

Statement for the Record

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House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:

Countering ISIL: Are We Making Progress?

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, it is an honor to appear again before this Committee to discuss the global campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This Committee was a leading voice in drawing attention to the growing menace of ISIL over a year ago, and I want to thank you up front for the support that you have provided to enable us to work with local partners in Iraq and Syria to begin pushing ISIL back.

My testimony today will focus first on Iraq with a brief overview of what has transpired since the city of Mosul fell to ISIL exactly six months ago. I will then discuss the current situation in Iraq, including both the promise and the inevitable challenges facing its new and inclusive federal government, as well as our ongoing efforts to create the conditions to combat ISIL in Syria and foster the conditions for a political transition process to move forward.

I will also explain key elements of our integrated campaign to defeat ISIL, now anchored by a 60-member global coalition. This global coalition was formalized for the first time last week in Brussels, with all members endorsing a common framework for organizing our efforts going forward.

I. Background: Last 180 Days in Iraq

On June 10, exactly six months ago today, the city of Mosul, with a population of 1.5 million people, fell to ISIL terrorists. I was in northern Iraq at the time, and have previously testified before this Committee regarding the events that led to Mosul's fall, and what soon followed.

This was an intense period of uncertainty and panic. Within 72 hours, ISIL formations poured from Mosul south through the Tigris Valley. Multiple cities fell. Entire divisions of the Iraqi Army disintegrated. Outside Tikrit, ISIL terrorists captured nearly 1,000 Iraqi Air Force recruits, led them to

their deaths, and put the slaughter on YouTube. Nearby, ISIL surrounded the Baiji refinery – beginning a siege that would last five months.

To the west, a lesser noted, but equally devastating offensive took place across the Syrian border. ISIL captured the strategic border city of al Qaim after a multi-pronged assault combining artillery strikes and maneuver forces. They then poured down the Euphrates valley, threatening the eastern approaches to Baghdad and its international airport.

In Baghdad itself, there was a growing dread among the population, Iraqi security services, and the diplomatic community. On June 13, ISIL’s spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani vowed: “The battle would soon rage in Baghdad and [the holy city] of Karbala.” Rumors began of an imminent “zero hour” in Baghdad to mark a multi-pronged ISIL assault on the capital. Our intelligence could neither confirm nor deny the reports.

Adnani next called on all ISIL fighters to “put on your [suicide] belts and get ready.” To ensure the safety of U.S. personnel, we relocated 1,500 civilians from our embassy in Baghdad to safer locations, mostly outside of Iraq. The situation during these critical days threatened a spiral towards wholesale state collapse. We were determined not to let that happen, however. Our consistent message to the Iraqis was to hold firm – and prepare to fight.

President Obama during this period ordered four initiatives to improve our own picture and help the Iraqis prepare a potential counter-offensive:

First: We surged intelligence assets over Iraq, from one intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) sortie per month to 60 per day. The aim was to gain a more granular picture of the ISIL network, which would be essential to any future operations.

Second: We established joint operations centers in Baghdad and in Erbil, restoring critical relationships with Iraqi central government and Kurdish commanders, and gaining an understanding of their capabilities and needs.

Third: We deployed Special Forces teams to assess Iraqi Security formations, with a focus on Baghdad’s defenses, ensuring that those defenses could hold, and that our personnel would be protected.

Fourth: We focused on helping the Iraqis maintain their political process following national elections to stand up a new government.

For the next several weeks, we worked these tracks in parallel, studying ISIL's leadership networks, movements, and patterns; restoring ties to key Iraqi security commanders; learning more about Iraqi Security Force deficiencies; and helping to keep the Iraqi political process on track.

For these reasons, on August 8th, when President Obama ordered air strikes against ISIL targets, our military forces were able to strike with precision and efficacy, due to sound intelligence and strong cooperation with Iraqi security counterparts on the ground. It was one month after these air strikes began that Iraq inaugurated a new – and very different – government.

Looking back, it is clear that the rapid decisions made during a period of deep fog and friction helped set a new foundation for stability in Iraq – and a new platform to begin taking the fight to ISIL. Central to this process was the new Iraqi government, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

II. New Iraqi Government

Iraq's new government reflects the full diversity of Iraq, with Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish leaders sharing power through an equitable distribution of cabinet posts and portfolios. The government is also committed to an inclusive national program, as enacted unanimously by the 328-member Iraqi parliament. The national program encompasses key elements of "functioning federalism," which is a driving principle for our policy.

A functioning federalism envisions an Iraq with important powers delegated to provinces, empowering local leaders to protect their communities as an integral part of Iraq's constitutional structure. The national program encompasses this principle, outlining plans for the Government of Iraq to distribute greater governing authority to regions and provinces.

Two central pillars of this concept include 1) security reform – with a smaller national army and more security responsibilities delegated to the provinces; and 2) equitable revenue sharing – with local institutions resourced to provide for their communities, and deny space to extremists.

Security Reform. The new Iraqi government has committed to building a smaller national army, consisting of eight divisions, and focused primarily on national sovereign functions. Army units will be based outside cities, with a mission to protect borders, preserve the sovereignty of the state, and be prepared to respond as overwatch units when local forces need support.

Primary day-to-day security responsibility will be handled by local police and provincial-based national guards. In the Kurdish region, primary security will be handled by Kurdish forces, but with funding derived from national resources, and as a part of the constitutional structure.

We believe that this security architecture – based squarely on the model outlined in the Iraqi constitution and endorsed by the new Iraqi government – is sustainable because it responds to realities on the ground, carries broad support within Iraq, and is designed over time to deny space for any armed group to operate outside a legal framework, including ISIL.

It will take time, however, to bring this program to fruition, and a number of intermediate steps must take place along the way. That is why the new government, with our support, is working to train and equip thousands of tribal fighters in Anbar province, even before there is formal legislation to introduce the National Guard concept. These fighters will join Iraqi forces to clear their areas from ISIL, and may ultimately become the backbone of local police and National Guard forces in the province.

We have also been encouraged by Prime Minister Abadi’s reform of the overly centralized security structures that had existed under the previous government. He has abolished the “Office of the Commander in Chief,” which centralized security control inside the Prime Minister’s office; in addition, he has named a new Minister of Defense – a Sunni Arab from Mosul – and replaced nearly five dozen senior officers with new leaders who are now working to build trust with communities they serve.

Revenue Sharing. The other pillar of a functioning federalism is revenue sharing and ensuring resources are allocated equitably to empower locally based institutions to deliver services and meet local needs. Security remains a precondition to effective resource allocation, but as soon as security is restored in areas ISIL now controls, local actors must be empowered and resourced to begin rebuilding as rapidly as possible.

Iraq took a major step forward in this regard last week, when the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, reached an interim accord on hydrocarbon exports and revenue sharing.

Under this arrangement, the KRG will export a total of 550,000 barrels of oil per day through the federal Iraqi system for the first time since 2012. The Government of Iraq, in turn, will resume its monthly transfers of 17% of the Iraqi budget to the KRG, and also allocate funds specifically to support the Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

This deal is important for Iraq's political and economic stability and a testament to the potential of this new Iraqi Government. The terms of the deal are not new, but it took new leadership – and cooperation between a new Finance Minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, Oil Minister, Adel Abd al-Mahdi, and senior KRG officials, particularly Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani – to finalize its terms, with the full support of Prime Minister Abadi.

These two pillars of functioning federalism – security reform and revenue sharing – must move in parallel with broader items on Iraq's national program, including criminal justice reforms and ending the system of “de-Baathification.” Importantly, this is not an agenda imposed by the United States or anyone else upon Iraq – it was developed by and for Iraqis.

As Prime Minister Abadi said last week in Brussels, speaking before foreign ministers from nearly 60 countries around the world:

“We are grateful for the support of the United States and every other member of the coalition. But we know that, on the ground, this is first and foremost our fight. And we understand that, in Iraq, while military action is necessary to defeat DAESH, we also need governmental reform, national reconciliation, and economic and social reconstruction. Our newly-elected government is undertaking all these tasks – all at once. And our efforts are already beginning to show results.”

There are signs of his matching these words to actions. Last week, on the same day the oil accord was announced, the Prime Minister issued an executive order to reform the process of handling detainees – mandating that anyone held without charge be released, and compiling a central database to ensure full tracking and accountability for anyone detained by the state.

Further to these reforms, the Iraqi government is working within its limited capacity to protect vulnerable communities under threat from ISIL. This is

an enormous undertaking, given that more than two million Iraqis have been internally displaced since January. In early November, the GOI, in coordination with the KRG, provided over 110 tons of humanitarian supplies to members of the Yezidi minority who continue to reside on Mount Sinjar. The GOI is also working with the KRG to help ensure that Christians and other minority groups have the capacity to protect their communities once ISIL is expelled from these ancient homelands.

Finally, the new government has embraced a policy of engagement with the region after years of strained relations between Baghdad, Arab capitals, and Ankara. Iraq's new Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Ja'afari, traveled to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, and Turkey shortly after inauguration of the Abadi government. Foreign Ministers of the UAE and Kuwait have made official visits to Baghdad, and Abadi plans to visit Abu Dhabi and Kuwait City over the coming weeks. Relations with Jordan are particularly strong after Prime Minister Abadi visited King Abdullah in October, and both capitals are now discussing expanding economic and security cooperation.

Relations with Turkey and Saudi Arabia had been particularly strained during the Maliki era. Today, they are improving. Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu visited Baghdad and Erbil on November 20 in a breakthrough visit. I was in Istanbul with Vice President Biden the next day, and we heard from Davutoglu about Turkey's positive view of the new Iraqi government and plans to provide security assistance to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces. He also informed us that Turkey and Iraq will now reestablish joint high-level committees to address mutual interests. The United States, Turkey, and Iraq are now working in close coordination to strengthen these ties.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, in July it provided \$500 million – the largest contribution to the UN for the crisis – to assist internally displaced Iraqis. Last month, Iraq's President, Fuad Massum, led a broad delegation to Riyadh, and Saudi Arabia said it would reopen its embassy in Baghdad for the first time since 1990. Prime Minister Abadi met last week with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal to follow up on these discussions. This past Sunday in Bahrain, I discussed the issue with Iraqi Foreign Minister Ja'afari, who said a site has now been identified for a future Saudi embassy, and both sides were working to facilitate the process.

While these are all promising signs, this new government faces some of the greatest challenges of any government on earth. ISIL retains thousands of fighters on Iraqi soil and controls nearly one-quarter of its territory, including two major cities. The IMF has also predicted that the Iraqi economy, which had been growing steadily at 4 percent per-year, is now contracting, due primarily to the falling price of oil.

The economic shock from falling oil prices will impact on our planning. The Government of Iraq is almost entirely dependent on oil revenues, and susceptible to the volatility of oil prices. This drop in revenue from prices falling by nearly \$30 per barrel, combined with increases in security and humanitarian expenses, has critically impacted Iraq's economic health and the new Iraqi government's capacity to manage the multiple crises it confronts.

For this and many other reasons, this new government simply cannot defeat ISIL and stabilize Iraq on its own; it needs the support of the United States, and we need the support of our partners from around the world.

III. The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL

At root, ISIL is not an Iraq or Syria problem; ISIL is a global problem – and a direct threat to U.S. interests. That is why President Obama and Secretary Kerry have focused on building an international coalition to support a comprehensive strategy to degrade and defeat ISIL. These efforts began on September 4 at the NATO Summit in Wales, expanded to GCC partners on September 10 in Jeddah, and expanded further through multiple ISIL-related events during the UN General Assembly in New York, including a special meeting of the UN Security Council chaired by Secretary Kerry.

On September 13, President Obama appointed John Allen and me to serve as his special envoys to help formalize this coalition. It is an honor to serve in this role, and alongside General Allen, who brings unparalleled experience to this most critical mission. Since our appointment, we have traveled to 16 capitals, many multiple times, engaged the 28 allies of NATO, the 28 EU members, the Arab League, and other international organizations.

All of these efforts culminated last week in Brussels, Belgium, where Secretary Kerry chaired a historic conference to formalize an anti-ISIL

coalition of more than 60 partners from around the world. At the end of this conference, all members unanimously endorsed a detailed joint statement to guide and coordinate our global efforts going forward, including commitment to five lines of effort designed to degrade and defeat ISIL.

The five lines of effort include:

1. Supporting military operations, capacity building, and training;
2. Disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters;
3. Cutting off ISIL's access to financing and funding;
4. Addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises;
5. Exposing ISIL's true nature (ideological delegitimization).

Going forward, we will measure our success as a coalition and progress in our campaign to defeat ISIL across each of these lines of effort. Thus far, while it remains early in this long-term campaign, there is progress across each line of effort and a clear program for the coming months.¹

1. Military Support from Partners. The military campaign against ISIL is centered on degrading ISIL from the air and defeating ISIL by working with ground forces to clear and hold territory. Over the skies of Iraq, there are now seven countries flying combat missions with U.S. forces – France, the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and Denmark. This air coalition has conducted more than 600 precision airstrikes, helped Iraqi central government and Kurdish forces hold and take back key terrain, and degraded ISIL's ability to mass and maneuver – which had been central to its operations. We have also killed a number of its top leaders, and those who are still alive can no longer communicate with ISIL formations and combat units.

Thus far, Iraqi security operations have helped restore strategic sites like the Mosul Dam and Baiji Refinery to state control, held off ISIL offensives in Anbar province, strengthened the defensive corridor around Baghdad, and secured major roadways and supply routes. There is hard fighting ahead, and ISIL is able to respond at times with localized offensives and

¹ While the global coalition is organized around these five lines of effort, the U.S. strategy and allocation of U.S. resources are allocated along nine lines of effort, many of which – such as “protecting the homeland” do not have a coalition corollary.

atrocities – including, last month, attacks against innocent men, women, and children of the Albu Nimr tribe in Anbar province. The main ISIL offensive, however, has been halted – and is now being rolled back.²

We are now planning the next phase of the Iraq campaign. U.S. military training and advising personnel are deployed to engage directly with Iraqi security commanders and tribal leaders to organize a counteroffensive. We are also working with a number of coalition partners to establish several sites across Iraq to train 12 new Iraqi brigades (nine Iraqi Army and three Kurdish Peshmerga). These sites will be located in northern, western, and southern Iraq – and the forces they generate will be designed to help Iraq restore and retain sovereign control over its territory.³

Iraq must also focus urgently on pushing resources to areas recovered from ISIL, and it has asked for coalition support to help do this. Such support will be essential given Iraq’s macro-economic situation and lack of excess funds to move resources quickly and efficiently. During the Brussels meeting last week, Prime Minister Abadi specifically requested the creation of an international reconstruction fund “to encourage the residents to return to their homes, to create jobs, and to tackle some of the causes of the rise of Daesh.” Secretary Kerry has endorsed this project, and we are in discussions now with coalition partners to begin its development.

In Syria, U.S. and partner nation forces have conducted more than 500 airstrikes against ISIL targets. We are conducting these operations in Syria at the specific request of the new Iraqi government and with the specific aim to degrade ISIL’s war fighting capacities (manpower, leadership, command and control, armored vehicles, and safe havens). We are also looking for ways to fuse these operations in a manner that strengthens

² We remain concerned by reports of unregulated militia activity in various parts of Iraq. These militias are a vestige of the crisis over the summer, and the new Iraqi government is working to rein in their excesses and ultimately bring all armed groups under the clear auspices of the Iraqi state. Prime Minister Abadi made the following pledge last week in Brussels, which we fully support: “We affirm our constitutional commitment not to allow any armed group or militia to work outside or in parallel to the Iraqi Security Forces. No arms would be permitted outside the control of the Iraqi Government.”

³ Last month, nearly 200 military planners from 33 countries met at CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa to discuss and refine the next phase of this campaign.

moderate opposition forces and allows them to hold territory. The Asad regime has shown that it cannot or will not confront terrorist groups effectively. The regime's own actions have fueled the rise of ISIL and other extremist groups in the region.

Our air coalition over Syria includes valuable contributions from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Jordan, and Qatar. (Note: Coalition partners have conducted nearly ten percent of all the air strikes conducted in Syria and Iraq.) The most intensive operations in Syria have occurred near the town of Kobani, where local Syrian fighters, both Arabs and Kurds – with the assistance of Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga – have heroically resisted a large-scale ISIL assault. As of today, that assault has failed, and has resulted in nearly 1,000 ISIL fighters killed, including many leaders.

The ongoing defense of Kobani demonstrates in Syria what we have seen over the past 100 days at multiple locations across Iraq: every time we can combine a local ground force, with sound intelligence, and the ability to coordinate air strikes – ISIL has been defeated.

This trend-line has potential to continue over the coming months in Iraq now that it has a new government and local forces with legitimacy and capacity to fight ISIL in coordinated defensive and offensive operations. The situation in Syria, however, is more challenging. While the moderate Syrian opposition is a willing partner in the fight against ISIL, at present it faces deficiencies in terms of equipment, capacity, organization, and command and control – all of which are necessary conditions to the type of sustained maneuver operations we are beginning to see in Iraq.

The Department of Defense is working with several coalition partners on a train and equip program that seeks to enhance the capabilities of moderate Syrian opposition fighters. In Brussels last week, key coalition partners agreed to significantly boost assistance to these moderate Syrian forces, which, as the final joint statement noted: “are fighting on multiple fronts against ISIL/Daesh, Al Nusra Front, and the Syrian regime.”

Accordingly, while the primary thrust of our campaign over the coming months will be in Iraq, we will work in parallel – subject to the authorities and resources as provided by Congress – to begin training these moderate opposition forces at multiple sites in the region, including in Turkey. We are strengthening the moderate opposition both to act as a counterweight to

ISIL and also to advance the prospects for a negotiated political transition in Damascus. Our goal remains helping the Syrian people reach a political transition, and that means a future without Asad or ISIL. As the President stated in his Address to the Nation on September 10:

“In the fight against ISIL, we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people – a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost. Instead, we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria’s crisis once and for all.”

2. Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters

Foreign fighters are the lifeblood of ISIL. They represent nearly all of its suicide bombers, its most hardened operatives (many with combat experience on other fronts such as the Caucasus), and are responsible for many of the mass atrocities witnessed across Syria and Iraq, including the beheadings of American citizens. They also represent an acute threat to the entire world, as a would-be suicide bomber will be directed to where he is told to go – whether a mosque in Baghdad or a subway in Madrid.

For these reasons, we are taking a global approach to combat this problem, and working with partners to shut down the networks beginning in source countries, share information on passenger records, track foreign fighters traveling to and from Syria, and boost the screening and border security capabilities of transit states such as Turkey, which has increased its efforts on this front. All member states of the United Nations now have a clear obligation to cooperate in this endeavor.

In September, President Obama presided over a historic meeting of the UN Security Council to oversee the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2178, which carried over 100 sponsors. This legally binding resolution requires all countries to “prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting, or equipping” of foreign fighters. It further calls on all member states to ensure their domestic laws allow for the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters and those who knowingly facilitate them.

Several countries have already enacted or proposed new legislation to criminalize traveling to a foreign country to participate in terrorist actions; other countries have stepped up their enforcement of existing laws. Last week, I was in Berlin with General Allen as a German court for the first time sentenced an individual who had traveled to Syria to fight with ISIL to three years in prison. Other coalition partners, including Australia and the UK, have brought similar prosecutions, which we fully support.

Other nations which have previously adopted new legislation to address the foreign fighter threat include Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia. Saudi Arabia has now issued formal decrees criminalizing ISIL and broken up ISIL cells with links to Syria. Recent arrests in Austria, Malaysia, and Kosovo also targeted foreign fighter facilitation networks. We are working with other partners in Asia and around the world to enhance legislation to close the net further.

In North Africa, Morocco is taking the lead to shine the spotlight on the threat of foreign fighters, hosting a conference next week to inaugurate the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) working group on the subject, which will focus on implementation of the “Good Practices” document, agreed in September at a GCTF meeting chaired by Secretary Kerry and Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu.

These efforts are only the start of what must be a long-term commitment to countering violent extremism and halting recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. As recent events in Ottawa have shown, the threat of terrorists radicalized at home remains acute, and the most dangerous of all are likely those who make it to Syria and then return – after honing combat skills and committing what the UN has documented as crimes against humanity.⁴

3. Stopping ISIL’s financing and funding

ISIL derives income from a range of sources, such as oil smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, illegal taxation, antiquities smuggling, and foreign donations. Together with coalition partners we are taking a

⁴ See Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria, November 14, 2014 (http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC_CRP_ISIS_14Nov2014.pdf).

holistic approach to combating ISIL's ability to generate revenues and sustain itself, including with direct military action whenever needed. Since September 23, coalition airstrikes targeted ISIL's energy infrastructure – modular refineries, petroleum storage tanks, and crude oil collection points – more than 30 times. The airstrikes have been effective and, thus far, have significantly degraded ISIL's refining capacity.

On the diplomatic front, our partners in Turkey, Iraq (including through the Kurdistan Region), and Jordan are now working to strengthen their border security and law enforcement mechanisms to prevent the flow of illicit oil refined fuel products and other smuggled goods out of and into ISIL-controlled territory.

Additionally we are using our sanctions tools to ensure that banks, companies, and citizens across the world do not engage in financial transactions with ISIL. We are working with partner nations to actively implement UN sanctions, including the UN Security Council 1267/1989 Al Qaeda Sanctions regime, which obligates all States to freeze assets, ban travel, and embargo arms from Al Qaeda-associated individuals and entities. Each of our 60 coalition partners reaffirmed their commitment to these efforts in our joint statement at last week's Ministerial in Brussels.

Precise outcomes of these efforts can be difficult to quantify, and while ISIL retains vast financial resources, there are growing signs that our efforts to combat its financing has begun to restrict its operations, including reports from Mosul that fighters are not getting paid or receiving far less than what ISIL leadership had promised. We will be working aggressively over the coming months to ensure that this trend continues.

4. Addressing humanitarian crises

With the onset of winter, the humanitarian emergency stemming from ISIL is becoming even more critical. There are now more than 2 million confirmed internally displaced persons, of which 600,000 were identified as needing critical shelter and relief items such as blankets and clothing, and half of them need urgent assistance to prepare for colder weather. Over six million Syrians require food assistance, and agencies could be forced to reduce refugee daily rations if donors do not continue to contribute generously.

These issues were front-and-center during the Brussels conference last week, where participants heard directly from UN Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov. He made a specific appeal to help fund UN organizations operating in Iraq to serve millions of people in need. More than three billion dollars of the UN's appeals for Syrians remain unfunded in 2014 and over \$1.5 billion for the 2014-15 response in Iraq. Coalition partners agreed to provide further assistance, and we are now following up in capitals for contributions.

The United States provided over \$208 million for the humanitarian response in Iraq in Fiscal Year 14, and over \$3 billion for Syria in support of the UN-led humanitarian response since the start of the conflict in 2011. Through the UN, we are working to coordinate assistance to vulnerable populations in Iraq, Syria, and the region. The crisis, however, remains beyond the reach of any one nation or international organization to manage – and it will require a massive global response over a period of years to manage effectively.

5. Exposing ISIL's true nature

Defeating ISIL ultimately requires not simply defeats on the battlefield, but also an ideological defeat: burying its false appeals to religious legitimacy and glory through rapid response messaging to expose its true nature as a barbaric and criminal enterprise devoted to mass murder of innocents. The leadership along this line of effort is being taken in the greater Middle East region where religious scholars and clerics are increasingly speaking out to directly counter ISIL's claims and doctrine.

In September, 120 Muslim scholars and leaders dismissed point-by-point speeches made by ISIL's leadership and declared its claims to a caliphate as illegitimate under Islam. In Saudi Arabia, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, the country's highest religious authority, condemned ISIL as the "number one enemy" of Islam and affirmed that the group could not claim to be a part of the faith. In Egypt, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed Al Tayeb called the acts committed by ISIL "barbaric and heinous crimes" and said ISIL was adulterating Islam.

To counter ISIL's propaganda – fused with appeals to battlefield glory and claims of creating a utopian version of 7th century Islam in areas it now controls – Kuwait has led an initiative to bring together like-minded states

to share best practices through various forms of media. This initiative, led by Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel, is now being followed up in the UAE and we are providing support and expertise to help directly combat ISIL's social media presence.

The best message against ISIL, however, will be its ultimate defeat, and making clear that joining the organization brings not glory or utopia on earth – but defeat on a battlefield for an unjust cause or imprisonment at home. ISIL may claim that its fighters embrace death on the battlefield, but having seen the camera footage of direct strikes on ISIL formations, that is not true. They all run for their lives whenever they hear a missile fired from a coalition aircraft screaming towards them. None outruns a missile.

IV. Conclusion

This global campaign against ISIL is still in its earliest phases. Efforts to halt ISIL's advance have been successful, but the rollback phase will be longer, and progress is likely to be uneven. We have no choice, however, but to prevail – over an enemy that represents a direct threat to the United States and to the world. The comprehensive approach described above is how we will do it, in full consultation with Congress, and together with coalition partners.

It is an honor to have this opportunity to address this Committee again, and I look forward to taking your questions.

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