

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Hearing: The Growing Strategic Threat of ISIS
February 12, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing will come to order. This morning the Committee continues its focus on the growing threat of ISIS. Of course, this hearing takes on added significance as yesterday the President requested that the Congress formally back military action against this jihadist group, which has beheaded Americans and raped and sold thousands of Syrian women.

This is not a new threat to our Members. One year ago, this Committee took testimony from one of the few Administration officials then sounding the ISIS alarm. Ambassador Bret McGurk told us the group's mission is clear: "carve out a zone of governing territory from Baghdad through Syria to Lebanon."

Over the past *twelve* months – through a dozen or so hearings – we've seen the ISIS threat only *grow*. Three American hostages - including Kayla Mueller – have been killed. ISIS has beheaded two Japanese hostages and immolated a downed Jordanian pilot for the world to see. The group occupies territory the size of Great Britain, holds an estimated \$2 billion in assets, and is believed to be the most well-funded terror group in history.

ISIS has used the "virtual caliphate" to recruit foreign fighters at an "unprecedented rate." Some *20,000* foreign fighters from more than *90* countries now make up its ranks. According to intelligence estimates, this includes at least 3,400 from the West and more than 150 Americans.

Over the past year, the Committee has pressed the Obama Administration to intensify and accelerate its response. Some pieces are being put together. But too slowly. Of a sixty-member coalition, about 85 percent of all airstrikes are from U.S. fighter jets. And this air campaign isn't pummeling the enemy as it should.

All of us were glad to see Iraq Prime Minister Maliki go; but with reports of Shiite militias wreaking havoc, the jury is still out on the Abadi government's ability to field a competent and inclusive security force. The training and equipping of Iraqi forces also continues to lag, and we aren't likely see the 12 Iraqi brigades envisioned for several more months. Sunni tribal fighters are becoming more supportive of the national force, but will they be in it for the long-haul? And after 6 months of fighting, the Committee is still deeply concerned to receive reports that the Kurdish *peshmerga* are outgunned on the front-lines, underarmed and underequipped by the U.S.

Last fall, Congress voted to authorize training and equipping the Syrian opposition forces. But that's still not up and running and Assad looks more comfortable by the day. Of course, this has

left key allies in the region distraught, and questioning the Administration's strategy, as many here do.

Despite these problems, Kurdish forces on the ground and concentrated air support from coalition forces in the air helped take back Kobani. Some six thousand fighters were killed. The Kurds are fighters and deserve more and timely delivered aid.

Jordan's tragedy is galvanizing the coalition, getting Amman to step up its role in the air campaign and to commit "thousands" of troops to the border area with Iraq in a show of force. Last week, the Committee met with Retired General John Allen – the State Department's lead to counter-ISIS – and pledged our support to get Jordan the equipment it needs in this fight. The UAE has also recommitted fighter planes to Jordan. It is these Arab forces and voices that must be central in this fight.

But they need to see and feel American leadership. I'm pleased that the President has formally requested that Congress act on an authorization for use of military force against ISIS. Now he needs to make the case to the American people - and this Committee - as we work to examine this proposal in-depth.

This won't be easy. But I am comforted by the fact that Ranking Member Engel and I are united in our desire to see bipartisan backing behind a proposal that ensures that the Commander-in-Chief has the authority needed to decisively defeat this enemy. But congressional authority is of no value if the president isn't willing to act decisively.

I know turn to the Ranking Member for any opening comments he may have.