

Testimony to The House Foreign Affairs Committee
Special Presidential Envoy for the Counter-ISIL Coalition
General John R. Allen
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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to update you on the progress of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

I returned to Washington this past weekend after a ten-day trip to Coalition capitals, where I met with partners in Rome and Ankara, Baghdad and Berlin, and finally in Brussels, where I briefed members of the EU and North Atlantic Council. My engagements in each of these stops reinforced my confidence in the Coalition strategy to Counter ISIL across the information, physical, and financial spheres in which it operates. In the territory ISIL has lost, in the increasing financial strain on the organization, and in the diminished morale and increased desertions of its fighters, we are clearly degrading its capabilities. The allure of the so-called Caliphate has been shattered.

To date, the Coalition has conducted nearly 3,000 airstrikes against ISIL terrorists; more than 1,600 in Iraq and nearly 1,300 in Syria. We have taken out ISIL's fighters, many of its commanders, as well as the infrastructure that supports its terror, including 20 training camps and over 200 oil and gas facilities. Since the Coalition campaign began, ISIL has lost more than a quarter of the populated territories it held in Iraq.

Because we lack the same kind of partners on the ground in Syria, the situation there is more challenging and complex. Still, we are working closely with regional partners to establish sites for training and equipping vetted, moderate Syrian opposition elements, in order to train approximately 5,000 troops per year for the next three years.

Syrian opposition groups in the counter-ISIL campaign continue to make strategic gains, expanding west and east from Kobane in retaking territory from ISIL. Coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Syria continue to degrade ISIL's sanctuary and limit its freedom of movement and military capabilities, as well as its capacity to resupply its efforts in Iraq.

In Iraq, Coalition airpower has supported many Iraqi Security Force-led operations. And we are actively supporting training of Iraqi forces at four camps where nine Iraqi Army and three Peshmerga brigades are being trained and equipped.

The Coalition is planning to build on this initial success as well as prepare to meet a set of critical challenges in the months to come. As ISIL is defeated in population centers and the military forces must move on to other objectives, there will be an immediate need for policing and public security efforts to set the conditions for essential service delivery.

Populations that have fled the fighting will need shelter, assistance, and security until they can return home. In many cases, facilities have been destroyed or made insecure by IEDs. Providers will need to rapidly assess and respond with basic medical care, water, electricity, and other municipal services.

A successful stabilization effort begins with fair treatment during military operations. We applaud Iraqi leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who publicly called for the protection of civilians and warned against acts of revenge, recrimination, or abuse. It also means protecting the schools, hospitals, and water treatment facilities and securing antiquities and libraries. These measures begin the process of reunifying Iraq and building trust between liberated communities and the Government of Iraq.

These critical stabilization efforts were at the center of my consultations last week in Baghdad. On the first day of meetings, we heard from the Iraqis about the need to plan for IDP returns, support IED removal, and provide resources and expertise to assist with stabilization efforts. On the second day, a team of experts and Coalition members met with their Iraqi counterparts and discussed Iraqi plans in greater detail. Throughout my meetings, I emphasized that Iraq's stabilization efforts will be the most important signal of the intentions of the Abadi government to fulfill its goal of rebuilding an Iraq for all Iraqis.

We know from experience that these kind of essential services are delivered more efficiently and effectively when they are sequenced and planned early on with close military and civilian cooperation. We also know this: stabilization operations require significant resources.

We, as a Coalition, will work together to assist and support Iraq as we are able, though we do not have the resources to support all of Iraq's needs. Nor can money

alone, whether from the Iraqi budget, from a trust fund, or from any number of partners, achieve full effectiveness without appropriate prioritization, planning, and sequencing.

From Baghdad, we traveled to Berlin for the first meeting of the Coalition's Stabilization Working Group. We convened more than a dozen Coalition partners to identify specific areas where the Coalition can support the Iraqis and establish a shared understanding of what we hope to achieve.

The Working Group on Stabilization is one of five Coalition Working Groups coordinating Coalition activity on specific lines of effort, including military support, counter-finance, counter-messaging, and efforts to stem the flow of foreign fighters.

Among Coalition members, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters is an urgent concern and rightly so. Partners are working together to make it more difficult for their citizens to fight in Syria and Iraq through criminal justice reform, enhanced border control, and better intelligence sharing. Eighteen Coalition partners have passed new Foreign Terrorist Fighter legislation over the last six months in order to stem the flow of fighters traveling to the region. More action is being contemplated.

We must continue to improve how we harmonize border and customs processes, track potential and actual fighters en route to the battle, and share intelligence with partners. This kind of information sharing and creative thinking between partners is also vital in meeting a related and similarly urgent challenge: constraining ISIL's access to financial support.

Here, the Coalition has made gains in synchronizing practices to block ISIL's access to banks, both in the region and globally. This includes stemming the flow of private donations and limiting ISIL's financial options by restricting its ability to generate oil revenues. We are now expanding these efforts to counter ISIL's access to local and informal financial networks.

There is also broad consensus among partners in the Coalition's Counter Finance Working Group, which met for the first time in Rome last week, that we must closely examine any financial ties between core ISIL and terrorists linked to ISIL in other regions.

We are also beginning to better posture ourselves to counter ISIL's violent messaging. Last month, the President announced the creation of a new Joint Online Operations Center with the UAE, where we will collaborate with regional partners to take on ISIL in the online information space. Efforts like these, to counter violent messaging, or to take on ISIL's recruitment capabilities and efforts to generate revenues, will endure long after we defeat ISIL, and will support long-term U.S. counter terrorism goals.

The United States and Coalition partners are also supporting the United Nations' efforts to provide food aid and supply critical assistance to protect vulnerable women, children, and men and attempt to limit the suffering caused by ISIL's advances.

Ultimately, the best way to protect vulnerable communities from ISIL's barbaric campaign of death and terror is to degrade and defeat the organization, militarily and ideologically, over the course of several years.

The President has outlined a framework for the authorities he believes will be necessary to pursue this campaign with his formal request to Congress for the authorization of the use of military force against ISIL. The AUMF request foresees using our unique capabilities in support of partners on the ground instead of through the long-term, large-scale deployment of U.S. ground forces. At the same time, the President has asked for the flexibility to fight an adaptable enemy, one that hopes to expand its reach and capabilities well beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria.

As the President has said, the world needs to know we are united in the effort against ISIL. We are strongest as a nation when the Administration and Congress work together on issues as serious as the use of military force. A new AUMF will prove that we stand united against this threat.

Taking the fight to ISIL also requires our close coordination with this Committee and with Congress, so that we are constantly evaluating our tactics and strategy, and that we are resourcing them appropriately.

This hearing presents an opportunity to continue that process of coordination and consultation. I want to thank you again for the invitation to speak with you and look forward to taking your questions.