

GLOBAL EFFORTS TO DEFEAT ISIS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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GLOBAL EFFORTS TO DEFEAT ISIS

TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2016

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m. in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker, Rubio, Johnson, Flake, Gardner, Perdue, Isakson, Barrasso, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Murphy, Kaine, and Markey.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Mr. McGurk, I would like to thank you for again appearing before the committee. You have always been a direct witness, and we thank you for that. I think after most of your testifying, whether classified or in public, most people leave far more informed than they do with most witnesses, and hopefully you will live up to that today.

Almost 2 years after we began military operations, ISIS has lost significant amounts of territory: 47 percent of its territory in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria, according to your testimony.

Unfortunately, that progress on the ground creates new threats to our national interests. As our CIA Director said this last month, as you continue to make gains, ISIS will likely intensify its global terror campaign and that the administration's efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach.

The New York Times reported recently that 1,200 people outside of Iraq and Syria have been killed in attacks either inspired or coordinated by ISIS, and nearly half of those deaths occurred in attacks targeting Westerners.

In the wake of the recent terrorist attack in Orlando, we expect you to provide and hope you will provide an honest assessment of where the global fight against ISIS is going and address some of the fundamental questions we all have. In particular, I would like to get your view on what actions the coalition has taken to counter the increased terror threat posed by ISIS in spite of the organization's losses in Iraq and Syria, again which we herald, and how the coalition plans to actually defeat ISIS militarily.

Some of the other questions I hope you will answer include: do the Syrian democratic forces—and I think there is a lot of confu-

sion about the various coalitions that are countering Assad but also countering ISIS, which is primarily made up of Kurds with an Arab contingent—have enough people to clear ISIS from the northern Syria area?

And even if we continue to take back territory from ISIS, are those gains backed by political progress necessary to sustain them? Obviously, there are rubs between that group and others, rubs between that group and Turkey itself. And as we leave it to its own accord, if you will, with these groups taking on ISIS in their own ways and taking on Assad in their own ways, are we really creating something that down the road is going to take us to a political settlement? Or is success on the battleground leaving behind the same vacuum that led to ISIS in the first place?

And finally, how do you reconcile the continued glaring disparity in Syria between a military campaign focused on ISIS and a failing diplomatic process dependent upon a transition from Assad? I do not see how the ISIS coalition can be successful while the Syrian civil war continues.

This administration has declared that Assad must go, but it certainly appears as if that position is changing or has changed. I do not see how what is left of the political process possibly leads to Assad's departure. And I hope you will really help us understand what is happening behind the scenes there.

I also fear that in spite of continued attacks on our homeland, our military response to ISIS does not adequately reflect the direct nature of this threat to the United States. I think many of us grow frustrated when the administration's optimistic rhetoric does not often match the results.

Additionally, much of our reliance on proxies to do the fighting is creating a range of diplomatic and political problems that will have ramifications for years to come.

With that, again I want to thank you for your service to our country. I want to thank you for the way that you talk with all of us in such a direct manner. We look forward to your testimony.

With that, our distinguished ranking member, Senator Cardin.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I first join you in welcoming Mr. McGurk here and thanking him for his service to our country in a critically important position. And I agree with the chairman's assessment. Every time you have appeared before our committee, either in open or closed sessions, we learn a lot and we have a great deal of confidence in the information that you are presenting to us. So thank you again for the manner in which you have conducted this office.

Mr. Chairman, ISIS is a global threat both to the physical safety and the democratic values we hold dear. It destabilizes already weak states, inflicts horrible acts of brutality, and inspires radicalization of individuals to perpetuate terrorism within their own countries as we and our allies have experienced.

As we see every day across the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere, ISIS attacks and propaganda are designed not only to kill but to turn communities against one another, Sunnis against Shia,

Muslim against Christian, immigrants against citizens. To defeat ISIS, we are mobilizing the international community militarily, economically, and diplomatically to shrink ISIS's safe havens, expand our humanitarian support, and combat extremism in all forms, both online and our own political discourse.

Due to the efforts of the administration, the United States leads a 66-nation coalition united against the scourge of ISIS terrorism. In the military sphere, we are shrinking ISIS's safe havens in places like Fallujah in Iraq, in Manbij, Syria, and Sirte, Libya. Their flow of foreign fighters has been cut, and they have lost millions in revenues. Yet, as I am sure our witness will agree, there is a lot more that needs to be done. There are no quick answers to this challenge.

These efforts have not been without serious costs. We stand in solidarity with countries such as Jordan, which suffered another terrorist attack in recent days. I commend our witness, Mr. McGurk, for his recent visit to Jordan where he reiterated our unwavering support to the Jordanian people.

We know our global efforts to fight ISIS will not be easy. As CIA Director John Brennan recently testified, as ISIS suffers even heavier losses, it will intensify its global terror campaign. We have got to be careful about that. We might be able to contain them on the ground, but then what happens with global terrorism?

But we must remain steadfast and redouble our efforts especially in the newly liberated areas formerly held by ISIS. In Fallujah, as we speak, tens of thousands of people who have been freed from ISIS captivity are now living in displacement camps in horrible conditions under intense summer desert heat.

I commend our administration's recent pledge to provide an additional \$20 million in humanitarian aid to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees' Iraq response. But more needs to be done. I call on our other partner nations, especially those in the Arab Gulf States to assist Fallujah residents desperately needing water, sanitation, food, and shelter. We cannot let those who have fled ISIS suffer even more.

On July 20th, the United States will join with Canada, Germany, and Japan to co-host a pledging conference in Washington. This is a critical opportunity for the international community to continue to support humanitarian and stabilization efforts in Iraq.

In addition to our humanitarian efforts, our coalition must work harder on long-term reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. In the absence of effective services, fair political participation and good governance, the defeat of this version of ISIS will only lead to another. The real weapon against ISIS and their ilk comes not just from the barrel of a gun but from the ballot box, the schoolhouse, the courts, and a growing economy. Prime Minister Abadi needs international aid now to rebuild Ramadi and Fallujah, and he needs international support to keep spoilers such as Iran from its interference in Iraqi politics.

Let me conclude with this. As I stated earlier, ISIS challenges not only our physical well-being but our principles of pluralism and openness. Let us commit not only to defeating ISIS on the battlefield but defeating their poisonous narrative of division. We are all in this fight together no matter what your religion, sexual orienta-

tion, or nationality. If we are truly going to fight ISIS globally, then we must fight the forces of divisiveness at home and abroad.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witness.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much for those comments and your leadership.

With that, Mr. McGurk is Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Your business card must be very large.

We thank you for being here today. I know that you realize you can summarize your comments, if you wish. Your written testimony, without objection, will be entered into the record. And with that, thank you for being here.

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

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee. I want to thank you for inviting me to speak to you today with an update on our global campaign to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant, or ISIL.

This hearing takes place within weeks of the mass murder against innocent Americans in Orlando, Florida. And as Director Brennan testified last week, this criminal act was an assault on the values of openness and tolerance that define us as a free nation. And we join the family and friends in mourning the loss of their loved ones and we wish a full and speedy recovery to the wounded.

While there has been no connection between the killer and these attacks and ISIL central abroad, the attacks underscore the imperative need to defeat ISIL at its core in Iraq and Syria and across its global networks.

I just returned from a visit to Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel.

In Jordan, as Senator Cardin mentioned, I met with our close partner, King Abdullah, just 1 day after an ISIL suicide bomber killed seven Jordanian soldiers guarding their border.

In Egypt, Egyptian forces are engaged in a struggle against an ISIL branch in the Sinai, and we have offered our support and assistance.

In Israel, ISIL's propaganda has sought recently to inspire attacks to compensate for losses of manpower and territory, and we must not allow them to succeed.

And in Iraq, on the front lines, Iraqi forces with our support and assistance are rooting out ISIL's strongholds one by one, most recently just this past week in Fallujah where ISIL had held a population hostage for over 30 months.

My statement today will highlight the progress we are making against ISIL, but that progress cannot discount the threats that remain nor diminish the truly unprecedented nature of a challenge that now confronts much of the world.

We analyze ISIL in three dimensions: the core in Iraq and Syria; the networks that feed its strength, foreign fighter networks, propaganda networks, and financial networks; and the global affiliates. There are eight in all that seek to expand its reach with Libya and the Sinai being the most significant.

Our global campaign plan, bringing together a coalition of 66 partners from around the world, seeks to defeat ISIL in each of these three areas. My written statement notes the indicators that we track, many of which are now trending in the right direction.

Foreign fighters are down and more countries than ever before sharing information to identify those who are still traveling.

Outside financing has been severed, and internal financing has taken a significant hit through painstaking intelligence work and precision targeting by military forces in Iraq and Syria.

ISIL's propaganda and messaging is now being challenged 24/7 through a global network of countries, civil society organizations, private companies, and individuals.

ISIL's leaders are either in hiding or being killed now at a rate of one every 3 days, including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's main deputies, terrorists named Haji Imam and Abu Sayyaf, killed by U.S. military forces.

And ISIL's territory is shrinking, losing nearly 50 percent of territory once controlled in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria over the last 18 months.

What makes ISIL different from other terrorist organizations is its attempt to hold territory and establish a state-like entity in Iraq and Syria, what it proclaims is a self-declared and phony caliphate. This notion of a caliphate has been a primary driver in recruitment for the tens of thousands of foreign fighters that have joined ISIL in Syria and Iraq. The territory it controls also allows ISIL to extract vast resources and, most importantly for us, plan and launch highly sophisticated external attacks. The attacks we have seen in Brussels and Paris, for example, we believe stem from ISIL's external plotting network, which is based in Raqqa and has sent operatives from Syria to Europe through what is known as the Manbij Pocket.

That is why we must take the territory away from ISIL and, just as important, stabilize areas after ISIL, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman. I would like to highlight briefly how we are doing so, pointing to three areas on the map that I had attached to my written testimony.

Number one on the map is the Manbij Pocket. 3 weeks ago, a coalition led by the Manbij Military Council—and these are local people seeking to liberate their own territory from ISIL—launched an attack across the Euphrates River with the mission to liberate the strategic City of Manbij. This force is approximately 3,500 strong, and it is made up primarily of Arabs, nearly 80 percent Arab, with Kurds and advice and assistance being provided by our special forces.

Putting together this coalition took painstaking work, military and diplomatic, but the results thus far are promising. The forces liberated 1,000 square kilometers and has begun to push into Manbij City neighborhood by neighborhood. As they move, they are acquiring a great deal of information on the ISIL foreign fighter network. We believe this model, recruiting local forces and providing them support to liberate their own areas as they model for future operations to isolate Raqqa.

From the other end of the Manbij Pocket, moderate opposite groups are beginning to push east against ISIL. This has been and

will remain a tough fight. ISIL is ordered to fight to the death, but now that we are moving on two fronts, ISIL defenses are beginning to degrade, and we are hopeful that coalition-backed forces can take this territory away from ISIL entirely.

Number five on the map is Mosul. Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces have launched a series of operations coordinated from a joint base in Makhmour where we tragically lost a U.S. marine last month. These operations, one of which just south of Mosul is ongoing at this hour, are setting the conditions for the isolation and ultimate liberation of Mosul. Mosul will be a significant military challenge but also a political, diplomatic, and humanitarian challenge. The planning is now underway.

Last week in Erbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, I was invited, together with our talented Ambassador Stu Jones, to attend a meeting with President Masoud Barzani and Faleh Fayad, the Iraqi National Security Advisor, to address the difficult political and humanitarian challenges of the Mosul campaign. This is one of the more positive meetings I have attended in Iraq, with all sides focused on the coming liberation of Mosul and what must be done, including the need for diverse communities in Iraq to work together. The Iraqi Government agreed in this meeting to pay and equip 15,000 local fighters from Ninewa Province for the Mosul campaign, representing Arabs, Kurds, Shabaks, Christians, and Yazidis. Many of these fighters have already been identified and our coalition will proudly help train them.

There is also emerging consensus on the basic stabilization arrangements for Mosul after ISIL, building on a model that has worked in Tikrit and now underway in Anbar with local leaders empowered to restore life to their communities and return the population with significant backing and support from our global coalition.

Finally, in Anbar, numbers 7 and 8 on the map, Iraqi forces, together with over 20,000 local tribal fighters, have over the past few months alone liberated Ramadi, Fallujah, Hit, Rutbah and broke a 2-year siege of the City of Haditha. This is significant progress, testament to our coalition's training of Iraqi forces who have not lost a battle now in over a year and key decisions by Prime Minister Abadi to empower the local people in Anbar in their own liberation from ISIL.

This is not to overshadow the serious problems that have occurred, including reports of human rights abuses and caring for IDPs. But there the Iraqi Government has taken immediate measures to address problems, holding people accountable for abuse and flowing resources where they are needed.

There is much work to do, particularly in Fallujah where IDPs last week overwhelmed the capacity of local responders. Thanks to quick decisions in Baghdad and here in Washington, tens of millions of dollars in aid is now flowing to these refugee camps, and the U.N. is hopeful to begin returns next month. As Senator Cardin mentioned, we will also host a very important pledging conference on July 20th here in Washington to generate the resources that are needed to care for these people.

Returning people to their homes is a key priority for our coalition, and to date in Iraq, 770,000 people have returned to areas lib-

erated from ISIL, including 95 percent of the population of Tikrit, thanks to the support from the Iraqi Government and a stabilization fund from our coalition.

Accordingly, as we look to accelerate the defeat of ISIL in these areas, we are equally focused most importantly on what comes after ISIL, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, and ensuring its defeat is lasting.

In sum, we have made progress over the last year against ISIL, but there is a great deal we have left to do on the ground in Iraq and Syria, here at home, and around the world against this unprecedented challenge.

And I am grateful for the opportunity again to appear before you, and I am happy to address your questions.

[Mr. McGurk's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRETT H. MCGURK

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to update you on our global campaign to defeat ISIL.

The fight against ISIL is an unprecedented challenge. More than 40,000 foreign fighters have flowed into Syria over the past five years, swelling the ranks of violent extremist organizations, the most significant of which is ISIL. ISIL is determined to establish a state in Iraq and Syria, and instill terror around the world as part of a perverse agenda, whereby, according to their own ideology, anyone who disagrees with them should die. We have no choice but to defeat ISIL by taking away its territory in Iraq and Syria, severing its global networks, and suffocating its global affiliates.

I will describe today the progress we are making in all of these areas, but this progress does not discount the significant threat that remains, and will remain, for years to come. As an entire government, and as a country, we must remain vigilant, committed to a sustainable, global, and long-term effort to defeat ISIL, and ensure that other violent extremist groups, such as Jabhat al Nusra, al Qaida's official affiliate in Syria, cannot rise from its ashes.

The support of this Committee and the Congress will be essential to our success, and it is my honor to appear before you again for an update on our campaign.

DIAGNOSING THE ISIL THREAT

We analyze the ISIL challenge in three dimensions: the core in Iraq and Syria (its phony self-proclaimed "caliphate"); the global networks (foreign fighter, financial, and messaging networks); and the global affiliates (eight in all, with some far more serious than others). Any successful campaign must address all three, and our global effort, anchored by a coalition of 66 partners, is designed to do just that.

At the same time, the ISIL core remains its center of gravity, allowing ISIL to extract resources, recruit, and plan sophisticated external terrorist attacks, as we have seen in Paris and Brussels. Thus, we are focused first and foremost on shrinking the core, uprooting ISIL from the cities, towns, and villages under its control, and destroying its underlying infrastructure, including the human capital of its leaders, now being eliminated one-by-one.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT

In July 2014, I testified before this committee as ISIL was expanding its territory, threatening Baghdad, and appeared unstoppable. The situation today is measurably different. ISIL has not launched a significant offensive in over a year; it is losing cities—Tikrit, Ramadi, Fallujah, Hit, Shadadi, and soon, Manbij—that were central to its rise; and the coalition-backed forces arrayed against it are increasingly confident and on offense, with our support.

I have included an annotated map as an attachment to this testimony, which points to our focus areas in the core, and demonstrates that we are now able to apply multiple points of pressure at once, from Manbij, to Fallujah, to Mosul. ISIL is under more pressure than ever before, and we will ensure that it increases dramatically over the coming weeks.

To assess the current situation, I will briefly review eight indicators that we track week-to-week to determine where we may need more focused efforts, and how the campaign is doing overall. These indicators are not exhaustive, but provide a decent top-line overview of what remains an extraordinarily complex, dynamic, and fast-moving situation on the ground.

1. *Morale*

ISIL's morale is plummeting. We have seen credible reports of ISIL executing its own fighters on the battlefield. Whereas it once claimed to represent the people under its control, it is now executing anyone seeking to leave its control. Whereas it once massed and maneuvered at will across Iraq and Syria, it can no longer operate in the open, train, or communicate. Whereas it once promised lavish pay for recruits, and free services in its "caliphate," it is now slashing pay, cannot provide services, and is facing internal resistance. We know from other sources, as well, that ISIL fighters are panicking on the battlefield, foreign recruits are now looking to return home, and leaders are struggling to maintain discipline, even despite the threat of execution for disobedience.

This picture from the ground level is also apparent in ISIL's own propaganda. Whereas ISIL once promised paradise with staged and sun-drenched scenes from Raqqa and Mosul, ISIL's own leaders now acknowledge they could lose Raqqa and Mosul.

ISIL spokesman Muhammad al-Adnani, for example, has for years described ISIL as a global, historic, expanding movement. His catchphrase was "remain and expand"—describing the territory under its control—and he promised ISIL would someday dominate the Middle East and ultimately control territory in southern Europe.

Adnani's latest statement in May was quite different. No longer the confident voice of an expanding movement, he acknowledged that ISIL may lose its holdings in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, including its strongholds of Mosul, Raqqa, and Sirte. We are now working to ensure that his prediction comes true, and that Adnani himself—who also leads ISIL's external operations arm—is eliminated, and no longer able to spew his incitement.

2. *Territory*

Territory is not the only indicator that matters, but it significant for three reasons:

First, territory, with millions of people under ISIL control, allows ISIL to extract resources, fund external operations, and embed its violent and genocidal system of control, raping women, murdering LGBT individuals, indoctrinating children, and brutally executing anyone who resists.

Second, territory allows ISIL to proclaim itself as vanguard of a historic "caliphate," which more than anything else we have seen, drives recruiting from around the world.

Third, and most important, territory and safe haven allow ISIL to plan future operations against our partners, and our own homeland, such as the suicide attacks in Paris, Brussels, and Ankara, which were planned in Raqqa with the support of logistics nodes in and around Manbij.

For all of these reasons, we must pressure ISIL in the areas it controls, and then take those areas away from ISIL altogether. I have included an attached map to guide the briefing on how and where we are comprehensively shrinking ISIL's territory.

The trajectory is positive. ISIL has not had a major battlefield victory in over a year. It has lost 47 percent of its territory in Iraq, and 20 percent in Syria. More important than percentages, however, is the strategic nature of the territory that ISIL has lost: nearly the entire border between Syria and Turkey, iconic cities like Ramadi, Tikrit, and Fallujah, and all the major transit points between Raqqa and Mosul, such as Sinjar, Hawl and Shahdadi (number three and four on the attached map), are no longer controlled by ISIL.

We are now working with local partners to shrink this territory further, through a combination of military, political, and security measures. I will highlight three areas where active ISIL offensives are now underway:

Manbij Pocket

First, is the "Manbij Pocket," labeled number one on the map. This has long been the last stretch of territory with access to an international border, allowing foreign fighters to transit in and out of Syria. We commend Turkey for taking measures to tighten the border on the north side, but the

threat will not reduce until the territory inside Syria is taken away from ISIL. That is what we are now doing.

Three weeks ago, the Syrian Democratic Forces—a mix of Syrian Kurds, Arabs, Syriac Christians, and Turkmen—launched a surprise attack from the east, crossing the Euphrates River and then rapidly enveloping Manbij city. As we speak, these fighters are now entering the city limits, under cover of coalition air support. ISIL has threatened to kill civilians leaving the city, and ordered a fight to the death. This has only reaffirmed the importance of this operation, which is on track to succeed.

This operation against Manbij was planned for months with military and political components. In my visits to Kobani, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya, I met the leaders of the military alliance now leading the offensive. Named the Manbij Military Council, it is 3,500 strong, over 80 percent Arab, mostly from the local area, fighting to free their own hometowns. This is a core premise of our strategy for liberating territory: we want local people, with local knowledge, in the operations to free their communities from ISIL, and stabilize the areas after ISIL is gone.

It took time to build this inclusive alliance, but the results on the ground, thus far, are promising, and provide a model as we look to isolate Raqqa—likely the next phase of operations after Manbij—with a predominantly Arab and locally-grown force.

The Manbij operation is also proving what we knew going in: that this area was a locus of ISIL's foreign fighter and external plotting network. Of the more than 1,000 ISIL fighters killed in this operation thus far, we believe nearly half are foreign fighters, and we are collecting information along the way on how ISIL's foreign fighter networks are organized and led.

From the other end of the Manbij pocket, we are working with moderate opposition groups to push east across what is known as the "Mari Line" (the extent of ISIL's westward advance). This effort had struggled—ISIL had the area heavily defended—before we launched the second front across the Euphrates, which pulled ISIL fighters away and allowed our moderate partners to advance.

We will continue to resource both offensives, and we are committed to collapsing ISIL within this pocket, an objective that is central to our own national security. We are also working, in coordination with Turkey, to ensure that local mistrust between elements in both offensives can be overcome, and humanitarian aid can flow into these areas as soon as they are liberated.

Anbar Province

Second, in Iraq's Anbar province, parts of which had been dominated by ISIL for nearly two years, Iraqi security forces and local tribes have recently liberated Ramadi, Hit, central Fallujah, Rutbah, and broke the siege of Haditha, where Sunni tribes held out heroically against ISIL since the summer of 2014. Adnani, the ISIL spokesman, once boasted that Haditha tribes would be wiped off the map, and that fathers would bring their sons to Haditha and say "this is where the Jughayfa (a leading tribe) once stood." In fact, Haditha, like Kobani in Syria, broke the back of ISIL and sparked the momentum we are now seeing across Anbar province.

This would not have been possible without local support, and we commend the Government of Iraq and Prime Minister Haidar al Abadi for supporting a program of tribal mobilization in Anbar province. There are now 20,000 Sunni tribal fighters working with Iraqi forces to clear and hold territory, in addition to over 14,000 local police across the province. We have been proud to support this program, together with our coalition partners, at two facilities in Anbar, one on Al Asad airbase near Haditha, and one at Taqadum airbase between Ramadi and Fallujah.

The results are impressive and now must be sustained. We have worked closely with the Government of Iraq to ensure that tribal fighters are embedded into the state security structure, thereby correcting a defect in the Anbar "awakening" model from 2007 and 2008, which was hugely successful, but more ad hoc and sustained with U.S. support. The Iraqis have allocated resources to these new fighters, and woven their ongoing support into

their national budget, passed by the Iraqi parliament, thereby helping to ensure ongoing and long-term support.¹

In Fallujah, Iraqi forces broke through the crust of ISIL's defenses last week and on Sunday announced the full liberation of the city. I was in Iraq last week and met with Anbar's governor, and two months ago met with the most prominent Fallujah sheikhs, all of whom pleaded with us to support their city's liberation. We have been proud to do so, not only with military support, but also with an Italian-led training program for local police to secure the city when military operations cease, a \$100 million nationwide coalition-funded stabilization program to help return people to their homes, a \$20 million allocation in humanitarian aid to reinforce the UN-led effort to manage the flow of Fallujah residents escaping ISIL's brutality, and a comprehensive mine clearance program.

The Fallujah operation has not been perfect. This is among the toughest places to fight in all of Iraq, and ISIL had controlled the city for over 2.5 years. There were concerning reports of abuses against civilians in the early stages of the operation, and the outflow of people initially overwhelmed the UN and humanitarian organizations. This was a primary focus of my visit to Iraq last week, and while we are encouraged by the immediate response to reports of abuse, and the infusion of resources to support IDPs, more must be done, and we have called on all of our coalition partners to help.

Stabilizing areas after ISIL can be even more important than clearing areas from ISIL. We are encouraged that, thus far in the campaign, no significant territory liberated by coalition-backed forces has been reclaimed by ISIL. Anbar is case-in-point: we have focused from the beginning, even when the situation seemed nearly hopeless, on investing local people in their own liberation, pooling coalition resources on stabilization needs, and working with the Government of Iraq to invest local leaders with authority to revitalize populated areas that had been devastated by ISIL.

We are focused now on reopening the Baghdad-Amman highway through Rutbah and the Trebil crossing (number eight on the attached map). This was a key topic of discussion in my meetings last week with Prime Minister Abadi in Baghdad, and then King Abdullah II in Amman. This highway before ISIL contributed to 20 percent of Jordan's exports and nearly \$100 million per month in trade; thus, reopening it is a main priority to help economically shore up some of our main allies in the region.

We are also working to return people to their homes in Ramadi, a process that has been slowed by ISIL's planting booby traps and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in civilian homes as well as considerable damage to infrastructure in the city as a result of ISIL's occupation. Tragically, of 60,000 initial returnees, nearly 100 were killed due to bombs planted in their homes, a tactic that once again reveals the lie that ISIL claims to represent the Sunnis of Anbar. In reality, ISIL has been focused on killing Sunnis to gain power, but lost the battle, and littered homes with bombs to keep life from returning to places like Ramadi.

Thanks to coalition contributions, a U.S. company, JANUS, is now overseeing the painstaking work of clearing Ramadi of booby traps, and preparing the ground for stabilization projects. We are aiming to repeat in Ramadi and then in Fallujah what we ultimately saw in Tikrit, where 95 percent of the population has returned to their homes after ISIL. Life there is returning to the streets, with local police in charge, businesses restarting, the university open, and Iraqi-led rebuilding projects underway.

Ninewa and Mosul

All of this sets the stage for what will be the greatest challenge to ISIL as we know it: the liberation of Mosul. For the past six months we have been working with local forces in Iraq and Syria to isolate Mosul from its supply routes in Syria. Operations in Hawl, Shahdadi, and Sinjar, helped cut roadways between Raqqa and Mosul, forcing ISIL leaders onto back roads, where they are easily targeted.

¹Article 40 of the 2016 Iraqi Budget Law guarantees that a minimum of thirty percent of the "Popular Mobilization Forces" must be comprised of locals from the provinces where the GOI is fighting ISIL. As a result, the GOI has enrolled, and continues to pay and equip, over 30,000 Sunni Arab volunteers across Iraq with the number likely to grow to 45,000. In this regard, the Iraqi mobilization program takes ownership over enlisting local Sunnis into the fight against ISIL—a principle we must ensure is sustained long after the battles against ISIL are won.

Last week, Iraqi forces began an operation from the south to cut ISIL's access points and sever the connections with areas ISIL still controls, such as the small towns of Hawija and Sharqat in Kirkuk and Salah Ad Din provinces. This operation is now underway and making considerable progress, enabled by Apache helicopters and other accelerants authorized by the President in April.

But Mosul is not simply a military challenge. It is a political, economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian challenge that, if not done right, may well outstrip the capacity of the Iraqi government, and the Kurdistan Regional Government, to manage alone. The only way it can succeed is if everybody—Iraqi forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, and local fighters from Ninewa—work together as part of a coordinated political-military plan.

I am pleased to report that this is now coming together. Late last year, the Iraqis established a joint headquarters facility at Makhmour, to the southeast of Mosul (near number five on the map). U.S. Marines arrived to support this joint operations center in February, and we tragically lost one of our Marines there in March. These heroic Marines together with our Special Forces advisors have helped Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces begin to turn the tide south of Mosul, enabling successful operations to seize villages and strategic territory held by ISIL since 2014.

The military advances have finally enabled the political planning that is essential to getting ISIL out of Mosul and stabilizing Mosul after ISIL. Last week, President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, held a historic meeting with Iraq's National Security Advisor, Faleh Fayyad, to discuss all aspects of the Mosul campaign. Barzani and Fayyad invited the U.S. to attend, and I was pleased to represent the United States, together with our terrific ambassador, Stu Jones.

This meeting began to solidify planning, to include authorization and funding for 15,000 local fighters from Ninewa to take part in the operation—building on the model that has worked in Anbar—as well as the political arrangements after ISIL.

We are also working through the coalition to ensure resources are ready to support internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Mosul and lay the groundwork for their return and stabilization after ISIL. Next month at the State Department, we will co-host with Canada, Germany, and Japan, a pledging conference to support specific humanitarian and stabilization needs in this regard.

There is a great deal of work left to do, and we will not put a timeline on the Mosul operation. But with momentum now on our side, it is safer to say that ISIL's days in Mosul—where it proclaimed its phony caliphate to the world—are numbered.

Southern Syria

As we squeeze ISIL out of its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, we must remain focused on southern Syria, where it may attempt to fill empty spaces and threaten our partner Jordan. I was in Amman last week, meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II and his national security team, the day after an ISIL attack killed seven Jordanian soldiers on their border. I expressed our profound condolences for those lost in this attack, and pledged unwavering support for Jordan and its Armed Forces.

Jordan has done its part in housing nearly 630,000 UN-registered refugees and their capacity has reached a limit. Near the site of the attack last week, approximately 60,000 to 100,000 Syrians are located in a tent city inside Syria across a berm from the Jordanian border. This is not Jordan's problem alone; it is an international problem, and one the international community must work with Jordan urgently to resolve.

We are supporting moderate opposition fighters in this region of southern Syria (number nine on the map) to pressure ISIL and help the defense in-depth of Jordan. These brave fighters have suffered ISIL vehicle bomb attacks, and last week, Russian jets bombed the camp, claiming not to know who was there. We have found Russian explanations of this attack to lack merit, and while there is now a "no strike" box over the area, the episode once again called into question Russian intentions in Syria.

Finally, we are working to root out an ISIL presence in the SW tri-border region of Syria adjacent to Jordan and the Golan Heights (number ten on the map). ISIL's media statements in recent months, as they suffer losses on the battlefield, have focused on Israel as a target, clearly hoping to generate international headlines to compensate for its defeats. We must not

allow this to happen. Last week, I stood at the border, where ISIL positions and training facilities were visible in the distance.

The State Department earlier this month designated the ISIL affiliate in this area, formally known as Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, as a specially designated global terrorist entity, and we are now working with moderate opposition groups to free Syrians under its grip from their barbaric rule.

We cannot permit ISIL to re-establish a presence anywhere in Syria, let alone on the borders of our closest friends.

3. Combat-Ready Fighters

ISIL's access to fighters has steadily diminished, now at the lowest point we have seen since the summer of 2014. We currently estimate that ISIL fields 18-22,000 overall fighters in Iraq and Syria, the lowest assessed range since we began conducting rigorous reviews of its manpower. This is down from a high-end estimate of 33,000 ISIL fighters in 2014. We are also seeing significant reduction in the flow of foreign fighters entering Syria and Iraq each month, and we are working through our coalition to identify and ensure that ISIL affiliated fighters cannot travel across borders. In short, we are making it harder for them to travel into Syria, and once there, making sure they can never leave.

This is painstaking work, requiring coordination across borders, and between executive and legislative branches. In September 2014, the President chaired a UN Security Council meeting to adopt the Chapter VII Resolution 2178, which calls on all states to take measures to deter travel of foreign fighters. Since then, our engagement with Middle Eastern and European partners has achieved results through increased information-sharing, better border security, improved counter-terrorism laws, counter-messaging, and improved cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence services.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 2178, more than 40 at risk countries have enacted laws or amendments to enhance obstacles for foreign terrorist fighters traveling into Iraq and Syria. At least 38 countries have reported arresting foreign terrorist fighters or aspirants, and 30 countries have successfully prosecuted foreign terrorist fighters, including the United States. In the United States, my colleagues at Department of Homeland Security and the FBI assess that over 250 U.S. citizens have joined or tried to join ISIL.

We must remain vigilant, here at home, and around the world. The United States now has information-sharing agreements with 55 international partners to assist efforts to identify, track, and deter the travel of suspected terrorists. Equally important, 58 countries, plus the United Nations, now contribute foreign fighter profiles to INTERPOL, and there has been a 500-percent increase in suspected foreign fighter identities in the INTERPOL database. Through our global coalition, we are discussing with INTERPOL how to appropriately incorporate foreign fighter data from the battlefield, ensuring that terrorists who manage to leave Syria can be identified in a routine traffic stop or at border entry, or those who die in Syria can be identified to map domestic contacts.

In addition, The European Union parliament in April issued an EU-wide directive to expand the Passenger Name Record (PNR) database, which would require more systematic collection, use, and retention of data on international airline passengers. This is an important step to ensure the interoperability of data systems across the EU so foreign fighters and terrorists can be tracked in real time, allowing law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and border security to foil ISIL attacks.

4. Access to Revenue

ISIL's revenues are overwhelmingly generated from the territory it controls, primarily from oil extraction and taxation/extortion of local citizens. This picture was not clear when we began the campaign in 2014, but through raids by our Special Operators inside Syria, and incredible work by our unsung intelligence analysts, the U.S. Government has been able to map ISIL's resource stream, and then, systematically, destroy it.

Under Operation Tidal Wave II—which aims to degrade and destroy ISIL's energy assets—the Coalition has carried out precision strikes against oil fields, infrastructure, oil-tanker trucks, banks, and cash storage sites that sustain ISIL's war effort. This phase of the campaign was preceded by many months of planning from across the U.S. Government. We sometimes hear that we just need to “bomb the oil fields” as if there is a simple military solution to this challenge; in fact, the military effort is the sharp end of the spear, and its success depends on hard-earned intelligence, careful analysis, and target development.

Because we took a systematic approach to this problem, the operations against ISIL's economic infrastructure have been quite successful to date. ISIL was forced

to halve fighter salaries in Raqqa and is detaining its own senior officials for trying to steal cash and gold. This has created a virtuous cycle: terrorist fighters are not paid, their supplies run low, they have less will to fight, and they are more easily defeated. Since the strikes against cash storage sites in Mosul, we have seen fighters thin out, with fewer checkpoints, and increasing reports of ISIL leaders executing their own rank-and-file for poor discipline.

This pressure will only increase. Just a couple of weeks ago outside Mosul, coalition strikes destroyed 600 oil transport trucks. Since these strikes began, trucks no longer line up at oil fields, and truck drivers are demanding higher pay to take on the risk of transporting ISIL oil, thereby increasing costs, reducing revenues, and making it even more difficult for ISIL to generate revenue from, or to use, energy resources.

At the same time, we continue to take out ISIL's cash storage sites, destroying their ability to pay fighters and sustain operations. In total, we have conducted more than 120 strikes on ISIL cash centers and oil infrastructure, and this number will continue to rise. We have also worked closely with Coalition partners in the region, particularly the Government of Iraq, to cut off ISIL's access to the international financial system and to disrupt its ability to move and store funds.

ISIL is an adaptive organization, however, and it is working to adapt to this pressure. It is our mission to adapt faster than they do, and continue the relentless pressure across the breadth and width of their operations. We are currently undergoing a careful assessment of ISIL's adaptation to our campaign, and as they adapt, we will respond aggressively.

5. Access to Borders

As noted above, ISIL now controls only a 98-kilometer strip of an international border in Syria, and it is shrinking. The loss of access to this border will deprive ISIL of its only route for material and foreign fighters, as well as degrade its ability to plan and launch external attacks. We know that many of the Paris attackers, for example, entered Turkey from this strip of border, and later flowed northward to Europe. This is unacceptable, and we must make every effort to shut it down these areas entirely to ISIL.

We are also supporting our NATO-ally Turkey on their side of the border to enhance border defense, utilize technology for monitoring, and implement effective systems to eliminate the flow of foreign fighters. It is impossible to seal the border entirely, but we have seen a marked increase in Turkish defenses, and ISIL propaganda has even appealed to its recruits not to travel into Syria, but instead, head to Libya.

They will find an inhospitable welcome in Libya. The Libyans are rejecting ISIL en masse, and what Adnani promised would be another citadel of his self-proclaimed caliphate is facing resistance from GNA-aligned Libyan forces and is now an isolated and shrinking piece of one city on the central coast, Sirte. In the last two weeks alone, multiple offensives by forces aligned with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) advanced rapidly towards Sirte and now have the city surrounded. These fighters have suffered casualties, but they have kept moving forward. If the GNA and Prime Minister Sarraj request support from the international community, and the counter-ISIL coalition, it will find many willing partners. The international community and our global coalition have united in support of the GNA.

6. Capable and Confident Leadership

Two years ago, around this time, I was in Iraq when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi pronounced the establishment of a "caliphate" from the largest mosque in Mosul. It was Ramadan, and the announcement, despite being denounced by thousands of Muslim leaders and scholars from around the world, spiked ISIL recruiting and the confidence of its adherents as a historic movement on the march. Baghdadi and other leaders throughout the summer of 2014 were appearing in the open, speaking, and recruiting.

I just returned from another trip to Iraq. It is Ramadan once again. Yet, we have not heard from the so-called "Caliph" in more than six months. This Ramadan is being celebrated not by Baghdadi, but by millions of Iraqis taking the streets each night as ISIL and its leaders have retreated to the shadows.

We have no evidence that Baghdadi is dead, but many of his deputies are. We have killed more than 100 mid-to-senior level ISIL leaders in the past few months alone, and the key deputies for Baghdadi in 2014, terrorists known as Abu Sayaf and Hajji Iman, have been killed by U.S. military forces. Baghdadi is not far behind.

In short, whereas ISIL once had leaders exhorting fighters in the open, making public addresses, and mocking the civilized world, its leaders are now dead, or in

hiding, and issuing written orders for inexperienced fighters to launch desperate missions against the increasingly confident and capable forces arrayed against them. We will work to make sure these trends continue.

7. *Media*

As ISIL loses leaders, territory, and resources, its message appears to be having less resonance online. We are countering its message 24/7, with coalition efforts led by UK, UAE, and Malaysia, providing counter-content with localized focus for different regions of the world. I have visited the Sawab (“Right Path”) Center in UAE, which is led by smart and energetic young people determined to defeat ISIL in cyberspace, and they are succeeding, with innovative media campaigns focused on ISIL defectors, and the truth behind what ISIL promises versus what it delivers on the ground, especially for women.

In the United States, the Global Engagement Center (GEC) coordinates, integrates, and synchronizes government-wide communications activities to counter ISIL’s messaging. The GEC also help provide assistance with content development platforms, and amplifying effective voices against the perverse ISIL narrative.

Twitter recently announced that it has eliminated nearly 125,000 ISIL-related or ISIL-affiliated “handles,” and that number is growing. Facebook and YouTube are similarly removing ISIL-related content from their platforms. Within the coalition, we have widely publicized how anyone can report ISIL content on-line, so that platforms can remove it if the content violates a platform’s terms of service, which it often does.

These efforts are having an impact. Pro-ISIL content is down and anti-ISIL content is up. Whereas ISIL two years ago had nearly free rein in cyberspace, today, there are reportedly six people opposing ISIL’s message online for each person supporting it. We need these numbers to increase, and recognize that the most effective voices are not governments, but individuals, with their own first-hand accounts of the horror under ISIL rule. As these stories increase, ISIL’s message is on defense, and it is our job to help keep it that way.

The Muslim world is also fighting the ideological battle. Shortly after Baghdadi declared himself “caliph,” 120 Muslim scholars from around the world released an open letter challenging and denouncing ISIL’s philosophy. The scholars took ISIL’s false claims one-by-one, using evidence directly from the Quran to illustrate how Baghdadi’s whims run counter to the teachings of Islam. More and more Muslims are taking to the Internet and public spaces to counter ISIL’s brand of hate and take back their faith.

8. *Global Branches*

From its core in Iraq and Syria, ISIL has declared eight global branches: Libya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sinai, Nigeria, Algeria, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan-Pakistan. We have carefully studied the situation in all of these locations, and in most, a pre-existing terrorist organization, such as Boko Haram, chose to wave the black flag of ISIL. In other cases, such as Yemen, or Afghanistan, small ISIL affiliates have broken off from larger al Qaida movements. We have been actively engaged in these regions, against existing threats, such as AQAP in Yemen, and we should not alter course just because a terrorist group chooses to fly an ISIL flag. Changing flags does not fundamentally change the nature of what—in most cases—was a pre-existing problem, or threat.

Where, however, we see threats emerge anew, or resources directed from the core in Syria to a global branch, it is a concern and we must determine how to act, and act effectively. Libya has been the best example, with ISIL capitalizing on a security vacuum and sending some of its most experienced operators to establish ISIL-Libya. One was named Abu Nabil, a Baghdadi acolyte and experienced terrorist. When we see a leader like this emigrating from the ISIL core to a global branch, we act. Accordingly, Nabil is now dead, targeted with precision in a U.S. airstrike. We have also taken military action to degrade the ISIL network in Libya responsible for launching external attacks in Tunisia.

To root out ISIL-Libya, however, we are building a robust partnership with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA). ISIL’s growth in Libya appears to have plateaued in its recruitment of 5,000-8,000 fighters, most from within Africa. Its recruiting drive for European fighters has not succeeded, with numbers in the low hundreds; and for those who made their way to Libya, they may soon lose their stronghold in Sirte.

ISIL-Libya is now under significant pressure. It has been largely expelled from Derna and we have increased engagement with our North African partners to further mitigate the threat, while supporting the UN-led political process in support of the GNA.

Just a few months ago there was no government on the ground. Today, the GNA is on the ground in Tripoli, and has aligned forces east and west of Sirte, which are making gains, isolating the city, and forcing many ISIL terrorists to flee. These GNA-aligned forces have demonstrated they are willing and able to fight ISIL, and we are working with Prime Minister Sarraj on an arms embargo exemption request to further support the GNA and our local partners on the ground.

The second branch of concern is Sinai, which we assess was responsible for destroying the civilian Metrojet airliner nine months ago, killing 224 people. I was in Cairo last week discussing the Sinai situation, on the heels of visits by Chairman Dunford and CENTCOM commander General Votel. We are determined to support our Egyptian partners in degrading and ultimately defeating the ISIL branch in Sinai.

The Sinai branch is comprised from a pre-existing violent extremist group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. We estimate its manpower to be from several hundred up to 1,000, with some estimates far less than that, and some slightly more. The current situation in Sinai is a low-grade conflict combining links to the ISIL core with violent extremist ideology drawn from Salafist beliefs and long-standing local grievances. The Egyptian Army has increased combat operations and closed almost all the tunnels that facilitated arms smuggling along the Gaza border.

The United States strongly supports Egypt's efforts to combat ISIL-Sinai, a message I conveyed in Cairo last week. We are providing Apache helicopters, MRAPs, counter-IED training and border security programs, and have intensified military-to-military discussions on how we can help Egypt adopt the counter-insurgency doctrine and tactics it needs to deal ISIL-Sinai a lasting and permanent defeat.

The Sinai security situation also impacts the Multi-National Force and Observers (MFO) mission. The U.S. is firmly committed to supporting the Treaty of Peace and MFO operations. Accordingly, we support the MFO's decisions to both modernize operations and implement force reductions that mitigate risk and enable continuation of its mission.

Beyond the Sinai and Libya branches, we continue to monitor ISIL's attempts to establish additional ones, such as in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Somalia. We are engaging partners and host nations in a whole-of-government approach to ensure that ISIL cannot grow roots in any of these locations.

Accordingly, while we focus on the core in Iraq and Syria, and cannot be distracted every time a pre-existing terror group waves a black flag, we are working to enhance the capacity of local partners to identify and eliminate emerging threats before they can materialize. This is part of a comprehensive and globally integrated campaign plan to contest ISIL in all dimensions, and stay attuned and ahead of emerging threats.

Looking Ahead

Defeating ISIL in Syria and Iraq (measured by its inability to control significant territory and threaten the viability of the Iraqi state), suffocating its global affiliates, and drying up its global networks, are all achievable objectives. Our strategy is making progress. However, ISIL as a threat, its existence as a cellular terrorist organization, or an appealing banner for disturbed individuals searching for meaning in their lives, will be with us for many years.

To further mitigate the threat, we are focused as much on what comes after ISIL, as we are on defeating ISIL. In Iraq, the coalition is providing resources to alleviate human suffering and help return people to their homes (over 725,000 to date), strengthen inclusive local governance, address macro-economic risks, and stabilize local communities through an innovative funding mechanism that is delivering results. Ultimately, however, long-term stability in Iraq rests on the Iraqis, and the center of all communities, Sunni, Shia, and Kurd, must hold against extremes working to pull the country—and their communities—apart. That center is stronger now than it has been in two years, but the situation remains fragile and volatile. U.S. engagement remains vital.

It will also be important to support the Government of Iraq in reforming security institutions after ISIL, managing the de-mobilization of volunteer forces, and ensuring that the state has full control over armed groups, which must operate under an agreed legal framework.

In Syria, as ISIL is losing territory in the east, its terrorist rival—Jabhat al-Nusra—is gaining ground in the west, putting down roots in Idlib province along the Turkish border. Nusra is establishing schools and training camps, recruiting from abroad, launching major military operations, and enjoying a sophisticated online presence, all the while providing safe haven for some of al Qaida's most experienced terrorists. With direct ties to Ayman al Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's successor, Nusra is now al Qaida largest formal affiliate in history.

This is a serious concern, and where we see Nusra planning external attacks, we will not hesitate to act. To end Nusra as a threat, however, we must find a mechanism to de-escalate and end the Syrian civil war, thereby allowing the moderate opposition to take charge of its own territory, without threat of Asad's barrel bombs overhead, or terrorists down the street. As the war goes on, the opposition is increasingly interwoven with Nusra, which provides pretext for the criminal Asad regime to target anyone it wants, on grounds that it is targeting terrorists. Nobody is fooled by this argument.

At bottom, the Syrian civil war remains an incubator for violent extremism, and to defeat the threats against our homeland over the long-term, we must find a diplomatic mechanism to enforce a nationwide cessation of hostilities, thereby isolating Nusra from the opposition, concentrating efforts on ISIL, ending bombardments by the Asad regime, and, ultimately, facilitating the political transition called for in UNSCR 2254 and the International Syria Support Group.

Conclusion

It is once again an honor to appear before this Committee. Our global campaign against ISIL is making progress and will accelerate over the coming weeks. This does not, however, mean the threat of terrorism will end. It will require constant collaboration with Congress to stay ahead of this most dynamic and complex challenge. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

I am going to reserve my time for interjections and turn to the ranking member.

Senator CARDIN. Once again, thank you for your testimony.

I want to follow up on the point that you raised, the chairman raised, I raised, and that is what happens after we take territory. We have had military success in the past. Can we hold that military success? Are we able to develop functioning governments that can protect all of the communities?

In Iraq, as we are starting to get more territory, Fallujah having fallen, the Sunni civilian population is justifiably concerned as to their safety as it relates to the Shia militia. What steps are we taking to protect the civilian population in these areas that we have been able to militarily reclaim?

Mr. MCGURK. So, Senator, thank you.

It is a primary focus of ours from day one. And on a positive side, so far in Iraq, no areas that have been retaken from ISIL, that have been liberated from ISIL has ISIL been able to retake. And that is fairly significant given how difficult the situation is in Iraq.

What we have done from day one—this really goes back to the fall of 2014. You know, we are not in the business of reconstructing Iraq, of repeating mistakes that we made in the past. We have tried to revolutionize how we do this. We have a Prime Minister Abadi who is a real partner in Baghdad who believes in decentralizing power as much as possible and empowering local people.

So the fundamental example of this was in Tikrit. Tikrit is a primarily Sunni city, an iconic Sunni city in the heart of a mixed province of Salah ad-Din Province. It was entirely depopulated by ISIL in the summer of 2014. It was a site of mass atrocities, thousands of people killed in mass killings.

Once it was liberated, through the coalition, we were able to flood resources to Tikrit through a stabilization fund that we established through the coalition. And this stabilization fund is focused on the necessities of getting people back to their homes. And returning people to their homes—it is important to recognize we looked at this historically in conflicts like this, one of the hardest things to do in the world. It can take years, if ever. And in Tikrit,

by empowering the governor, by empowering the local leaders, by making sure the resources are there, the number of returnees eventually reaches a tipping point, and now we have almost the entire city back in the streets of Tikrit. There are local people, Tikritis, guarding the streets.

Senator CARDIN. How do you deal with the Shia militia? How does the Abadi government deal—

Mr. MCGURK. First of all, Shia militias have to act under the control of the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi state. That is a fundamental principle of the Government of Iraq. We think most of these popular mobilization forces do operate under the control of the Iraqi state, but about 15 to 20 percent of them actually do not and those groups are a fundamental problem.

The number one thing we do is try to make sure they stay out of Sunni-populated areas where they can cause real problems. So in Tikrit, for example, Shia militias are not inside the streets of Tikrit. That is one thing that gave the population the confidence to return.

We have a principle when we support Iraqi forces in the military campaign, we will only support forces on the ground operating strictly under Iraqi command and control. That means going from the ground up an Iraqi chain of command into a joint operations center where we are working with Iraqi commanders. If there is a unit that is not operating under that structure, it does not get any support from us.

Senator CARDIN. Are you confident Fallujah will be able to maintain the safety of Sunni civilians?

Mr. MCGURK. So Fallujah, of course, just happened. They just completed the liberation of the last neighborhood over the weekend. We have about 80,000 displaced people. I am meeting with the head of one of the U.N. programs later this week. They are hopeful that all of these IDPs will be under shelter by the middle of this week and to begin returns next month.

What is also somewhat encouraging about Fallujah is that the destruction in the city looks to be fairly minimal compared to other operations. So we are hopeful that we can return the people of Fallujah to their streets as soon as possible. The government can lead that process.

And of course, the Shia militia groups that operate outside the rule of law have to be outside the city, otherwise people will not return. So absolutely. And we have a plan with local Fallujah police. Policemen from Fallujah have been trained for really the last year waiting to go back to guard their streets. That is what we did in Tikrit, and that is what we are going to try in Fallujah.

Senator CARDIN. I want to ask one more question on this round, if I might, and that is the legitimacy of ISIL. They were defining it by territory. They are now losing territory. Will they be defining it through international terrorism by the sensational covert attacks that we see all too often? Can we expect that that may accelerate? And what can we do to counter that if that appears to be their game plan on legitimacy?

Mr. MCGURK. So, Senator, ISIL has always talked about external attacks. I think I testified even back in late 2013 talking about what Baghdadi was saying, even about attacking—

Senator CARDIN. But as they start to lose territory, is it likely that they may accelerate that part of their campaign?

Mr. MCGURK. So their core banner in their propaganda has been the caliphate, retaining and expanding the caliphate. And in their last main statement by their spokesman, as I mentioned in my written testimony, is a very different message. He actually says we might lose all of our territory. We might lose Raqqa, Sirte, and Mosul. But we are still going to be around. Still join us. And they are trying to inspire these lone wolf attacks around the world. And this is what Director Brennan testified to last week. This is extraordinarily difficult to stop.

We have to remain vigilant. That is why we have a global coalition not just for Iraq and Syria, but to make sure that we are attacking the foreign fighter networks and sharing information, working with INTERPOL so that as these people try to travel, they can be picked up. And we are doing better at that now, but we have a ways to go, and we cannot let up because ISIL split from—it is Al Qaeda in Iraq. They split in two directions: one, Baghdadi establishing a caliphate, a state-like entity, and the other branch, Al Nusra, which is now Al Qaeda in Syria, which does not really have that notion of establishing a caliphate. But they are both Al Qaeda. They both want to kill Westerners. They both want to kill anyone that does not agree with them, and ISIL will continue to try to inspire external attacks.

One thing we are doing, though, on the ground, we are not just taking back territory. As we take back important territory, we are collecting substantial amounts of information about the foreign fighter network, about how it is put together, who leads it, and that helps us really root it out not only in Iraq and Syria but in the branches and little networks that exist in France and other places.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Johnson?

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. McGurk, thanks for coming here.

The analogy I have been using is that of a beehive. If you have one in your back yard, you can go out there and poke it with a stick and do damage to it, but you disturb the bees and they actually become more dangerous.

You have, obviously, been reporting out a fair amount of progress. We have been making some gains. We are getting information. We are taking back territory. And yet, the CIA Director did testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee and said that our efforts have not reduced their terrorism capability and global reach and they remain a formidable, resilient, and largely cohesive enemy.

Do you disagree with that assessment?

Mr. MCGURK. I agree with the Director, of course, that this is something—and I think you see in my testimony I am the last one working on this most complex issue every single day to diminish this significant threat.

You know, let me just put a number on it. 40,000 foreign fighters have traveled into Iraq and Syria over the last 4 or 5 years indoc-

trinated with this jihadi ideology. That is almost twice as many, from the numbers we have seen, that went to Afghanistan in the 1980s, and we know where that eventually led to. So this is something we have not seen before, and you add to it social media and the speed of international travel, everything now, it is an unprecedented challenge and is going to be with us for years.

Senator JOHNSON. So again, do you agree with CIA Director Brennan's assessment that we have not reduced their capability? They remain a largely formidable, resilient, and cohesive enemy.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, it is not the entity certainly that it was 18 months ago. You know, the attacks like Brussels and Paris are attacks that they planned from their safe havens and sanctuary. So those attacks we believe were organized in Raqqa, planned. Those sophisticated types of attacks—it is harder for them to do when you are pressuring them and pressuring their territory. The lone wolf attacks are the types of things that are very difficult to stop.

Senator JOHNSON. But my point being is until we actually defeat them—and again, we can nibble around the edges. We can make some progress. We can push them out of Iraq, but they remain in Syria. I mean, I have yet to hear out of this administration a game plan for actually defeating them. I mean, I hear the game plan for making progress, but actually defeating them—and that is the point I am trying to make. If we do not defeat them, if we do not deny them the territory, if we do not deny them the caliphate, if we do not take away those safe havens—they are incredibly sophisticated. They are inspiring the lone wolf type of activity we have seen in San Bernardino, now in Orlando tragically.

There was, by the way, a foiled plot against the Masonic Temple in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, also probably ISIS-inspired.

So we have to defeat them. Where is the game plan for that?

Mr. MCGURK. No, Senator. Our strategy is defeat. It is a 3-year campaign plan to degrade and defeat. And to defeat, you do have to take away their territory. So in Iraq, it has been city by city. In Mosul—I can go through in some detail, but in Mosul, we have been focused on isolating their key population nodes, cutting off their connections between Raqqa and Mosul. The operation in Manbij is about isolating Raqqa, and after Manbij, we will move on Raqqa.

Senator JOHNSON. When did the 3-year clock start? Because President Obama declared our goal of degrading and ultimately defeating ISIS 22 months ago. We are almost 2 years into it. Or when did the clock start ticking on our 3-year plan?

Mr. MCGURK. We put the campaign together in September of 2014. It took time to generate the local forces to be able to take on what at the time was the most formidable military force on the ground.

Senator JOHNSON. Do you think then that we will have ISIS defeated, in other words, deny them the territory, deny them the safe havens even in Syria within another—basically you are saying about 14 months then if it is a 3-year game plan.

Mr. MCGURK. I wanted to go a lot faster than that. One of the reasons I was in Iraq last week was to focus on the Mosul campaign. And we will not put a timeline on the Mosul campaign, but we would like to do it as soon as possible.

One reason we are moving on Manbij right now is to set the conditions in place to move on Raqqa. And the force that has to move on Raqqa has to be a predominantly Arab force. That is why we have increased our special forces inside Syria to train and equip that force. And after Manbij, the plan is Raqqa. So we are moving at a tempo that I believe will lead to the ultimate—

Senator JOHNSON. Within 14 months, if it is a 3-year game plan? I mean, we are not going to defeat them within 14 months. Are we?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, I wanted to go a lot faster than that.

Senator JOHNSON. That is my point. We are not doing this fast enough. Are we? We are poking the hive with the stick. It becomes more dangerous. We have not reduced their terrorism capability or their global reach. When are we going to have a game plan from this administration to actually accomplish the goal of defeating them? It is not going to happen in the 3-year time frame. Is it going to take—what is it going to take?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, I understand your question. We want to speed up their defeat in Mosul. So one thing we are doing—now, this is on the side. I mentioned it is not just the military, but we are using Apache helicopters. We are using forward advisors to begin this operation towards Mosul. There is an operation going right now south of Mosul that is critical to isolating ISIL inside Mosul. The Manbij operation is ongoing right now. It is hard fighting. Once that is done, that sets the conditions for Raqqa. So it is a step-by-step process to get to Raqqa and Mosul. We are beginning to totally isolate their presence in Raqqa and Mosul, and I believe we are setting the conditions in place to get them out of both of those cities.

Senator JOHNSON. Listen, I appreciate your efforts, but I agree with you. We are not moving anywhere to close to fast enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. McGurk.

I am not going to repeat lines of questioning that I have engaged in in earlier hearings.

I share some of Senator Johnson's critique and disagree with him on some points. But the main disagreement is that we are not moving fast enough. I think Congress has been in a position where we have wanted to criticize the administration, but we are 22 months into a war that we have not even really debated and voted on here. I just compare this with the level of detail that we just undertook to try to implement very piecemeal, narrow reforms in the Department of Defense in the NDAA bill. The amount of discussion in this body about an ongoing war where 17 people have been killed and others have been injured stuns me. But let us just pass that by, because I am well on the record about it, and get into some particulars.

I do congratulate our troops and the coalition for the effort that they made to succeed on the battlefield to shrink the territory that ISIL holds in Iraq and Syria. And I think that has been very notable, and I expect that to continue.

But let us talk about three areas beyond the original battlefield where I have concerns. Let us start with Libya.

ISIL in Libya has been losing its center of gravity in Sirte. That has been a positive. But where does the coalition believe that the next front will open up in North Africa? There are about 5,000 ISIL fighters in Libya. Where are they now located? What is being done to target them? Because I think North Africa, both because of dangers in Africa but proximity to Europe, the ISIL presence there is of significant concern.

Mr. MCGURK. That is a very good question, Senator.

One reason I was in Cairo last week was to discuss the whole North Africa region, including of course Libya.

And Libya is a good example because it just highlights how complicated this is. You know, most foreign fighters that have joined ISIL have come out of Tunisia, what is kind of seen as the bright spot of the Arab Spring, and it shows that what is indoctrinating these young people—some of it is sectarianism that exists in Iraq and Syria, but some of it is something else. We have 6,000 Tunisians, many of whom have gone to Libya. And this is a real problem. Tunisia is a close partner in the coalition. We are working closely with them, and we are working with Egypt on the situation in Libya. But also the bright spot in Libya is that the Libyan people are rejecting the presence of Da'esh.

So we were concerned about 90 days ago or so when we were really looking at the Libya situation of this kind of hockey stick-like growth of the acceleration of ISIL in Libya. Are they matching what they tried to do in Iraq and Syria? And it turns out at least that has not been the case. They have kind of plateaued at about 5,000–6,000 fighters. The numbers vary, but that is our assessment. They are isolated now in Sirte.

And the Misratan forces and other forces aligned with the new Government of National Accord have made real progress, more progress than we had anticipated. And so now we are looking at how do we accelerate that progress that is being made.

So I am fairly confident now that we have a strategy in place in Libya that can at least begin to really degrade that ISIL presence. Libya has a host of other problems. But the concern we had of this accelerating growth of ISIL in Libya—it is something that appears to have been mitigated, but we have to keep at it.

Senator KAINE. I am going to move to the Philippines. There has been a recent announcement by ISIL of an aggressive recruitment effort in the Philippines, working under the leadership there of Abu Abdullah. And there has even been recruiting efforts in countries like Malaysia to get foreign fighters to go not to Syria and Iraq but to go to the Philippines. Talk a little bit about worries about ISIL efforts in Asia, the Philippines, and other nations in Southeast Asia.

Mr. MCGURK. So another great question.

I was, a year or so ago, in Singapore and Malaysia talking about the growth in Southeast Asia. Many of these are preexisting terrorist groups that then fly the flag of ISIL.

Senator KAINE. Just like Boko Haram.

Mr. MCGURK. And the question we asked is what is the common denominator here all around the world for why these groups are

flying the flag of ISIL. And it is this notion of this caliphate. We hear this everywhere, this notion of a caliphate, this kind of magnet, this historic movement, which is one reason why shrinking the territory is so important even to drying up their global affiliates in a place like Southeast Asia.

So I saw the announcement in the Philippines recently. Again, I think—and I mentioned this in my written testimony—we cannot get too distracted by every time a preexisting terrorist group flies the flag of ISIL because we are already dealing with those problems in a whole variety of ways. It is where we see, as we saw in Libya, ISIL central in Raqqa sending some of its best leaders into Libya to establish a branch. That was a terrorist named Abu Nabil. We targeted him and killed him. In Sinai, we have seen money and leaders try to transfer to Sinai. That is where we really get concerned. We have not seen that in Southeast Asia.

So we have to work with our partners throughout the world but particularly in Southeast Asia to make sure that these problems remain contained. But we are not seeing that kind of Libya-like direct transfer of resources from ISIL central all the way out to Southeast Asia.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. My time is up.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I will use my first interjection in response. I, like the State Department, which Mr. McGurk works for, like the Pentagon, like the legal department from the White House, and like the White House, agree that this administration has all legal authority necessary to combat ISIS. And so I just want that to be stated. Certainly we have had multiple hearings on how to deal with this. And I personally have pushed back against efforts to limit his ability to conduct the operations which much of the discussions around an AUMF have been about.

So I just want to say again I support the efforts that are underway. I would like to see it happen in a much more expeditious manner. I know it is creating threats to our homeland, which we have got to counter, but I do support the administration's statement that they have the legal basis to do what they are doing. And I want to do everything I can to keep us as a body from limiting their ability to do that.

With that, I will turn to Senator Flake.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks for the testimony.

Turning to your statement about being able to deny them territory and impacting their ability to foment terrorism elsewhere or direct activities, are we seeing a difference in their ability in that their main headquarters in Raqqa, Syria really has not been impacted? How much of the activities that we see elsewhere are being directed from Raqqa or from areas that we have taken back?

Mr. MCGURK. Excellent.

So their ability to move fighters from Raqqa across the battlefield in Iraq and Syria but most importantly from Raqqa out of Syria has been significantly degraded.

Senator FLAKE. Because of the supply routes being challenged?

Mr. MCGURK. Because we have cut off the main roads between Raqqa and Mosul. They are now forced onto back roads. We, of course, have a special forces targeting team based in northern Iraq that goes after them when we are able to see the leaders, of course. And so we have greatly degraded their ability to move fighters around.

But most important for our homeland security—and that is why this operation in Manbij is so important—is that the sophisticated attacks like Paris and Brussels planned in Raqqa, they go up through this Manbij Pocket area, they coordinate and organize in Manbij City, and then move out through Turkey to conduct their attacks. We have worked with Turkey to close up that border on its side, and the Turks have done an awful lot and we commend them for that. But until we take that territory away, ISIL is still able to move in a way that we are not comfortable with, which is why this operation in Manbij is so critical.

So it is much harder for them to move now, but do not take my word for it. Even in their own statements and Dabiq magazine, which they kind of put out to their potential adherents, they are saying, hey, do not come to Syria anymore. Do an attack at home or go to Libya. And that is because it is much harder for them to get into Syria. And we have a ton of information on this as we see every morning in terms of their inability to get people in, and once they are in, it is very hard for them to get out. And we want to make sure they cannot get people into Syria, and once they are in Syria, they are never going to get out. I mean, that is kind of the essence of what we are trying to do with the foreign fighters.

Senator FLAKE. You mentioned in your testimony that we are killing their leadership at the rate of one every 3 days. What impact has that had on their planning abilities or the focus or priorities that they have set, whether it is the caliphate or external attacks?

Mr. MCGURK. So, I think, Senator, I testified before this committee in the summer of 2014 about a month after Mosul fell, and what we were seeing then was a highly sophisticated military-like organization with command and control able to maneuver around the battlefield in mass force, take entire cities. It cannot do that anymore. Their leaders are having a very hard time communicating. They are having a very hard time organizing where they are going to put their resources. So we have really degraded their ability to command, to control across Iraq and Syria, which is one of the preconditions to actually defeating them. So taking out their leaders is not a sufficient condition, but it is a necessary condition in order to actually degrade in the overall network.

Senator FLAKE. Turn to Iran for a minute. Since the nuclear deal was struck, we had hoped that some of their posture in the region would change. Has their posture changed? In Syria, have we seen a change in terms of Iran's behavior or their willingness to work with other groups in a positive way, or is it all still negative?

Mr. MCGURK. I in my role have not seen a significant change in Iranian behavior. ISIL is a threat to Iran. They are fighting ISIL from time to time, but they are primarily working to prop up the Assad regime. And they are also supporting some of these militia groups that I mentioned in Senator Cardin's question that are op-

erating outside the legal authority of the Iraqi state, which is a threat to Iraq's own sovereignty, are kind of supported by Iran. And that is a huge problem. We have not seen that diminish since the nuclear deal certainly.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Just in closing, let me just say I share Senator Kaine's view that Congress ought to weigh in with an AUMF, not to question whether or not we have the authority or the executive branch has the authority to wage this war. Even putting that aside, I think it is valuable for our adversaries and our allies to know that we speak with one voice here. As you mentioned, this is going to go on for a long, long time, and I think we would all benefit if the Congress weighed in more heavily.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. McGurk, for the efforts that you are undertaking.

I am sure you are aware that there was a widely reported story this week about weapons being stolen in Jordan. To what extent do we think any of those weapons are going to ISIS?

Mr. MCGURK. Senator, I have seen those reports. I just cannot address the roots of that story. I can maybe address it in a different setting.

Senator SHAHEEN. And to what extent does a story like that and the ability to steal from under our noses and the noses of the Jordanians, who are one of our most important allies in this fight—are they used as propaganda for ISIS in attracting new fighters and in promoting their cause?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, what I will say is, having just been in Jordan, I met their entire national security team. They are one of our closest partners in the region. We are supporting their armed forces 100 percent. They are on the very front line of this fight, and I think they would be just as concerned as anyone here with stories like that.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I certainly agree. I think Jordan has been a terrific ally, which is all the more reason why we need to get to the bottom of what has gone on there and address it in a way that does not allow it to continue to happen.

Let me ask because it is very—comparatively easy and concrete to be able to track what is happening on the battlefield with ISIS to be able to talk about what the efforts are to address them, to be able to talk about who in their leadership we have taken out. I think it is much more difficult to talk and to address the underlying governance issues that have allowed ISIS to metastasize, much harder to address the messaging that ISIS does to attract new fighters. Can you talk about the extent to which this effort is engaged with both of those more difficult challenges?

Mr. MCGURK. It is extremely difficult, and it is why there is this balance between speed and sustainability. I mean, it is true. We could maybe do some things to really speed it up, but then you will not have sustainable gains. Before you do a major operation to retake a city, you have to have in place who is going to hold the city,

who is going to govern the city, what is the humanitarian—you have to have everything in place. This is extraordinarily difficult.

So what we try to do, particularly in Iraq—and I think we have had some success here—is to make sure those conditions are in place before we really move to clear out ISIL from populated areas. And the governing philosophy of the new government of Iraq, led by Prime Minister Abadi, is more decentralization, more federalism, more empowering local people to control their affairs. And that is very important, and it is something that we very much support. We have seen the success I mentioned in Tikrit.

In Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, similarly about 60,000 people returned to their homes shortly after ISIL was pushed out of Ramadi, but 100 tragically were killed by these booby traps and IEDs that ISIL—as they leave, they put booby traps in people’s closets and refrigerators. And that is how barbaric this organization is.

And so we now have—through the coalition, we raised \$15 million immediately. We now have demining experts on the ground in Ramadi clearing block by block, and that is actually going quite well. But it is also an indicator of how difficult this is.

But the heart of your question is really important because we cannot just defeat ISIL, we have to deliver a lasting defeat. All of these pieces have to come together. It is one of the hardest things to do imaginable, but I think if you look at Tikrit, if you look at what we are trying to do in Ramadi, if you look at the mobilization of the Anbar tribes in Anbar Province, we would never have been able to clear all this territory in Anbar Province all the way out to Rutbah on the Jordanian border without the support of the local tribes. That took a lot of work. It took a lot of great work from our special forces who are out there working with them in Al Asad Airbase way out there by Haditha, but it has begun to generate momentum. So you have to pull all these pieces together in order to deliver a sustainable defeat of ISIL.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I think CIA Director Brennan and others actually have talked about as we made gains on the battlefield against ISIS, that there is a greater likelihood that we will see terrorist attacks in the West and other parts of the world to try and draw attention away from what is happening on the battlefield. Do you share that assessment?

Mr. MCGURK. Again, I think ISIL has been talking about attacking us for years. So it is not something new. The Brussels and Paris attacks were organized a long time ago even before we started taking their territory away.

What I do think they will try to do, as they are losing territory, as they are losing their central narrative of this caliphate, this kind of state that they are creating, they will try to inspire, through the Internet, these lone wolf types of attacks. And any deranged individual who wants to commit a crime can suddenly fly the banner of ISIL and get an international headline. And they recognize this and they are trying to inspire it. So I think the risk of that is something that is very much with us, will be with us for a long time.

But we will push them out of Mosul. We will push them out of Raqqa, but the ideology that is underpinning this kind of jihadi ideology—they call it tech fear ideology in which anybody who disagrees with them deserves to die. That is what they believe. It is completely crazy. That is going to be with us for a long time.

We have to defeat them on the battlefield, but there is only so much the United States can do. We also need our partners in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia and critical partners of our coalition to fight that ideological battle, and they are doing so.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could just interject. I certainly agree on the ideological battle. We continue to hear from foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, other places about their desire to more fully enter the battle on the ground, if you will. Of course, we hear lots of things. Unless we see something, it is not real.

They then talk about how the U.S.—they have concerns about the United States' commitment. Can you share with us the reality of, with the right effort, Saudi Arabia and others joining us more fully on the ground?

Mr. MCGURK. So I have been to the Gulf quite a bit over the last year, and the Saudis, of course, and the Emiratees are very focused on the conflict of Yemen. And as we hope the peace process there gets underway and that conflict can begin to wind down, there will be an increasing focus on Da'esh. We, of course, want these countries to join the air campaign, to be a part of it. We have heard these same requests from the possibility of troops on the ground, things like that.

It is very important that all of this is organized under our coalition effort. We, of course, have planners from all these countries in CENTCOM about the next steps of what we are going to do.

And I was in Saudi Arabia with the President at the GCC Summit about 6 weeks or so ago, and the Saudis make a very compelling case—and it is true—that ISIL is a fundamental threat to them. They have plots within Saudi Arabia. Almost every few weeks, they are breaking up a plot. And so it is this ideological struggle that has to be led by the Saudis, by the Egyptians, by the leaders in the Muslim world where I really think they can take a leading role. We are working with them on that, but they really need to be the—

The CHAIRMAN. But as it relates—I do not want to take up too much time here. As it relates to them actually participating, they cite in closed doors with us—it is not confidential, but they cite the lack of U.S. leadership and their distrust and therefore their unwillingness to really get engaged.

Away from the ideological but back to what is actually happening on the ground especially in Syria, do you believe that the comments they are making are real?

Mr. MCGURK. I think we work very hard to match capabilities and capacity with needs, and I think I could go through with you in a very detailed way in a different setting kind of what we are doing with each coalition partner. We would like to see those countries participate in the air campaign. They have been participating in the air campaign. The Jordanians are participating in the air

campaign. And we really need more assets in the sky as we develop more intelligence and more targets.

But in terms of ground capabilities, I think our focus on empowering local actors to liberate their own territory is the most sustainable solution for defeating ISIL, and that will remain our fundamental approach.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If my memory serves me correctly, back in 2014 we drew about two or three red lines in the sand for Assad not to cross. Is that not right? Were we not going to actually do a strategic bombing in Syria at one point in time and we backed away from that?

The CHAIRMAN. 2013, late August/early September.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My point is I remember that as well, and we did not really have the resolve in the Senate body itself to really move forward on that strategic attack, and Secretary Kerry kept modifying what that attack would be. And pretty much we backed away from it, drew a couple more lines in the sand, and then had the 22-month game plan that we are into now on going after ISIL.

There has not been that much mention of Assad in today's conversation or, for that matter, much of the conversation at all. Where does he fit in in terms of this game plan to take out ISIL right now?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, we believe very strongly we have to have a political transition process that can lead to a sustainable transition inside Syria. And so long as Assad is leading the government in Damascus, there is no way this war will ever end. That is something we have stated very clearly to the Russians. It is something we have stated very clearly to all the backers of the Assad regime. This war simply will not end with Assad leading the regime in Damascus.

And it is this question of the best way to set the incentives for a sustainable transition. I think militarily enforced regime change is something that we have seen before and is extremely risky and leaves unintended consequences.

But the Russians have said that they support a transition in Damascus. The Russians have claimed that they will support a cessation of hostilities on the ground in Syria. President Putin went to his people and said we will support a cessation of hostilities inside Syria. And quite frankly, the Russians have not done in this regard what they promised, and this remains a very serious problem.

Senator ISAKSON. Are the Iranians the main strength behind Assad? Are they the force behind him right now?

Mr. MCGURK. You know, the level of influence in Damascus is something that we look at very closely. It is kind of a sliding scale. I mean, the Russians were kind of seen as the main influencer maybe about 4 months ago, and I think more recently we are seeing the Iranians start to eclipse them a little bit. But both of them are backing the Assad regime.

We say to the Russians, look at this. You guys are in bed with the Assad regime, with Hezbollah, with the Quds Force, with Qassem Sulemeini. I mean, what exactly are you guys—what is

your long-term strategy here? And I frankly do not think they have one. So they came in to try to bulk up the Assad regime. Then I thought they could find a glide path out of Syria, but that has really not proven to be the case. The only way to have a sustainable solution in Syria is a political transition in which all forces can organize against these extremist threats.

Senator ISAKSON. And that is my point. Given the fact that there is not one on the horizon—a political transition—given the fact that Syria has just been decimated with the civil war over 4 or 5 years, given the fact the Iranians are backing Assad pretty steadily all the way through, there appears to be no end to Assad's ability to stay in place. Is that not correct?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, I think you hit the head on a very difficult situation in Syria. So, again, I go back to what the Russians said they would do but they are not doing, the cessation of hostilities, trying to deescalate the violence, trying to organize forces against ISIL and Nusra.

Where this really comes to a head is in Aleppo. In Aleppo, there are multiple offensives going on. There is an offensive in southwest Aleppo that is led by the Al Nusra Front, led by Al Qaeda. Al Nusra is not a part of the cessation of hostilities. And the Russians know they have every right to go after and defend Aleppo against that offensive, but what they are doing instead is launching—the regime is launching a counter-offensive against the moderate opposition in the north, groups that are a part of the cessation of hostilities.

So it is a very serious situation, Senator, and it is requiring a lot of our attention and focus. And the Russians will either live up to their commitments or not, but right now, Putin is either proving unable to deliver on what he told his people he would deliver or unwilling.

Senator ISAKSON. Well, I know this is a sensitive subject, and there are certain things you cannot address, probably certainly things I should not say or ask. But it appears to me that given Assad's backing by the Iranians and where he is and what he has endured for the past 3 years and given the matrix that is going on right now in that part of the world, ISIL, which we are trying to eradicate, going back to Senator Johnson's comments in his questioning, in the end game, as long as Assad is there, it is going to be very difficult to take ISIL out because they benefit from his staying in that power and giving them the authority to do what they do. Is that not right?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, where the civil war deescalates, where you start to see a—and we saw that in the south, for example, south of Damascus—it frees up opposition groups to actually fight ISIL. Where the civil war is escalating, opposition groups are obviously fighting the regime, and that gives ISIL, Al Nusra more space to grow. So dealing with the civil war is a fundamental element that in order for a long-term, sustainable solution, not just against ISIL but also Al Nusra, which is Al Qaeda in Syria, we have to address.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you for your service. We appreciate it very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Before turning to Senator Menendez, you had mentioned that when you take out leadership, you are learning a great deal about some of the relationships they have in other places. Can you tell us where the central nervous system is relative to the inspiration efforts to try to get people here in the United States and other places to conduct operations against Westerners? Where is that central nervous system housed? Is it in the caliphate, or is it outside?

Mr. MCGURK. I will give you an example of how difficult this is. So I believe, from everything I see, it is in Raqqa. And their leader trying to instigate these attacks was Jihadi John. Jihadi John is known as the brutal murderer of American hostages. But he was also a computer hacker, and he would sit in his apartment in Raqqa all day trying to inspire attacks in the West, here in our homeland and in other partner nations. He would just sit there in the apartment with hundreds of civilians in the apartment building. And it creates a real dilemma. You have to take out Jihadi John. We know where he is, but you do not want to destroy an apartment building with hundreds of people.

So we waited for him to come outside one day, and we were able, with very precise precision, to eliminate Jihadi John. He was their number one guy on the computer all day trying to inspire attacks. He was sitting in Raqqa in a crowded apartment building.

So I believe the heartbeat of it is Raqqa, and that is why after Manbij, we are going to organize a force to move down and isolate Raqqa.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McGurk, I have always appreciated your candor in closed sessions. I appreciate your efforts, and obviously we all wish you the best of luck.

But I have some real concerns as I have read the testimony and listened to some of your responses. So let me try to see if you can help me assuage them.

I want to return to CIA Director Brennan's remarks where he said—and I quote—unfortunately, despite all progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach. And he goes on to say, the group would have to suffer even heavier losses of territory, manpower, and money for its terrorist capacity to decline significantly. And in fact, as the pressure mounts on ISIL, we judge that it will intensify its global terror campaign to maintain its dominance on the global terrorism agenda.

And then I heard your response to Senator Cardin when he asked what happens, for example, in Iraq after we take territory back, and your response was that we are not repeating past mistakes, we are not reconstructing Iraq.

But it sort of like begs the question. Are we not actually repeating past mistakes? When you point to the map and you talk about Anbar and Mosul and Tikrit, these were places where our men and women gave their lives to fight one form of oppression, and now we are in midst of engaging in those same locations again as it relates to ISIL.

So how is this different? How is it that you are suggesting that we are not repeating past mistakes in terms of holding territory after we have cleared it and spent an enormous amount of lives and national treasure—we are doing this now for the second time—is not a repeat of past mistakes?

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Senator.

What I meant by that comment specifically was on the model of reconstruction. We spent \$60 billion on reconstruction in Iraq, and I do not think the record is one that was worth, frankly, that investment on the specific reconstruction case because we identified big projects without the real buy-in of local people.

So what we are doing now, we have this stabilization fund that requires the local people to identify the immediate specific needs for their communities. So how do you get the water back on, lights back on immediately?

Senator MENENDEZ. So I take your answer, your clarification to be that you meant the funds that we spent for reconstruction, but what are we doing? Do we believe the Iraqi forces, ones with our assistance, clearing out Anbar and Mosul and Tikrit are going to have the ability to sustain and hold the places that we have cleared so that we are not there for a third time? Is that your view?

Mr. MCGURK. Well, to date, as I mentioned, all the areas that have been taken back from ISIL—none of them have been retaken by ISIL. So I think that indicates at least that we have hit on something that is successful. You know, these are not American forces in the streets of these cities trying to hold the territory afterwards. We are organizing local police, local people who know the streets, who know the people to hold the territory afterwards.

Senator MENENDEZ. So your answer is yes. Your answer is yes. We believe that the Iraqis, through all of their combined forces, once cleared, will be able to maintain those territories on their own and be able to make sure that ISIL does not recapture any dominance in them.

Mr. MCGURK. I think the record so far in that regard is encouraging. This does not mean Iraq will not be full of a host of problems for many, many years to come, but an organized international genocidal terrorist organization controlling cities is something that I do not think they will be able to do.

Senator MENENDEZ. Let me turn to Syria. I assume that the administration's view is that the peace talks are our best avenue towards a solution. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. MCGURK. That has remained a consensus, an international consensus, that we need a diplomatic, political transition in Damascus to lead to a sustainable solution.

Senator MENENDEZ. And that is, in essence, the administration's hope. That is its policy. Right?

Mr. MCGURK. A political transition in Damascus, which is now enshrined in a U.N. Security Council resolution 2254.

Senator MENENDEZ. So here is my problem. The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. de Mistura, said last week that he hoped that the Syrian peace talks would resume in July but only if the security and humanitarian situation on the ground showed clear improvement. And he said political talks cannot proceed while hostilities are escalating and civilians are starving.

So on the one hand, we place our hopes in the United Nations process encouraging the coalition to do the same. On the other hand, the United Nations does not have a way forward because the security and humanitarian situation on the ground is not improving.

So the question remains—I do not particularly view that Russia and Iran have the same goals as we do as it relates to Syria and the Syrian people. Do we not need to be engaging in trying to improve the security and humanitarian situation on the ground so that the aspirational political talks can move forward? Should we not be looking at safe zones, no-fly zones, other elements of trying to create the basis for the aspirational peace talks to take place?

Mr. MCGURK. There is no question that with the current levels of violence, without a deescalation of violence, without a cessation of hostilities that can be maintained, the conditions for a meaningful political process that leads to transition are extremely difficult. So you are right, Senator.

On the humanitarian side, since the cessation of hostilities has been in place, we have managed to reach almost 10 times as many people who had been reached in an entire year before, but it is not nearly enough. And the Assad regime continues to even attack areas after humanitarian aid is delivered.

The real flash point of this right now is Aleppo where these multiple offensives are ongoing, as I mentioned. And we are working very hard to try to deescalate that. But without a cessation of hostilities that can be maintained and humanitarian aid getting to the people in need, the political process in Geneva really remains at a standstill.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could before turning to the Senator Perdue. There was a group of 51 people who dissented on U.S. policy, which I think is a good thing that the State Department allows that type of dissent to take place, and certainly we do not want to do anything to stifle that.

I also get the sense that very high leadership within the State Department has urged that we put pressure on Assad militarily because of this lack of cessation that has taken place, and the fact that when humanitarian aid is delivered, the next day you have a barrel bomb killing the very people that humanitarian aid was given to.

Can you give us any sense of whether there is a debate relative to how to handle Assad and the fact that with no cessation occurring, that maybe enhanced military pressure from the U.S. may be a route that is worth taking?

Mr. MCGURK. We are, Mr. Chairman, looking very closely at how to have an enforceable cessation of hostilities. And so that is something that is very much underway.

We have also looked very closely at—you know, the Assad regime, even just all the open source statistics—about 100,000 fighters on the side of the Assad regime have been killed by the opposition. GDP has collapsed 80 percent. Those are the types of assumptions that 4 years ago I think many people assumed would lead to conditions that would set a political transition, but it has not.

So what we need is an enforceable cessation of hostilities, and we are looking at—

The CHAIRMAN. Which we do not have and, without pressure, are not going to get. And I think everyone, including you, understands the circular situation we are in. It is not going to happen. I mean, we met with Secretary Kerry in Munich—Senator Perdue was there and others—felt that this cessation issue was not real. It has not been real. And I do not see anything at present that is going to change that dynamic.

I look forward to questioning you further.

I am going to go vote, Senator Perdue, and I will come back hopefully in time for you and Senator Markey to go vote. Senator Markey is next, and you are now chairman.

Senator Perdue [presiding]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. McGurk. Your testimony is always candid and to the point. I know you are the messenger.

I personally am concerned about the 14 months from now, the end of the 3 years. And I am not putting words in your mouth, but I want it on the record I am very concerned about that.

I want to talk about Syria just a minute, though. It seems to me that we have had witnesses in here that have given us testimony that the best option in Syria is a Sunni fighting force on the ground, a coalition Sunni fighting force, not an American force, not an outside force, but a Sunni fighting force. We see in Iraq we have got issues with Shia militia and security after a town is liberated and so forth.

In private meetings with some of the major players, they have given us information that they are ready to stand up, in Saudi Arabia's case, potentially 30,000 fighting troops to fight ISIS in Syria. Their concern is a lack of U.S. leadership and resolve, and so they are not doing that. They are waiting on the U.S. And so can you speak to that in a little more detail?

I am concerned that we get into Syria, it is a much more confused battle space than what we see in Iraq. Iraq is about territory now. And as we saw in Afghanistan and we are seeing today in Afghanistan, when the troops liberate a city and they turn it over to the police, that is where the Taliban comes right back. We see it this year as I sit here. So the question in Iraq is a different one. I am trying to get at Syria relative to what kind of fighting force is going to be able to sustain a long-term effort not only to take the ground but to hold the ground once it is liberated in Syria.

Mr. MCGURK. So, Senator, the fundamental premise here of what we need are local people to liberate and hold their own territory. So in the Sunni Arab areas of Iraq, we need Sunni Arabs from the local area. So what we have tried to do—I mentioned mobilizing the tribes of Anbar Province, training local police. We have a coalition effort led by the Italians training about 900 local police every 3 months. We are looking now to triple that by the end of the year. These are kind of police leaders who then organize the local people. That effort has actually been successful.

But we very much agree that we need Sunni Arabs to be the ones to liberate and hold their own territory, but oftentimes they need help. ISIL in many of these cities and towns that they have held for years is an army, and they defend it like an army. And

so you cannot just take out a bunch of Sunni tribesmen and kind of train them for a couple weeks and put them in the fight to go liberate a city like Fallujah. It just cannot work.

I have also met with Sunni tribal leaders who are exiled from Iraq and Syria and claim to have tens of thousands of people ready to fight. And we say give us the names. We will get them in the fight. And oftentimes they do not have that level of influence on the ground. So it is a very complex dynamic.

What we found in Anbar was really critical is having presence. So we have two sites in Anbar Province, one in Al Asad Airbase and one between Fallujah and Ramadi at Taqaddum Air Base. That is where our coalition advisors are located. And that has given us the ability to figure out who is who, organize local Sunni fighters and give them the capacity to succeed.

And now in Syria, the reason we have gone from 50 special forces advisors up to 300 is for this very reason. And we recognize that the force that will alter—

Senator PERDUE. I am sorry. Are those 300 special forces primarily training? Is that what they are doing?

Mr. MCGURK. Primarily training and some are out advising.

But the main mission there—again, Manbij will be a difficult fight. That is ongoing now, but after Manbij, it is organizing the force that will push down on Raqqa.

Senator PERDUE. Can I ask you a follow-up question on that?

Last year in 2015, a training program was initiated. At the end of the day, we had spent about \$45 million in 2015 under testimony at Armed Services, and we had trained about five people. So that was an unmitigated disaster.

As we sit here today, the numbers have been reported in the 100 range, and we have spent somewhere close to—I think we are approaching the \$500 million that was authorized, I think.

Can you talk about the training program that we have initiated? I know that we got special forces there doing that, but how many forces are really going back in to fight? And are these really trigger pullers, or are they just enablers or spotters or support people?

Mr. MCGURK. So let me try to explain what we are doing. So the effort that was tried to kind of organize and train these brigade-like units is something that did not work.

What we are doing now is there are a lot of fighters on the ground that are fighting ISIL every single day. Rather than taking them all out and training them in a 6-week course, what we are doing now is identifying those groups. They are vetted. They get support from us. They get supplies from us. And then we take out a couple of their leaders or some of the people they identify to learn how to call on airstrikes, to learn how to do more sophisticated type things, which then is a force multiplier for that unit.

So we have a system now that is very well structured in terms of a force that we work with on the ground being able to call in precision airstrikes, but it takes some training. Again, rather than trying to organize these large units to maneuver around, which is something that was not very successful, we are identifying units that are actually on the ground. They know the local area. They are able to fight. And then giving individual leaders those specialized skills that will enhance their capabilities on the ground.

Senator PERDUE. I appreciate that, but we really are not adding additional fighters through that training mechanism at this point in any significant numbers. Is that fair to say?

Mr. MCGURK. Through that effort, no. What we are trying to do is organize and grow the force that will move down particularly on Raqqa because that is a prime target of ours.

Senator PERDUE. I noticed the ranking member is back. I think it is you and me right now until the people get back from voting.

Senator CARDIN. Well, I like the numbers here. This works well. [Laughter.]

Senator PERDUE. I have got another question. I would like to talk about the second level of the fight. The first fight is kinetic on the ground and in the air. And I see that is a very messy fight in Syria with all the different groups that are fighting each other on different days. I would like to talk about the hybrid war that is underway. You have related to it earlier.

In January 2016, the administration announced a major change in our direction there in terms of trying to counter the message of ISIS on social media and other hybrid platforms. How is that working, and have we been able to draft outside voices to really try to counter ISIS? I guess the question overall is what are we doing today to truly try to counter the ISIS message in this hybrid warfare in propaganda and cyber and social media.

Mr. MCGURK. So a great question.

So we, of course, established at the State Department the Global Engagement Center, the GEC, which is focused on this 24/7. But this is not something that can just be done out of Washington. We need a global network to go after their online messaging.

2 years ago when this started, they had a kind of a free rein on Facebook, on Twitter, on Youtube, and their message was one of come join this glorious movement of the caliphate. And we have really reversed that trend. So Twitter is one data point. For every single pro-ISIL Twitter handle, there are now six anti-ISIL, kind of combating them every 24/7 in cyber space.

Senator PERDUE. Where are those six? Are they U.S. handles?

Mr. MCGURK. No. They are all over the place. Some of them are just voices from the region or different parts of the world.

Senator PERDUE. Are they coordinated?

Mr. MCGURK. Some of it is coordinated. But what really works most effectively is kind of the non-coordinated, organic counter-messaging.

We are also working with those companies. Twitter has taken off about 125,000 pro-ISIL sites. That is continuing. We are working with Facebook and Youtube on that.

But you asked a good question, how is this organized? And the Internet is kind of an organic, obviously, enterprise. You cannot really just have centers to do this. But we do have coordinating centers.

Senator PERDUE. We have just stood up two Army brigades of cyber warfare warriors.

Mr. MCGURK. We do. We have centers to kind of lead this effort. We do some here. We have an organization in UAE called the Sawab Center. I went there to visit them. They are young, smart, engaged, dynamic, incredible young people, Muslims from the UAE

and from the area that want to fight ISIL online. They are doing a great job. Malaysia has also been leading this. And that is important because in different parts of the world, the message is very different. So in the Gulf, you kind of have a more religiously inspired messaging focus from ISIL. In Europe, often it is the sundrenched scenes of the caliphate. Come bring your family, you know, literally kids eating ice cream cones. It is a total lie. And so in Europe, they are working to counter that.

But I think this network of voices on the Internet now is starting to turn the tide against their messaging.

Senator CARDIN. Let me rescue my colleague. There is no time left on the vote on the floor. So I want to make sure he gets over. Even though I am not sure we are voting the same way, I want to make sure he can get over and cast his vote.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you.

Senator Cardin [presiding]: Since I have the committee right now—no. Mr. McGurk, members are coming back. They just went to vote. I started over on the floor so we could continue the hearing.

Let me ask you. We have talked about territorial gain and what happens afterwards. In Syria, you put a lot of confidence in Manbij, in that area, being able to block the routes to Turkey. What does Assad do? What does Russia do in regards to the territorial gains in Syria? What will be their strategy?

Mr. MCGURK. So, as you know, we do not coordinate at all with the Russians. We talk to them to deconflict air space, and also when we are running an operation, we kind of make sure that there is no interference. And so far, in most cases, that has been the case.

The forces we have worked with that have retaken territory we have found have been able to govern that territory fairly effectively.

One problem we have in Syria that we have not had in Iraq is that the ability to get humanitarian assistance, humanitarian supplies into some of these areas is extremely limited, and this gets to the issue, of course, with Turkey and with the Syrian Kurds and kind of that conflict and the border being closed.

In Manbij, for example, once Manbij is liberated, we have identified the NGOs, the resources to get humanitarian aid flowing into Manbij, but we have to find the border posts and to work with Turkey to make sure that it can get in.

So I would just say so far we have not had any interference from the regime or the Russians in terms of particularly in the north where we have taken territory away from ISIL.

Senator CARDIN. But as far as the Assad loyal forces conflicting with the Syrian democratic forces, is that likely to occur in these areas?

Mr. MCGURK. This gets really complicated in northwest Syria where you Syrian regime forces. You have the Syrian democratic forces and the Kurds and the YPG. You have Syrian opposition forces, none of whom really coordinate and many of whom disagree with each other at a local level.

Actually this morning I was just working on this with some colleagues. We are working to get the leaders of all of those groups together, not including, of course, the Syrian forces, to talk about

literally locally based what is happening in this town, what is happening in that town to try to quiet things down between groups, all of whom share the threat of ISIL.

This is the most complicated thing from the strategic level, within the region and different countries and different capitals not always agreeing with one another, to say the least, and then at the local tactical level. So we have to work it really in all dimensions.

So what we are working to do in this northwest Syria area kind of called the Azaz Corridor is to get the leaders of different groups together with us to talk about how we can better work together here to get humanitarian aid flowing and to better organize forces against ISIL.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

The Chairman [presiding]: Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I want to begin. You talked earlier about now as ISIS begins to lose control over territory, you are going to see them increasingly relying on the ability to inspire attacks abroad by individuals who perhaps are not being directed by them but are being inspired by them. And you in fact said deranged individuals who can commit mass atrocities or whatever and doing it under the banner of ISIS. That seems to describe what we saw just 2 weeks ago tragically in my home State of Florida in Orlando. And so what you were saying is that as ISIS continues to lose territory and the ability to argue that they have created this caliphate, attacks like the one we saw in Orlando with individuals that fit that sort of profile will become more commonplace potentially and not just in the U.S. but in other parts of the world as well.

Mr. MCGURK. Senator, I am not sure I would say more commonplace. ISIL's propaganda has always called for attacks in our homeland. But as they lose territory—you know, they have stopped kind of calling—in Dabiq magazine, for example, I mentioned they have stopped calling for people to come to Syria. They are now saying, hey, stay at home. But they have been saying this for a couple years. So this is a problem. That is why I just have to be very candid in my assessment. It is the assessment, of course, of the administration and Director Brennan. This is a threat that will be with us for years.

We have had 40,000 of these foreign fighters come into Syria. Fortunately, we are killing them by the thousands inside Syria so they cannot get out. And we do believe that taking away their territory, taking away this notion of a caliphate, which has been a fundamental driver of their recruitment, will diminish the appeal of ISIL. But that does not mean they could then fly another banner, whether it is Nusra or something else.

Senator RUBIO. The thing I am trying to break through is this distinction that exists out there between "directed by ISIS" and "inspired by ISIS." In my mind, there is no distinction. They are two parts of the same strategy, which is to get people to commit terrorist acts in the name of ISIS in an effort to terrorize who they view as their opponents and call attention to their organization. There is no distinction. Inspiration is a way of directing these attacks as we saw here just a few weeks ago tragically.

And then you talk also—because this is another point that I have made. Even if you were to wipe them out on the battlefield, the ideology that underpins ISIS, this radical jihadist ideology, will remain in place. I think that when it comes to the issue of Syria—and this has already been touched upon in some of the other questions that we have heard here, Syria will remain a fertile ground for an ISIS-like group. It will be Jabhat al Nusra next or somebody else to step up and fill that vacuum as long as Assad is in power. He is the irritant that creates the conditions by which these sorts of things exist on the ground. That does not mean that everyone that is against Assad is a radical jihadist, but his presence there creates enough of an irritant, especially among Sunni populations where groups like ISIS or some successor group could take advantage of that to further their ideology and in essence take up arms the way ISIS has done. Is that not correct?

Mr. MCGURK. The Assad regime remains an incubator for—the conflict inside Syria remains an incubator for extremist groups on both sides of the sectarian divide. And it is the sectarian divide in the region that super charges these extremists from both sides. We see young Shia from Afghanistan coming in to fight in Syria and young Sunnis from all over the world coming in to fight in Syria. It is something that is destabilizing most importantly to Syria, but can also spawn attacks outside of Syria. So getting a handle on the Syrian civil war—I very much agree with you, Senator—is a fundamental precondition to mitigating the risks of ISIL and Jabhat al Nusra, which is an increasing concern.

Senator RUBIO. But not just getting a hold of the—I mean, the removal of Assad is critical. It is a critical component.

Mr. MCGURK. Well, the war will not end so long as Assad is there.

Senator RUBIO. Right. And to that point, the process we have in place now to achieve it through Geneva has been described to me now by people, including those involved in the process, as something that is circling the drain, in essence. It is not going well. The process in many ways has given Russia cover to do some of the things they have now done like, for example, much of the Russian military engagement in Syria has not been targeted at ISIS. It has been targeted at non-ISIS groups, and in particular, we saw an open source report last week that they specifically targeted U.S.-backed rebels near the Jordanian border. Is it not true that much of Russia's military action in the region has been geared towards non-ISIS rebels in an effort to basically wipe them out and then turn to the world and say you have two choices in Syria, ISIS or Assad?

Mr. MCGURK. So when Russia first came in, about 70–80 percent of their attacks were against opposition groups, moderate opposition groups, and after the cessation of hostilities, we did see that flip so that they were focused on Palmyra and other areas. But in the last weeks we have, as the situation particularly in Aleppo has escalated, they are conducting a significant amount of airstrikes in that northern Aleppo corridor, which is where we believe the moderate opposition is based. And so that is a total violation of the cessation of hostilities.

We have two problems with the cessation of hostilities. One is Jabhat al Nusra, which is launching these massive offensives, and then second is primarily the regime air force. So the regime air force, as far as we can tell, is basically a criminal enterprise dropping barrel bombs and attacking civilians under the pretext of attacking Nusra. So long as this is going on, it is a Petri dish for extremist organizations.

Senator RUBIO. Well, my time is up, but I just want to leave something on the record. I share the objective of retaking Manbij. I am concerned about the reliance that we placed in our alliance with the YPG and in their activities there and what that means both to our relationship with the Turks and ultimately to their stated goal of uniting the cantons across northern Syria. I think it is a strategy that perhaps was viewed as necessary given the realities on the battlefield, but I think in the long term creates some significant complications in the region with a number of different groups, including the Kurds in Iraq.

Senator Markey?

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

Mr. McGurk, during the past 2 weeks, both Ambassador Silliman, the nominee to be Ambassador to Iraq, and Jonathan Winer, the Special Envoy for Libya, testified before the committee. It is obvious that tactical successes against ISIS, whether in Iraq or Libya, will not bring about the strategic defeat of ISIS unless tactical operations are done in ways that not only avoid harming civilian populations but proactively protect them from harm and, two, we and international partners undertake aggressive political interventions to negotiate agreements to bring together divergent armed groups under unified governments that represent and protect all of the people.

In your testimony, you acknowledged that the Fallujah Shia militias committed abuses against Sunni civilians who were fleeing for their lives. It is also apparent that adequate advance preparations were not made to receive, transport, and provide relief to tens of thousands of people who fled the fighting in Fallujah. And I understand that after the fact, the Iraqi Government says it will hold offenders accountable for abuses and also that the international community is stepping up humanitarian relief efforts. But I am very concerned that after-the-fact fixes may not be enough to convince Sunni people that the Iraqi Government is on their side.

So my question is, what are the Iraqi Government actions? What are the armed forces doing before and during military operations to identify and mitigate foreseeable risks that Shia militia will engage in sectarian attacks on Sunni civilians? Are there specific things that our people who work with the Iraqis are doing or should be doing to ensure that battle plans include proactive measures to prevent such attacks from happening? We are politicians on this panel. That is the one thing that we are experts on. People will not forget if they were not protected even if there is a tactical victory in any individual city.

Mr. MCGURK. Thank you, Senator. This is critically important. It is something, when I was in Iraq last week, took up many of my discussions, particularly with Prime Minister Abadi and with the Iraqi security leaders.

It is important to recognize that most of the atrocities committed against Sunnis in places like Fallujah and Anbar Province are committed by ISIL. ISIL kind of held that population hostage. We are finding prisoners in dungeons and cellars in which they were committing incredible atrocities against Sunnis. When they retook Anbar Province, ISIL massacred hundreds of people from the Albu Nimr tribe, a very proud tribe in the central Euphrates Valley.

However, we have to make sure that when security operations come in to liberate these areas from ISIL, that these lawless groups are not part of the operation. And as I mentioned, in the early days of Fallujah, we had a serious problem. About 24 hours, there were serious reports, many of which have turned out not to be credible but some of which appear to be credible. And the Special Representative to the U.N. testified before the U.N. Security Council about this last week, particularly about the measures that are now in place to mitigate the risk of this.

So one thing that happens when you liberate a territory and the civilians come out, you do have to screen the population to make sure that ISIL terrorists have not infiltrated that population. So in Anbar, now there is a local official from Anbar, from the local area that is a part of that process every step of the way. That is something that the local leaders of Anbar insisted on, and that is now in place.

And in our discussions in Erbil on how to do the Mosul campaign—this is a front and center issue—we have to make sure that these types of events do not occur in Mosul and that all the forces that take part in the Mosul campaign are operating strictly under the control of the Iraqi security forces.

Senator MARKEY. What does the government say to you?

Mr. MCGURK. The government—and this is why the Government of Iraq is a real partner in this regard. The government is supportive. I mean, those atrocities were a tarnish on the government, on the Iraqi army, the Iraqi security forces, and that is something that Prime Minister Abadi very much recognizes.

Senator MARKEY. And did they agree that Fallujah was a mistake, the way it was conducted?

Mr. MCGURK. Certainly. It was really in the 24 hours of the offensive move into the city in which we had these reports. And it was top to bottom voices inside Iraq, from the Shia religious community, from Grand Ayatollah Sistani, all the way to Muqtada al-Sadr—immediately condemned those reports of abuse. Of course, the government did. The minister of defense announced the arrests of some members of the Iraqi army even who were involved in that abuse. And they have to remain vigilant against this. When you have got a lot of young people out on the streets with guns in a type of situation like this, it is almost impossible to mitigate the risk of anything happening. However, when you see something like we saw in the early days of Fallujah—

Senator MARKEY. How many people have been punished so far for what happened in Fallujah?

Mr. MCGURK. I think about four or five members of the Iraqi army have been detained and some members of the—

Senator MARKEY. What is their punishment so far?

Mr. MCGURK. I do not think the investigation has been concluded.

But our principle is and we are saying repeatedly is that people have to held accountable when reports are found to be credible.

Senator MARKEY. What is the answer to why were the Shia militia allowed to be put in those positions where they can commit those kinds of atrocities? What is the answer that you get from the government?

Mr. MCGURK. There is one particular unit of the popular mobilization forces on the Shia side that was operating totally outside the law in some of the suburbs of Fallujah such as Saqlawiyah. So I cannot say specifically why that unit was there in Saqlawiyah. But what I can say is that the government has taken measures to make sure that it is addressed.

Senator MARKEY. And I know my time is going to run out.

But I guess what I would say is if those five individuals and more are not severely punished and punished in a way that is public and clear, then there will be no discouragement in the other cities that we are trying to take. So I think your key political job is just to make sure that there is a punishment for those people because otherwise other militia will think that they can do it, get a slap on the wrist, they accomplished their vengeful purpose, but at the end of the day, they create a political conundrum that is very difficult to solve in the years ahead, that we not have to revisit this thing politically.

So is that a goal that you have, that these people be punished?

Mr. MCGURK. Accountability is fundamental.

Senator MARKEY. You are saying punishment for those five.

Mr. MCGURK. Accountability. That means that—

Senator MARKEY. Accountability can just be calling them out and saying do not do it again.

Mr. MCGURK. Punishment under the law, yes. So they have to have a process and people have to be held accountable, and that means they have to be punished when violations occur.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir.

Senator Murphy.

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

I know we consider Mr. McGurk to be a global citizen, but he is indeed a graduate of Hall High School in West Hartford, Connecticut.

Mr. MCGURK. Conard High School actually.

Senator MURPHY. Conard. I am sorry. Let me try to recover from that. [Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY. So thank you for being here, Mr. McGurk, and thank you for taking on what is, frankly, a nightmare of a job, trying to manage this crisis and manage this coalition, and we are lucky to have you at the helm.

In response I think to a question from Senator Corker earlier, you were talking about our concerns about some of our coalition partners not being as involved as we would like, especially with the air campaign. And so I wanted to ask you a question relative to the reasons why some members of the coalition are not participating at the level that we would expect.

When I was in Abu Dhabi at the end of last year, I went to get a brief from the ministry of defense. I was there with another member to oversee our counter-ISIS campaign. And the title of the brief, knowing that I was there to talk about the coalition fight against ISIL, was the threat from Iran. And the entire brief was about the work that the UAE and other coalition members are doing to counter the expansion of Iranian influence. And from what I understand, their focus, the Saudis' focus and UAE's focus, on Yemen has been one of the primary reasons why they have been less participatory in the air campaign against ISIL.

And so speak to the worry that some of us have that this concentration of focus on Yemen, which is facilitated by U.S. support, has quite frankly distracted resources from members of the coalition that we would like to be primarily used in the fight against ISIL. So we complain about the Saudis and the UAE sort of withdrawing support from the air campaign against ISIL, but to many of us, it appears that we have facilitated that withdrawal by assisting their air campaign in Yemen against the Houthis. So talk about the intersection of those two conflicts and how we get some of our partners to focus first on ISIL rather than first on the Houthis.

Mr. MCGURK. There is no question that the conflict in Yemen has pulled resources away from what was a real focus on the counter-ISIL campaign. That is one reason we have focused quite a bit in the recent months on trying to establish a political process to end the conflict in Yemen.

Our close partners, the Saudis, when they see a threat on the border, they have to act, and so we recognize their need to act. The Emiratees have been one of our closest partners militarily particularly and they have maintained a strong participation in the counter-ISIL campaign.

But we do very much believe the primary focus here is on ISIL, that ISIL is a threat not only to us, but it is also a threat to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I think that is something the Saudis will tell you.

But all I can say, Senator, is where we are right now, we want to end the war in Yemen in order to really focus efforts on the counter-ISIL campaign. So as these multiple conflicts have been going on, it has reduced the resources that we have been able to focus on ISIL over the skies of Syria.

That said, over the past recent months, we have had four additional coalition partners extend their strikes into Syria. I was just in Iraq talking to General McFarland, our overall commander. This is the most kinetic phase of the campaign to date. 70 percent of the planes now taking off are actually dropping their munitions. That is because we have better intelligence. We have more partners on the ground fighting. But that also brings us to the key point which you are raising is that we need more resources in the skies as we continue to accelerate.

So I am hopeful that as the Yemen political process moves forward—and we all hope that it does—that we will have more capacity brought to bear against ISIL.

Senator MURPHY. Second question. There have been a number of reports in the press over the last month or so about groups within the rebel coalition fighting each other, and some of this is relative

to groups that are backed covertly by the United States. And I understand the limitations on how much you can talk about that, recent reports about conflicts between the FSA and the YPG.

For many of us, our reluctance to arm and train groups inside the fight is because we have a belief that we are in the second order of fighting today. The first order was a fight between the rebels and Assad. The second order is the part of the war in which ISIS has joined. But there are then third and fourth and fifth orders that may involve groups that have been funded by the United States fighting each other as the battlefield shrinks and perhaps we actually make progress against some of the groups that right now provide a buffer between organizations that are funded by the United States.

Just speak to the fear that ultimately groups that are armed today by the United States who may be fighting the same enemy may ultimately be fighting each other if we are successful in our effort to try to downgrade the power and lethality of some of these existing groups.

Mr. MCGURK. So, Senator, where we are successful at kind of tamping down these locally based conflicts is where we have relationships and a presence on the ground. So in Iraq, we have had problems between Kurds and Arabs. We have had problems between different groups in Anbar Province, Sunni-on-Sunni things. Where we are present and we have relationships, we can tamp it down.

To be very candid, what is frustrating on the Syria side, we do not have anybody inside Syria on the ground. Sometimes it is very difficult to tell what is happening. We rely on people, particularly in the northwest, telling us what they think is happening. And our ability to then tamp down localized escalations is not what I wish it was.

In eastern Syria, where we do have platforms now, we are developing a relationship base that has been very effective and that we hope we can build upon in this northwest part of the country where you are talking about we have these localized competitions between different groups that we support that we can work locally to deescalate that.

But I just have to be honest. Without people on the ground working these problems, it is very hard. It is very hard to do it by remote control. And in Iraq, we have people on the ground. We have relationships. When things flare up, we can really work to flare them down. In eastern Syria, kind of east of the Euphrates, we have platforms. We are developing close relationships. To Senator Rubio's question, we recognize we need an Arab force to move down on Raqqa not just the Kurds. That is why we have these platforms. We are recruiting the Arabs by the thousands now. But in northwest Syria, it is incredibly difficult, and it is one of my frustrations working on this day to day, frankly.

Senator MURPHY. And I think you have identified the Gordian knot that we all have to deal with, which is that you are saying without more American presence on the ground, we risk these local conflicts becoming more heated and more problematic. But of course, many of us know the risks associated with putting more U.S. forces on the ground. This is a tough one to figure our way

out of and again part of the reason why I am glad that you have taken up this assignment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I know we are few minutes past your hard stop, and I will be very brief.

You had earlier talked about Manbij laying the foundation for what we would do in Raqqa. And I know you have talked a little bit with Senator Rubio about the makeup of what needs to happen.

Do we feel at present the forces can be assimilated to deal with Raqqa in the near term?

Mr. MCGURK. So to Senator Rubio's question, which is an important one, it is about we recognize we have to have an Arab force that moves into these Arab areas to push on Raqqa. And when I was in Kobani in February, this was kind of just getting off the ground. One of the reasons I was in there was to talk about this operation, which at the time was the biggest operation we were going to do in Syria, on a town called Shaddadi, which is an Arab town. We organized a force then of about 6,000 or so. 2,500 of them were Arab, the first time we had a real inclusive mix. It turned out to be successful. That is one of the things that gave President Obama the confidence to increase our special forces capability inside Syria to organize these forces.

Now, what is so important about Manbij is that the ratio is even reversed. So it is a mostly Arab force moving now on Manbij, a much more limited role for the Syrian Kurds. So it is kind of a model of what we would use ultimately to push down on Raqqa.

The Americans who are working this on the ground every day in northern Syria—the reports I am getting. They are encouraged that as we are having success, more and more of these Arab leaders, the Arab tribal leaders, are coming to join this force. They want to be part of this push on Raqqa. And so right now, I think the trend line is good.

But I would not underestimate how hard this is to pull these forces together, to organize them, to make them a cohesive unit to be able to push, together with our air support. However, from Shaddadi, which was a proof of concept, and now Manbij, I think we have hit on something that can work.

The CHAIRMAN. I will ask you in private. I know you do not want to lay out a time frame for either Mosul or Raqqa, you know, being in Raqqa. I guess I was in Iraq just a few months before last June when we thought last June was going to be the time that we went into Mosul. Obviously, it is this June and we are still not ready. But I look forward to having that offline conversation.

I know you are on your way to the White House. I do not know who the audience is there, but I would say again the fact that Assad is still killing people the day after humanitarian aid is being delivered does beg the question of what kind of force needs to be pressed against him to stifle the civil war. I mean, this is never going to be dealt with appropriately until that ends. It is evident that Russia and Iran have not had the effect on Assad that was contemplated when the cessation began. And I do hope you are able to talk to me after today a little bit more about what the thinking is in that regard.

We thank you for your service to our country.

The record will be open until the close of business on Thursday. Please answer the written questions that I am sure will follow as promptly as you can.

Again, we thank you for your service. We appreciate you being here.

And with that, the meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO BRETT MCGURK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question 1. Are you aware of the identities of the State Department officers who signed the so-called “dissent cable” that was leaked to the press two weeks ago?

Answer. I know some of them.

Question 2. Did any of them report to you and had any of them attempted to make their views known to you prior to signing this dissent cable?

Answer. None of them report to me.

Question 3. Do you agree with their views and do you support their recommendations? If not, which of their recommendations do you disagree with?

Answer. The issues surrounding the Syrian conflict are some of the most complicated in the world and among the hardest problems we have seen in some time. We have looked very closely at every angle of this issue and there are no easy solutions. The process has been rigorous, and we have fully considered a variety of ideas and their possible consequences. This is tough work that our diplomats pursue every day, to include how to defeat ISIL in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. As the Secretary has said, no one is happy with the situation in Syria and we continue to assess our approach on how to bring about a cessation of hostilities, deliver unimpeded humanitarian access to all Syrians in need, and have a genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué.

Question 4. Last week, I spoke to Riad Hijab, the head of the Syrian Higher Negotiation Committee, who very persuasively argues that no solution to the crisis in Syria will be achieved until Bashar al-Assad is removed from power. Do you disagree with Dr. Hijab?

Answer. As the President has said, Asad has lost all legitimacy and has no place in Syria’s future. His regime’s brutality against his own citizens helps extremists like ISIL continue to recruit support.

We believe Asad must go. The decisions for how that takes place must be made in the context of political negotiations among Syrians, under the auspices of the United Nations. We support the UN Special Envoy for Syria’s ongoing efforts with the opposition led by Riad Hijab’s High Negotiations Committee and the regime to gain agreement on a genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. We are committed to a unified, pluralistic, and peaceful Syria.

Question 5. What is the United States currently doing to put pressure on the Assad regime? Don’t we run the risk of endless negotiations with little to show for them due to our unwillingness to heed the advice of your State Department colleagues and apply some leverage to the Assad Government and its Russian backers?

Answer. As President Obama has stated, Asad has no role to play in Syria’s future, which must be determined through political negotiations among Syrians, under the auspices of the United Nations, aimed at achieving a genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. We are committed to a unified, pluralistic, and peaceful Syria.

How to achieve the objectives set out in Resolution 2254 is the subject of regular, frank strategic and tactical discussions within the Administration. There is no military solution to this conflict. Rather, we are working to bring about a political solution that includes a transition away from Asad.

Through the International Syria Support Group, we work with over 25 other countries and entities to implement UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254, a roadmap to end the conflict in Syria. UNSCR 2254 calls for a nationwide ceasefire and greater humanitarian access to millions of Syrians, in parallel with political negotiations between the Syrian opposition and government.

The Secretary continues to press Foreign Minister Lavrov—who has stated that Russia has significant influence on the Asad regime’s military actions—to act to relieve the needless suffering of the Syrian people.

Question 6. How many fighters does ISIL currently have under arms?

Answer. On ISIL numbers specifically, we assess that ISIL fields approximately 19,000 to 25,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria, the lowest assessed range since we began conducting rigorous reviews of the group’s manpower in 2014. This is down from a high end estimate of 31,500 frontline ISIL fighters in Iraq and Syria based on all-source intelligence reports from May to August 2014. The decrease reflects the combined effects of battlefield deaths, desertions, internal disciplinary actions, recruiting shortfalls, Coalition efforts, and difficulties that foreign terrorist fighters face traveling to Syria.

Question 7. How many foreign fighters have traveled to Syria since ISIL swept through large portions of Iraq in 2014?

Answer. Since 2011, nearly 40,000 fighters from more than 120 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq—including 6,900 with Western passports. Global efforts to counter foreign fighter flows are making progress, and we are seeing a drop in the number of fighters traveling to the conflict zones this year. In May during remarks at the International Special Operations Forces Convention, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Lisa Monaco reported the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria is down significantly over the last year. In early June, during a statement delivered before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency Director John Brennan noted fewer foreign fighters are traveling to Syria.

Question 8. How many have now returned to their home countries?

Answer. We rely on Intelligence Community assessments about the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and defer to them to provide more details—many of which are classified—on the basis of their assessment about the number of FTFs returning from the Middle East. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has a broad Center-wide effort to track foreign fighters traveling to Syria, working closely with Intelligence Community partners. As part of this effort, NCTC aggregates information on known or suspected terrorists traveling to Syria in the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE). This effort has created a valuable forum for identifying, tracking, and sharing information with law enforcement, counterterrorism, screening, and watchlisting communities on known or suspected terrorists. Forty-one countries have passed new laws or updated existing legislation to more effectively identify and prosecute returning FTFs; 38 countries have reported arresting FTFs; and 30 have successfully brought charges in FTF cases.

Question 9. Is it correct to say, that Americans should expect to see more terrorist attacks inspired in some way by the perceived success of ISIL, as we’ve seen in San Bernardino and now in Orlando, yes or no?

Answer. As ISIL continues to face military pressure and losses in Iraq and Syria, we expect it will continue its efforts to encourage and inspire attacks around the world. ISIL has used negative propaganda to inspire attacks in several countries around the world, and we recognize the difficulty security agencies face in disrupting lone offender attacks by individuals inspired by the group and other violent extremist organizations.

We defer to DHS and FBI on the specifics of the threat as it pertains to the U.S. Homeland and of their threat mitigation efforts. The Department of State and our diplomatic missions work hand in hand with domestic security agencies to expand international efforts and cooperation to mitigate continued terrorist threats to the Homeland and U.S. interests overseas and to protect our borders. For example, our efforts to improve border security abroad and to exchange watchlisting information with our partners aim to stop terrorists from reaching our shores or from harming our key partners and Western interests. As a result, more international partners and air carriers are employing threat-based security and border screening requirements. We will continue to protect our borders, strengthen criminal justice system responses, and work with local partners to counter violent extremism that could potentially target the Homeland.

Question 10. Whatever the military gains in recent weeks in Iraq and Syria, do you think that the view among elements of the Muslim community, in the Middle East, and in Western societies, is that ISIL is winning or losing its current battles?

Answer. Sixty-six partners have joined the United States in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, including Middle Eastern and Muslim majority countries such as Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, among others. Together we share the same goal of degrading and ultimately defeating this horrific organization. Pew Research Center survey data collected in 11 countries with significant Muslim populations from April and May 2015 shows that populations in nearly all of these countries (Burkina Faso, Jordan, Indonesia, Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, Palestinian territories, Senegal, and Turkey) express overwhelmingly negative opinions of ISIL. In addition, Pew Research Center data suggest there is support in Middle Eastern countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, for U.S. actions against ISIL. The 2016 Arab Youth Survey tells us that nearly four in five young Arabs rule out any support for ISIL even if ISIL stopped using violence, and most believe it will ultimately fail to establish its vision of an Islamic state. As ISIL's so-called "Caliphate" loses money and territory and attracts fewer fighters, the terrorist organization is being put on the defensive. Mindful of the many challenges ISIL poses across multiple regions, the United States remains committed to sustaining this momentum.

Question 11. Don't you think that the fact that this non-state group has stood up to the world's greatest military and a coalition of more than sixty countries for two and a half years without losing control of their largest cities is a pretty impressive achievement that raises some questions about our seriousness in this fight?

Answer. ISIL has not had a major battlefield victory in over a year. It has lost 47 percent of its territory in Iraq, and 20 percent in Syria. More important than percentages, however, is the strategic nature of the territory that ISIL has lost: nearly the entire border between Syria and Turkey, iconic cities like Ramadi, Tikrit, and Fallujah, and all the major transit points between Raqqa and Mosul, such as Sinjar, Hawl and Shaddadi. Loss of territory also equates to the loss of the tax base critical to sustaining the organization and funding external operations. ISIL's control of territory is also a basis for the group's self-declared legitimacy as a state. Denying it that territory directly denies it that legitimacy. ISIL's control over towns and cities provides it a base for planning and conducting external operations. A U.S. and Coalition-supported operation currently underway in northern Syria has isolated the city of Manbij, severing a major supply line to Raqqa and isolating an important external operations hub. In both Iraq and Syria we are now working with local partners to shrink this territory further, through a combination of military, political, and security measures.

Question 12. You may be aware of Osama bin Laden's 2001 comment that "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature, they will like the strong horse."

- Almost three years into this conflict, who do you think many Muslims in the Middle East, as well as those around the world who may be inspired by ISIL's apocalyptic worldview, view as the "strong horse,"—ISIL or the United States?

Answer. With Coalition support, local forces have now recaptured from ISIL nearly 10,000 square kilometers of strategically significant territory in northeastern Syria and nearly 30,000 square kilometers in Iraq. Financially, ISIL has been forced to cut its fighters' salaries in half and levy extortionate taxes on populations under its control to alleviate economic shortfalls. We have seen a significant reduction in the flow of foreign terrorist fighters entering Syria and Iraq each month. According to the 2016 Arab Youth Survey as well as polling conducted in the region, a majority of respondents in countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen consider ISIL to be a terrorist organization, and a majority of young Arabs believe ISIL will fail to successfully establish its vision of an Islamic state.

Question 13. What are we doing to change this ISIL narrative other than relying on often inadequate proxy forces to make painstakingly slow progress on the battlefield?

Answer. Our counter-ISIL campaign has liberated at least one third of the territory ISIL once controlled in Iraq and Syria, reduced its manpower by over 10,000, denied it economic revenue, is isolating it from the outer world, removing its leadership from the battlefield, directly challenging its global narrative, and is degrading ISIL's eight official branches. The effects of our counter-ISIL campaign are reflected in the evolving ISIL global narrative. ISIL spokesman Muhammad al-Adnani for years described ISIL as a global, historic, expanding movement. His catchphrase

was “remain and expand”—describing the territory under its control—and he promised ISIL would someday dominate the Middle East and ultimately control territory in southern Europe. Adnani’s latest statement in May was quite different. No longer the confident voice of an expanding movement, he acknowledged that ISIL may lose its holdings in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, including its strongholds of Mosul, Raqqa, and Sirte. We are now working to ensure that his prediction comes true, and that Adnani himself—who also leads ISIL’s external operations arm—is eliminated, and no longer able to spew his incitement.

Question 14a. Following the Obama Administration’s long overdue determination that ISIL has been committing genocide against Christians, Yazidis and others in Iraq and Syria, what is the Administration’s plan to ensure the safe resettlement and reintegration of ethnic and religious minorities into the homelands in Iraq?

Answer. We are committed to assisting people of all ethnicities, religions, and nationalities who are fleeing persecution and violence. Voluntary return is often the durable solution preferred by refugees and displaced persons. The United States supports voluntary repatriation when refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) can do so in safety and dignity, and in fact many Iraqis from a broad range of ethnic and religious backgrounds inform us that that is their first choice. We believe that refugees and IDPs should be permitted to integrate locally into their places of displacement if returns are not feasible. Resettlement to third countries is the last resort, and it can only apply to a very small percentage of displaced persons each year.

U.S. humanitarian assistance in Iraq benefits the displaced as well as host community members in urban areas and camps and informal settlements, as U.S.-funded humanitarian agencies support local infrastructure, including schools, medical clinics, and sanitation infrastructure. U.S.-supported agencies are also conducting quick-impact projects, such as repairs to wells, garbage collection, and livelihoods initiatives that strengthen communities’ resilience in the face of sustained trauma. These projects provide hope for the vulnerable, both the displaced and host community members, that there is a future for their communities in Iraq once the present conflict has subsided and that there are reasons to return home.

The United States has provided more than \$15 million to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-managed Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS). Based on priorities identified by the Government of Iraq and local authorities, FFIS programs provide immediate assistance to areas liberated from ISIL, and these projects complement ongoing Iraqi government efforts. By repairing public infrastructure, providing grants to small businesses, boosting the capacity of local government, promoting civil engagement and community reconciliation, and providing short-term employment through public works schemes, FFIS helps ensure initial services and stability to promote returns of displaced persons. Through the efforts of the Government of Iraq, and with the support of UNDP, the United States, and the Coalition, nearly 100 percent of the pre-ISIL population has returned to Tikrit, and more than 750,000 people have returned home to liberated areas throughout Iraq.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, since 2008, the U.S. government has provided more than \$100 million for a variety of efforts in Iraq that include promoting respect for rights of members of minority groups and interfaith tolerance, community stabilization, conflict mitigation, and cultural preservation. The Department of State has worked to promote respect for the human rights of persons belonging to religious minorities, including through increased engagement and staffing of the Office of International Religious Freedom; the work of Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Middle East and South and Central Asia Knox Thames; and increased foreign assistance programming focused on advocating for and promoting religious freedom around the world.

Question 14b. Does the Administration consider the return of ethnic and religious minorities to their homelands a critical component toward achieving a safe, secure, and sovereign Iraq?

Answer. Creating the conditions that allow for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return home of all Iraqis displaced by ISIL, including ethnic and religious minorities, is a critical element of long-term stability in Iraq. Members of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq regularly tell us that they want to return to their ancestral homelands if it is safe for them to do so. To help achieve this objective, the United States has emphasized stabilization of areas liberated from ISIL, which entails the deployment of trusted local security, the restoration of basic services like electricity and water, and the refurbishment of health clinics and schools.

The United States has supported stabilization efforts through UNDP’s Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization, which channels funds to rapid projects

prioritized by local leaders and UNDP. On July 20, the United States will co-host a Pledging Conference in Support of Iraq, which will generate hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions for stabilization, as well as significant contributions towards humanitarian assistance. Recognizing that preservation of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq cannot be sustained without the widespread understanding of their inherent value within Iraqi society, the United States supports programs centered on advocacy for key issues that impact minority communities and programs that promote reconciliation, stabilization, inclusiveness, and equitable and representative political participation.

The United States will continue to press the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government—to permit the voluntary return of all displaced persons and to ensure that any security screening processes for returnees, as well as the newly displaced, are transparent and humane.

To promote long-term stability, the United States has supported Prime Minister Abadi's efforts to decentralize federal authorities, giving local communities greater influence over their governance. In addition, the United States will support Government of Iraq efforts to hold accountable those who committed atrocities against ethnic and religious minorities.

Question 14c. What is the Administration doing to train and assist local forces, including Yezidi and Christian militias, so that they can help defend their home communities once they are recaptured?

Answer. The United States is committed to helping Iraq build a strong, capable security force that represents Iraq's ethnic and religious diversity. Prime Minister Abadi has made it a policy priority to enroll thousands of local fighters into the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and increase the recruitment of Sunnis and other minorities into the Iraqi Security Forces, and we support him in these efforts.

The United States, through the Government of Iraq, has supplied equipment to Sunni PMF units at a steady rate over the past year. This includes rifles and machine guns, anti-armor weapons, ammunition, vehicles, body armor, and uniforms. Christian PMF units and Christian volunteers associated with the Peshmerga, including the Ninewa Plains Protection Force, have received equipment and ammunition from both the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). To date, Christian forces have received hundreds of rifles, sniper rifles, and light machine guns, tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition, and hand grenades. Additional equipment is scheduled to arrive in time to support local fighters prepare for the impending Mosul offensive.

Question 15a. Many U.S. partners and even local citizens have raised concerns about our reliance on the Syrian Kurdish YPG forces as our partner in Syria.

- What is your response to those that worry about the long-term agenda of this partner that we have decided to work with in northern Syria?

Answer. Sustainability of counter-ISIL gains is integral to the campaign. That is why we are working with the Government of Iraq to recruit local Sunnis in Anbar and Ninewa who will comprise the local hold forces that secure terrain liberated from ISIL. In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Syrian alliance comprising Syrian Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, including Sunni Muslims and Christians, has liberated thousands of square kilometers of northern and northeastern Syria from ISIL. In February, a 40 percent Arab SDF force seized Shaddadi, liberated it from ISIL, and has held it since. For that operation I personally engaged SDF leadership and my DoD colleagues worked daily with SDF commanders to ensure the correct force composition. Since the end of May, we have supported an SDF operation to isolate and seize Manbij in northern Syria. The SDF force conducting this operation is over 80 percent Arab, mostly from the local area, and is fighting to free their hometowns. This is a core premise of our strategy for liberating territory: we want local people, with local knowledge, in the operations to free their communities from ISIL, and stabilize the areas after ISIL is gone.

Question 15b. What is the State Department doing to complement the U.S. military's engagement of the YPG with outreach to other members of Syrian Kurdish civil society?

Answer. In Iraq and Syria our work is predicated on the understanding that inclusive and representative governance is essential to serving local communities and empowering them to resist ISIL. This conviction guides our interactions with local actors, including governing officials. We complement this approach with engagement at the local level to assess the needs of communities, including in majority-Kurdish areas of northern Syria.

Question 16a. What role is the U.S. playing in finding more donors to get involved in solving this humanitarian crisis?

Answer. Since January 2014, more than 3.3 million Iraqis have become internally displaced due to ISIL-related violence and Iraqi efforts to retake territory from extremist control. The United States is the single largest donor to the Iraq humanitarian response, having provided more than \$778 million for vulnerable Iraqis since FY 2014. In light of recent events in Iraq, the U.S. announced an additional contribution of \$20 million in humanitarian assistance on June 21. However, the United States cannot be the only donor responding to this crisis. To that end, we regularly discuss Iraq's humanitarian needs with our international partners, highlighting the needs identified in the UN's 2016 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan, as well as individual appeals issued by the UN and other international organizations. On July 20, the United States will co-host with Germany, Canada, and Japan a pledging conference for Iraq in Washington that seeks to raise substantial new humanitarian contributions, in addition to stabilization and demining funds. We expect to announce a significant new humanitarian assistance contribution at the conference, and these funds will be available for response to the expected humanitarian needs following the Mosul operation.

Question 16b. Is the Iraqi government providing appropriate resources in Fallujah to address this humanitarian situation?

Answer. The Government of Iraq is facing an economic crisis following the recent downturn in oil prices. The Government of Iraq allocated \$10 million for the immediate response to the Fallujah displacements, and it manages several camps for internally displaced persons on the outskirts of Ameriyat al Fallujah and Habbaniya Touristic City, two Anbar cities that were hosting IDPs from previous displacement in the province. Nonetheless, the Government of Iraq will rely on extensive resources from the international community to help it address the immense humanitarian crisis it is facing, even before the anticipated liberation of Mosul. In Fallujah, the speed with which the June military offensive on Fallujah unfolded surprised both the humanitarian community and the UN system in Iraq, delaying the provision of immediate relief items to the 85,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled Fallujah and its suburbs.

The humanitarian agencies operating in Anbar province were still not fully prepared for the Fallujah response, due to a combination of funding shortfalls, access challenges, security threats, and limited staff surge capacity. The Government of Iraq, the United States, other donors, and the humanitarian community are taking the lessons learned in the Fallujah response in order to be more prepared for the expected offensive on Mosul in coming months.

Question 17. Lieutenant General Thomas Waldhauser who has been nominated by President Obama to be Commander of the U.S. Africa Command at his confirmation hearing on June 21, 2016 before the Senate Armed Services Committee stated that the Administration does not have an overall grand strategy with regard to Libya and specifically against the growing threat from ISIL.

- Do you agree with that assessment?

Answer. No, I do not agree. We do have a strategy in Libya centered on U.S. diplomacy playing a leading role in assembling a robust international coalition to support our interests in a unified and stable Libya. Our approach is closely linked with a broader international effort and organized around four components:

1. Advancing implementation of the Libya Political Agreement (LPA);
2. Promoting stability and civilian security;
3. Countering terrorism and violent extremism; and
4. Stimulating the economy and improving humanitarian conditions.

Some elements of this strategy are military, including strikes when we have identified a threat to U.S. interests or security, but the overarching strategy is larger than that. It is founded on our assessment, which is shared with a great number of international partners, that the only hope for long-term stability and security in Libya is a unified national government. It is fundamental, therefore, that our political and counterterrorism engagement be mutually reinforcing.

The U.S. Government has helped to actively advance the Libyan political process, support Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj's Government of National Accord (GNA) and the LPA, and promote security in Libya and the Maghreb and Sahel region. The United States supports the aspirations of the Libyan people for a united, inclusive, and responsive national government after 42 years of authoritarian misrule and the challenges and divisions Libya has faced since the 2011 revolution. U.S. diplomatic

support for the political process led by UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Martin Kobler has contributed to key Libyan political milestones, including the signing of the LPA in December 2015, the Libyan House of Representatives' vote to approve the LPA on January 25, and the arrival of Prime Minister al-Sarraj and the Presidency Council of the GNA in Tripoli on March 30.

Since the GNA entered Tripoli, Prime Minister al-Sarraj has undertaken a series of steps to stabilize the country, including measures to form a Presidential Guard, establish a joint command to combat ISIL, and ensure that ministries and acting ministers can get to work to serve the Libyan people, pending formal action by the Libyan parliament. Along with our international partners, the United States is supporting Prime Minister al-Sarraj's government as it combats ISIL, and takes steps to re-establish effective governance, restore stability, and address Libya's security, economic, and humanitarian challenges.

Secretary of State John Kerry and Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni co-hosted a Ministerial on Libya May 16 in Vienna to solidify international support behind Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj's government, particularly on security. At the Vienna Ministerial, four international organizations and 21 countries reiterated the international community's commitment to support the GNA as Libya's sole legitimate recipient of international security assistance. We support Prime Minister al-Sarraj's efforts to build an inclusive national security architecture.

We continue to urge all Libyan forces to enhance coordination and implement a unified command to direct the fight against ISIL in Libya. We are ready to respond to the Libyan government's requests to train and equip vetted, GNA-aligned forces from throughout Libya. The UN arms embargo allows for the GNA to request exemptions for the weapons it needs to secure the country and to combat ISIL. The GNA has voiced its intention to submit appropriate arms embargo exemption requests to the UN Libya Sanctions Committee to procure necessary lethal arms and materiel to counter UN-designated terrorist groups and to combat ISIL throughout the country. We will fully support these exemption efforts while continuing to reinforce the UN arms embargo to prevent transfer of illicit arms to Libya and prevent acquisition of arms by non-state actors.

We continue to assess ISIL activity in Libya and work with our partners to determine the best way to counter ISIL. As President Obama has made clear, we will not hesitate when it comes to defending U.S. national security interests and we have undertaken direct action against ISIL in Libya, when necessary. Ultimately, defeating ISIL will require that the GNA fill the political and security vacuum in Libya. The GNA will need the support of the United States and international community to be successful in this effort, and we have undertaken wide-reaching efforts to ensure its success.

Question 18. Are we allowing ISIL and its over 5,000 fighters in Libya to establish a stronghold that will be difficult for a new, fragile government in Libya to address?

Answer. Our counterterrorism policy in Libya is focused on degrading ISIL and other violent extremist groups and reducing the threat they pose to U.S. interests in North Africa and Europe. The United States and international community need to bolster Libya's unity government as a partner to most effectively counter the threat of ISIL in Libya. ISIL exploits ungoverned areas and an effective, unified central Libyan government is the best defense against any terrorist threat. While Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj's Government of National Accord remains fragile, it has already taken courageous steps to confront ISIL and taken back significant territory. We must provide it with our full support.

In Libya as elsewhere, President Obama has demonstrated his willingness to take action wherever our interests are in danger. In the past year the United States has conducted direct action against several terrorist targets in Libya: our June 2015 strike targeted Al-Qaida-affiliated Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar; our November 2015 strike killed Iraqi national and senior ISIL figure in Libya Abu Nabil al-Anbari; and our February 19 strikes took out a ISIL training camp and a foreign fighter facilitator in western Libya. We also are focused on disrupting the links between the ISIL branch in Libya and the core group in Iraq and Syria. The Global Coalition to Counter ISIL has committed to a concerted push to halt the flow of foreign fighters to Libya, disrupt ISIL finances there, and counter and defeat its destructive message.

Since late May, an offensive by GNA-aligned forces on the city of Sirte has made important gains. We continue to call on all armed actors in Libya to coordinate their efforts under the GNA's command.

As Secretary Kerry, 20 other countries, and four international organizations made clear at the May 16 Libya ministerial in Vienna, we support the efforts of Prime

Minister al-Sarraj's government to establish civilian command and control over an inclusive, national Libyan military.

The GNA announced in April that it would form a joint command to coordinate counter terrorism efforts. It has since formed four regional operations rooms focused on the fight against ISIL and other terrorist groups. These decisions have enabled GNA-aligned forces to make substantial progress against ISIL in and around its stronghold of Sirte.

The United States and our international partners affirmed in the May 16 Vienna Communiqué that the GNA is the sole legitimate recipient of international security assistance to Libya and that the international community will support the GNA by providing security assistance to counter UN-designated terrorist groups throughout the country. By providing assistance to forces under the GNA's command and reinforcing the UN arms embargo to ensure weapons do not go to other groups, we can help empower Prime Minister al-Sarraj to build the unified, inclusive, civilian-controlled, and capable security forces that Libya requires.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO BRETT MCGURK BY SENATOR BARBARA BOXER

Question 1. I understand that the Administration is in the process of negotiating a memorandum of understanding to provide \$415 million in assistance to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces for their fight against ISIL. Can you provide an update on the status of those negotiations for this MOU? When do you hope to conclude it?

Answer. The United States has substantially increased assistance to the Peshmerga in support of operations to defeat ISIL and liberate Mosul. We recognize the severe budget crises affecting both the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). To help the KRG address the crisis, DoD stepped up assistance to Peshmerga fighters. Sixty-five million in immediate assistance, including food, bulk medical supplies, fuel, and ammunition began moving to Erbil in early May. An additional \$415 million is on track to be dispensed later this summer. This additional funding will provide stipends, food, fuel, ammunition, medical equipment and other assistance for Peshmerga fighters. Under authority provided by the Iraq Train and Equip Fund, assistance will be provided by, with, and through the Government of Iraq.

Question 2. More broadly, how are we working with Iraq's central government to ensure that the Kurds are getting the weapons and equipment they need in a timely manner? Specifically, are there delays in the shipments of weapons and supplies from Baghdad to Erbil, and if so how is the Administration working to address this problem?

Answer. There is no delay in the shipments of weapons and supplies from Baghdad to Erbil. We expedite equipment deliveries to the Kurds, and Baghdad has neither prevented nor delayed the delivery of equipment to the Ministry of Peshmerga in Erbil. On the contrary, it has supported a coalition effort that has provided the Peshmerga with thousands of tons of ammunition and equipment cost-free. While aircraft carrying weapons and equipment destined for Erbil do stop in Baghdad for inspection, this usually adds less than a few hours to the transit time.

Coordination between Baghdad and Erbil has proven critical in the campaign—Baghdad provided the first flights of ammunition to the Kurdistan Regional Government after the fall of Mosul in 2014, and the Ministry of Defense has committed to directing a portion of the FMF loan to meet the needs of Kurdish forces.

Coordinating U.S. military assistance through the central government is required by both Iraqi and international law and helps demonstrate our commitment to a sovereign and independent Iraq. It is also essential to the lasting defeat of ISIL.

Thousands of Peshmerga have received training at Coalition Building Partner Capacity (BPC) sites in Iraq. In addition, the United States and the Coalition have provided the Peshmerga with tens of millions of dollars in ammunition; weapons including rifles, anti-tank systems, and high-caliber machine guns; counter-IED equipment; and vehicles, including ambulances and mine resistant vehicles.

Question 3. Countering ISIL's apocalyptic message, which promises heaven in exchange for mass murder, is perhaps a more complicated challenge than defeating ISIS on the battlefield. Can you describe the State Department's work to counter ISIL's propaganda online?

Answer. Countering ISIL's propaganda online is a complex issue that needs to be done in accordance with the Department of State's counterterrorism, human rights,

and cyber policies, as well as taking into account the government's engagement with the private sector regarding the use of their platforms for violent extremist propaganda and other content that may be protected under U.S. law. We believe that we can most effectively counter violent extremists' propaganda on the Internet by contesting terrorist narratives and worldviews through competitive or alternative messages—and by building the capacity of other credible voices internationally to do so.

Leading that effort is the Global Engagement Center (GEC), an interagency entity, housed at the State Department, which coordinates U.S. counterterrorism messaging to foreign audiences abroad. The work of the GEC is focused around four core areas: 1) building and empowering a global network of partners who message against violent extremism, 2) developing and procuring thematic guidance and content that partners can use to inform their messaging, 3) using data analytics from both the public and private sectors to inform our messaging efforts and measure our effectiveness, 4) and coordinating these efforts across the many U.S. national security agencies that operate in the information space.

The GEC runs collaborative, thematic campaigns with counter-ISIL coalition nations and other partners to effectively counter and offer an alternative narrative to ISIS's propaganda. For example, ISIS claims that it is invincible. In response, the GEC's digital outreach teams (disseminators of messaging) work in conjunction with our Coalition partners to highlight ISIS's territorial losses and other information that counters their claims. The GEC also curates and creates content from the open source media environment which is then shared with U.S. government and Coalition partners.

The GEC's foreign language messaging staffers are multilingual with extensive educational and/or professional experience in their countries of focus. As a result, the staff is uniquely qualified to understand the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of the societies to which they are messaging. This expertise is used to inform broader messaging efforts and campaigns.

Countering violent extremist messaging is an important part of our broader strategy to counter violent extremism (CVE). We must also work closely and creatively with communities, civil society, and the private sector. Several bureaus at State, including the Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (CT), Public Affairs (R), and the regional bureaus design, fund and implement capacity building programs to empower credible voices to counter ISIL's and other violent extremists' messages, among other CVE efforts. Engaged citizens, communities, and civil and religious groups can also play an essential role in developing counter narratives. Well-informed and empowered families, communities, and local institutions represent the best defense against terrorist ideologies.

There is also a role for governments to play in working with the private sector and civil society on a voluntary basis to discourage the use of the Internet to promote violent extremism and to encourage positive counter narratives

Question 4. How effective are our efforts to counter ISIL's online propaganda? How are we working with partner governments and NGOs?

Answer. The information campaigns of the GEC and its predecessor, the CSCC, against ISIL, in addition to violent extremist account suspensions by social media service providers, and ISIL's battlefield losses have contributed to a significant decline in ISIL's online propaganda activities since 2014.

- GEC's information campaigns and building of partners' capacity have contributed to a strong anti-ISIL movement online, which this year out numbers ISIL at a ratio of roughly 6 to 1 on Twitter, according to data obtained by The Associated Press.
- GEC's information campaigns regularly surpass industry-standard rates of engagement, indicating strong performance and public interest in anti-ISIL messaging.
- Battlefield losses have forced ISIL to modify its propaganda narratives and dissemination methods, resulting in less propaganda and weakened claims of an ascendant caliphate.

Additionally, various U.S. government departments and agencies have engaged with a range of key technology companies to inform and encourage companies' voluntary efforts to counter ISIL and other terrorist groups online and determine how best to build partnerships to address the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes.

As part of this effort to counter ISIL's online propaganda, the GEC assists in building, empowering, and maintaining a global network of credible voices to interrupt and undermine violent extremist recruitment and narratives, and mitigate the emergence of new violent extremist organizations and affiliates. This is achieved through partnership building with non-government organizations, to include civil so-

ciety, media outlets, and private sector companies. As we work with non-government partners, we also work with partner governments who are undertaking similar efforts as part of the Counter-ISIL Coalition. The GEC coordinates messaging efforts across the Coalition through its input to messaging themes and narratives provided to the Office of the Special Envoy to Counter ISIL and the Coalition Communications Cell, to ensure that there is consistency and unity in U.S. government and partner nation messaging efforts. ISIL's propaganda presents a global challenge and calls for a global solution. We are working with partners in the UK, the UAE, and Malaysia to provide a localized focus to counter ISIL's destructive narrative. I have visited the Sawab Center in the UAE, where dynamic young people work to implement messaging campaigns on themes such as national pride, family cohesion, and ISIL's inability to govern. Providing an alternative to ISIL's message and preventing radicalization will continue to be essential to this fight.

Question 5. What is the status of planning for the Mosul offensive? What is the next phase of the Iraqi military's campaign against ISIS?

Answer. We are working closely with the Government of Iraq as it plans the operation to retake Mosul. After the liberation of Fallujah, Prime Minister Abadi announced that Mosul was the next major operation. Shaping operations have been underway for a few months, with Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish Peshmerga, maneuvering to set the conditions for the encirclement and ultimate liberation of Mosul. The U.S. will continue to provide advice and assistance throughout the military campaign, but the Government of Iraq is ultimately responsible for determining the next phase in the operation.

Question. How are we working with the Iraqi Government to ensure that Iraq is holding areas wrested from ISIS's control?

Answer. The Iraqi government understands that only through improving security, stabilization, and reconciliation can it ensure the long-term defeat of ISIL. The United States is a key partner in all of these efforts.

Once a city is liberated, United States and Coalition advisors continue to work with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to ensure adequate security and provide intelligence support. The United States and Coalition partners are training and equipping ISF entities responsible for securing liberated areas to prevent the return of ISIL fighters. These "hold forces" are generally comprised of local police supported by Popular Mobilization Forces from the area.

Stabilization of liberated cities allows displaced Iraqis to quickly return and begin to rebuild. The United States has provided over \$15 million to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Funding

Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS), which is the main Coalition mechanism for immediate stabilization. Based on priorities identified by the Government of Iraq and local authorities, FFIS activities repair light infrastructure, provide small grants to businesses, assist local government with recovery, promote community reconciliation, and provide short-term employment through public works schemes, such as rubble clearing. These stabilization projects lay a foundation for reconciliation and prevent the return of ISIL by demonstrating support to those communities most impacted by the fighting.

Long-term reconciliation is in the hands of the Iraqi people and is the key to preventing the return of ISIL. The United States is working with the GOI to promote inclusive governance that respects minority rights and does not discriminate based on sect or belief.

Question 7. How effective are our current training missions to rebuild the Iraqi military?

Answer. Our efforts are not to rebuild the Iraqi military, but rather to regenerate forces through targeted training, equipping, and advising. More than 30,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), including Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) personnel, have received training, equipment, or other support from the Coalition. However, the best measure of effectiveness is not training metrics, but battlefield success. Since May of 2015, the ISF have not only prevented ISIL from seizing territory, but have retaken nearly 50 percent of the land that ISIL held at its height, including the cities of Ramadi, Fallujah, Sinjar, Hit, Tikrit, and Rutbah. Iraqi forces are currently undertaking shaping operations to liberate Mosul—Iraq's second largest city. With every victory the ISF has regained the confidence and morale needed to maintain an effective military. This has been and will remain an Iraqi fight, but the Coalition training mission has been critical to ensuring the Iraqis have the capability to take their country back from ISIL.

Question 8. Can you provide an update on the coalition’s “five lines of effort”?

Answer. Representing the basic Counter-ISIL Coalition lines of effort, the Coalition’s Working Groups seek to enhance coordination and share best practices. (Humanitarian assistance is led by the United Nations.) To the fullest extent possible, they draw on the activities of pre-existing multilateral fora and organizations, without creating duplicative structures and processes, and encourage a prominent role for countries most directly affected by ISIL, especially Arab and majority-Muslim states. Each has an Action Plan that outlines specific objectives, resource needs, key challenges and measures of performance. Working Groups are active in the following areas:

Coordinating Military Support

As a terrorist group with a unique military and networking capacity, ISIL represents a significant threat to the global community. In exercise of the inherent right of self-defense, including the collective self-defense of Iraq at Iraq’s request, Coalition members are contributing to a dynamic campaign led by the U.S. Central Command to deny ISIL safe-havens in Iraq and Syria, disrupt its ability to project power, and build partner capacity. To support this effort, the U.S. Department of Defense has established a secretariat that facilitates political-military consultations and holds meetings as needed.

Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters

An unprecedented number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) have traveled to Iraq and Syria, many of whom joined ISIL. In response, this Working Group draws extensively on the work of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), the UN, and efforts to implement UNSC Resolution 2178 and the GCTF Hague-Marrakech Memorandum, in accord with the security measures spelled out in the European Union’s Syria and Iraq foreign terrorist fighters strategy adopted on October 20, 2014. The Working Group focuses on key lines of intervention including: identifying current and potential national and transnational recruitment and facilitation networks; promoting intensified and accelerated exchange of information on FTF travel and routes; facilitating effective communication and a swift flow of information between Coalition members; discouraging individuals from traveling to participate in the Iraq/Syria conflict on ISIL’s behalf; criminalizing FTF activities and enforcing laws to counter them; disrupting the travel of aspiring or returning fighters; and as appropriate prosecuting and/or rehabilitating and reintegrating FTFs upon their return to home countries. We stress the need to strengthen cooperation at the international, regional, sub-regional and national levels to effectively prevent and counter terrorism.

Disrupting ISIL’s Financial Access and Economic Sustainment

Understanding and sharing information on ISIL’s financial and economic activities, and focusing international efforts to counter those activities are indispensable in ensuring ISIL’s ultimate defeat. This Working Group focuses on preventing ISIL’s use of the international financial system; countering its extortion and exploitation of economic assets and resources, including oil smuggling and looting of cultural and archeological goods; denying it funding from abroad, including from external donors, foreign terrorist fighter financing, and kidnapping for ransom; and preventing it from providing financial or material support to other terrorist groups. The working group promotes existing recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), supports the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 2161, 2170 and 2199, and considers, coordinates and incorporates initiatives in other fora (e.g., the G7, G20, Egmont Group and INTERPOL).

Developing Narratives to Counter ISIL

ISIL exists in both the physical and information spaces; its narrative is a threat in itself. This Working Group supports efforts to expose the bankruptcy of ISIL’s ideology and present a balanced alternative narrative that enhances social resilience against extremist propaganda and presents a vision of hope for a better future. It supports and empowers credible and independent community, political, economic, religious and educational leaders to get their messages out via both traditional and social media. The group plans and executes cooperative projects such as joint messaging centers, professional exchanges, sharing of research, conferences and public events, while promoting best practices and consistent messaging by Coalition members.

Providing Stabilization Support

Civilian security is essential to success in reclaiming territory from ISIL. This Working Group has worked to strengthen Iraq’s local, provincial and national au-

thorities and is looking at appropriate ways to assist liberated areas in Syria. The focus has been on immediate stabilization—i.e., the first 60 to 90 days after the end of combat operations—with a goal of laying the foundations for lasting stability and creating the conditions for the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons. The group works closely with the Baghdad-based Stabilization Task Force. It aims at mobilizing international support for local officials and security forces in developing plans and instruments for immediate recovery; and for efforts to advise and assist with civilian planning, police and local governance, and re-establishing essential services.

Question 9. Specifically, please describe the coalition’s efforts to stop ISIL’s funding and financing. What are ISIL’s major remaining sources of revenue, and what can the United States do to cut off those revenue streams?

Answer. The United States and the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL have made significant progress in recent months disrupting ISIL’s financial and resource networks, and we are seeing the results of these efforts on the ground. ISIL has cut salary payments to its fighters in Raqqa by 50 percent, leading many ISIL fighters to defect and leave the battlefield. ISIL has struggled to fulfill its various governance obligations such as basic services to Iraqi and Syrian citizens in ISIL-controlled territory due to stretched finances. ISIL has also increasingly resorted to the theft of property and arbitrary “tax” increases to make up the funding gap. Finally, we have seen increasingly frequent incidents of corruption within ISIL’s ranks as funds have diminished.

Despite these recent signs of progress, however, the sources of ISIL’s revenues make it an unusual counter-terrorist financing challenge. ISIL likely made around \$500 million in 2015 from oil and gas sales and about \$350 million from extortion. In addition to those two large revenue streams, ISIL made at least several million from foreign donations in 2014 and in 2015, between \$20 and \$45 million from kidnapping for ransom in 2014 but less in 2015, and less than \$10 million from trafficking in antiquities.

Our most effective method of disrupting ISIL’s revenues to date has also been one of the most atypical counter-terrorist finance tools: military airstrikes against ISIL-controlled oil and gas facilities and cash storage sites. Operation TIDAL WAVE II, launched in October 2015, targets ISIL’s entire oil and natural gas supply chain and has reduced ISIL’s ability to exploit oil and natural gas for profit in Iraq and Syria. Coalition airstrikes against ISIL’s cash storage sites have also reduced liquidity in ISIL-controlled territory in northern Iraq by at least tens of millions and possibly up to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Kinetic efforts have complemented diplomatic efforts to build a coalition of countries to disrupt ISIL’s finances. In March 2015, the United States established the Counter-ISIL Finance Group (CIFG) to serve as the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL’s working group on ISIL finance. Co-chaired by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Italy, the CIFG includes 39 members and observers focused on disrupting ISIL’s financial networks and limiting its ability to exploit resources in territory it controls. The CIFG has met five times and plans to meet again later this year in Kuwait.

The United States and its Coalition partners have also led efforts at the United Nations to strengthen the international framework for combatting ISIL’s financial and facilitation networks. UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 2199 and 2253, in particular, strengthened the UN Security Council’s ISIL and Al Qaeda Sanctions regime and obligated all countries to prevent direct or indirect support for ISIL through the illegal sales of oil and historical artefacts and through kidnapping for ransom. The United States and Coalition partners also continue to nominate ISIL leaders and facilitators to the UN Security Council’s 1267/1989/2253 ISIL and Al Qaida Sanctions List to disrupt ISIL’s ability to raise and transfer funds. In addition to our international sanctions, the Departments of State and Treasury have domestically sanctioned a number of ISIL leaders, financiers, facilitators, and branches under the Immigration and Nationality Act and Executive Order 13224.

The United States bilaterally engages key countries in the Middle East and around the world to complement our multilateral engagement. Our Embassy in Baghdad worked closely with the Government of Iraq to decrease liquidity in ISIL-controlled territory to prevent ISIL from profiting from extortion and “tax” collection. The Government of Iraq’s August 2015 decision to suspend government salary payments to ISIL-controlled territory was the most important of these efforts, as it hindered ISIL’s ability to tax these funds. We estimate salary payments to ISIL-held areas amounted to at least \$170 million per month in 2015, or the equivalent of roughly \$2 billion per year. The United States has also worked closely with the Gov-

ernment of Libya to help them improve their ability to monitor and protect the Libyan financial system from exploitation by ISIL.

The Department of State is also building partner capacity to counter-terrorist financing in a variety of ways, including helping partner nations build their capacity to identify, investigate, and prosecute illicit financial transactions and improve domestic anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance regulations.

Disrupting ISIL's financial networks is one of our top priorities, and our efforts have succeeded in forcing ISIL to cut salaries. There is no question ISIL remains a well-funded terrorist group, and they have proven resilient and adaptable in the face of sustained pressure from the United States and our Coalition partners. We will continue to adapt our tactics to maintain the effectiveness of our economic campaign, and we will use all tools at our disposal to disrupt ISIL's finances and cut ISIL off from the international financial system.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO BRETT MCGURK BY SENATOR RON JOHNSON

Question 1. On June 23, 2016, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing to examine the ideology of ISIS. The committee heard compelling testimony from witnesses who spoke about ISIS' persecution of certain populations. For example, human rights advocate Nadia Murad Basee Taho spoke about Yazidi persecution by ISIS. She described the choice given to Yazidis as "convert or die." Her mother and six brothers were killed, and she was among 3,000 Yazidi women and girls forced into sexual slavery. She said that today, "captive Yazidis are systematically used as human shields in combat by their ISIS captors," and ISIS is only encouraged by our ambivalence.

Please explain what specific actions the United States and coalition partners are taking to protect persecuted groups, including the Yazidis, from DA'ESH. What specific additional proposed actions are planned to protect persecuted minorities from these atrocities? What specific actions have been considered, but not undertaken, and why?

Answer. Since the earliest days of Da'esh's expansion, the United States has made clear our intent to degrade and ultimately destroy this odious group, and to act decisively to protect civilians threatened by mass atrocities. President Obama, in authorizing military operations in Iraq in August 2014, declared that "with innocent people facing the prospect of violence on a horrific scale," the U.S. government would act to prevent a potential genocide. We continue to be guided by this basic premise.

We see several elements as essential to giving Yazidis, Christians, and other persecuted minorities a future in their ancestral homelands, and we are working to address each of these. They include: defeating Da'esh; stabilizing and securing liberated areas; supporting political inclusion for all Iraqis and Syrians, including minorities, with equal participation in governance; stabilizing and securing the situation for refugees and IDPs and promoting their heritage and right to return home; and supporting efforts to hold accountable perpetrators of atrocities.

To achieve these aims, the U.S. and its allies continue robust military operations against Da'esh, including specific operations aimed to safeguard, protect or liberate civilian victims. The State Department operates in close and continuing partnership with the Department of Defense to share relevant information in real time on whereabouts and conditions of persecuted individuals, which are directly incorporated into military planning and operations. In our policy engagement in Iraq, we have repeatedly emphasized to both the national government and the Kurdistan regional authorities the need to take measures to protect all Iraqis, including vulnerable religious and ethnic minority communities.

In support of Da'esh's victims, we are funding provision of psychosocial assistance, legal services, local dispute mediation, and community-based protections in areas to which they have fled and in areas to which they have returned. To achieve justice and accountability, we currently support the investigation of missing person cases in Iraq, and efforts to protect, exhume, and analyze the contents of mass graves. We are empowering Iraqi and Syrian civil society organizations to document abuses and preserve and analyze evidence, and training journalists to report on atrocities and government response.

Our stabilization efforts are focused on areas liberated from Da'esh control, as we continue to re-inforce the need for effective, inclusive and responsible governance in these areas. We are strengthening local groups to advocate for equal access to government resources and services irrespective of religion or ethnicity. We also support

programs designed to restore essential services, provide business grants, and address small infrastructure damage as people return to their homes. All of these efforts come on top of the billions of dollars of humanitarian assistance we have provided—and millions we will provide in the coming fiscal year—to those impacted by violence in Iraq and Syria and throughout the broader region.

Question 2. On January 8, 2016, the State Department announced that it was “re-vamping its counter-violent-extremism communications efforts” with the creation of a new Global Engagement Center (GEC). The Administration established the GEC to “more effectively coordinate, integrate and synchronize messaging to foreign audiences that undermines the disinformation espoused by violent extremist groups, including ISIL and al-Qaeda, and that offers positive alternatives.”

What progress has the GEC made in accomplishing this goal? What specific additional actions is the GEC planning to take in order to meet this goal? Has it been successful in seeking out partners in the Muslim community that can provide effective alternative narratives to ISIS’ recruitment messaging? If so, please provide some examples. What steps has the GEC taken or is planning to take to coordinate its efforts with those of other members of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL?

Answer. The GEC has made significant progress in coordinating, integrating, and synchronizing all U.S. government communications directed at foreign audiences abroad to diminish the influence of violent extremists. The GEC has detailees from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and from across the Intelligence Community. When fully operational, the Center will also comprise staff from the private sector, as well as the Departments of Treasury, Justice, and USAID. Working across these agencies, the Center identifies efficiencies and opportunities to counter violent extremist messaging in the messaging space.

The Center is designed to be as agile and adaptive as our adversary and is armed with new authorities, personnel, and cutting-edge technology. The GEC utilizes state of the art digital analytics tools from the Intelligence Community, DARPA, and the technology sector. These tools and technologies help us tailor messages to our audience and measure the impact of our efforts.

The Center is taking a fundamentally new approach in countering violent extremist messaging in the information space. We have pivoted toward partner-driven messaging and content, because while the U.S. government has a good message to tell, there are an abundance of credible and diverse voices across the Middle East, Europe, and Africa—governments, NGOs, and civil society groups—that we are now leveraging in this fight. We do not publicize who many of our partners are in order to avoid exposing them to unnecessary danger, but the following are a couple of examples.

In Kosovo, we recently completed a training program with local NGOs, designed to amplify credible voices against violent extremism there. Kosovo is a compelling location because it has one of the highest numbers of foreign terrorist fighters per capita in Europe, and an active NGO community focused on countering violent extremism.

In East Africa we worked with a civil society partner to establish an online, mobile-enabled radio station in Swahili. It airs youth-produced programming that counters the rising volume of violent propaganda in the region. The content is aimed at youth living in neighborhoods where violent extremists recruit. Separately, in the same region, we run an interactive SMS program to reach populations in inaccessible areas.

The GEC is not just coordinating efforts to counter violent extremist messaging across the U.S. government, it is also coordinating with partners in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. One example of a Coalition partnership is the Sawab Center in Abu Dhabi, a joint messaging center where Emiratis work alongside Americans to counter ISIL online. Since July 2015, Sawab has launched nine original social-media campaigns, ranging from voices of victims and defectors, to affirming positive messages such as national pride. Each campaign has averaged over 125 million impressions on social media, and Sawab has consulted and shared its experience with 20 countries and international organizations interested in similar efforts to counter violent extremism.

In addition to the Sawab Center, the United States is backing efforts to create additional countering violent extremist messaging centers in other counter-ISIL coalition nations. Most promisingly, a new messaging center is slated to open in Malaysia later this year, which is a major step forward in our efforts to reach those vulnerable to violent extremist radicalization and recruiting efforts in Southeast Asia.

The GEC information campaigns that counter ISIL, in addition to violent extremist account suspensions by social media service providers, and ISIL’s battlefield losses have contributed to a significant decline in ISIL’s online propaganda activities

since 2014. For example, we have seen that pro-ISIL postings on social media have recently shrunk from .018 percent of total Twitter postings to .012 percent of total Twitter postings.

- According to GEC's Office of Analytics, pro-ISIL postings on Twitter have decreased by 45 percent since 2014 due to increased suspensions and increased anti-ISIL sentiment after ISIL atrocities.
- GEC's information campaigns and building of partners' capacity have contributed to a strong anti-ISIL movement online, which this year outnumbers ISIL at a ratio of roughly 6 to 1 on Twitter, according to data obtained by GEC's Office of Analytics.

Using this partners-first, data-driven approach, the Center is making progress toward discrediting ISIL's narrative and breaking their brand.

