

**Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor**  
**Written Testimony for Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on “ISIL’s Reign of Terror: Confronting the**  
**Growing Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq and Syria”**  
**Tuesday, December 9, 2014, 10am**  
**Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy,**  
**and Global Women's Issues**

Chairwoman Boxer and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this important and timely hearing on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) egregious human rights abuses in Iraq and Syria. We are meeting at a time when our ideals and interests are being tested in many places, but perhaps most starkly in the rise of the so called Islamic State, or Daesh. Not for the first time, we're seeing that our ability to imagine evil rarely measures up to the reality of mass executions, ethnic cleansing, the enslavement of women, and the murder of innocent Americans who came to the Middle East for the sole purpose of helping people and telling the world about their fate. The toll on a region already under stress has been extraordinary—over 1.5 million Iraqis have been displaced, while in Syria, civilians pressed from one side by Asad's barrel bombs and starvation sieges are now pressed from the other by this vicious terror group. Throughout the region, Daesh has destroyed hundreds of mosques and shrines, demolished Christian icons and crosses, and taken sledgehammers to the tombs of saints revered in Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

As enemies of human rights go, Daesh is in a unique class. Not because it uses bombings, assassinations or kidnappings to terrorize people, but because it targets entire ethnic and religious groups for particularly horrific and persistent violence, simply because of whom they are. It murders men who won't agree to accept its warped ideology. It seizes women not only as hostages but as commodities, spoils of war to be raped or sold. There are tyrants in the world who commit such crimes, but they know on some level that their conduct is shameful, so they hide what they do; Daesh puts its crimes on YouTube. It is of the utmost importance that those who commit and brag about such acts not be allowed to project a narrative of success, as Daesh tried to do earlier this year. It must fail and be seen to fail by every person and organization around the world that might have similar inclinations.

And Daesh will fail; there is no question about that now. By targeting people of all sects, religions, and nationalities, it has united people of all sects, religions, and nationalities against it, and enabled us to forge a global coalition in support of local forces that will ultimately defeat this organization and liberate people from its terror. We will restore human rights by defeating Daesh. But what I want to stress most of all today is that the reverse is also true: we will defeat Daesh in part by defending the human rights of its intended victims. The protection of civilians in Iraq and Syria is built into our strategy; we see it not just as a moral imperative but a key to success in the fight.

We know we can't defeat Daesh through airpower alone; we can do so only in partnership with allies on the ground, including members of local communities in the areas where Daesh operates, from Sunni tribes in Iraq and Syria, to Kurds in both countries, to groups like the Yezidis. Members of these communities will want to partner with us if we continue to show them that this

campaign is aimed at protecting them, and they will be able to partner with us if we help in the effort to bring them some relief from terror attacks. Moreover, Daesh benefits from atrocities committed by others. It arose in part because a dictator in Syria has spent the last three years destroying towns and cities, driving half the people of his country from their homes, until some of them became so desperate that they turned to the false deliverance Daesh offered. It ascended in part because many Iraqi Sunnis felt their legitimate grievances were ignored, or created, by the previous government in Baghdad. A campaign of prison breaks, the execution of former *Sahwa* leaders and moderate Sunnis, and virtually no protection from the central government left some Iraqi Sunnis at the mercy of Daesh's tactics.

By demonstrating concern for the welfare and protection of civilians in Iraq and Syria, we gain allies on the ground and build the foundations of resilient, rights-respecting societies in which extremist groups will have fewer grievances to prey on. Let me describe more specifically what we are doing:

**First, we are protecting the most vulnerable people from Daesh's reach. To that end, the United States has developed and led a coalition of 60 international partners, to include leaders in the Islamic world, in a campaign to defeat, degrade, and delegitimize Daesh and its campaign of horrors.**

Working with our coalition partners, we have come to the aid of members of communities targeted by Daesh on several occasions and dealt it strategic blows, halting its advance and preventing further atrocities. In August, as Daesh began its attack on the Yezidis on Mt. Sinjar, President Obama ordered airstrikes to avert a potential act of genocide and to protect American personnel in Iraq. The United States delivered 114,000 meals and 35,000 gallons of water via air drops during the first week alone. The airstrikes helped many Yezidis flee Mt. Sinjar for safety. As the crisis on Sinjar unfolded, my staff was in continuous contact with Yezidis in Iraq and the diaspora, including those still on Mt. Sinjar and women and girls held captive by Daesh. In September, our airstrikes broke Daesh's two-month siege of the Iraqi town of Amerli, where an estimated 15,000 Turkmen Shia were surrounded. Over the past two months, our airstrikes in Kobani--also called Ayn al-Arab--have helped to break another siege and allowed Kurdish and other fighters to push back Daesh militants' gains in northern Syria.

In the bureau I lead, we actively seek information from our contacts about vulnerable civilian populations still in harm's way, including female captives, and the movements of Daesh forces threatening them. We are working closely with CENTCOM, sharing this information in real time, so that they can act on the information when appropriate. And we have seen results where coalition action, coordinated with Iraqi ground operations, has directly supported members of vulnerable civilian populations and their needs, including protecting Yezidis remaining near Mt. Sinjar, and, given its importance to civilians, taking back the Mosul Dam. As more Iraqis, especially Sunnis, in Daesh-controlled areas rise up against them, we will be very attentive to the extra risk to them and their families stemming from that decision. In late October and early November in Anbar Province, Daesh executed over 300 members of the Albu Nimr tribe, including women and children, after the tribe decided to side with Iraqi forces against Daesh. Other members of the tribe had been able to flee. On October 27, we air dropped food to Iraqi

forces to provide to members of the Albu Nimr tribe who had recently fled from their homes to Al Asad Air Base to avoid retaliation.

When Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces, liberate territory captured by Daesh, they will need to be alert to the possibility of last minute reprisal attacks against vulnerable civilians, and captives to the needs of the people who suffered most, including any hostages who may be able to escape or be rescued. We are taking all these challenges into account in planning future efforts.

## **Second, we are strengthening civil society and governance structures on the ground.**

In Iraq, we are supporting Prime Minister Abadi's efforts to reach across sectarian lines and to demonstrate inclusivity. We have urged the Iraqi Government to further Prime Minister Abadi's proposed reforms to reduce sectarian divisions, to strengthen inclusivity in its security sector, and to promote reconciliation in Iraq. The test of the Abadi government starts now, in the conduct of the campaign against Daesh, which must persuade all Iraq's communities—from Shia who are constant targets of Daesh attacks, to minorities, to Sunnis who have felt disenfranchised by the Iraqi government and threatened by Shia militias—that they will be welcome and secure in Iraq under a non-sectarian government and a security sector to protect it. One possible mechanism for incorporating Christians, Yezidis, and Sunnis into the security infrastructure is through the new National Guard. Such an action may help provide these communities with representation and a role in their own protection—something they have long sought. Prime Minister Abadi took an important step December 2 by issuing an Executive Order to address some of the grievances of the Sunnis and uphold the rule of law. It would enforce legal limits on detentions of those who have not yet been charged and to expedite the release of those detainees who have been ordered to be freed by the courts. Abadi has shown he wishes to govern in a manner different than that of his predecessors and highlighted a “zero tolerance” policy for human rights abuses.

We do not have to pursue this endeavor alone. We will work in tandem with our over 60 coalition partners, including the Government of Iraq, to address atrocity prevention, stabilization, and recovery in a post-Daesh Iraq and Syria, and hold Daesh accountable for its actions. Secretary Kerry and General John Allen further elaborated these strategies at the December 3 Ministerial in Brussels.

In Syria, we face even greater challenges, and we are obviously not yet where we need to be. The vast majority of Syrians want to rid their country of Daesh, but the communities most threatened are caught in a vise between the terrorists and the Asad regime. In February and July, we supported UN Security Council resolutions on Syria that sought to force the Asad regime to end atrocities and permit entry of humanitarian assistance, and we remain committed to a political solution that will stop the killing and lead to an inclusive government. But the regime continues to defy all efforts to resolve the crisis.

Coalition airstrikes have helped to arrest the progress of Daesh in northern and eastern Syria, providing some relief and buying some time for the armed moderate opposition and civilians to regain their strength. Our planned support for the armed moderate opposition will help them do

more to protect their people in liberated areas and to push back the terrorists. Amidst all the bad news from Syria, it is important to remember that there is a great deal in these liberated areas that is worth defending and that can be built upon to achieve a better future for Syria. Dedicated Syrians are bravely trying to maintain local self-government, police and judicial institutions, to keep open schools, to deliver services, to rescue people hurt by fighting, and to rebuild what is constantly being destroyed. I sometimes fear that when people think about Syria, they imagine a place populated by nothing more than terrorists and Assad loyalists, with no one in between who can partner with us and inspire any hope. That is a cruel and dangerous falsehood.

We have provided \$330 million in non-lethal support to the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), local opposition councils, and civil society groups, to help Syria's moderate center stay alive. U.S. assistance is also being directed to maintain public safety and to mitigate sectarian violence. Assistance includes training and equipment to build the capacity of a network of more than 3,000 grassroots activists from more than 400 opposition councils and organizations from around the country. This assistance program links Syrian citizens with the national and local-level Syrian opposition. It also enhances linkages among Syrian activists, human rights organizations, and independent media outlets and empowers women leaders to play a more active role in transition planning.

After Daesh is defeated, effective governance will be critical to establishing and maintaining stability. Reintegration of displaced persons, recovery of basic services, and security will be essential to put affected areas on the road to stabilization. In Iraq, we will support this government's efforts to govern inclusively and to take significant, concrete steps to address the legitimate grievances and needs of all Iraqis. In Syria, we will continue to support efforts to pursue a political solution that will result in a united, inclusive, and democratic Syria.

### **Third, we are specifically seeking to support women and children.**

The U.S. Government provides psychological, medical, and social support, as well as case management and legal assistance, to Syrian women and children inside Syria and in refugee-hosting countries throughout the region. This support is delivered through reproductive health care efforts, the creation of women-friendly spaces, mobile clinics, and outreach workers. Through the *Gender-Based Violence Emergency Response and Protection Initiative*, we have provided emergency assistance to survivors of extreme forms of gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices. This has included the provision of emergency medical and psychosocial support to dozens of Yezidi women and girls formerly held captive by Daesh, who suffered the most egregious forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

We see a connection between protection of women and their participation in civil life and governance. U.S. support inside Syria is empowering women and girls to take an active role in governance and civic engagement, and we are working to amplify the voices of Syrian women civil society leaders participating in peacebuilding initiatives. In Iraq, we are providing training for tens of thousands of Iraqi students on rights awareness, violence prevention, and advocacy initiatives to promote legislation on gender equality. In addition, the U.S. Government supports campaigns to educate on the dangers of early and forced marriage across the region.

**Fourth, officials throughout the Administration are working closely with representatives of religious communities and other vulnerable groups in Iraq and Syria.**

These contacts share information about Daesh's abuses and humanitarian conditions facing members of displaced communities. Our Embassies, various bureaus in the State Department (including my own), and other U.S. agencies have extensive contacts with religious leaders like the Patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church, advocacy and aid groups like International Christian Concern and Catholic Relief Services, and human rights organizations like Yezidi Human Rights Organization-International.

In October, we brought a Syrian religious delegation to the United States to discuss interfaith issues. One participant, the well-known Sunni Sheikh Mohammed Yaqoubi, formerly the Imam of the Grand Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, engaged U.S. media—including CNN and PBS—and Muslim American communities across the United States to condemn Daesh and discourage American Muslims from joining Daesh and other extremist groups. He also led a Friday Muslim funerary prayer for Peter Kassig in his Indiana hometown, in the presence of Kassig's mother and father, where he spoke against Daesh in the strongest possible terms. His lectures of moderation and tolerance in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York drew thousands.

Throughout the Administration, both in Washington and in the region, we are collaborating with religious leaders and communities to address the underlying causes of and motivations for violent extremism, religious intolerance, and societal polarization. We are working with NGOs, civil society groups, and religious leaders to build relationships between religious communities, to combat terrorist propaganda about religious minorities, and to administer programs that promote tolerance and empower minorities to better advocate for their interests and rights. We are helping to strengthen grassroots organizations and local administrative bodies—foundations of democratic governance—as they step in to fill the void left by the Syrian regime and to provide basic services.

**Fifth, we are supporting documentation of atrocities to hold all actors accountable.**

Accountability is important. To establish a peaceful, inclusive political solution in Syria and effective, inclusive governance in Iraq that undermines and ultimately defeats Daesh, we must remain committed to seeking justice for victims of atrocities and accountability for those responsible for such heinous crimes; there can only be lasting peace if there is justice.

We have supported the work of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which recently released a report entitled, "*Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria.*" This report gathered information from more than 300 courageous Syrian men, women, and children, who shared accounts of Daesh's cruelty and inhumane treatment, including mass executions, sexual violence against women and girls, ethnic cleansing, recruitment of child soldiers, forced displacement, and targeting of journalists. The U.S. Government co-sponsored the UN Human Rights Council resolution requesting the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights dispatch a mission to Iraq to investigate alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law by ISIL and associated terrorist groups. The Office is documenting Daesh's

abuses committed in Iraq and will improve the ability of local authorities to promote and protect the human rights of affected communities.

The Department of State has programs to enable Iraqi and Syrian civil society to document human rights abuses to serve a wide range of future transitional justice purposes, including, but not limited to truth-telling, reconciliation, reparations, institutional reform, memorialization, evidence collection, and criminal accountability. We are supporting a number of initiatives focused on transitional justice and atrocity documentation, aimed at bolstering accountability for atrocities committed by all sides. The United States, along with eight other governments, supports the Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC) as one of the premier Syrian-led institutions leading this documentation effort through its database, analysis, training, and networks inside Syria. The information collected lays the groundwork for future accountability processes, including potential criminal prosecutions.

We are also committed to promoting justice and accountability for those responsible for Daesh's atrocities in Iraq by working with the Iraqi Government, other partners in the region, and the international community in supporting domestic justice and accountability efforts.

Chairwoman Boxer, members of the Committee, as you know this fight will not be won easily or quickly. But the protection of human rights is not merely the endpoint of the fight; it is the starting point; it is the way we will win.

This is not just a campaign against a group of people; it is a campaign for human dignity and justice, for the right of all to live in safety. Each time we succeed in protecting someone from Daesh, whether we are working with an entire religious community, like the Yezidis or the Christians, a single village, or a single person, we gain a strategic victory for ourselves and strike a moral and psychological blow to Daesh.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.