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THE U.S. ROLE AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: SYRIA, IRAQ, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

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THE U.S. ROLE AND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: SYRIA, IRAQ, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Corker, Risch, Johnson, Flake, Gardner, Perdue, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, and Markey.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE

The CHAIRMAN. Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We thank our witnesses for being here, and we look forward to your testimony.

Today's hearing is the start of what will be a new series of hearings examining the role of the United States in the Middle East. This hearing will focus on the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the humanitarian crisis resulting from the sustained and unrelenting violence in the region.

Two of our witnesses today will address the war in Syria and Iraq. And Mr. Bowers will speak directly to the humanitarian effects of the war.

Becoming more and more apparent that the administration's stated goal—goals in Syria of defeating ISIS and removing Assad are not aligned in any kind of clear, coherent strategy that we can realistically expect to achieve those stated goals.

In Iraq, ISIS largely has maintained its ground since they took Ramadi, in May. And more than 4 years into the war in Syria, as the administration continues to fumble for a strategy—and I think that is apparent by all—the devastating effects of the war are starting to confront us in a form of a refugee crisis that Americans and people around the world are able to see daily on television and read about in their publications.

I join many of my colleagues in the desire for the United States to play our appropriate role with respect to the refugee crisis, but we would be remiss to focus solely on a humanitarian response without addressing the root cause of this crisis: the Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian backers.

We have had multiple witnesses today testify before the committee that, after the conclusion of the Iran deal, the United States would need to prove that we are serious about pushing back against Iran's regional actions. I know the ranking member and others on the committee are steadfast in wanting to make sure that we end up with a Middle East policy that is not just the Iran nuclear deal, if you will, being the default position. And I appreciate our ranking member for his concern in that way.

Many have said the place for us to do that, in particular, is in Syria. As Russia flies weapons and troops over Iraq and into Syria establishing a greater presence, American leadership continues to be tested. The failing strategy in Iraq has led to Iranian-backed militias overshadowing U.S. military support.

In Syria, thousands continue to die at the hands of Assad and his backers, and millions of civilians have fled the country. Without defined, committed engagement to counter destabilizing actions in the region, the need for American involvement will continue to grow as conditions deteriorate.

Against the backdrop of unprecedented turmoil in the Middle East, we have just concluded a nuclear agreement with Iran that again alters the balance of power in the region. We have all heard from our allies in the region about the fear of American disengagement, and we cannot ignore that the lack of a coherent American leadership has left a vacuum that will continue to be filled by violence. And again, I think almost everyone in the committee is committed to pushing—pushing this administration toward having a coherent strategy that does not allow that to continue.

I hope our witnesses can help us understand what policies the United States should be seeking in Syria and Iraq and what is needed to achieve these goals. I want to thank you all again for appearing before our committee. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

And, without any objection, your written testimony will become a part of the record.

And, with that, I look forward to our distinguished ranking member's comments, a great partner, someone I cherish working with and I look forward to working with on this issue.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator CARDIN. Well, Senator Corker, first, thank you for your convening this hearing. I know we will have others dealing with the security in the Middle East. And I join you in encouraging these hearings, because I think we need to understand that we have been concentrating for the last, I guess, 2 months on Iran and the Iran nuclear agreement, which is what we should have done, but we also understand that the other preeminent threat tearing at the fiber of the Middle East is ISIS/ISIL, and we need to concentrate on what it is doing in the Middle East. I know Iran will be part of that discussion, as it should be.

As we turn to Syria, Iraq, and the fight against ISIL, it is important that we acknowledge Iran's malicious role in undermining stability. Iran, along with its proxies, is hampering political processes, reconciliation, and inclusive governments in both countries. Iran

may share in our short-term tactical goal of defeating ISIL, but I see no room for broader cooperation until and unless Iran commits to a Syria without Assad, and Iraq that is governed in a representative manner.

Over the past several weeks, we have been haunted and shocked by the images of Syrian refugees seeking a better life in Europe. We read that Iraqi citizens, seeing their Syrian neighbors successfully receive a welcome reception in some European countries, have undertaken this treacherous and uncertain journey themselves in search of safety and opportunity. But the crises in Syria and Iraq have also generated enormous burdens on neighboring countries, like Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Syrian and Iraqi citizens are losing hope that conditions in their own countries will improve anytime soon. This is a dire situation with frightening consequences for future generations in the Middle East, as well as for stability and success in the region.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the number of refugees and displaced people globally is around 60 million today, coming very close to the number we saw at the end of World War II. And it is increasing at an alarming rate. It is not getting better, it is getting worse. In 1 week in April, 1,000 people perished by two separate shipwrecks. It is dangerous, and people are losing their lives.

In Syria, over 50 percent of the people have left their homes. Lebanon, country of 4.2 million, has taken in 1.2 million Syrian refugees, equivalent to 30 percent of their population. That would be like the United States taking in 100 million refugees. As the refugee and humanitarian crisis continues to grow, the region is becoming more and more destabilized.

So, yes, Mr. Chairman, I agree with you completely, we have to deal with the root causes, but we also have to deal with the humanitarian crisis and help save lives. And the United States, I think, is uniquely qualified to provide that type of international leadership, and this committee should help our country in dealing with this challenge.

Today's hearing is a welcome opportunity to step back and assess the big picture. Are we making progress in degrading ISIL? And how are we measuring that progress? We hear promising reports from our coalition and military leaders about territory seized from ISIL and the number of airstrikes, but our effectiveness in combating the ISIL threat cannot be measured solely by the number of sorties flown, bombs dropped, or foreign fighters stopped, or the size of territory reclaimed. What would it ultimately take for us to defeat ISIL?

The Obama administration's anti-ISIL strategy includes military airstrikes and building up local ground forces, complemented with countering the other sources of ISIL's strength: cutting off its financing, interdicting foreign fighter flows, and undermining its propaganda machine. It is a sound strategy, but how is it working?

I commend the Obama administration for its dedication to building a truly global coalition committed to the anti-ISIL fight. I believe the United States has a critical and necessary leadership role to play in helping to combat ISIL and restoring stability to the region. But, large-scale U.S. forces, at this time, in this complex political and military atmosphere, would, at the end of the day, deci-

sively increase the prospect of losing the war against ISIL by increasing instability, making U.S. forces a magnet for violent extremists, and destroying the prospect for sustainable local solutions.

So, I look forward to engaging our witnesses today on U.S. policy in Iraq and Syria outside of the fight against ISIL, and how we are using our diplomatic strength, assistance, and military support to increase the prospects of a lasting and local political solution. In Iraq, this will require leaders willing to take bold steps beyond party, ethnic, and religious interests. It will mean implementing Prime Minister Abadi's bold reform agenda. It means building up Iraqi forces willing to fight for all Iraqis, and encouraging political reconciliation, power-sharing, and economic resiliency.

In Syria, we must reinvigorate a plan for Assad's exit. Assad's barrel bombs continue to drop, and it has been clear to many of us for some time that Syria will never be stable and at peace if our strategy focuses on ISIL alone. How can we galvanize a political process that can enable all Syrians, regardless of their ethnicity, sect, or faith, to live in peace and security?

That is our challenge, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses as we hear more about how the United States can provide the leadership necessary for stability in that region.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

I would now like to recognize our witnesses. Our first witness is Dr. Kimberly Kagan, founder and president of the Institute for the Study of War. We all know her well and appreciate her testimony today. Our second witness is Dr. Brian Katulis, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Thank you so much for being here. And finally, the third witness we will hear from today is Mr. Michael Bowers, vice president of Humanitarian Leadership and Response at Mercy Corps. We thank you for the work your organization does around the world, and your testimony today.

Instead of me introducing each of you, after the witness, if you all will just keep going, starting with Kimberly. You know the drill. If you could summarize in about 5 minutes, we have all of your testimony in writing; we appreciate that, and then we will ask questions.

Thank you very much. If you would begin, Dr. Kagan.

STATEMENT OF DR. KIMBERLY KAGAN, PRESIDENT, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. KAGAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member. I really appreciate your invitation to testify today on an issue that is vitally important for the United States, its security and its values.

The United States faces national security challenges in 2015 of a scope and scale that we, as a nation, have not encountered since the end of the cold war. The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, which we call ISIS, has seized control of terrain in Iraq and Syria, declared itself a caliphate, and aims not only to reify that claim, but also to provoke an apocalyptic war with the West. ISIS is challenging al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization from which it sprung, as the leader of the global jihadist movement.

Russia, a nuclear power, is waging a crypto war in Ukraine, and is using its capabilities to intimidate NATO. The United States and Iran have signed a nuclear deal that will have ramifications on sanctions in ways that will likely increase Iran's malign behavior inside of the Middle East, which already includes the use of proxy military forces to undermine U.S. allies, as you have referred to in your statements.

The threat to the United States in 2015 not only includes states and transnational organizations that have the intent and the capability to harm America, the United States also faces a threat from the growing global disorder that its enemies and adversaries are exploring and exploiting.

The Islamic State, for example, is pursuing a strategy that both breaks strong states, as it broke Iraq, and preys upon power vacuums in failed states, as it is doing in Libya. It has worked to provoke and expand a Sunni-Shia sectarian war since its origins in Iraq in 2004. And that sectarian war is now engulfing the region and spreading around the world. We have a fundamental driver of instability in that war.

In addition, Iran is helping to accelerate that sectarian war and actually expand it. The Iranians are supporting the Assad regime through a comprehensive strategy that includes military resources, such as trainers, advisors, and funding. And Iran has actually backed the Assad regime, which is deliberately starving its own people, dropping heinous barrel bombs on civilian targets, torturing family members of its opponents, and gassing its own people. These are war crimes committed primarily against Sunni. And the perpetuation of the Assad regime is one of the major accelerants of the radicalization of the Sunni as well as the Shia populations. And without Iran, the regime would not have stayed in power this long. In fact, Tehran has gone so far as to recruit Shia volunteers to fight in Syria, not only from Iran, but all the way from Afghanistan. And so, they are increasing the sectarian scope of this battle.

In addition, another major driver of instability right now is the collapse of states. We have seen, during the Arab Spring, the governments of Tunisia and Egypt change. And, of course, in Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, all of which were challenged by the Arab Spring, we have failed or failing states. And this is what ISIS, the Islamic State, is exploiting.

The Islamic State has a strategy. It is not simply a terrorist organization that aims to produce violence. They actually state their strategy, their strategic goals, in their English-language publications. Right now, ISIS's strategic intent is to remain and expand; that is to say, to remain in Iraq and Syria, and to expand beyond the borders of that original caliphate that it claimed. And my analysts at the Institute for the Study of War assess that ISIS is operating actually in three rings: an interior ring in Iraq and Syria, a near-abroad ring in the lands that were parts of the historical caliphate, and a far-abroad ring in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Asia. And in the near abroad, ISIS has active governorates in Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, the Caucasus, Algeria, and Nigeria.

It is in this context that we must evaluate ISIS and the campaign against ISIS inside of Iraq and Syria. We have watched ISIS

transfer its signature capabilities from Iraq into places such as Egypt. And I am happy to talk about that in any questions that you might have. But, as we think about the requirements to defeat ISIS, we must recognize that we have a global challenge. That does not mean that U.S. troops need to be everywhere that ISIS is, but, rather, that the United States needs to use military force as well as its diplomacy, all of the nation's instruments of power, to break ISIS's capability to fight, because it is an apocalyptic enemy, and its will is not going to break.

And, unfortunately, though we may talk about desiring to contain ISIS in Iraq and Syria, we have to recognize, in the first year of the campaign against ISIS, ISIS is no longer contained in Iraq and Syria, and we have drawn the wrong lens on the global problem that we face.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Brian.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Kagan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. KIMBERLY KAGAN

The United States faces national security challenges in 2015 of a scope and scale that we have not encountered since the end of the cold war. The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has seized control of terrain in Iraq and Syria, declared itself a caliphate, and aims not only to reify that claim but also to provoke an apocalyptic war with the West. ISIS is challenging al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization from which it sprung, as the leader of the global jihadist movement. Russia, a nuclear power, is waging a crypto-war in Ukraine and is using its military capabilities to intimidate NATO. The United States and Iran have signed a nuclear deal that will relieve sanctions in ways that will likely increase Iran's malign behavior in the Middle East, which already includes the use of proxy military forces to undermine U.S. allies. China is laying claim to areas in the South China Sea and is using its increasing military might to enforce those claims.

The threat to the United States in 2015 includes not only states and transnational organizations that have the intent and capability to harm America. The U.S. also faces a threat from the growing global disorder that its enemies and adversaries are exploiting. The Islamic State, for example, is pursuing a strategy that both breaks strong states and preys upon power vacuums in failed states. It has worked to provoke and expand a Sunni-Shia sectarian war since its origins as al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004. That sectarian war is now engulfing the region and spreading around the world.

Iran is helping to accelerate and expand sectarian war. The Iranians are supporting the Assad regime through a comprehensive strategy, including military resources such as trainers, advisors, and funding. That Alawite regime is deliberately starving its own people, dropping heinous barrel bombs on civilian targets, torturing family members of its opponents, and gassing its own people. These are war crimes committed primarily against Sunni. The perpetuation of the Assad regime is one of the major accelerants of the radicalization of Sunni as well as Shia populations, and without the Iranians, the regime would not have survived this long. Tehran has gone so far as to recruit its own people as "volunteers" to fight in Syria, and has mobilized Shia from as far away as Afghanistan to enter this sectarian battle.

All of these developments have led to the growth of dangerous power vacuums. The world has witnessed the collapse of governments and states. Governments changed in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring. Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, all challenged by the Arab Spring, are failed or failing states. The Islamic State, therefore, has room to grow in the voids where government once was and Iran's counterstrategy is making the problem much worse.

The Islamic State announced its intent to "remain and expand" in November 2014. The slogan, which appeared on the cover of its English language magazine, conveyed its strategic objectives: to remain in Iraq and Syria and to expand beyond their borders. My analysts at the Institute for the Study of War assess that ISIS is operating in three rings: an Interior ring, consisting of Iraq and Syria; a Near Abroad ring in lands that were parts of historical Caliphates; and a Far Abroad ring in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Asia. In the Near Abroad, ISIS has

active governorates, or wilayats, in Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yemen, the Caucasus, Algeria, and Nigeria.

The analysts at the Institute for the Study of War have observed that ISIS has brought signature capabilities and campaigns from Iraq to Egypt, where it is now pursuing a campaign against Egyptian Security Forces in the Sinai modeled on the "Soldiers Harvest" campaign that eroded the Iraqi Security Forces' capabilities and control in Mosul, Iraq in late 2013. That historical campaign's signature weapon, the House-Borne IED (HBIED), destroyed the houses of Egyptian security forces in Sinai repeatedly this summer. The United States has seen the impact of the fall of Mosul, and it should be extremely concerned about a capable terrorist organization that is trying to thin security forces in internationally significant terrain, such as the Egypt-Israel border.

The United States must therefore evaluate its efforts against ISIS in Iraq and Syria in this wider global context. President Obama, in September 2014, declared his intent to "degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group known as ISIL," the government's acronym for the Islamic State. The international coalition against ISIS speaks of its mission slightly more modestly, using the military doctrinal term defeat (meaning to break the enemy's will or capability to fight) in lieu of destroy (meaning physically to render an enemy's combat capability ineffective until it is reconstituted).

Defeating ISIS is a correct mission statement for the activities of the United States. It does not mean U.S. troops must be everywhere that ISIS is, or that military force is the only instrument that should be used. Rather, defeating ISIS requires using military force, diplomacy, and all the instruments of U.S. national power to break the organization's capability to fight, since the will of an apocalyptic enemy is not likely to break. Some in policy circles might hope that ISIS could be contained in Iraq and Syria. But unfortunately, ISIS has already spread beyond those areas, as I have noted. The opportunity for containing ISIS in Iraq and Syria has passed. The opportunity to defeat it in Iraq and Syria in ways that collapse its global reputation and capabilities is fleeting.

The United States is not succeeding at defeating ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Make no mistake, the United States and the international coalition have been essential to limiting ISIS's expansion and reversing some of its gains. Airstrikes in Iraq have been vital to helping ground forces retake terrain and degrade ISIS. The U.S. has helped the Iraqi Security Forces recover some territory that ISIS had seized, such as the very important gain in Tikrit. ISIS has gained new terrain in Ramadi, however, and still retains its safehaven in Mosul. This is not surprising. The U.S. has not provided support to the Iraqi Security Forces in ways sufficient to render them sufficiently effective against this enemy, such as close air support.

The problems of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) at this time stem from the government's lack of a monopoly on the use of force, an unsurprising consequence of the long delay in providing any U.S. military support to Iraq and then constraining that support to levels inadequate to meet the crisis Iraq faced. Iranian-backed proxy forces thus took the field shortly after the fall of Mosul and have gained influence from the reliance the Iraqi Government must place on them. The Iranian proxies are different from the popular mobilization of Shia volunteers that have also taken the field. The popular mobilization has largely remained under the control of Iraq's clergy and political parties. But the Iranian-backed groups have asserted their own command and control. They include Katai'b Hezbollah, which the United States designated as a terrorist organization, and Asai'b Ahl al-Haq, the Lebanese Hezbollah-trained militia responsible for kidnapping and killing five U.S. soldiers in Iraq in 2007, among many other American and Iraqi deaths it has caused.

Since the fall of Ramadi, the Iranian-backed militias have deliberately chosen campaign objectives different from those designated by Iraq's Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, in order to throw Abadi's strategy off track and take control of the military situation. They are motivated by the determination they share with their Iranian masters to drive the U.S. out of Iraq once more and install pliable Iranian clients—a role in which these groups' leaders fancy themselves——permanently in Baghdad. In recent weeks, they have threatened Iraqi officials in order to ensure that they do not advance the Prime Minister's vital and popularly supported reforms. They or another Iranian-backed element have kidnapped Turkish workers in order to compel Turkey to change its policies in Syria. And they are increasing violence among Shia in vital cities such as Baghdad and Basra. The Iranian-backed militias are in a showdown with the Prime Minister, and the future of the Government of Iraq and the unity of the country rely on the Prime Minister winning this very real contest for power.

The U.S. is trying to counter ISIS as though it is the only enemy on the battlefield, when, in fact, it is but one of the terrible actors driving the global sectarian

war. A strategy that tries to empower Iran and help Tehran expand its influence throughout the region will inevitably fail. It is actually making things worse. Exclusive focus on the Islamic State has also led the U.S. to ignore the growing threat of al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra.

Jabhat al-Nusra poses a threat to the United States for several reasons. It is strong, growing, and effective, and it creates momentum for global al-Qaeda, which is still a real threat to the United States. It hosts the Khorosan Group, elements of al-Qaeda core that are plotting to attack the West. It recruits foreign fighters from a global network who will eventually bring the fight to their home countries. It also precludes many of the political and military solutions that the United States seeks. It violently eliminates moderate opposition from the battlefield; it was the organization that killed, kidnapped, and dispersed the group of roughly fifty U.S. vetted and trained rebels introduced this summer. It opposes political transition or working with the West. It is intertwined into courts, administration, and command structures in rebel-held Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra embeds itself in existing opposition civilian and military structures and gradually remakes them in al-Qaeda's image. It is therefore stealthier, more intertwined with social and military groups, and harder to defeat than ISIS. Jabhat al-Nusra uses more patient means than ISIS to achieve its objectives, but those objectives are no less dangerous: namely an emirate for al-Qaeda in Syria that is a part of al-Qaeda's global caliphate.

The United States needs to recalibrate its policy to the security realities that we face. A strategy that tries to compartmentalize the ISIS threat from other drivers of regional and global instability will fail.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN KATULIS, SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. KATULIS. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the committee, I am grateful to have the chance to appear before you today.

At the outset, my bottom-line assessment of the overall campaign to counter ISIS 1 year since it began is that the United States and its coalition partners have fallen short and have failed to meet their potential to counter ISIS. The coming year offers an important opportunity to make the necessary course corrections to place this campaign on a stronger footing. And the responsibility for that is a shared one, one that the administration bears the primary burden for, but also Congress is an important part of that dialogue.

The three main reasons for the incomplete results are:

Number one, many of the countries engaged in the campaign have not made the effort to degrade and defeat ISIS its number one priority in the region. This is true for the United States under the Obama administration, which has seen its top priority in the past year as securing a nuclear deal with Iran. This is true for many of the key Arab Gulf countries, like Saudi Arabia, which shifted their focus a few months into the start of the anti-ISIS campaign, and shifted resources to Yemen just after we had initiated strikes in Iraq and in Syria. This is also true for the actions of our NATO ally, Turkey. If you look at Turkey's actions, it seems to indicate that they see a bigger threat from Kurdish separatist groups in the Assad regime compared to ISIS.

The second factor is the lack of reliable, capable ground forces that are motivated to counter ISIS. There are some exceptions to this, including some of the Kurdish groups operating in northern Iraq and northern Syria. And we have seen their capacity to actually take back territory from ISIS, in coordination with U.S. and coalition airstrikes.

The third factor which explains why I think we have fallen short is the lack of sufficient attention to political and power-sharing dy-

namics in both countries. These political and power-sharing dynamics give rise to the strong sense of grievance in many of the Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria. This has created a political vacuum that has been exploited by extremist groups like ISIS. And ISIS is only one of the many extremist groups operating in this territory.

The main remedy to address these challenges is, I think, a stronger and more coherent effort by the United States to synchronize all aspects of its articulated anti-ISIS strategy and to develop a much more integrated approach to the region. Importantly, the anti-ISIS coalition efforts need to be coordinated with other key aspects of U.S. security and diplomatic engagement in the region, especially the proposed military arms transfers and increased security cooperation with partners in the region that the Obama administration has proposed in the aftermath of the Iran deal.

At this moment, I do not see, as an analyst, a coordinated, integrated strategy. Without that clearer strategy, all of these different pieces of what the United States is doing on the security front, on the diplomatic front, could actually end up accelerating the fragmentation that we see in some of the regions, rather than arrest it. And that is why I think it is key, at this moment, at this pivotal juncture, 1 year into the campaign, that we need to shift our focus to that broader landscape.

Very briefly, I think the Obama administration put in place the right concept of a coalition with more than 60 countries working on five lines of effort. My written testimony analyzes how we are doing on those five lines of effort. The sum total is that it is desperately incomplete and that we can do better to actually work with coalition partners to strengthen all five lines of effort.

Secondly, in Iraq, I actually think the United States has a stronger approach that is integrating the political, diplomatic, and economic engagements relative to Syria. This is not to state that Iraq is out of the woods, but there is a much more integrated strategy, there is much more to work with, when it comes to institutions inside of Iraq. And I think it is been a story of several steps forward, several steps back.

In Syria, I think Dr. Kagan and I and many are in full agreement that U.S. policy is in need of a major course correction. Achieving that course correction is easier said than done, in the context of today's Middle East, where you have multiple actors—state actors, like Iran, as was mentioned, but also non-state actors—getting engaged in this conflict. The recent increased internationalization of the conflict, with Russia's increased presence, needs to actually force us to talk about what is our realistic end state here. And, at this moment, U.S. policy has not provided sufficient clarity.

In conclusion, I think that the United States is at a really important pivotal moment in its position in the region, and this next year is an important point to try to reprioritize the fight against ISIS. This opportunity, I think, again, presents the Obama administration and Congress to build a new national consensus that elevates these challenges. I think the lack of an authorization for the use of military force, the lack of consensus on this, is yet another

example of how we as a society, we as a country, have not found a way to elevate this as a priority.

I have several thoughts on how we integrate these different pieces, but I look forward to the discussion and thank you again for inviting me to appear today.

Thanks.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Katulis follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRIAN KATULIS

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Syria, Iraq, and the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS. I have structured my testimony today around five main points:

1. Overall assessment of the campaign.
2. The broader regional security and political context for the anti-ISIS campaign.
3. The anti-ISIS coalition efforts 1 year into the campaign.
4. Iraq.
5. Syria.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 1 YEAR INTO THE CAMPAIGN

At the outset, my bottom line assessment of the overall campaign 1 year since it began is that the United States and its coalition partners have fallen short in the effort to counter ISIS. The next U.S. President will inherit the problem of ISIS. But the coming 16 months offer an opportunity to make important course corrections and place the anti-ISIS strategy on a stronger footing.

The United States mounted the anti-ISIS campaign in reaction to the group's surprisingly rapid advances across Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014. The campaign has helped key partners in Iraq's governing authorities and some countries in the region, such as Jordan, develop a more effective response to the group's rise.[1] Nonetheless, the campaign has not moved beyond a mix of limited tactical successes and setbacks.

The primary reason for these incomplete results is that many of the countries engaged in the anti-ISIS campaign have not made the effort to degrade, dismantle, and defeat ISIS their top priority over the past year. The Obama administration's number one priority in the region over the past year was securing a diplomatic deal with Iran on its nuclear program. The fact that the administration and Congress have not been able to arrive at a consensus over an authorization of the use of military force after 1 year also suggests that the anti-ISIS campaign has not been a leading priority.

Key regional partners in the anti-ISIS coalition, including Saudi Arabia, shifted their focus just months into the start of the anti-ISIS campaign and diverted resources to Yemen.[2] The actions of Turkey's Government, a NATO ally and member of the anti-ISIS coalition, seem to indicate that it sees a bigger threat to its interests from Kurdish separatist groups and the Assad regime in Syria than from terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate al-Nusra Front.[3] But now with an Iran nuclear deal completed, there is a possible opportunity to shift the focus to actions that enhance regional stability and marginalize the terrorists and extremists operating in the region, including ISIS.

A second key reason for the incomplete results is the lack of reliable ground forces that are motivated, capable, and equipped to counter ISIS effectively in many parts of the region. Airstrikes alone clearly will not effectively degrade and defeat ISIS. This does not mean the United States should send large numbers of ground troops—doing so would amount to repeating the mistakes of the past decade. Rather, this past year has demonstrated that there is a need for more reliable and capable partners that are motivated to counter ISIS. In some parts of northern Iraq and northern Syria, various Kurdish forces have taken territory from ISIS, offering an example of what can be achieved with capable and reliable ground forces.[4]

A third key reason for the incomplete results of the anti-ISIS campaign 1 year into the effort is the lack of sufficient attention to the political and power-sharing dynamics that have given rise to a strong sense of grievance among large sectors of the Sunni Muslim communities in Iraq and Syria. Groups such as ISIS have fed off of this dynamic and exploited the political vacuums in parts of Iraq and Syria. Thus far, the anti-ISIS campaign has not done enough to help these communities create the space to define a counter-ISIS political alternative.

The main remedy to address these challenges is a stronger U.S. effort to synchronize the various aspects of its anti-ISIS strategy with the recently proposed efforts to counter Iran's destabilizing regional role.[5] In essence, the United States needs to advance a clearer, more compelling, and proactive strategy for its engagement in the Middle East and move beyond the reactive, ad hoc, and tactical mode of operations that has dominated policy for years.

The recent Obama administration proposals to increase security cooperation and military transfers to partners in the wake of the Iran nuclear deal merit close consideration and must be analyzed in the context of the broader regional security efforts underway, including the anti-ISIS campaign.[6] Sending arms without having a more integrated political and diplomatic strategy for the region could end up contributing to greater fragmentation. Increased arms transfers to Gulf States also need to be carefully balanced with the additional assistance the Obama administration has provided to meet Israel's security needs, which remain significant and will grow if Iran increases its support to its proxies, such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Sending more U.S. troops to train, advise, and assist security forces in Iraq and possible partners in Syria, together with airstrikes, may eliminate some immediate terrorist threats and produce short-term security gains. Providing more advanced weapons systems to regional security partners might help reassure them in the face of concerns about Iran's role. But these actions on their own will not lead to the marginalization and ultimate political defeat of terrorist movements such as ISIS that are shaking the fragile state system in the Middle East.

THE MIDDLE EAST'S SHIFTING ENVIRONMENT AND THE CRISIS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

The anti-ISIS campaign and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria are part of a broader period of transformation in the Middle East. The region has entered an unpredictable and fluid period of transition involving increased competition for influence among key countries and the growing power of nonstate actors, including new categories of Islamist extremist groups, such as ISIS.[7]

The region's top powers are engaged in a multipolar and multidimensional struggle for influence and power. This competition is multipolar because it includes Shia-Sunni sectarian divisions as witnessed in the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but it also involves tensions between different countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Turkey, over the status of Islamist movements. In this multipolar competition, no single government is likely to emerge as a dominant power or hegemon. Rather, the structure of this competition is likely to strain the overall state system of the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

The competition is multidimensional because it involves both traditional forms of power projection—such as military aid and economic assistance—as well as new tools, including direct investments in media outlets, nonstate actors, and political movements. The region's wealthier, more politically stable states compete with each other by proxy—and, in some cases, directly—on the ground in poorer and more politically polarized states.

A core part of the challenge in this current regional dynamic is the crisis of political legitimacy for some of the major states in the region. Some governments lack support and a sense of allegiance from key sectors of their populations. This crisis has deep roots in the region's history over the past century, and the political legitimacy crisis is linked to the some governments' failure to provide basic security and a sense of inclusion, ownership, and justice to some of their citizens.

Groups such as ISIS have exploited this lack of political legitimacy and thrived in the vacuums that have emerged over the past decade in the Middle East. ISIS is part of a wider phenomenon of extremist ideologies taking root and the threat from terrorist networks mutating in dangerous and unpredictable ways. This broader context helps explain why the anti-ISIS campaign has had such limited impact after 1 year: A campaign against a group like ISIS requires a holistic, integrated approach that uses all aspects of U.S. power in coordination with partners, and it will require a longer time horizon to degrade and ultimately defeat these groups politically.

A central part of a long-term strategy for defeating ISIS and stabilizing the Middle East must involve some forward thinking about the possible governance structures that would most likely succeed in providing basic law and order, justice, and vital services while also enjoying the popular legitimacy of its people. In both Iraq and Syria, one possible sustainable end state is a decentralized federal structure of government—one that allows greater autonomy and a devolution of power from the center. This idea is not a call for an imposed partition or a breakup of these countries; past experience of international actors trying to delineate new borders without

the consent of the people has contributed to the problems witnessed today in the Middle East. Rather, the long-term strategy for stability in the Middle East will likely require extensive negotiations over the balance of power within key countries. In Iraq, that discussion has been ongoing for much of the past decade and there is a clearer possible pathway forward than there is in Syria today.

THE ANTI-ISIS COALITION: THE RIGHT CONCEPT WITH MAJOR GAPS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Last year, the Obama administration took some important first steps in building a sound policy framework to combat ISIS through its efforts to build an international coalition with key Middle Eastern powers. This framework was essential—having stakeholders from the region engaged is a necessary component in any long-term effort aimed at defeating ISIS and producing sustainable security in the Middle East. This impressive coalition now has more than 60 formal members working together on five main lines of effort:[8]

1. Providing military support to partners.
2. Impeding the flow of foreign fighters.
3. Stopping ISIS's financing and funding.
4. Addressing humanitarian crises in the region.
5. Exposing the true nature of ISIS.

In addition to building this coalition, the United States also worked with relevant international organizations, including the United Nations, to structure the dialogue aimed at developing an effective response to ISIS. As with all international efforts, followup and implementation are as important as the structure—and this points to one major area for increased efforts to realign the strategy in the next 16 months.

Overall, the anti-ISIS coalition's efforts along these five main areas are largely incomplete. The coalition has provided crucial military support to partners in Iraq and the broader region to counter the ISIS threat, but the absence of viable ground troops in key theaters has limited the overall impact of airstrikes conducted by the U.S.-led coalition in many parts of Iraq and most parts of Syria.

On impeding the flow of foreign fighters, several countries in the coalition—including Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Morocco, Spain, and Jordan—have passed new laws and undertaken law enforcement and intelligence actions aimed at stopping recruitment, but it is unclear whether these efforts have stemmed the flow of thousands of recruits from around the region and the world in a substantial way. Moreover, there appear to be no clear metrics for measuring success on this front in a way that defines the flow of foreign fighters to a broader range of extremist groups, including al-Qaeda's affiliate, al-Nusra Front.

As with foreign fighter recruitment, several countries—including the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Jordan—have launched financial task forces and new efforts to try to stem the flow of financing to ISIS, but it remains unclear how much these efforts are affecting the group's ability to fund itself, particularly as it has acquired quasi-state status in controlling key sources of revenue and access to basic services in parts of Iraq and Syria.

The humanitarian crisis resulting from the turmoil in Iraq and Syria continues unabated, as witnessed in the increased flows of refugees and displaced persons from those two countries this summer. Nearly 15 million people are displaced in Iraq and Syria: There are 4 million Syrian refugees, 7.6 million people displaced inside of Syria, and 3 million people displaced inside of Iraq.[9] The international community's response to the needs of the millions uprooted by the conflict has fallen far short.

On the last line of effort, countering ISIS's message and propaganda and exposing its true nature, the coalition has had a coordinated and focused effort. Earlier this summer, the United States and the United Arab Emirates launched an online messaging center to counter ISIS propaganda on social media platforms, and the leaders of some countries in the region, such as Jordan, have been strongly vocal in condemning the violent extremism of ISIS.[10] But the fact that the ISIS movement has continued to go viral beyond Syria and Iraq—with groups and followers pledging allegiance in places that include Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Nigeria, and Afghanistan[11]—points to the incomplete nature of the response.

Overall, the structure and framework of the coalition and how its lines of effort are defined seem correct, but the implementation and integration of different measures have been less successful. There does not appear to be a clear identification of the tasks, roles, and responsibilities expected from each member of the coalition.

In sum, more effort is needed to strengthen and coordinate all components of the campaign and place more emphasis on the nonmilitary aspects of the effort required to degrade and defeat ISIS. In Iraq, a strategic approach that integrates the mili-

tary, diplomatic, and economic components of U.S. and coalition engagement is currently clearer than it has been in Syria over the past year.

IRAQ: MIXED RESULTS IN THE FIRST YEAR, AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE FORWARD IN THE COMING YEAR

In the past year, the center of gravity in the anti-ISIS campaign for U.S. policy has been Iraq. It is the area where the United States has the greatest room to maneuver militarily and diplomatically and the coalition finds some of its most capable partners on the ground to counter ISIS.

Lessons learned from the past year

The Obama administration began the anti-ISIS campaign in Iraq last year by linking additional security assistance and airstrikes to a diplomatic effort to help produce an Iraqi national government that has ruled somewhat more inclusively than the previous government and broadened its outreach to key communities, but this political effort remains incomplete. The United States utilized additional security assistance as leverage to help the Iraqis agree upon a new Prime Minister. The current Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, has been trying to take more steps to address the lack of inclusion and the extreme challenges in providing basic governance and dealing with corruption in Iraq.[12]

On the security front, the anti-ISIS military campaign has produced limited and tentative advances in certain parts of northern and central Iraq, but the effort remains incomplete and directly linked to building the capacity of Iraqi Security Forces. The addition of limited numbers of U.S. troops to support Iraq's Security Forces have produced some results. These military actions were necessary first steps to arrest the rising tide of ISIS. At the same time, the Obama administration made the correct decision to limit the number of U.S. ground troops sent back to Iraq—sending a larger force would have repeated the mistakes of the previous decade, when the U.S. troop presence became a rallying cry and recruitment tool for terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda.

Three key lessons learned from the past year of increased U.S. engagement in Iraq include:

- Iraqi internal political dynamics can be shaped and influenced to achieve more positive political outcomes, within limits. The fact that the United States, working with other outside powers, created incentives to motivate Iraq's political leaders to make leadership changes demonstrates that the tough efforts of diplomatic engagement combined with other forms of assistance can help produce some positive results. Much work remains incomplete in helping Iraq develop an inclusive approach to governing, and the current Prime Minister faces a difficult, fractured, and often dysfunctional political system. But a system exists for negotiations over power, and the discussion continues with many key sectors of Iraq's population, including the dialogue between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Iraq's central government.
- Security assistance to Iraqi forces is important but needs to be linked to efforts to boost the legitimacy and credibility of sustainable governing structures in Iraq. After spending more than $25 billion on security assistance in Iraq for nearly a decade,[13] the collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces in key parts of the country last year demonstrates the importance of linking all security assistance efforts to governing authorities that have the population's broad support.
- Economic challenges will continue to strain the overall effort in Iraq. The global drop in oil prices presents severe budget challenges to Iraq's Government and will continue to affect the political dialogue inside of Iraq. In order to enhance the credibility of Iraq's governing structures as a viable alternative to the model that ISIS has developed in some areas, the strategy will also need to focus on how economic resources are allocated.

Looking ahead to the coming year

Iraq has many assets and structures in place that Syria does not, and the United States has a deeper and more extensive knowledge of Iraq's internal dynamics. Degrading and ultimately defeating ISIS in Iraq will require a continued focus on all elements of the strategy—the political, the diplomatic, and the military. Often, U.S. debates get stuck on the tactical questions of how many troops the nation might send to train and advise Iraqi forces. More U.S. ground troops on their own are unlikely to fundamentally alter the political dynamics and balance of power in the Iraqi political system. Continued, active diplomatic engagement will be necessary on several fronts to help Iraqi leaders produce an inclusive, national response to the threats posed by ISIS.

For the most part, the Obama administration has reengaged in Iraq after several years of neglect, which has helped develop an initial response that has mostly stopped the advances of ISIS, with a few notable exceptions such as the ISIS seizure of Ramadi earlier this year.

In the coming year, U.S. strategy will need to continue its efforts to build capable Iraqi Security Forces and conduct targeted strikes against ISIS. It will also need to safeguard against the potential long-term threats posed by armed groups operating outside of the control of the Iraqi governing authorities, such as the popular mobilization forces.

Most importantly, U.S. strategy must continue to remain engaged diplomatically on helping Iraqis achieve the right balance of power in their internal political system. There is a risk that the anti-ISIS campaign could produce a more fractured Iraq. Ultimately, a heavily decentralized system of government may be the only viable pathway to help Iraq's governing structures gain greater support and political legitimacy and offer an alternative to ISIS.

SYRIA: IN NEED OF A MAJOR COURSE CORRECTION

The current state of affairs in Syria is dismal. The structure of the overall conflict remains increasingly fragmented and the devastating impact that the war has had on most Syrians is difficult to comprehend, with more than 200,000 people killed and about half of the country's residents pushed out of their homes over the past 4 years.[14]

The Assad regime in Damascus, with support from regional actors such as Iran and Hezbollah and global powers such as Russia, has been able to remain in power years after the United States and other countries initially called on President Bashar al-Assad to step down. But the past year has presented major challenges to the Assad regime, as it has lost territory to a range of terrorist organizations and other opposition forces.

Lessons learned from the past year

The gap between the stated goals of U.S. policy—a negotiated political settlement with a transition from Assad's leadership—and the key tactics being used to achieve those goals, including support for a viable third-way opposition to ISIS and the Assad regime, remains wide. After receiving support from Congress to boost the training of opposition forces last year, the Obama administration has not produced meaningful results in the overall battlefield dynamics. Airstrikes and limited, targeted special forces raids have done some damage to ISIS and its leadership, but these measures have not fundamentally altered the movement's ability to control territory and expand its grip in certain parts of the country.

The recent moves by Russia to increase its support to the Assad regime[15] add a new layer of complexity to the dynamics in Syria and demonstrate that other actors will likely continue seeking to fill perceived vacuums and asserting themselves in actions when the United States and its anti-ISIS coalition partners are unwilling or unable to produce results.

Three key lessons from the past year of U.S. policy in Syria include:

- Building alternative armed forces opposed to ISIS is difficult, cannot be done halfheartedly, and must be connected to a wider long-term strategy to produce peace and stability. The U.S. effort to build an armed opposition to ISIS has not succeeded thus far, and it has had no discernable impact on the structure of the conflict in Syria. The airstrikes and some limited, targeted cross-border raids have had some impact on the ISIS movement, but these represent tactical gains and have not fundamentally altered the nature of the conflict in Syria. The effort has been slow to ramp up. Vetting possible forces to ensure that they do not have ties to terrorist groups and will not defect to other camps is a major challenge. Also, there is great difficulty in finding Syrians who are willing to pledge to fight ISIS but not turn their weapons on the Assad regime.
- ISIS is a leading terrorist challenge, but it is not the only one in Syria. The vacuum produced in many parts of Syria has been filled not only by ISIS but also al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's affiliate, and several other smaller terrorist organizations. The U.S.-led airstrikes have exacted some costs on these movements and may have prevented international terrorist attacks, but they have not fundamentally degraded these movements.
- The Assad regime's brutal actions continue to delegitimize it in the eyes of many Syrians. The majority of deaths in Syria are the result of the Assad regime's actions. Salvaging key institutions that are part of the current Syrian Government should be an objective of U.S. policy; the continued breakdown of Syrian institutions will only accelerate the country's overall fragmentation. But

any notion that the Assad regime will be part of a long-term plan to stabilize and unify the country is not connected to today's reality.

Looking ahead to the coming year

The United States needs to chart a new course on Syria and work with the international community and key regional actors to help deescalate the conflict and move back to some notion of a negotiated settlement. This process will take years, and this next year could be pivotal in establishing a framework for a long-term resolution to Syria's conflict. But this will require the Obama administration to give a much sharper focus and higher priority to Syria. Without a long-term strategy to stabilize Syria, the massive humanitarian challenges witnessed in the ongoing refugee crisis will continue.

The growing involvement of outside actors, including Russia, mirrors a wider internationalization of the civil war in Syria. With each passing month, regional and other outside powers become more deeply invested in the proxy conflict playing out across the country. The Gulf States and Turkey have focused largely on groups organized across the north. Jordan is playing an increasingly overt role in the southern front along its border. Russia and Iran continue to appear to double down on their support for the Assad regime in Damascus.

These international players continue to battle each other through their proxies on the ground, fueling the conflict for which Syrian civilians continue to the pay the price. But this greater internationalization may provide a window for diplomacy in the coming year. It is hard to see how any of these sponsors achieve their objectives through protracted proxy warfare. This only promises to splinter what remains of the Syrian state. A strategic stalemate will eventual emerge but at extremely high costs.

A truly integrated regional strategy would leverage U.S. support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and proposed weapons sales to the Gulf States in order to achieve a greater alignment of objectives in Syria. This means improving focus on ISIS and cutting off assistance to the most radical elements among their proxies. The United States gulf partners need help in Yemen and against Iran in the region. The United States need theirs against ISIS in Syria.

CONCLUSION

The United States and its coalition partners have taken some important steps to counter the threats posed by ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and beyond, but the steps are incomplete and require a higher priority focus than in the first year of the campaign. The strongest component of the campaign has been Iraq, and even there, the results are mixed. The weakest aspect of the strategy has been Syria, and a major recalibration of that effort is required. Keeping the actions within the framework of the coalition that the Obama administration has assembled is essential, but tighter coordination among the members of the coalition along all five lines of effort is necessary.

The United States has an extensive network of security partnerships with a wide range of actors in the Middle East. No other outside power rivals the range of relationships the United States currently has. At a time of increased activism by actors in the region, the United States needs to define a clearer strategy for engagement that takes into the account the roles and actions of the region's countries. This is a new period of complex transition.

For several decades during the cold war, the strategic framework for U.S. engagement in the Middle East was defined by the rivalry with the Soviet Union. In the immediate post-cold-war environment, the United States redefined its strategy in the gulf region as dual containment of Iraq and Iraq. The 2003 Iraq war marked a shift away from this strategy, and the strategic consequences of that shift are still underway. For much of the past decade, U.S. policy in the Middle East has been marked by a reactive, crisis management posture. The next year presents an opportunity to advance a more proactive agenda—one in which the question of how many U.S. troops are on the ground is an important but ultimately tactical consideration.

The coming year presents an opportunity for the Obama administration and Congress to build a new national consensus that elevates the challenges posed by ISIS to a higher priority than they have been in the past year. One possible vehicle for advancing this dialogue is a renewed focus on the authorization for the use of force measure proposed by the Obama administration.[16] In the wake of the Iran deal, Congress and the Obama administration should renew the discussion on developing a more sustainable legal framework for U.S. actions in the fight against ISIS and use those discussions as an opportunity to develop a stronger long-term strategy to defeat ISIS and stabilize the Middle East.

End Notes

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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BOWERS, VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSE, MERCY CORPS, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. BOWERS. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, thank you for inviting me to testify today about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria and Iraq. As you know, Mercy Corps has been working in the Middle East and North Africa for more than three decades. We currently operate in Syria, Iraq, as well as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and now, unfortunately, Greece.

Senators, I have just returned from Lesbos, Greece, which, as you know, is a island not just a few kilometers from the Turkish coast. This island is now a way station for thousands of refugees in their long journey to Europe. There I saw many people who have risked everything they have—that they have to—on their person—to flee for their lives. They are all survivors of a violent, protracted crisis that urgently requires a political solution. What we are seeing in Europe is, indeed, an emergency, but it is with an a much larger and complex crisis.

Tragically, Syrians and Iraqis are worse off today than they were a year ago, whether they are in Syria, Iraq, or living in neighboring countries. Regional host countries that are receiving the vast majority of refugees face particular strain on their resources. The longer the war drags on, the more new challenges we face. Humanitarian aid to assist those fleeing extreme violence in Syria and Iraq is critical, and we are thankful the U.S. Government has been so generous. Still, ending this crisis and its impact on the region requires more than writing checks. These response efforts continue to be just a drop in the bucket compared to the exponentially growing needs. The humanitarian community is struggling to assist hundreds of thousands of innocent people. And, to be frank, we are nearing a breaking point. The sheer number of people is staggering. Their needs grow ever greater and more desperate by the day, and there is still no end in sight.

Let me tell you a little bit of what we are seeing in Syria. As you know, protection continues to be the number-one challenge facing Syrians who are still in the country. On a daily basis, civilians living outside the areas where the coalition is fighting ISIS face unrelenting aerial attacks, including the threat of barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime also continues to restrict access to humanitarians such as ours. In some areas, we wait up to 8 months to access people in need. An entire generation of Syrian children and youth are growing up in this war zone. Instead of worrying about their schoolwork, they worry whether they or their family will be killed the next day.

For the first time, we are starting to see changes of food, aid, and systems in Aleppo governate, where we work. Many people originally that we assisted over the last few years, this was supplemental food. It is now coming to the stage where they do not have enough to eat without our aid. Hunger is not far away for these people.

We are also seeing a new trend when fighting of ISIS threatens towns and villages. People are fleeing closer to the border of Turkey. Everyone is on the phone, literally, with relatives, many already outside of the country, so they can make a quick decision. These tipping points are what you are seeing on the news today, in terms of the European migration flow.

In Iraq, we are witnessing a displacement of large proportions, with more than 3 million internally displaced. People are moving around the country because they do not feel safe. Importantly, while needs across ethnic and sectarian lines are there, most are—the displaced are Sunni Arabs. People are fleeing violence and repression from ISIS as well as a conflict generated by Iraqi Security Forces counteroffensives, and they need protection. Underlying this are unresolved ethnic divisions which continue to fester.

The humanitarian crisis within Iraq risks become something of a forgotten crisis overshadowed by, and conflated with, the war in Syria. The Iraq crisis has its own roots and its own nuances. The humanitarian response in Iraq should not be seen as another dimension of the response to the wider Syrian regional crisis.

While this situation is bleak, there are a number of concrete steps that Congress can take now to help the people in Syria and

Iraq. In addition to my full written testimony, I would like to leave the committee with at least two key recommendations.

First, provide funding for humanitarian assistance and longer term needs. As of this month, a joint U.N. and NGO funding appeals for Syria and Iraq are funded at barely 30 and 46 percent, respectively. This week alone, the World Food Programme cut food assistance for one-third of Syrian refugees. That is around 230,000 refugees in Jordan. It is more important than ever to shore up funding for the various humanitarian accounts in the FY16 budget.

Second, support programs that address the underlying causes of conflict that can build resilience and promote better social cohesion. After 4-plus years of war, families are tired of growing aid dependency, and, despite the risks, they want to rebuild and repair their schools, clinics, and water systems, where possible. They want to address the underlying conflict issues that fuel the cycle of violence. But, because of the way assistance is compartmentalized within our government, humanitarian aid does not fully allow for these type of programs. In Syria and Iraq, we need more multiyear, multisector programs that integrate the humanitarian and the development.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, humanitarians are not obviously the solution to these crisises. I must urge you to work with the Obama administration to find and work on a political solution to the war in Syria and support growth for a more accountable government in Iraq. As Americans, we can do better to end this violence. U.S. leadership must take a decisive action and push for a lasting peace. But, where is the determined and resilient diplomatic push, I ask? The moment for the push is now.

In conclusion, I would like to say that, though our—through our work and our partnerships in the region, we have been humbled and touched by the grace and dignity of Syrians and Iraqis alike, as well as by the generosity of their hosts. Despite the many profound challenges they face, we are also heartened by the unwavering faith of Syrians everywhere that one day there will be a peaceful resolution. It is with that goal in mind that we will obviously continue our work.

I wish to sincerely thank the committee for its focus in this tremendous important issue and for extending me to the privilege of testifying today.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bowers follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL BOWERS

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, thank you for inviting me to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations today about the spiraling humanitarian crisis in Syria and Iraq, and for the close attention you have paid to this complex and protracted crisis. I am here today in my capacity as Vice President of Humanitarian Leadership and Response with Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian and development nongovernmental organization (NGO) that responds to emergencies and supports community-led development in more than 40 countries around the world. Mercy Corps has been working in the Middle East and North Africa for more than three decades; we currently run and manage programs in Syria and Iraq, as well as in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and now Greece.

Senators, I just returned from Lesbos, Greece, this week. This island is a waystation for many refugees in their long journey to Europe. There I saw thousands of people who have risked everything they had left to flee for their lives. They are all survivors of a violent, protracted crisis that urgently requires a political solution.

What we are seeing in Europe is an emergency within a much bigger and more complex crisis.

Tragically, Syrians and Iraqis are worse off today than they were a year ago, whether they are in Syria, Iraq, or living in neighboring countries. Regional host countries that are receiving the vast majority of refugees face particular strain on their resources. The longer the war drags on, the more new challenges emerge. Humanitarian aid to assist those fleeing unimaginable violence in Syria and Iraq is critical, and the U.S. Government has been incredibly generous. Still, ending this crisis and its impact on the region requires more than writing checks.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE EFFORTS: REACHING A BREAKING POINT

I can say without hesitation that for Mercy Corps and other humanitarian agencies, Syria and Iraq present some of the most hostile and complex environments in which we have ever worked.

In the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances, through our local partnerships with Syrian and Iraqi civil society groups, we have been able to respond to humanitarian needs on a large scale.

In Syria, Mercy Corps is among the largest providers of food assistance as well as essential supplies that people need to survive and maintain a modicum of dignity and small comfort, such as blankets, toothbrushes, soap, and cooking utensils. We are also working hard to strengthen access to clean water and sanitation services, as well as a means to earn income and keep local markets going. Our programs meet the needs of an estimated 500,000 vulnerable Syrian civilians every month. Over the last year in Iraq, we met the critical needs of 365,000 displaced Iraqis and 385,000 Syrians through cross-border operations providing cash assistance, support to Iraqi civil society, access to education and programs that give communities the tools to address conflicts. Funding for these programs comes from contributions of the United States Agency for International Development; the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; and other institutional donors.

These response efforts continue to be just a drop in the bucket compared to the exponentially growing needs. The humanitarian community is struggling to assist hundreds of thousands of innocent people who need our help. To be direct—we are nearing a breaking point. The sheer number of people in need is staggering, their needs grow ever greater and more desperate by the day, and there is still no end in sight.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN SYRIA

Let me tell you what we are seeing in Syria. At this juncture, more than 11.6 million Syrians are on the run and half of those people are children. According to the U.N., an estimated 7.6 million Syrians have fled their homes and are still trying to survive in Syria. Another 4 million have been forced to seek safety in neighboring countries. Syria's prewar population is estimated to have been 22 million. By this accounting, to date more than half of the country has been displaced by the conflict.

Protection continues to be the number one challenge facing Syrians who are still in the country. On a daily basis, civilians living outside the areas where the coalition is fighting ISIS face unrelenting aerial attacks, including the threat of barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime. In ISIS-held areas like Mare in Northern Syria, we heard reports from multiple sources, including medical personnel, of chemical agents being used against civilians; some of our own staff were impacted. Medical professionals throughout the country are overwhelmed and targeted. The Syrian regime continues to restrict access—in some areas, agencies wait up to 8 months for permission to access people in need. On a daily basis, our partners, as a matter of common practice, painstakingly negotiate access across numerous conflict lines in order to deliver lifesaving aid.

An entire generation of Syrian children and youth are growing up in a war zone. Instead of worrying about their schoolwork, they worry whether they or their family might be killed. They are frustrated and isolated—young women in particular rarely leave their homes. Young men and women both experience a sense of powerlessness and humiliation.

For the first time since we started delivering aid into the Aleppo governorate 3 years ago, families we spoke to this week said that they depend on our food aid to survive; their personal resources are now completely exhausted. Without this aid they would go hungry. A mother of 10 in Aleppo told us that she has no money left to buy groceries, but with the monthly food basket her children will not go hungry. During August alone, we responded to the needs of more than 400,000, delivering 2,600 tons of food. We are observing a new trend in our northern operating area: When fighting with ISIS threatens towns and villages, people are moving closer to

the border with Turkey so they can cross if things get too bad. Everyone is on the phone with relatives, many already outside of the country, so they can make a decision in real time.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN IRAQ

In Iraq, we are witnessing displacement of massive proportions with more than 3 million internally displaced Iraqis. People are moving around the country because they do not feel safe. Importantly, while needs cross ethnic and sectarian lines, most of those displaced are Sunni Arabs. People are fleeing violence and repression from ISIS, as well as the conflict generated by the Iraqi Security Forces' counter-offensives, and need protection. Underlying this, unresolved ethnic divisions continue to fester.

The humanitarian crisis within Iraq risks becoming something of a "forgotten" crisis—overshadowed by, and conflated with, the war in Syria. The Iraqi crisis has its own roots and its own nuances. The humanitarian response in Iraq should not be seen as another dimension of response to the wider Syrian regional crisis.

Although currently overshadowed by the dangers of ISIS, weak governance driven by sectarian divisions threatens to magnify the scale of the crisis in Iraq, and over the longer term poses a threat to stability. The displacement crisis compounds existing fragility, accentuates the risk of fragmentation and amplifies human suffering. Moreover, the conflict overlays Iraq's vulnerability to other man-made and natural disasters—like the continued structural vulnerability of the Mosul Dam. While it is unknown just how fragile the dam is, recent Iraqi Security Forces' activity urging people to relocate from villages nearby the dam in Nineweh governorate does prompt renewed concern. Imagine the humanitarian consequences of a serious dam breach: more than a million displaced; flooding that would overwhelm the city of Mosul and even put the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad under several feet of water; and untold implications for an already tense and violent society and for a humanitarian response that is already stretched beyond capacity.

A proactive strategy is essential now to address the root causes of violence in Iraq and to prepare Iraq for the protracted challenges that will no doubt remain even after ISIS is defeated. Iraqis are concerned about the protection issues and human rights abuses taking place now, but are even more concerned about what will happen after the current fighting ends. If history is any guide, communities will face violent retribution and collective justice in the aftermath, and we need to act now to prevent atrocities. We also need to support the work of grassroots organizations that are leading response efforts—including in areas where needs are great but access is increasingly difficult for international actors—and avoid segmenting aid or favoring particular regions or demographics in Iraq, which in some cases inadvertently fuels sectarianism.

If the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress continue to take a narrow and predominantly short-term approach to addressing humanitarian needs in Iraq, the cycle of violence will surely continue and most likely escalate. Interventions that only address the symptoms of the conflict have the real potential to do more harm than good by creating dependencies and sidelining the voices of Iraq's fledgling civil society and government stakeholders, both local and central. This includes government bodies like the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Directorate, Reconciliation Committee at the Prime Minister's office, provincial councils and the Iraqi Civil Society Committee, which are seeking to lead reconciliation efforts and address the underlying drivers of the conflict: poor governance and political grievances. Some notable progress has been made on this front with dedicated funding from the Department of State for peace building and reconciliation efforts, with Iraqi civil society in the lead, but this work needs greater attention.

CHALLENGES OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN ISIS-CONTROLLED AREAS

In both Syria and Iraq, aid agencies like Mercy Corps are increasingly walking a fine line between the humanitarian imperative to respond to the tremendous human suffering in areas under the control of sanctioned terrorist groups such as ISIS, and the need to protect U.S. taxpayer-funded aid from falling into the hands of such groups.

This is a tough challenge to navigate. Aid agencies are conducting operations where the need is greatest—inevitably high-risk areas—yet we lack adequate legal protections. The result is a chilling effect on our operations: Banks are terrified of doing business with Syrian humanitarian aid groups because they fear that the U.S. Government will crack down on them. Humanitarian actors are reticent to work in areas of real need due to fears that any diversion of aid—no matter how small—

will cost them their reputation or shut down their ability to provide aid elsewhere. This leaves innocent civilians trapped in besieged areas, left to fend for themselves.

Mercy Corps—like other professional humanitarian organizations—brings decades of global experience, rigorously tested standards and robust rules of engagement, which we clearly communicate to armed actors in our areas of operation. Where red lines are crossed, we will not hesitate to suspend operations. Where aid is captured, we do not hesitate to hold those responsible to account and seek to regain that aid. The humanitarian community has developed operating protocols that have proven effective in countering aid diversion and opening up access in non-ISIS areas. We want to roll these out further in ISIS areas, too. But, to do that with any measure of confidence, we urgently need clarity on U.S. Government policy toward humanitarian negotiations with groups such as ISIS, as well as a crisper delineation of the space we have to operate.

EFFORTS TO COUNTER VIOLET EXTREMISM

While speaking to the destruction caused by ISIS, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the administration's strategic leadership in advancing a new global policy framework on countering violent extremism focused on mitigating and preventing violent extremism.

The February White House Summit on CVE—Countering Violent Extremism—has truly helped to usher in a new global dialogue on how to strengthen civilian efforts to mitigate the grievances and root causes that fuel cycles of violence and lure communities into joining or supporting violent groups.

On September 29, President Obama will lead a high level leader's summit in New York focused on advancing this framework. We urge congressional attention and support to advance this emerging, but potentially pivotal, policy framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

While the situation is bleak, there are a number of concrete steps that Congress can take now to help the people of Syria and Iraq. I would like to leave the committee with the following four key recommendations:

First, provide adequate funding for humanitarian assistance and longer term needs. As of this month, the joint U.N. and NGO funding appeals for Syria and Iraq are funded at barely 30 percent and 46 percent, respectively. This week, the World Food Programme cut food assistance for one-third of Syrian refugees, including 229,000 people in Jordan.

It is more important than ever to shore up funding for the various humanitarian accounts in the FY16 budget—Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA), International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Food for Peace (FFP), and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA). Specifically, we urge that these accounts be funded at no less than the following levels—$3.059 billion for MRA, $1.895 billion for IDA, $1.466 billion for FFP, and $50 million for ERMA.

We also need funding for programs that address root causes underlying the Syrian crisis among others. We urge you to support funding levels of $6.1 billion for Economic Support Funds (ESF), including no less than $72.5 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF), both base and Overseas Contingency Funds (OCO), in Iraq to help local governments and service ministries respond to citizens' needs and rebuild trust and legitimacy in communities in areas throughout the country. Continue to support allocation of $25 million in Iraq for conflict response programming, as directed in the FY15 omnibus spending bill in FY16, and consider expanding to cover civil society support efforts.

Finally, support funding of no less than $100 million for the Complex Crisis Fund (CCF), a crucial flexible account that enables civilian agencies around the world to undertake rapid stabilization, prevention and crisis response activities.

Second, support programs that address the underlying causes of conflict, build resilience and promote social cohesion. After four-plus years of war, families are tired of dependency. Despite the risks, they want to rebuild and repair schools, clinics and water systems. They want to address the underlying conflicts that fuel cycles of violence. And the people we work with want opportunities to earn a living. But because of the way assistance is compartmentalized, humanitarian aid does not fully allow for these types of programs.

An overreliance on emergency response—without simultaneous support to programs that seek to address the underlying causes of crises—is unsustainable. In Syria and Iraq, we need more multiyear, multisector programs that integrate "humanitarian" and "development" and that support local and national actors—including the private sector, local government and civil society—who usually have the greatest knowledge and capacity to operate effectively.

Third, rebalance risk and operations in high-risk environments by providing reasonable legal protections for humanitarian actors. The U.S. and other major donors do not have adequate legal frameworks to protect humanitarian actors from criminal prosecution against overly aggressive counterterrorism legislation. We have worked with the administration toward a solution on this issue for years, to unsatisfactory outcomes. We urgently need the Senate to accelerate efforts to reform U.S. counterterrorism frameworks and laws that slow or impede effective humanitarian operations or access.

Finally, humanitarians are not the solution to these crises. I urge you work with the Obama administration to urgently seek a political solution to the war in Syria and support the growth of a more accountable government in Iraq. Our world leaders must take decisive action and push for a lasting peace. Humanitarians are being hung out to dry, left to address the Syria crisis by themselves. Where is the diplomatic push? The moment for this push is now. With the U.N. General Assembly and G20 coming up in quick succession, Congress needs to urge the Obama administration to work with other P5 governments, among others, to invest the diplomatic energy necessary to end the war in Syria. In Iraq, the escalating violence of recent months reminds us that the international community needs to aggressively invest in conflict mitigation, reconciliation and good governance as part of a long-term vision for Iraq's stability. Following the establishment of a new government in Baghdad in September 2014, this is an especially critical time for the central government to respond positively to demands for political inclusivity.

In conclusion, I would like to say that through our work and partnerships in the region, we have been humbled and touched by the grace and dignity of Syrians and Iraqis, as well as by the generosity of their hosts, despite the many profound challenges they face.

I wish to sincerely thank the committee for its focus on this tremendously important issue, and for extending me the privilege of testifying today.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much. And thank you all for your testimony and your expertise being shared with us.

I want to go back to try to understand exactly where we are. But, I want to thank Chairman Menendez for convening us, back in August, early September of 2013, at a moment in time when, had we taken the steps that this committee authorized on a bipartisan basis, I am absolutely convinced we would not be seeing the mass problem that we are seeing spread across Europe today. I am absolutely convinced of that. And, instead of the administration going ahead with a 10-hour operation—it is going to involve no combat boots on the ground at a time when there was actually a free Syrian opposition that was moderate, that was really functioning and building momentum—instead of that happening, that did not occur. Matter of act, we did not even call our partners, in many cases. They just watched that on CNN.

Mr. Bowers, I know most of us have been to the refugee camps both in Jordan and Turkey, and you are right, their hosts have been incredible—Incredible. What the people in those countries have done, and others, is truly heartwarming, to see the way they have brought these people in. At the same time, I have been there multiple times and told them what we were going to do to support them, relative to, again, going back against Assad. And it has not happened. We certainly have a role to play, especially now, in triage. And I think you will see bipartisan consensus around that.

So, then we tried to push for a no-fly zone, which would have had a dual purpose of keeping those who were displaced in their own country, but also would have kept the border from Turkey being so porous and allowing people to go into Syria and Iraq. And, of course, we could not do that, because it might cause American troops to be—or American Air Force to be—against Assad, and we

could not allow something like that to happen, even though Assad—it was our stated policy—that he had to go.

So, since that time, he has been barrel-bombing his own citizens and neighborhoods, not unlike those that people here in the audience come from, just average neighborhoods—been barrel-bombing them, torturing them in prison. We saw, at the Holocaust Museum presentation, what he is doing to his own people. And so, now people obviously have spread and left the country. Half the citizens of Syria today are displaced. Again, and we have a hand in that, because we did not do what we said we were going to do, and then we would not follow on with a policy.

So, I have a question. I, first, want to understand what is going on. We have this deal with Iran. And, just as it is completed, Iran says that there will be no United States involvement, no other country involvement, in taking Assad out. We now have Russia flying over Iran and Iraq, delivering equipment to Assad. Our partners. Our partners.

We have got some quasi-border deal with Turkey. They wanted to do something much stronger. We would not do that.

You talk about the 60 countries in our coalition. I do not see much really occurring. We have a train-and-equip program, which I said at the time was just eyewash—$500 million just to make it look like we were doing something. I know today there was testimony in Armed Services where 60 were trained. I thought it was 54. And now four are left.

I thought there was just zero. So, we have four people left out of this program, which obviously shows a lack of commitment.

I do not understand where we are, so I would just like to ask our two more war-oriented witnesses: What is happening? Where is Russia in this? And are we actually encouraging—with a wink and a nod—Russia to prop up Assad? Is that part of our strategy in beating back ISIS? Just explain to us—we are going to have some administration witnesses in, but I would just like to understand, from your perspective, what you think is really happening here, because there is obviously no real commitment, if you will, on the ground yet. When I say "on the ground," in the country, relative to ISIS. Or Assad. And Assad, by the way, is the genesis—the genesis of what we are seeing on the television and all of these people leaving their country. But, go ahead.

Dr. KAGAN. Senator Corker, thank you for your question.

I will provide my assessment of what I think is a turning point, or a potential turning point, in the Syrian conflict, and an assessment of a turning point in Iraqi politics that need to be the guidelines or the parameters in which we, the United States, formulate our strategy.

Within Syria, the regime has taken significant losses over the course of the spring, and in particular, lost Idlib province, which is right up against the Alawite areas that Bashar al-Assad calls home. And, in fact, we should be very concerned because one of the leaders of the capture of that particular province was al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, which is also a grave threat to U.S. interests.

That said, as Assad has had to think about how to continue to maintain his regime and the outposts that he is maintaining in far

corners of Syria, he has been under increasing pressure, and it has been clear, really since 2013, that he has relied on outside supporters, particularly the Iranians, to provide manpower, command and control and advisors, in order to retain his regime while under pressure.

I assess that he faces similar pressure right now, but that the Iranians do not have as much to give as they have before. They have provided quite a lot. And I do assess that the Russians mean to provide the Assad regime with some support in order to make sure that the regime does not collapse, and perhaps in order to regain terrain for the regime.

At the same time, we have ISIS poised for continued operations, perhaps even into central Syria, and we have al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra poised either for an offensive in Latakia or elsewhere in central Syria in a very threatening way.

And so, if I were Assad, I would be concerned. And I think the reason why we are seeing international actions right now to support Assad is that he has every reason to be concerned, but also because the United States has not offered anything meaningful, in terms of military support, to the Syrian opposition that is fighting him in a way that will allow them to help defeat him or allow us to help save the lives of innocent civilians.

Furthermore—just one more point—inside of Iraq, whereas—where we see Prime Minister Abadi trying to make important reforms that are essential to securing the institutions of the Iraqi Security Forces that we seek to partner with, we also see Iranian Shia-backed militias, Iranian-backed militias kidnapping Turkish hostages—workers. We see them kidnapping, actually, Iraqi figures and politicians and, in general, challenging, through the use and threat of use of military force, the very power of Prime Minister Abadi and the institutions that he supports.

So, in fact, the United States is facing a counteroffensive right now between Iran and Russia, and it is taking place on both fronts: Iraq and Syria.

The CHAIRMAN. Brian, if you would be brief, I have gone a little bit over my time, but what is——

Mr. KATULIS. It is——

The CHAIRMAN [continuing]. If you would, specifically, What exactly is occurring right now with Russia?

Mr. KATULIS. Well, I think it is still too early to really tell. And the fact that the United States—this administration seems to be caught off guard by this—and this is not the first episode, both in Iraq and Syria in the past 18 months, where we seem to have been surprised—you know, the blitzkrieg of ISIS throughout central Iraq points to, I think, some areas where we might explore some oversight and why there is this seeming lack of anticipatory intelligence.

I think—the thing I would say about Russia at this point is, clearly what their stated goal here, and what President Putin said, there seems to be at least some truth to it. They have a deep concern about the Islamist extremism. I would argue that offering support to a regime like the Assad regime, which has contributed to that Islamic extremism, is probably the worst way to defeat this threat.

When we come back to what I think is a point of consensus between Dr. Kagan and I, and I think a shared view, is that we need to nest our tactics, our different policies in Syria in a broader context of a political settlement. And it is something that Mr. Bowers has highlighted, as well.

We do not have that. We have, from this administration, the rhetoric of that. And, even today, it is hard to really understand how they are—the Obama administration really is going to try to deal with this with Russia. Will it talk to Russia, or not? I have not seen the latest on this. I would be very skeptical that Russia has a clear plan, here, to actually help stabilize Syria and then also defeat the threat.

So, my main conclusion is, I think it is too early to tell. I would not give a lot of credit to what Russia is trying to do, here, to help. I do not think it is intended to stabilize Syria in the holistic sense, in the way that I think we all agree is necessary.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Well, as I listen to your responses, it just adds to the complexity of our challenges. It is difficult to figure out how we can deal with so many players, including Russia and Iran, in the context of what is happening in Iraq and Syria and with ISIL.

The first question I have is: How would you define metrics to determine whether we are gaining ground on controlling and eliminating ISIL, or not? I mean, we have heard a lot of different characterizations of what we want to get done. But, can you just—very briefly, how would you judge the success of a program to eliminate the threat of ISIL?

Mr. KATULIS. If I could start. And I did this a bit at length in my written testimony. I actually think the contours of what General Allen and the team that is charged with the anti-ISIL coalition, the five lines of effort, I think are the start of really good metrics or categories. First is providing military support to partners. And I think that can be assessed as—that question is complicated to assess, given the fragmentation even inside of Iraq, the fact that there are different forces, like Kurdish forces and the discussion about a Sunni, you know, national guard. In Syria, this is another opportunity for oversight from the Congress. If I were someone who had voted for funding the arming and training and equipping of that program over the last year, I would have a lot of questions, because I just do not know what happened there.

Second, the metric of impeding the flow of foreign fighters is—and, as I put in my written testimony, looking at that, actually quantifying it, is a difficult thing to do, especially when you have a coalition of 60-plus. But, you can look at the legal measures, the law enforcement measures, and then also try to collect that information, because I do not think our intelligence agencies have an accurate read on the flow of foreign fighters. And that is defined to ISIS. Let me highlight that—what I said before, the other extremist groups, like Jabhat al-Nusra and others.

Third, stopping the flow of financing. Again, right category. I am not certain that I see any public or private reports coming from the administration or the coalition that tells us a little bit about how this is doing. We are initiated, at the Center, looking at these five

lines of efforts. The humanitarian crisis, which was well covered by Mr. Bowers, I think is crystal clear. We have all fallen short, and we are not observing that.

And then, lastly, which I think is one of the weakest lines of effort, which is exposing the true nature of ISIS, the counternarrative, the countering violent extremism. Here again, you see piecemeal efforts on the part of the United States and some people in the coalition, but you are not seeing the results in any way. I think a fair assessment 1 year into this campaign, given that ISIS has seen its brand expand to places like Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, and other places, we are on a—this ad hoc reactive tactical posture, and it is baffling to me, because this is a force that is using the very tools that our society created: Twitter——

Senator CARDIN. That is very helpful.

Mr. KATULIS. Thank you.

Senator CARDIN. Dr. Kagan, I want to get you engaged on a separate issue. If you want to comment more, it will be fine. We have had some success, particularly with the Kurdish forces, in both Iraq and Syria. But it is complicated. In Iraq, it is complicated because of our support for a central government that is effective. It is also sensitive for Turkey, and we need Turkey as an ally. So, do you have any recommendations on how we can handle the Kurdish fighters?

Dr. KAGAN. The Kurdish fighters have been extremely important for retaking control of terrain that is predominantly Kurdish near the Kurdish-held areas. But, the Kurdish forces are not really a power-projection force that can go into Arab Iraq or Arab Syria and successfully recover terrain. So, I think they are absolutely important to fund, train, and equip as a defense against ISIS and as a counteroffensive force, but I do not think that they can be the sole force that we fund, train, and equip. I remember being in Mosul in 2007–08, when, in fact, the Kurds were flying Kurdish flags over Iraqi Government buildings. There is no love lost between Kurds and Arabs in northern Iraq or Syria, and we need to be very careful that we do not inadvertently provoke an ethnic conflict to replace the grave sectarian conflict that we already see.

Senator CARDIN. And I would just point out—we have heard directly from the Iraqi government on it—they are very concerned about a functioning national government and how we deal with the Kurdish areas.

I just want to underscore one thing that the chairman said, last Congress we worked together to try to provide authorization for helping the moderate opposition in Syria. And I think it was a strong bipartisan effort. I am sorry we were unable to get to the finish line. I do want to, though, point out that a safe zone—a no-fly zone—is a different issue, and it is an issue that has a lot of pluses and minuses. We did not take that issue up in our committee, and I think you will find there are different views on whether a no-fly zone would be beneficial, or not, or whether it draws us into more of a military conflict.

To Mr. Bowers, no one is going to disagree that you need money to address the humanitarian crisis. The resilience and social issues you mentioned in Syria, I find it hard to believe that we could be successful in any sustained effort to provide that type of a climate.

So, we have an immediate crisis and people are dying every day. Other than money, what would you like to see U.S. leadership do to help people at risk?

Mr. BOWERS. Senator, thank you. I think, just on the issue of what else we can do, beyond the humanitarian, I would say you would be surprised where we can actually wedge in issues on both building resilience, where you can find it, and social cohesion. It does exist there, even in such a violent place.

The reports that we have put out recently would indicate that, you know, there are areas of intervention, beyond the humanitarian, that can sort of underline and rebuild some of that social fabric. So, I would not discount that so quickly.

Money, of course, is a big issue. Ideally, at this stage, if there is hope of a political process that will lead to some type of negotiated resolution, you may find people changing their mind of exodus, say, to Europe. So, you need to provide—the world community, and led by the United States and others—will need to provide that there is a end to this in sight at some point, or at least a process put in place that is credible, beyond the envoys that we already have.

The political resolution is what is driving, at the end of the day, or lack of, why people are leaving in drove. They cannot work legally in these host countries. Most of these schools are—even in the camps—to our best of our abilities, are not providing the education they want for their children. And so, ultimately, they are seeking refuge in another place on a permanent basis, most likely.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. If I can qualify for the committee—we had officials within the administration pursuing, with Turkey, a no-fly zone. Many of us have been there to hear reports of their efforts. I supported that along the Turkish border to create a place for these people to be, inside their own country. As I understand it, when the decision memo got to the President, he did not agree to that. So, it was not just me and others on this committee pushing for that. There were people inside the administration charged with these responsibilities that also were pushing for that. And obviously it did not occur. I did not mean to imply the committee——

Senator CARDIN. No, no. And, Mr. Chairman, I am not suggesting there are not proponents in the administration of no-fly zones. All I am suggesting is that, from a congressional weigh-in on no-fly zones, we really have not——

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, that is correct.

Senator CARDIN [continuing]. We have not taken a position.

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct. That is correct.

Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously, this is a huge problem. Coming from a manufacturing background, I have solved a lot of problems. It starts with acknowledging reality, even when you really do not like looking at it, and then setting achievable goals. So, I would like to do a quick timeline, because it lays out the history of this fight. I have heard, since I joined this committee, and from this administration, that we need to find a political solution, and I am wondering if that is really a realistic goal.

The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2010. In 2011, Bashar Assad started slaughtering citizens. There were hundreds slaughtered when President Obama declared that Assad should step aside, he decided that Mubarak must go and Qaddafi must go, without any plan to figure out what happens when they go.

By 2012, Assad had slaughtered somewhere between 8,000 and 37,000 of his citizens, and in August 2012, President Obama drew a redline on use of chemical weapons. By 2013, there had been 100,000 Syrians slaughtered, and, of course, Bashar Assad crossed that redline and we did nothing. By 2014, there were more than 200,000 Syrians slaughtered. In 2015, the number is definitely above that. Now we have 7.6 million Syrians displaced within Syria, 4 million refugees, and we are starting to see hundreds of thousands flow into Europe.

I want to talk about Iran's role in the Middle East. Anybody dispute that Iran was one of the greatest destabilizing factors in Iraq? [No response.]

So, we definitely won the Iraq war, and then we lost it, largely because Iran destabilized it, correct, backing the Shiites—militias? [No response.]

Obviously, Iran is one of the greatest supporters of the Assad regime in Syria, as we have seen that spin out of control.

Oh, I failed to mention, in 2011, kind of a key date, President Obama made the historic blunder of pulling the stabilizing force out of Iraq. I think keeping this force would have stabilized and seized a historic opportunity to see a Sunni, Shia, and Kurd coalition potentially succeed, and also would have helped stop Iran supply overflights into Syria.

But, Iran is destabilizing Yemen; Lebanon, through Hezbollah; Gaza, through Hamas. Are we seeing a common destabilizing factor there? Now, to complete the history lesson, we just completed this deal with Iran, where the world is going to allow tens of billions—eventually hundreds of billions—of dollars to flow into the Iranian economy and the military to strengthen that destabilizing state sponsor of terror. Is there really a political solution that is going to be possible in Syria?

I will start with you, Dr. Kagan.

Dr. KAGAN. I am extremely concerned about the prospect of a political solution in Syria, because there are many parties to the conflict who do not wish to see a political solution that we, the United States, would define as acceptable. Bashar al-Assad is one, of course, since perpetuation of his power and his regime is certainly one of his goals. And I assess that his presence at the head of that regime is a driver of radicalization through the region.

A second actor that does not wish to see a political solution is Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda affiliate inside of Syria. And, because Jabhat al-Nusra is intertwined with Syrian opposition fighters in combined headquarters, and provides high-end military capabilities to those opposition forces, it is a credible spokesperson to those forces. They listen to Jabhat al-Nusra because they have military capability that is wanted. They are actively opposing a political solution.

Senator JOHNSON. So——

Dr. KAGAN. So, in short, although I would like to see one, I do not actually think that the behavior of different groups on the ground is simply going to change in order to enable political transition. Rather, I do actually think that sometimes diplomacy needs to be backed by force.

Senator JOHNSON. Now, talking about the denial of reality, I have listened to this administration talk about how, for example, in Ukraine, we need to offer Vladimir Putin an off-ramp. I do not know about you, but all I see Vladimir Putin doing is biding his time looking for on-ramps. I am afraid we are going to start hearing that pretty quickly. When referring to his involvement with Syria he said, "Oh, we have got to offer him an off-ramp." No, Putin is looking for an on-ramp. And again, why do we talk about a political solution when, let us face it, we are not going to have a political solution until there is a military victory. Is that not basically true?

Dr. KAGAN. I believe that, without security, human beings do not turn to political solutions.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Katulis, President Obama stated his goal: degrade and ultimately defeat ISIS. Are we making any progress toward that goal at all? Do you see any kind of strategy for defeating ISIS out of this administration?

Mr. KATULIS. I think there is this—excuse me, Mr. Senator—there is a strategy on paper, but the implementation of that strategy has been lacking in certain aspects. I think, in Iraq, there has actually been some decent progress on using our leverage to try to get the central government to be more inclusive. A different face, a different approach there. The integration of these military and diplomatic tools has been quite good. The picture in Iraq still is tough, but it has arrested the rise of ISIS last year, and has beat it back in some cases, and there is a lot to work with.

In Syria, the gap between the stated administration policies, its goals, this goal of a political solution and the tactics we have in place, is very wide. In the short run, I actually do not see a prospect for a political solution inside of Syria at this point. But, if some of these tools that some of the Senators have talked about—the discussion about a no-fly zone or a safe zone—if all of these different pieces, which I essentially see as tactics, are wrapped up in a strategy that tries to get to some sort of cessation of hostilities, some sort of sense of battle lines, which, I think, if you see from ISW's maps—in Iraq, you more or less have a general sense of the contours, and there is a little bit of predictability there; in Syria, that is not the case. A political solution is much more viable if we actually see a decline in violence, something Mr. Bowers has highlighted, too, for the refugee crisis.

So, today, no, I do not see it. But, we do need to actually think about, How do we use these military tools? Because if the U.S. starts using military tools with the great power that we have without thinking through how this will likely impact a fragmented conflict in Syria, we could actually accelerate the fragmentation of that state without thinking through what are the next steps.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, thank you both for your testimony. I have to be honest with you, I am bewildered in trying to understand the rhyme or reason of our actions as it relates to Syria, for sure, and even beyond.

We have spent an enormous amount of lives and national treasure in Iraq. And yet, unless there is political reconciliation, where Sunnis feel that they are fighting for a country that includes them, we can continue to spend all the money in the world; we are not going to achieve our goal there, I think.

In Syria, just simply put, the train-and-equip program just came far too late and too feeble. When this committee authorized train and assist, the administration just was not there. And that might have been a time in which the dynamics would have allowed us to have a real effect on the ground by a robust train-and-equip program, but we could not get the administration there. And now it is so feeble, in part because we insist on excluding everyone who wants to fight Assad, versus only ISIL. So, at the end of the day, I understand testimony before the Armed Services Committee today says that there is four or five, actually, that we have trained. That is pretty incredible. And I do not know if the American taxpayer is going to accept that expenditure of money for that result, at the end of the day, not to mention the lack of success that we want as it relates to changing the dynamics in Syria.

This committee passed an Authorization for the Use of Military Force in Syria at a time that Assad was using its chemical weapons against its own people. And we thought that it had succeeded in eliminating all chemical weapons from the battlefield. But, in fact, we see that Assad is in the midst of barrel-bombing and using chlorine gas as a weapon against his own people, and we seem not to want to raise that issue because to do so might be a very violation of the success we thought we had and the red line that we had drawn.

I look at the situation with Russia, and I just cannot for the life of me, after just having agreed to a nuclear agreement with Iran and having spent so many American lives and billions of dollars in Iraq, that we cannot at least Iraq, if not Iran, not to allow military overflights so that they can take more weapons to Syria. And when I read the press reports—and I hope they are wrong—when we talk about talking to Russia, we are talking—I see questions of deconflicting. The question is not deconflicting, the question is, What is Russia doing sending more military hardware, trying to prop up Assad, creating an airbase in Syria? That is for their own purposes. And yet, we have, clearly, Putin trying to use that, as if he cares enough about ISIL that that is his primary purpose. But, I—having seen Putin in Ukraine, in Georgia, and in so many other places, I doubt very much that is his only purpose. It could be an additional purpose, but I doubt it is very much his only purpose.

So, I look at all of this, and I just wonder what our policy—actually, I do not think there is a policy; there are a series of actions, and we are listless, at best, or moribund, at worse.

So, with that as a preface at least to where my concerns are, can you help me—I read both of your statements. Professor—Dr. Kagan, I read yours, and the 2014 strategy to defeat the Islamic State, which proposes, basically, orchestrating elements of Amer-

ican political, economic, and military power of a scope that would remind us somewhat of the Iraq war. And I appreciate your presentation. But, what convinces you that we would be more successful this time if we employed that than we have been?

And to you, Mr. Katulis, I—you have argued for the need to build reliable partners on the ground. In Iraq, this means training and equipping Iraqi Security Forces, Kurdish peshmerga, Sunni tribal fighters, while encouraging political reconciliation, somewhat reminiscent of the limited efforts we put into Libya following NATO airstrikes or the monumental efforts we have put in training Iraqi forces. And I appreciate your presentation, which builds on that train-and-equip model. But, what convinces you that there will be a different result than that which we have experienced in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, or even Libya, if we pursue your approach?

So, my first part was to put the premise of my concerns——

Dr. KAGAN. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ [continuing]. And hopefully part of understanding how your approaches, based upon past experiences, could actually change the dynamic now and help deal with some of those concerns.

Dr. KAGAN. First, to correct the record, I am not proposing the use of force on a scope or scale that we used during the Iraq war. And so, there are not numbers associated with my recommendations, and I do not—do not—believe that the reinvasion of Iraq or reinsertion of 100-some-odd-thousand troops is a good idea.

But, I do not actually think that the question right now should be, How do we ensure that we do not get the same results as we got before? We actually need to make sure that we do not—that we curtail the results of the chaotic situation that is happening now. And so, when we look at our strategy and we look at our policy and we fear Iraq in 20-—in 2007 or 2008 or 2009, quite rightly, we also have to fear Iraq and the chaos that its collapse will cause in 2015, 2016, and 2017. And, as we engage with much more modest goals and more modest resources, I believe that we need to recognize that we have a responsibility, as a country and as—as a country, to make sure that the Islamic State does not hold ground, does not gain ground, and that we keep a unified Iraqi state in the location where Iraq is in order for us to be able to pursue our interests and protect ourselves in the Middle East and here at home. We need a unified Iraq, and that should be our goal.

Mr. KATULIS. I will be brief, because I know the time is short.

I am not a strong proponent of the train-arm-and-equip as a primary tool of our engagement in the Middle East. And I think the lesson of the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates that is a fixation on tactics, when the broader landscape is shifting. The thrust of my written testimony, and what I tried to articulate, was that we have a scenario in the region right now that, as Senator Johnson mentioned about Iran, but I would add to it, complementing it, you have got partners in the Gulf Arab States that are actually much more active in Syria and in other places, in throwing their weight around, in arming and training, and equipping different types of forces—that has accelerated the fragmentation. The thrust of what I tried to say—and this is, I think, easier to do in

Iraq, and to conceptualize in Iraq, because we understand it, we have more legal authorities, more room to maneuver—is to link any sort of arm, train, and equip effort to a notion of what is a end state, the political end state inside of Iraq. We kind of have the contours of that. And the picture is clearer. But, the current strategy, as I read it, is not driving towards an end state. And I want to be clear, I am not talking about partition or something enforced from the outside; I am talking about a negotiation over power, which has been going on for years inside of Iraq.

In Syria, I share the same views that I think have been expressed here at this hearing, of being baffled about what has happened over the last year or so in this effort to create what I like to call a third-way force, anti-ISIS, but also opposed to the Assad regime. None of that has shifted the battlefield to our advantage or towards a viable political solution. That is where I think the crux of the debate—where, if we want to drill down a little bit more is—some of the things that Dr. Kagan and I have been talking about. How do you bring these strands together? Because I agree with what you said, Senator. We have got a series of different policy initiatives, but they are not wedded together, in the sense of, How does it achieve a realistic sense of stability inside of Syria that reflects our interests and as well as our values, I would say, too?

Senator MENENDEZ. Just one final comment, Mr. Chair.

I would just simply say that four or five people on the ground as trained entities in the train-and-assist program, even as a tactic, could not possibly be a successful tactic to try to get the result that we want.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Perdue, please.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank you and Ranking Member Senator Cardin for staying on this. We have been talking about—we have been distracted by the Iran nuclear debate and dialogue over the last few months, obviously, but it is only a factor. It is a part of a bigger issue.

And I want to thank Senator Menendez. For the last few years, even before I became a more—part of this conversation—of trying to shed light and put pressure on this administration, members of his own party, to try to develop a long-term strategy.

Mr. Katulis, I could not agree more that, I think—and on recent months, our top priority has been the nuclear Iran deal, for whatever reason, at the expense of developing a long-term strategy, not only for ISIS, but our policies in the entire region.

I personally have been very measured about this. I am glad to see us moving back to a nonpartisan position on this, because this is war. We have men and women at risk every day in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world. We need a strategy, not only for them, but for these—this humanitarian crisis.

Mr. Bowers, God bless you for what you guys are doing.

With limited time, I want to focus on the cause of that. I hope, another day, we will have another chance to come back and deal with the possible solutions to this crisis, because it is out of control.

But, I agree, Mr. Katulis, this is a pivotal moment. I am just a business guy, but if you look at what our history has had over the

last 50 years, we are in a more dangerous period right than anytime in my lifetime, in my estimate. Rise of traditional rivals, Russia and China. I was with Admiral Harris, just a couple of weeks ago, where he informed us that we are now at military parity in the Pacific region, the United States and China. That is a very dangerous place to be. In the Middle East, General Campbell, in Afghanistan, will tell us that, "Hey, this is about developing a long-term strategy in that area," and yet we still do not have one. I have never seen a more confused battlespace than Syria. In southern Syria, four people—four groups are battling right now. And in any given week in any given village, any combination of those four could be fighting against the other combination of those four.

So, given that, I want to talk about—and, by the way, in the backdrop of an environment where we are now told that even the data upon which we are all basing our decisions, including the administration, may be in doubt. We have 50 analysts, just this week or last week, complain. We have two analysts now filed a letter or sent a letter to the Department of Defense saying their reports are being doctored, as it goes upstream, to support the administration's strategy. And then we hear that Foreign Minister Lavrov, in Russia, has basically, said, "Let us make sure that we do not—that the United States understands that there will be unintended consequences if our militaries do not cooperate." Cooperate? In Syria? Really? And yet, at the time when we are engaging Russia in a dialogue, Senator Ashcroft, Secretary of Defense, is not even in the meeting. So, I am not very concerned about our strategy there.

I have a question. Given the fact that we are now facing with—it looks like this Iran nuclear deal is going to be put in effect tomorrow, I guess. And given the fact that Russia now is on the ground with troops and military equipment inside Syria—let us start with you, Dr. Kagan—I would like you and Mr. Katulis to address, though—How do those two developments—we have talked around it today, but specifically—How should that frame—and how does it complicate it—and how should that frame our thinking about advising and consenting on helping the administration develop a strategy for that part of the world to avoid the future catastrophes of human—at a human scale that we see today?

Dr. KAGAN. The United States would benefit from having a strategy that is as consistent as the strategy that the Iranians are pursuing and that the Russians are pursuing. I think we are, in fact, over-compartmentalizing what we see transpiring in the world around us, and we have a tendency to want to fight ISIS, but not—not take on a counter-Assad fight, when, in fact, that is what the majority of Syrians are fighting for. We have a tendency to think that what is happening in Ukraine stays in Ukraine and that what happens inside of Iraq is one part of the theater that can be segregated from what happens inside of Syria, when, in fact, we have enemies such as the Islamic State shifting resources from one to the other, and when we have a set of catastrophic failures in the governments of two neighboring countries.

So, my strongest recommendation is that we recognize that our interests in Iraq and Syria are real, that they extend beyond the fight against the Islamic State, that that ought to have consequences for our policy and ought to allow us to broaden the range

of what we provide on the military or diplomatic side, or economic side, in order to stabilize two crises that are really spilling over, not only into the region, but into the world.

Mr. KATULIS. Mr. Senator, I think this broader strategic perspective is very important to raise. And I think—it is my view that U.S. strategy in the Middle East has been AWL—AWOL for more than a decade, I would argue, that if you—and I put this in the written testimony, but if you look at what the conception was in the post-cold-war period, particularly in the gulf, it was this notion of dual containment. We were going to contain both Iran and Iraq. And I would submit that that largely succeeded, you know. And one strategic consequence of the 2003 Iraq war and its aftermath was this upending of the regional order, that we helped, inadvertently, to facilitate the rise of Iranian power in the region, and its connections to various proxies.

Senator PERDUE. Could I interrupt. I am sorry.

Mr. KATULIS. Sure.

Senator PERDUE. Specifically on that, could you address the Sunni-Shia balance and the fact that today it looks like those lines are being drawn in a way that we have not seen before? I mean, they have always been there, but, I mean, right now, if you look at what Saudi and Iran are doing, you see two pivotal points being placed there. And what happened in Yemen earlier this year. It affects what you are saying. Could you address that, as well?

Mr. KATULIS. Right. I mean, it is—the truth of the matter is, that is true, as an analytical framework and as a dynamic, but it is very complex. That was happening, I would submit, even while the United States had 170,000 troops in the center of Iraq. A lot of the massive displacements and sectarian cleansing that happened in Baghdad, even at the height or right before we did the surge in 2007—a lot of that, I think, was—I would not say it was inevitable, but it was sort of a rebalancing. And it is an ugly process that is happening quite clearly throughout Syria.

But, back to the broader point is that I think—and I am not blaming either administration; I just think the United States, essentially since 2004 or 2005, has been in the Middle East in a largely reactive tactical crisis-management mode. We are not driving events.

The exception to it—again, and I—I am in a—I am in favor of the Iran nuclear deal, but I think we need to be clear-eyed about its role in the region. And I agree with a lot of the comments that were made here. And one of the main points I was trying to stress in my opening statement and in my written statement is what I do not see at this point, post-Iran deal, if it sustains itself, is an integrated approach that looks at all of the tools that the United States already has in play in the anti-ISIL coalition, the patchwork of different bilateral cooperation efforts we have with partners in the region, and how does that sync up with what is now being proposed, in addition to all of that, in light of the Iran deal, as reassurance to our allies? It would be great to get a clearer presentation of that, because—and I think that opens the pathway, potentially, to what—a strategy for U.S. engagement here, one that recognizes that there are actors in the region, many of which have nefarious purposes, some of whom are actually our partners, but then

work with different forces that are contributing to the fragmentation of Syria or Yemen.

So, trying to figure out a new strategic framework of, How do we actually get to a broader goal of sustainable security in the broader Middle East? I think it is the bigger picture in which these different theaters—Iraq, Syria—I would add Libya, Yemen to that—we do not have that overarching picture right now. And I think it is in part—with all due respect to the Obama administration, it is leaned to disinclination and caution in reaction to what were viewed as, I think, dangerous mistakes of omission—of commission in the previous decade.

Senator PERDUE. To add to that, if I may, the Pashtun and the other people that are not—you know, that are without countries—you know, so the Kurds, the Pashtuns—I mean, that is a dimension we have not even gotten to yet, in terms of complicating this sectarian issue in the region.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I just want to say, I thought your answer there was superb. And I think what you are saying is—I think the folks on this committee that have been most involved in these kinds of issues understand that there is a vacuum, relative to a larger Middle East policy, and I—without being pejorative, I think it is unlikely to come. And so—I mean, I think that is what our effort is over the next 5 or 6 weeks. And I know that I, in particular, and others, have been very hard on the administration, relative to Syria. Both sides of the aisle actually have. But, I think it is fair also to understand the balance-of-power issue that took place with our efforts in Iraq, and how that boosted Iran. There is no question. It is hard to deny that. So, I think it is fair for us to set the context in an appropriate way, and I hope somehow we will be able to push—you know, it still takes the administration—under article 2 of the Constitution, they still have supreme powers on these types of issues, but I think that is what this effort is about.

So, thank you. An outstanding answer.

Senator Murphy.

Mr. BOWERS. Mr. Chairman, may I add a quick comment before you continue? I just want to provide a little bit of a counternarrative, as well, just real quickly.

Obviously, these are large geopolitical issues and large forces, as you said, both formal actors and nonformal actors. However, just 3 days ago, I sat down with four different refugee families in this Greek Island, two of them from al-Latakia, two of them were from al-Raqqa. Two of them were pro-Assad, two of them were anti-Assad. They are all in the same boat, literally and figuratively, at this point. So, the elements for all these very difficult political solutions we have been talking about, though sound intractable now—on the ground, for average Syrians, they are the reality of what they need to see right now. So, even Sunni-Shia connections can be made, at this point, even if the political action seems impossible to do. I began my career, 20 years ago, in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and, at the same point, we said the same things, that we were not going to bring peace to that.

So, I just think we need to make sure we add a little bit of that urgency around what we can and should do, besides the very difficult players we are dealing with.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

No, I agree, I think the consensus here is that there is a vacuum. And I think, to the extent that there is division, it is over the question of whether there is a scenario in which an American-led plan can fill it. Whether we ultimately hold the cards necessary to try to fix the problems inside Syria. And, as much as we all talk about the fact that we learned all these lessons from Iraq, I sort of still feel like there is this leftover hubris in which we think that we are the most important player in the region. And the fact that things are really bad on the ground is just due to the American strategy failing. And so, I think this is a really important debate, but I also want to make sure that we set our expectations at the right place as to what we can do and what we cannot do.

And the reason why I may be reluctant to commit more military assets to the region is because I think that there is a potentially really significantly high cost to the United States compared to what I would suggest is a potentially really low positive reward.

So, I may want to play that out a little bit. I just came back from the region. I was there for the last week of our recess. And I saw something really disturbing play out in Baghdad while I was there. And, Mr. Katulis, I think you have talked about some of the positive things that have come out of Baghdad, in terms of political reconciliation, but I did not see it while I was there. We are a year and a half into this crisis, and the Iraqi military is still 94 percent Shia. This so-called Sunni National Guard that we hear about every single time that somebody comes and testifies in front of us still has not materialized. And during the 2 days in which I was there with Senator Peters, Abadi told us to his face that he was going to shelve the national guard initiative because of a personal political slight that had happened to him the day before from the Sunni Speaker of the House, which suggests how sort of fragile things are there. And you get the sense that, with 3,000 more Americans there, and calls for potentially a few thousand more, that Abadi and his elites that are just sitting inside the Green Zone, protected from the realities in other parts of the country, are kind of content to just live in this political morass of backbiting and infighting, knowing that the Americans are still basically giving them a guarantee that we will do what is necessary to stop these bad guys from marching on Baghdad.

Now, I have supported the troops that are there, and I have supported the airstrikes, but having just come back, I still am not clear whether we are pressing the right levers internally to get the kind of political reconciliation necessary so that, when the Iraqi army does eventually march back into Ramadi or to Mosul, that there is somebody other than the Shiite-dominated militias or Iraqi Army to control territory so that we do not just spiral into the same place again.

And so, I want to hear from all of you, but particularly from Mr. Katulis and Dr. Kagan, as to how we continue to push the—let us start with the Iraqis—on political reconciliation, because I feel the same cycle playing out again in which the crutch of the American

military and the crutch of our implicit guarantee is just sort of lulling them into a sense of political complacency that is dangerous.

Mr. KATULIS. Senator Murphy, I agree with much of what you said. And when I talked about positive things in Iraq, I was mostly talking about the first stage of the anti-ISIL coalition, where the United States actually used its leverage to create incentives for the Iraqi leadership to move from Prime Minister Maliki to Prime Minister Abadi. And I think Prime Minister Abadi, based on my research trips to the region and discussions with different leaders over the last year, has a different style and approach about him that is a little bit more inclusive. Whether it is effective, whether it could actually create fundamental change, is the big question.

And you asked about whether there are levers, secret levers that we have not tried in the last 10 years, and that begs the question, really, of, What is Iraq, and how does it identify itself? How does it define its identity? I think, ultimately—and this is what I was trying to emphasize—is that this notion of decentralization, which Prime Minister Abadi has been discussing, been discussed for a long period of time—of decentralizing authority from the center, is a delicate process, but I think it is an important part of the process of creating what I see as a fundamental challenge inside of Iraq and throughout many places in the Middle East, the issue of political legitimacy.

All of these tools are impressive tools. The billions of dollars we spent on security assistance, were all eroded because we did not create strategies either in the surge in 2007 or other things that helped stitch these things together. And, in my view, it was not the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011 that was the real challenge there, it was the relative downgrading of the diplomatic importance of Iraq, the engagement with the different centers of power. And the fact that people like our Ambassador out there now, or Brett McGurk and others in the administration, have been very active in the last year or so. It actually has produced small results. I do not know—the honest answer is, I do not know whether the whole piece of Iraq will hang together. That is a decision Iraqis themselves have to make. And you talk to the Kurdistan regional government leadership at different moments, and there are some serious questions there.

So, the main point is, I share a lot of your concerns, right? And I am not certain, you know, at 1 year into this, that we should give up on Iraq at any point. I do not think that is what you are suggesting, but I do not think there is a silver bullet, besides this continued sort of steady diplomatic engagement, which was, I think, lacking from the United States from 2011 to 2014, and was, I think, the key factor that contributed to the mess that we have now.

Senator MURPHY. Walking——

Dr. KAGAN. But——

Senator MURPHY. Walking away is not my prescription. I just think our metrics here have been a little screwed up and that we are not watching carefully enough the lack of political progress that will guarantee the very temporary nature of any military victories we are able to get.

Dr. Kagan, sorry.

Dr. KAGAN. Yes. I agree with you, Senator. The—there are two fundamental challenges to reconciliation in Iraq today, other than the fact that, of course, ISIS occupies major cities inside of Iraq. The first is that the Iranians hold—the Iraqi state does not have a monopoly on the use of force in its own country. On the contrary, the Iranians, who, on the 14th of June, just 4 days after Mosul fell, began to send forces and transfer Shia militias into Iraq to assure the safety of the shrined cities and stop the advance of ISIS. The Iranian-backed militias are, in fact, the most power independent actor inside of Iraq, and they pose a threat to Prime Minister Hadi—Haider al-Abadi, not just a threat to the Sunni population. In fact, we have seen, over the past few weeks, leaders of militias, such as Qaes Qazali, who was responsible for the kidnapping of five U.S. soldiers in Iraq in 2007, paying a call on the President of Iraq in order, presumably, to pay him good wishes or possibly to threaten the use of force. Likewise, we have seen Mohandis, designated terrorist, leader of a designated terrorist organization, pay a call on the Supreme Court Judge who holds the fate of Abadi's reforms in his hands. We must not be naive. The Iranians are threatening Abadi, and he does not have maneuver room.

The second problem that we have, though, is Sunni politicians who do not represent the people that they are supposed to represent. And, in fact, the communities that they are supposed to represent do not exist any longer. We have 3 million internally displaced persons who are strewn through Iraq. And it is not that they are without leaders or without leadership. It is just that the political leaders are not the ones who lead them.

And so, the kinds of reform that we need to advocate and undertake, we need to be very savvy and very smart that it is going to take a long time and a fair bit of effort to fix the morass of problems in the Sunni community that make Sunni people feel unrepresented, but also to neutralize the Iranian influence that makes the Prime Minister unable, really, to wield the Iraqi Security Force that we want to train and assist.

Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And my only point in all of this is that I think—I agree with everything you have said, and I just want to make sure that we have a sober understanding of, amongst those problems, which ones we an solve and which ones we cannot, and, when we assess blame for the failure of our strategy, that we allocate it appropriately and do not lump all of it on a failure of Washington to coordinate amongst a variety of groups that are all not stepping up to the plate in a variety of ways.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. And I am sure you will ensure that we continue to think about that. Thank you so much.

I want to say to Mr. Katulis's answer to you, I think what happened in 2011—I am certain this is true, because of the many trips made there—that what happened when the troops did leave is, there was a check-the-box mentality on the diplomacy piece. I do think—and that shuttle diplomacy, which was us, let us face it, playing a huge role in keeping the country together, dissipated,

and, without the troops there, candidly, a little of the oomph, if you will, that went with that dissipated, too. But, I agree, we have been much more active, and it has borne some fruit, and I thank you for your answer.

Senator Flake.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Well aware of the limitations of what Washington can do to coordinate and whatnot. What—the things that we can do, I think we should do.

And, Mr. Katulis, in your testimony, you talked about the lack of an AUMF that specifically authorizes this engagement we have with ISIS as being a problem. What—in what way would it help, in terms of our allies, in terms of what our enemies see, in terms of what—the troops that are coordinating the air attacks there? How would it help?

Mr. KATULIS. I want to stipulate I am not a lawyer, and I am a security expert. And what I was—the argument I was trying to articulate was the need to elevate the anti-ISIS campaign in our own national dialogue, in our own national consensus. And I see the inability of the administration and different Members of Congress to come together on this as a sign of how this is seen as somewhat of a lower priority. It is—I know it is a complex issue. And some of my friends who are lawyers tell me sort of the complexity of that. I actually think having that debate and dialogue about the duration of an authorization, the scope of it, the—you know, and there was attempts to have this, I think, last fall, which I think were warranted. There was great leadership by some members up here to try to tee this up.

So, your question, I take more as, How would this help us operationally, and how would it make a difference on the ground? I do not think it would change much, fundamentally. I mean, it may perhaps open up some pathways to new tactics in Syria that would lead us to a more cohesive Syrian strategy, because I sense that some of the things that we are not doing in Syria may be related to how lawyers may read authorization. The wide berth that we give and have in Iraq is not reflected in our policy in Syria.

But, mostly I was making the case for—we are at war. We have thousands of people back in Iraq. We can say that they are noncombat roles. And that is true. But, given the situation in Iraq, I think it is deeply unfair, as a society, to expect so much from—and we did this for a decade after 9/11—and to do that again, a year into the campaign against ISIS, when it was struck again, I think—I was mostly arguing it as a means to create a dialogue in this country to bring the country together that is been divided about all sorts of things.

Senator FLAKE. Yes. I agree, certainly, with that. It would also seem that one of the biggest problems we have is the inability or unwillingness of our allies in the region to step up to the plate. And as long as they are unaware or confused about our role and the limitations of our involvement, then they have a crutch to fall back on. That would be one advantage, I would think, of spelling out what our—where our authority starts and ends there, to encourage them to fulfill their role, which they certainly have not, so far.

But, moving on to the JCPOA, it was discussed briefly here about the impact of the Iran agreement on regional security there. In one way, you could certainly say, "Well, we are cooperating with Iran in—on the nuclear front. That might lead to greater cooperation on the nonnuclear front." But, you could also view it, I would think—and what worried me about this agreement is the restrictions it seems to place on Congress, in terms of our ability to respond to Iran's non-nuclear behavior in the region that is detrimental. That is not the only detrimental behavior. They are not the only bad actor in certain areas. But, it—in what way do you see that playing out, in terms of our—the JCPOA and our ability to check or deter or to punish Iran for its malicious behavior in the region?

Mr. KATULIS. I think it really depends on the posture that the administration assumes, post-Iran deal, on a range of different fronts throughout the Middle East, vis-a-vis Iran. And it—you know, I mentioned Secretary Kerry's speech earlier this month and the proposals for enhanced security cooperation. And actually, I think these are quite warranted if it is placed in the context of a broader strategy that is not simply about reacting to the Iran threat or the ISIS threat, but is framed in the sense of what is it we are actually seeking to create and to achieve in the long run. That is really what is been lacking when we talk about this strategic perspective.

I think, you know, we—I think it is right to focus on Iran's malign behavior. I agree with much of what Dr. Kagan said. But, I would also submit—and I said this in the written testimony—that some of our closest partners on the other side who fear Iran also do things in other theaters in the Middle East that do not enhance stability and, in fact, actually accelerate this fragmentation. We have lost not only sort of a sense of stability in Iraq and Syria, but Libya, now Yemen. And I fear for those closest partners of ours, like Jordan and others, that—we need to actually deal with all of the destabilizing behaviors by actors in the region—state actors—to work with proxies that are ultimately undermining the state system in the Middle East.

Senator FLAKE. Well, I hope we can move forward now. And the next step we have talked about is looking at a regional security framework moving ahead in light of the Iran agreement. I hope it is the case that greater cooperation on the nuclear front will lead to other cooperation elsewhere. I do fear what we have seen so far is a reluctance to challenge Iran's interpretation of the agreement thus far. And if we are reluctant thus far, I can see that later on—I worry that we will be even more reluctant to challenge their behavior—nonnuclear behavior, for fear that it will give them pretext to forego their obligations on the nuclear side. That is a concern that I have, and hopefully—and that, I think, points up the importance, again, of us coming together, Congress and the administration, on a bipartisan basis to put together a—you know, a strategic security framework for the region.

Thank you for your testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for being here this afternoon.

I would just like to, apropos Senator Flake's comments, point out that there is legislation in both the House and Senate to further sanction Hezbollah, and that that would be something that we could do very quickly that would send a very strong message. And I certainly hope we will take that opportunity.

So, let me—Mr. Bowers, I want to go to you first, because I had, along with Senator Kaine, the benefit of sitting through a hearing in the Armed Services Committee this morning on exactly this topic. And one of the issues that was raised was the potential to set up a safe haven in Syria that might help with the refugee crisis. And I just wondered, from the perspective of your agency, whether you think that would be beneficial, or not, because one of the challenges that is presented by that is that we could then have a permanent very large refugee camp in Syria that could be subject to ISIS attack and others. So, do you have a view on that?

Mr. BOWERS. Thank you, Senator. Yes, we do, with abundance of caution and, I think, much more analysis on the pros and cons of what a so-called safe haven would do.

First and foremost, our concerns are that it is—there is a adverse reaction, in that refugees would no longer be able to seek asylum in neighboring countries, that essentially those host countries would find a reason, an excuse, if you will, to no longer keep their doors open, which they are required to under international law. So, we are concerned about asylum-seeking issues.

Secondly, safe havens, unless they are cleared of all combatant actors, nonstate or otherwise, they would be a magnet, possibly, for attack of civilians in that zone. Presumably, anything that is done in a nonconsent way would need some sort of military backup behind it. I cannot imagine, in—I have been into northern Syria. It is ruled by arms there, of course. There is no ambient security, otherwise. So, even if we called it a "safe haven" and somehow you cleared out a aerial zone around that, we would likely find more violence and more harm than we would gain.

So, if it is something that is moving along a trajectory with regional governments there and of our own, I would urge us to think through the consequences, both pro and con, both at State, at Department of Defense, USAID, and implementers like Mercy Corps. We have not seen safe havens really work, quite frankly, in many other conflict zones around the world, so they are very difficult.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much. That is very helpful, to hear your perspective.

I want to go, next, to both your testimony, Dr. Kagan, and yours, Mr. Katulis, because—I virtually agreed with everything that both of you said about the current situation, and I think our efforts in Syria have been a tragic failure. But, what I have not—what I cannot quite understand from what you were saying is what your strategy is for changing what we are doing, because—I mean, Dr. Kagan, just for example, you say, in your testimony, "Rather, defeating ISIS requires using military force, diplomacy, and all the instruments of U.S. national power to break the organization's capability to fight." I think many people looking at what the United States has tried to do on ISIS would suggest that we have done a number of those things, and are continuing to do that.

So, I am still trying to figure out exactly what you all are proposing that we do differently. Because I agree, we need to do something differently. I think we need to reassess our whole strategy across the Middle East. What I am still trying to understand is what exactly that strategy is going to include that is going to help us, with the international community, get to a better place.

So, I do not know which one of you wants to go first.

Mr. KATULIS. And, Senator Shaheen, I would take your question focused mostly on the Syria component, correct?

Senator SHAHEEN. Well——

Mr. KATULIS. I just want to be clear. Because you——

Senator SHAHEEN. I think it is——

Mr. KATULIS [continuing]. You leaded with that and then broaded it out.

Senator SHAHEEN. I did. I did.

Mr. KATULIS. Yes. I——

Senator SHAHEEN. So, I think it is really both.

Mr. KATULIS. Okay.

Senator SHAHEEN. I mean, Syria, obviously, is the most intractable, because there is no governance structure there, really, beyond Assad, that allows us to build on something. And Iraq, you have talked quite well about what is there and some of the challenges. But, since they are both part of the same crisis that we are experiencing, maybe you could speak to both of them.

Mr. KATULIS. Yes. Well, briefly on Syria, what I would propose is a lot of the things the administration has said they would do but has not done yet. Toward the end of creating some sense of greater stability of battle lines, if there is a moment here—and I do not know that—the way I analyze the conflict in Syria—and I think Dr. Kagan's Institute has great maps of what is happening there. It is frightening. But, it is heavily fragmented. You know, this notion of ISIS versus Assad versus opposition forces, when you dip beneath that, it is actually a militiatization of the society, and there are different pockets. I mean, ISIS is a dominant actor.

But, you know, the first thing I would do is press the administration that, if we are serious about building a third-way alternative force that is aimed at pushing back against ISIS and perhaps creating the space for the long-term political settlement, then where is that plan? We all agree, I think, here today, no one sees that. Greater stability——

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, let me——

Mr. KATULIS. Yes, sorry.

Senator SHAHEEN [continuing]. Let me just see if I can better understand what you are saying. So, are you suggesting that, rather than taking the approach that says we are only going to support those Syrian militias that are fighting ISIS and not fighting Assad, because we do not want to get in the middle of the Assad issue, that we ought to be saying, we are going to all be on the same side to fight ISIS and worry about Assad later?

Mr. KATULIS. I think that is what the administration is trying to say right now, and it may be a reason why the numbers are so low, in terms of who they were able to vet and recruit. And I did not hear the hearing this morning that you were a part of. But, what I am saying is that, if we are going to try to at least say—

and we have vocalized this for the last year or so—that this, in part, will not only aim to defeat ISIS, but then also perhaps set the stage for a negotiated political solution, we need to do a better job on building those forces. And then these complicated questions of if those forces are then capable, and then reinsert it into the battlefield, the complicated questions of what the United States can and cannot do to protect those forces from barrel-bombing, for instance, by the Assad regime, that is where I think the discussion about an AUMF and authorities actually really is terribly relevant for the situation on the ground.

But, more or less what I am trying to say is that we need—we either need to sort of go bigger—and I think we disagree on how far, you know, the use of force should be used in Syria. Dr. Kagan and I might disagree on that, because I think there is this potential that if we just do airstrikes against the Assad regime and things like this, it could lead to this further fragmentation in the country. We do, I think, have an interest in seeing some of the security institutions of Syria maintain their coherence. But, right now we are so far afield from putting together the different pieces of what our stated tactics are into this stated end goal of a political solution.

Really briefly, I—we went out longer—I think the broader concept I have talked about for the regional strategy in the Middle East needs to pragmatically recognize that there are many of our partners, including the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, others, that are actually throwing their weight around in ways, and exercising their self-interests as they see fit. A lot of the discussions that President Obama had, like the GCC Summit, I think are very good to do. The issue, then, is, What is our implementation in all of this? How do these different pieces of an anti-ISIS coalition, which many of these countries are part of, and the reassurance on the Iran nuclear deal—post-Iran nuclear deal—how is this blended together, not in reaction to just the Iranian threat, which is real, or the ISIS threat, which is real, but driving towards a positive end state and realistically saying—certainly it is going to outlast this administration, but, where do we want to be in 2020? Where do we want to be in 2025? That tactical reactive mode, the crisis management, we will be stuck in that unless we have a glimmer of what that vision looks like. And I think that vision needs to be crafted with partners in the region. We cannot do it ourselves at this point.

Senator SHAHEEN. I am actually out of time, but hopefully I can get your response, Dr. Kagan, on a second round.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Markey.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

Again, I am just going to call for a little bit of humility. We wanted to remove Qaddafi from Libya. We wanted to remove Mubarak from Egypt. We wanted to remove Saddam Hussein from Iraq. And we want to remove Assad from Syria. Not working out so great, so far. So, going forward, just a little bit of humility, I think will help all of us, in terms of understanding the law of unintended consequences that we invoke every time we move into a situation. It might be idealistic, it might be towards the goal of introducing Jeffersonian democracy. That is all fine and dandy. But, I

think the system in the Middle East has rejected the—that approach thus far.

I want to move, if I could, Mr. Bowers—and, by the way, thank you for the incredible work that your organization does. It is my understanding that Russia really is not accepting refugees from Syria at this time in any numbers that is significant. Is that correct?

Mr. BOWERS. I do not have that factual information. I do know that migrants are transiting through Russia at this point to get into the EU. So, I think there is some tacit acknowledgment of flows. I think there are different strategies the Russian Government are using to support humanitarian aid there which is not part of our formal system.

Senator MARKEY. Yes. But, is there is any knowledge that you have that there are substantial numbers of refugees that are staying in Russia and are being cared for by the Russian Government?

Mr. BOWERS. No, the information I have seen usually has to do with their so-called cultural exchange programs, educational programs. Many Syrians will seek application to universities there. Whether or not they are staying there to become students or transiting——

Senator MARKEY. Yes.

Mr. BOWERS [continuing]. Through, we do not know.

Senator MARKEY. And I kind of think that is interesting, because the United States and Russia each have objectives in Syria. And right now, neither country is actually taking any substantial number of refugees from that country at all, as we look on. And I think—first of all, I think the United States should take a lot more refugees. You know, we broke a lot of the china over there, and we have a moral responsibility to take a lot of the people who are collateral damage. There was no ISIS in Iraq until we started. And so, all of this flows out of decisions that we made, maybe well intentioned by some people, but did not work out. And the same thing is true for Russia. Russia wants to prop up Assad, Assad kills a lot of people, and refugees have to go someplace, but, so far, they are not staying there.

I think one of the ways that we can actually help this effort is to kind of put pressure on Russia to keep a lot more of these refugees in Russia. Keep them there—so that they're paradoxed by the consequences of proxy state politics in the same way that we should have to take a lot more, so we are living with the consequences of our role over there, and it presses us more fully find a political resolution of the issue. And ultimately, we can only do it through a partnership with Russia. Cannot do it without them. We need them at the table.

Could you comment upon that, Mr. Bowers?

Mr. BOWERS. Well, I would amend your call to action, Senator, to say I would agree entirely the United States can and should do more to resettle refugees in this country. There is no doubt the apparatus is here. There is no doubt the generosity of the American people is calling for that. So, I would definitely urge this Congress to work with the administration to make that happen. I know they will come back with "There are administrative issues, there are security issues, and there are financial issues." But, to say, at this

point in the history of our Nation, that we cannot take in more than 10,000 refugees out of a nation of 300-million-plus is ridiculous.

Senator MARKEY. I am agreeing with you——

Mr. BOWERS. So, I entirely——

Senator MARKEY [continuing]. 100 percent. So——

Mr. BOWERS [continuing]. Agree with you.

In terms of partnership with Russia for a resettlement program, I would think that would raise more problems than it would net. That does not mean that the United States cannot take a leadership role, along with the European Union, along with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, to shame and name the world community to do more. Essentially, at this point, Syrians are needing durable resettlement solutions. If we are not in agreement of how to get to a political resolution here, we need to get to agreement on how to help them.

Senator MARKEY. And I agree with you 100 percent. I mean, in my old congressional district, in my own hometown of Malden, where I live, we have thousands and thousands of Vietnamese Catholics who are now the Catholics at the church in Malden, the Catholic church, because we backed the Catholics against the Buddhists in Vietnam. So, America had to absorb those refugees in America. And we did. We had to. We had made a decision, you know, to intervene, and there were people who were collateral damage, their families. And we have the same responsibility in Syria, in Iraq. We got in, and we have to now, for the rest of this century, live with the consequences of that, in terms of incorporating many, many more of them into our own society.

There seems to be an aversion, at a certain level, to dealing with the realpolitik of Putin having a military base right on the Mediterranean. And I heard Ms. Kagan talk earlier about al-Nusra moving in that direction. So, I do not think it is a surprise why the Russians all of a sudden are moving in more military aid in that area. You know, they are not going to allow their military to, you know, suffer losses there. You know, and it just seems so, to me, obviously related—right?—that they get paranoid, in terms of what the impact of al-Nusra can be in that region.

And so, right now we do not want al-Nusra to win, we do not want Assad to win, and we do not want ISIS to win. And it does not leave much in the country. So, it clearly requires a step back in looking at all of the larger geopolitical issues that are on the table, including Ukraine, Crimea, you name it. And we have got to go to the table with Russia. We have got to have a larger discussion, in the same way we did during the cold war with Russia, because, from Nicaragua to El Salvador to country after country around the world, these smaller countries were just proxies in a larger discussion. And we did not get realistic about it for years and years, decades actually. But, ultimately, ordinary families just became pawns. Huh?

So, I would say that it is time for us to have those kind of hearings. Mr. Chairman, I would recommend that we do, that we, maybe, bring in those Secretaries of State from the past who have experience in dealing with that Soviet-era level of confrontation that, thankfully, stayed cold, that did not get hot. But, there were

a lot of countries to pay the price, you know. Americans did not die, Russians did not die, but a lot of other people did. That is where we are today, and I think it is time for us to step back and begin to put these larger pieces together.

And I thank you for having the hearing, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

If I could just make a point before turning to Senator Coons, I think—first of all, I agree that we need to play an appropriate role, and have said so on the front end, relative to refugees. I think we do forget that we are the largest contributor of support right now in the places that they are. I mean, we dominate, if you will, relative to financial support.

And, secondly, as I understand it, even if we said, today, 10,000 people, it is not the 10,000 people we are looking at on the television screen, it is 10,000 people 2 years from now by virtue—so, I think we should be realistic about the situation and say that even if we raised our quotas, it is not helping the people we are seeing on the television screen, it is helping people 24 months from now, based on where we are. That does not mean that we should not play an important role, but—you are shaking your head, which I assume to agree—assume to be a yes.

Mr. BOWERS. I agree, but it is back to the leadership and taking a position of—a role to accept that responsibility and lead with that. And even, as you said, there are many bureaucratic hurdles for intaking asylum-seekers that are referred to us from UNHCR, in particular. That does not mean we cannot represent that leadership role.

The CHAIRMAN. I agree with you.

Senator MARKEY. Mr. Chairman, I would just urge—I mean, I think we need to have some briefings on this subject, because, I agree with Mr. Bowers, it is U.S. leadership. Right now, Europe looks at—it is mainly their burden of dealing with the Syrian refugees. And they are having a political problem as to how they allocate, based upon where the person seeking asylum first reaches a safe country. And it is—if U.S. leadership showed that we were compassionate as to accepting refugees—and there are refugees from all over the world in which some are closer to the United States—the leadership requires us to be more aggressive than we have been in the past. But, I would just urge us to have an understanding, perhaps through briefings or hearings, because I do think the United States can play a greater role than just providing the resources, the dollars.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, Senator Coons, if—with your permission, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I just wanted to make a clarification, because it is my understanding that, while the United States is the largest single contributor of any one country to the humanitarian effort in the Middle East, actually the EU has contributed, as an entity, more than the United States. And so, I think it is important to point that out.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, 28 countries, that is right.

Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Cardin, for holding this hearing.

Mr. Bowers, if I might just follow up on an intriguing point you made both in your early testimony and then the recent comments, and then we will turn to some of the more strategic questions.

You were talking about safe havens, you were talking about how we can deliver humanitarian assistance and support in a way that is more sustainable and is more effective. In your spoken testimony, you talked about silos. Tony Lake is a dear friend and mentor of mine, going back to college, and recently made some remarks in his role as head of UNICEF about how, as the U.N. begins to look at the sustainable development goals, if they are to be reached, if development is to mean anything, the enormous number of children who are most at risk, who are displaced, who are refugees, who will principally be reached, if at all, through humanitarian relief, have to be taken into account in looking at our development goals. What advice would you have for us in how we might help break down silos, in how both the United States and the world community looks at the challenges of humanitarian relief, refugee resettlement, and long-term development? And what do you see as the consequences for Syria and Iraq of having a whole generation of children growing up displaced and without reliable education or healthcare or a sense of a stable connection to community?

Mr. BOWERS. Thank you, Senator. Yes, we are victims of our own success, in that, in the humanitarian development world, we definitely utilize the resources put forward, primarily from funders such as the U.S. Government. Those sources tend to be, of course, controlled by Congress, and the way they are developed and designed and then executed, especially by USAID and its organs, tends to compartmentalize our thinking. So, for instance, with the Office of Disaster Assistance, OFDA, we usually work on a 6-month cycle. And yet, we know that this protracted crisis will not—will go beyond 6 months. So, most of our strategies are focused on very short-term delivery issues.

Now, those are critical for saving lives, but we cannot necessarily bridge those underlying issues as effectively as we would like to.

Then we have our development friends, who are often looking at cycles in multiyear realms, right? And we simply do not do enough work to talk to each other across that channel. And Mercy Corps, along with many other organizations, have been in dialogue both with USAID and our European funders on, How do we break down those silos? How do we actually program in a way that is smart and effective, saving lives and livelihoods, but also looking at some underlying issues that we know we need to get to? Poor governance, illegitimacy with youth within that society, these are several things that, you know, we have to address, basically, concurrently with the humanitarian streams.

One of the events occurring next year in Istanbul that is being hosted by Ban Ki Moon, the World Humanitarian Summit, will be one of those forums where I think we would like to put some pressure points on our donors—the United States and the Europeans, in particular—on how to change, in a statutory way. They fund implementors like Mercy Corps.

And then, finally, I think the issues you raised, in terms of that no lost generation, correct? Children, a whole group of children are lost, now, to years of violence. That requires a multiyear, multi-

sector approach. So, where Tony Lake is talking to you, I think he is exactly on spot, in terms of where we need to engage with youth, both on the humanitarian level, but also where they see themselves in 5, 10 years. Because, at this point, their hope is diminishing fast.

So, it is a significant population for us to be concerned about. And, sectorily, how do we address those issues of countering violent extremism within those youth groups, offering ways that is not just short-term employment? We know that, beyond employment schemes, youth are looking for a purpose, they are looking for ownership in their society. So, we should not just be offering very short-term projects, we should be looking at solutions that bridge that.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Michael.

Previously, Senator Shaheen asked about safe zones and their humanitarian impact. I would be interested, Mr. Katulis, Dr. Kagan, in your comments, as well, on whether they are strategically, or at least tactically, advisable, sustainable. They have been debated a great deal as to whether a safe zone on the Turkish border that might be funded by some of our gulf allies and enforced by either coalition aircraft or the Turks would stabilize the region, either from a refugee perspective or at least from a combat and ISIS perspective. And then another question I would have is whether a safe zone on the Jordanian border makes any sense. I would be interested in your view of whether this idea of a no-fly zone or a safe zone makes any sense, from a military or strategic perspective.

Dr. KAGAN. I assess that a safe zone would have to be enforced and enforceable through U.S. military capabilities, because we, the United States, have capabilities that other people in the world do not have, including our reconnaissance capabilities, our intelligence capabilities, the quality of our Armed Forces, and the extraordinary precision with which we can deliver fires. If we, the United States, are not prepared to secure a safe zone and to make sure that the people inside are safe, then we risk having another Srebrenica, and that should not, in fact, be our goal.

So, if we go toward a safe zone, we had better enforce it. But, a safe zone and a no-fly zone are actually two different things. And I cannot stress enough that the United States does have the capacities to end the kinds of overflights that the Assad regime is taking and using in order to bring barrel bombs and other heinous weapons on civilian targets, and that I think that an essential prerequisite for getting to the kinds of political solutions that we want is the cessation of barrel bombing and other uses of violence by the state against the civilian population. And that, in my opinion, is something that we ought to consider much, much, much more robustly.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Mr. Katulis.

Mr. KATULIS. I will just say briefly, because the time is short, on the question of strategic feasibility, I would stress the importance of trying to—if we were to implement that, getting the regional buy-in and those countries. And each of the theaters, I think, are quite complicated. The 9 months that it took for the United States

and Turkey to come to some sort of consensus—and even that consensus, it is not clear where it is going because of the concerns about: What are the ground forces then that would backfill in the northern part? Jordan, a place that I feel strongly about—I used to live there—southern safe zone. The devil is in the details of the implementation and making sure that, in addition to what Dr. Kagan said, that we are willing to sort of see it through, but also it is a question to our partners in that venture, too.

Senator COONS. Well, Mr. Katulis, if I might—this will have to be my last question. In your very opening comments, you said, "What is a realistic end state?" You asked the question. Perhaps I missed it. I do not recall a concise answer. But, in your written testimony, you talk at length about how the central part of a long-term strategy for stabilizing the region has to be some decentralized federal structure of government in Iraq and Syria. Just talk a little bit more about—and, given the complexities and difficulties of accomplishing that in Iraq, given how far we are from a path to that in Syria, just help me understand what that would look like and what the transition to that might look like. I am assuming that you do not think we could achieve that without the real engagement of regional partners and others—I mean, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Saudis—and that some sort of federal structure might in some ways literally cross the borders of the existing states of Iraq and Syria. Help me understand exactly how that would work, in your view.

Mr. KATULIS. I think it is clear to understand inside of Iraq, and in—particularly, the central government versus the Kurdistan regional government——

Senator COONS. Right.

Mr. KATULIS [continuing]. Because the contours are almost already there.

Senator COONS. Right.

Mr. KATULIS. The big missing link in all of this—and we talked about the security threat and the military threat that ISIS poses, and I think it is real—but, what is missing is—I talked about the sense of Sunni grievance, both in Iraq and in Syria. It is different because of the different power dynamics there. You know, the Sunnis are a majority inside of Syria, whereas they are a minority inside of Iraq, though many of their leaders still do not recognize it as such if you interview. And we went out to Erbil and talked to people who were leadership in Mosul, the Sunni leaders. You know, they still see as a fundamental problem of U.S. policy that we are working with the wrong people in the central government. They are not willing to recognize the new reality that it—that Iraq has become over the last 10 or 12 years.

So, the idea of decentralized—I want to be clear. I said this in the written testimony. We should not be in the business of us partitioning and drawing new borders. You were very clear. Part of the problem we are facing today is, I think, a consequence of other outside powers doing that.

I think, in Iraq, it is easier to figure out: How do we actually have that dialogue with the different communities, and especially the Sunni communities? It is not easy, but figuring out—you know, certainly there is Kurdish autonomy, there has been discussion of

Shia autonomy in the southern part of Iraq, but there has not really been a fulsome idea of if, you know, the—after we retake Mosul or somebody retakes Mosul and Anbar, what does that actually look like, in terms of decentralized authorities, budgeting, and other things?

Syria, I will just admit, it is so hard to conceptualize at this point in a—as I was saying before, the fragmentation of the conflict itself. If we could get to some sort of stable battle lines, where the militant groups that now dominate the conflict in—in terms of opposition to Assad. And that is a big "if." That is a long timeframe right now. Then a lot of the things that I think Mr. Bowers was talking about, in terms of those pieces that we are doing, in terms of tactical assistance to different communities—all of these things that parts of the State Department have been working on and have not yet amounted to anything because of the trajectory of the conflict right now. But, if you could get to at least some sort of sense of stability in the battle lines, then you might actually be able to have that broader discussion of: What is a negotiated transition?

The broader point is this, is that I—I think that these societies need to negotiate that. In Iraq, there is a little bit more of a framework and a pathway forward to do that. In Syria, I do not see the first step right now, because a lot of the tactics we said we were going to use to shift the battlefield, we just have not implemented. But, we should not—just because that is the case and just because that failed, I think it would be a grave mistake to just say there is nothing we can do about it. I think we either need to double down on those efforts to create credible, reliable, third-way opposition forces in Syria or we need to fundamentally reassess what our strategic positioning is in Syria.

I doubt—I will say on this—I am very skeptical of anyone who argues that the Assad regime is part of the solution to stability in Syria. The devastation it has caused to its own population has, I think, obliterated its potential legitimacy in a long-term sustainable solution.

Senator COONS. Well, thank you.

Thank you for a thoughtful answer that I think highlights just how difficult it is for us to chart a clear path towards a negotiated resolution in Syria. Like many others, I think I also have a concern that as we—if we are to succeed in shrinking the area of control of ISIS, and creating more and more pressure on ISIS from Iraq, it puts Lebanon and Jordan at greater risk. We need a regional strategy, not just a battlefield strategy, not just in one country or one place. And how we act, moving forward from the Iran deal to reinforce and strengthen and partner with regional allies, has to be done in the context of this strategy.

To your earlier point, if they are simply fragmented and going past each other, it really can cause greater dislocation and greater confusion about our real, ultimate strategy and goals. And I look forward to working with the chairman and other members of the committee in trying to craft a coherent strategy through all these challenges in the months ahead.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

And, just for the members, I think most of them know this, but we have tentatively set up Monday, Senator Cardin and myself, a briefing from the administration on the refugee crisis, at 5:30. So, we are still negotiating over witnesses. But, anyway, I want you to know that, Mr. Bowers, or certainly the other members.

Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks, to the witnesses, for your efforts, your testimony, and, to Mercy Corps, especially, for your front-line work. I have been to the Middle East, I guess, six times during my time in the Senate, and I hardly ever go without asking Mercy Corps to help arrange part of the itinerary. And those meetings are always very valuable.

Today, I started with a Armed Services hearing about ISIL, and then, at lunch, we did European Ambassadors to talk about the migrant crisis largely by Syrian refugees. And here we are in the Foreign Relations.

The morning hearing in Armed Services was a testimony to the growing scope of the war. The territory has expanded, so we are in the battlefield against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, but there is ISIL presidents—ISIL presence in Yemen, Libya, and Afghanistan that has attracted our military's attention, at a minimum, and there is also ISIL alliance that Boko Haram has claimed. They, Boko Haram, has not said they want to take action against the United States, but we are seeing an expanded territorial issue with ISIL.

The tactical complexities are growing. The administration announced, in August, that they had decided, tactically, that trained Syrians, if they came under attack by the Assad regime, that part of our strategy should be to rebuff those attacks. I have a huge question about what is the legal justification for that. Although tactically I think it is a good idea, I just do not think there is any current legal authority for it. We have already engaged in tactical attacks against al-Nusra to try to protect Syrians that we have trained in Syria.

General Austin, Mr. Chair, testified, this morning when he was asked, that the war against ISIL would—he thought would take many years. He did not want to put a number on that. Would you suggest that that is the case? I mean, is there any scenario that you see now that involves us not engaged in military action against ISIL, at least for a number of years?

Dr. KAGAN. I will answer that question, Senator. I think you are asking a really important question. And I think that, among the different lines of effort that we need to undertake, and among the different strategic shifts that we can make, expanding our timeline and recognizing that, in fact, we have a generational problem because of the amount of destruction that we have seen in Iraq and Syria and the propensity to violence that groups will have, and the propensity of renewed civil war to occur in places that have experienced civil war, we actually need to approach the conflict with the Islamic State in the way that we framed our approach to the cold war; namely, that we have a challenge that is going to take many administrations, many generations, that it is something that we should stop asking, "What do we do now in order to fix the problem?" but, really, "What should we do in order to get all of our in-

stitutions ready to confront an idea that is hostile and inimical to the United States and its values, to confront military manifestations of that idea that will continue to pop up in power vacuums all over the world, and to recognize that we, too, need to be thinking about long-term rather than short-term solutions."

Senator KAINE. Let me say this, and I am going to then segue to Mr. Katulis on this question. If both General Austin and Dr. Kagan suggest that this is a multiyear effort, I am struck, as I always am, by the fact that we are 14 months in into a war, and we have said virtually nothing about it. When we had an Armed Services hearing with General Dunford with respect to his position to be head of the Joint Chiefs, I asked him the question, "What would an AUMF do, in your view?" And this is almost a precise quote.

He said, "What our young men and women need, and it is virtually all that they need to do what we ask them to do, is a sense that what they are doing has purpose, has meaning, and has the support of the American people."

Now, let us just focus on that point, our troops, which in—it is important to all of us, and it is really important in Virginia. Do the troops, the thousands that are fighting against ISIL now, understand the purpose of what they are doing? Do they understand the meaning of what we are doing? Do they think that what they are doing has the support of the American people? This is a rhetorical question. I think the answer to that is no, because we have not even debated it. We have not even really weighed in on it. I mean, for——

Congress is approaching this as if we are fans at a game opining about what play should be called by the coach. But, we are not fans. We are the owners of the team. I mean, we are like editorial writers, opining every time we hear witnesses. We will offer thoughts about it. We bash the administration witnesses around the day. We are just, you know, freelancing various opinions and things like that. But, in terms of whether the troops know that what they do has purpose, has meaning, and has the support of the American people, we have not given them that. We have not given that to the adversary, who has not—we have not given that to the allies. And we have not subjected the administration to the kind of penetrating cross-X in questioning and force them to get better and better and better at defining a strategy so that we can do that kind of long-term strategizing that Dr. Kagan mentioned.

And so, I just—you know, I—I am tired of hearing myself say it. I am not impressing anybody with saying it. But, we are 14 months into a war, and I do think—and, Mr. Katulis, this was in your testimony—I think we would benefit our troops, we would benefit our own thinking and crystallize a strategic, rather than a reactive, vision if we would really dive into it.

The issue of Sunni grievance, really quick, just to kind of offer an insight. I was in Iraq, and—right on the Syrian border, in Gaziantep, in July . And, boy, the Sunni grievance narrative is very strong, and I had not really thought about it. Let me summarize it just for, like, 30 seconds.

Sunni grievance in Iraq: "Boy, for a while, you really worked with us really closely, but then you left in 2011, and you left us at the mercy of a Shia-dominated country. And now you have come

back in, and you are not really doing a ton in the Sunni area. You are trying to shore up this central government, which is Shia-dominated. And we are getting kicked around by the central government, and then ISIL started to run rampant in the Sunni zone, and you did not do anything. But, as soon as the Kurds were in trouble, you got in and started bombing to save the Kurds." That is what I heard in Iraq.

Then I was in, talking to Syrians in Gaziantep. "You said Assad must go. That made us hopeful. Us, Sunnis. But, you did not then pull the trigger on that step, and we are getting just run roughshod over by an Alawite minority that is being backed up by Russia and Iran. And we are fleeing our country, we are getting slaughtered, by the, you know, tens and hundreds of thousands. But, as soon as the Kurds got in trouble in northern Syria, you engaged in a bombing—you did not engage in the bombing campaign after the chemical weapons, but you did engage in a bombing campaign in Syria to work with the Kurds."

And I am glad about this, because the Kurds are good partners. So, I am—do not get me wrong. I am not saying we should not have. But, the Sunni in both countries are looking at us as folks who will not really come strongly to their against ISIL, and will not come strongly to their aid against a Shia-dominated central government in Baghdad, and will not come strongly to their aid against Bashar al-Assad. But, we are very glad to come to the aid of the Kurds.

So, I mean, I do not know what I think about that, but, when I heard people say that to me, I found myself having a hard time, you know, mounting the counterargument. I think that that is something that we have to contemplate.

Mr. Chair, could I ask one more question? I have gone over, but just—the scope of what we may still see, from a humanitarian situation in Syria.

So, I—as I understand it, about 2-point million—2 million have—I am sorry—4 million have fled outside Syria. About 7.6 million have displaced inside Syria. Is there any reason to think, based on what we are seeing now, unless there is a dramatic change in calculation, that that is going to slow down, or are we likely to see significant more millions displaced out and significant more millions displaced in, unless the status quo is somehow altered?

Mr. BOWERS. There is approximately 11 million people left, we think, inside Syria. So, that is 11 million more people that could displace, obviously——

Senator KAINE. And the internally displaced could also displace out, right?

Mr. BOWERS. That is right. Obviously, at this stage, I could only give you a speculation, but every worst-case scenario has come true that we have put together over the last 4 years of this conflict. Four years ago, I would not have thought we would see a disintegrated, failed state of Syria. Now it is. So, essentially, take that as an indicator of things to come. Because if there is no other political situation, that is going to be brought down to bear. Individuals have exhausted what they can do, literally, in the region, both financially and otherwise. And again, when you are—do not have a right to work in Lebanon, Jordan, or Turkey, you are at the whims

of then living in the camps or living on the streets. And that pressure on those host communities, that will have something to bear, as well, especially Lebanon, as we have talked about.

So, the tide of people will only go forward, we think.

Senator KAINE. And then, finally, recognizing the complexity of the whole safe-zone, humanitarian-zone thing—and let us step back from kind of the legal aspect of it. I do think what Dr. Kagan said was true, there would be no way to do it without military support. But, if the folks who remain in Syria who are still trying to decide what to do—if there were segments of the country that they viewed as largely safe, all things being equal, would they rather stay in their own country than flee outside the country, if they felt like there were places where they would be safe?

Mr. BOWERS. Every Syrian we spoke to, of course, does not want to leave at all. No Syrian wants——

Senator KAINE. And many want to come back. The ones in Turkey——

Mr. BOWERS. Many want to come back.

I think, though, the credibility of the international community saying, "We are going to create a safe zone" is very weak, frankly. And, as Dr. Kagan pointed out, unless you have a military force mobilized to enforce that safe zone, which, in effect, becomes a new combatant zone——

Senator KAINE. Yes.

Mr. BOWERS [continuing]. I doubt people will be attracted to those zones.

Senator KAINE. I agree with you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cardin, do you have any closing comments?

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me just thank our witnesses again.

I mean, I think it is clear that U.S. leadership is desperately needed for stability in this region. We need a regional strategy that is credible, that is achievable, and we have to stick to our values, and do what we do best. But we must also understand there is a lot that we cannot do, and it must be done by empowering the local governments and the people and ultimately the governments have to respect the rights of all citizens. We keep coming back to the same points. But I thought this hearing was extremely helpful in trying to put together the different players and pieces.

And I would just thank our witnesses.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, I thank our witnesses, too. I think it is been a great hearing and a great start for what we are going to be doing over the next month. My friend from Virginia is one of the most thoughtful members that we have on the committee, and without his efforts and Senator Cardin's and others, we would not have had the focus we have had recently on the Iran nuclear agreement.

I will say I am one of those people that do believe that the administration is authorized to do what it is doing. It is on the edge. I do believe that the American people are very much behind our efforts against ISIS. I see no division whatsoever. I cannot imagine how any military personnel would not feel supported in what they are doing.

And, as I have mentioned, I think, for some members—certainly not every member, but for some members, the discussion of an AUMF has been, let us face it, more about limiting the next administration's ability to actually counter ISIS than to authorize efforts against them today.

So, with all those forces, I think everyone would have to acknowledge that that is certainly the case—but, I—again, I appreciate so much Senator Kaine, Senator Flake, continuing to pursue the rightful role. I am not unsure that, as we develop this regional effort, that is not the place for this to appropriately occur, where many things might be authorized.

But, I thank you all for listening to me say that, back to Senator Kaine—most importantly, for your testimony today.

And if it is okay, we will leave the record open until the close of business Friday. If you would respond to questions that come to you in a prompt manner, we would appreciate it.

Thank you for your time, what you do on behalf of our Nation. And we look forward to seeing you again.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:50 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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