

Brig Gen Mike Fantini
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Opening Statement
March 26, 2015 0830

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, Members of the Committee, thank you for having me here today. I will briefly describe efforts we are undertaking to counter ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

As General Allen mentioned, the U.S. strategy to counter ISIL is a whole of government effort, supported by a broad international coalition. It includes multiple lines of effort across the government to counter ISIL. The Department of Defense has lead responsibility for denying ISIL safe haven and building partner capacity. This means conducting strikes against critical ISIL assets and supporting partners on the ground—principally the Iraqi Security Forces and the vetted Syrian opposition—so that they can go on the offensive against ISIL.

Denying Safe Haven

To deny ISIL safe haven, the coalition has conducted over 2,900 airstrikes against ISIL including more than 1,600 in Iraq since August 8, 2014 and over 1,200 in Syria since September 23, 2014. We have taken out ISIL's fighters and commanders, more than a thousand vehicles and tanks, over 200 oil and gas facilities, the infrastructure that funds their terror, over 20 training camps, and more than two thousand fighting positions, checkpoints, buildings, and barracks in Iraq and Syria. As a result of this effort, the coalition has arrested ISIL's momentum, degraded its ability to mass and maneuver forces, pressured or eliminated its leadership cells, and disrupted its command-and-control and supply lines. Overall, we have put ISIL on the defensive in Iraq.

Building Partner Capacity in Iraq

Countering ISIL will not be possible without local partners in the lead. To build partner capacity in Iraq, U.S. and Coalition partners are supporting the Government of Iraq in its efforts to

strengthen and reconstitute the Iraqi Security Forces by helping train, equip, and advise Iraqi Security Forces – to include Kurdish fighters. Last summer, we stood up our “advise and assist” teams to partner with local forces, and earlier this year, we began training Iraqi Security and Kurdish forces at four sites across Iraq. I was able to visit Taji recently and see firsthand the partnership that we have undertaken with the Iraqi forces. With the help of Congress, the Iraq Train and Equip Fund will enable us to train and equip twelve Iraqi brigades, to include three brigades of Kurdish forces, and nine Iraqi Army brigades, as well as Sunni tribal forces.

Syria Train and Equip

In addition to our efforts in Iraq, we working are with our coalition partners to build the capabilities of the moderate Syrian opposition—with training of the first class set to begin later this month. The goal is to train vetted Syrian recruits to defend the Syrian people; stabilize areas under opposition control; empower trainees to go on the offensive against ISIL; and promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to the end of the conflict in Syria. Our partners in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and others have offered strong support to host and quickly stand up the program. U.S. forces in the region strengthen our partners’ ability to fight terrorism locally, but it will be Iraqi forces and Syrian fighters who will secure the gains against ISIL and inflict a lasting defeat.

We look forward to working closely with you and we will continue to keep you and your colleagues informed. I look forward to your questions.