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**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:  
From Iraq and Syria to Libya and Beyond: The Evolving ISIL Threat**

February 10, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. Today we will hear from the Administration's point-man on its efforts to combat ISIS.

It's now been two years since President Obama dismissed ISIS as the JV team. Today the administration claims its goal is to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS, but it still doesn't have a strategy to get the job done. The tide has not been turned.

Instead, these "fighters on the back of pickup trucks" – as the President described them – have grown into a global force, capable of striking in Europe, Asia, Africa – and here at home. Some 50 ISIS-linked groups are on the ground in 21 countries. And it is everywhere in cyberspace, spewing its deadly messages.

Ambassador McGurk – just back from the frontlines with Syrian Kurds – will note some encouraging developments: Ramadi in Iraq was retaken in December, and after some much-needed loosening of the rules of engagement, ISIS-controlled oil installations in Syria have been finally bombed. Good. But these gains have been too slow to come and too limited. Every day that ISIS makes advances, seemingly unchecked, it draws recruits to plot new attacks abroad, including the United States.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government hasn't been able to deliver as it should. The Iraqi Kurds, long denied better arms, are desperate. Sunni forces, key to any success, don't trust Baghdad as the government has failed to include them in the government and armed forces in a meaningful way. And across the region, the U.S. is perceived as only willing to back non-Sunnis. This only empowers ISIS.

Militarily, the size of the recently announced Special Operations force to target ISIS leadership is a fraction of what past efforts have entailed. And our airstrikes are still only averaging 23 a day – a fraction of what a serious air campaign looks like.

In the failed state of Libya – where militants don't face a threat from the air – ISIS has doubled in size. These 6,000 fighters are close to Europe and have their sights on Libya's oil, a tactic that made it the world's richest terror group. Despite years of warnings about Libya's course, the Administration's response has been feeble.

In Afghanistan too, ISIS is spreading. But only recently has the President lifted the rules of engagement that were preventing our troops from targeting this deadly group. Last week, U.S. airstrikes finally destroyed an ISIS “Voice of the Caliphate” radio station.

What took so long? ISIS propaganda operations are in overdrive, getting better every day. Yet our government’s effort to counter-message – led by the Broadcasting Board of Governors – remains in disarray.

And when it comes to Syria, tragically, the U.S. response has been downright shameful. The slaughter goes on. Train and equip failed. In December, the U.S. joined Russia to pass a U.N. Security Council Resolution that required humanitarian aid and the end of civilian bombing as part of its plan for “peace talks.” But rather than stand firm and put pressure on Russia to abide by this resolution, Secretary Kerry pushed the opposition to the negotiating table, even as the Russian and Assad regime bombing intensified. The result: predictable failure.

As Syria has imploded the over years, rather than tackle the problem, the Obama Administration has sat on its hands – paralyzed by a series of “what ifs.” Today Assad and Russian forces have Aleppo under siege. They are relentlessly bombing U.S. backed-Sunni opposition that is critical to the fight against ISIS.

Just yesterday, Lt. Gen. Stewart, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, warned that ISIS “will attempt attacks on the U.S. homeland in 2016.” If we are going to truly defeat ISIS, and we must, the half-measures and the indecisiveness must stop.

I now yield to the Ranking Member for any opening comments he may have.