

Statement by Joan A. Polaschik
Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
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South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism
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Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the challenges Iraq continues to face from Iran, ISIS, and armed groups not under the control of the Iraqi government, including some that are backed by Iran. These actors pose a threat to the stability of Iraq and to Iraq's future and I look forward to discussing the many ways the United States and the U.S.-led Coalition can help Iraq as they continue to seek stability and re-integrate into the region.

Our relationship with Iraq remains vital for U.S. national security interests and regional security. Bolstering Iraq as a sovereign, stable, united, and democratic partner of the United States continues to be our principal objective. We must remain engaged to ensure that Iraq can fend off the internal and external threats, including threats from Iran, to its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

To help offset the impact of Iran's harmful meddling in Iraq, we must continue to build on our successful diplomatic efforts to reintegrate Iraq into the region, particularly among Arab states. Constructive relations between Iraq and its neighbors are a powerful counterweight to Iran's malign influence. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi, President Barham Salih, and Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali al-Hakim, Iraq has strengthened ties across the region. Since taking office, they have welcomed King Abdullah II of Jordan and with him inaugurated a joint industrial zone along the Jordan-Iraq border; they have received an unprecedented visit from the Emir of Kuwait; and they have conducted significant state visits to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among other key milestones.

U.S. security assistance remains integral to Iraq's security and stability. Iraq relies on our assistance to reinforce the primacy of the Iraqi Security Forces, strengthen their capabilities, and deepen their professionalism. In support of our partners in the Iraqi Security Forces, the U.S.-led Global Coalition to defeat ISIS helped Iraq regain control over all its territory and train-and-equip more than 212,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga. The Government of Iraq's December 2018 announcement of the liberation of all Iraqi territory from ISIS control was a great moment for Iraq and all Iraqis. Together with the U.S.-led Coalition and our Iraqi partners, we must remain vigilant to prevent the return of ISIS or the emergence of other terrorist groups.

The United States remains committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS and eliminating the conditions that would allow for its resurgence. The work of the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS is not over yet. The United States and our partners continue to operate in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government, with two dozen other countries helping Iraq ensure that our gains against ISIS endure. The Iraqi Security Forces realize that they still need the Coalition's assistance in conducting targeted counter-terrorism operations and combatting a reemerging ISIS

insurgency. Iraq's growing ability to act in partnership with the Coalition to defeat our shared national security threats is one of the truly remarkable developments since 2014. For example, Iraq was instrumental in advancing the Coalition's military campaign in Syria, providing valuable artillery support and airstrikes for the Syrian Democratic Forces' offensive just over the border.

Despite the gains they have made with our support, Iraq's armed forces are stretched by competing demands and need continued assistance and training to eradicate ISIS remnants, secure Iraq's borders, and become a source of regional stability. Consequently, the U.S.-led Coalition must continue to build the capacity of Iraq's legitimate and professional security forces.

Iraq's stability will hinge upon its government's ability to assert control over increasingly powerful militia groups. We support the Government of Iraq's efforts to bring all armed groups fully under state control. On July 1, Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi issued a decree to institutionalize the Popular Mobilization Forces. Disciplined elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces were instrumental in the territorial defeat of ISIS and we recognize the critical role they played in that campaign. Some rogue elements, however, take instructions from Iran rather than the Iraqi central government. Their activities are particularly destabilizing in the liberated areas, where they appear to prioritize smuggling and extortion for personal gain over fighting ISIS. These same groups surveil our diplomatic facilities as well as Iraqi military bases where the Coalition is training the Iraqi Security Forces. We know that militia leaders continue to plot against U.S. interests and plan operations that could be used to kill Americans, other Coalition partners, and even Iraqis that work closely with us. Undisciplined Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) groups also continue to conduct nuisance indirect fire attacks, as they did against our Consulate in Basrah last year. The Prime Minister's decree is an important step towards shoring up Iraq's sovereignty and security. Implementation of the decree will be key, and we will engage with the Government of Iraq on its plans for enforcement.

Eliminating Iraqi dependence on Iranian energy imports will strengthen the Iraqi economy and deprive Iran of resources to exert its malign influence. A country as wealthy in natural resources as Iraq should be able to produce all of its own electricity. Iraq, however, imports a significant amount of electricity and natural gas from Iran. While we recognize there is no quick fix to eliminate Iraq's energy imports from Iran, we support Iraq's efforts to expand its own energy independence over time. These efforts include increasing domestic gas capture and electricity generation capacity as well as enhancing energy cooperation with Iraq's Gulf neighbors and Jordan. Of course, it will take years for Iraq to realize full energy independence. Iraq, should remain focused on advancing projects to install new power generation facilities, develop electricity delivery infrastructure, and promote domestic production of natural gas. These projects not only make economic sense, they contribute to Iraq's national interest of full autonomy from Iran, and simultaneously support our policy of denying the Iranian regime revenue.

In order for Iraq to reach its economic potential, the Government of Iraq must tackle corruption and the problem of excessive red tape. To that end, the United States continues to support an initiative from the UN's Conference on Trade and Development, which is

streamlining some of Iraq's bureaucratic processes, thereby increasing transparency both for the Iraqi public and for U.S. investors.

Lack of essential services and high unemployment, especially among youth, are major drivers of Iraq's instability. The best solution is to foster a sustainable Iraqi private sector as an outlet for the 800,000 Iraqis who reach working age every year. The government cannot be the sole source of employment for a country where sixty percent of Iraq's population is under the age of 25. Iraq's current and future stability depends on finding work for this disproportionately large youth segment.

It is in our interest to support Iraq's democratic development, but significant challenges remain to the building of durable institutions that will protect the rule of law, secure human rights for all its citizens, and promote free and fair elections. Iraqis are demanding better governance and ultimately their voices must be heard. Unfortunately, last year's electoral turnout was the lowest since 2005. In spite of all of the turmoil of the past 15 years, however, Iraq's core democratic institutions have survived. The Administration will continue to support free and fair elections while encouraging all Iraqis to vote.

In particular, supporting pluralism and protecting the rights of minorities is integral to the Administration's effort to defeat ISIS, counter violent extremism, and promote religious freedom around the world. In a little more than two weeks, it will be five years since ISIS launched its campaign of genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and other religious minorities. In response, we have programmed over \$340 million since fiscal year 2017 to help the recovery of Iraq's persecuted religious communities. Our support includes life-saving humanitarian assistance, rehabilitating critical infrastructure, clearing explosive remnants of war, psychosocial and legal services, funding justice and accountability efforts, and help for local businesses. Yet, hundreds of thousands of Yezidi, Christian and other religious minorities, remain blocked from returning home by these noncompliant militias, representing an existential threat to Iraq's religious mosaic. We continue to press the Government of Iraq to take immediate steps to transition security in Sinjar and Nineveh Plain away from these militias to formal state bodies and help these traumatized communities return home and restore their lives within Iraq.

The administration believes that a strong Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) within a unified and federal Iraq is essential to Iraq's long-term stability and to the enduring defeat of ISIS. We are proud of our longstanding and historic partnership with Iraq's Kurdish people. Following the Kurds' 2017 independence referendum, the Administration has focused on helping leaders in Baghdad and in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) mend relations, and since the appointment of Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, the Government of Iraq and the KRG have made strides toward this. We will continue to work with Baghdad and Erbil to encourage their efforts to resolve outstanding sources of tension. We will also continue to press the KRG to implement badly-needed reforms. For example, the KRG must put Peshmerga security forces under the direct control of the KRG rather than political parties. In addition, we encourage the KRG and the Government of Iraq to restore joint security mechanisms which will increase security and counterterrorism cooperation and eliminate security gaps in seams between KRG and Government of Iraq-controlled areas.

Chairman Romney, Ranking Member Murphy, as you know, Mission Iraq operates in a critical threat environment. On May 14, the Department approved Embassy Baghdad's request to go on Ordered Departure. The decision was based on the current threat situation against U.S. personnel and facilities. We recognize the critical importance of advancing U.S. interests in Iraq through our diplomatic presence; however the President and Secretary have been clear that the safety and security of our all Americans is the Administration's top priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.