

**Testimony**

**United States House of Representatives**

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

**By**

**General John M. Keane, USA (Ret)**

**on**

**Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Towards Iraq and Syria**

**1100 hours, 30 April 2015**

**Rayburn House Office Building**

**Room 2172**

Thank you Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee for inviting me back to testify today on the “Regional Impact of US Policy towards Iraq and Syria.” Am honored to be with such a distinguished panel. Attached to my written testimony are 3 maps prepared by ISW for your reference.

It is indisputable in my judgment, that U.S. policy failures in Iraq and Syria:

- enabled Iranian expansion in the Middle East.

- enabled ISIS to reemerge, establish a sanctuary in Syria and expand into Iraq, Egyptian Sinai, North Africa and South Asia, while conducting daily acts of barbarism against humanity and civilization.

- enabled the Al Qaeda (AQ) to expand significantly in Syria to include the Khorasan Group which is committed to out of region attacks against the US and Europe , while also expanding in North and North East Africa.

- enabled Assad and his regime to very methodically kill over 220K of his own population while forcing the displacement of over 7M

people from their homes, a humanitarian catastrophe, as the Syrian nation is systematically destroyed.

While I certainly understand there are other underlying factors contributing to the political, social and chaotic upheaval in the region such as historical sectarianism, repressive regimes, political incompetence, lack of moral courage, political and social injustice and the lack of economic opportunity. One cannot simply blame these “larger forces operating in the region” and absolve the US of specific policy decisions that has unintended adverse consequences. The facts are:

#### 1. IRAQ:

By 2009 the Sunni insurgency supported by AQ and the Iranian backed Shia militias and others were defeated. This is the only time since the beginning of the Iranian regime in 1980 that an Iranian proxy was defeated. However beginning in 2009, the US begins to pull away from Iraq politically, Maliki knows he has a different relationship with the new administration and despite the Iranian defeat the previous year, Iran begins to regain influence. In 2010 Maliki loses the election by one vote but instead of helping his preferred opponent, Allawi, to form a new government, the US inexplicably

backs Maliki. In 2011 the US pulls all troops out leaving Iraq with no effective CT capability and no comprehensive intelligence. AQI reemerges as ISIS.

## 2. SYRIA:

The Arab Spring reaches Syria in 2011, Assad has a very violent response, many military leaders and troops depart the regime forces and join the opposition. Despite Assad's obvious military advantage, the opposition attacks the regime in multiple locations, simultaneously, and many predict the regime will fall, as the opposition force seeks additional ammunition and more sophisticated weapons to fight the regime. While the President calls for Assad to go, he, surprisingly, refuses the opposition force request. Iran, recognizing the Assad regime's problems, begins daily flights of supplies and ammunition plus the commitment of Quds force advisors to include Qassem Soleimani. Furthermore, Iran deploys its proxies: 5K Hezbollah from Lebanon and, at its peak, 20K Iraqi Shia militia. Aided also by the Russians, the momentum shifts to Assad's favor. Systematic killing of the Syrian people begins, the AQ recognizes the opportunity of this political and social

upheaval and moves in and ISIS in 2012 deploys from Iraq to North Eastern Syria to establish a sanctuary.

Many, who recognize the danger of a regional spillover war, desire the moderate opposition to be armed and trained robustly and, quickly.

Secretaries Clinton and Panetta, General Dempsey and Director, CIA, Petraeus make a similar recommendation in the summer of 2012, the President refuses. The killing continues, Assad in 2013 uses CW and crosses the US “redline” but still the US president does not act. American power and credibility reaches all time lows in the region.

### 3. ISIS:

After expanding territory and governance considerably in Syria, ISIS invades Iraq in January 2014. The Maliki government requests assistance. The President refuses. Iran begins immediate assistance, similar to Syria: Quds force advisors, Qassem Soleimani, daily flights of supplies and ammunition. In June 2014, Mosul falls and the Maliki government again requests emergency air power. The President refuses. Not until August, some 8 months after the ISIS invasion does the US respond and the evidence suggests the beheading of Americans by ISIS and the dramatic and sudden

shift in American public opinion are a catalyst for the change in policy. Despite ISIS recent setbacks in Iraq as you can see on the ISIS sanctuary map, it still holds considerable territory and influence in Iraq and remains on offense today, while it has expanded its territorial control and influence in Syria. Moreover it is expanding its influence in what it calls the “near abroad” as you can see on the global rings map. Its affiliates or Wilayats are expanding as ISIS is rapidly becoming the new face of radical Islam and competing with AQ for control and influence.

#### US STRATEGY:

In Iraq we are taking less than half measures to assist the ISF with insufficient trainers and advisors, no forward air controllers, insufficient plans to train the Sunni tribes, insufficient arms to the Kurds and Sunnis, and no direct action SOF to hunt down and kill ISIS leaders. In Syria there are no plans to defeat ISIS. To do so requires an effective ground force supported by air power. There is none. US policy is to train 5K new recruits for the FSA which is fighting the regime, not ISIS and, indeed, ISIS recruits on average one thousand new fighters a month. Does this policy make any sense? The US policy to defeat ISIS: to form a politically inclusive government in Iraq,

to conduct CT, to provide humanitarian assistance, to counter the financing, to undermine the ideology and to train and assist local forces, while meaningful with some moderate success is fundamentally inadequate to defeat ISIS.

Since 2009 Iran has gained significant influence in Iraq. Syria is now Iran's client state, having saved the Syrian regime, and Iran is seeking to consolidate political and military power through the Houthis in Yemen, which, if successful, will shift the balance of power in the region as it gains control of the strategic pathway to and from the Suez Canal. The US has no strategy to stop the regional hegemonic aspirations of the Iranian regime. On the contrary the US is desperately and naively moving to accommodate Iran on a nuclear deal hoping that Iran's aggressive behavior will change as it supposedly joins the community of nations.

#### CONCLUSION:

The appalling lack of a comprehensive and coherent strategy to defeat radical Islam, 22 years after the first attack on the WTC, 17 years after the two embassy bombings in Africa, 14 years after the USS Cole attack and almost 14 years after 9/11 is a generational policy failure that transcends

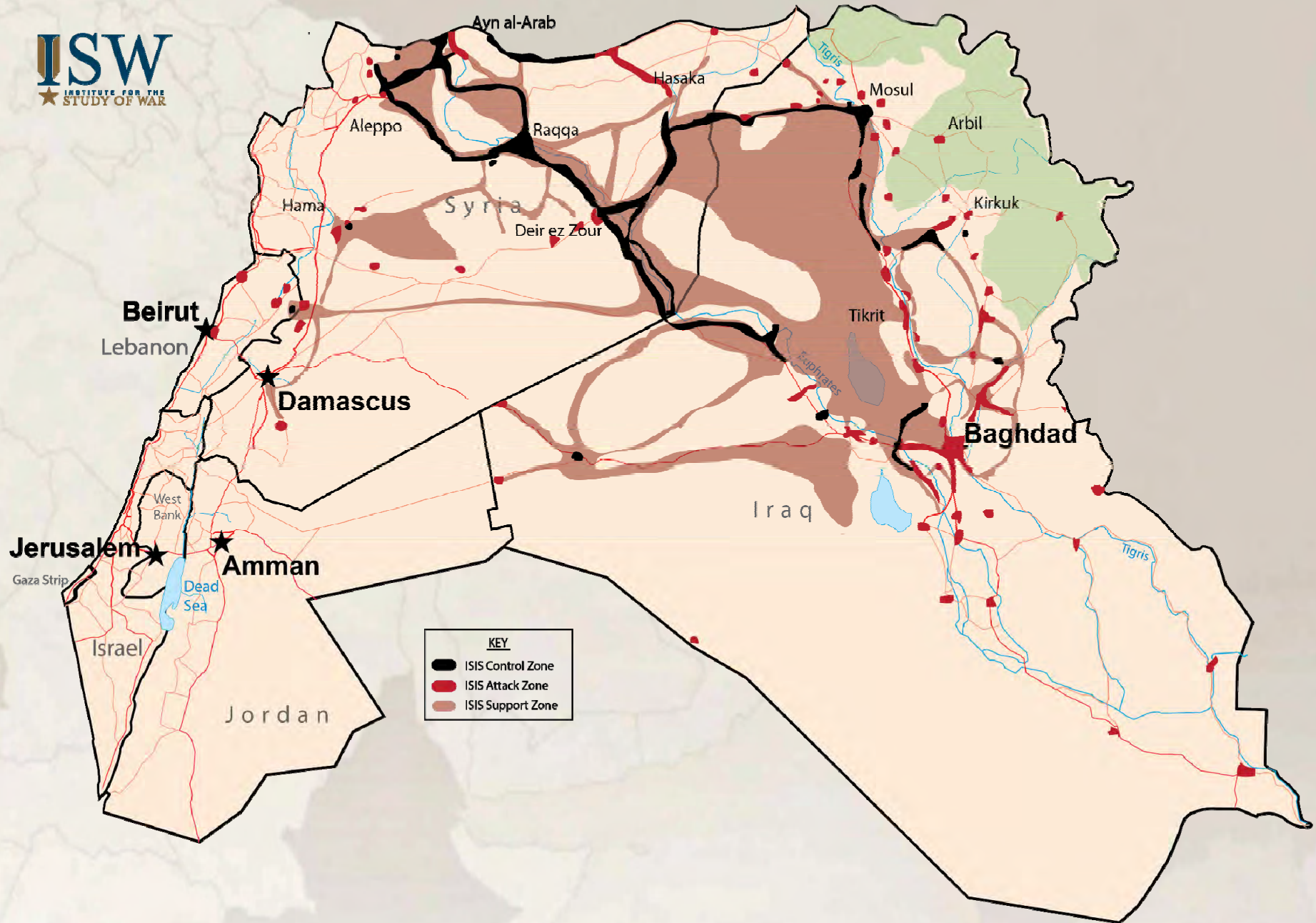
republican and democratic administrations. To date, we don't define radical Islam, we don't explain it, we don't try to understand its appeal, we don't counter and undermine the ideology which is grounded in a religious belief system. When I say we, I don't mean just the US, far from it. This is not just a regional problem, it is becoming a global problem and the countries who have a vested interest in stopping and defeating radical Islam should join together in an alliance to determine what a comprehensive strategy should be and how to enlist the Muslim religious leaders to undermine a religious ideology. Such an alliance would share intelligence, technology, equipment and training, similar to NATO and SEATO which successfully opposed a communist ideology.

The balance of power in the Middle East is shifting against the US regional interests and against US security. As stated, American power is considered weak and our credibility is at an all time low. There are no simple answers or solutions but without strong US leadership, our adversaries will continue to be emboldened, our friends out of fear are susceptible to poor decisions, while the Middle East region and the world becomes a more dangerous place.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.



# ISIS Sanctuary: April 2015



# ISIS's Global Rings: April 2015





# Control in Syria: April 2015

