

**Opening Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Committee
March 11, 2015
Washington, D.C.**

Chairman Corker and Members of the Committee, I'm pleased to return here and to do so in the distinguished company of Defense Secretary Ash Carter and General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

This panel is looked to for leadership – and justifiably so – on the full range of international issues, but few topics are of such paramount importance as the one that brings us together today. The Administration seeks the Committee's support and that of the entire Congress for a Joint Resolution to authorize the use of military force against the terrorist organization known as ISIL.

Mr. Chairman, in our democracy, there are many views about the challenges and opportunities we face, but I hope and believe that there is an overwhelming consensus that ISIL must be stopped. Our nation is strongest when we act together – and we simply cannot allow this collection of murderers and thugs to achieve its ambitions – which include the death or submission of all who oppose it, the seizure of land, the theft of resources, and the incitement of terrorist acts across the globe.

The Joint Resolution proposed by the President provides the means for America and its representatives to speak with a single powerful voice at this pivotal hour, when ISIL's momentum has diminished amid signs of fragmentation – but its savage attacks continue. To ensure its defeat, we must persist until we prevail in the broad-based campaign along multiple lines of effort that is now underway.

The President already has statutory authority to act against ISIL, but a clear and formal expression of your backing would dispel any doubt anywhere that Americans are united in this effort. Approval of this Resolution would encourage our friends and partners in the Middle East; it would further energize the members and prospective members of the global coalition we have assembled to oppose ISIL; and it would constitute a richly deserved vote of confidence in the men and women of our armed forces. Your unity would also send an unmistakable message

to the leaders of ISIL – who must understand that they cannot divide us; they cannot intimidate us; and they have no hope of defeating us.

The Resolution we have proposed would give the President a clear mandate to prosecute armed conflict against ISIL and associated persons or forces. And while the proposal contains certain limitations that are appropriate in light of the nature of our mission, it provides the flexibility the President needs to direct a successful military campaign.

That is why the Administration has proposed a limitation on the use of “enduring offensive ground combat operations.” The Administration sees no need for U.S. forces to engage in enduring offensive ground combat operations against ISIL. That is the responsibility of our local partners – a task they are determined and preparing to meet.

The proposal includes no geographic limitation, although we do not anticipate conducting operations against targets in countries other than Iraq and Syria at this time. It would be a mistake to communicate to ISIL that there are safe havens for them outside of Iraq and Syria, by limiting the authorization to specific countries.

Mr. Chairman, we know that there are many terrorist groups in the world that aspire to harm the United States, our friends, and our partners. ISIL is distinctive, however, because it holds territory and will continue – if not stopped – to seize more; because of its financial resources; because of the destabilizing impact of its activities on the broader Middle East; because of its pretensions to worldwide leadership; and because it has already been culpable in the violent death of Americans. I don’t need to review for this committee the full litany of outrages committed by ISIL, but I will say that among them are atrocities against the Assyrian Christian and Yazidi religious communities; the crucifixion of children; the sale and enslavement of women and girls; the hideous murder of captives from as near as Jordan and as distant as Japan; the destruction of irreplaceable cultural sites; and the plunder and destruction of cities and towns in which followers of Islam worship, work, and raise their families.

Just two weeks ago – as part of our budget presentation – I testified before this committee regarding our strategy for disrupting and defeating ISIL. That strategy

continues to move forward on all fronts. Secretary Carter and General Dempsey will touch on the military elements, but I can say – from the diplomatic perspective – that the world is strongly united in seeking ISIL’s defeat. Our Coalition is receiving help from governments throughout and well beyond the Middle East – governments that may disagree on other issues but not about the need to take decisive action against ISIL. To date, we have assembled a Coalition of 62 members, including 14 nations contributing to air operations against ISIL in Iraq or Syria, and 16 which have committed to help train or otherwise assist Iraqi security forces. Since the Coalition came together less than half a year ago, we have stopped ISIL’s surge, degraded its leadership, forced it to change its communications and tactics, and heavily damaged its revenue-generating oil facilities.

We also continue to see progress on governance in Iraq, where the new leaders are working to strengthen and reform the country’s security forces through the purging of incompetent or corrupt officers and the more extensive inclusion of Sunni fighters.

Have no doubt, marginalizing and defeating ISIL in Iraq will be a difficult and time-consuming process. Defeating ISIL in Syria – with Syria’s brutal and repressive government – will be even harder and take more time. But the principles at stake in each country are the same and so is our determination. In Syria, as in Iraq, our goal is to support effective and inclusive leadership and a more stable country where violent extremism is no longer a major threat and refugees are able to return home and live normal lives.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I hope that in thinking about this issue, we will all bear in mind the difference between a future in which ISIL is on the rampage, gobbling up land, attracting recruits, and striving to sow terror beyond every boundary – and a future in which that loathsome organization has been defeated on the battlefield, plunged into bankruptcy, and is widely seen on social media and in the court of public opinion as the loser that it is. Between those two futures; there can be only one choice.

Responding to the threat posed by ISIL is obviously not a partisan issue. It is not really even a bipartisan issue. It’s a test that transcends political affiliations

altogether; it's a tremendous challenge to the security of our nation, the values of our citizens, and the well-being of friends and allies across the globe; it's the kind of challenge that this Committee and our country have never in the past failed to meet – and that I am confident we will embrace today with courage and unity.

I will be pleased to respond to your questions but with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I will yield first to my colleague and friend, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter.

Thank you.