

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ASH CARTER
TESTIMONY ON THE PRESIDENT’S REQUEST FOR
AUTHORIZATION TO USE MILITARY FORCE AGAINST ISIL
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2015**

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and Members of the Committee:

As you know, I recently returned from my first trip abroad as Secretary of Defense.

My last stop was in Kuwait, where I thanked our men and women in uniform for their contributions to an important mission and talked with our ambassadors and military leaders in the region about our campaign against ISIL.

The trip confirmed for me that ISIL represents a serious and complex threat, especially in our interconnected and networked world. But it also confirmed the enemy can be defeated. We will deliver ISIL a lasting defeat.

Let me take a few moments to share with you my view of this fight.

First, defeating ISIL will require a combined U.S. diplomatic and military effort, and I believe DoD’s partners in the U.S. government, at this table, and in the region, are unified and working together effectively. Second, while the 62-member coalition the United States is leading is a great strength, we can – and we will – do a better job leveraging the individual contributions of each member. Third, while we are conducting the current campaign in Iraq and Syria, it has clear ramifications for other parts of the Middle East and other regions of the world. Fourth, ISIL’s sophisticated communications strategy, including its use of social media, requires us to be more creative in combating it in the information dimension.

Our counter-ISIL strategy for enduring success calls for U.S. military and coalition forces to conduct a systematic air campaign in Iraq and Syria, and counts on local forces to conduct ground operations. While our program to train and equip vetted elements of the Syrian opposition is just getting off the ground, our strategy is already having effect in Iraq, where America and our coalition partners have helped local forces – the key to a lasting victory against ISIL – seize the initiative.

In reviewing the President’s proposed Authorization for the Use of Military Force, as Secretary of Defense, I asked two questions:

First, does it provide the necessary authority and flexibility to wage our current campaign, allowing for a full range of likely military scenarios?

Second, will it send the message to the people I am responsible for – our brave men and women in uniform, and civilian personnel who will wage this campaign – that the country is behind them?

I believe the President’s proposed AUMF does both. And I urge this Congress to pass it.

Let me explain why I judge that the proposed AUMF gives the authority and flexibility needed to prevail in this campaign.

First, the proposed AUMF takes into account the reality that ISIL as an organization is likely to evolve strategically... morphing, rebranding, and associating with other terrorist groups, while continuing to threaten the United States and our allies.

Second, the proposed AUMF wisely does not include any geographical restriction because ISIL already shows signs of metastasizing outside of Syria and Iraq.

Third, the President’s proposed authorization provides great flexibility in the military means we need as we pursue our strategy, with one exception: the proposed AUMF does not

authorize long-term, large-scale offensive ground combat operations like those we conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan.... because our strategy does not call for them. Instead, local forces must provide the enduring presence needed for an enduring victory.

Fourth and finally, the proposed AUMF expires in three years. I cannot tell you our campaign to defeat ISIL will be completed in three years. But I understand the reason for the proposed sunset provision. It derives from the important principle, stemming from the Constitution, that makes the grave matter of enacting an authorization for the use of military force a shared responsibility of the President and Congress. The President's proposed authorization affords the American people the chance to assess our progress in three years' time, and provides the next president and the next Congress the opportunity to reauthorize if they find it necessary. To me, this is a sensible and principled provision of the AUMF, even though I cannot assure that the counter-ISIL campaign will be completed in three years.

In addition to providing the authority and flexibility to wage a successful campaign, I said I had another key consideration as Secretary of Defense: sending the right signals, most importantly, to the troops.

Passing the proposed AUMF will demonstrate to our personnel that their government stands behind them. And, as Secretary Kerry explained, it will signal to our coalition partners and to our adversary that the United States government has come together to address a serious national challenge.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, we have all learned lessons – many of them hard-won – from the past 13-plus years of war. Our experience informs our strategy, just as I am sure it informs all our opinions on this issue. I know that some worry the proposed authorization places too many limitations on DoD. And I know others are concerned that the authorization does not impose enough constraints. I am confident that the proposed AUMF gives DoD the authority and flexibility required to execute our strategy and stamp out ISIL.

We all want Congress in this important fight. That is why President Obama committed to an ISIL AUMF, even though existing AUMFs provide the necessary legal authority for our ongoing military operations in Iraq and Syria. It is also why the administration has worked closely with members of this committee and the Congress to develop the proposed language before you. And the discussion we are engaging in today helps the American people understand the stakes in this fight, just as our civil deliberation stands in sharp contrast to the discourse of our barbaric and oppressive enemy.

We all took an oath to protect the nation and its interests. But to do so, we must work together. I know everyone on this committee takes the ISIL threat seriously. President Obama – and everyone at this table – does as well.

We encourage a serious debate. But I urge you to pass the President's AUMF because it provides the necessary authority and flexibility to wage our current campaign. Because it is the best next step in our work together to degrade and defeat ISIL. And because it will demonstrate to our men and women in uniform – some of whom are in harm's way right now – that all of us stand unflinchingly behind them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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