S. HRG. 116–200

IRAQ: A CROSSROADS OF U.S. POLICY

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST, SOUTH ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA, AND COUNTERTERRORISM

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JULY 16, 2019

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations

Available via the World Wide Web:
http://www.govinfo.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
40–519 PDF WASHINGTON : 2020

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IRAQ: A CROSSROADS OF U.S. POLICY

TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2019

U.S. SENATE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST, SOUTH ASIA,
CENTRAL ASIA, AND COUNTERTERRORISM,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:00 p.m. in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Mitt Romney, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Romney, Gardner, Murphy, Shaheen, and Kaine.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MITT ROMNEY, U.S. SENATOR FROM UTAH

Senator ROMNEY. The hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism will come to order.

Today we are holding the first hearing in this Congress of the Near East Subcommittee. It is significant that the topic we are considering is Iraq. Not only is Iraq a place of enormous strategic interest for the U.S., it is a country where 4,565 United States service members have given their lives. We remember and honor these individuals and the families who survive them. Iraqi Freedom came at a great cost.

Several months ago, Ranking Member Murphy and I traveled to Iraq to meet with U.S. officials there and with Iraqi Government leaders. Iraq has proven for nearly two decades to be the place where vital U.S. interests and the Middle East intersect. This is the focus of our hearing today.

In 2014, ISIS seized control of roughly a third of Iraqi territory, terrorized the Iraqi people with a level of brutality unexpected even in a country that had lived under the regime of Saddam Hussein. While ISIS is no longer a territorial caliphate, Iraq still faces major security and economic challenges. Among those challenges are how to build an independent Iraq, how to sustain a vibrant economy, whether and how to assimilate returning ISIS fighters, and how to counter excessive Iranian influence.

The question for us is how can the U.S. best support Iraq's efforts to achieve a secure and prosperous future and become a stabilizing force in the region. We note that Iraq has significant natural resources, but it is failing to exploit them. It flares its natural gas because of insufficient infrastructure. The annual value of flared gas is in the tens of billions of dollars. Even so, infrastructure in-

vestments have been negotiated for years but never executed. Just last month, a 30-year $53 billion project with Exxon Mobil was placed on hold.

Recently the Iraqi Government lifted travel restrictions in Baghdad's Green Zone, but the security situation is not resolved. ISIS may no longer have territorial control but is reorganizing in underground cells. The Iraqi Government faces enormous challenges to prevent these extremists from terrorizing and radicalizing the people.

Of course, the ISIS challenge is not just from terrorist cells. There are currently tens of thousands of former ISIS fighters and their families in camps in Iraq and Syria. The government is committed to bringing home as many as 30,000 Iraqis who went to Syria as part of the Islamic State. Determining how to handle such a staggering number of radicalized men, women, and even children is a daunting challenge.

Another concern is the ongoing presence of militias that were formed to counter ISIS. These militias have not been easily assimilated into Iraqi security apparatus. Some of them remain under Iranian direction.

And finally and perhaps most significantly, Iraq needs a strategy to address its relationship with Iran. The Iraqi leaders we met with underscored that they do not want their nation to become a vassal state of anyone. I note that recent Iranian attacks on ships and a U.S. drone have elevated our concern for the safety of American troops there, as well as our diplomatic personnel. The question then becomes how can we help Iraq foster closer ties with other countries in the region to balance Iranian influence.

I am grateful to have two expert witnesses from the administration with us to discuss these issues. I hope today that you will be able to provide an overview not only of the current situation on the ground in the context of these challenges, but also to provide your insights and recommendations about how the U.S. can support Iraq in its journey to become a secure, economically successful, and independent state.

And with that, I will turn things over to Senator Murphy for his comments.

STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER MURPHY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I was grateful to join you in visiting the region, grateful for our hearing today.

As you have noted, more than a year and a half since the Iraqi Government declared victory over ISIS, a number of challenges still remain. The first is obvious. ISIS is not fully defeated. It has lost control over territory. That is a very important step, but the group has gone underground to regroup. And they still periodically mount insurgency-style attacks in the country. The threat they pose in Iraq remains.

Of course, there cannot be any enduring victory over ISIS in Iraq without political stability. The Iraqi Government will need to rebuild decimated cities and help millions of civilians that are displaced. The Iraqi Government will need to resolve territorial and

resource disputes with the Kurdistan regional government. They need to tackle corruption, improve service delivery, diversify the economy, and integrate militia groups.

If this sounds like a familiar prescription for success, it is because it is. The political mission inside Iraq is the one that America has, unfortunately, failed at over and over. The military successes—they come a little bit easier.

We spent a lot of money in Iraq, averaging about $1.2 billion annually in recent years to train and equip Iraqi Security Forces and billions more in economic assistance, humanitarian aid, and lines of credit.

But looking back on the trends of U.S. assistance to Iraq, there is a pattern: huge spikes in military and non-military assistance levels in response to outbreaks of violence in the country, and then dramatic drop-offs once victory is declared, only to see this cycle repeat. There has to be a better way to play the long game here, to signal a longer-term, multiyear level of commitment in ways that do not require us to dramatically ramp up and ramp down funding in response to crises.

When we were in Iraq in April, I heard from many Iraqis who told me that they worry that the United States is just going to move on and forget about them. Listen, I opposed the Iraq war, but I also understand that we have a moral obligation as a country to help fix a nation that we played a leading role in breaking. So we need to reassure the Iraqis that we are invested in their long-term stability and success.

Unfortunately, it seems some of the moves by this administration are signaling the opposite. Today the bulk of our assistance to Iraq is military assistance, and because it is parceled out on a year-to-year basis, it seems that many of our representatives in Baghdad are spending their time just trying to buy as much stuff as quickly as possible for the Iraqis. One of the folks we talked to there said that they would rather have $100 million over 10 years than have to spend $100 million in 1 year. The balance of our assistance, military to civilian, seems badly askew.

Last September, we also closed our consulate in Basra and withdrew our diplomats. Over the weekend, new reports emerged that the diplomatic drawdown from our embassy in Baghdad has left less then 15 State Department officials working directly on our core diplomatic functions. From an outside perspective, it is hard to reconcile the withdrawal of our diplomats now when we were able to maintain a diplomatic presence in Baghdad and Basra through even the most dangerous years in Iraq in the mid-2000s. How can we hope to have any influence in Iraq without sufficient diplomatic personnel in place? How can we accomplish our goals if we have no one in the field?

And lastly, the administration's backward policy towards Iran is making our job much, much harder. I hope to ask you some questions about the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization. We have put our troops at risk of attack, and we have cut off much of our ability to talk to any of the Iraqi militia groups that have relationships with Tehran. The cost of this new, hastily-planned hard line with Iran is going to make our job of political reconciliation a lot harder in Iraq.

I am grateful for the hearing. There is a lot to discuss, and I look forward to hearing from both of our witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Senator Murphy.

Let me note that I made an error in my comments. I said the annual value of flared gas is in the tens of billions of dollars. That is not accurate. It is in the single billions of dollars.

We have one panel here today with two witnesses.

Ambassador Joan Polaschik is here. She is the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, is a career Foreign Service officer, and has focused her career on the Middle East and North Africa. Most recently she served as the U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of Algeria. Her previous positions included serving as the Director of the State Department's Office of Egypt and Levant Affairs and Director of the Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. embassy in Tripoli, Libya, and Regional Refugee Coordinator based at the U.S. embassy in Amman, Jordan.

We also have Michael or Mick P. Mulroy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East. Mr. Mulroy is a retired paramilitary operations officer from the Central Intelligence Agency. His previous assignments include Chief of Department in the Special Activities Center, Chief of Station of an overseas country, Chief of Expeditionary Team in a war zone country, Chief of Base in a war zone country, and Deputy Chief of Branch in the Special Activities Division. He served as a U.S. Marine reservist who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

We will now turn to our first witness, Ambassador Polaschik. Thank you for your service and your willingness to testify here today. Your full statement will be included in the record, without objection. So if you could please keep your remarks to no more than 5 minutes or so, we would appreciate that so that we can engage with some questions. Ambassador.

STATEMENT OF HON. JOAN POLASCHIK, ACTING PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today and agree that my full testimony should be submitted for the record. Thank you for that.

I look forward to discussing the challenges Iraq continues to face and the many ways the United States can help Iraq as it seeks stability and reintegrates into the region.

Our relationship with Iraq remains vital for U.S. national security interests. Bolstering Iraq as a sovereign, stable, united, and democratic partner continues to be our principal objective. We must remain engaged to ensure that Iraq can fend off internal and external threats, including from Iran, to its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

U.S. security assistance remains integral to Iraq's stability. Iraq relies on our assistance to reinforce the primacy of the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga.

The United States remains committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS and eliminating the conditions that would allow for its resurgence. We operate in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, and together with two dozen other countries, we help Iraq ensure that our gains against ISIS endure. Iraq's growing ability to act in partnership with the coalition to defeat our shared national security threats is one of the truly remarkable developments since 2014.

Despite the gains they have made, Iraq's armed forces are stretched by competing demands and need continued assistance to eradicate ISIS remnants, secure Iraq's borders, and become a source of regional stability. The U.S.-led coalition must continue to build the capacity of Iraq's legitimate and professional security forces.

Iraq's stability will hinge upon its government's ability to assert control over militia groups. We support the Government of Iraq's efforts to bring all armed groups fully under state control. On July 1, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi issued a decree to institutionalize the Popular Mobilization Forces, or PMF. Disciplined elements of the PMF were instrumental in the territorial defeat of ISIS. Some rogue PMF elements, however, take instructions from Iran. Their activities are particularly destabilizing in the liberated areas where they prioritize smuggling and extortion over fighting ISIS. These same groups surveil our diplomatic facilities and Iraqi military bases where the coalition is training Iraqi Security Forces. Some militia leaders plot against U.S. interests and plan operations that could kill Americans, coalition partners, and Iraqis. Undisciplined PMF groups also continue to conduct indirect fire attacks as they did against our consulate in Basra last year. The prime minister's decree, therefore, is an important step for shoring up Iraq's sovereignty and security. Implementation of the decree will be key, and we will engage with the Government of Iraq on its plans for enforcement.

Eliminating Iraqi dependence on Iranian energy imports will strengthen the Iraqi economy and deprive Iran of resources to exert its malign influence. Iraq should remain focused on advancing projects to install new power generation facilities, develop electricity delivery infrastructure, and promote domestic production of natural gas. These projects make economic sense, contribute to Iraq's full autonomy from Iran, and support our policy of denying the Iranian regime revenue.

In order for Iraq to reach its economic potential, the Government of Iraq must also tackle corruption and excessive red tape. The United States continues to support an initiative from the U.N.'s Conference on Trade and Development which will increase transparency for the Iraqi public and U.S. investors.

It is in our interest to support Iraq's democratic development, but significant challenges remain to the building of durable institutions that protect the rule of law, secure human rights, and promote free and fair elections. Supporting pluralism and protecting the rights of minorities is integral to the administration's effort to defeat ISIS, counter violent extremism, and promote religious freedom. In the 5 years since ISIS launched its campaign of genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and other religious minorities, we have

programmed over $340 million to help the recovery of Iraq's persecuted religious communities.

Finally, a strong Kurdistan regional government within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability. We are proud of our longstanding partnership with Iraq's Kurdish people. Following the Kurds' 2017 independence referendum, the administration has focused on helping Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdistan region mend relations. The Government of Iraq and the KRG have made progress and we will continue to work with both sides to resolve outstanding tensions.

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Polaschik follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JOAN POLASCHIK

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, Members of the Committee: I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the challenges Iraq continues to face from Iran, ISIS, and armed groups not under the control of the Iraqi government, including some that are backed by Iran. These actors pose a threat to the stability of Iraq and to Iraq's future and I look forward to discussing the many ways the United States and the U.S.-led Coalition can help Iraq as they continue to seek stability and re-integrate into the region.

Our relationship with Iraq remains vital for U.S. national security interests and regional security. Bolstering Iraq as a sovereign, stable, united, and democratic partner of the United States continues to be our principal objective. We must remain engaged to ensure that Iraq can fend off the internal and external threats, including threats from Iran, to its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

To help offset the impact of Iran's harmful meddling in Iraq, we must continue to build on our successful diplomatic efforts to reintegrate Iraq into the region, particularly among Arab states. Constructive relations between Iraq and its neighbors are a powerful counterweight to Iran's malign influence. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi, President Barham Salih, and Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali al-Hakim, Iraq has strengthened ties across the region. Since taking office, they have welcomed King Abdullah II of Jordan and with him inaugurated a joint industrial zone along the Jordan-Iraq border; they have received an unprecedented visit from the Emir of Kuwait; and they have conducted significant state visits to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among other key milestones.

U.S. security assistance remains integral to Iraq's security and stability. Iraq relies on our assistance to reinforce the primacy of the Iraqi Security Forces, strengthen their capabilities, and deepen their professionalism. In support of our partners in the Iraqi Security Forces, the U.S.-led Global Coalition to defeat ISIS helped Iraq regain control over all its territory and train-and-equip more than 212,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga. The Government of Iraq's December 2018 announcement of the liberation of all Iraqi territory from ISIS control was a great moment for Iraq and all Iraqis. Together with the U.S.-led Coalition and our Iraqi partners, we must remain vigilant to prevent the return of ISIS or the emergence of other terrorist groups.

The United States remains committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS and eliminating the conditions that would allow for its resurgence. The work of the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS is not over yet. The United States and our partners continue to operate in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government, with two dozen other countries helping Iraq ensure that our gains against ISIS endure. The Iraqi Security Forces realize that they still need the Coalition's assistance in conducting targeted counter-terrorism operations and combatting a reemerging ISIS insurgency. Iraq's growing ability to act in partnership with the Coalition to defeat our shared national security threats is one of the truly remarkable developments since 2014. For example, Iraq was instrumental in advancing the Coalition's military campaign in Syria, providing valuable artillery support and airstrikes for the Syrian Democratic Forces' offensive just over the border.

Despite the gains they have made with our support, Iraq's armed forces are stretched by competing demands and need continued assistance and training to eradicate ISIS remnants, secure Iraq's borders, and become a source of regional stability. Consequently, the U.S.-led Coalition must continue to build the capacity of Iraq's legitimate and professional security forces.

Iraq's stability will hinge upon its government's ability to assert control over increasingly powerful militia groups. We support the Government of Iraq's efforts to bring all armed groups fully under state control. On July 1, Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi issued a decree to institutionalize the Popular Mobilization Forces. Disciplined elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces were instrumental in the territorial defeat of ISIS and we recognize the critical role they played in that campaign. Some rogue elements, however, take instructions from Iran rather than the Iraqi central government. Their activities are particularly destabilizing in the liberated areas, where they appear to prioritize smuggling and extortion for personal gain over fighting ISIS. These same groups surveil our diplomatic facilities as well as Iraqi military bases where the Coalition is training the Iraqi Security Forces. We know that militia leaders continue to plot against U.S. interests and plan operations that could be used to kill Americans, other Coalition partners, and even Iraqis that work closely with us. Undisciplined Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) groups also continue to conduct nuisance indirect fire attacks, as they did against our Consulate in Basrah last year. The Prime Minister's decree is an important step towards shoring up Iraq's sovereignty and security. Implementation of the decree will be key, and we will engage with the Government of Iraq on its plans for enforcement.

Eliminating Iraqi dependence on Iranian energy imports will strengthen the Iraqi economy and deprive Iran of resources to exert its malign influence. A country as wealthy in natural resources as Iraq should be able to produce all of its own electricity. Iraq, however, imports a significant amount of electricity and natural gas from Iran. While we recognize there is no quick fix to eliminate Iraq's energy imports from Iran, we support Iraq's efforts to expand its own energy independence over time. These efforts include increasing domestic gas capture and electricity generation capacity as well as enhancing energy cooperation with Iraq's Gulf neighbors and Jordan. Of course, it will take years for Iraq to realize full energy independence. Iraq, should remain focused on advancing projects to install new power generation facilities, develop electricity delivery infrastructure, and promote domestic production of natural gas.

These projects not only make economic sense, they contribute to Iraq's national interest of full autonomy from Iran, and simultaneously support our policy of denying the Iranian regime revenue.

In order for Iraq to reach its economic potential, the Government of Iraq must tackle corruption and the problem of excessive red tape. To that end, the United States continues to support an initiative from the U.N.'s Conference on Trade and Development, which is streamlining some of Iraq's bureaucratic processes, thereby increasing transparency both for the Iraqi public and for U.S. investors.

Lack of essential services and high unemployment, especially among youth, are major drivers of Iraq's instability. The best solution is to foster a sustainable Iraqi private sector as an outlet for the 800,000 Iraqis who reach working age every year. The government cannot be the sole source of employment for a country where 60 percent of Iraq's population is under the age of 25. Iraq's current and future stability depends on finding work for this disproportionately large youth segment.

It is in our interest to support Iraq's democratic development, but significant challenges remain to the building of durable institutions that will protect the rule of law, secure human rights for all its citizens, and promote free and fair elections. Iraqis are demanding better governance and ultimately their voices must be heard. Unfortunately, last year's electoral turnout was the lowest since 2005. In spite of all of the turmoil of the past 15 years, however, Iraq's core democratic institutions have survived. The administration will continue to support free and fair elections while encouraging all Iraqis to vote.

In particular, supporting pluralism and protecting the rights of minorities is integral to the administration's effort to defeat ISIS, counter violent extremism, and promote religious freedom around the world. In a little more than 2 weeks, it will be 5 years since ISIS launched its campaign of genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and other religious minorities. In response, we have programmed over $340 million since fiscal year 2017 to help the recovery of Iraq's persecuted religious communities. Our support includes life-saving humanitarian assistance, rehabilitating critical infrastructure, clearing explosive remnants of war, psychosocial and legal services, funding justice and accountability efforts, and help for local businesses. Yet, hundreds of thousands of Yezidi, Christian and other religious minorities, remain blocked from returning home by these noncompliant militias, representing an existential threat to Iraq's religious mosaic. We continue to press the Government of Iraq to take immediate steps to transition security in Sinjar and Nineveh Plain away from these militias to formal state bodies and help these traumatized communities return home and restore their lives within Iraq.

The administration believes that a strong Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and to the enduring defeat of ISIS. We are proud of our longstanding and historic partnership with Iraq's Kurdish people.

Following the Kurds' 2017 independence referendum, the administration has focused on helping leaders in Baghdad and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) mend relations, and since the appointment of Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, the Government of Iraq and the KRG have made strides toward this. We will continue to work with Baghdad and Erbil to encourage their efforts to resolve outstanding sources of tension. We will also continue to press the KRG to implement badly-needed reforms. For example, the KRG must put Peshmerga security forces under the direct control of the KRG rather than political parties. In addition, we encourage the KRG and the Government of Iraq to restore joint security mechanisms which will increase security and counterterrorism cooperation and eliminate security gaps in seams between KRG and Government of Iraq-controlled areas.

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, as you know, Mission Iraq operates in a critical threat environment. On May 14, the Department approved Embassy Baghdad's request to go on Ordered Departure. The decision was based on the current threat situation against U.S. personnel and facilities. We recognize the critical importance of advancing U.S. interests in Iraq through our diplomatic presence; however the President and Secretary have been clear that the safety and security of our all Americans is the administration's top priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. Mulroy.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL P. MULROY, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. MULROY. Thank you, sir. Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, members of the committee, it is my pleasure and privilege to speak to you today.

The U.S.-Iraq security partnership is of vital importance. Any disengaging from Iraq would risk an ISIS resurgence. It would cede the field to Iran and destabilize the region. U.S. and coalition forces are operating at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, anchored in the Strategic Framework Agreement signed by our countries more than 10 years ago.

The best way to honor U.S., coalition, and Iraqi sacrifices is to bolster Iraqi Security Forces to defend their sovereignty against internal and external threats.

The fight against ISIS is not over, and the road to recovery will be long. 5 years ago, ISIS controlled a territory the size of West Virginia. The group seized major cities, attracted terrorist fighters from across the globe, and generated over $1 million in income every day. It also claimed responsibility for numerous global attacks and its violent propaganda casts a shadow across the world.

When the Government of Iraq requested support to defeat ISIS, the United States answered the call. We mobilized a global coalition which now stands at 80 members. The combined joint task force Operation Inherent Resolve includes the United States and 15 other nations. It brought immense fire power through thousands of airstrikes and combat-experienced side-by-side advisors. I have been one of those advisors in the past, and I can tell you that nothing gives you more confidence than having the United States Air Force above you and a tactical air controller beside you.

I would also like to highlight Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service. They rank among the region's most capable, and they serve as a testament to our capacity-building efforts.

Our priority now is to ensure that the investments of blood and sweat in the D–ISIS fight outlive the warfighting of the last 5 years. Our by, with, and through approach continues to benefit both countries with a relatively limited U.S. footprint, down from 150,000 in 2008 to just over 5,000 today.

The defeat of ISIS, however, is not a foregone conclusion. We see ISIS building clandestine networks across Iraq and Syria, working to undermine the Iraqi Security Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces and to create conditions they need to seize territory in the future.

At the Department of Defense, we also recognize that good governance and economic opportunity are needed to translate battlefield gains into a lasting peace. U.S. diplomats are the main effort in this endeavor, and at the Department of Defense, we proudly support them.

Critics of our military presence often claim we have ulterior motives. We do not. We are in Iraq to defeat ISIS and build Iraq's capacity. The more capable their security institutions are, the more resilient they will be in the face of terrorists and malign activities bent on exploitation.

Iran is the foremost of these malign actors. Iran-backed militias have consistently flouted Baghdad and turned to crime for self-enrichment. We see Iran using this playbook throughout the region. They hide behind their proxies and use them to fight only for Iranian interests. Our primary concern is the extent to which these noncompliant militias, more loyal to Tehran than Baghdad, undermine the prime minister's authority, prey on ordinary Iraqis, and destabilize the fragile communities recently liberated by ISIS.

It is in Iraq's national security interest to unburden itself from Iran's exploitation. We are encouraged by the prime minister's July 1st decree to bring all militias under formal Iraqi control.

Another high priority concern is Baghdad-Erbil relations. We are encouraging the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to work through their political differences, coordinate security in northern Iraq, and prevent an ISIS resurgence.

There is also growing risk that ISIS will exploit their captured fighters in prisons in Iraq and their family members residing in IDP camps. This situation amounts to a ticking time bomb, given the risk of producing a new generation of extremists. It is ISIS 2.0 if the international community does not address it.

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, only with a long-term security partnership can Iraq prevent the territorial resurgence of ISIS that would threaten the United States, Iraq, and the world. If sufficiently resourced for the long game, the Department of Defense's efforts will afford diplomats the space to help Iraq overcome its challenges. Over time, we will further economize our footprint, normalize our security cooperation, and sustain an increasingly mature partnership with Iraq.

I look forward to discussing how we best advance our interests with you. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mulroy follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL P. MULROY

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, Members of the Committee: It is my pleasure to speak to you today as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East. I look forward to discussing how we can best advance U.S. interests in Iraq.

The U.S.-Iraq security partnership is of vital importance. Our principal objective is to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. U.S. and Coalition forces are operating in Iraq at the express invitation of the Iraqi government to help Iraqis secure Iraq. When I was last in Baghdad in March, every Iraqi I met with underscored the indispensability of our security partnership. U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces fought shoulder to shoulder to defeat ISIS's so-called "caliphate." The best way to honor those shared sacrifices is to bolster Iraq's security forces to prevent an ISIS resurgence and defend its sovereignty against internal and external threats. U.S. national security interests and regional stability hinge on a secure, sovereign Iraq.

At the Department of Defense (DoD), we recognize that the U.S. military effort cannot alone deliver the desired results in Iraq. We see our toolkit as nested within a whole-of-government approach. U.S. commitment to diplomatic and economic action is required to ensure Iraq's long-term stability and security.

Supporting Iraq in providing good governance and economic opportunity can translate battlefield gains into lasting peace. U.S. diplomats represent the vanguard in this endeavor, and we proudly support them.

There is a fundamental premise that shapes much of our thinking on Iraq: Prematurely disengaging would compromise U.S. national security, leave Iraq exposed to other foreign influence, and destabilize the region.

The fight against ISIS is not over, and the road to recovery will be long.

Five years ago, ISIS controlled approximately 21,000 square miles of Iraqi territory. That is nearly the size of West Virginia. More than 4 million people in Iraq lived under ISIS's oppressive rule. The group fielded a battlefield force capable of seizing major cities, attracted foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 countries to Iraq and Syria, and generated at least $1 million a day in income. It claimed responsibility for a steady drumbeat of terrorist attacks outside of Iraq and Syria, from coordinated mass-casualty attacks, such as in Paris in November 2015, to those conducted by lone actors claiming inspiration from the group.

Despite the liberation of ISIS-held territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS-linked attacks continue abroad, including in Sri Lanka in April 2019.

Ruthless and cruel, ISIS's attempts to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria were marked by mass executions and public beheadings. On Iraqi soil, ISIS committed acts of genocide, desecrated holy sites, and nearly destroyed the Iraqi economy. The resulting refugee crisis from Iraq and neighboring Syria rippled across Europe. The group's weaponization of violent propaganda cast a shadow across the world.

When the Government of Iraq requested U.S. support to defeat ISIS in 2014, the United States readily answered. We mobilized a Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which now stands at 80 members, including many with which we work side by side in Iraq. Our State Department colleagues have seen success in fundraising from the Global Coalition, particularly to support humanitarian and stabilization activities, and DoD has received contributions from partners to support counter-ISIS efforts directly. DoD also continues to work with these allies and partners to clear areas liberated from ISIS, train partner forces and provide technical assistance, conduct targeted CT operations to address continuing threats, and support stabilization efforts. Moreover, the United Nations Assistance Mission, U.N. Investigative Team for Accountability of Da'esh, NATO Mission Iraq, and EU Advisory Mission also represent crucial political and political-military efforts.

The Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR), which includes the United States and 15 other nations, brought to bear immense firepower against ISIS through thousands of airstrikes and the expertise of thousands of experienced U.S. and Coalition advisors building the capacity of Iraq's soldiers. CJTF–OIR currently helps train and equip 28 Iraqi brigades composed of thousands of soldiers. U.S. and Coalition forces have trained and equipped more than 212,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including our stalwart Kurdish Peshmerga partners in the north. Iraq's Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) ranks among the region's most capable and serves as a testament to the capacity-building enterprise and the importance of sustaining our support.

The CTS, of course, cannot accomplish this mission alone. The Iraqi government has to coordinate the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Justice, as well as its intelligence services, to disrupt ISIS networks effectively and deny them sanctuary.

This requires the capability to detect terrorist activity, analyze facilitation and support networks, and disrupt activity before ISIS can carry out attacks.

In December 2017, the Iraqi government declared all its territory liberated from ISIS control. It was a proud moment not just for Iraqis but for everyone around the world reeling from the group's terror.

Our priority now is to ensure that U.S. and Coalition investments in the D—ISIS fight outlive the warfighting of the last 5 years. With a relatively light U.S. footprint, efforts to train and equip Iraq's security forces continue to reap dividends and prove the effectiveness of our "by, with, and through" approach. In 2008, the United States had more than 150,000 U.S. military forces in Iraq at an expense of nearly $150 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funds; today, there are approximately 5,200 U.S. military forces stationed in Iraq, funded with less than $15 billion in OCO funding.

The ISIS threat in Iraq persists, and the group's enduring defeat in Iraq and Syria is not a foregone conclusion. We see ISIS building clandestine networks across Iraq and Syria, working to undermine the ISF and Syrian Democratic Forces and to create the conditions they need to seize territory in the future. Despite Iraq's growing capability, the Iraqis require additional U.S. and Coalition support to conduct effective counterterrorism and wide-area security operations necessary to keep ISIS at bay. We will continue to empower Iraq's legitimate and professional security forces to protect its sovereignty and prevent an ISIS resurgence.

We are resolute in our commitment to Iraq's security and prosperity, but critics of our military presence often insinuate vague ulterior motives. The premise of our capacity-building initiative is to help Iraqis secure Iraq. The more capable Iraq's security institutions are, the more resilient Iraq will be in the face of terrorists and malign regional actors bent on coercion and exploitation.

Iran is foremost among those malign actors. Iran's cynical interference undermines Iraqi interests and jeopardizes Iraqi stability. Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have come to embody this challenge, although the problem set is far from black and white. Disciplined PMF elements, we recognize, fought bravely against ISIS and earned public respect. But in recent years, Iran-backed, semi-autonomous militias have consistently flouted the Government of Iraq and turned to local criminality for self-enrichment. We see Iran using this playbook throughout the region; they hide behind proxies and use them to fight Tehran's fight. Our primary concern is the extent to which noncompliant militias, more loyal to Tehran than Baghdad, undermine the Iraqi Prime Minister's legitimate authority, prey on ordinary Iraqis, and destabilize the fragile communities recently liberated from ISIS control.

It is in Iraq's own interest to unburden itself from Iranian exploitation. Iraqi sovereignty depends on it, and no one craves that independence more than Iraqis. The prospect of coercive militias preventing local communities from recovering from the trauma of ISIS risks sparking further violent extremism and insurgency. DoD is committed to supporting State Department-led engagements with the Iraqi government on this issue. We are encouraged by the Prime Minister's July 1 decree bringing all militias under formal government control.

At the end of the day, the best way to counter Iran's malign influence in Iraq is to continue supporting the Iraqis and delivering visible good for the Iraqi people. No other country can match the world-class security assistance we provide, let alone our ability to mobilize international diplomatic and financial resources to support Iraq's long-term prosperity.

Another high priority for DoD concerns Baghdad-Erbil relations. The seams separating Kurdish and federal Iraqi security forces in northern Iraq's so-called disputed territories are susceptible to ISIS resurgence. As is the case with the CTS and the Iraqi Army, the Peshmerga are trusted U.S. partners in the fight against terrorism. It is crucial that the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government work through their political differences and coordinate security for those areas. Otherwise, ISIS will surely exploit security vacuums and gather steam.

There is also the growing risk that ISIS—notoriously adept at building clandestine networks—will exploit not only the populations of captured ISIS fighters now in prison in Iraq but also their family members, who may reside in local communities or in internally displaced person camps. At present, it has been reported that tens of thousands of Iraqis could soon return from Syria, the vast majority of them women and children, many possibly linked to ISIS fighters and who likely still subscribe to the terrorist ideology that helped give rise to ISIS. It has also been reported that some 45,000 children born in ISIS-controlled territory in Iraq remain in limbo because of their lack of recognized birth records.. The exploitation of Iraqis by ISIS, and the marginalization of ISIS victims leads many observers to deem the problem a "ticking time bomb," given the risk of producing a new generation of vio-

lent extremists if there is not a reintegration process and if they are not treated humanely.

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, only with a long-term security partnership can Iraq prevent ISIS' from territorial resurgence that would threaten the U.S. homeland, Iraq, the region, and the world. The Defense Department's continued work in the security sector will afford diplomats the political space to help Iraq resolve its systemic challenges. Over time we will incrementally economize our footprint, normalize our security cooperation, and sustain an increasingly mature partnership with Iraqi security institutions.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Mr. Mulroy.

Let me begin by offering several questions, and hopefully I can hear from both of you on these.

First of all, one of the things that we heard in our travel was from the leadership of the country which, as you know, represents leaders from Kurdistan, as well as Sunni and Shia leaders, with the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of the house. And they made it a very high priority in their communication with us to communicate that they have no interest in becoming a puppet state of Iran and that they believe that at least in the public press—and perhaps I am projecting on them my own reading of the public press—a sense that Iraq has fallen under the sway of Iran and will increasingly do their bidding. They, instead, said no, our interest is not becoming the puppet of any nation, but is instead to become an independent and strong, stable entity.

Is that an accurate assessment of what you believe is really the intent of the leadership in Iraq, or is that just what they hope to be able to sell to traveling Americans?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Senator, thank you very much for that question.

I concur. I mean, I believe that that is an accurate portrayal of the genuine Iraqi leadership view on this issue. Iraq's goal is to become a sovereign, independent, unified, democratic state, and that is certainly the goal of the United States' policy as well. When you look at the horrors of what has happened in the last few years in Iraq, the ravages of the institutions both from the era of Saddam Hussein and then in the difficult fight against ISIS, the Iraqi authorities have a real desire to rebuild institutions and ensure that they have the capacity to withstand any threats, any hostile actions from any of their neighbors.

Senator ROMNEY. Mr. Mulroy.

Mr. MULROY. Yes, sir. So they said essentially the exact same thing to me in my trip in March. And I would point out that all three of those leaders you mentioned have longstanding relationships with U.S. senior leaders for decades, and they do talk very bluntly.

I would say that the July 1st proclamation by the prime minister is a very good step to bring them under the control of the Iraqi Security Forces and away from political affiliations. It is important to note that all PMF fought against ISIS. Some of them are very well thought of by the Iraqi people. Others are almost wholly controlled by the Iranians and not only do not work for the best interests of the Iraqi people, but they have essentially turned to criminality to fund themselves even further. And they have become less and less favored by the Iraqi people. It is important, I think, that we do everything we can to help facilitate the Government of Iraq bringing

in the good and the disciplined PMF under the authority of the Iraqi military and disband the remainder.

Senator ROMNEY. One of the things we heard from the leaders there was a recognition that they share a very large border with Iran, that Iran has substantial interests in extending their influences throughout Iraq, that Iran is investing substantially in enterprises of various kinds to strengthen those ties, and they wonder why are other nations not doing the same.

Given the obvious conflict geopolitically between Iran and Saudi Arabia, I would have anticipated that Saudi Arabia would have been a very active participant in Iraq as well, that it would have been countering Iran's influence there by its own investments, by its own personnel, cultural exchanges, and so forth. But that was not what was recounted by Iraq's leaders.

Is there a reason that Saudi Arabia is not more involved and other Arab nations are not more involved with Iraq? And are there ways to encourage their greater participation there, as well as more U.S. participation? Clearly, the Exxon Mobil investment would have been a major connection between our nations. But are there ways we have of encouraging Saudi Arabia and others to become more involved with the Iraqi economy?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Those are all great questions, Mr. Chairman.

I would note that the prime minister's first trip outside of Iraq was to Cairo, not to Tehran. And this was a really important step because he went there to meet with heads of state from Egypt and Jordan to further the Iraqi Government's goal of further reintegration with their Arab neighbors. Iran and Iraq have a shared border, a shared history, a shared culture. A lot of infrastructure is connected. So those are tough things to undo. But I think the fact that the prime minister's very first trip was to the Arab world rather than to Tehran shows that he is very committed to strengthening those ties.

We are working very hard to support the Iraqi Government's goal of becoming more sovereign, more independent. Energy independence, as you highlighted in your remarks, is a very key part of that. In addition to the various U.S. projects that we are promoting, we are also looking at ways that Iraq could hook its infrastructure further into the GCC countries or even into Jordan. So these are very interesting ideas for Iraq to pivot west rather than east.

The business climate in Iraq is challenging, and I think it is a lot easier for countries with less high standards than the United States, countries that do not have strong anti-corruption laws to do business. But that said, we are working very closely with the Iraqi Government to try to improve the business climate there. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, UNCTAD has an important project that works to improve the business environment. We have been very supportive in working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business delegations, other business groups to bring American businesses to Iraq to establish the relationships, to get to know the environment there. Deputy Secretary Sullivan, for example, led our largest-ever trade delegation to Iraq, and we continue to do that.

So it is a work in progress of supporting Iraq's goal to reorient itself away from dependence on Iran in an economic sense to opening to the rest of the region.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. I will let Mr. Mulroy respond briefly, if you will, but in particular, why is Saudi Arabia not more involved there, and can we encourage that?

Mr. MULROY. Sir, to the point of your question, you know, with the tyranny of geography when it comes to Iran, they do share a 900-mile border with Iraq, and they have $12 billion in trade. And they have extensive, permanent family ties back and forth.

For the U.S., we provide a lot of things that they do not. We have provided the top-notch security assistance that actually is to the benefit of the government of Iraq. We also, of course, have international leadership when it comes to stabilization and economic development.

Specifically to Saudi Arabia, we under defense diplomacy, so to speak, support the State Department in its efforts to get Saudi Arabia more involved, and I think they are getting more involved. I also think they are getting more involved in some of the key components of that, which includes bringing some of the disenfranchised parts of Iraq like the Sunni Arab tribes into the future of Iraq. They have a unique perspective on that and capability to do that, and they have been involved with us in developing that tribal engagement program that we think is so important so we do not do perhaps the same mistakes of the past where we have just excluded the Sunnis.

I would also point out the fact that Jordan is becoming more involved economically with our encouragement with Iraq, and I think that is very important because at the end of the day, the key component of stabilization is economic development that lasts. And I think coming from the Department of Defense person, that is the key to further normalizing our relationship and getting to a place where we are not so dependent on U.S. military support.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you for your responses to my questions.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Again, thank you both for your service and for being here today.

Mr. Mulroy, first I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the efficacy of our security assistance. The United States spent about $20 billion on the Iraqi military between 2003 and 2011. Of course, then faced with a marching ISIS in 2014, an army of a quarter million just seemed to melt away. Since 2014, we have spent another $5 billion. And so the logical question is what are we doing differently this time around to ensure that the same outcome does not repeat itself.

But I mentioned in my opening statement another concern, which is that when we were there, one of our top commanders talked to us about the difficulty of getting large amounts of short-term money out the door. We appropriate on an annual basis. We have given significant amounts of security assistance, and it worries me that it seems that many of our top military people there are spending lots of time spinning their wheels just trying get as much money out the door as quickly as possible because they do not know whether it will be there the next year, leading one of

these individuals to say to us we would rather have $100 million over 10 years than $100 million in 1 year so that we could engage in long-term projects.

So my question is, what are we doing differently this time? What are the top line things we are doing differently? And is there a danger about not having a longer-term commitment here so that we can do longer-term military and security investments rather than just speeding money out the door?

Mr. MULROY. Yes, sir. So I would point out that in 2008, when we had 120,000 troops there, we were spending $150 billion a year. Now in 2019, we are spending $15 billion. For me, it still sounds like a lot of money because it is. But it is important to see that we have a trend in the right direction when it comes to expenditures of taxpayer money.

I would say one other difference, when we saw the collapse of the Iraqi military in 2014 to when we saw how they performed more recently 2017, 2018, 2019. One of the things they had—and that is why I highlighted it in my opening—is the enabling component of the U.S. military. It is a game changer when you have air support conducted by the most effective air force in the world. And we have advisors that can actually assist them on the ground and give them the confidence that they will be there in the height of the battle. I really do think that, in my estimation, is the game changer.

When it comes to the specifics of the spending, as you requested, I think I have heard that a lot when it comes to government spending everywhere, that there is a requirement to spend everything at the end of a particular fiscal year and that oftentimes people spend—and I think that is a legitimate issue that you raise, which also includes in a place like Iraq. From my perspective, everything we are trying to do now is move more to the economy of forces, which I have already highlighted we are, but also to a normalization.

So we have established an SDO/DATT, and we are moving toward a traditional country team model with the SDO/DATT answering to the ambassador, now Ambassador Tueller, and we will start standardizing and modernizing and normalizing our spending as we do that. We are doing that with the Kurdish Peshmerga right now, and we obviously are going to be doing that when it comes to the rest of the Iraqi Government.

Senator MURPHY. We can solve that problem partially. Congress can do a multiyear authorization. It is still an authorization subject to appropriation, but we can at least provide some of that certainty. And I would encourage our committee to look into that.

Ambassador Polaschik, I wanted you to address something else I brought up in my opening statement, which is a report over the weekend, a really concerning report, suggesting that the embassy in Baghdad is down to 15 functional political staffers. Help me understand the conundrum I laid out in my opening remarks, which is how do we maintain our political mission inside Baghdad if we have pulled so many of our personnel out? Can you confirm that we are down to 15 functional political staffers in Baghdad? And if we were able to maintain a full diplomatic corps there during the height of the Iraq war in the 2000s, why can we not do the same today? The report from this weekend suggests that this is a perma-

nent decision, that State has made a decision that they are going to keep these low levels of staff for a time uncertain. And so given that report, I wondered if you could clarify some of that for the committee today.

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Of course. First, I would like to maybe go back just a couple of months to early May where we faced a very serious, specific, credible threat stream against U.S. personnel in Iraq. And that threat stream has not diminished. It is still there. So that was the reason that Embassy Baghdad requested authorization to go to ordered departure status, and the Secretary of State approved that on May 14th.

This is a temporary situation. Ordered departure is something that is done in 30-day increments. We constantly evaluate the situation, looking carefully at the threat information that we have and the personnel on the ground and to make sure that we have got the right fit. And the Secretary just renewed the ordered departure status on July 12 for another 30 days.

I would prefer not to go into specific numbers of personnel that we have on the ground in this open setting, but I would be very, very happy to brief you later.

I would note again, though, that this is just a temporary decision. We have not made any decisions to permanently withdraw staff. We are constantly evaluating the situation, and it is certainly our hope that we are able to have a maximum presence on the ground in order to achieve all of the important objectives that we have.

Senator MURPHY. Certainly without getting into a classified threat assessment, I think it is hard to suggest that the threat is higher today than it was during the height of the insurgency and the fighting in and around Baghdad. And so while I would never second guess the security decisions, I would hope that if there is a long-term decision made to have lower levels of staffing there, that we start to think about how to increase security so that we can return to some level of political functionality because if we do not, if we maintain a dozen or two dozen political staffers there, it is an invitation for ISIS to reemerge because we are not there helping the Iraqis do the hard lift of political reconciliation that ultimately protects our interests against the future rise of ISIS or a follow-on organization. And so I understand how sensitive this is because you are talking about the lives of American personnel there. But the risk of a long-term political withdrawal from Baghdad could, in the end, cost as many American lives as we are saving in the short run, and it is just something I hope the State Department is contemplating.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I may have a few if we have a second round as well.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Senator Murphy.

Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses. Good to be with you again.

How would you describe the relationship between the United States and Iraq? Are we partners? Are we allies? Are we competitors? Are we adversaries? You do not have to pick from my labels, but how would you describe the relationship?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. I would say that we are partners. And this Iraqi Government in particular has made it very clear that it is intent upon ensuring Iraq's sovereignty, its independence, its unified democratic status. So we are a partner and working with them.

Senator KAINE. And the current government continues to want U.S. engagement as they pursue that strategy. Correct?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Absolutely. We are there at the invitation of the Iraqi Government.

Senator KAINE. Mr. Mulroy, how would you describe the relationship?

Mr. MULROY. I completely agree, sir. It is a partnership, and I think they would actually say the same thing. Specific to the Government of Iraq, if you look at the president, Bahram Salih, he used to be the chairman of the American University in Saladin. And I think most of my colleagues have known him for 10 to 15 years in the Department of Defense. The prime minister—very similar relationships. The speaker of the house, Halbusi—he worked very closely with us when he was a governor in Anbar, and many of us know him.

So I think they talk to us pretty bluntly, and I think we know what they are saying when they are saying it. And I think that we both view this as a long-term partnership because we have been together so long. So it is more than just a label. It is actually real relationships that have proven effective in the fight against ISIS, for example, and hopefully will prove effective going forward as they become more and more sovereign and have the ability to push back.

Senator KAINE. And there is no doubt, is there, as we sit in the room today that we would not consider Iraq an adversary or an enemy. Correct?

Mr. MULROY. Iran, sir?

Senator KAINE. We would not consider Iraq an adversary of an enemy. Would we?

Mr. MULROY. No, sir.

Senator KAINE. The reason I asked that is there are currently pending two authorizations for military force against Iraq. The 1991 authorization for use of military force by the United States against Iraq had no termination date, and so that is still a pending war authorization against the sovereign Government of Iraq. That was the first Gulf War. That was never repealed.

There was a 2002 authorization for war against the sovereign nation of Iraq that was passed in October of 2002. It had no termination date. That is still pending.

It strikes me as highly bizarre that we are sitting here at a hearing talking about our partner, the long-term partnership, going through the president and the prime minister and the speaker and their connections to the United States. And you are stating facts that I believe from my visits there as well as in my conversations with Iraqi officials. And yet we still have two unexpired war authorizations against Iraq.

Senator Young and I have introduced a bill that would repeal the 1991 and the 2002 war authorizations to simply recognize that we are not enemies anymore. We are not adversaries. We are not seek-

ing to, through military force, topple the Government of Iraq anymore. We are actually using our military assets to support the Government of Iraq.

I hope my colleagues would agree that if we cannot agree on a lot of complicated things, when we have got the Trump administration witnesses sitting here looking us in the face and telling us we are partners with Iraq, why do we need two war authorizations with Iraq? I have been trying to get the administration to—their official position is we do not seek a change of any war authorization at this time. But they have given me no reason to suggest why we should continue to have war authorizations against Iraq.

And I am deeply worried that if we pass war authorizations with no termination date and we leave them sort of floating out in space, these zombie war authorizations that can be used by any administration at any time to cook up a bootstrapped argument for some military misadventure, then we really are not doing the job that we should do.

The legislation that I filed with Senator Young and others has been pending before this committee now for a number of months. I would hope that my colleagues would support the idea of bringing it up and repealing the war authorizations and sending the very clear message that we do not consider Iraq an enemy. We do not consider Iraq an adversary. We do not think they are going to turn into one tomorrow. If they did, we could pass a new authorization. But why would we leave war authorizations out there against them?

On the Kurds, I want to talk to you about this. In my visits to Iraq, the situation, the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil is a complicated one and there is much history there. And I know it is the U.S.'s preference that Iraq be democratic and stable and united. There are Kurdish aspirations. This is not necessarily that every Kurd believes this. It is not a monolith, but there are Kurdish aspirations for independence. There are longstanding disagreements over allocation of oil revenues and payment for governmental services, et cetera.

I am curious. Tell us a little bit about what you think is the kind of current state of play between the relatively new government in Baghdad and also a new governmental arrangement—the last names are not different, but some of the individuals are different—in Kurdistan.

Ambassador POLASCHIK. First, Senator, I would stress that a strong Kurdistan Regional Government within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and the enduring defeat of ISIS. This is a top priority for us.

So in the wake of the 2017 referendum for independence, we have been working very hard to try to promote reconciliation between the Kurds and the central authorities in Baghdad. And we have had some successes. Oil is now flowing through the Kirkuk pipeline. That is important. The central authorities are now paying the salaries of civil servants in the KRG. And we are working very effectively to promote greater security cooperation particularly in the seam line areas between the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi central authorities. So we still have a ways to go, but we feel that there is positive progress. And I would note, in fact, that the new

KRG prime minister was just in Baghdad I believe either yesterday or today. So that is a very positive sign.

Senator KAINE. Excellent.

Mr. Mulroy, do you want to add to that?

Mr. MULROY. Yes, sir. So I would agree with everything that the Ambassador said. A one-Iraq policy I think is the best policy not just for the United States' interests but for Iraq and for the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

I would say, albeit anecdotally, I have talked and I know several of the new generation of Iraqi Kurds, and they would highlight that during their struggles against Saddam Hussein, that that generation often relied on external forces. Sometimes it was Iran. The current generation's struggle against Saddam Hussein and after that against ISIS—they relied almost exclusively on the United States. So their affinity with the United States is very strong, and I think that we can talk to them more openly that way and explain, at least from our perspective, why we think a one-Iraq policy is the most effective for them, not just for the overall mission. And I think that many of them understand that.

Senator KAINE. Great. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for being here. I am sorry that I missed your testimony, but I was in Iraq in April, and certainly what I have heard you say in terms of the new government, I would agree with. They were very supportive of the United States' partnership there and of the joint command that is operating there.

One of the concerns that we heard when we were there is about the ISIS detainees that are still in Syria and the potential for that to become a growing problem for Iraq. Now, as we know, many of those detainees are Iraqis, but we have a number of foreign fighters who are being detained in Syria, and most of them are in the custody of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

So I wonder, Ms. Polaschik, how many ISIS detainees do we know are currently in the custody of the central Government of Iraq or of the Kurdish Regional Government?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Senator, thank you for raising this issue. It is a serious problem that we spend a lot of time thinking about at the State Department.

In terms of the exact numbers, I would have to take that question back and get back to you.

[The information requested above was not available at time of print]

But this is a global effort. We are engaging with all of our partners throughout the world to ask them to take home their foreign nationals.

With respect to the situation in Iraq, we also recognize that there are capacity issues. There are rule of law issues. There are human rights issues. So we have an intense and ongoing dialogue with the Iraqi authorities to make sure that those Iraqi citizens who are returned to Iraq face a fair, transparent judicial process and that also

the family members who are there, because we have large numbers of children, for example, who are in some of these detention facilities, that they have the psychosocial support that they need to ensure that they are reintegrated into society and do not turn to radicalization.

Senator SHAHEEN. Absolutely. It was a very big concern. There was a camp at that time of, I think, about 70,000 families and detainees that was very close to the Iraqi border, and they were quite concerned about what was going to happen to those folks.

I saw that Italy recently repatriated the foreign fighter who was in Syria. Can you talk about what efforts we have underway with some of our Western allies to repatriate the foreign fighters who are from their countries?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. The Counterterrorism Bureau in the State Department has the lead on that. So I think, with your permission, I would like to take that question back to make sure that we get you the most accurate information.

Senator SHAHEEN. That would be very helpful. I am sure you are aware there is also language in the defense authorization bill that would create a coordinator to help work on the detainee issue because we have made very little progress.

And I know that we have some folks who would like to see some of those terrorists brought back. James Foley was a constituent. His family was a constituent of mine. The family who was murdered by ISIS—there was a question about whether his murderers are in custody in Syria. And his family and the family of other Americans murdered are very interested in seeing them brought back to justice and tried in our civilian courts. So I hope that that will be a focus of the efforts with detainees.

Let me go to another question because the other issue that was raised on our trip was the importance of the continued U.S. troop presence in northern Syria and the support for U.S. stabilization efforts in areas that are controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. I am concerned, as we have heard the administration talk about the need to draw down those forces, that we do not have any backup there. Can you talk about what the position is of the State Department and the Department of Defense in terms of trying to encourage and ensure that we have stabilization efforts in that northeastern region of Syria? I will ask you both that question.

Ambassador POLASCHIK. Senator, perhaps I could address the stabilization issue and then ask Mr. Mulroy to discuss the troop issues.

It is very clear that stabilization efforts need to continue. I think that is the painful lesson that we have all learned over these many years now of strife in the Middle East, that if those core issues are left unaddressed, there will still be problems.

So the United States is still engaged. The administration has made a priority to have burden sharing so that it is not the United States alone which is funding all of these efforts. We have been very successful in securing funds from our Gulf partners, in particular Saudi Arab and the United Arab Emirates. Of course, our European partners are there as well. So the United States has residual funding from previous years that we are still using. But our partners are relying on U.S. experts then to make sure that the as-

sistance is being channeled and useful in effective ways. We still have our START mission that is based in Turkey, and we also have our START forward team as well. So we are there. We are in the game, and the State Department feels very strongly that we need to continue these stabilization efforts in order to ensure that ISIS truly is defeated.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Mulroy.

Mr. MULROY. If I could start with the issue brought up in the first question, the SDF currently has over 2,000 foreign terrorist fighters in their custody from over 50 countries. And this is obviously a group with very limited resources who expends quite a bit of time, effort, and resources taking care of everybody else's problems. So from our perspective at the DOD, we are pushing all the time for our partners to take back their citizens. It is their responsibility.

Specific to stabilization, the Strategic Assessment Review 2018 puts State Department in the lead, USAID as the implementer, and the DOD provides support, security and logistics. And we do so in everything the Ambassador just referenced, and that includes in northern Iraq to the efforts that go on there by USAID.

From our perspective, the long-term plan for protecting the religious minorities in these areas is to train local security forces as police to be there for the long term. The point being is locals need jobs. These jobs are obviously helpful to stabilize the situation. They will stay there in the long term, and we are going to train them more as police, less as soldiers, as that, for obvious reasons, is what provides long-term security in the area. So as a concept, that is the effort we intend to pursue.

Senator SHAHEEN. But you are talking about Iraq when you are saying that——

Mr. MULROY. I am talking about Iraq.

Senator SHAHEEN. —not Syria.

Mr. MULROY. Iraq, yes, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. Can I ask another question, Mr. Chairman? Because that raises another issue that we heard when we were there and that is about the influence of the Iranian-backed militias and the effort to integrate the militias into the structure of the Iraqi Security Forces. I noticed that Prime Minister Mahdi announced on July 1st that all of Iraq's Iranian-backed militias would be more closely integrated.

Can you talk about some of the challenges that exist there and what we are doing to support the Iraqis as they try and address those Iranian-backed militias because they have the potential to create a lot of mischief in Iraq?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. From the political, diplomatic perspective, it is a huge step that the prime minister has taken by issuing this decree on July 1. And we are committed to working with Prime Minister al-Mahdi and his cabinet to make sure that they implement this quickly.

As Mr. Mulroy had said in his earlier remarks, the PMF played a very important role in the defeat of ISIS, and there are good groups among them so it will be very important to integrate the good PMF elements fully into the Iraqi Security Forces.

There are also undisciplined actors out there who continue to extort local populations, who are plotting very nefarious activities. The United States has been quite clear in its opposition to these groups. I would note that just in March of this year we designated Harakat al-Nujaba, one of the primary Iran-backed PMF groups that is engaged in all sorts of deplorable activities. So we will continue to exercise pressure on these groups to ensure that they are no longer able to pose a threat to Iraq or to U.S. interests in Iraq.

Mr. MULROY. Yes. I completely agree that the PMF is not a homogenous group. Many of them did play a really substantial role in the defeat of ISIS. So there is a popularity amongst the Iraqi people. Now many of them have turned to criminality and are essentially a scourge on the population. Others have been completely controlled by Iran. KH has already been designated and HAN is now designated. So what we need to do is be sophisticated in our approach to the PMF, assess them, find out which ones could be integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces and which ones could never be, and then isolate the latter and obviously embrace the former.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

The ranking member has an additional question we are going to let him ask.

I would just underscore, before he asks that question, the concern that I share with him that we need as many diplomatic personnel as possible in Iraq to encourage that government and to support that government in the enormous challenges that they have. I did hear from another source in the administration the belief that Iran has pulled back from their level of threat on our interests or our resources in the region. I would just encourage the administration to be as up to date as possible with all of its intelligence resources to make that assessment and to restore a full diplomatic presence as soon as possible.

With that, let me turn to Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am going to try to sneak two quick ones in here.

Mr. Mulroy, you described the militias as sort of belonging to two categories, and Ambassador Polaschik referenced the same. There is the group that enjoys popular support in Iraq in part because of the good work they did against ISIS, and then there is the group that is directly aligned with Iran. And that is not how I understand it.

I understand there to be a Venn diagram in which there are groups that have broad popular support and there are groups that have very close relationships with Iran, and those two circles overlap in big parts. And one of the concerns that I heard when we were there is that by forcing this choice with the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization, we are in fact pushing some groups that exist inside the overlap to Iran because those groups perceive the United States, again, to be a relatively short-term player and partner. Iran is going to be around forever. And so by sort of pushing this question in front of many of these militias that are popularly supported and have relationships with Iran, we are

actually working against our interests by pushing more of these groups towards Iran. They are not making the choice to align with us.

Would you disagree with that assessment?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. I fully agree with your assessment that it is a little squishier, that there are overlapping circles. And it is an important question that the Iraqi Government is grappling with and that we are grappling with as well. What is the best way to encourage good behavior from groups that fall into that middle area? There are several PMF groups which now have political parties and they have members elected to the Council of Representatives. And so how could we encourage those groups to become good actors instead of bad actors?

So this is an ongoing policy debate within the administration. It is something that we are grappling with, but the intent is to do everything possible that we can to strengthen Iraq's sovereignty and its capacity to withstand threats to its sovereignty both internal and external. So you have hit, I think, one of the hot button issues that we continue to deliberate and is very much on our minds.

Senator MURPHY. I am not speaking to either of you here. I think the administration has essentially already deliberated on this question and has made a decision with respect to the designation of the IRGC that makes all of your jobs much more difficult.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, if I could just ask one question on stabilization, to build on Senator Shaheen's question. I just have a hard time figuring out the math here. Again, this is a question of finite resources. But the estimate is that the rebuilding of places like west Mosul are in the $80 billion range when you look at all of the work that needs to be done inside that country. And yet, we are appropriating about $250 million a year, and we have got commitments from other partners that get that number up to maybe about a billion dollars a year. I just do not know how that math works.

If we are putting together a billion dollars, a quarter of that is our money which, by the way, represents about one-quarter of 1 percent of the U.S. defense budget, how does Iraq put together the dollars to rebuild parts of that country which are literally rubble today? Because, again, if they do not rebuild, then it is part of the political impetus for ISIS to emerge. Is the rest of it all on them or is there hope that bigger numbers ride to the rescue from outside of the country?

Ambassador POLASCHIK. There was the Iraq reconstruction pledging conference. Perhaps that name is not accurate, but it was early in 2018 where there were significant pledges from key Arab countries. From the United States' perspective, we have been very focused on immediate stabilization needs, getting the essential services back on, providing humanitarian assistance, working on justice and accountability, all of the measures that are required to allow people to come home.

And yes, there are huge infrastructure needs that exist, but I think one way to address that would be to also push forward on the economic reform agenda because a lot of construction, writ large development can be done by the private sector if there is a better business environment. I mean, there is serious money that

could be made in Iraq. It is a wealthy country in terms of its resources, in terms of its human capacity. So that is why we are also putting the emphasis on the regulatory reforms that will be required to create a more open, inviting business environment because Iraq is still a statist economy. This is a very heavy legacy from the Saddam Hussein era. So whatever we can do to transition the Iraqi economy away from that heavy statist focus to more a more open market approach I think will be better.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Romney noted they do not help themselves when they continue to reject offers from Western companies, Western energy companies to help them get a better return on their rate of investment in fossil fuels. So I appreciate that answer.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you so much to the individuals who have been witnesses today for providing your testimony, as well as your response to our questions. Thank you also for your service to our great country.

For the information of members, the record will remain open until the close of business on Thursday, including for members to submit questions for the record.

And so with thanks to the committee members, this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF HON. JOAN POLASCHIK TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

RUSSIA IN IRAQ

Russia continues to make significant investments into Iraq's energy sector, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan. I am particularly concerned by press reports that Rosneft has purchased 60 percent of the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) oil export pipeline while also committing to build a gas export pipeline from Erbil to Turkey, in addition to exploration blocks and advance crude purchases.

Question. What has motivated the KRG, a reliable U.S. partner in the counter-ISIS fight, to pursue these deals with Russia?

Answer. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) saw Russia and state-controlled Rosneft as a potential ally in its bid for independence due to historic ties between Iraqi Kurds and the former Soviet Union. The agreement was negotiated before the independence referendum, but was signed after it in October 2017.

Question. What steps has the U.S. taken to discourage these deals and provide the KRG and the Iraqi government with alternatives to Russian energy deals? What has been the response from the KRG or Iraqi Government? What steps is the U.S. taking going forward?

Answer. Because the Government of Iraq (GOI) views oil and gas deals negotiated outside its purview as illegal, the GOI has taken the KRG to court over the deal. While Iraqi courts hear legal arguments and Iraqi politicians continue negotiations, the United States has promoted U.S. energy companies in all of Iraq. The GOI is in negotiations with several U.S. companies to capture gas and improve oil and gas infrastructure.

Question. What message have U.S. officials delivered to KRG or Iraqi Government officials regarding these deals? At what level have those messages been delivered?

Answer. U.S. officials including our Ambassador to Iraq and the Secretary of Energy have raised the issue of Russian involvement in the KRG's energy sector with both GOI and KRG officials. The message has been consistent that Western companies can provide better services and that Russia does not have an interest in seeing

Iraqi gas compete with Russian gas for European markets. Moreover, Russia's ownership of the oil pipeline creates dependence that does not benefit the KRG nor Iraq.

POPULAR MOBILIZATION FORCES

Question. On July 1st, Iraq's Prime Minister issued a decree attempting to more closely integrate the Popular Mobilizations Forces (PMFs) into the Iraqi Armed Forces. As you know, these militias, some of which are backed by Iran, contribute to Iraq's instability, especially in the northern regions: What continuing support, if any, does Iran provide to PMF units? What is your assessment of the PMF threat to Iraq's security?

Answer. Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) continue to provide support to some, but not all, PMF units. This includes logistical, advisory, and material support as well as training. The actions of some PMF units such as Kata'ib Hizballah, Harakat al-Nujaba, and other Iran-backed groups are destabilizing and threaten Iraq's internal security. In contrast to Iran's efforts to undermine Iraq's stability, we remain committed to supporting Iraqi sovereignty.

Question. What are the State Department and Department of Defense doing to help the Government of Iraq integrate these groups into the Ministry of Defense chain of command?

Answer. One of the Government of Iraq's (GOI) primary challenges is reining in undisciplined Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) elements that operate outside of state control. The Prime Minister's recent decree ordering PMF units to de-politicize, remove checkpoints, and forego economic activities is a positive first step toward reform. The timeline by which PMF units are formally and fully integrated into the broader Iraqi security force architecture, as called for by the Prime Minister's decree, is for the GOI to decide. Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi continues to be steadfast in his public statements that the PMF must reform into a professional, disciplined, and apolitical security service, and the U.S. Government supports the GOI's efforts to achieve this goal.

Question. How is this decree and its implementation different from a similar decree by former Prime Minister Haider Abadi that was meant to integrate the PMF into the Ministry of Defense but was not fully implemented?

Answer. Former Prime Minister Haider Abadi's decree proclaimed that the PMF would have the same pay and benefits as their counterparts in the Ministry of Defense, and additionally subjected them to Iraq's military service laws and regulations. The decree did not address the future of the PMF's roles and responsibilities, and did little to reform undisciplined and Iranian-backed PMF units significantly. The decree issued July 1st by Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi is a more significant effort to bring all armed groups under the effective command and control of the Government of Iraq (GOI). This decree orders PMF offices closed, units be stripped of sectarian nomenclature, and that economic and political endeavors discontinue. While implementing PMF reform would be a challenge for any Iraqi Prime Minster, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi has demonstrated serious intent and we fully support his efforts to ensure effective GOI control of all armed groups in Iraq.

CAPTURED ISIS FIGHTERS

According to the United Nations, some 55,000 suspected ISIS fighters and their families remain in detention in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, there are numerous reports coming out about overcrowding and horrific conditions in these detentions centers, specifically in the Ninewa region of Iraq, an area which is a key focus of this administration's religious minority work. Yet, neither the Government of Iraq, nor the United States seems to have a plan for this population.

Question. What is the administration's long-term plan for addressing this population?

Answer. The United States encourages the repatriation of suspected ISIS foreign terrorist fighters held in Syria so that they face justice at home, in accordance with domestic and international law. The Government of Iraq (GOI) is working to bring back its citizens from Syria, and has reached an agreement with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to repatriate Iraqi ISIS fighters detained in Syria and to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of displaced Iraqis currently in Syria. The repatriation of Iraqi ISIS fighters has already begun. The GOI has been insistent that all those who fought for ISIS and brought damage and harm to the Iraqi people need to be held responsible for their crimes. We fully support Iraq's efforts to repatriate its citizens and to hold ISIS fighters accountable for their crimes.

Question. How is the United States engaging in judicial process and reform at the national and local levels in Iraq?

Answer. The United States is supporting UNITAD's efforts to collect, preserve, and store evidence of ISIS atrocities that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide for use in prosecutions. The United States has made it clear that the Government of Iraq's prosecution of ISIS suspects should be fair and subscribe to due process norms, so as not to engender feelings of arbitrary persecution that can drive cycles of radicalization. The Department has provided support to Iraq's justice system through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), among others, which works with foreign governments to develop professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transnational crime and terrorism.

Question. How is the United States working with other countries on accepting returned ISIS fighters?

Answer. The State Department is engaging countries to urge that they take responsibility for their foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) citizens in Syria by repatriating and prosecuting them for their crimes. This remains an urgent undertaking as our partner, the Syrian Democratic Forces, has custody of more than 2000 FTFs. This engagement is done both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. Repatriation has been a major theme in all Global Coalition meetings as well as the FTF Working Group, made up of almost half of the Global Coalition's 80 members as well as observer states. The Secretary called for action at the Global Coalition Ministerial in February.

The State Department's Counterterrorism (CT) Bureau seeks to enhance the capacity of our partners to manage threats posed by FTFs through technical assistance to law enforcement, corrections, and justice sector agencies and, by doing so, to enable those partners to repatriate and, where possible and appropriate, prosecute their FTF citizens. The CT Bureau also works to build partner nation capacity through initiatives to enhance rehabilitation and reintegration of repatriated FTFs and their families. Working through multilateral organizations such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Institute of Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ), the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), Hedayah, and the aforementioned Coalition FTF working group, we helped develop and are now contributing to programs that help countries implement good practices for addressing the challenges posed by returning families of FTFs.

Question. How is the United States engaging in judicial process and reform at the national and local levels in Iraq?

Answer. The United States is supporting UNITAD's efforts to collect, preserve, and store evidence of ISIS atrocities that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide for use in prosecutions. The United States has made it clear that the Government of Iraq's prosecution of ISIS suspects should be fair and subscribe to due process norms, so as not to engender feelings of arbitrary persecution that can drive cycles of radicalization. The Department has provided support to Iraq's justice system through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), among others, which works with foreign governments to develop professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transnational crime and terrorism.

Question. What programs does the United States have in place, including those working with Iraq and other countries, to counter violent extremism?

Answer. The Department has provided support to Iraq's justice system through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), among others, which works with foreign governments to develop professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transitional crime and terrorism. We support the implementation of effective psychosocial efforts, especially for children of ISIS foreign terrorist fighters who endured trauma from the violence they witnessed and suffered. We also support the reintegration of non-combatants into their communities, through which Iraqis can remove some of the radicalizing influences and make room in detention facilities for those convicted of serious offenses related to violent extremism. We also support inclusive governmental practices, which counter violent extremism by diminishing exclusion of various communities from engagement in political and economic life in Iraq.

GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ-KRG RELATIONS

Question. What are the issues that have improved?

Answer. The KRG and Government of Iraq have made significant progress to improve relations since the appointment of Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi. We have seen early indications that the new KRG government led by PM Masrour Barzani intends to build on that. Progress since last fall includes an agreement to resume the transportation and export of Kirkuk oil through a KRG-administered pipeline in the north. Another agreement harmonizes customs duties, facilitating the removal of internal GOI customs checkpoints along the internal boundary with the IKR.

Question. What are the key outstanding issues that remain unresolved?

Answer.Unresolved issues include disputed areas, oil shipments to the central government, and security coordination to prevent ISIS from exploiting weaknesses in national and regional security units.

Question. How is the U.S. engaging to help resolve those differences?

Answer. A strong KRG within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and to the enduring defeat of ISIS. Thus, it remains in our interest to help Baghdad and Erbil resolve these outstanding differences. We will continue to encourage KRG and Government of Iraq officials, with whom we have strong relationships, to resolve their differences by identifying and accepting reasonable compromises.

POST-ISIS RECONSTRUCTION AND STABILIZATION

Question. What are the prospects for stabilization and reconstruction in areas of northern and western Iraq most damaged by the battle with the Islamic State [specifically]: How long will it take these areas to recover?

Answer. Iraq's recovery from the devastation wrought by ISIS depends on many factors, including the support of its allies. The next several years will be critical as Iraq continues to implement security, economic, and governance reforms necessary to achieve long-term stability. The Department of State is working to shift from the provision of humanitarian and stabilization assistance, that helps restore services in areas liberated from ISIS and encourage internally displaced persons to return home, to a longer-term partnership on security, trade, and investment. Assistance to Iraq will remain essential in promoting U.S. goals for America's security and prosperity. Not only will security, economic, and governance assistance stabilize Iraq, it will also enable Iraq to be a stabilizing influence in the region.

Question. How much money has the USG invested in Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities since the Vice President's announcement in October 2017?

Answer. Since the Vice President's announcement in October 2017, the U.S. government has provided $340 million in funding to support religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq.

Question. How much has the United States invested in minority populated areas relative to Mosul and Ramadi?

Answer. Much of the $340 million in funding provided in support for religious and ethnic minorities focuses on the Ninewa Plain, Sinjar, and areas in northern Iraq to which Iraqis from those areas have been displaced. Programs in these provinces address critical needs, including: the provision of shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene, protection and psychosocial services; the restoration of core essential services by rehabilitating damaged infrastructure such as schools, clinics, hospitals, electric and water systems; support to local and faith-based civil society organizations with intimate knowledge of the communities affected by ISIS; legal assistance to Iraqis who suffered human rights abuses at the hands of ISIS; and enabling investment in the private sector to rehabilitate the economy in these areas. Many country-wide USG-supported programs also include activity in Anbar and Ninewa, including programs to clear explosive remnants of war, provide support to victims of violence and conflict, support the return of displaced populations, and promote economic recovery. USAID has committed $69 million specifically to support the revival of Mosul, the economic and education center of northern Iraq, through electricity, water, education, and business development projects. The Department of State and USAID have also committed to providing $100 million in additional funds to support the stabilization of Anbar province.

Question. How is the United States prioritizing development and reconstruction funds for certain populations?

Answer. The Department of State has prioritized support that addresses critical needs for health care, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene, and protection services. These funds also support the restoration of core services in the three provinces most affected by ISIS—Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah al Din. Further programs will foster stability and reconciliation by strengthening citizen-responsive governance, security, democracy, and the rule of law. The Department will support efforts to provide assistance and political support to at-risk minority communities, and to encourage governmental and civil society efforts to mediate disputes among Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious minority populations, particularly in areas liberated from ISIS in recent years.

Question. What further investments [in stabilization and reconstruction] does the administration plan to make?

Answer. The Department of State and USAID have committed to providing $100 million in additional FY 2018 funds to support the stabilization of Anbar province, one of the regions most affected by ISIS. These funds will support the provision of essential services in Anbar province and the return of internally displaced persons, and also will help reduce Anbar's vulnerability to another insurgency.

The Department will continue to announce additional contributions as funds become available for obligation through the foreign assistance process.

DIPLOMATIC DRAWDOWN

Question. What exactly is the plan for U.S. presence in Iraq?

Answer. With Mission Iraq under ordered departure for the third month, we are assessing how best to staff the post in the long-term, amid continued heightened regional tensions. Our goal is to ensure that we have the resources to meet the President's objectives while at the same time protecting our people. We are currently in the midst of internal discussions on this issue and look forward to working with Congress once we have additional information.

Question. How many personnel are currently in-country and where?

Answer. Today there are a total 328 personnel under Chief of Mission security responsibility (excluding Locally Employed Staff) at the Baghdad Embassy Compound, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and Consulate General Erbil. There are another 3,169 USG contractors, located at the three sites above plus Union III, the headquarters for the Coalition Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR). These numbers fluctuate daily as personnel depart on R&R and permanent change of station, and others enter Iraq to assume those emergency duties.

Question. What are the impacts of reducing diplomatic presence in our diplomatic facilities?

Answer. Despite reductions, the United States remains committed to our important bilateral relationship with Iraq and continues daily diplomatic engagement to counter external malign influence and to advance our many other interests in Iraq and the region. Ambassador Tueller leads a strong team of some our best and most effective diplomatic professionals at our Embassy in Baghdad.

Question. What do you assess to be primary threats to U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq?

Answer. The undisciplined Iran-aligned Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and ISIS are the principle threats to U.S. interests in Iraq. The threat of undisciplined PMF units has grown in recent months in response to the United States increasing its maximum pressure campaign against Iran.

Despite ISIS's loss of territory, it has transitioned into using traditional terrorist tactics in Iraq. ISIS's targets are primarily Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including the PMF, and Sunni tribal groups. ISIS continues to conduct attacks against these entities in an effort to create a more permissive operating environment for itself in Iraq.

U.S. PRESENCE IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

Question. Along with many of my colleagues, I continue to be concerned about the closure of our consulate in Basra. Additionally, the administration has just notified $10 million in assistance for a Basra water project: Please describe the administration's plans for engagement with the southern governorates of Iraq and how you plan to monitor the $10 million, in the wake of the temporary closure of the U.S. Consulate in Basra.

What effects has the U.S. withdrawal had on U.S. interlocutors among the local Iraqi populations in the south?

Answer. The United States remains deeply engaged in Basrah and the southern provinces. The Embassy has established a Southern Iraq Affairs Unit that maintains frequent contact with a wide range of government and private sector contacts in southern Iraq. U.S. outreach and programming focused on southern Iraq continues to be implemented with the approval of national and local government officials and is being administered effectively by Baghdad-based personnel. The Department's efforts are aimed at helping the Government of Iraq to improve its delivery of essential basic services, build professional security forces loyal to the Iraqi state, develop durable democratic institutions, and promote adherence to the rule of law. These efforts are a stark contrast to Iran's destructive agenda to undermine the Iraqi government and propagate sectarianism.

DESIGNATION OF THE IRGC AS A FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

Question. How has the designation of the IRGC as an FTO impacted U.S. engagement with Iraqi interlocutors in Iraq, both diplomats and military?

Answer. The IRGC designation has not hindered the USG's ability to interact with its Iraqi partners. The United States continues to monitor the situation closely, warning Iraqis of the consequences of providing support to designated terrorist groups like the IRGC.

Question. Please describe diplomatic outreach to Iraqi officials to describe the designation.

Answer. Secretary Pompeo designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Embassy Baghdad and Department officials in the United States briefed and continue to engage a wide range of Iraqi officials on the designations and their implications for Iraq. Although Iraqis may be concerned that the escalating tensions between the United States and Iran will affect Iraq, we continue to assure them that the United States is not seeking conflict with Iran and we do not view Iraq as an arena for escalation.

Question. Please describe how this determination was made, and what considerations were made regarding U.S. presence and operations in Iraq.

Answer. On April 15, 2019, the State Department designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The Secretary of State made this decision after consulting with the Departments of Justice and the Treasury, as required by statute, and considering input from other relevant agencies.

This designation demonstrates the United States' unwavering commitment to a sovereign, independent Iraq free from malign external influence. An important part of that effort is isolating the actors that conduct the Iranian regime's malign behavior and deterring others from supporting them.

NORTHERN IRAQ

Question. What is your assessment of security in Erbil?

Answer. U.S. interests throughout Iraq are at high risk for violence, crime, kidnapping, and terrorism. Kurdish security forces are highly responsive to these threats, including that of ISIS, which remains a significant threat in northern Iraq. The United States has adequate resources to conduct its core diplomatic tasks despite these challenges, and we continue to work with both our Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government partners to advance U.S. interests and promote the security of American citizens.

Question. Please describe any discussions with the government of Turkey regarding security in and around Erbil and Northern Iraq.

Answer. Whether through Embassy Ankara's engagements with Turkish interlocutors or as part of high-level U.S.-Turkey meetings in Washington and Ankara, the United States regularly engages with the Government of Turkey regarding security in and around Erbil and Northern Iraq, particularly as it relates to the presence of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization.

When engaging regarding security in Northern Iraq, the United States consistently urges the Government of Turkey to coordinate with the Government of Iraq and to act consistent with Iraqi sovereignty.

Question. Please describe your assessment of the PKK's operational capacity in Iraq.

Answer. The United States takes the threat of the PKK seriously and works closely with the governments of Iraq and Turkey to bolster the security of our partners. The group maintains the ability to plan and conduct terrorist attacks both in Iraq and elsewhere from their bases in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq.

RESPONSES OF MICHAEL P. MULROY TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. On July 1st, Iraq's Prime Minister issued a decree attempting to more closely integrate the Popular Mobilizations Forces (PMFs) into the Iraqi Armed Forces. As you know, these militias, some of which are backed by Iran, contribute to Iraq's instability, especially in the northern regions. a) What continuing support, if any, does Iran provide to PMF units? What is your assessment of the PMF threat to Iraq's security? b) What are the State Department and Department of Defense doing to help the Government of Iraq integrate these groups into the Ministry of Defense chain of command? c) How is this decree and its implementation different from a similar decree by former Prime Minister Haider Abadi that was meant to integrate the PMF into the Ministry of Defense but was not fully implemented?

Answer. Iran has historically provided arms, training, and advising to its preferred elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and Iran maintains continuing relationships with those groups. Although many PMF units made great sacrifices to liberate Iraqi territories from ISIS, undisciplined elements of the PMF now exploit liberated populations and contribute to instability that could aid ISIS in its attempts to resurge. Changing the structure of the PMF or integrating PMF units into the Ministry of Defense chain of command is an Iraqi decision. The Department of Defense is prepared to assist and encourage our Iraqi partners in reforming their security institutions. The recent decree on the PMF from Prime Minister Abd-al-Mahdi reiterates and reinforces many of the same themes from former Prime Minister Abadi's PMF decree. The effectiveness of this decree will ultimately depend on implementation. We have seen some promising signs in recent weeks with some significant PMF units agreeing to comply, but much work remains to be done in fully implementing the decree.

Question. According to the United Nations, some 55,000 suspected ISIS fighters and their families remain in detention in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, there are numerous reports coming out about overcrowding and horrific conditions in these detentions centers, specifically in the Ninewa region of Iraq, an area which is a key focus of this administration's religious minority work. Yet, neither the Government of Iraq, nor the United States seems to have a plan for this population. a) What is the administration's long-term plan for addressing this population? b) How is the United States engaging with Iraq on suspected ISIS fighters, both Iraqi and non-Iraqi? c) How is the United States working with other countries on accepting returned ISIS fighters? d) How is the United States engaging in judicial process and reform at the national and local levels in Iraq? e) What programs does the United States have in place, including those working with Iraq and other countries, to counter violent extremism?

Answer. Returning captured ISIS fighters currently held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria, including foreign terrorist fighters, to their countries of origin is the best way to keep them from returning to the battlefield, re-engaging in terrorism, or further radicalization. In this way, repatriation and prosecution of ISIS fighters by countries of origin are in the best interest of regional and international security. The Department of Defense supports the Department of State's efforts to encourage countries to take back their foreign terrorist fighters and their families, to address the challenges posed by these populations, and to counter violent extremism more broadly. Iraqi citizens make up a significant portion of the ISIS fighters currently detained by the SDF in Syria. The Government of Iraq (GoI) has announced that it plans to repatriate Iraqi citizens from Syria, and we understand the GoI and SDF are working together to start that process. The United States is not involved in this arrangement. We commend the GoI for taking this step to return suspected Iraqi ISIS fighters and their families from Syria and for holding members of ISIS accountable. The GoI has been consistent that all those who fought for ISIS, including foreign terrorist fighters, and brought damage and harm to the Iraqi people, need to be held responsible for their crimes. We encourage the SDF, the GoI, and all countries of origin to detain these individuals humanely

and prosecute them fairly, in accordance with their domestic and international obligations.

Question. How has the designation of the IRGC as an FTO impacted U.S. engagement with Iraqi interlocutors in Iraq, both diplomats and military?

Answer. The Department of Defense maintains a close partnership and robust engagement with the Iraqi Security Forces. That partnership has not changed since the designation of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). We would defer to the Department of State on broader diplomatic engagements with the GoI.

Question. Please describe diplomatic outreach to Iraqi officials to describe the designation.

Answer. We would defer to the Department of State on diplomatic outreach to Iraqi officials with respect to the IRGC FTO designation.

Question. Please describe how this determination was made, and what considerations were made regarding U.S. presence and operations in Iraq.

Answer. The Secretary of State made this decision after consulting with the Departments of Justice and the Treasury, as required by statute, and considering input from other relevant agencies, including from the Department of Defense.

Question. What is your assessment of security in Erbil?

Answer. Thanks to close collaboration between Coalition and Iraqi Kurdish security forces, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) has enjoyed relative security since the fall of ISIS's physical caliphate. The recent Erbil restaurant shooting, which resulted in the tragic death of a Turkish diplomat, was a rare example of political violence in the IKR's capital city. We defer to the State Department for more details.

Question. Please describe any discussions with the government of Turkey regarding security in and around Erbil and Northern Iraq.

Answer. We defer to the Department of State on any such negotiations.

Question. Please describe your assessment of the PKK's operational capacity in Iraq.

Answer. The PKK is based out of the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, from where it mounts smallscale attacks in Northern Iraq and Turkey. The PKK's operational capacity remains a threat to our NATO Ally Turkey and our partner Iraq. We defer to the intelligence community for a specific and current assessment of the PKK's operational capacity.

RESPONSES OF HON. JOAN POLASCHIK TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. Why didn't the Department request Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance for Iraq for FY2020? Do you expect that the Department will obligate FY 2019 FMF funds for Iraq?

Answer. We remain committed to helping the Iraqi government defend itself against terrorist threats, counter malign Iranian influence, and promote internal stability. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) will receive robust support from the U.S. government and other coalition partners in FY 2020, and are increasingly able to sustain the costs FMF has covered in the past.

FY 2019 FMF funding will continue to support the procurement of defense articles, technical support, and training to build the long-term capacity of Iraq's defense institutions, interoperability within the ISF, and increase professionalization. Funds may also be used to meet critically needed counterterrorism needs and support Kurdish forces organized under the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Question. What are the State Department's views on the future of the Office of Security Cooperation at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad? How does the State Department envision the security assistance mission in Iraq evolving and what resources and personnel will the State Department contribute to the mission of security partnership with Iraq?

Answer. The State Department views the Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq (OSC–I) as an essential part of our security relationship in Iraq. During the peak of the military campaign against ISIS, OSC–I ensured materials and resources were provided to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). As the campaign wore on and the Department of Defense was able to fulfill the immediate needs of the ISF, OSC–I focused on long term institution building and other tasks essential to the enduring

defeat of ISIS. We anticipate OSCI–I continuing to be of broad benefit to Iraqi security over the long term.

Question. What is the status of U.S. outreach and programming in southern Iraq in light of the 2018 decision to withdraw U.S. personnel from the U.S. Consulate facility in Basra? What are the implications of reduced U.S. presence and activity for U.S. interests and the security of international businesses?

Answer. The United States remains deeply engaged in Basrah. The Embassy has established a Southern Iraq Affairs Unit that maintains frequent contact with a wide range of government and private sector contacts in southern Iraq. U.S. outreach and programming focused on southern Iraq continues to be implemented with the approval of national and local government officials and are being administered effectively by Baghdad-based personnel. The Department's efforts are aimed at helping the Government of Iraq to improve its delivery of essential basic services, build professional security forces loyal to the Iraqi state, develop durable democratic institutions, and promote adherence to the rule of law. These efforts are a stark contrast to Iran's destructive agenda to undermine the Iraqi government and propagate sectarianism.

Question. What support is the United States providing to help the Iraqi government improve electricity and water service reliability and quality in south-central and southern Iraq?

Answer. The United States has been clear with Iraq's national and local government officials that they must take responsibility for service delivery to Iraqi citizens. That said, U.S. efforts to assist Iraq continue. On electricity, the United States is urging Iraq to attract foreign investment that would expand its domestic electricity production while supporting Iraqi-led efforts to enhance regional energy cooperation. On water, the State Department is providing training for Ministry of Water Resources personnel on water use optimization and, through USAID, improved prioritization of infrastructure repairs.

Question. Do you expect Iran-linked elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces to comply with the various de-politicization, demobilization, and disarmament demands of Prime Minister Abd al Mahdi's recent decree? What are the implications for his government if these groups refuse to comply?

Answer. The Prime Minister's decree seeks to bring all Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) units under firm state control. We view the decree as a positive step toward a secure and sovereign Iraq. Enforcement will be a significant challenge, but we continue to support the Government of Iraq's efforts to bring all armed groups under effective command and control.

We believe the Iraqi people are tired of the criminal and destabilizing actions of some Iran-backed PMF and are broadly supportive of the Government of Iraq's efforts to address destabilizing PMF behavior. This political reality will incentivize PMF compliance with the decree and isolate groups that fail to adhere to the Prime Minister's orders.

Question. To what extent have those elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces that have integrated with the Iraqi Security Forces to date maintained their individual unit structures versus their personnel being absorbed and distributed into other units?

Answer. The Government of Iraq is working to establish control over all armed groups in the country. Reining in undisciplined Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) operating outside of state control is a particularly daunting challenge that Iraq is now addressing. We believe the Prime Minister's recent decree ordering PMF units to de-politicize, remove checkpoints, and refrain from money-generating activity is a positive first step. The timeline by which PMF units are formally integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces as called for by the Prime Minister's decree is for the Government of Iraq to decide. Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi continues to be steadfast in his public statements that the Popular Mobilization Forces must reform into a professional, disciplined, and apolitical security service, and we support the Government of Iraq's efforts to achieve this goal.

Question. What are the administration's plans for providing additional support for stabilization and reconstruction in areas of northern and western Iraq most damaged by the battle with the Islamic State? When will the administration announce additional contributions from funds already appropriated by Congress for this purpose in FY 2018 and FY 2019?

Answer. To date, the Department of State and USAID have provided $365 million in funds to the UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization for stabilization assistance

and $340 million for the recovery of religious and ethnic minority populations in areas most damaged by the Islamic State in northern and western Iraq. The Department of State and USAID have committed to providing $100 million in additional FY 2018 funds to support the stabilization of Anbar province, one of the regions most affected by ISIS. These funds will support the provision of essential services in Anbar province, the return of internally displaced persons, and will help reduce Anbar's vulnerability to another insurgency.

USAID will also program at least an additional $30 million into programs supporting the recovery of communities in the Ninewa Plain and western Ninewa, as well as supporting communities displaced from those areas to other parts of northern Iraq, whose populations are predominantly religious and ethnic minorities targeted for genocide by ISIS.

The Department will continue to announce additional contributions as funds become available for obligation through the foreign assistance process.

Question. Now that the KRG has resolved its leadership selection process, what are the prospects for the relationship between the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq? What are the key outstanding issues of difference between the national government and the KRG?

Answer. The KRG and Government of Iraq have made important progress to improve relations since the appointment of Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, and we have seen early indications that the new KRG government led by PM Masrour Barzani intends to build on that. Progress since last fall includes an agreement to resume the transportation and export of Kirkuk oil through a KRG-administered pipeline in the north, and another agreement to harmonize customs duties, facilitating the removal of internal GOI customs checkpoints along the internal boundary with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Unresolved issues include disputed areas, oil shipments to the central government, and security coordination to prevent ISIS from exploiting the seams between national and regional security units.

Question. What, if anything, can and should the United States do to help resolve these differences?

Answer. A strong KRG within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and to the enduring defeat of ISIS. Thus, it remains in our interest to help Baghdad and Erbil resolve these outstanding differences. We will continue to encourage KRG and Government of Iraq officials, with whom we have strong relationships, to resolve their differences by identifying and accepting reasonable compromises.

Question. In late 2017, Vice President Pence announced that the Trump administration would hold up funding pledged to U.N. reconstruction activities in Iraq, instead channeling funds directly to Christian communities in the north of the country. A recent article in The Washington Post noted that: " . . . for Iraq's Sunni Muslims, who bore the brunt of the Islamic State occupation but have received little reconstruction help from the United States, the miserable conditions could seed a new round of militancy." One of the major advantages of working with the U.N. in these types of situations is that it delivers humanitarian and development assistance in an impartial and non-discriminatory manner on the basis of greatest need: Can you address these concerns?

Answer. Since FY 2014, the U.S. government has provided more than $2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance for the Iraq response in the region, including for IDPs in Iraq. U.S. government humanitarian aid is provided through the U.N. and other international and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. The U.N., in coordination with the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government, is leading the humanitarian response in Iraq. We provide humanitarian assistance strictly on the basis of need, without consideration of religion or ethnicity.

Since FY 2014, we have also committed $358 million in stabilization assistance that is being implemented through UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization to help stabilize areas of Iraq liberated from ISIS. On April 14, 2019, we announced a $100 million contribution to UNDP in support of stabilization work in Anbar Province, which has a majority-Sunni population.

Question. Will the administration commit to working with the U.N. to address the humanitarian and development needs of all of Iraq's citizens, including religious minorities?

Answer. Yes. Our support for minority communities is not at the exclusion of support for other Iraqi communities who are also recovering from the destruction of ISIS. For example, on April 14, 2019, we announced a $100 million contribution to

UNDP in support of stabilization work in Anbar Province, which has a majority-Sunni population.

Question. Since 2003, a U.N. political mission (the U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq, or UNAMI) has been on the ground supporting international efforts to stabilize Iraq. The U.S. has long been a key supporter of UNAMI, repeatedly supporting the reauthorization of its mandate by the U.N. Security Council over the years, including most recently this May. Moving forward, will the administration continue to coordinate its efforts in Iraq with UNAMI?

Answer. Yes. UNAMI significantly contributes to U.S. policy goals of a sovereign, stable, and prosperous Iraq that is free from foreign interference and capable of disrupting ISIS and other terrorist networks. Following the territorial defeat of ISIS, UNAMI is coordinating with the Iraqi government on reconstruction, recovery, and stabilization efforts. The Mission enjoys strong support among Iraqi political and religious elites, who view UNAMI as a neutral broker and often consult with UNAMI leadership in efforts to break political impasses. UNAMI's recent mandate renewal in May 2019 focuses on progress related to corruption, stabilization, regional integration with neighboring countries, reining in undisciplined armed groups, and internally displaced persons.

Question. The U.S. strongly supported adoption of the Security Council resolution authorizing UNITAD at the time; does it still find value in these types of activities?

Answer. Yes. The United States strongly supports UNITAD's work to collect, preserve, and store evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed by ISIS in Iraq. Iraqis, including religious and ethnic minorities, suffered unspeakable atrocities under the genocidal rule of ISIS; these crimes cannot go unpunished or undocumented. To this end, the United States has contributed $2 million to UNITAD to begin exhumations of mass graves in the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq, historic home to the Yezidi people.

Question. How is the U.S. working with UNITAD to support the collection and preservation of evidence, while at the same time impressing on Iraqi authorities the need to ensure that trials of terrorism suspects meet international human rights standards?

Answer. The United States has contributed $2 million to UNITAD for the exhumation of mass graves in the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq, historic home to the Yezidi people, in order to collect, preserve, and store evidence of ISIS atrocities that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide for use in prosecutions. This support builds on years of funding and support provided to the International Commission on Missing Persons in Iraq to lay the foundation for processing mass graves from decades of conflict in Iraq. The United States is urging other countries to repatriate suspected foreign terrorist fighters for prosecution in their countries of origin and supports the Government of Iraq's prosecution of ISIS suspects pursuant to its domestic laws. The United States has made it clear that this process should be fair and subscribe to due process norms, so as not to engender feelings of arbitrary persecution that can drive cycles of radicalization. The Department has provided support to Iraq through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), among others, to develop and support institutions to investigate, prosecute, and defend against human rights abuses, criminal behavior, and other abuses of power within Iraq's security services.

Question. The U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) is playing a critical role in efforts to address the ongoing acute needs of children in Iraq. For example, the agency is currently working to reopen nearly 2,000 schools in arrears formerly controlled by ISIS, including in conflict affected arrears of Mosul. Nevertheless, the needs remain immense: according to UNICEF's team in Iraq, 2.6 million children are still either out of school or "at risk of missing out on their education" due to the disruptions caused by the conflict: What is the U.S. doing to support efforts by UNICEF and other organizations to restore educational opportunities for children in Iraq?

Answer. We share your concerns about the disruption in education caused by the conflict against ISIS in Iraq and are working to ensure children have access to education. The U.S. government, through the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, has provided more than $16 million in humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019 to UNICEF's education, protection, and assistance activities for displaced and conflict-affected children in Iraq. In addition, in FY 2018, the State Department supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to rehabilitate schools, provide teacher training and learning materials, and assist students to re-enroll in formal education, among other activities. U.S. government assistance also focuses on meeting the needs of out-of-school children and of adolescent girls and boys who face heightened protection risks, as well as the needs of gender-based violence survivors.

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