

General Allen Opening Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

February 25, 2015

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, 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 just returned to Washington late yesterday from Kuwait, where at the request of Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, I joined a group of more than 30 senior U.S. diplomats and military commanders for a wide ranging discussion of the counter-ISIL strategy and progress to date.

While my role as Special Envoy is concerned with the consolidation and integration of Coalition contributions, not the coordination of its military activities, I remain closely synced with my colleagues in the military, and we meet regularly with other departments and agencies involved to review progress of the Coalition's counter-ISIL activities.

In addition, we are discussing the Coalition's next steps now that we have largely achieved the objective for the campaign's first phase: to blunt ISIL's strategic, operational, and tactical momentum in Iraq.

Through over 2,500 coordinated Coalition airstrikes in support of our partners on the ground, we have degraded ISIL's leadership, logistical, and operational capability, and are denying it a sanctuary in Iraq from which it can plan and execute attacks.

With New Zealand's announcement yesterday that it will provide military trainers to build the capacity of Iraqi Security Forces, a dozen Coalition nations are now participating in these efforts in multiple sites across Iraq.

Still, the situation in Iraq remains extraordinarily complex, and the road ahead will be challenging and non-linear. But considering where we were only eight months ago, one begins to see how this first phase of our strategy is delivering results.

In June of last year, ISIL burst into the international scene as a genocidal and seemingly unstoppable juggernaut. It conquered a city, Mosul, of 1.5 million, then poured south towards Baghdad, taking cities, towns, and villages along the way. Outside Tikrit, it rounded up and massacred over 1,000 Iraqi Air Force recruits. To the west, it broke through the border town of al Qaim, and poured east towards Baghdad. ISIL's spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, vowed: "The battle would soon rage in Baghdad and [in the holy city of] Karbala." Shortly thereafter, ISIL launched a multiple pronged attack further into northern Iraq, massacring minority populations, enslaving hundreds of women and girls, surrounding tens of thousands of Yazidis at Sinjar mountain, and opening a clear route to Erbil, the region's capital.

Then the United States acted. Since our first airstrikes in August, ISIL's advance has been largely blunted, and has been driven back away from the regional capitals of Baghdad and Erbil. It has also lost half of its Iraq-based leadership and thousands of hardened fighters, and is no longer able to mass, maneuver, and communicate as an effective force.

Iraqis are also standing on their feet. The Kurdish Peshmerga have recovered nearly all of the ground lost in August. Peshmerga have taken control of Mosul Dam, Rabiya

border crossing, Sinjar Mountain, Zumar, and the Kisik road junction, which eliminated a supply route for ISIL from Syria to Mosul. Iraqi security forces with popular volunteers have secured the routes to Baghdad, and the capital is now seeing the lowest levels of violence it's seen in years. These forces also broke the siege of the Bayji oil refinery, and have begun to push north up the Tigris Valley. To the west, Sunni tribes are working with Iraqi Security Forces to retake land in the heart of Anbar province, land I know well.

Just last week, under the cover of bad weather, ISIL launched an attack the town of Al-Baghdadi, near al Asad airbase, where our forces are located with the Danes and Australians to help train Iraqi soldiers and tribal volunteers. ISIL, as it has done over and over again , rampaged through the town, killing civilians, and driving hundreds of families into exile on the airbase. But the Iraqis did not sit idle; they organized, and fought back.

Prime Minister Abadi went to the Joint Operations Center in Baghdad and ordered a counter-attack. The Minister of Defense flew to Al-Asad to organize available forces. Iraqi Army commanders sent an armored column from Baghdad to join the attack. Sunni tribal volunteers organized to support and in some cases lead the attack. Today, much of Al-Baghdadi is back in the hands of these local tribes and security forces. I was at Al Asad Airbase last month, and my deputy, Brett McGurk, was there three days ago. All Americans would be proud to see what our troops are doing there, helping the Iraqis and the tribes join the battle against ISIL. This is only a start, and ISIL will remain a formidable foe: but any aura of invincibility has been shattered. ISIL is not invincible, it is defeatable, and is being defeated -- by Iraqi forces, defending and taking back their towns, villages, and cities with the support of the United States and the Coalition.

Because we lack the same kind of partners on the ground in Syria, the situation is more challenging and complex there . Still, we are working closely with regional partners to establish sites for training and equipping vetted, moderate Syrian opposition elements, to train approximately 5,000 troops per year for the next three years. On February 19, we formalized a framework on Turkey's support for the Department of Defense's train and equip activities for the moderate Syrian opposition.

These and other military aspects of the campaign will inevitably receive the most attention. But as I saw in Afghanistan during my command there, in Iraq in Al Anbar in 2007-08, and in recovery efforts for the 2004 South Asian tsunami, the military effort is essential but not sufficient.

It will ultimately be the aggregate pressure of the Coalition's activity over multiple, mutually-supporting lines of effort that will determine a campaign's success.

That is why when I visit a Coalition capital and meet with a prime minister, a king, or president, I describe the coalition component of the counter-ISIL strategy as being organized around multiple lines of effort including the military line to deny safe haven and provide security assistance, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters, disrupting ISIL's financial resources, providing humanitarian relief and support to its victims, and counter-messaging ... or defeating ISIL as an idea.

Since mid-September, I have traveled to 21 partner capitals, several of them multiple times, to meet with the national leadership. In that short span, we have assembled a global coalition of 62 nations and international organizations.

Among Coalition members, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters is an urgent concern in all of these conversations ... and rightly so. There is no question that the thousands of young men who have traveled to fight in Syria and Iraq present a truly unprecedented, generational challenge.

Today, Coalition members are coming together to take the coordinated actions required to meet this growing threat.

More than a dozen nations have changed laws and penalties to make it more difficult to travel and fight in Syria and Iraq. Through capacity building in the Balkans, criminal justice efforts in North Africa, and a 20 million euro investment from the European Union to engage at-risk communities, governments are taking a series of concerted actions.

Even with these expanded measures, foreign fighters continue to stream to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq ... so we are enhancing our cooperation with key international partners to confront this threat. 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 significant 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.

As we come together to curb ISIL's financial support, we are also providing urgent assistance to ISIL's victims.

The Coalition is supporting the United Nations' efforts to provide food aid and supply critical assistance to protect vulnerable women, children and men from harsh winter conditions. Saudi Arabia alone has contributed \$500M in aid in support of the UN appeal for Iraq, and has provided more than a dozen medical camps; numerous partners have made substantial investments in education for refugee children and in host communities. The United States alone has contributed close to \$4 billion in assistance for many of the 13 million displaced Iraqis and Syrians. But we and our partners must do more.

The communities and refugees left in ISIL's wake bear witness to ISIL's true identity, one we are actively working with coalition partners to expose, with Arab partners taking a leading role.

ISIL is attractive to many of its recruits because it proclaimed the Caliphate, and emerged onto the world stage with self-proclaimed inevitability and invincibility. But the last six months have amply demonstrated that ISIL is little more than a criminal gang and death cult, which now finds itself under increasing pressure, sending naïve and gullible recruits to die by the hundreds.

Our coalition partners are working together as never before to share messages, engage traditional and social media and underscore the vision of religious leaders and the

international community that rejects ISIL's millennialist vision. As the President announced recently, we are partnering with the U.A.E. to create a joint messaging center that will contest ISIL's vigorous offensive in the information battlespace.

In confronting these enduring challenges, the Coalition can take some confidence from what it has already helped to achieve. We as a country and as a Coalition will inevitably have good days and hard days on the battlefield and we are still in the early stages of a long-term campaign.

The President has outlined a framework for the authorities he believes will be necessary to pursue this long-term 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 use of 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 is expanding its reach and capabilities well beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. Taking the fight to ISIL requires that we be flexible and patient in our efforts. It also requires 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.