

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER
OPENING STATEMENT ON COUNTER-ISIL
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2015**

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Committee: Thank you for inviting me to discuss with Chairman Joe Dunford, the U.S. counter-ISIL military campaign.

ISIL's attacks in Paris, like those it has perpetrated elsewhere, were barbaric...they were an assault on the civilization we defend. ISIL requires, and it will receive, a lasting defeat. The President had directed us to intensify and adapt the military campaign before the Paris attacks, and we will describe those new actions today. We continue to accelerate our efforts in the wake of Paris, and we are urging others to do the same, because those attacks further highlighted the stakes that not just the United States but the world has in this fight.

As I've discussed with you in the past, the United States' strategy requires leveraging all the components of our nation's might to destroy ISIL. Every instrument of national power – diplomatic, military, law enforcement, homeland security, economic, informational – is engaged and every national security agency is contributing to one of the strategy's nine lines of effort. We're defending the homeland, acting to defeat ISIL in its core in Syria and Iraq, and taking appropriate action wherever else in the world this evil organization metastasizes.

The Defense Department contributes to nearly all the lines of effort, but protecting the homeland is among our highest priorities. We're adapting to meet ISIL's threat, including assuring the security of Defense Department installations and personnel. And, just last week, I hosted some of the top national security and law enforcement leaders at the Pentagon to discuss efforts to cut off the flow of foreign fighters.

We at the Defense Department, of course, are also centrally responsible for the military campaign, which will be the focus of my statement to this Committee. Through our own action and those of our coalition partners, the military campaign will destroy ISIL's leadership and forces, and deprive it of resources, safe haven, and mobility – all while we seek to identify and then enable capable, motivated local forces on the ground to expel ISIL from its territory, hold and govern it, and ensure that victory sticks.

That's the right strategic approach for two principal reasons. First, it emphasizes the necessity of capable, motivated local forces – as the only force that can assure a lasting victory. Such forces are hard to find, but they do exist. And we can enable them – and we are constantly looking for effective ways to expand doing so – but we cannot substitute for them.

And, second, this strategic approach sets the conditions for a political solution to the civil war in Syria and to crippling sectarianism in Iraq, which are the only durable ways to prevent a future ISIL-like organization from re-emerging. And that's why the diplomatic work, led by Secretary Kerry and the State Department, is the first and most critical line of effort in our strategy.

We are gathering momentum on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq. And today, I will describe how the U.S. is continuing to accelerate the military campaign against ISIL, and what more we're asking of our global partners. While I cannot describe everything in this unclassified setting, I do want to take a few extra minutes this morning to give as much detail as possible about the new things we are doing to accelerate ISIL's defeat.

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We're at war. We are using the might of the finest fighting force the world has ever known. Tens of thousands of U.S. personnel are operating in the broader Middle East region, and more are on the way. We have some of our most advanced air and naval forces attacking ISIL. U.S. troops are advising and assisting ground operations in Syria and Iraq. I will describe briefly some of these efforts and how we can accelerate them.

In northern Syria, local forces, with our support, are fighting along the Ma'ra line, engaging ISIL in the last remaining pocket of access into Turkey. Meanwhile, a coalition of Syrian Arabs that we helped equip in Northeastern Syria – with statutory authorizations and funds provided by Congress – are fighting alongside Kurdish forces and have recaptured important terrain, most recently pushing ISIL out of the town of Al Hawl and at least 900 square kilometers of surrounding territory. They are now focused on moving south to isolate ISIL's nominal capital of Raqqa, with the ultimate objective of collapsing its control over the city.

This momentum on the ground in northern Syria has been enabled by increased coalition airstrikes. In early November, we deployed additional strike aircraft to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey. Those and other aircraft in the region combined with improved intelligence allowed us, in November, to significantly increase our airstrikes against ISIL, to the highest level since the start of our operations in August 2014.

To build on that momentum, we're sending – on President Obama's orders and the Chairman's and my advice – Special Operations forces personnel to Syria to support the fight against ISIL. American special operators bring a unique suite of capabilities that make them force multipliers: they will help us garner valuable ground intelligence, further enhance our air campaign, and enable local forces that can regain and then hold territory occupied by ISIL. Where we find further opportunity to leverage such capability, we will be prepared to expand it.

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Next, in the south of Syria, we are also taking advantage of opportunities to open a southern front on ISIL, by enabling fighters, trained and equipped by us and other Coalition partners, to conduct strikes inside Syria. We are also enhancing the border control and defenses of a key ally, Jordan, with additional military assets and planning assistance.

In northern Iraq, Peshmerga units, with the help of U.S. air power and advisers, have retaken the town of Sinjar, cutting the main line of communication between Raqqa and Mosul, the two largest cities under ISIL's control. To move people and supplies, ISIL now must rely on backroads, where we will locate and destroy them.

Elsewhere in Iraq, we have about 3,500 troops at six locations in Iraq in support of Iraqi Security Forces, or ISF. There, we've been providing increased lethal fire and augmenting the existing training, advising, and assisting program. And we're prepared to do more as Iraq shows capability and motivation in the counter-ISIL fight and in resolving its political divisions.

The progress in the Sunni portions of Iraq – as the campaign to recapture Ramadi shows – has been slow, much to our and Prime Minister Abadi's frustration. Despite his efforts, sectarian politics and Iranian influence have made building a multi-sectarian ISF difficult, with some notable exceptions, such as the effective U.S.-trained counter-terrorism forces. We continue to offer additional U.S. support of all kinds and urge Baghdad to enroll, train, arm, and pay Sunni Arab fighters, as well as local Sunni Arab police forces, to hold territory recaptured from ISIL.

All these efforts – from northern Syria through Iraq – have shrunk the ISIL-controlled territory in both. Importantly, we now have an opportunity to divide ISIL's presence in Iraq from that in Syria. This could be important because, while both countries are plagued by ISIL, each, as I said earlier, has different political pathologies that provide the opportunity for extremism, and they ultimately require different kinds of political progress to assure lasting victory.

Next, in full coordination with the Government of Iraq, we're deploying a specialized expeditionary targeting force to assist Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces and to put even more pressure on ISIL. These special operators will over time be able to conduct raids, free hostages, gather intelligence, and capture ISIL leaders. That creates a virtuous cycle of better intelligence, which generates more targets, more raids, and more momentum. The raids in Iraq will be done at the invitation of the Iraqi government and focused on defending its borders and building the ISF's own capacity. This force will also be in a position to conduct unilateral operations into Syria.

Next, we are also significantly expanding U.S. attacks on ISIL's infrastructure and sources of revenue, particularly its oil revenue. Over the past several weeks, because of improved intelligence and understanding of ISIL's operations, we've intensified the air campaign against ISIL's war-sustaining oil enterprise, a critical pillar of ISIL's financial infrastructure. In addition to destroying fixed facilities like wells and processing facilities, we've destroyed nearly 400 of ISIL's oil tanker trucks, reducing a major source of its daily revenues. There's more to come too.

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And we're improving our capability to eliminate ISIL's leadership, by conducting raids using the expeditionary targeting force I discussed a moment ago and targeted airstrikes. Since I last appeared before this committee in June, we have removed some key ISIL figures from the battlefield – Hajji Mutaz, ISIL's second in command; Junaid Hussein, a key external operative actively plotting against our servicemembers; Mohammed Emwazi, a.k.a "Jihadi John," an ISIL executioner; and Abu Nabil, ISIL's leader in Libya. Like previous actions, these strikes serve notice to ISIL that no target is beyond our reach.

Finally, even as we work to defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq, where its parent tumor has grown, we also recognize ISIL has metastasized elsewhere. The threat posed by ISIL, and groups like it, can span regions and our own combatant commands. That's why the Defense Department is organizing a new way to leverage infrastructure we've already established in Afghanistan, the Levant, East Africa, and Southern Europe into a unified capability to counter transnational and transregional threats like ISIL.

An example of this network in action was our recent strike on Abu Nabil, where assets from several locations converged to successfully kill this ISIL leader in Libya.

As that strike shows, there's a lot of potential here, but to do more, we need to be creative, and consider changes to how the Defense Department works and is structured. This could be an important focus of any new Goldwater-Nichols-type reforms, which I know this committee, and particularly Chairman Thornberry, is exploring. I welcome this timely review and look forward to working with you on it, as we complete our own ongoing reform initiatives in the Department.

These are just eight areas of the adaptations we've made over the past six weeks to accelerate this campaign, and we've seen momentum build. Chairman Dunford, if I can compliment him for a moment, has been a tremendous source of actionable ideas. We've also seen real ingenuity from our team at CENTCOM, and many of the other combatant commands involved in this fight. And President Obama is committed to doing what it takes...as opportunities arise, as we see what works, and as the enemy adapts...until ISIL is defeated in a lasting way.

As I just explained, we're constantly looking to do more in this fight, but the world must do the same. The international community – including our allies and partners – has to step up before another attack like Paris.

France has been galvanized by the attacks in its capital, and the French have intensified their role. Britain is debating expanded airstrikes. Italy has made important contributions in Iraq. And Germany is making additional contributions.

But we all, let me repeat that, we all must do more. Turkey must do more to control its often porous border. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states joined the air campaign in the early days, but have since been pre-occupied by the conflict in Yemen.

Meanwhile, Russia, which has publicly committed to defeating ISIL, has instead largely attacked opposition forces, not ISIL. It is time for Russia to focus on the right side of this fight.

American leadership is essential, but the more contributions we receive from other nations, the greater combat power we can achieve using our own force. Just as importantly, we also need to leverage our allies and partners' relationships and capabilities to effectively work with Syrians and Iraqis, who in the end must expel ISIL and restore effective governance.

The President, Secretary Kerry, and I have spoken to many of our counterparts. And we're encouraging them to provide additional strike and support aircraft, as well as Special Operations personnel; deeper and more effective intelligence sharing; additional train, advise,

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and assist personnel and resources; combat search and rescue capabilities; combat support and combat service support; base security forces; and additional economic aid and humanitarian assistance.

As I conclude, I want to commend this committee on last month's budget deal, which is the kind of deal I called for back in March before this committee. It was a consequential agreement for the nation's security.

Thank you.

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