

Statement by

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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the situation in Iraq and options for US policy there.

One year ago I retired following 38 years of active duty, during which I spent three tours of duty in Iraq, spending a total of 46 months in Iraq. Since my retirement, over the past year, I have been back to Iraq – in Erbil, Baghdad and Basra – 6 times, maintaining close contact with many Shia, Sunni and Kurdish leaders. So, Iraq and its future is a subject of great personal importance to me.

I am especially honored to appear with these two distinguished fellow panelists who are respected experts on the subject of today's hearing. And given the broad and deep expertise of Ambassador Jeffrey and Doctor Pollack, I will focus my remarks on the security sector -- the current security situation and recommendations on options for our security policy moving forward.

I would like begin with several overall observations on the current security situation; followed by an assessment of the ISIS threat, and finishing with recommendations on assistance to Iraq's security needs.

Observations on the current situation

- Time accrues to the benefit of ISIS; while we “assess” they maintain the momentum, they grow stronger, and their hold on the population intensifies. ISIS continues to exert its control, consolidate gains and build a state.
- ISIS has established control across a contiguous area in both Syria and Iraq and we must realize it is the Iraq-Syria front, not just think in terms of Iraq.
- ISIS poses a formidable regional threat. As it executed its sweeping campaign in Iraq, ISIS simultaneously continued its campaign expansion in Eastern Syria and has the strategy and capabilities to continue the offensive.
- The Iraqi Security Forces have regrouped and stopped the ISIS advance. However these forces have serious, fundamental flaws

and will require significant assistance to be able to undertake a counteroffensive to dislodge and rollback ISIS control.

- ISIS is an existential threat to both Baghdad and the Kurds. The Kurds have a 1000+ KM border/front with ISIS and they are largely on their own. It is time to assist and enable the Kurds in their fight with ISIS.

Now, I would like to elaborate on these points and discuss the security situation in Iraq.

ISIS and the Syria-Iraq Front

ISIS seeks to create an Islamic Caliphate extending across Syria and Iraq by first destroying the existing state boundaries of Iraq and Syria and expanding the territory under their control. It is a mistake to consider ISIS actions in Iraq in isolation. Rather, ISIS must be viewed in the new reality that it has established control over major, contiguous areas of Syria and Iraq.

In Syria, following the declaration of a caliphate by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a cascade of surrenders by rebel and tribal brigades in Syria's Deir ez-Zour province conferred large swaths of territorial control to ISIS. Beginning on July 2, these advances dramatically changed the balance of power within the province and provided ISIS the opportunity to achieve territorial continuity along the Euphrates River into Iraq's al-Anbar Province. ISIS has successfully linked its territorial control between its ar-Raqqa stronghold and Deir ez-Zour city, solidifying an ISIS control zone that stretches from ar-Raqqa into Iraq's al-Anbar province. ISIS seized control of eight towns located northwest of Deir ez-Zour city from the al-Bosarya tribe on July 18. This advance comes as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and Ahrar al-Sham forces surrendered control of the towns of as-Shametia and Jabal Kabous to ISIS, abandoned their local headquarters and withdrawing from the province.

The surrender of a large number of local rebel and tribal brigades to ISIS in Syria's Deir ez-Zour province was a reflection and result of ISIS success in Iraq. Driven by apprehension in the wake of ISIS's success in Iraq, a number of local leaders sought to avoid an armed takeover by reinvigorated ISIS forces and agreed to a set of ISIS-imposed conditions for the peaceful surrender of rebel forces. These agreements

allowed ISIS to quickly and efficiently assert full control over a large swath of territory whose armed takeover would have otherwise required a significant and costly ISIS ground offensive. Critically, further surrenders have occurred as ISIS began to consolidate. In addition to providing an additional windfall of weaponry, these surrenders have expanded ISIS's zones of control and sustained the current ISIS momentum within the province.

According to some reports ISIS now controls 35% of Syrian territory and the Syrian regime has been unable to meaningfully challenge the ISIS advance.

In Iraq, as evidence that actions in Syria and in Iraq are closely linked, ISIS completed its military operation to connect its line of communication between its strongholds in ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour and Mosul, Iraq. For example, ISIS has extended its campaign against primarily Kurdish-protected areas by attacking in Sinjar. Sinjar, which has been quiet since Tal Afar fell, may become a more significant focus for ISIS.

In Baghdad, ISIS's Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) campaign is active again, relaunching its signature wave of VBIEDs attacks. Multiple, near-simultaneous attacks are the signature strategy that ISIS pursued as it gained strength in 2012 and 2013. In the first significant use of VBIEDs since a wave of attacks occurred on May 13, 2014, Last Saturday on 19 July, multiple VBIEDs detonated in Baghdad's Shi'a neighborhoods. I believe these actions portend an ISIS campaign to attack Baghdad as part of its strategic campaign to secure Baghdad. Spectacular attacks in the form of VBIED and indirect fire attacks against Shia and Government targets in Baghdad, including Baghdad International Airport will be accompanied by 'conventional' ground attacks to turn Baghdad into a warzone.

Across the Syria-Iraq front, ISIS possesses the momentum in all areas and will continue its operations to assert control over occupied territories, continue its assault in Iraq to secure its lines of communication and expand its control over strategic objectives.

Iraqi Security Forces

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), in their present state, cannot successfully meet this ISIS threat, let alone mount a major and effective counteroffensive, without significant assistance. Preparing ISF for an effective counteroffensive operation requires extensive preparation; it cannot be thrown together in days or weeks. The capabilities necessary to counter ISIS do not exist today in Iraq and they will not likely materialize on their own anytime soon.

Let me be clear -- I am not talking about a direct ground combat role for US Forces. However, enabling the ISF to be successful against ISIS will require robust advising and enabling by American forces, and this effort must be started immediately and executed simultaneously in several critical areas.

First, the decisive way to defeat an ISIS force is to attack its entire network: its leaders, financiers, suppliers and key operators, combat capabilities and front line fighters. However, generating targetable intelligence to attack ISIS requires a deep understanding of the network, which is only gained through a robust and effective intelligence effort over time. This intelligence support has 2 components. First, this requires an investment of personnel and technical intelligence capabilities in Iraq to develop an intelligence system that integrates all types of intelligence from all sources. The ISF need support in tactical intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination in order to understand the ISIS structure and develop targets. In the absence of this actionable intelligence, independent ground operations or isolated airstrikes, as we have seen from the ISF in recent days and weeks, will remain ineffective in producing the desired effect of seriously degrading the ISIS network.

To support operations in Iraq, there must be a second intelligence component – the collection and analysis effort of ISIS and their external support network must be made a priority for our National Intelligence Community. The ISIS network in Iraq, Syria and the Regional support network external to the Iraq-Syria front must be a National collection and analysis priority. And one of the prime objectives of this collection is to identify and target ISIS finances and financial support. While ISIS is reported to be very well resourced from their recent asset seizures in

Iraq, these resources must be replenished. We must identify all sources of income and employ all of the Counter Threat Finance tools that our Interagency brings to this fight in order to target and limit the free flow of funding to ISIS. This targeting must include any regional government and non-government entities.

Second, we should establish a training program for ISF to improve their basic combat skills to develop modest combined arms capability in order to effectively conduct offensive operations by conventional forces to dislodge ISIS from the occupied areas under ISIS control. The ISF are largely a 'checkpoint army.' Since 2011 their operations have been defensive in nature, static in disposition and disjointed in execution. They need training to develop the skills required to fight this ISIS army, as recent tactical failures against ISIS clearly indicate. We also need to enhance the capabilities of ISF Special Operations Forces. While these are the most competent and most effective of the ISF, they will need to greatly improve their capabilities in order to conduct the unrelenting, precise strike operations against critical ISIS targets.

Third, the ISF need assistance in establishing effective wartime sustainment structure and process. The existing sustainment system of the ISF is a peacetime system, designed to support fielding of military systems while dealing with a low-level insurgency. In 2010, we identified ISF sustainment as being a significant shortfall and that if it was not addressed, the readiness of ISF equipment would soon be in a 'death spiral' where the backlog of deferred maintenance would overwhelm their abilities to field effective, modern forces. Reversing years of decline in equipment readiness will be a daunting, but not impossible process.

Fourth, The ISF require a decentralized command and control system that can rapidly process information and enable tactical decisions. The system that is in place in Iraq, one of Area Operations Commands emplaced by, and reporting directly to, Prime Minister Maliki, is a peacetime structure to ensure centralized control, with leaders chosen by the Prime Minister for loyalty over combat competence. The ISF require a command and control structure for sustained combat operations against a capable enemy.

Fifth, the ISF need the weaponry and equipment necessary for sustained combat operations. We have rushed some weapons and armaments to Iraq, however we need to do more. Most of our military aid to Iraq is moving at the glacial pace of our Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process. Iraq's Ambassador to the United States has lamented that the slow pace of our support when compared to the rapid support from Iran and Russia. We should quickly approve, ship and enable material support to Iraq.

Sixth, we should support the ISF with airstrikes in order to degrade ISIS capabilities. But, let me be clear – isolated drone and air strikes in the absence of these other capabilities will be marginally effective. One cannot drone-strike or airstrike one's way out of this. These strikes will serve as an important part of a coordinated approach to this ISIS threat, but in isolation they will achieve fleeting effects. They must be integrated into the overall counteroffensive. Also, to produce effective airstrikes, especially against an enemy among the population, one needs to have air controllers on the ground to call-in precise strikes and to control the effects. The Iraqis do not possess the capability to serve in this role. And no amount of isolated airstrikes will turn the current tactical situation in Iraq and produce *decisive* effects on their own.

Seventh, we should support the Kurds and enable them to defend against this existential threat of ISIS. The Peshmerga are an effective, determined and well-led force. However, they are lightly armed, inadequately equipped and insufficiently trained to counter the better-equipped ISIS force. They are stretched very thin over their 1050-kilometer front with ISIS and, *when* ISIS turns on them, they will be outgunned and overmatched. The Kurds have proven to be loyal friends and allies to the United States and they have recently asked for material and non-material support from us and we should expedite this support to them.

Understanding the complex relationship between Erbil and Baghdad, our "one Iraq" policy, and the arguments against aiding the Kurdish Region apart from the central government, the realities on the ground make this an exigent requirement. From a purely tactical and security perspective, why wouldn't we enable the Kurds to defend Northern Iraq from ISIS, prevent the oil-rich North from falling into ISIS hands, and force ISIS to fight on two fronts in Iraq?

Security depends on a Political Arrangement that includes Sunnis and Kurds

However, for this security support to succeed, we need two things from Baghdad. First, we need a willing partner, one that is committed to accepting this assistance and to making the systemic and structural changes necessary to the Iraqi Security structure in order to build the ISF into an effective force. Second, underpinning these military operations is the most critical requirement, a political accommodation of the Sunnis and the Kurds. In order to separate ISIS from their greatest advantage, an acquiescent Sunni population, there needs to be a political arrangement in Baghdad that the Sunnis can broadly accept. This political arrangement must also accommodate the Kurds and create the proper conditions for the Kurds to participate. However, as the recent political activities in Baghdad prove, a political agreement that satisfies all parties of Iraq could be the toughest impediment to reversing this existential threat to Iraq. But, in order for *any* hope of success, there must be some sort of political accommodation and an acceptable arrangement, which allows the Sunnis and Kurds to join in a unified military action.

Conclusion

ISIS is an existential threat to Iraq and a significant threat to the Region. Iraq and its security forces have proven unable to defeat this threat in their present condition and with their present capabilities. The longer we wait to decide on our response to Iraq's requests for support, the stronger ISIS becomes. If the prevention of an ISIS-controlled Iraq is in the interest of the United States, then we should act to aid and enable Iraq and the Kurds to defeat this threat as quickly as possible.

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and distinguished members of the committee, again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.