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HEARING ON IRAQ, SYRIA, AND ISIL
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
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Chairman Levin, Senator Inhofe, Members of the Committee: Chairman Dempsey and I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the President's strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.

As you know, today President Obama is in Atlanta meeting with CDC officials regarding the Ebola crisis, and will then travel to Tampa to receive a briefing from the Commander of U.S. Central Command, General Austin, on operational plans to implement his ISIL strategy. I will join the President in Tampa tomorrow for that briefing.

The Defense Department's civilian and military leaders are in complete agreement that the United States and our allies and partners must take action against ISIL, and that the President's strategy is the right approach.

However, as President Obama has repeatedly made clear, American military power alone cannot eradicate the threats posed by ISIL to the United States, our allies, and our friends and partners in the region. Iraq's continued political progress toward a more inclusive and representative government – and its program of reform and reconciliation – will be critical. We believe that Iraq's new Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi is committed to bringing all Iraqis together against ISIL. To support him and the Iraqi people in their fight, the coalition will need to use all its instruments of power – military, law enforcement, economic, diplomatic, and intelligence – in coordination with countries in the region.

To succeed, this strategy will also require a strong partnership between the Executive Branch and Congress. The President has made it a priority to consult with Congressional leadership on the ISIL challenge, as have Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry, and many senior members of the administration. I have appreciated the opportunities I've had to discuss the President's strategy with members of this committee and other members of the Senate and the House over the last couple of weeks. We will continue to consult closely with Congress as this campaign moves forward.

The ISIL Threat to the United States

ISIL poses a real threat to all countries in the Middle East, our European allies, and to America.

In the last few months, the world has seen ISIL's barbarity up close as its fighters advanced across western and northern Iraq and slaughtered thousands of innocent civilians – including Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish Iraqis, and religious minorities. ISIL's murder of two U.S. journalists outraged the American people and exposed the depravity of ISIL's ideology and tactics to the world. Over the weekend, we saw ISIL's murder of a British citizen. ISIL now controls a vast swath of eastern Syria and western and northern Iraq, including towns and cities in these areas.

ISIL has gained strength by exploiting the civil war in Syria and sectarian strife in Iraq. As it has seized territory across both countries and acquired significant resources and advanced weapons, ISIL has employed a violent combination of terrorist, insurgent, and conventional military tactics.

ISIL has also been very adept at deploying technology and social media to increase its global profile and attract tens of thousands of fighters. Its goal is to become the new vanguard of the global extremist movement and establish an extremist Islamic Caliphate across the Middle East. It considers itself the rightful inheritor of Osama bin Laden's legacy.

While ISIL clearly poses an immediate threat to American citizens in Iraq and our interests in the Middle East, we also know that thousands of foreign fighters – including Europeans and more than 100 Americans – have traveled to Syria. With passports that give them relative freedom of movement, these fighters can exploit ISIL's safe haven to plan, coordinate, and carry out attacks against the United States and Europe.

Although the intelligence community has not yet detected specific plotting against the U.S. homeland, ISIL has global aspirations and, as President Obama has made clear, ISIL's leaders have threatened America and our allies. If left unchecked, ISIL will directly threaten our homeland and our allies.

Building a Coalition Is Key to President Obama's Strategy

In his address to the nation last week, President Obama announced that the United States will lead a broad multinational coalition to roll back the ISIL threat.

More than 40 nations have already expressed their willingness to participate in this effort, and more than 30 nations have indicated their readiness to offer military support. President Obama, Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry and I and others have been working in recent weeks to unite and expand this coalition. At the NATO Summit in Wales, Secretary Kerry and I convened a meeting of key partners in the coalition. I then went to Georgia and Turkey. The Georgians made clear that they want to help. Turkey, by virtue of its geography and its common interest in destroying ISIL, which is holding 46 Turkish diplomats hostage, will play an important role in this effort. Turkey joined our meeting in Wales and Secretary Kerry and I continue to discuss specific contributions Turkey can make.

Secretary Kerry convened a meeting in Jeddah last week with the Foreign Ministers from the six Gulf Cooperation Council nations, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon ... and all signed a communiqué to “do their share in the comprehensive fight against ISIL, including ... joining in the many aspects of a coordinated military campaign against ISIL.”

Also last week, the 22 nations of the Arab League adopted a resolution at their summit in Cairo calling for comprehensive measures to combat ISIL. And yesterday in Paris, President Hollande of France – who traveled to Iraq last weekend – hosted a conference attended by the UN Security Council permanent members, European and Arab leaders, and representatives of the EU, Arab League and United Nations. They all pledged to help Iraq in the fight against ISIL, including through military assistance.

Key allies such as the United Kingdom, France, and Australia are already contributing military support and other partners have begun to make specific offers. At next week's UN General Assembly, we expect that additional nations will begin making commitments across the spectrum of capabilities, building on the strong Chapter VII UN Security Council Resolution adopted last month calling on all member states to take measures to counter ISIL and suppress the flow of foreign fighters to ISIL. Also, next week President Obama will chair a meeting of the UN Security Council to further mobilize the international community.

As you all know, former International Security Assistance Force Commander and Acting CENTCOM Commander General John Allen, has been designated to serve as Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. President Obama is meeting with

General Allen this morning. General Allen will work in a civilian, diplomatic capacity to coordinate, build and sustain the coalition, drawing on his extensive experience in the region. He will be the administration's point man to coordinate coalition contributions and to build support within the region. He will work closely with General Austin to ensure that coalition efforts are aligned across all elements of our strategy.

Implementing President Obama's Strategy

In his address to the nation, the President outlined the four elements of this strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. Let me now describe how we are implementing this whole of government approach.

1. Broader Air Campaign

First, in close coordination with the new Iraqi government, we are broadening our air campaign to conduct systematic airstrikes against ISIL targets.

To protect Americans threatened by ISIL's advances and to prevent humanitarian catastrophe, the U.S. military has already conducted more than 160 successful airstrikes which have killed ISIL fighters, destroyed weapons and equipment, and enabled Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish forces to get back on the offensive and secure key territory and critical infrastructure – including the Mosul and Haditha Dams.

These actions have disrupted ISIL tactically, and helped buy time for the Iraqi government to begin forming an inclusive and broad-based governing coalition led by the new Prime Minister. That was one of President Obama's essential preconditions for taking further action against ISIL, because the Iraqi people must be united in their opposition against ISIL in order to defeat them. This will require a united and inclusive government. This is ultimately *their* fight.

The new, broader air campaign will include strikes against all ISIL targets and enable the Iraqi security forces – including Kurdish forces – to continue to stay on the offensive and recapture territory from ISIL and hold it.

Because ISIL operates freely across the Iraqi-Syrian border, and maintains a safe haven in Syria, our actions will not be restrained by a border in name only. As the President said last week, "if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven."

The President of the United States has the constitutional and statutory authority to use military force against ISIL in Syria as well as Iraq, and CENTCOM is refining and finalizing those plans, which General Austin will brief to the President tomorrow in Tampa. This plan includes targeted actions against ISIL safe havens in Syria – including its command and control, logistics capabilities, and infrastructure. General Dempsey and I have both reviewed and approved the CENTCOM plan.

2. Increased Support for Iraqi Security Forces & the Syrian Moderate Opposition

The second element of the strategy is to increase our support for forces fighting ISIL on the ground – the Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces, and the moderate Syrian opposition.

To support Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish forces, the President announced last week that we would deploy an additional 475 American troops to Iraq.

Part of that number includes approximately 150 advisors and support personnel to supplement forces already in Iraq conducting assessments of the Iraqi Security Forces. This assessment mission is now transitioning to an advise-and-assist mission, with more than 15

teams embedding with Iraqi Security Forces at the headquarters level to provide strategic and operational advice and assistance.

The rest of the additional 475 troops include 125 personnel to support intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions out of Erbil and 200 personnel to increase headquarters elements in both Baghdad and Erbil ... helping us better coordinate military activities across Iraq.

By the time all these forces arrive, there will be approximately 1,600 U.S. personnel in Iraq responding to the ISIL threat. But, as the President said last week, “American forces will not have a combat mission.”

Instead, these advisors are supporting Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish forces and supporting the government’s plans to stand up Iraqi National Guard units to help Sunni communities defeat ISIL.

The best counterweights to ISIL are local forces and the people of the area. As you know, in June, the President asked Congress for the necessary authority for DoD to train and equip moderate Syrian opposition forces, and \$500 million to fund this program.

We have now secured support from Saudi Arabia to host the training program for this mission, and Saudi Arabia has offered financial support as well.

The \$500 million request the President made in June for this train and equip program reflects CENTCOM’s estimate of the cost to train, equip, and resupply more than 5,000 opposition forces over one year. The package of assistance that we initially provide would consist of small arms, vehicles, and basic equipment like communications, as well as tactical and strategic training. As these forces prove their effectiveness on the battlefield, we would be prepared to provide increasingly sophisticated types of assistance to the most trusted commanders and capable forces. Because DoD does not currently have the authority to conduct a train and equip mission, the administration has asked Congress to provide the authority in the Continuing Resolution it is currently considering.

A rigorous vetting process will be critical to the success of this program. DoD will work closely with the State Department, the intelligence community, and our partners in the region to screen and vet the forces we train and equip. We will monitor them closely to ensure that weapons do not fall into the hands of radical elements of the opposition, ISIL, the Syrian regime, or other extremist groups. There will always be risk in a program like this, but we believe that risk is justified by the imperative of destroying ISIL – and the necessity of having capable partners on the ground in Syria.

As we pursue this program, the United States will continue to press for a political resolution to the Syrian conflict resulting in the end of the Assad regime. Assad has lost all legitimacy to govern, and has created the conditions that allowed ISIL and other terrorist groups to gain ground and terrorize and slaughter the Syrian population. The United States will not coordinate or cooperate with the Assad regime. We will also continue to counter Assad through diplomatic and economic pressure.

3. Preventing Homeland Attacks

The third element of the President’s strategy is an all-inclusive approach to preventing attacks from ISIL against the homelands of the United States and our allies. In concert with our international partners, the United States will draw on intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and economic tools to cut off ISIL’s funding, improve our intelligence, strengthen homeland

defense, and stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the region. The Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security have launched an initiative to partner with local communities to counter extremist recruiting, and the Department of Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence is working to disrupt ISIL's financing and expose their activities.

4. Continued Humanitarian Assistance

The final element of the President's strategy is to continue providing humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians displaced or threatened by ISIL.

Alongside the Government of Iraq, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and France, U.S. troops have already delivered lifesaving aid to thousands of threatened Iraqi civilians on Mt. Sinjar and the Iraqi town of Amirli. In total, the U.S. military conducted 32 airdrops of food and supplies, providing 818,500 pounds of aid including 45,500 gallons of water and nearly 122,000 meals ready to eat in these operations.

In addition to this assistance, last week the State Department announced an additional \$48 million in aid for civilian organizations to meet the urgent needs of Iraqis displaced by ISIL. Our total humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis is now more than \$186 million in fiscal year 2014.

The United States is also the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance for the millions of Syrians affected by the civil war. Last week, Secretary Kerry announced an additional \$500 million in humanitarian assistance. Since the start of the Syrian conflict, the United States has now committed almost \$3 billion in humanitarian assistance to those affected by the civil war.

A Long-Term Effort

All four elements of this strategy require a significant commitment of resources on the part of the United States and our coalition partners.

This will not be an easy or brief effort. We are at war with ISIL, as we are with al Qaeda. But destroying ISIL will require more than military efforts alone ... it will require political progress in the region, and effective partners on the ground in Iraq and Syria. As the Congress and the Administration work together, we know this effort will take time. The President has outlined a clear, comprehensive, and workable strategy to achieve our goals and protect our interests. Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Thank you.

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