

Statement for the Record
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Performing the Duties of the Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy

House Foreign Affairs Committee
United States Support to Iraq
July 23, 2014

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Administration's response to the current security situation in Iraq. My remarks today will focus on two areas:

- 1) An overview of our national security interests in Iraq; and
- 2) A review of President Obama's current policy towards Iraq.

U.S. National Security Interests

The U.S. has a vital national interest in ensuring that Iraq, or any other country, does not become a destabilized safe haven for terrorists who could threaten our homeland or U.S. interests and citizens abroad. As the President has said, ISIL's advance across Iraqi territory in recent weeks, and particularly its ability to continue to establish a safe haven in the region, poses a threat to both U.S. interests and the Middle East. In considering the ISIL threat, we don't restrict our view of the threat to specific geographic boundaries.

Current U.S. Efforts in Iraq

Despite this complex and fluid situation, we are taking a responsible, deliberate, and flexible approach to this crisis. I want to be clear that there is no exclusively military solution to the threats posed by ISIL in Iraq. However, DoD remains postured should the President decide to use military force as part of a broader strategy. Our immediate goals, as announced on June 19, are to (1) protect our people and property in Iraq; (2) gain a better understanding of how we might best train, advise, and support the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) capabilities should we decide to support the ISF going forward; and (3) expand our understanding—particularly via intelligence—of ISIL. All three are critical to any future U.S. strategy vis-à-vis Iraq. To that end we have done the following four things:

Added Forces to Protect our People:

First, we have added forces to protect U.S. personnel in Iraq. The safety of U.S. citizens and personnel in Baghdad and throughout Iraq is our highest priority. The Department of Defense is meeting all requests from the Department of State for security support to U.S. Embassy Baghdad. As described in the War Powers notifications we transmitted to Congress on June 16 and 26, DoD has sent a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST), a Crisis Response Element (CRE), and additional military assets and personnel to reinforce security at our diplomatic facilities in Baghdad and the Baghdad International Airport.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel also ordered the amphibious transport ship USS MESA VERDE into the Arabian Gulf. Its presence in the Gulf adds to that of other U.S. naval ships—including the aircraft carrier USS GEORGE HW BUSH—and provides the President additional options to protect American citizens and interests in Iraq, should he choose to use them.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)

Second, as part of this effort, we have surged intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in Iraq. At the request of the Government of Iraq, we surged ISR over Iraq after the fall of Mosul and also increased information-sharing initiatives. These ISR sorties provide us a better understanding of ISIL operations and disposition and allow us to help the ISF counter ISIL. We are now capable of around-the-clock coverage over Iraq and have been focusing our efforts on ISIL-controlled territory as well as Baghdad.

U.S. Assessment Teams and Joint Operations Centers (JOCs)

Third, we continue to assess the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). On June 19, the President announced additional measures—including the deployment of up to 300 additional U.S. military advisors to evaluate how we might best train, advise, and support the ISF. These small teams of special forces are working to evaluate the Iraqi Security Forces in and around Baghdad. They are armed for self-defense—but do not have an offensive mission.

And fourth, following the President's direction, two Joint Operation Centers (JOCs), one in Baghdad and one in Northern Iraq, have been established to help support our efforts on the ground.

The initial assessment mission is not unlike many others that DoD performs around the world. We currently maintain special operators in more than 70 countries, in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Furthermore, since the U.S. troop drawdown in December 2011, a small presence of military personnel has been located at the Embassy in Baghdad, consistent with the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement.

Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey received the draft assessment of the ISF last week from Central Command. Department leaders are undertaking a deliberate and rigorous review of the assessment, which will inform recommendations to the President. Meanwhile, additional assessment work continues with respect to the developing situation on the ground.

In closing, I want to reiterate that there is no exclusively military solution to the threats posed by ISIL. However, we do have a vital security interest in ensuring that Iraq, nor any other country, becomes a safe haven for terrorists who could threaten our homeland or U.S. interests and citizens abroad.