but I still care very much about it. I understand they are scheduled to run through the end of the year. And let me take that back to the State

Department and get you a very detailed answer on that question. And also on the MEK, that is something I also continue to follow quite closely. We have made some progress in getting those folks out of Iraq, many of them going to Albania, but I will also get you a written answer on that.

On the question of the humanitarian situation in Syria, I will just repeat what I said. It is completely unacceptable. The failure to provide humanitarian assistance to besieged communities in Syria is not only an international law obligation; it is now anchored by a brand-new U.N. Security Council resolution. This is something that we have to open up these corridors, period.

And so first and foremost on the agenda when we get to Munich is the humanitarian corridor issue. There are besieged communities across Syria, millions of people. Some of them are besieged by ISIL. Some of them are besieged by—most of them are besieged by the regime. Some of them are besieged by more extreme elements of the opposition. All of them should have humanitarian access. That is a principle of international law. It is bounded by a U.N. Security Council resolution that we all agreed to as part of the Syria support group process, and it is first and foremost on the agenda in Munich. And again without underestimating the difficulty, I am hoping we can come out of Munich with some agreements on that.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you, Chairman Royce.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We go now to Mr. David Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and thank you, Mr. McGurk, for being here. I want to just focus for a moment on the effort to address the issue of the terrorist financing of ISIL. And I know you indicated in your written testimony that ISIL controls 80 percent of Syria's energy supply and it accounts for 50 percent of their revenues, about $500 million a year since 2014.

And so my first question is who is purchasing this oil generating the $500 million of revenue? And you also indicated that there are 100 members of a centralized management team as well as 1,600 energy related personnel. What are we doing to get to those individuals who are facilitating the financing of this terrorist organization?

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Congressman. So I will elaborate what is in my written testimony. You are right. We believe ISIL's overall revenue is about $1 billion a year. It is less than that now. That is $500 million from energy products. It is purchased by a lot of middlemen and it is hard to tell exactly where it is going. The Russians claim Turkey is buying most of it; that actually is not true. The regime is buying a lot of ISIL oil, but what is happening is it is sold to middlemen and then it goes to a third party and so it is hard to trace from ISIL to the actual end user.

But it is a significant revenue stream that we are now significantly degrading. They are not able to do what they were able to do in the past. We had a big debate amongst ourselves about when to target the trucks because the truck drivers, most of them are ordinary Iraqis and ordinary Syrians. So what we did, a very sophisticated campaign in which we—I won't say exactly how, but we

warned them that if you are driving trucks here your days are going to be numbered. And we were able to destroy about 400 trucks in one shot with very limited collateral damage or civilian deaths, and it has had a tremendous impact on their ability to move oil around.

So we will continue to do that but it is a fundamental priority of the overall campaign, not just taking back territory but denying their revenue sources. And in Mosul, because of our intelligence picture, we were able to target where they had cash warehouse sites. I mean, hundreds of millions of dollars that is how they pay their fighters in Mosul no longer exists.

Mr. CICILLINE. Second, I want to ask you about we have seen a lot of the success of ISIL using the Internet and social media both to promote their propaganda as well as recruit. And I would like to hear a little bit about what we are doing and how we are helping to counter that narrative. This is obviously a religious based, false argument but an effective one, and not a response or narrative that we can necessarily respond to effectively as the United States. But are there efforts underway so that somebody is responding to this very aggressively in the same medium to help stem the flow of additional recruits?

And final question I will ask so you will have time to answer both of them is, at the donor conference I know there was a commitment by Germany of $1.2 billion, I think, the United States over $600 million, but we still aren't seeing the same kind of level of support from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. This is a huge humanitarian crisis of really unprecedented magnitude, and what can we do to encourage these other countries to play a more generous role in dealing with the humanitarian crisis?

Mr. MCGURK. Let me address the messaging issue because it is really critical. ISIL, we have looked at this in some detail, they have three main messaging campaigns. One is the glory of the caliphate. These sun-drenched scenes of children eating ice cream cones and come-bring-your-family is a total lie, but it is actually the majority of their content. Second is a religiously based message primarily focused in the Gulf and other Muslim communities, and then third is what gets a lot of attention which is the gore and the kind of the executions and beheadings. That is actually the smallest number of their content.

But we are combating it at every single level, so we have a 24/7 hub now in the UAE. The UAE has been a really critical partner here. It is called the Sawab Center. I went to see them. These are young Emiratis, actually people from all around the region working 24/7 to combat the messages. They have had really a pretty good effect particularly with the campaign which highlighted defectors from ISIL that in their own narratives and their own testimony told the world what it was really like to be under this organization.

So I think we are actually making some progress now in the messaging campaign. We are working closely with Twitter, with YouTube, with Facebook. Twitter just took down about 125,000 ISIL affiliated, ISIL related sites. And the messaging gets a lot easier when we are making progress. If you are doing a messaging campaign for the Washington Redskins, it is easier when the team is winning than when the team is losing.

So in 2014 when it looked like ISIL was on the march and they would put out these videos of their flag going from Iraq to Syria all the way to Italy and Rome, they really can't say that with any credibility anymore. Their messages now, their spokesman, as I quoted in my written testimony, most of his statements now are defending the fact, explaining why they are losing so much territory.

So it has changed quite a bit, but we have to remain at it 24/7; the UAE has been key. We want to set up a similar hub, 24/7, in Malaysia because there is a very different messaging propaganda component going out to East Asia, and also Europe because it is a different campaign there. So we have to check that 24/7.

In terms of the air contributions, I have to say the Saudis put in $500 million into Iraqi humanitarian at a critical, critical moment in Iraq. I will actually never forget that being in Iraq. It was a really critical need and that money went to good use and saved an awful lot of lives. I will have to get for you, Congressman, the donations from those states at the recent London donor's conference. I think there were some pretty good contributions, but I will have to come back to you with the details.

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

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We go to Mr. Chris Smith of New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this very important hearing. And Mr. McGurk, welcome, again, to the committee and thank you for your good work. Let me just ask you a couple of questions. While the administration's focus is on ISIS, how is this impacting the growth of al-Nusra? Does the focus on ISIS risk allowing other groups like al-Nusra to grow in strength, and what is the plan to defeat it and other like-minded groups?

Let me also ask, you point out that fighters, foreign fighters, are coming from about 100 countries. And I am wondering, the flow back and forth, how many are from the U.S., years to date, if you have that number. When you talk about groups like Boko Haram, are terrorists from Boko Haram making their way to ISIS and back again, or is there no flow there?

You do talk, and I am glad you do, about degrading the global affiliates. Are we, for example, with regards to Boko Haram truly training particularly the Nigerians, of course with Leahy vetted troops, how to do counterinsurgency on an order and scale that will help make them more effective, because obviously Boko Haram is on a tear in its terrorism. So if you could speak to those I would appreciate it.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Congressman. I want to go briefly through your very good questions. Nusra is a real problem and as we focus on ISIL we can't take our sights off Nusra. Nusra is core al-Qaeda. Its leader Julani reports directly to Ayman al-Zawahiri. And while the estimates vary, there are about 10,000 Nusra affiliated fighters in Syria. We think most of them are Syrians who are kind of under the banner of Nusra because that is just where they are going to survive.

But we have to unravel Nusra. When we see a threat emanating from Nusra, we target it. The Khorasan group is something that we have talked about before. That was a core al-Qaeda type external plotting cell which we completely eliminated. So we are very focused on Nusra. And it is very important for you to remind all of us that it is not just ISIL, but Nusra is an acute threat to the United States.

Let me just jump to Boko Haram and the affiliates. A lot of the affiliates who are now raising the banner of ISIL, they are pre-existing terrorist groups. Boko Haram is a good example. It is not like suddenly they became an ISIL affiliate and became a fundamentally different problem. It is a problem that is unique to that part of the world, to Nigeria, and we have to work with our local partners to combat it.

I think you have asked some good questions about the vetting standards, making sure we have a credible force that is able to effectively combat it, and I know that we are very focused on that. But the affiliates with ISIL that we are most concerned about in Libya, for example, and Libya is where it wasn't a preexisting movement, they rose the flag of ISIL and it drew a lot of recruits like a magnet. We have seen the direct flow of resources, of command and control, of propaganda from ISIL core into Libya. Right now in Libya, again if we see a threat emerging we will not hesitate to act.

The President ordered a strike on Abu Nabil, the number one leader of ISIL in Libya, and he was eliminated. He was an ISIL guy, former al-Qaeda in Iraq guy from Iraq, so that just shows the connections between ISIL core and Libya, which is very concerning. The number of foreign fighters in the United States, I think we have those specific numbers. I don't want to give it to you just off the top of my head, but I believe it is in the low hundreds.

But our FBI is all over this problem and they are doing a great job to protect the country against these threats and they will continue to do so, but I will follow up with you on the precise figures.

Mr. SMITH. I appreciate it. Just before my time runs out, the Boko Haram fighters, is there any exchange between fighters? Do any of those go to Syria to fight? And is al-Shabaab a part of this as well?

Mr. MCGURK. So al-Shabaab is not a formal affiliate, but we have found Somalis on the battlefield in Iraq. So these jihadist networks, they all, there is a symbiotic relationship. The good thing about Iraq and Syria is if they come into Iraq and Syria, as I mentioned in my statement, they are unlikely to get out. We are going to make sure we kill them in Iraq and Syria. But Libya is an emerging threat from Africa because a lot of the guys are pooling up to Libya.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We go to Mr. Gregory Meeks of New York.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me start with this and I want to kind of follow up with what Mr. Cicilline said. He talked about Saudi Arabia's activities or asked there about their contributions on a humanitarian level. In fighting against ISIS or ISIL in Syria, et cetera, I am concerned, because a lot of this is

Sunni, Shia also, and what the Arab states and what the Sunnis, and in particular Saudi Arabia, may be doing on a military level on the ground.

Are they doing—I know initially they sent out some jets, et cetera, whether they are still fighting, whether they—what are they doing or what contributions are they making on a military level in regards to this fight and how does that play into our equation?

Mr. MCGURK. So it is something that Secretary Carter has discussed quite a bit publicly, and he is discussing in Brussels today with our partners. Most of the GCC states were with us in the early stages of the air campaign. Right now Jordan has renewed their air strikes in Syria which we are grateful for. The Emirates, I think, are about to do that. Saudi Arabia has been very focused on the conflict in Yemen, of course. This is something we discuss with them quite a bit, so we are constantly engaged with them about what the particular role can be. And I don't want to get ahead of the process, but that is something that Secretary Carter is discussing in some detail with the defense ministers in Brussels today, including Mohammad bin Salman from Saudi Arabia.

But we need the region to be fully invested in this fight, but it is not just military as was mentioned earlier. It is also the humanitarian and the stabilization side. In Iraq now, as I mentioned, these are iconic Sunni cities that have now been cleared of ISIL and now we want to return the population to get back on their feet. The internally displaced in Iraq, most of them are Sunnis, 70 percent of them are women and girls and they need help.

And so on the humanitarian, on the stabilization side, that is something where the region, we are very hopeful can step up in a fairly aggressive way. Because we have the programs in place, we have the support of the Iraqi Government in place, we have U.N. programs in place to help people, but it is an issue of the resources.

And one thing that has really hampered this quite a bit is just the collapsing price of oil, which I can go into some detail. I mean, Iraq is now facing a monthly, about a $5 billion financing gap. They are producing more oil than they have in some time, over 4 million barrels a day. When I was working on Iraq, full time, 5 years ago that would have been unimaginable, 4 million barrels a day. That is because of decisions the Iraqi Government has made and decisions that we have made with them, and that is a real testament to their progress.

But the falling price of oil has just greatly impacted their budget situation. It has depleted the resources we had hoped we would have to deal with some of these stabilization and humanitarian problems. So that is something, Congressman, where the region we are very hopeful can contribute.

Mr. MEEKS. Well, I just, because I was just surprised at a recent statement that Saudi Arabia made saying that if the United States put troops on the ground that they would be right behind us militarily. And I was just wondering why, that it has to be as you said something where if anybody is going to be on the ground so it doesn't look like we are occupying anyone again or coming in in that regard, the Sunni especially in Sunni territory that they and

those from the Arab League be the ones that are out in front and not the United States of America.

So when I heard that statement I was just wondering whether or not they have been further engaged militarily or not, and whether they have shown—and I know about Yemen—but have they shown because ISIL is still a threat to them also, and so whether they are willing to really step up.

Same thing to some regards with Turkey and what they may or may not be doing. And let me ask you that question then, what they may not be doing militarily also in regards to the fight with ISIL. What about Turkey?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, Turkey as a part of this process, a very intense negotiation and an agreement with them to base our planes at Incirlik Airbase which has dramatically decreased the flying time to be able to strike ISIL targets. And we are very grateful for the agreements we have reached with Turkey in that regard.

Turkey has also, as I mentioned, really worked to seal its border, that 98 kilometer strip of border. It is much harder for these foreign fighters to get into Syria than it was until then. Turkey is also caring for 2.1 million refugees from Syria, spending almost $8 billion, something people forget about. So Turkey is doing an awful lot here.

Militarily, they are doing some very important air strikes in the north of the country. Right now we are working with them to get them back into the campaign, but we are doing that very carefully because the conflict with, not conflict but the tension between Turkey and Russia after Turkey shot down a Russian plane after the Russian plane violated Turkey's airspace kind of complicated the picture. So that is something we are working very closely with Turkey on. But we are very comfortable with Turkey's contributions. They are a critical NATO ally of ours and so we will continue to work closely with them.

Mr. MEEKS. Great. Thank you. I am out of time.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Mr. Dana Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you for your service. And when you mentioned in the beginning of your testimony that Abu Sayyaf had left this world with our help, was that the same Abu Sayyaf that was the power in Afghanistan 20 years ago, or is this another Abu Sayyaf?

Mr. MCGURK. No. This is an individual that was a legacy al-Qaeda in Iraq, Zarqawi acolyte, very much from the Iraq-Syria theater. He was their head financier.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So he is not the same guy who was the financier back in——

Mr. MCGURK. Not that I am aware of.

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. Mujahideen days. How many fighters do we have? How many people are fighting Assad, the number of fighters that are there, and I guess Aleppo and that region?

Mr. MCGURK. I can't put a number on Aleppo. The uppermost estimate of our moderate opposition fighter, the uppermost estimate I have heard is about 70,000 fighters. That is all the way from the south to the north.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes.

Mr. MCGURK. But those are split into hundreds of different groups.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay.

Mr. MCGURK. So to bring coherence to that is very difficult.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And are there any of those anti-Assad fighters who are fighting ISIL at this point?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, yes. And before the Russian air strike campaign, we felt pretty good about some—the word, I guess, is coherence and capacity that we were gaining along that Mari line which is on the map which I projected. But since then, a lot of those guys have peeled off from the ISIL fight to fight the regime, which has not been helpful to the ISIL campaign.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, let us just note that this administration has told us before that there will be no civility unless we get rid of so-and-so or so-and-so, and in fact the opposite has been true. In Libya in particular, which you outlined today as being a catastrophe, we were told in almost the same words that you have used today there is never going to be any peace there until we get rid of Gaddafi and in fact that is why we have to help the non-Gaddafi forces, and now we have testimony of course that ISIL is on the verge of taking over Libya. Let me note that I didn't see Assad as ever a threat. Was Assad ever a threat to the United States?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, Assad has given sustenance to Hezbollah and then terrorist groups for a number of years. He is a threat to some of our closest partners in the region.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Assad was never a threat to the United States. Frankly, we Republicans made a mistake when we backed our President when he said we have to get rid of Saddam Hussein. And frankly, it looks like to me that all of this chaos and confusion that you are describing today that unfortunately is in your lap to try to correct started when we made a mistake that we have to get rid of Saddam Hussein because he is a bad guy and he is committing atrocities against his own people. And that has destabilized the whole region and led to many thousands more people being killed.

I would think, frankly, from a distance it looks like Assad is in that same type of, fighting Assad is the same type of situation. Let me ask how many of the ISIL fighters are foreigners, meaning from other areas rather than Syria and Iraq?

Mr. MCGURK. The total number of foreign fighters that have come into the theater are above 30,000, but many of them as I mentioned in my opening it has decreased quite a bit. So foreign fighters fighting with ISIL now, I probably would put in the number of, and according to our most recent estimates, of 15,000 or so are left.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. 15,000. And how many of those come from places like Chechnya?

Mr. MCGURK. Oh, a lot. And in fact, one example, when I was in Iraq recently with the Baiji campaign there was a major battle for the Baiji refinery. A very heroic battle that went on for almost a year, and we were picking up mostly the fighters that our guys were dealing with—speaking Russian.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So we have all of these thousands of radical Islamic terrorist fighters and who come from Russia and Chechnya, and so the Russians maybe have something, maybe even more important, for them to be involved than us to be involved, because they have had exact fighters from their country. I don't believe there are any Americans over there with that terrorist group.

Let me just say the idea that the Turkish—that you don't know that we don't know where those trucks are going and who is purchasing that fuel is unacceptable. Let me just say that before the Russians started bombing those trucks, which then ignited this outrage from Turkey, that before they did this body, this committee, saw evidence day after day after day of trucks loaded with fuel, thus meaning supplies and money and wealth that would go into ISIL were just not touched. How much evidence, Mr. Chairman, did we have, overwhelming evidence that this administration wasn't doing a thing about it and once the Russians started then we did.

I think that this idea that——

Mr. MCGURK. Well, if I could just correct the record just to raise a point. I think once the French, it was the French, after the attack in Paris attributable to ISIS forces the French made the decision to hit those targets on the open highway.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me also note that the Russians were doing that. However, you never know who the Russians are hitting because that is their business. They haven't been able to outline it for us.

I would just say this. That people who are a threat to the United States of America, to our people, the terrorist network from around the world, we should be working closely with anyone like that who is not a threat to us. And whether or not they oppress their own people, I am sorry. We didn't like Saddam Hussein, and look what we did to the world by getting rid of him. We didn't like Gaddafi. There is a number of cases like this. And the idea, our question shouldn't be how do we get rid of Assad, and spending lots of attention and resources on that. Our vision should be how do we get rid of ISIL and these radical Islamists who will terrorize the western world and murder us if they get a chance? Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. We now go to Mr. Gerry Connolly of Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I certainly want to concur with my friend from California in his critique of the mistake by Republicans in supporting the reckless foreign policy of George W. Bush. I certainly want to associate myself with those remarks.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Absolutely.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I will point out though that some of the current critique like Libya, it would be fun to replay video of my colleagues who criticized President Obama for not being more involved in Libya at the time, for being too reluctant, for not taking the lead and being at the forefront of the revolution against Gaddafi, and now we are bemoaning the fact that the stability was a victim as well as the Gaddafi regime.

So that was then, this is now. Welcome, Ambassador McGurk. Let me start with Russia, one of the favorite topics of my friend from California. How concerned are we that Russia's air strikes in Syria are non-ISIL focused and, in fact, they have targeted either deliberately or just coincidentally non-ISIL insurgent groups that we were hoping to use as part of the coalition against Assad?

Mr. MCGURK. It is a huge problem, and——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Could you say that louder? I couldn't hear you.

Mr. MCGURK. Yes, it is a huge problem. They say they want to fight ISIL and Nusra, but they are hitting groups that were ready, as I mentioned, ready to fight ISIL. So this is where we just have to be honest. They are hitting, 70 percent of their air strikes are against the opposition. Many of those opposition groups are ready to fight ISIL.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So we now have a situation where the Russian activity in Syria is directly in conflict with western goals. Is that correct? Would that be fair?

Mr. MCGURK. You can't put it in total black and white terms because there are some overlapping interests. They are hitting ISIL around Palmyra, so I want to acknowledge that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes, but given the fact you said 70 percent we don't want to equivocate.

Mr. MCGURK. But at very strategic locations like the Mari line north of Aleppo their air strikes have helped ISIL.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Is the United States prepared to do something about that besides a diplomatic protest?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, as I think the Secretary said yesterday, I think we have to focus on the diplomatic process and that is why we are going to get together tomorrow in Munich. But we also have to be thinking ahead in the event that that doesn't work.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. Well, all right. I think it was Frederick the Great who said, "L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace." One needs to be bold. I hope diplomatic protests work, but we cannot afford to have Russia countermanding our activities which have been difficult and hard to piece together on the field in Syria. And it just seems to me we will need to maybe follow Frederick the Great's advice.

Tell me a little bit about the complications of working with the Kurds. From my point of view, and I think a lot of my colleagues' on this committee, the Kurds are pro-American. They are willing to fight on the ground. They have had territorial gains. They have actually beaten ISIL on the battlefield more than once. They are critical in looking at the looming fight with respect to Aleppo, but they have problems with the central government and they have had other problems with some of our allies in the region like Turkey. How complicated is that relationship, and what ought to be the U.S. posture with respect to training, equipping, and financing the Peshmerga?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, Congressman, I will start in Iraq. There are vestiges of what used to happen under the government of former Prime Minister Maliki in which the relationship was very difficult. With Abadi it has been very different. And I just want to be clear. Every single shipment of weapons or supplies that we wanted to send to the Kurds has gone. Nothing has been held up by the cen-

tral government under Prime Minister Abadi, I mean zero. Under the ITEF that was approved for this——

Mr. CONNOLLY. But they are not paying the soldiers.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, a lot of people in Iraq are not getting paid. I mean, what is happening now in Iraq in terms of the oil allocation, the Kurds are exporting their oil on their own and keeping those revenues and they are not therefore getting the revenues from the south, which is actually an equitable exchange.

But as I mentioned, Iraq, writ large, has focused every single month now a $5 billion funding deficit. That is a problem writ large. For the Kurdish Peshmerga there is about a $400 million monthly gap. Peshmerga salaries are about $50 million a month. So we want to focus on this in a holistic way in working with the World Bank, the IMF, with the international financial institutions. I think our budget requests will have some recommendations for how we might help the Iraqis here, but we want to focus on it holistically.

But the Kurds will have what they need to fight ISIL. They will have what they need to be successful in the Mosul campaign, no question about it. I will see President Barzani. I believe he is going to be in Munich so I will look forward to seeing him. Prime Minister Abadi will also be in Munich.

When I was in Iraq last week, a very senior delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government was in Baghdad to meet with Prime Minister Abadi. That relationship is very good right now and we want to keep it that way. The Kurds in the north in Iraq also have a lot of political divisions that I encourage them as a close friend of theirs to try to find a way to resolve. Because when the ISIL wolf was at the door all the Kurds were united.

Syrian Kurds, the Iraqi Kurds, everybody was united, particularly in that moment at Kobani when the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga went through Turkey to fight in Kobani, and a historical moment that I was a part of. Now that the ISIL threat has receded a little bit all of these divisions have opened up.

So there are three Kurdish parties in the north; there are great political divisions there. There are divisions between the Syrian Kurds and the Kurds in northern Iraq. Our message to them is that this fight is not over. The entire southern border, the Iraqi Kurdistan region, is controlled by ISIL. So long as that is the case there is not going to be a stable situation there, so our advice is to unite against the threat against ISIL despite all the difference. There are a lot of differences. Meanwhile, we have to help them with the financial difficulties and it is something I look forward to working with this committee to do.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, I am glad to hear that. I think that is essential, and I think we need to be providing that financial support because they are willing to fight. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Gerry. Okay, Ted Poe of Texas.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. ISIS is deliberately targeting religious minorities, specifically Christians. Christians have been executed by the thousands. Clergy has been assassinated. Jihadists in Mosul stamped the homes of Christians with an "N" for Nazarene, enforces "convert or die," convert to their way of

thinking or you die. Christian females were sold in slave markets. Three of them were featured by the New York Times magazine last summer. ISIS' magazine, Dabiq, approves the enslavement of Christian girls in Nigeria and posts the prices for selling them on the marketplace.

The Pope has said that this is genocide. I mention these things to get your opinion on this issue specifically of genocide. The Omnibus bill that was passed, the President signed, requires that the administration determine whether or not religious minorities like Christians, Shia Muslims, Yazidis suffer genocide, specific term, by the hands of ISIS, by March the 18th. Can you give us some insight on whether or not the United States will take the position that what ISIS does against religious minorities is genocide or not?

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Congressman. And we are focused on answering that legislative request, and our lawyers are deeply—as you said, genocide is a very specific term so it is a legal determination, and we are looking at it, I believe, across the board.

And there is no question everything that you said is true and more. What ISIL has done to the Christian community and to minority communities throughout particularly Iraq and Syria is unbelievable, and then on top of it destroying our common heritage, our common culture, our ancient history. This is why we have to destroy this terrorist organization, period. And what we want to do particularly in liberating some of these areas near Mosul is return Christians to their ancestral homeland and that is something we are very focused on.

I meet regularly in Erbil with Archbishop Warda, when I am in Baghdad I try to see the patriarch Archbishop Sako to try to return the Christian communities to their homes, and one thing that drives us all in fact, particularly for this campaign in northern Nineveh Province near Mosul, is to help us do that. Because they have been driven out of their homes in the most atrocious manner possible and we have to work to get them back.

In Sinjar, I again have to praise our friends in the Peshmerga. They liberated Sinjar from ISIL about 3 or 4 months ago, a very successful operation. Sinjar is aware of course. ISIL came in and enslaved thousands of Yazidis killing many of the young men and taking off the women, thousands of them, to enslave the women. This is why we have to destroy this barbaric terrorist organization and, but in response to this specific request about the genocide determination that is something that I know our lawyers are working on right now.

Mr. POE. Do you see any reason why the administration won't be able to comply on March 18th and we will get a verdict one way or another?

Mr. MCGURK. No, I think we will meet that deadline.

Mr. POE. Okay, another question dealing with the Omnibus. There was an amendment that I put in, or I had put in, to the Omnibus bill that requires a strategy to defeat ISIS, and it was passed into law that there would be a strategy by the administration to what we are going to do to defeat ISIS by June the 18th. As far as I think there is no real concrete strategy to defeat ISIS. Not contain, but to defeat ISIS. June 18th is the deadline. Do you see any

reason based on your expertise why we won't be able to get that strategy by June the 18th?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, in terms of strategy we are going to suffocate this network every single which way. It is like an Anaconda strategy, constant pressure, the financial network, the foreign fighter network, the propaganda network, its ability to control territory. That is exactly what we are doing across the board. So in Iraq and Syria, as I explained in some detail, we are working to take away their territory. The global networks, we are working to cut off and slice off their foreign fighter networks.

Mr. POE. So we will have a strategy to defeat ISIS that is concrete. I mean, the train and equip that was a disaster and the President has even said that that was a disaster. So, and I am not going to be argumentative, but will we have a concrete strategy so the American public, so Bubba down there in Texas, knows what the United States is going to do to defeat ISIS? Do you see any reason why we won't have that in writing for us and the American public by June the 18th? That is really the question.

Mr. MCGURK. No, we have a strategy now, so I——

Mr. POE. Well, part of it is not working. So are we just going to get the same strategy? That is really my question. Is it going to be the same thing or is it going to be a concrete strategy? This is something that we can understand that we will defeat. We go after the oil fields, but we go after the trucks but we don't bomb the oil fields. Things like that in tactics.

Mr. MCGURK. I understand. The things that haven't worked we have already adjusted. So I will follow up with you with more specific details so you can have that very clear narrative laid down.

Mr. POE. So we will see that strategy by June 18th. I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. We go to Karen Bass of California.

Ms. BASS. Thank you again for your testimony and your time here in our hearing. I wanted to ask you a few questions. Congressman Smith was asking you about Boko Haram and Africa, and I would like to focus some of my questions there as well. One of the things that has been just a little frustrating is when we think of Boko Haram and ISIS and knowing that Boko Haram actually has, their reign of terror has actually continued every day and at the end of last year actually killed more people than ISIS did.

And so I am concerned, especially with what is happening in Libya, the deterioration in Libya, and knowing when Libya first fell it essentially led to a coup in Mali. And so I am wondering what you are seeing now, especially with ISIS increasing its involvement and occupation in Libya. What do you think or what do you see the fallout being in other countries?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, as I mentioned, Libya remains an acute focus because Libya is where, unlike in Boko Haram which is a preexisting problem——

Ms. BASS. Right.

Mr. MCGURK [continuing]. Terrorist problem for ISIL, the fact that they have now raised an ISIL flag doesn't fundamentally change the nature of the problem. ISIL in Libya is different. So in Libya what we are working very hard to do—one of my colleagues, the Special Envoy for Libya Jonathan Winer, we were just in Rome together for the coalition meeting on ISIL working to form the Gov-

ernment of National Accord, a national unity government in Libya, and hoping to get that done very soon. And the U.N. Special Envoy Martin Kobler is also a close friend of mine. I worked with him for years in Iraq. I know he has been working day and night to get this done.

And we have to have that because you need a foundational partner. I mentioned in the summer of 2014 it was very important to get the new Iraqi Government formed. Iraq had just had an election; it was going through the government formation process. Had we come into Iraq in a very major way militarily before we had a government and a foundational partner, it would have been hard to, I think, build the coherence that we needed to really push back effectively and aggressively.

So the sequencing in Libya is to try to get this national government formed and then to work with it to come up with a strategy to begin to combat Libya. But I will say, if that takes some time and we see threats emerging to our own national security interests, the President has shown he will take military action in Libya. And that is why we killed the overall ISIL leader in Libya, Abu Nabil. So those sorts of things will continue to be ongoing. But the political and the military here is quite intertwined, and so we are hoping to get that government formed very soon.

Ms. BASS. And so while we are doing that—and I absolutely understand and recognize the significance and importance of that—are you seeing though any involvement in terms of either ISIL folks moving south or moving weapons, which is what was the situation was in Mali, while we are working to stabilize the government—and I absolutely understand that.

Mr. MCGURK. What I have seen, Congresswoman, is the flow north to Libya, primarily. They seem to be in Libya doing what they did in Syria, establish state-like structures. So in Sirte, right in the central coast, and then they are trying to establish, you can see training camps popping up elsewhere. But they are trying to establish that state-like structure. So in their own Dabiq magazine, their own open source magazine, says come to Libya. They are trying to flow resources to Libya. If they can establish themselves there in a very rooted way and get rooted, then the risk will be it flows outward.

Ms. BASS. I see.

Mr. MCGURK. So we are going to try to make sure that they can't do that.

Ms. BASS. So back to Boko Haram, and I understand Boko Haram was preexisting and all and the significance of them raising the flag, if it was more symbolic, are they getting any resources, any of the financial resources from ISIL or really was it just symbolic?

Mr. MCGURK. We have seen some media coordination, so some of the Boko Haram media products have been a little more sophisticated which shows some connections with ISIL. But again not the type of direct weapons flow, finance, just because Boko Haram was already a self-contained entity. But we have to work with the Nigerians to get at the Boko Haram problem, period. Whether it calls itself ISIL or Boko Haram doesn't really matter. It is a fundamental problem.

Ms. BASS. And so the attack that took place in Mali recently, took place right after France, what do you know of that in terms of its relationship to ISIL? I believe it was al-Qaeda.

Mr. MCGURK. Yes. So this is where things, we don't want to paint with too sharp of a brush because al-Qaeda often has the same goals. That was an al-Qaeda attack. That was not an ISIL attack. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if ISIL is attacking your hotel or al-Qaeda is attacking the hotel, these are huge problems. So Mali, the French have really taken a major lead on the Mali side. Have degraded that network, but obviously it is still able to launch attacks like that.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Thank you, Ms. Bass. Mr. Cook of California.

Mr. COOK. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador for being here. I don't envy your job. Very, very difficult. I don't have your sense of optimism about Syria. With the Russians supporting him, I think he is, it is going to be very, very tough to dislodge him.

Picking up on that question of the Turks and the Kurds, point blank, is there any hope for a separate homeland for the Kurdistan? I don't think geography favors it, but we have disappointed the Kurds so many times, and after all the fighting and everything else and particularly with the pressure with the Kurds, I just don't, I think we are going to betray them again. Can you comment on that?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, the Kurds, and I have dealt with my friends the Kurds and the Kurdistan region of Iraq for almost a decade now, and you are right. There is a historical memory of what happened to the Kurds after World War I, which is something I think we have to all recognize and be quite sympathetic to.

The Kurds in northern Syria we have developed a relationship with over the last 18 months or so in the counter-ISIL campaign. I was able to go into northern Syria last week and meet a number of them, and they had the same, it is a very similar, historical narrative. However, at this moment in time creating new independent states is not something I think that would be particularly stabilizing.

So when it comes to the northern Iraq and the Kurds, as I mentioned, I think before something like that can be discussed in a serious way, first, you have to get ISIL off the southern border. It is all Jihadistan on the entire southern border of northern Iraq in the Kurdistan region. Second, the economic situation has to stabilize, and third, the political situation has to stabilize.

So right now I think the Kurds of northern Iraq recognize this. Nobody is trying to do the impossible and create a unified Iraq that is a glowing democracy, but a Federal Iraq which is defined in their constitution which empowers local leaders, empowers the Sunnis in the provinces, empowers the Kurds in northern Iraq, empowers the Shia in southern Iraq, is something that is realistic. It is interwoven in Iraq's constitution and something we very much support.

Mr. COOK. Okay. Thank you very much. The other question I had was I just got back from the Middle East, and a couple of things.

Incirlik. Our sorties from Incirlik really, really help our pilots from the Gulf States. Eight hours flying down there, I don't know how they do it. I really don't.

The problem is, in the past is the Turks have been, well, we will control all the air operations about Incirlik. And I just hope that that doesn't go back to the way it was, say, a year or 2 years ago where they had almost complete control over air ops and what was going in. I know that is kind of a military/foreign affairs question, but I am very, very nervous about Erdogan and the politics and how that affects that particular base. I am not really sure sometimes why we even have it there other than it is very, very close in the Middle East.

Mr. MCGURK. So that is a question for my military colleagues, but I have been to Incirlik, met our pilots there. The agreement when it comes to the anti-ISIL campaign is that those planes fly within the air coalition of the counter-ISIL campaign which is coordinated out of Qatar. And so we do, every day there is an air tasking order which goes out and so those planes out of Incirlik are integrated with that. So it is part of the overall cohesive campaign.

Mr. COOK. No, and I just got back from Qatar and I—but I am just very, very nervous about the politics of Turkey.

The last question I had was about Saudi, the Gulf States and everything else. Sometimes I think we are led to believe that their number one focus is ISIS. No, the impression I have is it is all about the war in Yemen. And their forces and everything else—yeah, yeah, we are committed to that—but the States that I talk to, it is all about what is going on with Yemen and particularly the influence of the Saudis in leading that coalition there. Could you comment on that?

Mr. MCGURK. You are right. Yemen is a primary focus in a lot of those capitals. But you can have a different conversation from Riyadh to Cairo to Abu Dhabi to Doha depending on where you are. I mean, this is not necessarily homogenous.

Mr. COOK. I am just looking at resources that are going into Yemen right now.

Mr. MCGURK. Yes. Yemen has definitely been a major focus of the Saudis and for good reason. It is right on their border. So one reason we are working very hard to try to de-escalate that conflict is so we can focus minds and attentions on ISIL, which we do consider the most fundamental threat.

Mr. COOK. Thank you very much for your answers. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Mr. Higgins of New York.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair. ISIS has proven to be particularly effective at fundraising. Estimates in 2014 was that they were raising about $3 million a day, originally through oil revenues and the sale of oil through the black market, and then through territorial gains where they would tax the people, provide services but tax and provide protection and basically operating a corrupt society whereby they would gain a lot of revenue.

How much is known about ISIS funding from Sunni Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, who I think views the existential threat to them as Iranian territorial gains, and Iraq, clearly with the direct involvement of Qasem Soleimani, and in Syria under an Alawite government which is a variant of Shia? So I suppose my

question is Saudi Arabian influence in helping to finance ISIS terrorist activity.

Mr. MCGURK. We certainly don't see any indications of that and the Saudis have been very close partners on the counterterrorism side for some time. What makes ISIL different than al-Qaeda or some of these other jihadist groups is that they don't really rely on outside financing and funding. When there was some evidence of that we have worked with Kuwait and others to really shut that down. My colleagues in the Treasury Department, Adam Szubin and others, have done a great job on that, and Danny Glaser.

But what makes ISIL different, because as you said, Congressman, it controls vast swaths of territory, has millions of people under its control, it acts through taxes and extortion to have a revenue base. So to cut at its finance streams—very early on a couple years ago we might have said, oh, there must be a lot of outside funding coming in, but in fact it is locally generated. So that is why we are—and it is true. The French led in this. After Paris, we of course helped them. But cutting off their ability to move oil, cutting off their ability to move energy supplies, cutting off their ability to store cash, which is something we have done in Mosul, so to cut off the finances you have to focus on that core in Iraq and Syria where it is controlling territory and resources.

Mr. HIGGINS. How many U.S.-led air strikes in Iraq and Syria in the past year?

Mr. MCGURK. I mean, total air strikes, Congressman, it is about 10,000 now. I can get you the breakdown. I mean, total air strikes as of yesterday, 9,901 to be specific. There are about 6,615 in Iraq, 3,286 in Syria. The U.S. has conducted more than 7,000 of those and the rest of the coalition about 2,300.

Mr. HIGGINS. And in the past year, ISIS has lost 40 percent of its territorial gains in Iraq and 10 percent of its territorial gains in Syria?

Mr. MCGURK. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Okay. ISIS, the one thing that is constant, reading Michael Weiss' book, "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror," Joby Warrick's book, "Black Flags," the one thing that seems constant about ISIS is change. And ISIS has evolved in its reach and organizational ability. The ISIS presence in Libya, I think, is particularly disturbing. It is a pivotal stronghold in North Africa.

Africa is, there is a lot of instability to exploit in Africa. You have 55 countries in that continent, many of which are very, very unstable from South Sudan to just, there is a lot of countries to exploit. So my concern is that while we may be influencing a loss of territorial control in both Iraq and Syria, what about the ISIS threat in expanding into other countries in the continent of Africa?

Mr. MCGURK. Again it is a great question. And as we analyze it and as we discuss this with intelligence services and the governments in all of these different capitals all around the world, the common theme we hear, I mean, I have heard this from Malaysia to Brussels to the Gulf, is that this false notion of this caliphate is what is drawing so many young people to this dangerous movement. And that is why we are focused on the core and shrinking that overall territory.

And its narrative, in those books that you mention its narrative is one of expansion and conquest. So we had to show that actually you are not expanding, you are actually shrinking, and if you go to join this phony caliphate you are not going to live a glorious life with ice cream cones like which is in their propaganda, you are actually going to die a pretty miserable death there.

Now some of these people want to go die a miserable death and we are happy to oblige them, but we have to shrink the caliphate, their phony notion of a caliphate, in order to also dry up the global networks. That does not mean as we defeat ISIL that there won't be a global jihadist terrorism problem under different banners. That is something that is going to be with us for some time.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Higgins. My Florida colleague, Mr. DeSantis.

Mr. DESANTIS. Mr. McGurk, you just said that there will still be a global jihadist problem and I agree with that. And I notice in your written testimony that there was not any reference explicitly to either Iran or Hezbollah particularly with respect to the destabilizing role that they both play in Iraq and in Syria. They have murdered Sunni civilians, and Assad obviously drives people, Sunni Arabs who if the choice is between a militant Shiite force or a government backed by Iran and ISIS, which is at least Sunni, many of them unfortunately are driven to ISIS. So was the exclusion of Iran's contribution to the problem deliberate, or was that just something that you omitted?

Mr. MCGURK. No, certainly not. Let me take it on directly. When Mosul fell in the summer of 2014, Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf issued a fatwa saying everybody rise up and protect the country. And it was a really critical moment, and had he not done that I think it would have been actually very hard to check what ISIL was doing because they were just on a rampage and he would cause a massive panic in the country.

You had about 80,000 volunteers kind of rise up and join the ranks to defend Iraq. Most of them in those early days are Shia from the south and most of them are nationalists, they answer to the government. But there is a segment of them, maybe 10,000 to 15,000 who are actually answerable to militias or that are controlled by Iran. And this is a huge concern for us, it is a huge concern for the Government of Iraq, and it is a huge concern for Prime Minister Abadi. Prime Minister Abadi, when he was here in Washington, said publicly that if Iran is operating a militia on Iraqi soil outside the command of the Iraqi Government that would be a hostile act against Iraq. So he has been very clear about this.

When we see abuses and violations of human rights the Government of Iraq has acted. Just recently there were some reports of Shia militia violence in Diyala Province, which has always been a hotbed of extremism on both sides of the sectarian divide. Prime Minister Abadi went to the site twice, and just last week they have arrested nine individuals from some of these militias as part of that investigation.

So this is a serious problem. It is something that we are focused on all the time. But we don't want to paint all of these volunteers,

many of whom are Shia, within the same brush because that simply wouldn't be true.

Mr. DESANTIS. But what about something like in Al Anbar Province? I mean, the administration has touted some of the advances in places like Ramadi, but my understanding is that is powered a lot by Shia forces, including some of the Iranian backed forces. And so what are you doing to empower the Sunni tribal forces and the Sunni tribal elders? Because it seems to me that driving ISIS out of places like Ramadi is obviously something that is desirable, but the notion that those Sunni Arabs are going to be happy living under forces or a government that they see as being dominated by Iran and Shia, that is probably going to be a tough sell.

Mr. MCGURK. So very much agree with you. So when it came to Ramadi it was the Government of Iraq's decision to ensure that that operation was conducted by the Iraqi security forces, the Iraqi counterterrorism forces, and local Sunni tribal fighters.

Mr. DESANTIS. So they were integrated with the security forces?

Mr. MCGURK. They were integrated in the campaign, and the Popular Mobilization Forces from the Shia side of the street were not a part of that Ramadi campaign. And that was very important, because we wanted to show that the Iraqi security forces can do this, and, because what is so important, whether Sunni or Shias, is locals who know their territory and know their neighborhood, who know what it is like, who know the alleys and the back streets. That you get locals invested in the fight.

So in Anbar now we have about 10,000 of these tribal fighters. They are invested in the fight. They are getting paid. I gave the figures earlier in my testimony. But it is a constant effort. But we have full support from the new government in Iraq and Prime Minister Abadi. We have full support from the governor of Anbar Province, Governor al-Rawi, and they are working closely with us.

We have two platforms in Anbar Province, one at Al Asad Airbase and one at Taqaddum Airbase. We are working every day with the Iraqi security forces and these tribal fighters to get them in the fight and they are making real gains. They were just on defense, now they are moving on offense, they are doing operations so it is moving the right way.

Mr. DESANTIS. Just a final question will be with respect to the Kurds, and I think a lot of my colleagues share this view. I think that they are pro-American forces that we should be supporting. But Turkey does not accept the actions of a lot of the Kurds, so there are problems there—you have one of our NATO partners essentially opposing some of our battlefield allies. And so can you address the conflict there between Turkey and some of the Kurdish fighters?

Mr. MCGURK. Let me first say Turkey faces a real threat from the PKK. So we have to recognize that this conflict between Turkey and the PKK, which flared up again over the summer, began if you run the timeline when the PKK killed a number of Turkish police officers. And I have been very clear about that. Turkey has a right to respond in its own self defense.

At the same time, this conflict has now escalated to the point where we want to work very hard to try to de-escalate it, and Vice President Biden discussed this with President Erdogan last week,

because the more this is going on the more it drives people to the ranks of really extreme militarism which is very dangerous. So we want to protect Turkey against the PKK and that is something we are going to help them do, we are going to continue to help them do.

But we also want to strengthen the Kurds in northern Syria. The Kurds in northern Syria have joined a conglomeration; have built a coalition force with Arabs and Christians and Syrian—I met a number of them—under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces. They have just put out a political platform. It makes clear that they want to be part of Syria. It makes clear that they want to have positive relations with their neighbors, which means Turkey. They don't want to interfere in those relations, which means distancing from any relation with the PKK.

This will remain a work in progress, but something that we are going to work on every day. But most importantly we will continue to work with Turkey to protect itself against the PKK militarism, which is extremely dangerous and which is killing Turkish soldiers and police officers every day.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir. Thank you. And now we move to Mr. Sherman of California.

Mr. SHERMAN. First, I know the visa waiver program was mentioned earlier about the idea that those who visit Libya, I want to point out the visa waiver program is not a right that we extend to all Europeans and reducing it doesn't show that we would hate Europeans. We don't provide visa waivers to people from Brazil, and we love Brazilians, et cetera, and many of other—and I believe we don't have a visa waiver relationship with any of the Latin American countries that are our allies.

But I would also point out that those we want to focus on who have visited Syria and Iraq to work with ISIS; they don't have a stamp on their passport from Syria. They don't have a stamp on their passport from Iraq. They have a stamp on their passport for Turkey. And we ought to be looking at whether we should provide visa waiver to those who have visited Turkey. At the same time, we have to look at our European friends and make sure that they don't just give a new passport to somebody who doesn't like the stamps on their old passport without telling us that it did have a stamp from Libya or from Iraq or from Turkey.

And so I do think we are going to have to look at this visa waiver idea, but as long as any European can just get a new passport and then have visa waiver without letting us know that they visited Turkey, Syria or Iraq or Libya, we are going to have a problem.

But now I want to focus on questions. We were serious in World War II. We had a strategic bombing program designed to destroy the economic capacity of occupied Europe. I believe we killed 90,000 French civilians and then we were welcomed by the French people as liberators. We were serious in that war. We won that war. De Gaulle never paid French civil servants in occupied France. De Gaulle did not arrange to provide food and fuel to those living in a Nazi-exploited occupied France.

The Iraqi Government has told us that they finally stopped paying the civil servants in ISIS-occupied areas. Is that true? Are civil servants who live in ISIS, ISIL or ISIS-occupied territory able to

leave, get their money and then go drive back to Mosul, or have they finally stopped paying people who are taxed by ISIS? Or don't you know?

Mr. MCGURK. No, thank you, Congressman. I have actually worked on this quite a bit. So the Iraqi Government made a decision, passed through their cabinet last summer that all——

Mr. SHERMAN. I have got very limited time. Are they still paying the civil servants or not?

Mr. MCGURK. No, they are not.

Mr. SHERMAN. And even if the civil servant leaves they can't get their money?

Mr. MCGURK. The salaries paid to people living under ISIL control are held in escrow. So when those areas are liberated they will get——

Mr. SHERMAN. Wait a minute. If somebody just drives from Mosul, goes down to Kirkuk, can they pick up the money that is being held in escrow for them?

Mr. MCGURK. If they are living in Mosul they should not be able to do that.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. Well, you should check on that because I am told they can get their money and then go back.

But we also have a bombing—in World War II we bombed electric generation facilities. In Iraq, the Iraqi Government provides free electricity to ISIS. Are we willing to bomb the transmission lines through which that free electricity flows to Mosul?

Mr. MCGURK. The problem in Mosul is that a lot of the electricity in Mosul comes from the Mosul Dam, and we have to keep the Mosul Dam running to——

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, we keep it running, but why use it to supply electricity to ISIS?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, it is a sophisticated engineering issue, because we don't want electricity going into Mosul. So——

Mr. SHERMAN. It is not a sophisticated—it is a sophisticated political question. You don't have to send electricity to Mosul. Don't tell me that the dam breaks if you don't send electricity to the enemy.

Mr. MCGURK. By keeping the dam running, as I understand——

Mr. SHERMAN. The dam should be kept running. That doesn't mean you have to send the electricity to ISIS.

Mr. MCGURK. We don't want electricity going into——

Mr. SHERMAN. So bomb the transmission lines inside or outside of ISIS controlled territory.

Mr. MCGURK. Something we have looked at and we will look at it again. I will get the answer——

Mr. SHERMAN. You have looked at it but you won't tell us why you are not doing it, will you?

Mr. MCGURK. We will get——

Mr. SHERMAN. And why does the Iraqi Government provide electricity to Mosul for free and is that consistent with the approach we took in World War II when we were serious?

Mr. MCGURK. Probably different than the approach in World War II, but nobody is more anti-ISIL than the guys I know in the Iraqi Government. There is a debate between local leaders and the government about we don't want to drive the population into the

hands of the ISIL in some of these areas, but the issue of electricity to Mosul is something I can get you a very detailed, specific answer on and I will do that.

[The information referred to follows:]

WRITTEN RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM THE HONORABLE BRETT MCGURK TO QUESTION ASKED DURING THE HEARING BY THE HONORABLE BRAD SHERMAN

The reason the Government of Iraq provides electricity to Mosul is not because it wants to, but because it has to. As the dam is in a progressive state of failure, reservoir levels need to be carefully controlled to avoid creating undue pressure on the dam either by draining it or by maintaining water levels above the emergency spillway threshold. The appropriate reservoir level is between 300 to 319 meters above sea level, according to a December 2006 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study. There are two ways to release water: either through the two bottom outlets or through the hydroelectric turbines. One of the bottom outlets does not work and the other only partially works, leaving the hydroelectric turbines as the most reliable way to release water and control the reservoir level. There is no way to run water through the turbines without producing electricity and the transmission lines only go to Mosul. Thus, in order to effectively control the reservoir level, electricity must be sent to Mosul.

The Government of Iraq put out a tender late last year for an international engineering firm to restore credible grouting at the dam to stabilize the foundation and also to repair the bottom outlets. Until that work has begun and the bottom outlets have been repaired, electricity will continue to be produced and go to Mosul in order to maintain an appropriate reservoir level and protect the integrity of the dam.

Mr. SHERMAN. I look forward—and finally, we had a zero civilian casualty approach to our strategic bombing so we weren't hitting the tanker trucks. Now again if we had had a zero civilian casualty approach——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Sherman, we are over your time, so finish your question and maybe he could give a final answer.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. Obviously in World War II we hit trains and trucks and factories. Are we hitting ISIS' economic targets even knowing that that will cause civilian casualties, for example, oil tanker trucks?

Mr. MCGURK. I addressed the issue of trucks earlier, Congressman. Yes, we are hitting the trucks. We are trying to do it in a way that limits the possibility of killing the truck drivers, but we have actually figured out a way to do that. But the trucks are not——

Mr. SHERMAN. But are we willing to hit the trucks while they are being driven?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, we have figured out a way to hit the trucks and the trucks are not being driven.

Mr. SHERMAN. In other words, you are only willing to hit the trucks when they are parked and if they are being driven you won't hit them.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, we don't want to needlessly, and I would really defer to my military colleagues here who work at this very closely. We don't want to needlessly——

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you, Mr. Sherman. Dr. Yoho of Florida.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Sherman, I feel your anxiety and your pain. I feel the same way. Is the administration planning on dropping humanitarian aid to Aleppo? I think—a yes or no.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, I think we are looking at all options on the humanitarian side right now.

Mr. YOHO. That is not really answering. That is just saying you are looking at them. And that kind of reminds me of the President's budget that says national security and global leadership in President's budget, and it says that is why the United States is leading the global coalition that will destroy the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant, and the budget provides for over $11 billion for the DoD.

That is like wanting to learn to play the piano and you buy the piano and you put in the money for lessons but you don't practice it you are not going to play the piano. I hear a lot like we are looking at it. We are looking at the safe zones in Syria by Jordan and by Turkey, we are looking at that. We have been studying that 4 years. At some point it has to be acted upon.

And I want to follow up with Mr. Sherman's comment. The reasoning to continually not bomb these transport vehicles with oil when the no-fly zone that was initiated by this administration along with Hillary Clinton to create a no-fly zone that led to a failed state, the fall of Gaddifi, and now Libya is an ISIS recruiting and training center and they have one of their biggest camps 12 miles from Libya's largest oil production facility, why are we not just bombing them? Like Mr. Sherman said, in World War II we had a strategy. Yes, that is one of the fallouts of war, but it brought that war to an end.

We have been studying things and we are looking at options for 4 years, or 5 years now, close to 300,000 people have died. The Assad barrel bombs, we have been looking at maybe putting pressure on that and we are still studying it, but yet nothing happens. And we have the largest migration of refugees around the world because of the failed policies of this administration. What are we doing? I mean, when are we going to stop looking and start acting stronger and leading?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, Congressman, I was just in Kobani. I stood in the streets of Kobani where we killed 6,000 ISIL fighters with air strikes there; in fact still pulling bodies out of the rubble near where I was standing of ISIL fighters, killed 6,000 in that battle alone. We have destroyed 400 tanker trucks. So the idea that we are just watching this is not——

Mr. YOHO. When were the 400 tanker trucks destroyed? What time period? In the last 6 months?

Mr. MCGURK. Probably the last 4 to 5 months.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. But we have known about this for over 3 years. I mean, we hear constituents saying, why is ISIS having oil production facilities? Why are they even allowed to produce anything? They should have been destroyed back then had we had a clear cut strategy.

This is a real pointed question. What is this administration's reasoning to continually press for refugees from Syria and other areas in the Middle East, to relax the entry requirements into the U.S. especially when France, Germany and Belgium have documented that over 70 to 80 ISIS members entered the EU through Syria with fake passports, and those were the people that did the shoot-

ings in Paris. Why is this administration hellbent on relaxing these restrictions? What is the reasoning for that?

Mr. MCGURK. I think we have the most stringent entry standards on the refugee program in the world and that is something that is going to continue.

Mr. YOHO. Yes, but yet FBI Director Comey and Jeh Johnson of DHS says there is no way to vet these people. So why not put a pause on this until we know for sure that they are not fake passports, they are not this? You are saying that but yet France and Germany and those other countries are kind of saying, hey, wait a minute, we are not doing this anymore. Why are we not heeding the warning that we know is going to happen?

Mr. MCGURK. Again, I think I defer to my colleagues who work this issue every day and I can get you a more detailed answer. But we have one of the most stringent refugee admissions processes in the entire world and that is why I am not aware of any terrorists who have entered through the refugee program.

Mr. YOHO. Again going back to the ISIS transport. We talked about the administration's failure to go after this early. Four to six months ago they did this. And we are at a war at terrorism, right, and ISIS is the terrorist organization that we are in conflict with. And I don't know what poll you have, but I sure wish you guys would crank down on this administration and say that. Because what I see is a reckless endangerment and a dereliction of duty on our national security by this administration. And I hope you would help them straighten that out. I yield back. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Dr. Yoho. Now my other Florida colleague, Mr. Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just on the subject of reckless endangerment as long as we are talking about some of these issues, I am not going to ask you, Mr. McGurk, to comment on this. But it is really hard for me to comprehend how we have this entire hearing with all kinds of accusations made about the administration's policies, the request that the administration actually take certain actions only to have you explain that we are taking them and then the criticism be, well, why didn't we take them sooner, when the concern that we have about fighting terrorism at least in one small respect can be addressed if we simply acknowledge that individuals who can't fly into this country because they are on a terrorism watch list can still, if they are in this country, go to any gun store and purchase a gun.

I don't understand it, and if we are going to talk about reckless endangerment that is something that this Congress ought to be doing that the Speaker ought to allow us to have a debate on. And it is impossible for me to understand how after this entire hearing that single step that is logical that has the overwhelming support of the American people has yet to be done.

Now Mr. McGurk, I want to circle back to a comment, an exchange you had earlier on Iran that focuses really on Iraq. But I want to talk about Iran's activities in Syria and the question I have is really straightforward. After the Iran nuclear deal and implementation day which has now passed, has that had any impact in the way that we interact with the Iranians with respect to their ac-

tivities on the ground in Syria both supporting Hezbollah, propping up Assad, but at the same time fighting ISIL?

Mr. MCGURK. Congressman, thanks for your question. Iran, since the nuclear deal they are a part of the Vienna process. They are at the table with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey; everyone else. So that is significant. But certainly I think their tactic strategies in Syria, if anything, have made the conflict worse. I think we have been very clear on that. Iran is focused on, they have an election upcoming later this month which will decide some things about the direction the country is headed, but certainly we have not seen a significant change in terms of what they are doing in Syria.

Mr. DEUTCH. And just the only other thing I would observe that I am not sure how many things will be decided when the number of reformers who are allowed to run is mere tens out of the thousands who had sought that, but I appreciate that. And I want to just ask a follow-up.

But the fact is that Iran and its proxies are responsible for so much of Assad's, propping up Assad and Assad's ability to massacre his own people. In the earlier stages of these debates there was talk about individuals who would like to go after Assad because of the butchery, the brutality against their family members and their community members, and if they didn't have that opportunity sometimes they turn to whoever would give them the chance to fight no matter how awful that group might be.

What are we doing now to ensure that the battle they wage is one that is against ISIL and yet also acknowledges that the Assad, the brutal Assad regime ultimately is responsible for so much of the problem that exists?

Mr. MCGURK. This is real problem, because so long as the conflict between the regime and the opposition is running at full bore, which it is right now enabled by the Russian air campaign, the pool of fighters particularly in those parts of the country to fight ISIL are reduced. So I discussed in some detail north of Aleppo, the Mari line, groups we were working with to fight ISIL have now peeled off to fight the regime, again which is why the Russian air campaign in this respect has made the fight against ISIL more difficult.

Mr. DEUTCH. And finally, I know the chairman joins me in telling you that while—first, I want to commend you personally for your efforts in helping to secure the release of American citizens who had been held in Iran. As you know, my constituent, Bob Levinson, was not among them. I was with the family this morning over on the Senate side at a markup of a resolution that we are going to be taking up here. They deserve to have that same feeling of joy and relief that the other families are now feeling, and I just can't emphasize strongly enough how important it is for us, for the American people, and for you specifically to be unrelenting in your efforts to bring Bob home.

Mr. MCGURK. Congressman, I assure you the issue with the prisoners was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. I have gotten to know the families quite well. I have met the Levinsons a number of times. I saw them in the West Wing yesterday before they saw the President. And we certainly will not cease in our efforts.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. Thank you for that Mr. Deutch. Mr. Keating of Massachusetts.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for having this hearing. I would like to thank Mr. McGurk for your service and the work you have done. It is important and you have done a great job and I appreciate that personally, and I am speaking as a Member of Congress as well.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. I would like to, at first, associate myself with some remarks my colleague Mr. Deutch made about even when putting things in perspective in terms of threats here at home, even with the language and to scrub the Terrorist Watch List, I think it is just important that we get a vote on that. The idea that people on that Terrorist Watch List that can legally procure explosives and weapons and do that legally in this country is something that we have to address as part of our own homeland security.

A question I have along those lines, earlier this last year I went with a group of my colleagues from the Homeland Security Committee. We were looking at tracking the issues surrounding foreign terrorist fighters and those issues. Could you give an update on the Security Council resolution in that regard, 2178? And also more specifically, my concern is too with some of the progress we have made, you mentioned with Turkey that we will see how that turns out. I am hopeful but somewhat skeptical about their ability to secure that border area.

But two issues that stand out, the passenger name record issue with EU countries and even the kind of security that is done on the exterior border of the Schengen countries. Can you tell me any progress that you are aware of that we have made with our European allies so that they can tighten that up? That has a direct effect with our security here at home, their ability to do that.

Mr. MCGURK. So great questions, Congressman. I addressed this somewhat in my written statement. Since Paris we have certainly seen a lot of movement in this regard. The first step was to focus international attention on this problem and then to get something concrete out of it which was Resolution 2178 which came out of the U.N. General Assembly in 2014. Since then, I think as my testimony mentioned, about 45 countries have updated their laws to track down foreign terrorist fighters.

What we are trying to do now as we learn more about the networks and through the coalitions—it is why our global coalition is so important. It is not just the military which gets a lot of the focus, it is sharing information across these multiple lines of effort, and in the foreign fighter side we have a cell which shares information across borders.

So we have had arrests now in Belgium, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Netherlands, Philippines, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, Qatar, here in the United States, and now what we are doing is sharing information to try to really collapse these foreign fighter networks.

And it is a very difficult endeavor. It is law enforcement, it is intelligence, but it is constantly sharing information. We have found that many of the countries we work with, they have a difficult time

sharing information amongst themselves in their capital. It is a problem we had before 9/11.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, there are different laws, privacy laws.

Mr. MCGURK. So we have broken down a lot of those stovepipes here in the U.S. post 9/11, and we are finding out post Paris, particularly in the EU they are also working to do the same thing.

Passenger name recognition is a critical thing. That was getting in the way, getting hung up on privacy laws in the EU. Now the EU Parliament has passed, finally, the passenger name recognition, so we know everybody who is on—they know everybody who is on those airplanes. We of course know everybody coming into the U.S. So something we are diligent about, something we raise all the time, and within the coalition we now have a permanent structure set up on the foreign terrorist fighter side, so—and it is a permanent platform now, constantly sharing information and figuring out, connecting dots. It has led, as I mentioned in my testimony, to a number of FBI investigations. This came right out of our coalition activities, and it is something that we are going to continue.

Mr. KEATING. Quickly, one other question before my time expires. There have been written reports out there that the terrorist fighters that their salaries and the money they are getting has been cut by as much as 50 percent. What do you know about those reports, how real are they, and obviously what kind of impact would that have on their recruitment when this begins to break down? Because we are trying to hone in and really damage their ability to finance these terrorist activities.

Mr. MCGURK. Again a very good question. And one reason we decided to go after these cash, bulk cash storage sites particularly in Mosul, look, they are right in downtown Mosul. To answer some of the questions from your colleagues earlier is there a risk that some civilians might lose their lives in an air strike like that? The answer is yes. However, the judgment was that it is important to strike those sites because this is how they are paying and recruiting their fighters. And we eliminated those sites.

But I just want to go back. We are very careful about civilian casualties for a reason. We are not going to be like the Russians or some others who are just using dummy bombs on civilian areas and trying to kill people they consider extremists. This has been the most precise air campaign in history and we are very proud of that. It is also, I think history will show, it has been one of the most effective air campaigns in history.

And what we have done to ISIL's finances by a careful infusion of intelligence, sharing information across the coalition and within the U.S. Government to identify the targets and then to action those targets is something that takes time to piece together. Sometimes it takes longer than we might want, but we have pieced it together. We have now done those air strikes, they have been very effective, and as you said they have led to very credible information we have now that ISIL has cut its pay to foreign fighters by nearly 50 percent.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. McGurk. And I wish we could say the same thing about the Russians and the way they are conducting their bombing exercises as we can about our own exercises. I yield back, Madam.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Keating. And Mr. McGurk, we appreciate the time that you took with us this morning. I know that you are headed to the airport to continue your work, but ISIS is an incredibly dangerous threat that is global and continues to grow and the committee looks forward to continuing to work with you on this important issue. With that the hearing is adjourned.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you so much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Safe journey.

[Whereupon, at 12:11 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

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

Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

February 10, 2016

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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

DATE: Wednesday, February 10, 2016

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: From Iraq and Syria to Libya and Beyond: The Evolving ISIL Threat

WITNESS: The Honorable Brett McGurk
Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Wednesday* Date *2/10/16* Room *2172*

Starting Time *10:06* Ending Time *12:11*

Recesses *0* (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Edward R. Royce, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

From Iraq and Syria to Libya and Beyond: The Evolving ISIL Threat

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee

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

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

SFR - Rep. Gerald Connolly
QFR - Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
QFR - Rep. Michael McCaul
QFR - Rep. David Trott

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE
or
TIME ADJOURNED _____

Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
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X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
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X	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
	Joaquin Castro, TX
	Robin Kelly, IL
X	Brendan Boyle, PA
X	Sheila Jackson-Lee

Submitted by Chairman Edward Royce on the Behalf of SAWA
Drafted By: Patrick Maloy
FBO Team SAWA (With Iraqi Input from Sheik Jalal Al-Gaood)
February 15, 2016

A respected non-governmental organization, Transparency International, has consistently ranked Iraq as among the worst countries for corruption (some years 161st out of 167 countries, other years 170th out of 175 countries). Most recently, police commanders are asking people to either pay a bribe or be listed on Terrorist Lists; relatives of 4,000 arbitrarily detained people in Habaniya (from newly liberated areas in Ramadi) are being told to pay bribes to obtain the release of these detainees; even local business owners of gas stations are requested to pay bribes or their stations will not receive fuel. A modest amount of corruption, in a newly emerging country, could be overlooked as a "social illness" equivalent to air pollution. However, the Government of Iraq's widespread, endemic corruption has become a national security concern that is endangering the continued existence of the modern Iraqi state. It has destroyed the average citizen's faith in the legitimacy of its own government, and made them more susceptible to recruitment by ISIS' propaganda of the moral superiority of their Caliphate over the Baghdad government. P.M. Alabadi's most recent call for a complete reshuffling of the cabinet to cleanse it of corrupt and incompetent ministers has been strongly opposed by these corrupt individuals.

Question: What are the U.S., its coalition allies, and the IMF - through its Stand-By Arrangement, doing to hold the Iraqi government, parliament and justice system responsible to meet its obligation to fight corruption and bring to justice those who accept bribes and steal public funds, which only breeds poverty, disillusionment with democracy, and the next generation of terrorists?

One of the main reasons for the rapid collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces across Al Anbar in the face ISIS was because of incompetent, politically selected offices, with few ties and no loyalty to the communities they were assigned to defend. They reportedly purchased their assigned areas based upon an estimate of the amount of funds they could extract from the local population, and then corruptly utilized their positon to inflate the number of their "ghost soldiers," allowing them to steal the Iraqi Security Force payroll with impunity. When ISIS advanced, they abandoned the local communities, fled with their corrupt gains, and were never prosecuted. This Iraqi Security Forces "defeat" strengthened the ISIS mystique, while the largely U.S.-supplied military equipment they abandoned was used to equip the ISIS forces.

The Government of Iraq appears to be following the same pattern of selecting officers for the Iraqi Security Forces on the basis of religious political parties, not professional competence, and with few ties and no loyalty to the local communities they are to defend. For example:

a. 1st Division based in Habanyeh: Col. Jalil (Shiaa from South of Iraq);
b. 7th Division based in Alassad Base: does have Col. Numan Alzobai (a Sunni from Anbar), but with a 350 person brigade of SWAT, and an Army brigade of 400 commando unit both of which are all Shiaa;
c. 8th Division: (all Shiaa force from the south of Iraq);
d. 10th Division from Missan Province (all Shiaa Force from south of Iraq);

e. Badia and Jazeera Division based at Haditha Dam, western Anbar: Col. Ali Damoun (Shiaa); and,
f. SWAT & anti-Terrorist forces: Gen. Abdul Gani Alasadi (Shiaa and closely associated with Dawa).

As a principal sponsor of the regular Iraq Security Forces, this appears to be the sector where the Administration has the greatest leverage to insist upon reforms, to avoid another disastrous defeat by ISIS.

Question: What is the Administration doing to discourage the Iraq government from making the same mistakes as in the past with the Iraqi Security Forces - appointing only Shiaa politically connected persons as military officers; with few ties and no loyalty to the local communities they are to defend; who then utilize their positions to recruit only Shiaa soldiers from outside the region; and falsely inflating the unit rosters enabling them to corruptly steal ISF payroll?

There is an exclusive sectarian underpinning in the recruitment and the composition of the manpower of these Iraqi Security Forces. The Militia and Hashid have been able to infiltrate these Iraqi Security Forces, since an estimated ninety percent (90%) of these forces are Shiaa. Such prejudicial recruitment policies appear to be only slightly better in the Police and Tribal forces. Police and Tribal forces are theoretically supposed to "hold ground" after liberation. However, our fact-finding reveals there are tribal fighters in Al Anbar who could be encouraged to take up arms against the ISIS forces. Many of these tribes have suffered cruelly at the hands of ISIS. Most recently, Albu Nimir offered to volunteer three thousand of these fighters - but were turned down. Surely these are the tribes who can put the elusive "boots on the ground" that are acknowledged to be necessary for the defeat of ISIS. At the same time, other alleged "Tribal Forces" are actually new creations of Shia political parties, designed to corruptly siphon away financial support, utilizing the prior "ghost soldier" scheme to inflate and then steal the payroll. This practice was commonly done to benefit the Dawa party utilizing the Iraqi Security Force structure - with especially disastrous results in the abandonment of Mosul. Dawa is reported to be again supporting another such a corrupt scheme of creating ghost "tribal forces" in the vicinity of Haditha.

The obvious solution to such institutionalized incompetence and corruption is to establish and locally recruit National Guard units, tasked with defending their own local communities. This will at least ensure stability to the security situation in the local community. This was the driving concept behind the National Guard Law which has stalled in the Iraqi parliament. It is our concern that political parties did not want to lose control over the lucrative ISF payroll, and have been insisting on retaining their patronage ability to appoint sectarian officers. Such corrupt practices were discredited by the resounding defeat of the regular Iraqi Security Forces by ISIS. Continuation of such practices are an existential threat to the survival of the modern Iraqi state.

Question: What is the Administration doing to promote the enactment of the National Guard Law as originally envisioned – to establish locally-raised units committed to defending their own communities?

The U.S. government spent millions of taxpayer dollars and many years of effort attempting to create credible Iraqi Security forces. Due to corruption and sectarian political influence, the Iraqi Security Forces abandoned their positions and were defeated by the ISIS Forces. The Central government and religious authorities then called for the assistance of the Hashid and local Shiaa militia on an emergency basis to defend Bagdad.
The emergency has passed, and the regular Iraqi Security Forces have recaptured Ramadi without the assistance of the Militia and Hashid. These irregular forces, which are not provided for under the Iraqi Constitution, have not been disbanded; instead they appear to be growing in strength and challenging the authority of the Iraqi government. Some of them are reportedly supplied and are led by Iranian Quds Force officers. If these irregular forces, modeled upon the Quds Force, acting outside of the Iraqi Constitution and central government control, are allowed to continue, it will ensure a generational conflict within Iraq upon sectarian lines.

A clear example of the threat these irregular forces pose can be seen in their destruction of the Ministry of Oil-owned refinery in Baiji, Salahaddin province. Baiji included four discrete refineries, several plants that produce refined products, and multiple warehouses. The Ministry's complex was supplying fifty percent (50%) of the demand for all of Iraq's refined products. Although ISIS overran the facility in April 2015; pro-government forces regained full control of the refinery and most of the surrounding areas six months later in October. The refinery complex then became controlled by a collection of militias, including Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Badr Organization, Kataib Hezbollah, and Kataib Imam Ali – approximately 4,000 Hashid militiamen. Under their direction and control, Hashid leaders looted and then arranged a series of auctions for thousands of spare parts, generators and other equipment from the warehouses in the complex. Militia commanders were granted discrete areas of the refinery. Thieves from Baghdad and Iran were allowed on-site to bid on equipment ranging from mobile generators to such large fixed parts of the refinery that they had to be disassembled by engineers. Equipment which was auctioned off and then carted away included the four towering boilers used to heat crude - an essential component at the start of any refining process. These boilers were only installed recently as part of a refurbishment of the refinery complex. The deprecations the Hashid and Militia inflicted on this central government installation must never be allowed upon the inhabitants of Mosul. The multi-ethnic communities of Mosul have suffered enough under ISIS; they must not be allowed to fall prey to the Hashid and Militias.

Question: What is the Administration doing to focus the Iraqi government on their own rebuilding of the Iraqi Security Forces based on their Constitution; when and how will the Militias and Hashid be demobilized and disarmed under central government control?

If the modern state of Iraq is to survive, it appears necessary to develop a more decentralized federal system, as permitted by its current Constitution. While the Iraqi citizens living within the boundaries of the Kurdish Regional Governorate have benefited from that arrangement; the citizens living in the western provinces have not. One arrangement provided for in the Constitution is the recognition of an Administrative Region, existing wholly within the pre-established boundaries of an existing province. Such an arrangement would appear less threatening to the central government than the ethnic-based three provinces of the Kurdish Regional Government, but still allow the citizens living in a province a degree of local representation over their own affairs that is not currently being provided by the Central Government.

Question: Would the Administration support the establishment of Administrative Regions in Iraq (each province recognized as a region within its current boundaries) thereby permitting a fairer local level of political sharing as permitted by the Iraqi Constitution?

The Iraqi Constitution as currently written allows for a system that meets the needs of its citizens for fair treatment and proper power sharing when fully implemented. The Administration must adopt, and more strongly promote, a new approach to Iraq that promotes respect within Iraq for its own Constitution and the rule of law. The root cause of Iraq's current problems is not ISIS – that is just a symptom of the illness. Rather, the modern state of Iraq is in danger of dissolution due to endemic corruption and sectarian hatred. The Administration must adopt a position linking assistance to the Iraqi government based upon their own implementation of the Iraqi Constitution and respect for the human rights of all its citizens.

Statement for the Record
Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia

Understanding the threat posed by the violent terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), is only the beginning of what promises to be a long and difficult fight. The territorial gains made by ISIL have helped deepen the conflict in Syria and destabilize the government in Iraq. ISIL-affiliated groups around the globe have pledged to further ISIL's jihadist goals and foment conflict in countries abroad, and, most concerning, ISIL adherents have already answered the call to carry out attacks on the U.S. homeland and against our allies.

Defining this threat and determining our ability and resolve to counter it is essential to establishing effective benchmarks towards the ultimate goal of defeating ISIL. Often cited numbers such as the more than 10,000 coalition airstrikes carried out against ISIL targets and ISIL's loss of 40% of its territory are less meaningful if the nature of the threat is evolving into an international network of jihadist cells. Similarly, counting enemy casualties is hardly a metric for success when lost fighters are quickly replaced with new recruits.

In attempting to understand the threat, we have repeatedly been caught off-guard by a radical jihadist group that does not match our expectations for how foreign terrorist organizations traditionally operate. The inability to define the trajectory of ISIL as an organization has confused the U.S. response and inhibited our ability to coalesce around an effective strategy against ISIL.

The lack of consensus extends to Congress where the debate regarding an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) against ISIL has not yet made it out of the gate. While the House Foreign Affairs Committee has regularly examined ISIL's influence and the trajectory of the organization's capacity to spread terror and violence across the region, Congress has far from fulfilled its constitutional duty to authorize this conflict. It is time Congress make crystal clear to the Administration, our allies, our constituents, and our military families the circumstances and parameters under which we would once again authorize engagement by our men and women in uniform in this tumultuous region of the world.

I look forward to hearing from our witness today regarding our understanding of the current and future threats posed by ISIL. How would we measure and define victory against ISIL? If ISIL lost 100% of its territory in Syria and Iraq, would that diminish by an appreciable amount the threat it represents to the U.S.?

As informal discussions regarding an AUMF against ISIL have simmered, they have raised these fundamental questions about the future of fighting terror and how we accommodate necessary military action in an AUMF that would allow the U.S. to effectively prosecute terrorism without committing to war in perpetuity. We must heed the lessons of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and avoid falling headlong into a conflict with no clear mandate and conflicting objectives.

Some have exploited the lack of dialogue and people's misconceptions and fears to claim that we are somehow at war with an entire religion. A thoughtful discussion that seeks a tailored response to ISIL rather than perpetuating a one size fits all approach to the war on terrorism will help us define this conflict and discern friend from foe. ISIL does represent a challenge to U.S. security interests, but it should not threaten our values or our democratic institutions – and Congress can demonstrate this by exercising the authority granted to it in Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11 of the Constitution.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Special Envoy Brett McGurk by
Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
February 10, 2016

Question:
The administration's focus has been on defeating ISIL and a so-called diplomatic resolution after that, while paying little attention to al-Nusra. Is there any scenario in which we can defeat ISIL without allowing al-Nusra to fill that power vacuum? Why is there little focus on al-Nusra?

Answer:
Today's terrorism environment is complex, and we continue to focus on the threat both ISIL and al-Qa'ida pose to our homeland. Through our comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, we pursue a range of tools to degrade, disrupt, and defeat ISIL and al-Qa'ida, including through strong counterterrorism partnerships, multilateral initiatives, military action, and other means. We remain committed to combatting al-Qa'ida, including its affiliates, such as al-Nusrah Front (ANF) in Syria and al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, as well as ISIL. In July 2015, for instance, the U.S. military killed the operational leader of al-Qa'ida's Khorasan Group in Syria Muhsin al-Fadhli as well as chief bombmaker David Drugeon. Following, in October, we killed Sanafi al-Nasr, who at the time was the highest-ranking member of the al-Qa'ida affiliated Khorasan Group, helping to reduce the group's plans to attack the United States and our allies. We have conducted similar operations against senior AQAP commanders in Yemen, killing AQAP Amir Nasser al-Wahishi in June 2015. The Administration will continue to carry out such actions in pursuit of our National Counterterrorism Strategy's goal to disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida and its associated forces.

Question:
Other than diplomatic protests, will the administration take any measures to stop Russia from bombing Syrian civilians and continuing its support of Assad and his atrocities? If so, when? And if not, why not?

Answer:
Credible non-governmental organizations estimate Russian airstrikes have killed hundreds of civilians and displaced 70,000 Syrians. There is evidence showing the Russians are using "double tap" bombing methods, where their planes hit a civilian target, wait for the ambulances to arrive, and then bomb again. We have credible reports that hospitals, schools, and first responders have been hit. As Secretary Kerry has said, this has to stop.

But there is no military solution to this conflict. As President Obama has said, "what is it that Russia thinks it gains if it gets a country that's been completely destroyed as an ally that it now has to perpetually spend billions of dollars to prop up?" Russian actions only prolong the conflict and cause more deaths of innocent Syrians.

We are pressuring Russia to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decrease their operations in keeping with international consensus that a reduction in violence must be urgently implemented in Syria. We plan to take this message with us during the February 11 International

Syria Support Group Meeting in Munich in an effort to take concrete steps to reduce the violence in Syria.

Question:
Does the administration believe that our failure to assist the moderate opposition in Syria, and our inability to stop Russia from bombing Syrian civilians and continuing its support of Assad and his atrocities, risks further radicalization? Does it conflict with the administration's goal of degrading and defeating ISIL – can ISIL be defeated while Assad's atrocities continue?

Answer:
President Obama has set forth three inter-related goals in Syria: defeat Da'esh; stabilize the region; and help bring about a political transition to end this civil war. These are not in priority order – they are mutually reinforcing and we are moving forward on all of them.

We have not turned our back on the Syrian people. The United States has provided more than $500 million in transition and non-lethal support to the Syrian opposition, including support to moderate armed opposition unites. This support is designed to enable key local institutions to respond to community needs, preserve the moderate ideals of the revolution, and lay the foundation for inclusive governance. By empowering moderates to meet the needs of their communities, this support serves as a direct bulwark against extremists who would seek to buy the allegiance of the Syrian people. This support also prepares moderates to play a role in a future Syria that is inclusive and respects human rights.

With respect to the ongoing Russian intervention, Russia has said it wants Da'esh destroyed. We have countered that Asad is not a partner in defeating this terrorist organization. In contrast, the regime's brutality is a key recruiting tool for Da'esh foreign fighters. Of course, the truth is that, thus far in its campaign, Russian strikes have not targeted Da'esh.

The United States-led 66 member counter-Da'esh Coalition (Coalition) continues conducts airstrikes and works with groups on the ground to degrade and ultimately defeat Da'esh. We assess Da'esh currently has 19,000-25,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria, the lowest assessed range since the summer of 2014. Coalition-backed local forces have liberated several areas in Syria from Da'esh, including most recently the Tishreen Dam which serves as a critical Da'esh supply route from the Turkish border to Raqqa. Overall, Da'esh has lost 10 percent of the territory it controlled at its height in Syria. U.S. and coalition efforts will not stop until Da'esh is ultimately defeated and no longer controls territory in Syria or Iraq.

Question:
Is there concern that the members of the opposition will view the U.S. as having forsaken them and drive them away from us if we don't take immediate action in support of Aleppo? Aleppo is a majority Sunni city – is the administration worried that we may be making enemies out of the Sunnis by not taking decisive action there?

Answer:
Syria is a predominately Sunni country, and we are the largest single donor of humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian crisis, over $5.1 billion to-date. We continue to push for concrete steps to influence the regime and opposition groups to allow much needed humanitarian aid to reach besieged areas, including food and medical supplies, regardless of

ethnicity or religion which we will work to make a reality at the upcoming International Syria Support Group Ministerial in Munich on February 11.

As of February 4, regime advances, aided by Russian strikes, in the northern Aleppo countryside have displaced 70,000 Syrians according to UN and our partners, 80 percent of whom are reported to be children and women. Credible non-governmental organizations estimate Russian airstrikes have killed hundreds of civilians. We are very concerned about the people of Aleppo. We are continuing to provide the people of Aleppo with much needed humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies. Emergency assistance from USAID partners includes household food rations, flour to bakeries, food vouchers, medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. In coming months, relief agencies providing food assistance in Aleppo City plan to reach 165,000 people. We are also continuing our support to local and provincial councils to ensure they have the capability to continue to meet the needs of their communities during this trying time.

We are pressuring Russia to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decrease their operations in keeping with international consensus that a reduction in violence must be urgently implemented in Syria. We plan to take this message with us during the February 11 International Syria Support Group Meeting in Munich.

Question:
Other than diplomatic protests, does the administration intend on taking any measures to prevent a massacre of Syria's remaining moderate opposition and Russia's indiscriminate bombing inside and outside of Aleppo? How have Russia's recent military successes in support of Assad impacted the future of Syria and any political process that would lead to Assad's removal from power?

Answer:

In the Aleppo Governorate alone, Russian attacks that have displaced over 70,000 people, 80 percent of whom are reported to be children and women. Credible non-governmental organizations estimate Russian airstrikes have killed hundreds of civilians and displaced over 100,000. As Secretary Kerry said, this has to stop.

We are not relying on diplomatic efforts alone—to date, the U.S. has provided nearly $500 million in support to the moderate civilian and armed opposition in Syria. This support includes approximately $130 million in non-lethal support to vetted units of the moderate armed opposition. Our assistance helps to build unit cohesion, attract and retain fighters, and enhance the opposition's logistical capabilities on the battlefield as it protects fighters and their communities from the regime and its allies. We are pressuring Russia to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decrease their operations in keeping with international consensus that a reduction in violence must be urgently implemented in Syria. We plan to take this message with us during the February 11 International Syria Support Group Meeting in Munich.

There is no doubt that Russian support has shored up Bashar al-Asad's grip on Syria. But, as President Obama as said, "what is it that Russia thinks it gains if it gets a country that's been completely destroyed as an ally that it now has to perpetually spend billions of dollars to prop up?" Russian actions only prolong the conflict and cause more deaths of innocent Syrians. Russia wants Da'esh destroyed, but Bashar Asad is not a partner in defeating this terrorist organization – and we continue to relay that message. The regime's brutality is a key recruiting tool for Da'esh foreign fighters.

As part of the International Syria Support Group process, Russia joined in the Vienna II Statement in November, which reaffirms key Geneva Communique principles. Most importantly, the Statement reaffirmed the commitment to a political transition, including free and fair elections within 18 months, pursuant to a new constitution and administered under UN supervision to ensure the highest international standards. Russia also supported UNSCR 2254 which calls for the Regime and opposition negotiating teams to come to a consensus on President Asad's fate within six months of the beginning of negotiations in Geneva between the Syrian opposition and the Asad regime.

Question:
When will the administration airdrop humanitarian supplies to the people of Aleppo? Will the administration take action to airdrop supplies to Aleppo without going through the Munich talks process? If not, why not?

Answer:
We continue to work with United Nations agencies and a number of Non-Governmental Organizations to pursue all possible options to reach the 13.5 million people in need inside Syria, including Aleppo. The preferred method of aid is by land transportation, for reasons of security, logistics, control, and volume. Aid is still able to reach Aleppo via ground channels which we continue to use. Areas of Eastern Aleppo are priorities for deliveries in the next round of UN convoys of assistance to besieged areas.
While in certain circumstances airdropping humanitarian supplies is the only option, it is challenging for a number of reasons.

Aircraft delivering the supplies may be targeted by armed groups on the ground. Even if we succeed in airdropping supplies to the intended population, recipients could face retaliation by armed groups. Targeting in these circumstances is difficult. Aleppo, in particular, has multiple active conflict lines and there is no guarantee that opposition groups who secured the supplies would distribute them impartially to the most vulnerable amongst the populations such as women, children, the elderly and/or the disabled.

For these reasons it is imperative that Security Resolution 2254 be fully enforced so that unfettered access to supplies is made possible for all inside Syria.

The U.S. government has provided over $5.1 billion to date in response to the Syria humanitarian crisis.

Question:
How can the administration justify asking the Syrian opposition to drop its condition that the Assad regime, Russia and Iran cease committing crimes against humanity as a condition to continue the Geneva talks? Will there be any consequences for Assad and his supporters conducting airstrikes on February 15, 2016, in and around Aleppo – hitting two hospitals, including a children's hospital – after the cessation of hostilities was announced on February 11, 2016?

Answer:
We echo the HNC's call that UN Security Council Resolution 2254 must be fully implemented and share the opposition's beliefs that the Asad regime must stop blocking food and humanitarian assistance from reaching those in urgent need and stop barrel bombing the

Syrian people. The ISSG is clear in insisting that there must be humanitarian access to all needed parts of Syria. Humanitarian assistance to these communities needs to be sustained, supported by the international community, and not used as a bargaining chip.

Asad's brutality against his own people is unconscionable, and the United States does not support a Syrian government in which Asad remains in power. Russian actions to prop his regime only prolong the conflict and cause more deaths of innocent Syrians. But, there is no military solution to this conflict. We are pressuring Russia to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decrease their operations in keeping with international consensus that a reduction in violence must be urgently implemented in Syria. We plan to take this message with us during the February 11 International Syria Support Group Meeting in Munich and make concrete steps toward this action.

Question:
Will the State Department return the Iraqi Jewish Archive to Iraq this year and what is the fate of the Archive after the exhibit ends its run at my alma mater, Florida International University (FIU)?

Answer:
The Iraqi Jewish Archive (IJA) exhibit, arranged by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), is currently on display at the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU. Since 2003, the Department of State (DOS) has provided $3.5 million to NARA for the preservation and restoration of the more than 3,500 items that are collectively called the IJA. Per previous agreement with the Government of Iraq, the DOS is working, in consultation with NARA, to identify IJA items unrelated to the exhibit that might be returned to Iraq in the near term.

The exhibit at FIU consists of approximately 23 IJA items, which are representative of the larger collection. Miami is the fifth city to host the exhibit in the United States. When the exhibit closes in early March, the display items will return to NARA for temporary maintenance and item substitutions, as appropriate. DOS is working with NARA to identify additional venues for the exhibit, thereby allowing the exhibit to continue to inform the American people about the cultural and religious diversity of Iraq.

Question:
What guarantees have you received from the Iraqis in order to protect the residents of Camp Liberty from the newly strengthened and well-funded regime in Tehran?

Answer:
We have urged the Government of Iraq to do its utmost to secure Camp Hurriya from attack, and the Government of Iraq has stated its commitment to the security of the camp. However, the security situation in Iraq and the nature of indirect fire attacks make it impossible to prevent similar rocket attacks completely. The only way the residents of Camp Hurriya can be made secure is by finding them safe and permanent locations to live outside of Iraq. The State Department is working to identify countries willing to accept the residents for relocation, and an interagency team continues the effort to identify at least 100 residents for parole into the United States.

Question:
Will the United States or Iraq provide aerial protection to the Camp Liberty residents?

Answer:
The Government of Iraq is responsible for the security of Camp Hurriya. The counter-Da'esh fight has stretched the Iraqi Security Forces significantly, but Camp Hurriya remains within the heavily fortified Baghdad International Airport complex, limiting the risk of a ground attack. The risk of indirect fire attacks by rogue actors remains, though, leaving relocation out of Iraq as the only means to protect the residents.

Question:
What is the United States government doing to ensure the installation of T-walls around Camp Liberty?

Answer:
In response to a request by the residents of Camp Hurriya after the October 29, 2015 indirect fire attack, the Government of Iraq approved the installation of T-walls to reinforce safe havens in the camp. Between December 10, 2015 and January 11, 2016, contractors placed 886 T-walls. A total of 26 dining halls, which the residents designated as safe havens, now have T-walls placed around them. This includes fourteen that were protected prior to the October 29 attack and 12 newly protected safe-havens. T-walls were also installed around several additional housing units selected by camp residents. Residents have also installed over 50,000 sand bags.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Special Envoy Brett McGurk
Representative Michael McCaul
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
February 10, 2016

Question:
A UN report released last week found that, as of mid-December 2015, nearly 34 militant groups from around the world had reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIL. The report stated that ISIL poses "an unprecedented threat" to global security because of its ability to persuade groups in various locations to join its cause. As has been learned over the past two decades, terror networks operate in countries frequently beyond the reach of American access and influence – and with recent attacks in France, Lebanon, Turkey, Mali, and Indonesia, it is clear that this problem requires a comprehensive, multilateral solution.

In addition to supporting the adoption and implementation of multilateral, legally-binding sanctions, what other steps is the U.S. taking, at the UN and other international organizations, to take action against ISIL and related groups?

Answer:
The United States is working through a broad range of UN and other international organizations to build the political will and capacities of countries around the world to promote and implement international commitments, good practices, and norms to counter ISIL (hereafter "ISIL/Da'esh").

In the UN Security Council (UNSC), U.S. efforts led to the unanimous adoption, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, of resolution 2199 (2015), that deploys a range of tools to degrade ISIL/Dae'sh's financial support networks, including ISIL/Da'esh's raising of funds through oil smuggling, looting of antiquities, kidnapping for ransom, donations, and other illicit activities, as well as reaffirms existing prohibitions on supplying ISIL/Da'esh with arms and related materiel.

Under the U.S. presidency of the UNSC in December 2015, Secretary of the Treasury Jacob J. Lew chaired an unprecedented special meeting of the Security Council with finance ministers, which focused on advancing implementation of global standards on countering the financing of terrorism. The meeting also unanimously adopted resolution 2253, which refocused the UNSC 1267/1989 Al-Qaida Sanctions Regime more squarely on ISIL/Da'esh, including renaming it the "ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime," and encourages greater international action to disrupt ISIL/Da'esh's financing.

After the historic high-level summit of the UNSC chaired by President Obama on September 24, 2014, which adopted UNSC resolution 2178 to target foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), the UN has also increased its focus on FTFs. Approximately 45 countries have passed or updated existing laws to more effectively identify and prosecute FTFs, while respecting the rule of law, and are increasingly active in arresting and prosecuting FTFs. In May 2015, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson represented the U.S. at a special session of the UNSC with interior ministers that sought to further implementation of UNSC resolution 2178 and international cooperation to counter FTFs.

The United States is working with the UN's Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) Office, tasked to coordinate 37 entities of the UN system, to develop a capacity-building implementation plan to help coordinate technical assistance across the UN for countering FTFs.

Following the February 2015 White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), regional CVE summits throughout the summer, and the Leaders' Summit to Counter ISIL and Violent Extremism held on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the U.S. led adoption of a CVE resolution in the Human Rights Council in October 2015 to advance the human rights dimensions in CVE. In January 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon released a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Plan recommends that member states develop national action plans to prevent violent extremism and outlines mechanisms for the UN system to enhance its capacity to counter and prevent violent extremism.

In December 2015, the U.S. participated in a special meeting of the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee on "Preventing Terrorists from Exploiting the Internet and Social Media to Recruit Terrorists and Incite Terrorist Acts, while Respecting Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" that brought together member states, civil society and technology companies for two-day multi-stakeholder discussions of the issues and to better determine what role the UN could play to help address them.

The United States is partnering with UNESCO and with other member states to counter ISIL/Da'esh exploitation of cultural antiquities. UNESCO has developed a strategy to enhance its efforts to protect culture and promote cultural pluralism in the context of armed conflict. Similarly, following the adoption of U.S.-led UNESCO resolution 197 EX-46 (October 2015), UNESCO is developing guides for policy makers, toolkits for teachers, digital educational resources, and global networks on preventing violent extremism through education.

The United States continues to promote the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) work on countering the financing of terrorism, including by helping to facilitate a joint meeting of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL's Finance Group (CIFG) and FATF on February 14, 2016.

Following the example of the U.S. National Central Bureau, a number of member countries are now integrating the International Criminal Police Organization's (INTERPOL) information sharing resources into their national border security and law enforcement infrastructure to help monitor and interdict the international transit of FTFs and other transnational criminals. With financial and staffing support from the United States, INTERPOL's Counter-Terrorism Fusion Centre's FTF project manages an analytical database containing identity information that supports law enforcement and border control authorities' abilities to determine the terrorist threat posed by subjects located in, or attempting to enter, their respective jurisdictions.

In 2015, the United States provided funding for several new UN Office on Drugs Crime Terrorism/Prevention Branch programs aimed at strengthening the legal regime against terrorism within a rule of law framework in Morocco and improving the criminal justice response to FTFs in the Balkans and Central Asia.

In 2015, the United States provided funding to the UN interregional Crime and Justice Institute to launch a pilot diversion program aimed at potential FTFs and others at risk of recruitment into violent extremism and terrorism.

Under U.S. leadership and support, the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) has mobilized over $300 million to support national and regional efforts to strengthen civilian institutions to counter terrorism and violent extremism. In the past year, the GCTF launched

initiatives to develop and manage a database of recent and ongoing CT and CVE capacity-building assistance and to address the lifecycle of radicalization to violence, to provide alternatives for susceptible individuals who may be attracted to the ideologies promoted by ISIL/Da'esh and other terrorist groups. The GCTF and the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL FTF working groups on FTFs jointly met in January 2016 and published the *The Hague Implementation Plan on Foreign Terrorist Fighters to* synchronize and update their efforts.

In 2015, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) adopted declarations on CVE to strengthen OSCE efforts to counter Da'esh and, with U.S. funding, contributed to building the capabilities of border and customs officials to counter transnational threats in Central Asia. The United States also funded a border security training seminar focused on the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners (North Africa and the Middle East) in Spain. Through the OSCE's Action against Terrorism Unit, the United States also supported initiatives aimed at addressing effective criminal justice system responses to terrorism, travel document security, cyber security, and nonproliferation.

Question:
As the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, I fully understand the threat posed by ISIS to our homeland. However, I believe it is important for this Administration to continue its focus on the growing threat of other extremist organizations, particularly Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria. How do our attacks against ISIS affect our strategy and response to Al-Nusra? Does attacking ISIS make Al-Nusra Stronger or weaker?

Answer:
Today's terrorism environment is complex, and we continue to focus on the threat both ISIL and al-Qa'ida pose to our homeland. Through our comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, we pursue a range of tools to degrade, disrupt, and defeat ISIL and al-Qa'ida, including through strong counterterrorism partnerships, multilateral initiatives, military action, and other means. We remain committed to combatting al-Qa'ida, including its affiliates, such as al-Nusrah Front (ANF) in Syria and al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, as well as ISIL. In July 2015, for instance, the U.S. military killed the operational leader of al-Qa'ida's Khorasan Group in Syria Muhsin al-Fadhli as well as chief bombmaker David Drugeon. Following, in October, we killed Sanafi al-Nasr, who at the time was the highest-ranking member of the al-Qa'ida affiliated Khorasan Group, helping to reduce the group's plans to attack the United States and our allies. We have conducted similar operations against senior AQAP commanders in Yemen, killing AQAP Amir Nasser al-Wahishi in June 2015. The Administration will continue to carry out such actions in pursuit of our National Counterterrorism Strategy's goal to disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida and its associated forces.

Question:
What should the U.S. response to Aleppo be, and in your opinion, what impact would our failure to act have on our ability to lead in the region moving forward?
(Ryiad Hijab came out and essentially blamed the Administration's bad diplomacy in the region for the situation on the ground. I happen to agree with Mr. Hijab and believe that Aleppo is a sign of the U.S. inability to lead in the region. However, I also believe that what happens in Aleppo will be of great significance in our fight against extremism moving forward. I believe that

if the U.S. responds to the threat in Aleppo in the right way and assists in preventing Aleppo's fall, it would be a large step in disproving the narrative from terrorist organizations, such as ISIS and al-Nusra that the U.S. is against the Sunni population. If we do nothing, then we will have to live with the fact our inability to lead caused the coming catastrophe.)

Answer:

The United States continues to support moderate Syrian opposition forces and Syrian anti-Da'esh forces in northern Syria. North of Aleppo U.S.-supported groups are fighting Da'esh along the Ma'ra Line. In northeastern Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces, with U.S. air support, have reduced Da'esh access to the Turkish border to a remaining 98 kilometers. We continue to work with our ally Turkey to close this border to Da'esh and to ensure that humanitarian relief is delivered to those in need.

In Aleppo Governorate, Syrian Regime advances and Russian attacks have reportedly displaced over 70,000 people, 80 percent of whom are reported to be children and women. Credible non-governmental organizations estimate Russian airstrikes have killed hundreds of civilians and indicate that hospitals, schools, and first responders have been hit.

We are pressuring Russia, and through Russia, the Asad Regime, to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decrease their operations in keeping with international consensus that a reduction in violence must be urgently implemented in Syria. We plan to take this message with us during the February 11 International Syria Support Group Meeting in Munich and make concrete steps towards a reduction in violence.

In conjunction with our diplomatic efforts, we continue to provide the people of Aleppo with much needed humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies. We are also continuing our support to local and provincial councils to ensure they have the capability to continue to meet the needs of their communities during this trying time.

Through longstanding, flexible emergency relief programs, humanitarian actors continue both to provide and stockpile a significant amount of food and medical assistance in Aleppo City and surrounding areas to respond to ongoing and intensifying displacement and to anticipate a potential siege of the city. Emergency assistance from USAID partners includes household food rations, flour to bakeries, food vouchers, medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. In coming months, relief agencies providing food assistance in Aleppo City plan to reach 165,000 people. However, the only way to truly stop the suffering of the Syrian people is to find a political solution to this conflict. President Obama has set forth three inter-related goals in Syria: defeat Da'esh; stabilize the region; and help bring about a political transition to end this civil war. These are not in priority order – they are mutually reinforcing and we are moving forward on all of them.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Special Envoy Brett McGurk
Representative Dave Trott
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
February 10, 2016

Question:
The Kurds are benefitting from the breakdown of the Sykes-Picot agreement and President Massoud Barzani has said that the borders are now drawn in blood. Regarding the largest, stateless ethnic group in the Middle East and their aspirations for statehood, are they close to achieving such a measure? What does this mean for the future of ethnic and religious minorities in northern Iraq?

Answer:
The United States continues to support an Iraq that is federal, democratic, pluralistic, and unified. The Iraqi constitution recognizes the Iraq Kurdistan Region (IKR) as a semi-autonomous region, which gives it special rights including a high level of self-governance. Any future move towards statehood for the region is an internal Iraqi matter that IKR President Masoud Barzani has said would be worked out peacefully with greater Iraq.

The safety and rights of members of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq are issues of long-standing concern for the Department of State. More than 3.3 million Iraqis have been internally displaced in Iraq since January 2014. Of that number, more than 28 percent have fled to the three provinces of the IKR. This includes many internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are members of minority religious communities from the Ninewa Plain region, and ethnic minorities from Central and Northern Iraq. The United States continues to closely monitor the needs of all vulnerable populations in Iraq, including members of religious and ethnic minorities such as Christians, Yezidis, Kaka'i, Sabean-Mandaeans, Turkmen, and Shabak, as well as the needs of the much larger populations of Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq.

Question:
Minority communities have expressed sentiment of abandonment from both the Peshmerga and the Iraqi security forces following the rise of ISIS. What efforts have been made to support/integrate minority security forces who are willing to fight on the front lines to protect areas in the Nineveh plain?

Answer:
We encourage the Government of Iraq to ensure the protection of minority groups and the empowerment of local communities so that it might bolster its credibility among all Iraqis. In Anbar Province, Prime Minister Abadi appointed Governor Sohaib al-Rawi, a Sunni, as the Chair of the Ramadi High Committee for Stabilization and Reconstruction and provided Governor Rawi considerable flexibility and authority in stabilizing Ramadi. PM Abadi authorized the training and equipping of local forces as part of the Sunni Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), so local Anbaris are part of the effort to liberate and secure their land. He has also given greater authority to leadership in Salah ad Din Province and guaranteed Sunnis from Ninewa Province a role in the liberation of Mosul. The protection and inclusion of minority groups in Iraq is a top priority in our relationship with the Government of Iraq.

Coordinating U.S. military assistance through the central government is required by Iraqi law, and it helps demonstrate our commitment to a unified, sovereign and independent Iraq. With that in mind, we have not separately armed and equipped any minority group militias that have not been incorporated into the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Peshmerga and the Popular Mobilization Forces. There are formations of militias organized from Iraq's religious minority communities, including Shabak and Yezidi, who have been incorporated into the Peshmerga.

Question:
Iraqi defense minister, Khaled al-Obeidi, who hails from Mosul, has publicly stated that the Mosul offensive will take place this year. Is the government of Iraq on track to dislodge the operations of the Islamic State? Could you also briefly discuss what the political environment will look like in a post-Daesh settlement, specifically in Mosul? What role will the region's historic ethnic and religious minorities have in this new settlement?

Answer:
Shaping operations for the eventual liberation of Mosul have already begun. Conditions on the ground, including whether or not Iraqi forces can successfully isolate Mosul, will dictate when operations will begin in the city proper.

The Government of Iraq, with support from Coalition partners and the United Nations Development Program, has already begun planning for stabilization activities in a liberated Mosul, with particular attention to the reestablishment of local security units and restoration of basic services. The successful liberation and stabilization operations executed in Tikrit and ongoing in Ramadi provide the template for the post-Da'esh environment in Ninewa province. In all our high-level engagement, we highlight the need to speed the reintegration of minorities into liberated communities. Prime Minister Abadi and Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Barzani have both publicly stressed the need to protect minorities.

We have also supported a program empowering the Ninewa Provincial Council (NPC) to take the lead role in organizing inclusive security in three pilot districts (Zummar, Rabia, and Makhmour). The program also promotes dialogue and mediation to develop local models of community coexistence, provide training on concepts of trauma, reconciliation, and documentation, and produce and publicize testimonials on abuses suffered. As more areas are liberated from Da'esh control and the NPC grows into its role, the goal is to use the pilot districts as a model for the rest of Ninewa Province, including Mosul. We will continue to work with the Government of Iraq to encourage the development of stabilization plans that are inclusive of all Iraqis.

Question:
Using Sinjar as a model and the remnants left behind by ISIS (booby trapping public infrastructure and houses), has the planning begun/resources allocated to restore, reconstruct and get people back in their homes, especially in Mosul and its surrounding areas?

Answer:
The United States, the Iraqi government, and the counter-ISIL coalition are working closely to overcome the many challenges that impede the stabilization of liberated areas. The best example of this is the stabilization work done in Tikrit, largely funded by the Funding

Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS), a UNDP program. Coalition partners have provided over $77 million to the FFIS to support stabilization activities.

The Coalition's Stabilization Working Group is focused entirely on identifying Iraqi needs and soliciting partners to help fill those needs. Beyond Tikrit, the UNDP has worked closely with Iraqi national and provincial leaders to prepare for stabilization activities in other areas, including Sinjar and Ramadi. UNDP is in the process of completing assessments in both Ramadi and Sinjar as the next step in identifying stabilization needs. In addition, we continue to provide financial, military, and other support to the Iraqis in clearing explosive remnants of war.

Mosul will be a significant challenge for stabilization. It is a large city, and Da'esh has had ample time to prepare its defenses. As the Iraqis develop their plan to retake Mosul, supported by the U.S. and other Coalition partners, we will continue to consider stabilization requirements and coordinate both military and political efforts.

Question:
I'm from southeast Michigan and I'm proud to represent one of the largest Chaldean constituencies in the United States. It's providential that we host this hearing on Ash Wednesday, when it seems that often that the religious minorities, who are indigenous to these lands, are often ignored, if not completely forgotten about. I unfortunately noticed in your 10 page testimony that you did not mention the words "religious minority," "Christian," "Chaldean," "Assyrian" at all, and the word "Yzidi" was only mentioned once. [Note: Not a question; was not answered by NEA]

Answer:
Note: 7 QFRs original sent, but QFR #5 was a statement not a question.

Question:
Why does the administration continue to be tone-deaf in recognizing the plight of these embattled religious minorities, and what serious steps has the administration taken to ensure that Chaldeans and other ethno-religious minorities are being integrated into plans, not just for Iraq's future, but the present?

Answer:
The Department of State has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of religious freedom—a universal human right—for members of religious and ethnic minorities, including in Iraq. Additionally, we are dedicated to preserving the region's cultural and religious diversity in the name of pluralism and political and social tolerance.

As the United States leads a coalition to degrade and ultimately defeat Da'esh and end Da'esh's atrocities, we harness all elements of American power—military, information, diplomatic, economic, development, and the power of our values. Senior officials, including Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein, are focused on the dire situation of all Iraqis, including Christians, Shabak, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandeans, and members of other groups, who suffer at the hands of Da'esh.

The United States has provided nearly $604 million in humanitarian assistance since October 2013 for more than 3.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and Iraqi refugees in the region. Much of this assistance has been spent in support of minority families who have been displaced. The United States has also provided funding for Syrian refugees and other conflict-

affected populations within Iraq. Our assistance in Iraq is not enough to make up for funding shortfalls in the UN appeals. The most recent UN appeal for Iraq was 63 percent funded.

Since 2008, the Department of State and USAID have provided more than $100 million in assistance for religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq for a variety of efforts, including promotion of respect for members of minority groups, interfaith tolerance, religious tolerance, reconciliation, community stabilization, conflict mitigation, and cultural preservation.

The Department of State will hold a conference in May 2016 on the protection of religious minorities in the Middle East, which will bring civil society and religious leaders together with senior government officials to mobilize additional resources and develop practical steps towards protecting vulnerable religious communities and ensuring their integration into the plans and programs for reconciliation efforts that are building toward the future of Iraq.

Question:
Do you believe that the Chaldeans and other religious minorities in Iraq are in the midst of genocide?

Answer:
Da'esh's atrocities, which involve forced displacement, forced conversions, and sexual violence, have resulted in wide-scale fatalities and injuries. We are appalled by the horrific acts being committed by Da'esh. We are working, and will continue to work, to support efforts to hold those responsible for such barbarous acts accountable. The United States is leading a coalition of 66 partners to degrade and ultimately defeat Da'esh and end these atrocities. We are also working with partners to document evidence of Da'esh's acts, thereby laying the groundwork for future justice efforts.

Regardless of whether Da'esh's conduct satisfies certain legal definitions, including genocide and crimes against humanity, the United States has been clear that our interest in accountability for perpetrators remains undiminished. We abhor Da'esh's heinous acts and are taking direct action to end these atrocities. As Da'esh seeks to destroy the diversity of the areas it terrorizes, the U.S. government will continue to work to help prevent mass atrocities, particularly against vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities.

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