

Statement for the Record

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And

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Conflict

before the

Committee on Foreign Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

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Good morning Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity speak with you today about the Department of Defense's (DoD) continued use of the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (P.L. 107-40) for our global counterterrorism operations.

The last twenty years of sustained counterterrorism pressure by the United States and our allies and partners has significantly degraded terrorist threats to the United States, but we still face a number of terrorist groups committed to threatening U.S. interests and personnel. These groups take advantage of instability and ungoverned space, leverage new technologies and the information environment, circumvent traditional financial systems, and continue to influence new generations of recruits to join them or conduct independent attacks on their behalf. The threats posed by those groups are substantial, and DoD is addressing them in a number of ways.

The 2001 AUMF provides the foundational legal basis for our continuing military operations against al-Qa'ida and associated forces, including against ISIS. DoD uses the 2001

AUMF in conducting military activities to reduce the threat these groups pose to the United States and to our allies and partners around the world. In Syria and Iraq, ISIS remains a capable and dangerous threat. The U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS continues to work “by, with, and through” vetted local partner forces, including the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS. With U.S. and Coalition support, the SDF recently was able to re-take control of a detention facility in Hasakah following an ISIS attack. The successful February 2, 2022 raid in northwest Syria by U.S. special operations forces on the compound of the ISIS leader, Haji Abdullah, removed a major terrorist threat to the United States and the world. Additionally, U.S. forces remain in Iraq at the invitation of the Government of Iraq in a training, advising, assisting, and intelligence-sharing role. DoD remains committed to supporting the Government of Iraq through security and counterterrorism cooperation in our shared fight against ISIS. These and other actions U.S. forces take against ISIS and in support of our ISF and SDF partners in Iraq and Syria help demonstrate the critical authority that the 2001 AUMF continues to provide.

The 2001 AUMF also provides authority for critical counterterrorism operations in other theaters. For example, our approach in Somalia similarly works “by, with, and through” local partners to achieve stability and security, including in their fight against al Shabaab, an associated force of al-Qaeda. DoD support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA) focuses on building partner nation institutions and capabilities that can both provide for Somalia’s long-term security at home and help counter terrorist threats to the United States. In Afghanistan, even with U.S. forces withdrawn from the country, we are prepared to counter terrorist threats to the United States and our citizens by utilizing capabilities from outside the country against the ongoing threat from ISIS and al-Qa’ida. The Executive Branch has kept, and will continue to keep, the Congress informed about

the ways in which it relies upon the 2001 AUMF in regular reporting, consistent with the War Powers Resolution, as well as through other reports and engagements.

As the terrorist threat continues to evolve, our counterterrorism capabilities and authorities must evolve with them. We have seen terrorist groups splinter and re-align themselves under new names or new leadership, while still maintaining their intent to attack the United States. DoD works closely with our partners in the Intelligence Community and other departments and agencies to monitor new and emerging terrorist groups and to respond appropriately where new threats emerge. Of course, as our State Department colleagues have also made clear, this does not mean that the United States may use military force against every terrorist group pursuant to the 2001 AUMF. The mere fact that an entity has been labeled as a terrorist group or has committed terrorist acts does not bring it within the scope of the 2001 AUMF. Indeed, the reality of the changing terrorism threat landscape reflects why authorizations for use of military force should be narrow and specific to address current threats to the United States, while also remaining appropriately adaptive to the dynamic nature of the evolving threat environment. That is one of the reasons why the President has committed to working with Congress to ensure that outdated authorizations for the use of military force are replaced with a narrow and specific framework that will ensure that we can continue to protect Americans from terrorist threats. As our State Department colleagues have said, we welcome this dialogue between Congress and the Executive over the use of military force, and look forward to continuing it.

Although this hearing is focused on the 2001 AUMF, it is important to recognize that a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy involves more than only forcible U.S. military operations. Counterterrorism efforts are most effective when we can leverage DoD's military

capabilities to use necessary and proportionate force alongside non-forcible military activities and the important diplomatic, humanitarian, financial, and other efforts of our interagency partners across the U.S. Government and by our international allies and partners to address the root causes of instability that al-Qa'ida and associated forces exploit. For DoD, we aim to implement this approach through, among other things, developing relationships with local partner forces, using our military education and capacity building programs to help develop increased partner counterterrorism capacity in critical regions, and ensuring that our security cooperation efforts integrate with other, complementary U.S. Government programs.

Thank you. We look forward to answering your questions today.