

[H.A.S.C. No. 114-78]

**OUTSIDE VIEWS ON THE U.S. STRATEGY  
FOR IRAQ AND SYRIA AND THE  
EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM**

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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HEARING HELD  
JANUARY 12, 2016



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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

98-887

WASHINGTON : 2016

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ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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## CONTENTS

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	Page
STATEMENTS PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS	
Sanchez, Hon. Loretta, a Representative from California, Committee on Armed Services .....	1
Thornberry, Hon. William M. "Mac," a Representative from Texas, Chairman, Committee on Armed Services .....	1
WITNESSES	
Ford, Robert S., Former Ambassador to Syria .....	8
Morell, Michael J., Former Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency .....	3
Vickers, Michael G., Former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence .....	6
APPENDIX	
PREPARED STATEMENTS:	
Ford, Robert S. ....	67
Morell, Michael J. ....	51
Vickers, Michael G. ....	59
DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD:	
[There were no Documents submitted.]	
WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE HEARING:	
[There were no answers provided to Questions submitted during the hearing.]	
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING:	
Mr. Franks .....	79
Mr. Langevin .....	79



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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC, Tuesday, January 12, 2016.*

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:01 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. William M. “Mac” Thornberry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM M. “MAC” THORNBERRY, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

The committee is very pleased today to welcome three distinguished public servants to help offer us some insights on ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and the general direction of radical Islamist terrorism. Each of these gentlemen have served not only in the Obama administration but in previous administrations in a variety of agencies, and I am certainly very grateful that they would be willing to come today to help share their insights on this threat that we face, on what we can and should do about it, and the direction that this ideology, this threat that we have dealt with, especially since 9/11, should be.

Certainly we know that there is some success in reclaiming towns in Iraq, but at the same time ISIS seems to spread and deepen its hold in sections of Libya all the way across to Afghanistan. So this broader direction is something that I think we need to understand and try to get our arms around.

In addition, this threat extends to us here at home, as we have seen in recent days and weeks. We are not exempt from its reach. So we need the expertise that these gentlemen can provide and the guidance that they can provide us in carrying out our responsibilities, and we are glad to have them today.

Mr. Smith is not here today, so I would yield to the gentlelady from California, Ms. Sanchez, for any comments she would like to make.

**STATEMENT OF HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM CALIFORNIA, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you. I will read a few of these comments, Mr. Chairman, only because Mr. Smith wanted to make sure that—I want to make sure that we provide some of his voice while he is gone.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being before us today, and I welcome you. And I hope that you can in fact shed light on what is a very complicated situation.

No longer is this just about whether we send in ground troops to counter ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] or not. We see ISIL's influence permeating into so many different countries, permeating through the Internet, in the dark spaces of the Internet that none of us really can understand. We see it in the violence that we have in Europe, in the Middle East. And, of course, we saw its influence in my home State, just 20 miles away from where I live, in San Bernardino.

So the influence of ISIL is spreading; I think we have to get our heads around that. And we also see other extremist groups that are beginning to align or coordinate with ISIL from North Africa, and this is a problem.

So, in general, I would say that the international community, the U.S., the Democrats, Republicans, we are trying to really grapple with how we define, how we handle, what is the best way in which we defeat this evolving situation of ISIL and aligned groups.

And although we have seen progress on ISIL—for example, Iraq's reclaiming of Ramadi—the situation appears to be growing even more complex, and I am worried that it may get even more difficult given the situation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for example.

I am also concerned—I think we need a clearer strategy. And I don't know that that strategy is one we want to make public, Mr. Chairman, because I am always one of those people that says, if you are going to battle someone, you want the upper hand, but I think we, as the representatives of the people, need to understand what the strategy is. Because if we can understand how we go about this, then we can agree, as Democrats and Republicans, as Americans really, to put in the resources that are required to get the job done.

As I have stated before, defeating ISIL will require a broad commitment that will take many years to take the effect that we want. But we cannot allow ourselves to be pulled into the same types of mistakes that we saw in the Iraq war. ISIL is out to get us, and we need to understand that. It is not just about over there; it has now come here. So we have to figure out how to expose the dark and the hopeless nature of ISIL's vicious and morally bankrupt agenda, and we have to do everything to delegitimize ISIL's twisted and lurid appeal.

And it is beyond my comprehension—let me end with this, Mr. Chairman—beyond my comprehension how, in today's world, we can have such a massive humanitarian crisis occurring in Syria and where we could have 40,000 civilians in the city of Madaya starving to death as a result of ISIL and Assad and the confluence of what is happening there.

So I am interested in your views today, trying to find some answers, trying to find that nugget of what is a real strategy that we and our allies—because it will take more than just the U.S. to resolve this issue.

I yield back, and I look forward to your testimony, gentlemen.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee is pleased to welcome with us today Mr. Mike Morell, former Acting Director of the Central Intel-

ligence Agency; Dr. Michael Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; and Mr. Robert Ford, former Ambassador to Syria.

Committee members have their complete background information. Those were only the last jobs of these guys.

Again, thank you all for being here. Without objection, your complete written statement will be made part of the record, and we would like to hear any oral comments that you would like to make at this time.

Mr. Morell.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL J. MORELL, FORMER ACTING  
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

Mr. MORELL. Thank you.

Chairman Thornberry, Congresswoman Sanchez, members of the committee, good morning, and thank you for the invitation to be here today to talk about an extremely important national security challenge facing our Nation.

It is an honor to be here. Indeed, I am humbled that you have asked me here to hear my thoughts. And it is good to see so many old friends, both on the committee and here at the table with me.

I plan on keeping my opening remarks short. Over the years, I have come to understand that questions and answers are a much more effective way to get to understanding than hearing somebody read a long testimony.

Let me start with the bottom line: I believe ISIS poses a significant strategic and lethal threat to the United States of America. That is a very strong statement. Let me walk you through why I believe that.

The nature and the significance of the threat posed by ISIS flows from the fact that ISIS is at the same time a terrorist group, a quasi-state, and a revolutionary political movement. We have not faced the likes of it before.

As a terrorist group, ISIS poses a threat to the U.S. homeland. In mid-2015, so just 6 months ago, that threat was largely indirect—ISIS's ability to radicalize young American men and women to conduct lone-wolf attacks here. That indirect threat remains today.

There are thousands of ISIS sympathizers in the United States, more than Al Qaeda ever had. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] has over 900 open investigations into homegrown extremists, the vast majority radicalized by ISIS and a large number of which relate to individuals who may be plotting attacks here.

Such attacks have already occurred in the United States, including the attack in San Bernardino last month, which in terms of fatalities was the largest terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11. There are other ISIS supporters who have been arrested before they could act.

Today, in addition to that indirect threat, we face a direct threat from ISIS—an ISIS capability to plan and direct attacks in the homeland from the group's safe haven in Iraq and Syria, largely from Raqqa in Syria, just like the group did in Paris in November. The Paris attack, as you know, was the largest attack in Western

Europe since the Madrid train bombings in 2004 and the first ISIS-directed attack in the West ever.

What is the difference between the direct threat and an indirect threat? Why does it matter? A lone-wolf attack, while horrific, is likely to produce fairly limited casualties on the order of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013—3 killed—or the shootings at Fort Hood in 2009—12 killed.

A directed attack, however, carries the potential to be more complex and more sophisticated—multiple simultaneous attacks, for example—and, therefore, more deadly, again, just like Paris—130 killed—or London in 2005—56 killed—or even 9/11 itself.

The attack in Paris was the first manifestation of an effort that ISIS has made to put together an attack capability in Europe, an effort they began less than a year before the Paris attack. More attacks in Europe are likely. The head of the U.K.'s [United Kingdom's] domestic security agency has warned that ISIS is planning mass casualty attacks in Britain. ISIS has said that it wants to conduct similar attacks in the United States.

One of the things I learned in 33 years in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] is sometimes it is really important to listen to what your adversary tells you. Sometimes they tell you exactly what they are going to do. ISIS has told us they are going to attack us here.

Now that they have the attack capability in Europe, they are almost certainly working to do the same thing here. And unless they are degraded, they will succeed. I don't have any doubt about that.

Switching from terrorist group to quasi-state, as a quasi-state, ISIS poses a threat to regional stability. ISIS is a state in every respect of the word except one: It does not have foreign recognition or relations with other states. But in every other respect it is a state. It has an executive, it has an army, it has a police force, it has a set of laws, it has a judiciary, it provides social services, it takes care of its poor, and it raises taxes.

Why does it matter that ISIS is a quasi-state? Two reasons.

One is that, as a state, it can utilize all of the resources, human and otherwise, within the area that it controls in the pursuit of its objectives. The best example of this is the tens of millions of dollars a month in revenue that ISIS earns from taxing the people that are inside the caliphate. They actually earn more in taxes than they do in oil sales.

And, two, the second reason it is important that it is a state is that it is going to make it more difficult to dislodge them. They have become deeply rooted in the areas that they control. The ISIS threat to regional stability is a threat to the very territorial integrity of the current nation-states there, a threat to inflame the entire region, I think, in sectarian war.

All of this—all of this—in a part of the world that still provides almost a third of the world's oil supply; a region that is home to one of America's closest allies, Israel; and a region that is home to a set of close American allies, the Gulf Arab states, that are a bulwark against Iran's push for hegemony in the region.

Third, as a revolutionary political movement, ISIS is gaining affiliates—this was mentioned in the opening statements—ISIS is gaining affiliates among extremist groups around the world. These



groups are signing up for what ISIS desires as its objective: a global caliphate where day-to-day life is governed by extreme religious views. In the mind of ISIS, its global caliphate would extend to the United States of America itself.

When they join ISIS, these affiliates evolve from focusing on local issues, local grievances, to focusing on establishing an extension of the caliphate themselves. They want their own little caliphates. And their targets evolve from local to international ones. This is the story of the bombing of the Russian airliner by an ISIS group in the Egyptian Sinai, only the third airliner brought down by a bomb in the last 25 years. It is remarkable.

ISIS has gained affiliates faster than Al Qaeda ever did. From nothing a year ago, there are now militant groups in nearly 20 countries that have sworn allegiance to ISIS. They have conducted attacks that have already killed Americans, and they carry the potential to, themselves, grab large amounts of territory.

Libya is a place where this could happen in the near term. ISIS controls territory in Libya. They are currently expanding that territory, and foreign fighters are beginning to go to Libya to fight with the ISIS group there. I would not be surprised if we woke up one morning and ISIS in Libya had grabbed a large part of Libyan territory, the same kind of blitzkrieg on a smaller scale that we saw in Iraq.

Degrading and ultimately defeating ISIS will both require removing the leadership from the battlefield and will require the shrinking and the eventual elimination of the safe haven, the elimination of the quasi-state, which is currently the size of Great Britain.

The safe haven, the state, is a key part of the ISIS narrative that it is winning. As long as they have it—right?—they have a narrative that they are winning. This narrative is absolutely critical to them. It is absolutely critical to radicalizing homegrown extremists here and absolutely critical to creating affiliates among other militant groups around the world.

The safe haven provides security for ISIS to plot and to train. There are two things that are necessary for a successful attack on the homeland: a desire to do so and the capability to do it. And the safe haven allows for the building of that capability.

And the safe haven provides a place for foreign fighters to gather. No safe haven, no place to gather. Nearly 30,000 individuals from over 100 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight. Some are homesteading there to help create the caliphate. Others will die on the battlefield. But still others will return home, carrying with them the potential to conduct attacks. This has already happened in Europe, as you know. This creates the potential for attacks that cause more casualties because the individuals who return home will have battlefield experience.

Removing the leadership is easier than eliminating the safe haven. The former requires good intelligence and the military assets to turn that intelligence into action. The latter requires complex military operations in both Iraq and Syria, and it requires a political solution in Damascus to the problem of Bashar al-Assad and a political solution in Iraq to the problem of the disenfranchisement of the Sunnis there.

Mr. Chairman, let me close with this. Early last month, during a debate in the British Commons over whether Parliament should authorize British air strikes against ISIS in Syria, the Labour Party's shadow minister for foreign affairs, Hilary Benn, gave a remarkable speech. Some of his colleagues called it one of the greatest speeches in the history of the British Commons.

Benn, breaking with his own party leader and supporting British air strikes in Syria, said, and I quote, "We are here faced by fascists, not just their calculated brutality but their belief that they are superior to every single one of us in this chamber tonight and all of the people that we represent. They hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our very democracy in contempt."

Benn went on, and I quote, "What we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated. It is why this entire house stood up against Hitler and Mussolini. We must now confront this evil."

Mr. Chairman, I associate myself with Hilary Benn's remarks. That is the picture as I see it as a former intelligence officer who spent years watching Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Morell can be found in the Appendix on page 51.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Dr. Vickers.

#### **STATEMENT OF MICHAEL G. VICKERS, FORMER UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTELLIGENCE**

Dr. VICKERS. Chairman Thornberry, Congresswoman Sanchez, distinguished members of the committee, good morning. It is a privilege and pleasure to be with the House Armed Services Committee to provide an outside view on U.S. strategy for Iraq, Syria, and the global jihadist threat.

My former colleague and dear friend, Michael Morell, has described the threats that ISIS, or ISIL, poses. The ISIS threat is nested in several other conflicts that are raging across the Middle East—civil war and sectarian conflict, the global jihad, and then proxy war between Saudi Arabia and its allies and Iran and its allies.

In my opening statement this morning, I would like to offer a few thoughts on how I believe U.S. strategy needs to be intensified and accelerated to deal with these challenges.

The aims of U.S. strategy in the Middle East should be threefold: one, to prevent a major attack on the U.S. homeland and defeat the global jihadist threat; two, to reassure our allies and partners and contain Iran; and, three, to restore a favorable balance of power and greater stability across the Middle East.

I will discuss, in turn, what I believe are the needed adjustments to our strategy in Syria and Iraq against the global jihadists and against Iran, beginning with Syria.

Syria is the center of gravity for Middle Eastern conflict. It is where the battle for the future of the Middle East is largely being waged. A coalition victory in Syria would roll back Iranian power and deal a significant blow to the global jihadist movement.

I believe we need to adjust our strategy in Syria in two principal ways.

First, U.S. strategy has treated Syria as a secondary theater of war in the Iraq-Syria war. In my judgment, we need to shift to a Syria-first strategy and reinvigorate our efforts to remove Assad from power.

Second, we need to significantly intensify our operations. Strike sorties and the weight of strikes need to be significantly increased, as does coalition support, both quantitative and qualitative, for the moderate Syrian opposition. It is not too late to decisively support the opposition. We did not develop a war-winning strategy, for example, until the sixth year of our covert war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in President Reagan's second term.

Let me now briefly turn to Iraq and make four points.

First, as the retaking of Ramadi shows, a more intense application of airpower and more aggressive use of U.S. combat advisers is also a good strategy in Iraq.

Second, the key to a Sunni tribal uprising against ISIL or ISIS is decisive U.S. engagement. The key to sustaining that uprising is the devolution of political power in Iraq across sectarian lines.

Third, we are in a competition with Iran for influence in Iraq. How sectarian identity, politics, and a post-war settlement will shape the future of Iraq and Syria remains to be determined, but our competition for influence with Iran is one we should seek to win.

And then, fourth, more broadly to both Iraq and Syria, raids by special operations forces will contribute an important line of effort to our strategy, but to be effective the tempo of operations needs to dramatically increase. For this to happen, the Iraqi Government must approve an increase in the number of U.S. special operations personnel on its territory.

Now turning to the global jihad, global jihad has metastasized, and time is not on our side, as Michael mentioned. Global jihadists cannot be contained. They must be defeated and continually disrupted while they are in the process of being defeated. Sanctuaries must be denied.

There are three points I would like to make.

First, disrupting and defeating the global jihadists in Syria and Iraq and beyond will require roughly the same ways—precision air strikes exploited by indigenous ground forces led by U.S. advisers—and sufficient means. The global jihadists will not be defeated until the ungoverned space in which they operate is eliminated, their ideology is discredited, and stability is returned to the Middle East. This will require a significant long-term investment in capacity-building of indigenous forces, irregular as well as regular, and sustained U.S. engagement.

Second, the Predator has been our most effective weapon in our campaign against the global jihadists, and the size of the Predator fleet will remain a critical limiting factor in the conduct of our campaigns.

Third, intelligence is our first line of defense, and, accordingly, investments in this area should have top priority.

I would like to conclude by saying a few words about U.S. strategy for Iran and the need to reassure our allies. Iran remains on

the offensive in its quest for regional hegemony, and our Gulf Arab allies feel increasingly under siege as they confront a multi-front war with Sunni radicals and Iran and are increasingly estranged from us. Further estrangement would pose a serious challenge to our campaign against the global jihadists and will result in our allies becoming more vulnerable to Iranian and radical Islamic aggression. Reassuring our Gulf Arab allies, strengthening our fraying Arab-Turkish-Kurdish coalition, and containing Iranian expansion are thus critical to our broader efforts in the Middle East.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vickers can be found in the Appendix on page 59.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.  
Ambassador Ford.

#### **STATEMENT OF ROBERT S. FORD, FORMER AMBASSADOR TO SYRIA**

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the invitation to address you and the honorable members of the committee today. It gave me an excuse to come down from the cold winter up in northern New England.

I would like to in my remarks speak, above all, about the politics that is underway in Iraq and in Syria. I am going to avoid the strict military discussion because, to me, the Islamic State is more than the sum of its fighters. It is actually, as Mike Morell was saying, it is a quasi-state. But it builds support, it recruits, it replaces fighters who are killed, it even trains little children.

And so, confronting something like that, we need to think about what is a sustainable solution over the long term. And I am going to therefore talk about resources, and I am going to talk about the politics of national reconciliation.

First, Iraq. I visited Iraq a couple of months ago. It was my first time there on the ground in 5 years. I worked in Iraq for 5 years with the American Embassy and before that with the Coalition Provisional Authority.

My sense is that in Iraq on the military side there is progress, but there are two big challenges.

First, on the resource side, both the Iraqi Government in Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government in Irbil, both are heavily dependent on oil and oil sales. And low oil prices are really crunching their ability to mobilize resources in the fight against the Islamic State.

It was very noticeable to me that the Kurdish leadership, whom I have known since 2004, was genuinely concerned about their budget abilities to sustain the fight against Islamic State. Some of their Peshmerga fighters had not been paid for 3 months. But even in Baghdad, the authorities were concerned about the resources.

Second issue on Iraq: the politics of national reconciliation. Mike Vickers just mentioned the importance of devolution and decentralization. I certainly agree with that, and I am hopeful on that, because the Sunni Arab leaders, again, whom I have known since 2004, have really come around 180 degrees. They used to be in

favor of a tight, strong central government, and now they are arguing for devolution of power.

That is what the Shia and the Kurds always wanted 10 years ago. For the first time, I have actually seen the Sunnis, the Shia, and the Kurds in Iraq all talking about, sort of, the same system of government. That is new, and that is hopeful.

But, at the same time, as events in Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, yesterday showed, there is serious sectarian tension. The Islamic State yesterday exploded several car bombs in the weary city of Baqubah, and there was immediately concern among the local Sunni Arab population that Shia irregular, Shia militia, would retaliate. There was actually a fear that they would attack Sunni Arab mosques.

In order to mobilize Sunni Arabs to contain the Islamic State, there must be efforts at national reconciliation. And this is important because we don't want the Islamic State to be put down militarily and then revive, as happened between 2011 and 2013. I really don't want to see an Islamic State version 2.0.

It is important for the Americans, therefore, to maintain pressure on the Shia militia problem in Iraq. There are Iraqis, such as Prime Minister Abadi, Ayatollah Sistani, a superb religious leader in the Shia community, people like, on the Sunni side, Speaker Jabouri, who are all working for national reconciliation.

And so, in Iraq, we need to help mobilize resources for both the central authorities in Iraq, Baghdad, for the Kurdish regional government in Irbil, and we have to be engaged on the national reconciliation, working with the gentlemen I pointed out.

On the Syrian side, Mr. Chairman, I am much less upbeat, much less optimistic. There has been some progress on the ground in northeastern Syria, but that has been led by Syrian Kurds, who have a separate political agenda. And their political agenda is, first, autonomy, and second, fight the Islamic State. Make sure we all understand that: first, autonomy; second, fight the Islamic State.

Because their first priority is autonomy, in that heterogeneous area of northern Syria, these Syrian Kurds have already stirred substantial resentment among local Arabs. I would note that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both issued reports accusing the Syrian Kurdish militia, the ones we are helping—they have accused them of ethnic cleansing and war crimes against the local Arab communities. That does not help national reconciliation. That does not help build local Sunni indigenous forces to contain the Islamic State. We don't need to help the Islamic State recruit.

As Michael Vickers just noted, the only way really to generate more indigenous forces is to help the Syrian opposition and to see the removal of Bashar al-Assad at some point and the creation of a new national unity government. The sooner that can be done in Syria, the better. Only a new national unity government in Syria is going to be able to mobilize enough Syrians to fight and destroy the Islamic State.

In both countries, in both Iraq and Syria, as territory is cleared of the Islamic State, local authorities who are trying to keep the electricity going, trying to keep hospitals operating, trying to keep

the water going, are going to need help. The Islamic State operated these things. As Mike Morell just said, it acts as a state. When it is gone, services must be contained.

That will be a job for the U.S. State Department, its people in Turkey and in Jordan, and for the U.S. Agency for International Development. They will need resources to do that, and they are going to have to be able to move around despite the security risks.

Finally, if I may, one last word about North Africa. I served in Algeria as Ambassador, and I was also in Algeria in the mid-nineties during a horrible civil war there, where the Algerian Government had to confront a very nasty sort of pre-Al Qaeda insurgency.

I am watching what is happening in Libya with concern. Even if the Islamic State, which is capturing oil facilities, even if it can't sell oil the way the Islamic State affiliates in Iraq and Syria have done, they may be able to use the oil assets they have locally to generate revenues. They are an administration. They have an increasing ability to project military power out of their base at Sirte, and they have a safe haven space to organize, plan, and recruit. Just as the attack in Paris was organized in Syria, so they have space in Libya to do the same kind of thing.

It will be important, therefore, Mr. Chairman, to help a new Libyan Government and to help it control territory. And we will need to be ready to do that.

Thank you very much again for the invitation to address the committee, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ford can be found in the Appendix on page 67.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all. Much to think about and much to follow up on.

All committee members received notice that Mr. Smith and I agreed for the purpose of this hearing that, after the chairman and ranking member's questions, that members would be recognized in reverse order of seniority if you were here at the time of the gavel. Then we will proceed according to when you entered the room, as we normally do.

To get that started, I am going to yield my 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. MacArthur.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank all three of you for being here. It was very helpful, listening to you.

Mr. Morell, you painted a bleak and, I think, compelling picture of why ISIS poses a real threat, a strategic threat and a lethal threat, to the United States.

And if I heard you correctly, you mentioned three things: One, they are capable of completing indirect and direct attacks against us and our interests, and if we don't stop them, they will succeed. Two, they are really a state in every sense that matters. And I would add on that that I think it might serve us better if we recognize that. We call them a quasi-state, but they really are a repressive or an illegitimate state but they are a state, and they act as one. And then, thirdly, you said they have a growing network that will spread their influence.

It seems that the bottom of all of that is their control of land and people and resources. And so I wanted to ask you if you believe

that we are doing everything necessary to get them out of that territory. And if not, briefly, what would you suggest that we add to what we are doing?

Mr. MORELL. So I agree with both of my colleagues here that we need to do more. I also believe very much what Robert said, that we really can't have military success—and there is a lot we need to do on the military side, but we really can't have military success without political solutions in both places. That has to come first.

Airpower alone is not going to win it. We need to do more than airpower. You know, Mike can talk about that. There is more we can do with airpower, but airpower is not going to win this thing alone. We need a ground force. There is a strategy in Iraq to get that ground force. Ramadi showed that that strategy has potential. There is no ground force on the Syrian side that carries the same kind of potential as the Iraqi military carries.

And, you know, we can do more, I think, with the moderate opposition, but at the end of the day, I think Assad has to go. And we have to take Syrian military security resources, as degraded as they have become, and turn them into a force that the international community supports in taking on ISIS.

So I think we need to be more aggressive on the military side to put pressure on both ISIS and Assad in the short term while we get very, very aggressive on the political side, on the diplomatic side, to force political solutions in both places.

Mr. MACARTHUR. Let me segue on that comment, because Dr. Vickers also made it clear that he sees a Syria-first strategy in which Assad's departure is at the center of it, and now you have said the same.

And maybe I will start with you, Ambassador, because you have spent a good deal of time there. What follows Assad? And while I agree with you he is a bad actor that ideally would not be there, sometimes the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know. And what potentially follows Assad in that region, in that state?

Ambassador FORD. Very briefly, we don't know exactly who would follow Bashar al-Assad. It has to be a negotiation. I think, had we asked the question who would follow Saddam Hussein, we wouldn't have known the answer to that in 2003, obviously. So it will also be the subject of a negotiation among Syrians.

And I suspect, frankly, it will be a very wobbly initial national government, if the Syrians can ever have a serious negotiation. And that is a big "if," Congressman. Therefore, a wobbly government like that, just as the wobbly government in Iraq in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 needed help, that will be the case also in Syria.

I do not believe that, if Assad goes, only the Islamic State takes over. I think that is wrong on multiple levels and is indicative of a sense that there is no hope, whereas, actually, there is quite a bit of hope. As big as the Islamic State is in Syria, it is actually not the biggest force fighting Assad right now. The other elements of the opposition are actually much bigger than the Islamic State.

Mr. MACARTHUR. I thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Sanchez.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, ISIL has successfully expanded its influence and has received oaths of allegiance from groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, France, Belgium, the U.S., and so many others.

I recently read an article where a supposed expert says that the goal of ISIS is the establishment of sharia law through Muslim lands, but they have actually created a caliphate and are trying to establish a government, with the caliph and they have taxation, garbage services, et cetera, et cetera—a government, if you will.

So my first question is, where or what is ISIL's center of gravity? Where should we be focusing our time and resources? That is my first question.

The second one is, if you can talk a little about the worries or what we need to do about the Saudi-Iran Government issue going on.

Thank you.

Dr. VICKERS. So, first, their center of gravity is really their capital in Raqqa. That is where they administer their caliphate from. They draw a lot of power from Iraq's second-largest city, in Mosul, where they seized a lot of assets. Generally, the Sunni areas of western and northern Iraq and northeastern Syria is where they comprise, but Raqqa is really the center of gravity. And that is why I advocated a Syria-first strategy that really tries to take that on sooner rather than later.

The Iranian-Saudi competition is something that dates back to 1979. It has ebbed and flowed; it has intensified very dramatically. Probably even predates that, with the Shah, but certainly it intensified in 1979.

And, you know, from the Gulf Arab point of view, and particularly the Saudis, the Iranians, you know, have allies all around them, with Lebanese Hezbollah, with Syria, with their influence with the Government in Baghdad, and then in Yemen. And then they see a threat to their kingdom, as well. And so they see themselves fighting a multi-front war in this area and also against Sunni Islamic radicals.

Robert, I don't know if you want to add anything.

Ambassador FORD. I think Michael is exactly right, Congresswoman. Raqqa in Syria, the capital, and Mosul are the two centers of gravity physically, geographically. But the Islamic State's fighters have a saying, which is—I will translate it from Arabic. It is, "We are surviving, and we are expanding."

If they lose Raqqa and if they lose Mosul, they will still be there. Their predecessor organization, the mother organization, if you will, basically operated almost underground for a long time, for several years, in Iraq before it popped back out in both Syria and Iraq. And they have experience doing that, Congresswoman, and they will do it again.

That is why I was saying it is important to have indigenous forces who are staying and will keep it under control and grind it out of its holes little by little by little. I think grinding it out of its holes will take much longer than retaking Ramadi or retaking Raqqa or retaking Mosul.



I worry, frankly, that we do not yet have enough people, friendly indigenous fighters, in places like Ramadi, Anbar province, Diyala province to do that. I think right now the numbers that the administration is talking about are 30,000 Iraqis. I am not sure if 30,000 is going to be enough to secure that Syrian border and control those towns.

Mr. MORELL. Ma'am, I think you hit on something really important at the beginning of your question when you talked about what are these guys after, what do they want. And as an intelligence officer, I think it is really important to understand your enemy.

And what these guys are all about is they believe that Allah has chosen them personally to prepare the world for the coming of the Mahdi. And that preparation involves giving people the choice between becoming a Muslim, a good Muslim in their definition, or being killed. And then, once all of that work has been done—that is the establishment of the caliphate—then the Mahdi comes and the end of the world happens and God sorts out the good from the bad.

That is what they believe. They believe that based on, you know, not very good readings of the Koran, not very particularly good interpretations of what it is they are looking at. It is exactly—exactly—what the Al Qaeda leadership believed, exactly the same, about what their ultimate goals are and their ultimate objectives. And we need to understand that.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the interest of time—I mean, I just think we really have to get to what it is they want before we come up with a strategy of how—we can no longer contain them. If what you are saying is true, they go down a hole and they wait.

Now, something that someone had said was, now that they have established the caliphate, they have the caliph; this is really the lynchpin for them to be able to do this sharia law and everything else that comes with it, or, as you said, maybe the coming.

So I think, as members, we need to really begin to understand what moves before we can understand that not just bombs will get rid of this.

Thank you. I yield back.

Ambassador FORD. Congresswoman, can I add a point?

Ms. SANCHEZ. Yes.

Ambassador FORD. I think this is important, since you want to talk about what they want.

The establishment of the caliphate was very controversial within jihadi circles, very controversial. Why? Because many jihadi clerics, including Al Qaeda, said you can't declare a caliphate if you can't hold territory and apply sharia law. You can't declare a caliphate; it is illegitimate. That is still the position of Al Qaeda today with respect to the Islamic State.

Holding territory, therefore, taking it back from them, taking back Raqqa, taking back Mosul, taking back the other cities, matters. It will put a big dent in their recruitment because they will lose a great deal of the legitimacy that they have enjoyed within jihadi circles. They will still go underground, and they will still have to be routed out, but it will be easier if they can't recruit as well.

Ms. SANCHEZ. Thank you for that enlightenment. I mean, I have really been one of those who has been trying to understand what is the root of this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. McSally.

Ms. MCSALLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your service and your testimony today.

In my time in the military, one of the things that was most concerning as far as threat was the combination of a terrorist organization with weapons of mass destruction [WMD].

I serve on Homeland Security. I am the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communication. We have done some hearings on the threat of chemical and biological terrorism. And if you look at what ISIS has said, you know, they have stated in open source that they want to use these types of weapons and export their terror on us. Obviously, that could potentially be a game changer, not just small-scale physical attacks, but then actually using chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear capabilities.

And what we have seen with ISIS, as you know, is that they are not just trying to acquire them—and there are reports they have used them on the battlefield—but they try and recruit individuals with the expertise so that they can create those capabilities themselves, not from scratch but just by importing those with the experience.

So I was wondering if you could comment, Mr. Morell, on the WMD threat with ISIS and your concerns about that and what to do about that.

Mr. MORELL. So I share your concerns.

They have made two things very clear publicly in documents that have come out. One is that if they acquired these weapons that they would use them, and they wouldn't care that the vast majority of those killed were civilians. And they have also provided a religious justification very similar to Al Qaeda's—in fact, I think it was identical to Al Qaeda's—justification for using such weapons.

I have no doubt that they are pursuing such weapons. I do not know how far along they are. I don't have access to intelligence anymore.

But one thing—you know, the safe haven here is so important for many, many reasons, and one of the reasons is exactly this—right?—is, when you have safe haven, it gives you opportunities to work on weapons like this. Al Qaeda made significant advances in anthrax research because they had a safe haven.

And so I am concerned that as long as they have a safe haven they will have the space. And because they are a quasi-state they can use the human resources within that state—right?—as they pursue these things.

So I don't know where it stands at the moment, but I am deeply concerned about it.

Ms. MCSALLY. Great. Thank you.

I have been extremely critical about the military campaign against ISIS. The caliphate was declared 19 months ago. This so-called air campaign has been going on. I have some good friends

that are still at the Pentagon and are involved in it, and they sarcastically call it "Operation Shade," which means they literally have fighters stacked up on top of each other and they are providing mostly shade to those on the ground as opposed to using airpower for all it brings to the fight.

It has been very two-dimensional. It has been very sequential, very reactive, as opposed to using airpower for all it brings to the fight, by identifying those centers of gravity, which you mentioned, and taking them out and unleashing airpower in order to destroy their capabilities. And it has been very much a gradual approach, as you guys noted in your testimony.

When we had the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman here a couple months ago, they stated they had just started talking to the State Department single-digit months ago to look at a comprehensive strategy. They just started looking at the oil infrastructure and figuring out how to hit it, when we know it has been \$1 million, minimum, a day.

What is going on here? I mean, we know from, again, our intelligence understanding it is not that difficult to figure out where their resources are coming from and go after them using airpower.

And I just would like definitely, Dr. Vickers, and really any of your comments on what needs to change from the military strategy, because we do need to destroy their capabilities. There is a political solution, obviously, but we have to destroy their capabilities.

Dr. VICKERS. So to put some numbers on it, if you compare—I think the best air campaign analogy to what we face in Iraq and Syria is Afghanistan, 2001–2002. And the number of strike sorties that we did a day in Afghanistan in 2001 is a factor of about eight above what we have done in Iraq and Syria. And then, furthermore, two-thirds of coalition efforts have really been against Iraq, not against Syria, where the more dangerous threat has existed.

So I think those are the two fundamental problems with the air campaign, that it has essentially been a fraction of what it should be in mass. And, you know, as we have shown since really 1990 but certainly through—when you start putting precision weapons on bombers, you can combine mass without sacrificing precision.

As Michael said, though, airpower alone is not enough, and Ambassador Ford as well. We have to have an indigenous ground force to exploit the effects. And, certainly, you know, if you want to deny a sanctuary sooner rather than later, just like in 2001, having some ground force that can exploit the effects of airpower makes a big difference. And there, U.S. advisers matter.

Ms. MCSALLY. Great. Thanks.

And my time has expired, so if you need to elaborate, maybe when another question comes up. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for your long years of service. I regret that you still have so many opportunities for your service continuing now.

I feel somewhat the same way. I had a much shorter period of service in the Marines, but when I was a part of the surge in Iraq, I very much felt like I was a part of finishing the job. We had

messed it up for years, we got it right, and then I went home. And now I am back here watching us have to return to Iraq just 5 years after we left.

And so, while we can debate—and there is much to discuss—about the military strategy to defeat ISIS in the short term, the focus of my questions today is about how we ensure we don't find ourselves continually going back and having to apply military power against ISIS or the next ISIS successor in the long term.

And we have heard many people testify before this committee about the importance of a long-term political strategy. General Petraeus joined us last week and emphasized that. General Dunford, as Representative McSally pointed out, talked about the importance of State Department coordination and how it hasn't been happening for a long time.

So, to begin, I just wanted to see if we are on the same page with a few high-level points.

Is there any one of you who disagrees with, from the Iraq perspective, the need to empower the central Iraqi Government, that that is the best strategy we have on the table right now for a long-term political solution in Iraq?

Ambassador FORD. I think the Iraq Central Government Prime Minister Abadi is someone who believes in national reconciliation, and I think he has a political vision. But I worry when you say "empower," Congressman, because I think so much of the sustainable solution—you were in Anbar—so much of the sustainable solution will not come just from Baghdad but will come from local Sunni communities who feel that they have a stake—

Mr. MOULTON. Fair enough.

Mr. FORD [continuing]. In Iraq.

Mr. MOULTON. So, unquestionably, more federalism. But we are not talking about dividing up the state at this point.

Ambassador FORD. No, I hope not.

Mr. MOULTON. Okay.

Do we all agree that Assad needs to go in Syria?

Ambassador FORD. Yes.

Mr. MOULTON. Is there any disagreement with that?

Okay.

And I was struck, Ambassador Ford, by your point about the Kurds. I think it is very tempting from Americans to say, let's just get on board with the Kurds because they are great allies, they are strong fighters, and they share many of our values. But that is not enough. We have to empower the Sunnis, as well.

Is there any disagreement with that?

Okay.

And then taking this all together, what type of time commitment are we talking about? So the American people understand what this will take, diplomatically and politically, after we leave and perhaps with a residual military presence so we don't find ourselves in the situation where, after we militarily defeat ISIS, we have to send young troops back to fight them or their successor again in the next 5 or 10 years. Are we talking about a Germany and Japan type of commitment? What will this take?

Mr. Morell, perhaps we could start with you.

Mr. MORELL. So I think it is a long-term commitment. I can't give you, you know, a number of years, but I think it is a long-term commitment.

I think the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011 is a big part of the story here of why we are where we are. I am not casting blame in any direction here. I am just saying I think it is a big part of why we are sitting here today.

Mr. MOULTON. General Dunford made that point as well, that if we had stayed more integrated in Iraqi politics as well, we wouldn't have this great vacuum that has allowed ISIS to take over.

Mr. MORELL. You know, I would point out that we needed to be in South Korea for a very, very, very long time to maintain stability on the peninsula. So I think you are looking at, you know, 10, 15, 20 years of U.S. commitment to this region in a very, very significant way.

Mr. MOULTON. Dr. Vickers, if I could just go to you, and I just have a minute left. Based on your experience with past conflicts, what kind of additional political support can we be providing in Iraq and Syria?

When we say there needs to be more political/diplomatic support, there needs to be that kind of strategy, what kinds of resources has the U.S. used in past conflicts that we are not using today to ensure longer-term success?

Dr. VICKERS. Well, this is honestly an area where we have struggled since 9/11. You know, the Korea, Germany, Japan models are all good ones, but very, very different strategic context.

You know, as Michael mentioned, shifting to a security assistance model, an embassy-based presence where we lost our political influence, but, also, frankly, the Iraqis' work in progress and working out power-sharing I think has got us to where we are.

I think we require a long-term political and security commitment but not necessarily in large numbers, just in terms of enablers and advisers. Because, as Ambassador Ford said, even if you get a national unity government in Syria, you know, it is going to take time to make that government strong.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you.

I am out of time, but, gentlemen, if you would be willing to follow up—

Dr. VICKERS. Sure.

Mr. MOULTON [continuing]. With details of what that more robust political strategy might look like, I think it would be helpful for us if you could do that in written testimony.

[The information referred to was not available at the time of printing.]

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Stefanik.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your thoughtful testimony.

Earlier on in this Congress, last March, we had a hearing with Ms. Wormuth, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and I asked her a question related to what is the administration's policy toward Syria. And it was quite clear in her testimony that there was no coherent strategy toward Syria, and I think that is clearly still the case today.

I agree with your assessment that we must have a Syria-first approach to much of the regional instability in the Middle East, but one significant player that has not been brought up today is the role of Russia.

I would love to get your feedback on the fact that the vacuum that the United States has left has allowed Russia to fill that vacuum, propping up the Assad regime, and how that will play into the geopolitics of phasing Assad out.

Mr. MORELL. So I will start.

You know, I think that Vladimir Putin's objective, main objective—there are a lot of different objectives in what he did, but his main objective was to prop up Assad, who, when Putin made his move, Assad was at his weakest point since the fall of 2012. And Putin believes that he needs to prop up Assad because Putin is concerned that, if Assad goes, there will be chaos in Syria and there will be more running room for ISIS.

And like Robert, I don't necessarily believe that. Right? It depends on what comes next. Right? So what we need is a transition from Assad to a government that all Syrians can agree with. That is the transition we need. And if that happens, then Putin is wrong. Then Assad going is not a bad thing; Assad going is a good thing.

And what Putin has done is now made that potential transition much more difficult. Because Assad was on the verge—right?—of falling, essentially, and allowing us to get to that new government, right? And now Russia has made that so much more difficult. And what he has done is also now made Russia a player at the table, right? So Russia is now going to get to determine how that negotiation goes because of what he did.

I will let others comment, as well.

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah, I agree with all that. And I don't think our interests are very well aligned with Russia. There is some commonality, but I don't think it is as much as some have said.

And I don't think we should be deterred, you know, from our objectives in Syria from the relatively modest Russian intervention. If you look at the few thousand troops and 36 aircraft and the number of strike sorties, you know, it is not the world's biggest combat power there.

And so there is a lot of Syria they can't control, and, you know, our policy will drive—you know, having had experience with the Russians in Afghanistan with a much, much bigger force, this is pretty small by comparison.

Ms. STEFANIK. Ambassador Ford.

Ambassador FORD. We need to get to peace talks. And getting to peace talks, by itself, isn't the answer. That is just a venue. What really is needed is deep concessions, deep compromises on the two sides to the conflict, Assad's government and its opposition.

I think the Russian intervention has made it infinitely harder to get the concessions needed from the Assad side of the table, which will impede getting to a new national unity government. And so, therefore, I don't see what the Russians have done so far as very positive.

If I thought the Russians were going to use their new and improved leverage against Assad in the peace talks, then I would feel

better. But the fact that they are using cluster bombs, the fact that they are targeting civilian areas regularly, the fact that they are targeting aid convoys, humanitarian aid convoys regularly, this does not look like a Russian policy designed to extract concessions from Bashar al-Assad to advance a peace process.

Ms. STEFANIK. Great.

And in my last 39 seconds, I want to shift gears here. One of the proposals that has been introduced by some of the leaders, military leaders—General Petraeus is one—do you think an additional four-star commander headquarters under CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] is necessary for effective command and control of Operation Inherent Resolve?

Dr. VICKERS. Well, we have a unified three-star now, with General Sean McFarland, who is a very, very capable officer, who as a colonel led the operations in Ramadi in 2007.

You know, we don't go to war anymore with our combatant commands; we form a task force underneath them. So whether that is three-star or four-star is really a function of bureaucratic politics and the weight in the building—and I guess I am more agnostic—than picking the right three- or four-star that will get us to victory.

Ms. STEFANIK. Any other feedback?

Thanks.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Walz.

Mr. WALZ. Thank you, Chairman.

And, again, I thank you gentlemen for being here.

I would like to build a little bit on where Mr. Moulton was going on this broader strategy. And I think the timeline of this—I had the opportunity to be in Damascus in 2009, and I know Ambassador Ford early on challenged the Assad regime, at great personal risk.

And I thank you for that. You were articulating this clearly.

In 2013, when President Obama made the now-infamous “red line” statement, I held periodic town halls or whatever, and on that one hundreds of people showed up. And I had never seen anything like this, the involvement of getting into Syria to take Assad out because what he was doing with chemical weapons was unacceptable. And in that group of people that showed up, all 100 percent of them were opposed to any intervention.

Trust me, I have held them on health care—it does not quite work that way—and other things. It was an amazing thing, that the American public at that point, weary of war, weary of this, not committed to the strategy, didn't know what to say.

And I bring this up because I think where Mr. Moulton was getting at—and, Mr. Morell, you answered it—you are talking decades, and I think you are absolutely right. I think your assessment is correct, and I agree with that. What I think we need to understand here is that there are multiple administrations. Some you will like, some you will dislike.

And our commitment of that overarching strategy of smart power, what are the things we can put in place that can start to ensure that that transition is more coherent and more stable? Because I worry about that, because if you wait around here long enough, you will blame somebody else for where this happened.

My concern is that we get the strategy in place, and if it is 25 years, that needs to be clearly articulated to the American public with a strategy that they can get behind. Because if hundreds of people show up in a small grocery store in Minnesota and all say no, it is very difficult to make this work.

So I would be interested to hear your thoughts on implementation of smart power and broader thinking, how do the Chinese factor into this, some of the things that we should be thinking about. Whoever wants to take that one.

Mr. MORELL. I will start. It is a great question.

You know, I believe—and I am going to broaden out here from just ISIS in Iraq and Syria to the extremist problem in general—since 9/11, the United States of America has done a remarkable job at protecting the homeland from another attack. We have done a remarkable job, up to now with ISIS I would say, disrupting, degrading terrorist organizations so that they can't conduct an attack here. We have put intelligence resources on it in a substantial way, military resources on it in a substantial way. If you are plotting an attack against the United States, we are going to find you and we are going to do something about it.

What we have done a horrible job at, an absolutely horrible job, is dealing with the fundamental roots of the problem.

Mr. WALZ. Yeah.

Mr. MORELL. You know, for every thousand hours that I sat in the Sit [Situation] Room talking about what to do about terrorists who already exist, I spent maybe an hour talking about how do we prevent the creation of terrorists in the first place. And I am just making up these numbers, but for every \$1 million that the United States of America spends on dealing with terrorists that already exist, maybe we spend a dollar on how do we prevent the creation of terrorists in the first place.

And it is not something the United States can do on its own. You know, we need the leadership of Muslim countries, we need clerics in Muslim countries, we need teachers in Muslim countries, and parents in Muslim countries.

There needs to be a big strategy to get our arms around this. It is economic, it is political, it is social, and it is religious. We and our allies need a strategy to deal with the radicalization problem, or, as quickly as we deal with one group, another group is going to pop up somewhere and we are going to have a problem somewhere else.

So I would say that the next administration really needs to take a really hard look at how we deal with radicalization in the first place.

Dr. VICKERS. And I would just enlarge the problem a bit more and say, you know, we are at a real turning point in our Nation's history if you look at the post-9/11 era and the Cold War, in the sense that we have three challenges in three critical regions—rise of China, resurging Russia, and then a Middle East in chaos—that are not amenable to short-term solutions in either case. You know, like the Cold War, you are going to be at these things for decades.

And so you have to come up with not only a strategy that allows you to contain the problem but eventually resolve it, but that is sustainable across administrations, much as our Cold War strategy



was. I liken the current period that we are heading into now as like 1947 with new actors.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I take to heart what you said about the reticence of the American public to get involved in 2013. I remember that vividly. Now, however, we are flying daily combat missions in Syria and Iraq, so it is funny how things work out.

I have a couple of thoughts on the long term. I think the long term, especially in Syria, is going to take decades. Syria is now a completely failed state, and it is basically—what is left of the government is propped up by foreign militia, mainly out of Iraq, organized by Iran as well as Lebanese Hezbollah. Rebuilding all of that is going to take years and years.

And it should not be and it cannot be something that only Americans do. I think part of a political strategy is to get an agreement among all of the regional states, as well as Russia and China, to stop promoting individual clients that in turn then degrade the ability of the central state to operate. And we have seen that historically in Iraq. We have seen it in Lebanon. We certainly see it in Syria. We see it in Libya, where different regional countries are taking different sides. That is one part.

Second part is, reconstruction should not be an American responsibility solely, but I don't think any country can lead an international effort to rebuild in places like Syria or Libya better than the United States. We have the diplomatic tact. But that means bringing a lot of regional states to the table. It means bringing organizations like the World Bank to the table, as well.

And then, finally, as I mentioned before, there has to be an effort to get local services running. This was always a big problem in Iraq, as I am sure Congressman Moulton will remember, getting things like electricity and water. It is not that USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] has to go in and do all of that, but there may be areas where we can help local people. Syria has a lot of engineers, Syria has a lot of planners, but they may be able to use help in some of the planning. And so that is a third thing for the United States to do.

Mr. WALZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do agree with your assessment of ISIS, but I also don't think Al Qaeda is out of the game. And my fear is, being number two, Al Qaeda will strike in a larger way because they are in a battle for influence.

But I would like to turn the attention to Iran. Since Congress failed to stop the President's Iranian deal, we have watched Iran launch two ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles], we have watched them deploy missile strikes in Camp Liberty, we have watched them embolden and, to a degree, influence the Shia militia.

To your point about reconciliation between the Sunnis and the Shia, as Iranian influence begins to be emboldened, I don't see how a Sunni reconciliation can occur without checking Iran.

And there are reports, and I believe they are valid, as the Shia militia went through its anti-Sunni rallying cries and battle cries.

And my fear in Ramadi—although I think that we were wise to put the Iraqi military in charge of that operation rather than the Shia militia—as that territory is gained, if the result is simply the Shia militia and a greater Iranian influence in the Anbar Province, I think that is perilous.

How concerned are you about Iranian influence in Iraq and Syria?

Mr. MORELL. So I will go first here.

You know, I am deeply concerned about Iran. The nuclear issue is not the only problem that we have with the Iranians. We have a long list of problems with the Iranians.

Number one, they want to be the hegemonic power in the region. They want to call the shots. They want the influence. It is not incorrect to say that they want to reestablish the Persian Empire. And it is not just this government; it is not just this Supreme Leader. It goes way back in Iranian history. The Shah wanted to do it.

So that is number one. That is not in our interest, in my view.

Two, I think it is fair to say—Michael will correct me here if I am wrong. I think it is fair to say that Iran is the only country on the planet that still, itself, conducts terrorism as a tool of statecraft against its neighbors, around the world. The IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] Quds Force conducts terrorist acts. That is not a good thing.

Three, Iran supports international terrorist groups. Hezbollah could not exist without the support it gets from Iran. And just a reminder: Prior to 9/11, Hezbollah killed more Americans than any other terrorist group on the planet.

Four, it is Iranian state policy—it is Iranian state policy for the state of Israel to be the wiped off the face of the planet. And if you don't believe me, just listen to the Supreme Leader; he says it all the time. He actually has a 9- or 10-point plan to destroy Israel. You can Google it, "Supreme Leader, Iran, Israel, nine-point plan," and you will see it. He claims it is nonviolent. I don't know how you remove a country from the planet without violence, however.

And then you put the nuclear program on top of all that.

So this is, I believe, a strategic threat to the region and a strategic threat to the United States of America.

Mr. ZINKE. Do you see any indication that Iran has changed their tune?

Mr. MORELL. No, not at all. And I think the proper response is that we push back on malign behavior in the region by Iran. We have to show them that we are going to stand up to them. That will send them a very powerful message, and it will send our allies a very powerful message. Right now, our allies think that they are all alone against their version of the Soviet Union. And that is not too strong a statement, Congressman.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you.

And really quick, because I am running out of time, a question directed to you, Mr. Ambassador, is—and thank you for being here—is that, talking to our allies, there seems to be a problem with trust. I would say that our allies don't trust us and our enemies don't fear us.

But I do believe a solution, both political and a military solution, is called for, but part of the military solution cannot be just a U.S.-only force. It has to be made of—because this is a war between Islam as much as it is East and West.

Are you concerned about the level of trust in our allies? Because I agree with your assessment, that only the U.S. can lead this successfully. And yet, how do we gain the trust back of our allies should we decide to bring a force in and allies—a group of allies? And I think you know the members.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I think it is possible that some of the states in the region, Gulf States, Jordanians and others, would be willing to insert ground forces into a place like Syria, but they are not going to do it without the blessing and even the support of the United States.

Mr. ZINKE. That is very clear.

Ambassador FORD. And what the mission of that force would be would have to be defined. And I don't think it is the answer by itself. It might be one part of a longer list of things to be done. By itself, it is not enough.

But in terms of your question about how do you rebuild trust, I think two things: Number one, the administration needs to show people in the Gulf, and, in particular, Saudi Arabia, but also countries like Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, that we may disagree on a lot of things—human rights issues and other things, the influence of the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, where we have a deep disagreement—but, fundamentally, we stand for their security.

In the tit-for-tat between Iran and Saudi Arabia, I have not heard the administration come out and say, "We may disagree with the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, but the stability and security of Saudi Arabia is a vital American national interest." I have not heard that said.

Second, just on an operational level, I would actually like higher-level envoys to take that message out to the Gulf. I would like to see some people from Washington, and not just people in uniform, as important as they are to this, but I would also like to see high-level envoys from the Department of State and/or the White House go out and deliver that message so that you could begin to have a conversation, a really frank conversation, about what we are all trying to do in the region.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you.

Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Castro.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony.

As you know, there was a suicide bomber who attacked Istanbul at about 10:15 a.m. Tuesday morning in Turkey. And because of that, I want to ask a few questions related to Turkey.

And the first one is really a preface question. How effective do you believe or have you seen that Turkey has been to stem the unwanted flow of fighters and goods into and out of their country?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, it was more or less an open border in 2012 and 2013. The Turks have taken a lot of measures to tighten that border. It is very different from what it was 3 years ago, 4 years ago.

That said, that border is still not completely shut. There are lots of little goat paths and donkey trails that date back hundreds of years. Smugglers know them, and the Turks can know them. But it is a manpower-intensive operation, and the Turks need to assign enough manpower to do it.

Mr. CASTRO. Secondly, Turkey recently decided to seal its border, create a buffer zone in northern Syria, and allow U.S. aircraft to use the Incirlik Air Base for bombing missions in Iraq and Syria.

What additional role do you foresee Turkey having in the fight against ISIL?

And I ask this question also because of the instability in the region and their recent tension with Russia over the downed jet.

Dr. VICKERS. Well, you mentioned the major contributions. You know, again, Turkish policy primarily puts the defeat of Assad ahead—or sees them intertwined, certainly, in a major way. And that is one area where we have had some disagreement.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I think that one thing—two things the Turks can do.

Number one, as I said, they can put more manpower down on that border and shut the last smuggling trail.

The second thing that they can do is increase their assistance to Syrian rebel groups that are, themselves, fighting the Islamic State right now—for example, north of Aleppo, where there is quite a dogfight going on between the Islamic State on one side and moderate Syrian rebel forces, called the Marea Front, on the other side.

The Americans could actually help the Turks in that effort by directing some of our air strikes against Islamic State in coordination with those Syrian rebels that the Turks are trying to help.

Mr. CASTRO. And then let me ask you, I know there has been a lot of discussion about how we stop ISIS and other terrorist groups from recruiting folks, whether it is in the region or in Europe or the United States. I think everybody here would agree that terrorism has essentially become a franchise in the Middle East and North Africa and growing in other places in the world.

And so, Mr. Morell, I think you mentioned that there were about 900 cases the FBI is investigating of folks who have been recruited towards terrorism by ISIS.

You know, essentially, have you seen a difference in what Europe is doing to address that problem and what the United States is doing, or a difference between the United States and any other region of the world, with respect to the Internet specifically?

Mr. MORELL. Yeah, I don't know the answer to the question, Congressman. I don't know if the Europeans are doing something that we are not.

I do know the problem is bigger in Europe than it is here. Their radicalization problem is much worse. Muslim communities in Europe are simply not as well integrated into the European society. Muslims in America are much better integrated.

The Internet is a huge problem, but the bigger problem than the vehicle for the message is the resonance of the message. And it is a very powerful message. It is a very powerful message that the West, led by the United States, is trying to destroy our religion, and we need you to fight for us, we need you to fight for your religion.

And we don't have a lot of credibility, we or the Western European governments, don't have a lot of credibility in pushing back against that message because we don't have any credibility because we are not Muslim. So there are others who have to get the right counter-narrative.

So it is more the message than it is the vehicle for it.

I will also say, just to reiterate something that Robert said earlier, the fact that they have a safe haven gives them great credibility in spreading their message. It makes them the center of mass in the jihadi movement. People want to join the winners. And if you put the message with that, that is where the power comes from.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Byrne.

Mr. BYRNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, gentlemen, for your patience and your very good insight.

If I had done—and I did do—town hall meetings 2 years ago, the people in my district would have been, at best, ambivalent and probably pretty negative about any idea of further intervention in Syria. But a lot has happened over the last 2 years, and I can tell you from my town hall meetings, that is not what I am hearing anymore. People are worried, because if you watch the course of events, these events have come closer and closer to home. San Bernardino, a lone-wolf attack but nonetheless inspired, if not indirectly directed, by the people of ISIS, have got my constituents' attention.

But I am from Alabama. We believe in winning. We know you can't win unless you have the right coach—Roll Tide—you can't win unless you have the right coach. I am not asking you to comment on the coach. And that coach has got to have a plan. And the plan has to be a plan to win. And you have to train the team to win on that plan.

Now, my constituents come to my town hall meetings and say, where is the plan, the winning plan? This President has not articulated a plan at all, whether it is a winning one or not.

So we are going to be changing coaches, changing Presidents in a year. And, once again, my question is not directed at who that should be. But if you were advising that next President of the United States on what the winning plan is, how we win this war, what would the elements of that plan be?

Dr. VICKERS. So, first, as an Alabama grad, let me say "Roll Tide" back at you.

Mr. BYRNE. There you go. Roll Tide.

Dr. VICKERS. So I tried to outline some of them, with respect to Syria and then the global jihad and then the broader competition between regional powers in the Middle East. But, again, these things will take time. You know, it is a question of reducing our risk, denying the sanctuary.

But these operations—you know, if you think of it as a series of campaigns that eventually lead to a winning strategy that eventually lets you win the war, winning the war is going to take an awful long time until you get governance in the Middle East.

And so then you have to think of it in terms of a Syria campaign, Iraq campaign, campaign against the global jihadists in Libya and elsewhere to make sure, you know, you are progressively defeating them while you, you know, accelerate efforts in some areas. But, again, the problem is just too big for a single knockout blow.

Robert.

Ambassador FORD. I think the biggest problem with our Syria policy is we have a strategy, which is to get to a new national unity government, but we have no tactics to get there. It is like a hope. It is a wish. And it has been a wish since 2012, but we are not getting any closer, frankly. As I mentioned before, the Russian intervention probably pushes it even further back.

So, to me, the fundamentals of the strategy are: We want an indigenous force in Syria, and in Iraq, able to eventually grind out, eliminate the Islamic State and other extremists. I take the Congressman's point that Al Qaeda is still there.

In order to do that, you have to have governments that basically promote national reconciliation on some level. I think we are seeing that emerge in Iraq. We are nowhere near it in Syria.

And I think if the press reports of what I read of what General Petraeus said to the committee last week are accurate, I subscribe fully to the sorts of things that he was talking about, in terms of putting pressure on in order to get to a serious negotiation. So far, the administration has declined to do that.

Mr. BYRNE. Let me ask you a follow-up question, Ambassador. If we are going to rebuild that country, we have to rebuild it with Syrian people. Yet we have seen a wholesale outflow of refugees from Syria—I would argue, probably the very people we need to depend upon to rebuild the country.

Shouldn't we be pursuing a policy that brings those people back to Syria, closer to Syria, so that we can bring them into rebuilding of that country, and not continue to see these efforts to welcome them to places away from Syria?

Ambassador FORD. I think you want to be careful here, Congressman. Why did they leave Syria? The opinion polls that I have read of Syrian refugees themselves, somewhere between 70 and 80 percent say they left because of the aerial bombings of their neighborhood, the barrel bombs. And some fled the Islamic State, although, actually, the numbers that fled the Assad government's aerial bombing are much, much, much higher than the number who fled the Islamic State, as brutal as the Islamic State is.

So you have to deal with that root cause in order to convince people to go back. There could be reconstruction. We might be able to find ways to generate the resources to help the country rebuild. But you can't do any of that as long as the war goes on, so I go back to what I said about that.

With respect to keeping them closer versus farther, yes, there is big debate about Syrian refugees right now. I would just say this: Having refugees in camps indefinitely, even near Syria, in Lebanon or Turkey or Jordan or Iraq, where there is no hope, also breeds resentment and actually helps the Islamic State recruit, as well.

And so as we, the Americans, think about whether or not we should take refugees, I think we also need to bear in mind that choosing not to take refugees plays into an Islamic State recruiting

effort. And so we will have to judge a whole series of factors as we make that decision about refugees.

Mr. BYRNE. Thank you, sir.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank our witnesses for your service to the country and also for your appearance today, in particular, Mr. Morell and Dr. Vickers. In my 8 years on the Intelligence Committee and also my years here on the Armed Services Committee, I always appreciated your candid testimony before me in both those areas.

I think, clearly, obviously we have extraordinary challenges in our efforts to defeat ISIL, both on the military front and on the political front. And you all have outlined some concrete steps on both, particularly on the military front. The bigger challenge that we see is going to be defeating ISIL on the political front, especially given the fact that there are countless examples throughout the Koran that ISIL uses to justify their actions.

What are the most effective ways for us to delegitimize ISIL, in particular, you know, given the headwinds we are up against when ISIL or Al Qaeda are using the Koran to justify what they are doing?

Now, the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee has recently held several hearings and briefings on countering extremist messaging, also authorizing a counter-messaging demo program last year. And on Friday the White House announced a new task force for this very purpose.

So as we work to bolster information operations in our fight to delegitimize ISIL's ideological messaging, what capabilities do we need, and what tactics and techniques and procedures should the military and the new task force employ?

Dr. VICKERS. So I will start.

I think the most immediate thing we can do in the near term is to take away their narrative that they are on the path to victory. As we were talking about earlier with Congresswoman Sanchez, it really is this caliphate on the path to end times that I think is our most promising opportunity.

It won't end the war, it won't destroy their ideology, but it will certainly put a big dent in it, much as you saw right after 9/11 when Al Qaeda was expelled from Afghanistan. You know, Al Qaeda's stock went down in terms of public opinion in the Islamic world for a while. You know, they were seen as suddenly a loser rather than a winner.

Mr. MORELL. Congressman, I would just add that, you know, I think the illegitimizing of the religious justification for what jihadists are doing, whether they are ISIS or Al Qaeda or anybody else, has got to come from the Muslim leadership.

President Sisi in Egypt gave a remarkable speech a year ago, a year ago this month, where he basically said that there needs to be a revolution inside of Islam. He has not done any follow-up to that, as far as I am aware, but it was a remarkable speech at the time, and it was absolutely right.

There are plenty of verses in the Bible that would seem to justify violence, but there aren't a lot of—there is not a significant number

of Christians who act on that. We moved beyond that. Islam needs to do the same. And that is what President Sisi was saying.

And we don't have credibility in making those arguments. We just don't. And so we need to have conversations with the leadership in the Muslim world about how they need to take this on themselves. But I think that is something that America's diplomats need to talk to the leadership of those countries about.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

Ambassador, do you have anything to add?

Ambassador FORD. Yes, I do.

The most effective social media video that I have heard about in the last 6 months to delegitimize the Islamic State came out of the Free Syrian Army. And it got a lot of play on social media. And, basically, if I can sum it up in 15 seconds, the video shows victorious Free Syrian Army soldiers marching a bunch of orange-clad Islamic State prisoners and says, we are now going to execute these guys because they are infidels, they are apostates, which is exactly what the Islamic State has been doing to Free Syrian Army soldiers they have captured.

But at the very last moment, as they are about to behead them, a screen comes on and it quotes several verses from the Koran saying, "God says grant mercy. God says don't kill people. They have intrinsic value." And so the knife is pulled back and their chains are set free, and they say, "Join us." That video has been viewed tens of thousands of times in the Middle East.

My point in this is it was indigenously produced, and, in a sense, it played to themes that they understand better than I ever would, even though I spent 30 years in the region.

What we can probably most do is help people like that get their messages out. But it can't be put on a dot-gov Web site because young Arabs aren't going to get a lot of guidance, shall we say, or they are not going to take a lot of advice from a dot-gov Web site.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

My time has expired, and I want to thank you all for your testimony.

One thing, if you would, in writing if you could respond, just identifying our most significant intelligence gaps and what we should do to close those now. I know my time has expired, so I will yield back, but if you could respond to those in writing, it would be very helpful, especially given your experience and years of service in those areas.

[The information referred to was not available at the time of printing.]

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Wenstrup.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you all for being here today.

You know, as I look at what we are facing and what you have talked about so well today, you know, I believe that the United States needs to lead on this, but we can't lead and do things alone, that we need to develop our coalitions wholeheartedly with our European allies and with our allies in the Middle East. You know, you see what happened in Paris, and then France wants to become more involved. And I think that we need to establish that.



And my concern is that we are not doing enough; we are not doing enough to establish these diplomatic ties with our allies. Possibly, we need to share more information, coordinate better, and certainly could possibly do more as far as trying to disrupt them economically. And then, of course, there is the component of what we are going to do militarily.

And, Ambassador, I appreciate what you just shared with us because that has been one of my concerns all along, is what we are doing. I have seen some of their videos and how they try to recruit, and I am like, are we doing anything to counteract that, to get people that go online, to pay attention to these things, to get another point of view? And I would hope that we would do something more like that to counter how effective they have been in that regard.

But I would like to just to ask each of you, what more do you think we should be doing, militarily and non-military, and maybe even more non-military, as I discussed, as far as diplomacy and trying to hurt them economically?

You know, you mentioned before how much they collect in taxes. I mean, that is pretty incredible. And I don't know that many people realize that. That was kind of a new revelation to me. You know, I thought most of the revenue was coming from oil.

So what are some of the things that we can do, both militarily and non-militarily? And how should we develop our coalitions? Because, to me, this is a global good-versus-evil event that is taking place in this time.

I will start with you, Mr. Morell.

Mr. MORELL. So I will answer the intelligence question now because it is an area that we need—I don't know if it is put more emphasis on, because I know there is a lot of emphasis, but it is an area we need to improve on significantly.

We need two types of intelligence out of ISIS. We need intelligence on their plans and intentions and specific plots that they are planning, both in the region and in Europe and the United States, if we are going to be able to disrupt those.

And we need intelligence that will give us a lot more targets on the ground. You know, Mike talked about our success against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan post-9/11. It was because we had very specific intelligence on what the target should be. All right?

So I think we need a much better intelligence in those two areas. It is very difficult to get because we are not on the ground in the caliphate. So we are going to need partnerships with a lot of different people in order to get the assets that we need to get inside the ISIS leadership and to get those targets on the ground that we need. And it probably needs to be the most important thing that the intelligence community is doing at the moment.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Dr. Vickers.

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah, I agree with that. And if you look at our counterterrorism campaigns where we have had a lot of success, that approach has worked generally well, where we have really built up our assets over time, from Afghanistan and on into the Pakistan tribal areas, et cetera. It has paid big dividends, and then it started to pay in Yemen, as well, and, you know, we are trying to close the gap in Syria.

As far as the outlines of the strategy, the military side, I think, again, more intense going after ISIS as a state. You have to take that state down for political reasons, but, also, that is one thing our military really knows how to do. And then to exploit the effects of that, you have to have an indigenous ground force.

Dr. WENSTRUP. And I appreciate that. And so, I guess, what do you see that looking like? Because it is something we are good at, let's say, but I don't think in this situation, having served in Iraq, I don't want to be seen as occupiers, I don't want to be there by ourselves. I think we need to have people from the region, as well, that are holding that ground.

Dr. VICKERS. I agree with you. I think, you know, our role should be limited to being advisers, one, for the reasons that Robert talked about, about national reconciliation and the rebuilding task, which is really the hard task afterwards. And if we try to do that, one, we will fail, but, two, we will subject ourselves to a lot of unnecessary pain.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Ambassador, do you have anything to add?

Ambassador FORD. Can I shift just slightly?

Dr. WENSTRUP. Sure.

Ambassador FORD. I think there are two—I talked about Saudi Arabia and the Gulf and reassuring on our shared interest in their stability. I think, two other things on the diplomatic side that need to be done.

Number one, I think there is a need for a much more frank, high-level discussion with Turkey. I am very happy every time I see that our President has talked to their President. I wish they would talk all the time. Because Turkey is probably the most important country in the Syria conflict, aside from Iran, and it has an ability to really help and it has an ability to really be a spoiler.

And so we just have to have a really frank, behind-closed-door discussion with them. I think the Vice President is planning to go to Turkey. I certainly hope he does. And I think the message needs to be blunt, but it needs to be behind closed doors. That is not an argument that should be aired in public.

And to be fair to the Turks, they have interests. I mean, they have interests with what is happening with the Kurds, and they have interest with the neighbor to the south in Iraq and in Syria.

And so, second, and related to that, Turkey and Qatar are backing one side in the Libyan conflict, and the Egyptians and the Emirates are backing a different side. And just the fact that they are pulling in opposite directions, Congressman, just makes the whole Libya problem more difficult.

There are other countries that have interests in Libya too. Algeria shares a very long border, and Algeria has a problem itself with Islamic extremists; Tunisia, where there have been multiple terrorism attacks; the European Union.

There just has to be a greater sustained effort on the Libya diplomacy side. Secretary Kerry was with the United Nations in Rome, where they talked about putting together a Government of National Accord. It is not a one-time-meeting kind of thing. There needs to be a sustained, high-level effort.

Dr. WENSTRUP. Thank you. My time has expired.

The CHAIRMAN. Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for bringing your expertise to us today. We appreciate your distinguished service.

I wanted to sort of respond to some of the conversation that we have had. And I think that we all acknowledge and understand one of the first things that we need here, I think, on the committee but also in the country is patience. It is very difficult to push when we know that the timeline is out. I remember one of the Iraqi generals saying something to the effect of, well, we think we might be operational by 2020. And everybody looked at him like, you know, come back another day. And so that is important for us to acknowledge.

And the other thing that you have all mentioned, and I think particularly Ambassador Ford, is reassuring our allies.

So I wanted to ask you, Ambassador Ford, because you highlighted, in talking to Syria, issues of conditionality, particularly as we are working with those who are fighting with the opposition, where is it that we have fallen short in seeking more conditionality moving forward? How could that be done differently?

And, certainly, this is a whole-of-government approach to a large extent, and you have been talking about sustaining the efforts in terms of the State Department. And, at the same time, we know that, whether it is funding or whatever that may be, we often don't engage at the level that we should. Where should those efforts be, specifically, in terms of Syria?

Ambassador FORD. I think, Congresswoman, on two levels.

On a national geostrategic level with countries of the region—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, who are big players in Syria, and Iran. And I assume the Secretary of State is now having some frank conversations with the Iranian Foreign Minister. Of course, the Iranian Foreign Minister doesn't control Iranian policy in Syria. There is another man in the Iranian Government named Qasem Soleimani from the Revolutionary Guard Corps who controls it. So it is awkward, but there needs to be sustained engagement there.

And I think when you talk about conditionality, to me, one of the basic elements is we tell the Turks and the Saudis that we are not interested in helping extremists in the Syrian opposition who will reject a political solution and insist only on military victory. Any assistance we give to any Syrian opposition group should be conditioned on their acceptance of an eventual political deal, not military victory.

Second level for conditionality engagement has to be at a more local level. I mentioned that there are areas that are being liberated, whether it is from the Islamic State or sometimes from the Assad regime. You would need to keep the services going.

And State Department has tried to do this. I have to be honest; my colleagues who are still in government tell me it is becoming more difficult because of security. And I certainly hope, and I know Chris Stevens would hope, that what happened in Benghazi does not prevent colleagues from doing their jobs, going forward and engaging with people locally, in the case of Syria or Iraq, to help national reconciliation and the restoration of capable local governance.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. Thank you for that.

I don't know whether, Mr. Morell or Dr. Vickers, you wanted to comment on that area of conditionality, but I wanted to just follow up quickly.

I know, Dr. Vickers, you spoke about trying to look at the Afghan strikes initially and kind of taking a look at that. What happened after, obviously, was a far greater problem. But are you suggesting that we really do need to have far more strikes than we are having? And issues of collateral damage, issues of greater radicalization of the area that can occur, are these the considerations that come into this equation? And how does this play into, really, the issues around a no-fly zone, as well?

Dr. VICKERS. Thank you.

So, yes, I am arguing for a more intense air campaign, much like we did in Afghanistan in 2001. And, as you said, that didn't end the war. That just eliminated Al Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan and, you know, toppled the Taliban regime, you know, and the Taliban lived to fight another day, and Al Qaeda fled somewhere else.

Mrs. DAVIS. Right. And, unfortunately, we went to Iraq.

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah. So, you know, all sorts of things.

But one of the things you see in these campaigns is that—collateral damage is, obviously, a critical concern. It does not go up linearly with the intensity of strike, mainly by the way we operate.

So if you look at areas where we have had more relaxed rules of engagements in our counterterrorism campaigns and we have done more strikes, we have had more liberal policy, versus others where we have been more restrained, you know, you occasionally make mistakes, and so you have that 1 percent where, no matter how hard you try, you are not perfect, but there is not this correlation by a factor of 10.

And that was true—now, again, you know, war zones are different from areas outside of hostilities. But, you know, we are in generally a precision world right now, and so I think that you can responsibly intensify the air campaign.

Because, as you said, if you do have collateral damage, you will defeat your purpose. You know, you will turn more people against you and everything else. And so that is just driven into our operations right now.

I don't know if my colleagues want to address that.

Mrs. DAVIS. I am sorry, I think I am out of time.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here.

And I know we have talked a lot about Syria and other parts of the world outside the U.S. I want to get back to the U.S. for a couple of minutes.

Mr. Morell, you said that the FBI has over 800 open investigations in this country?

Mr. MORELL. 900.

Mr. SCOTT. 900. Okay. I am, quite honestly, surprised that it is not even higher than that, with what we have seen.

Do we know what percentage of those investigations are U.S. citizens and what percentage are not U.S. citizens?

Mr. MORELL. I think, Congressman, the vast majority are U.S. citizens.

Mr. SCOTT. The vast majority are U.S. citizens.

Of those who are not U.S. citizens, do we know how they got to the United States, whether it was refugee or visa, or what gaps? Did they come across the border illegally?

Mr. MORELL. Congressman, I just don't know that data.

Mr. SCOTT. Those are certainly things that I think we should follow up on and try to find what the commonalities are of those who seem to desire to be a part of that organization.

The other thing that there seems to be uniform agreement on is that, as long as ISIS maintains large blocks of territory, then they will be a power in that region of the world. How many countries do they claim to have territory in today?

Dr. VICKERS. I want to say it is about 8 to 10, something like that.

Mr. SCOTT. Eight to ten. That is—

Dr. VICKERS. There is Nigeria, Algeria, Libya, the Sinai—

Mr. MORELL. There are militant groups in about 20 countries that associate themselves in some way with ISIS. ISIS does not have—

Mr. SCOTT. Do they claim territory in all of those areas, or—

Mr. MORELL. No.

Mr. SCOTT [continuing]. Do they just—

Mr. MORELL. No. No. They claim territory in a handful of them.

Dr. VICKERS. They call them provinces.

Mr. SCOTT. Right.

Mr. MORELL. And some of those have no contact with the ISIS leadership in Raqqa. Some of them do. ISIS has sent emissaries to some of these places to interact with these guys.

Mr. SCOTT. Would you agree that an area where they actually claim territory, that is different than having an operation, the actual claim of physical territory and land?

Mr. MORELL. You know, we all three of us—right?—have made points about how important safe haven is, how important territory is. And that is true for those militant groups who associate themselves with ISIS, as it is for ISIS.

Mr. SCOTT. So is one of the countries that they claim to have a safe haven in Saudi Arabia?

Mr. MORELL. No.

Mr. SCOTT. It is not?

Mr. MORELL. No. They have cells, they have terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia.

Mr. SCOTT. Okay. So which one of those territories, or nations that they claim to have territory in, would their operation be the smallest in?

Ambassador FORD. Algeria.

Mr. SCOTT. Algeria.

Ambassador FORD. They have an affiliate, the Wilayat al-Jazair, the Algeria Prophet, they call it, and it is basically a group called Jund al-Khilafah. It is not very big, probably maybe 50 to 100 fighters. They murdered a Frenchman—

Mr. SCOTT. Let me stop you right there. You hit on the point I was trying to get to: It is not very big.

Ambassador FORD. Right.

Mr. SCOTT. So while we are trying to figure out how to carry out these extremely complex military operations and diplomatic operations in countries like Syria, why shouldn't we destroy them in these other countries that they claim territory in, start to get small victories against them? Why shouldn't we just wipe them out in there?

If they only have 100 people, why can't we—why don't we, I should say—wipe them out so that instead of claiming land in 10 countries they claim it in 2 or 3? And you defeat the small ones first, and then you defeat the big ones. That way, you are not playing Whac-A-Mole when you go in and take on the big one.

Ambassador FORD. With respect to a place like Algeria—two comments.

Number one, the Algerian Government is vigorously pursuing this group. They hate them. They despise them. They have been fighting groups like this since the early 1990s.

That said, the Algerians, in particular, are quite sensitive about the deployment of foreign forces on their soil. They are hypersensitive. It would probably be easier, Congressman, to deploy special operations forces—politically, it would be easier, politically, to do it in a place like Tunisia or Yemen.

Mr. SCOTT. And if I can finish up, with the 15 seconds I have left. That is what creates the challenge with the authorization for the use of military force, is that they are in so many countries which are sovereign states, and us, as a country, operating militarily in those states without their permission is a tremendous challenge.

And so any suggestions that you have—I am out of time, but, certainly, in how the authorization for use of military force could be drafted that allowed us to carry out those operations. But you are talking about multiple countries, not just one or two, and that makes it an extremely complex issue.

Congratulations on the national championship, Dr. Vickers. We look forward to beating you—

Dr. VICKERS. There is always next year.

Mr. SCOTT [continuing]. Next year.

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah. That was a great game.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Gabbard.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you.

Good morning—good afternoon.

Mr. Morell, you spoke about President el-Sisi in Egypt and that great speech that he gave and the need for leaders within Islam to combat and counter this radical extremist ideology that is driving groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda. And you very eloquently drew that line between connecting groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda and how that ideology is exactly the same.

I had a chance to meet with President el-Sisi in Egypt in November. I spent close to 2 hours talking with him and heard from him how he is continuing to meet with imams and gatherings of religious Muslim leaders and continuing this effort but remains frustrated about the cold shoulder that he is getting from the United States and, really, the lack of action on our part about recognizing

the need to, as you said, identify and understand your enemy and the ideology that is driving them.

So when we understand and know that ISIS has the same ideology of this radical political Islamism that Al Qaeda has, that al-Nusrah has, and many of these other groups that are fighting in Syria to overthrow Assad, to establish their caliphate, why is it, in your opinion, that the U.S. in Syria is only targeting ISIS and is not, to my knowledge, targeting any of these other variety of Islamic extremist groups who adhere to and who are fighting under and motivated by this exact same radical Islamic ideology?

Mr. MORELL. We are. In particular, the Khorasan Group, which is associated with al-Nusrah and is the external operations arm of al-Nusrah.

Ms. GABBARD. Do you know when the most recent attack on the Khorasan Group was?

Mr. MORELL. I don't. I know there was a flurry of attacks on them early.

Ms. GABBARD. A couple years ago, I think.

Mr. MORELL. Those attacks were successful.

You know, the focus is on ISIS for obvious reasons, but my sense is that we are targeting other groups in Syria.

Just to go back to what you said about Egypt, which I think is very, very important, Congresswoman, I agree with what Robert said earlier, that it is very important for the United States to be able to segregate. It is very important for us to be able to say to President Sisi, here are the things that you are doing that we don't like, but here are the things that we are going to support you on 100 percent.

And I think it is very important to be able to have those conversations and to separate your policy in a way that you can be supportive of the very, very important things that a leader might be doing even though you have some other problems with him.

Ms. GABBARD. Well, I think even folks who are working within Egypt on our side recognize that there is still a lot more that needs to be done—

Mr. MORELL. Yes, they do.

Ms. GABBARD [continuing]. In order to form that partnership that is mutually beneficial for both of us.

Just to your point about your sense is that we are targeting Al Qaeda, I have been asking that question multiple times of multiple people and have not gotten that sense, that we are targeting Al Qaeda and al-Nusrah.

And one of the reasons that I see—and some of you have been talking about the opposition forces. It has become very clear to me that we are ignoring, the United States is ignoring the fact that the most effective fighting force within that opposition that you and others are referring to who are trying to overthrow Assad are Al Qaeda, they are al-Nusrah, they are these Islamic extremist groups, who have been reported, as they have taken over territory, to be implementing and enacting this political Islam, forcing women to wear burqas, and implementing this religious law on the society that they have in the same way that we have seen ISIS in the territory that they have regained.

Go ahead, Dr. Vickers.

Dr. VICKERS. So, one, I think—I generally agree, but I think you need to draw a distinction between the external plotting arm of al-Nusrah, whether they call them Khorasan Group or Al Qaeda veterans. A number of those attacks, which began in September 2014, have continued as those targets have been developed. I think Sanafi al-Nasr or somebody—you know, there have been—David Drugeon—I mean, there were a series of them over the past year, I would say.

Al-Nusrah proper, which is, I don't know, some 6,000, 9,000 troops or so, but they are spread across the country. I would agree that a lot of the foot soldiers have done tactical alliances with other parts of the opposition and have not been targeted in the same way. Partially, I think it is an intelligence issue, and, you know, the big focus has really been on these external plotters, I believe.

Ms. GABBARD. Well, I think that—and I will just close with this—to me, the problem is very clear that there are two contradictory U.S. wars that we are waging. One is to overthrow the Syrian Government of Assad, which is also the objective of ISIS and Al Qaeda and these other groups. And the other is the war to defeat ISIS, without a clear strategy or a clear action that I have seen, at least, against Al Qaeda and al-Nusrah and these other groups.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Dr. Fleming.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you.

Gentlemen, I have listened to your testimony, and it is all very interesting and informative.

Let me ask you this: Have all three of you worked within the Obama administration?

Dr. VICKERS. I have.

Dr. FLEMING. I believe you have.

And I listened intently as you, in particular, Mr. Morell, outlined eloquently how the current state of the Islamic world is an apocalyptic sort of view coming out of their religious studies out of Iran. Many believe that if you are an infidel, if you are not a believer, that you should be put to death and that there will be a messianic figure to come and kind of rule over the world.

I guess my question is, have you had these conversations with our President?

Mr. MORELL. Sir, I would say that there is not much that I have said here today that my former organization hasn't shared with the President of the United States.

Dr. FLEMING. Okay.

Would you say the same?

Dr. VICKERS. I would.

Dr. FLEMING. The reason why I ask that question is because the American people, I think, just listening through the media, reading newspapers, agree with what you have to say, but our President seems to think that it is merely a coincidence that terrorists happen to be of the Islamic faith. And the problem with that, of course, is that limits how we deal with the core issues behind all of this.

I also heard you articulate, very importantly, how non-Islamists like ourselves, we don't have quite the credibility to say, "Guys, you know, these beliefs are not consistent with the Koran and it is not



consistent with how we should live together in this world. You really need to turn away from this philosophy." We need to rely on the Muslim world to do that.

But yet it seems to me—and I will tell you that most people in my State of Louisiana seem to feel that, even though there are many Muslims around the world, both domestically and abroad, who may not be in the fight, they still agree with the philosophy, the basic philosophy. And that is the reason why there is a resistance for them to come through and say, "Look, we need to cut this out. We need to stop killing people just because they are not believers in Islam."

I would love to have your response on that.

Mr. MORELL. I mean, I do think there are the guys who actually are acting on the beliefs, and then there is another group who share those beliefs and aren't acting on them, and then there is a not insignificant number—it is not a majority, but not an insignificant number—who are comfortable with all of it. And you see it in polls. Absolutely, you do.

And it just reinforces—right?—what we talked about earlier, the importance of getting your arms around the creation of terrorists in the first place—right?—and not just dealing with them once they have been created.

Dr. FLEMING. Right.

The other gentlemen, would you like to add to that?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, some of the opinion polls that I have read done by the Pew organization, Pew Research, have some statistics that are actually kind of shocking. The number of people in countries like Egypt and Jordan who support, for example, chopping the hands off thieves sometimes goes up to the 70- and 80-percent range—for a variety of, sort of, things which the Islamic State already does.

And that is not to say those people are all believers in what the Islamic State is trying to do, but it is to say that they are religiously conservative.

Dr. FLEMING. Right.

Ambassador FORD. That is just one of the complications of dealing with the Islamic State.

That said, Michael Morell was talking about the role of President Sisi. I was very struck that, about a year and a half ago, 300 scholars, some of them quite well known within the Islamic world, Sunni, came out with a very, very strong denunciation of the Islamic State and the caliphate. It was about 3 months after it was announced and after they had done the first really gruesome beheadings of foreigners, as well as Syrians and Iraqis.

And I think it is always good to remember that the vast majority of victims of the Islamic State are themselves Muslim. Christians have suffered, unquestionably, and others, but the vast majority are Muslim. And that is why I think the most effective people to talk back to the Islamic State are not Americans who are not Muslims but other Muslims.

Dr. FLEMING. Well, I am running out of time, but I would just end by saying that it seems absolutely necessary that we energize and stimulate the Muslim world to see this for what it is and that it is only going to make life difficult for everyone until they get in-

volved and actually begin to counter these terrible philosophies that are really keeping us away from peace around the world.

And I thank you, gentlemen.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. O'Rourke.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Ford, I would like you to comment on a relatively recent development, which is the U.N. Security Council outline for a peace process in Syria. And I would like you to do so within the context of everyone's agreed goal of ultimately seeing Assad replaced. We want to make sure that we minimize any threats to the United States and to our allies. We would like to see stability in that region. We want to minimize the loss of human life and suffering. And I think we all, the United States and the world community, would like to see justice served for some truly horrific crimes in that area.

Train and equip hasn't really worked to that end so far. It has been an abysmal failure. Mr. Morell, prior to saying at the end of the day we have to get rid of Assad, or Assad has to go, said we don't have a credible ground force in Syria.

So tell me, Ambassador Ford, your thoughts on the prospects for this process, how aggressively we should commit to it, if you agree that it is the path to take, and what we can do most effectively, militarily, diplomatically, economically, or otherwise, to get to our goals through a more peaceful process.

Ambassador FORD. Thank you, Congressman O'Rourke.

In brief, I don't think the process is going to go anywhere. And I didn't think that a month ago before this Saudi-Iranian latest spat erupted.

There is nothing in the documents that came out of Vienna, where Secretary Kerry was with other foreign ministers, nor is there anything in the Security Council resolution that says that Bashar al-Assad must go. It is just simply not addressed.

Second—by the way, I would just say that, to me, is something the Syrians ought to negotiate. It shouldn't be a precondition, but it ought to be on the table.

Second, right now, there is a lot of goofing around going on about who should represent the Syrian opposition. And the Russians are trying to put their friends on the opposition delegation; the Iranians are trying to put some of their friends; and, frankly, the Turks and the Saudis are trying to put some of their friends. Syrians are not in control of this.

That, to me, spells disaster, especially if the really serious armed opposition guys, who accept a political solution, if those serious armed opposition guys are excluded from the negotiation, I can't imagine they will sustain their support for a political deal.

There has been a lot of talk about getting a cease-fire. You know the pictures of the starving people in Madaya? Madaya had a cease-fire. You can see what a cease-fire looks like. So if you are in one of those areas where there is a cease-fire and then you begin to criticize the regime, you don't want to appear on TV in their propaganda, which is what happened in Madaya; then, suddenly, food gets cut.

So I think, in all of this, it is not to say we shouldn't pursue a political process with this U.N. Security Council resolution, but it only works if there is pressure on all the sides—and I do mean pressure—on all the sides to make a compromise.

Mr. O'ROURKE. So be explicit about that. In terms of pressure, are you suggesting a greater military pressure from the United States?

Ambassador FORD. Well, I am not saying that the United States should be bombing the Assad regime. I have never advocated for that. But I do think that there are people in the Syrian opposition who accept the need for a political solution, and they need more support than they are getting. They always have, and they still do.

Mr. O'ROURKE. And you think some additional support will get us to where we need to be—

Ambassador FORD. Absolutely.

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. So when the Russians intervened, started bombing, suddenly more anti-tank missiles appeared on the battlefield in the hands of the opposition, and they blunted a series of Assad offenses. That is what I am talking about.

It is not that the opposition is going to win a military victory. That would take forever and destroy whatever is left of Syria, not that there is much left. But the point is to inflict enough pain on the Assad government and its supporters that they will negotiate seriously at the table.

Mr. O'ROURKE. So what Syria is missing right now is more pain. There hasn't been enough pain in the last few years.

Ambassador FORD. There hasn't been enough pressure put on the Assad regime to accept major compromises.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Yeah.

With everyone on the panel agreeing that Assad should go—and I think he should also go, but I think you also said that should be a decision of the Syrian people—do you think the United States should be willing to accept his staying for some short period of time in order to achieve some of our other goals?

There is no perfect solution to the situation right now that is at least within our control. Should we be willing to concede some things, including Assad's presence, in order to get less suffering, more peace, more stability, serve our interests in the region?

And I am out of time, so I will take that response for the record from the panel.

[The information referred to was not available at the time of printing.]

Mr. O'ROURKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Coffman.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I served in Iraq with the United States Marine Corps 2005–2006 in Al Anbar province as a civil affairs officer. And I recall the problems with that 20 percent population, the Sunnis, who were the ruling elite in the country and were no longer and, for a time, certainly didn't see any path to being equitably treated. Then you have, later on—I think we gave them that path, and then Maliki, I think, pushed them out again and created an opening for ISIS.

And so I think that, in looking at a post-ISIS Iraq, that there needs to be some kind of political accommodation for the Sunnis. And what I remember is the Kurds had gotten a provision within the constitution whereby they could form a semiautonomous region, and they have done so.

Wouldn't that make sense—if we look at the areas that have fallen to ISIS, they are all Sunni Arab areas—wouldn't that make sense, that there be some sort of a push in that direction to show the Sunni Arabs that there is a path, a political accommodation, where they could coexist with a Shia-dominated Baghdad government?

And I wonder if any of you could answer that question.

Ambassador FORD. This is exactly what I was talking to Sunni Arabs when I was in Iraq last October. And, you know, there was a time when they wouldn't have accepted it, but they have changed 180 degrees.

Mr. COFFMAN. Good. Good.

Ambassador FORD. So I think it would have been negotiated, obviously. And there are provisions in the Iraqi constitution, the same one that the United Nations and the United States helped them draft, but there are provisions to do that. And so, given that it is constitutionally possible and political stars are sort of starting to align that way, I could see that.

Of course, there is a real fear, Congressman, among Iraqi Shias that if you just arm a bunch of Sunnis they will come back after us again.

Mr. COFFMAN. Sure.

Ambassador FORD. And that is not an entirely unreasonable fear. And so that is why I said it has to be negotiated.

But I would hope that the American Embassy and our people here at the State Department are keeping an open mind about this eventuality and are prepared to engage on it. If that builds enough Sunni Arab support, then we will have more Sunni Arabs in Iraq going after the Islamic State.

Mr. COFFMAN. Would anybody else like to comment on that?

I just think it is very—I mean, it is a vertically integrated form of government where, without that regional autonomy, all decisions are made from Baghdad, even down to whether it is public education or it is local police or any decision. So I think there are no teeth in terms of provincial or municipal power at this point. And I think that when we talk about the Sunnis pushed out of the government, the current structure really exacerbates that.

I have a question about, it seems to me that the targeting is fairly limited. And one thing that was discussed earlier was the fact that their greatest revenue source for ISIS is their ability to tax economic activity within the territories they control.

And so it seems to me that, you know, things like these trucks that move the oil, the crude oil, those industries that are controlled by ISIS, that we should have a broader target list, not simply to hit which is a direct asset to the regime, like, say, the selling of crude oil, but also to understand that, quite frankly, their capacity to govern is based on, in part, the sustainment of that economy. And I think we have to look at degrading that economy in order

to deny them that economic activity and, you know, the capacity to govern.

And I wonder if any of you can comment on that.

Dr. VICKERS. Yes. I think, you know, all the aspects of state power that ISIL has need to be targeted. And I think there actually is some intensification in that area recently.

Now, you know, you would like to destroy as much as possible their field army, but they are not making themselves as visible.

Mr. COFFMAN. Sure.

Mr. MORELL. I agree, but I do think you need to be very careful about collateral damage. Right? I do think you need to be very careful that we don't create a bigger problem than we solve by broadening the target set. So agree that it should be broadened, but broadened within the context of minimizing collateral damage.

Mr. COFFMAN. Sure. But if you—Mr. Chairman, can I just end it on one note for the record?

The CHAIRMAN. Briefly.

Mr. COFFMAN. It would seem that if you—let's say those fuel trucks are not only central to revenue for the ISIS government but they are also essential for economic activity within their territories, sustaining that economy—and so, right now, we are only hitting those that we discern are directly related to ISIS. But I would argue that anything—if you say, if it moves it, we are going to hit it, and it is a tangible target, then my hope is that it wouldn't move. And that would, quite frankly, damage the economy and deny them a source of revenue from that economic activity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Vickers, you have used the term “global jihadist movement” and thus identified the global jihadist movement as the focus of America's fight against terrorism.

Isn't it a fact that the global jihadist movement is very closely linked to the teachings of Wahhabism? Yes or no?

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah, I would say they draw inspiration, in a perverted sense. But, yes, I would say—Robert may want to elaborate on that, but the two big global jihadists are Al Qaeda and ISIL.

Mr. JOHNSON. And they draw their inspiration from the Wahhabi strain of Islam. Isn't that correct?

Dr. VICKERS. Yes.

Mr. JOHNSON. And Wahhabism is an 18th-century offshoot of Sunni Islam, which began in the land that has come to be known as Saudi Arabia. Isn't that correct?

Dr. VICKERS. Yes.

Mr. JOHNSON. And Wahhabism seeks to purify Islam by getting rid of a number of human behaviors and practices that it considers to be sins against Allah, correct?

Dr. VICKERS. Correct.

Mr. JOHNSON. And Wahhabism is a strict, fundamentalist, highly intolerant strain of Islam, correct?

Dr. VICKERS. Yes, correct.

Mr. JOHNSON. And, now, isn't it a fact that the Saudi ruling monarchy derives its legitimacy by reliance on the ideology of Wahhabism?

Dr. VICKERS. Do you want to——

Ambassador FORD. The Saudis are riding a tiger.

Mr. JOHNSON. The?

Ambassador FORD. The Saudis are riding a tiger.

Mr. JOHNSON. So if you will answer my question——

Ambassador FORD. What I am saying is——

Mr. JOHNSON. Isn't it a fact that——

Ambassador FORD. No, I wouldn't put it that way. I would say it is not a fact that they depend solely on Wahhabism for their legitimacy. They derive their legitimacy from a variety of things. One of them is Wahhabism, but it is not the only one.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, is it fair to say that Wahhabism is the state-sponsored religion of Saudi Arabia?

Ambassador FORD. Yes. The Saudi Government sanctions Wahhabi imams in their major mosques.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, as a matter of fact, the Saudi monarchy promotes Wahhabism through official state-sponsored mosques and through religious schools known as madrassas all over the world. Isn't that correct?

Ambassador FORD. Yes.

Mr. JOHNSON. And isn't it true that the Saudi Government promotes Wahhabism throughout the world based on its oil and gas revenue?

Ambassador FORD. Absolutely, the government's revenues, directly or indirectly, help the proselytizing that you mentioned.

Mr. JOHNSON. And the Wahhabism ideology lines up with the ideology of ISIL. Isn't that correct?

Ambassador FORD. I would say no. For example, the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, the official ones, do not kill Shia. They persecute them. They do not have equal rights. They do not have equal rights, but they don't kill them. However, a Shia in Mosul or a Shia in Raqqah is liable to be killed.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, yeah, but it is true, though, that the ideology of ISIL lines up with Wahhabism.

Ambassador FORD. I would say it is a starting point, and then the Islamic State has taken it several steps farther.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes.

And is it fair to say that Saudi support for the teachings of Wahhabism create fertile ground for ISIL recruitment efforts?

Ambassador FORD. I think Saudi promotion of Wahhabism is absolutely a problem in terms of Islamic State recruitment.

Mr. JOHNSON. And so we will be unable to defeat the global jihadist movement, which is based on largely Wahhabism, which is a state-sponsored religion of Saudi Arabia, without somehow enlisting the support of the Saudi royal family in withdrawing its financial support for Wahhabism. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr. MORELL. So, in the discussion we had earlier about dealing with radicalization in the first place—that is what you are talking about, right? I think Saudi Arabia is a center of where that needs to take place. So there needs to be a discussion with the Saudis

about their support for Wahhabism and how it should be treated and how they should think about it. So, absolutely right.

Mr. JOHNSON. What was the latest amount of arms that we sold to Saudi Arabia, the latest shipment? I think it was, what, \$100 million worth of arms?

Dr. VICKERS. Well, there is support for the campaign in Yemen, but the arms sales that occur periodically are in the billions of dollars.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

And I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Gallego.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Like Rep. Coffman, I, too, am a graduate of the University of Al Anbar with the Marines and a graduate degree—I like to boot to that sometimes. From my experience there, just operating out in that area, mostly the, kind of, Haditha, Al Asad, Al Qayyim corridor, I operated a lot with ING [Iraq National Guard], and they were decent infantry soldiers.

Earlier this year, you know, Secretary Carter stated that, while air strikes are effective, we are going to need a good, reliable Iraqi ground force to be able to take back a lot of this territory from ISIL. In your estimation—it doesn't matter which one of you all three want to answer this—are we seeing an effective Iraqi force on the ground right now?

There are some conflicting reports I have read about Ramadi, how there was an overreliance on air strikes and, I think, the special forces of that counterterrorism. And what does this mean in the larger relations of us being able to push them out of Mosul and other parts of Al Anbar too?

Dr. VICKERS. So I think the Iraqi Army did make improvements in the last year, as the Ramadi campaign shows, but, as you said, there is still a heavy reliance on the elite forces of the counterterrorism service and its subordinate elements.

And then Mosul is a—I mean, one, to take an area, to clear an area, is the first part of the problem, as you know from your own experience—

Mr. GALLEGO. Right. Hold it.

Mr. VICKERS [continuing]. Then you have to hold it.

Mr. GALLEGO. Yeah.

Dr. VICKERS. And so the problems will multiply there. And then Mosul is, you know, a factor of five, at least, more complicated than Ramadi.

Mr. GALLEGO. In further following up—and I had questions last time we were meeting; I think it was just last week—any idea how many bridges and crossways over the Euphrates are controlled by ISIL at this point?

By what means are they resupplying Mosul? From what I understand, it is getting more difficult but they still have the capability of resupplying Mosul, going through the desert up through Al Anbar.

Dr. VICKERS. Yeah, that is my understanding too. You know, as Sinjar and some of the other areas on the direct supply routes have been cut, they have been forced to go around, which, you know, adds time and difficulty, but it doesn't eliminate it.

Mr. GALLEG0. Thank you.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Veasey.

Mr. VEASEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to ask you a question about ground coalitions or Arab allies coming together to help defeat ISIL, particularly in Syria.

You know, last week, we heard from General Petraeus, and he basically implied that the U.S. needs to take more of a support role and help them to defeat ISIL. And then Secretary James Baker, also a Texan, he has said the fact that the Arab allies needing to come together to create a coalition to build a ground force.

If you were going to build a ground force of—an Arab coalition ground force, particularly with Sunni soldiers that would go into Syria, to be able to go door to door and tell people in these towns and in these cities and communities that ISIL is basically an insult and gives Islam a bad name all around the world, what would that ground force look like, with the U.S. obviously only providing air support?

Dr. VICKERS. So I don't know where that outside-Syria Sunni ground force would come from. Most of those countries do not have large ground forces, and they are engaged already. So the UAE [United Arab Emirates] and Saudi Arabia really are engaged in Yemen in defense of their own territory. You know, the Turks are the ones who have significant manpower. But I think for practical political reasons, you know, our best option for a Sunni ground force in Syria is with Syrians, not with outside forces.

Mr. VEASEY. And the reason why I brought that up is because one of you had mentioned a little bit earlier about the fact that, more than social media, the fact that there—or the perception of Western forces are in there influencing really is more of a danger than the social media itself.

Mr. Morell, I wanted to ask you a question also. You had made mention a little bit earlier, you talked about the Crusades and the fact that Christianity has, you know, come to a point now to where it is not—that, you know, we have moved beyond that in Christianity and that Islam needs to be able to get to that point at some time.

But I want to ask you, more so than the teachings of Islam—and there has been a lot out there about whether or not there is a certain percentage of Muslims around the world that subscribe to more of a violent form of Medina Islam versus, you know, the Mecca that is more commonly known.

But don't you think that really the problems that we are seeing in the Middle East and the radicalization really stems from a shift that happened in the 1970s with the Ayatollah and other religious leaders in that part of the world basically trying to, you know, put more of a radical form of Islam throughout their countries?

Mr. MORELL. So, Congressman, I think that extremism has been a problem within the religion for a very, very long time, since its birth actually.

I think modern Islamic extremism can be dated to 1979. I think that is when modern Shia extremism started, with the revolution in Iran and the takeover of the U.S. Embassy and the direction the Iranian Government took as a result.



And I also think that modern Sunni extremism started in 1979, with the takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by a group of Sunnis who believed that Saudi Arabia was modernizing way too quickly.

So, yeah, I do think it has its roots in the late 1970s.

Mr. VEASEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. It is interesting to think, if we could go back and do something different, could we? Would we? I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. O'Rourke, you had another question.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to follow up on the great response from Ambassador Ford on my question about what a peace process would look like.

And you are much closer to this and have much greater experience and expertise on why the current U.N. Security Council process may not be a serious one. And if I heard you correctly, you said our strategy should be to arrive at a point of greater leverage against Assad, Iran, and Russia by better supporting and supplying those forces in opposition, excluding ISIL. And that will allow us then ultimately to enter negotiations on our terms, including, potentially, Assad stepping down.

What do we expect, reasonably, Russia to do? If we escalate, does Russia say, "All right, you guys win," or do they escalate? And then what does the next round of escalation look like? In other words, could you set our expectations on length of time, cost, and potential reactions to the other players in Syria?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, first, let me answer your question about Bashar al-Assad and should the United States accept him.

As I said, I don't think it is up to us to say he should stay or he should not. The man has no legitimacy, but that is a different question from whether or not he should stay.

I think we should judge whether or not Bashar al-Assad stays on this one criteria: If he stays, will the new national government under him be better able to mobilize Syrians to fight extremists or not? Will most of the armed opposition fighters, who are not extremists, will they then turn around and fight the extremists under a Bashar al-Assad-led government or not? That, to me, is the criteria.

So with respect to your question about Russian and Iranian reactions, I think for a time they will also escalate. Already, I think the Turks and the Saudis are escalating in response to what the Russians and the Iranians have done. I can imagine that this will go up several levels more.

It doesn't mean you can't have the peace talks start in the meantime, I think. Obviously, we would want that. I just don't think we are going to get very far in terms of mutual concessions and compromises until the Syrian Government and its allies feel more pain. I am sorry to say that, but it is what it is.

Mr. O'ROURKE. My understanding of the peace process as adopted by the Security Council is that, within 18 months after the talks begin, elections are to be held that include the Syrian diaspora.

Now, that would, I think, arguably, result in the election of someone other than Bashar al-Assad.

And, you know, however complicated it is to perform those elections, if you could in some way allow Syrians in Syria and outside of Syria to rally behind some person, then that might solve the concern that you raise there.

Now, getting there, you know, that is quite a challenge. I would like to see us, to the degree we can, help to facilitate that process to get to where you argued we should be, which is Syrians deciding this for themselves.

I don't know if either of the other panelists would like to comment on this.

Dr. VICKERS. No, I agree. And, you know, I think Russia's power to really escalate is somewhat limited. And you see strains right now in Iran and Hezbollah, but I think the two of them could actually probably do more, and they probably would, before they, you know, give up on this regime that has been so great to them for three decades.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Morell, any thoughts on Russia's response to additional escalation on our part?

Mr. MORELL. I agree with what both Robert and Mike have said. I am much more concerned about Iranian escalation than I am about Russian escalation.

I think the key to getting the Russians on board with the strategy that you eloquently outlined here is to get the Russians to twist the arm of the Iranians. I think that is how the process has to go. Bring enough pain to the Russians where they see the solution that we all see, and then get them to twist the Iranians' arm.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Okay.

Thank you for your responses and for being here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. As you all have heard from a number of members, this has been tremendously helpful and insightful on some very difficult problems.

Dr. Vickers, I need to publicly confess that I am quoting you a lot these days, when you said we ought to figure out what we would do after the next big 9/11-style attack here at home and do that before the attack. It seems to me to be a measure of common sense. I am not sure the President is on the same page with us, but it could certainly alleviate a lot of casualties here at home.

But I think, Mr. Morell, you are exactly right; ISIS is a significant strategic and lethal threat. And, Ambassador, we have to deal with it in a way where it doesn't return in a new, even more virulent form in the future. It is a big challenge, as you all have said. It is going to take a while to do, but it is that serious and that significant.

So thank you all for being here, for being willing to answer our questions.

With that, the hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:37 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

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# **A P P E N D I X**

JANUARY 12, 2016

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**PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD**

JANUARY 12, 2016

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**Michael Morell**  
**Written and Oral Statement**  
**House Armed Services Committee Hearing on "Outside Views**  
**on the U.S. Strategy for Iraq and Syria and Evolution of Islamic Extremism"**  
**January 12, 2016**

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee: Good morning and thank you for the invitation to be here today to talk about an extremely important national security challenge facing our nation. It is an honor to be here. Indeed, I am humbled that you have asked me to share my views with you. And it is good to see so many old friends.

I plan on keeping my opening remarks brief. I have always found that questions and answers are a much more effective way to add to the public's understanding than a witness simply reading a long testimony.

Let me start with the bottom line: I believe ISIS poses a significant strategic and lethal threat to the United States of America. That is a very strong statement. Let me walk you through why I believe that.

The nature and significance of the threat posed by ISIS flows from the fact that ISIS is a terrorist group, it is a quasi-state, and it is a revolutionary political movement. We have not faced the likes of it before.

As a terrorist group, ISIS poses a threat to the homeland. In mid-2015, that threat was largely indirect – ISIS's ability to radicalize young American men and women to conduct lone wolf attacks here. That indirect threat remains today. There are thousands of ISIS sympathizers in the United States – more than al Qa'ida ever had. The FBI has over 900 open investigations into homegrown extremists – the vast majority radicalized by ISIS and a large number of which relate to individuals who may be plotting attacks here. Such attacks have already occurred in the US, including the attack in San Bernadino last month, which in terms of fatalities was the largest terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11. Other ISIS supporters have been arrested before they could act.

Today, we face an additional threat from ISIS – a direct threat – an ISIS capability to plan and direct attacks in the homeland from the group's safe haven in Iraq and Syria. Just like the group did in Paris in November. This was the largest terrorist attack in Western Europe since the Madrid train bombings in 2004.

What is the difference between a direct and indirect threat? A lone wolf attack, while horrific, is likely to produce fairly limited casualties – on the order of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 (three killed) or the shootings at Fort Hood in 2009 (12 killed). A directed attack, however, carries the potential to be more complex and sophisticated – multiple simultaneous attacks, for example – and therefore more deadly, again just like in Paris (130 killed), or London in 2005 (56 killed), or even 9/11 itself.

The attack in Paris was the first manifestation of an effort that ISIS made to put together an attack capability in Europe – an effort that they began less than a year before. More attacks in Europe are likely. The head of the UK's domestic security agency has warned that ISIS is planning mass casualty attacks in Britain. ISIS has said that it wants to conduct attacks in the United States. Now that they have an attack capability in Europe, they are almost certainly working to do the same here. And, unless they are degraded, they will succeed.

As a quasi-state, ISIS poses a threat to regional stability. ISIS is a state in every respect of the word, except one. It does not have foreign recognition or relations with other states. But it does have an executive, it has an army, it has a police force, it has a set of laws, it has a judiciary, it provides social services, it takes care of the poor, and it raises taxes.

Why does it matter that ISIS is a quasi-state? Two reasons. One is that, as a state, it can utilize all the resources – human and otherwise – within the area it controls in the pursuit of its aims. The best example is the tens of millions dollars a month in revenue that ISIS earns from the selling the oil that it controls. And two is that it will make it more difficult to dislodge them. They are every day becoming more deeply rooted in the area they control.

The ISIS threat to regional stability is a threat to the very territorial integrity of the current nation states there, a threat to inflame the entire region in sectarian war. All this in a part of the world that still provides almost a third of the world's oil supply; a region that is home to one of America's closest allies, Israel; and a region that is home to a set of close American allies – the Gulf Arab states -- that are a bulwark against Iran's push for regional hegemony.

And, as a revolutionary political movement, ISIS is gaining affiliates among extremist groups around the world. They are signing up for what ISIS desires as its objective – a global caliphate where day-to-day life is governed by extreme religious views. In the mind of ISIS, its global caliphate would extend to the US itself.

When they join ISIS, these affiliates evolve from focusing on local issues to focusing on establishing an extension of the caliphate themselves. And, their targets evolve from local to international ones. This is the story of the bombing of the Russian airliner by an ISIS group in the Egyptian Sinai—only the third airliner brought down by a bomb in the last 25 years.

ISIS has gained affiliates faster than al Qa'ida ever did. From nothing a year ago, there are now militant groups in nearly 20 countries that have sworn allegiance to ISIS. They have conducted attacks that have already killed Americans, and they carry the potential to themselves grab large amounts of territory. Libya is a place that this could happen in the near term. ISIS controls territory in Libya, and foreign fighters are begging to join ISIS there.

Degrading and ultimately defeating ISIS will both require removing the leadership from the battlefield and will require the shrinking and eventual elimination of the safehaven, the elimination of the state, currently the size of Great Britain.

--The safe haven, the State, is a key part of ISIS narrative that it is winning. This narrative is absolutely critical to radicalizing homegrown extremists here and absolutely critical to creating affiliates among other militant groups.

--The safe haven provides security for ISIS to plot and train. There are two things that are necessary for a successful attack on the Homeland – a desire to do so and the capability to attack us. The safe haven allows for the building of that capability.

--And, the safe haven provides a place for foreign fighters to gather. No safe haven; no place to gather. Nearly 30,000 individuals from over 100 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq. Some are homesteading there to help create the caliphate, others will die on the battlefield, but still others will return home – carrying with them the potential to conduct attacks. This has already happened in Europe. This creates the potential for attacks that cause more casualties because the individuals who return home will have battlefield experience.



Removing the leadership is easier than eliminating the sahehaven. The former requires good intelligence and the military assets to turn that intelligence into action.

The latter requires complex military operations in both Iraq and Syria. And that requires a political solution in Damascus to the problem of Bashar al-Assad and a political solution in Iraq to the problem of the disenfranchisement of the Sunnis.

Mr. Chairman, let me close with this. Early last month, during a debate in the British Commons over whether Parliament should authorize British airstrikes against ISIS in Syria, the Labor Party's shadow minister for Foreign Affairs, Hilary Benn, gave a remarkable speech. Some of his colleagues called it one of the greatest speeches in the history of the British commons.

Benn, breaking with his own party leader and supporting British air strikes in Syria, said "We are here faced by fascists – not just their calculated brutality but their belief that they are superior to every single one of us in this Chamber tonight and all the people that we represent. They hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy....in contempt.

Benn went on. "What we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated....It's why this entire House stood up against Hitler and Mussolini.... We must now confront this evil."

I associate myself with Hilary Benn's remarks.

Mr. Chairman, that is the picture as I see it -- as a former intelligence officer who spent years watching al Qai'ida and other terrorist groups. I will, of course, be happy to answer any questions.

## **Michael J. Morell**

Michael Morell, the former Acting Director and Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is one of our nation's leading national security professionals, with extensive experience in intelligence and foreign policy. He has been at the center of our nation's fight against terrorism, its work to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and its efforts to respond to trends that are altering the international landscape—including the Arab Spring, the rise of China, and the cyber threat.

During his 33-year career at CIA, Michael served as Deputy Director for over three years, a job in which he managed the Agency's day-to-day operations, represented the Agency at the White House and Congress, and maintained the Agency's relationships with intelligence services and foreign leaders around the world. Michael also served twice as Acting Director, leading CIA when Leon Panetta was named Secretary of Defense and again after David Petraeus left government.

Michael's senior assignments at CIA also included serving for two years as the Director of Intelligence, the Agency's top analyst, and for two years as Executive Director, the CIA's top administrator—managing human resources, the budget, security, and information technology for an agency the size of a Fortune 200 firm.

Michael has been a witness to history on multiple occasions. He is the only person who was both with President Bush on September 11th, when al-Qaida burst into the American consciousness, and with President Obama on May 1st, when Bin Laden was brought to justice. Michael played a major role in the Bin Laden operation.

Michael is known inside CIA for his leadership. He inspired individuals and work units to perform beyond expectations. He mentored most of the Agency's current senior leadership team, including a significant number of women and minorities. When he departed CIA, thousands of officers wrote Michael notes of thanks.

Michael is the recipient of many awards. He received the Presidential Rank Award for exceptional performance — the nation's highest honor for civilian service. He also received the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, CIA's highest award, for his role in the Bin Ladin operation. Michael is also the recipient of the Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal, the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal, and the Department of Defense Service Medal.

Today, Michael is involved in a wide range of activities. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company; Senior Counselor to Washington's fastest growing consulting firm, Beacon Global Strategies; and a

consultant to a number of private sector entities. He is also a member of the Advisory Board to the President of the University of Akron.

Much of what Michael does today is tied to national security. He is a national security commentator for CBS News and a frequent guest on the Charlie Rose Show discussing national security issues. He is a Senior Fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, a Senior Fellow at West Point's Center on Combatting Terrorism, a Senior Fellow at the Madison Policy Forum, a member of the Aspen Institute's Homeland Security Group, a member of the Board of Directors of the Atlantic Council, a member of the Advisory Board to the University of Chicago's Project on Security and Terrorism, and a member of the Atlantic Council's advisory group to its study on the future of the Middle East. He served as a Member of President Obama's Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technology.

Michael is the author of a book on CIA's nearly 20-year fight against al Qaeda. The title of the book is "The Great War of Our Time: An Insider's Account of the CIA's Fight Against Terrorism – From al Qaeda to ISIS." It was published in May 2015.

Michael is a native of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, and he maintains close ties to northeast Ohio. His father and mother—who taught him hard work, the pursuit of excellence, and humility—were an autoworker and a homemaker. Michael is a first-generation college student, earning a B.A. summa cum laude in economics from the University of Akron. He also earned an M.A. in economics from Georgetown University.

Michael is married and he has three children. Michael enjoys playing golf and tennis, watching sports, reading, and traveling. Michael is involved with charities associated with supporting the families of fallen soldiers and intelligence officers. He is on the Board of the CIA Officer's Memorial Foundation.

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**Witness name:** Michael Morell

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## **U.S. Strategy for Iraq, Syria and the Global Jihadist Threat**

Testimony by Michael G. Vickers  
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence

House Armed Services Committee

January 12, 2016

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, it is a privilege and pleasure to be with the House Armed Services Committee this morning to provide an outside view on U.S. strategy for Iraq, Syria and the global jihadist threat. It is great to see you both.

The old order has collapsed in the Middle East, and several conflicts are intensifying in scale and scope across and beyond the region that threaten vital U.S. national security interests. There is a continuing assault on the international system by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, al-Qa'ida, and associated global jihadi groups and an expansion of the global jihadist threat; there is expanding internal and sectarian conflict across the region; and there is a bid for regional hegemony by Iran and a widening proxy war between Saudi Arabia and its allies, and Iran and its allies. Ungoverned space is growing substantially, large populations are being displaced and radicalized, and the prospect of a region-wide war is increasing. Several U.S. allies and partners in the region face growing threats to their stability, and they increasingly doubt our resolve. Outside powers have been drawn into the region, and our adversaries do not feel sufficiently deterred by American power.

Given these multiple negative trends and their impact on American interests, U.S. strategy in the region needs be intensified significantly across several lines of effort, in my judgment. I want to state at the outset that the conflicts ravaging the Middle East are broad and deep, and that there is no quick or easy strategic solution to all of them. The region is undergoing a generational conflict, and bringing it to an end across its several dimensions will require a series of integrated and sustained campaigns using all elements of national power. And, it is only one of three challenges to world order that we face.

I want to further emphasize that there are good Americans working very hard on our Iraq, Syria and counterterrorism strategy. That said, with the intensifications and accelerations of strategy I will propose below, I believe the wars in the Middle East can be fought by leveraging U.S. strengths while minimizing our vulnerabilities. In general terms, doing so requires that we seek to exploit our adversaries' vulnerabilities, making them play our game, or in some cases, beating them at their own game when they make themselves vulnerable, and getting the politics right. I believe strongly that these wars must be fought, albeit in large measure through others, and that they must be won.

The aims of U.S. strategy must be to prevent a major attack on the U.S. homeland and defeat the global jihadist threat; to reassure our allies and partners and contain Iran; and to restore a favorable balance of power and greater stability across the Middle East. I would now like to offer a few thoughts on ways U.S. strategy could be made more effective in Syria and Iraq, against ISIL, al-Qa'ida and other global jihadists, and in the region more broadly.

### **Intensifying Our Efforts in Syria and Iraq**

Syria is the center of gravity for Middle Eastern conflict. It has the largest concentration of global jihadists – both ISIL and al-Qa'ida – bent on attacking the West, and the Syrian Civil War and the continued existence of the Assad regime remain by far the largest draw for global jihadists; it is also a principal battleground in the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is where the battle for the future of the Middle East is largely being waged. A coalition victory in Syria would reshape the Middle East. It will roll back Iranian power, and deal a significant blow to the global jihadist movement.

U.S. strategy, however, has treated Syria as the secondary theater in the Iraq-Syria War. Two-thirds of Coalition airstrikes to date have been in Iraq, as have the bulk of our capacity building efforts. We need to shift to a “Syria-first” strategy, and reinvigorate our efforts to remove Assad from power.

Second, drawing inspiration from our Afghanistan campaign in late 2001 that overthrew the Taliban/al-Qa'ida regime in two months, and from our defeat of the Red Army in the Afghanistan in the 1980s, we need to significantly intensify our operations in Syria. The difference between our success in Afghanistan in late 2001 and in the 1980s and our lack of success in Syria the past 16 months is principally a function of the quantity and quality of force we are bringing to bear, and the ways in which we are employing our forces. In Afghanistan in late 2001, we conducted a far more intense air campaign – executing 8-to-10 times the number of combat strikes in Afghanistan on a daily basis as we have in Syria, and brought far greater mass to bear, in terms of bomb tonnage dropped, without sacrificing precision. The effects of air power were also exploited by an indigenous ground force, led by CIA and Special Forces advisors, which resulted in the rapid defeat of the Taliban/al-Qa'ida regime.

Strike sorties and the weight of strikes need to be significantly increased, as does coalition support – both quantitative and qualitative – for the moderate Syrian opposition. In Afghanistan in the 1980s, we provided the Afghanistan resistance in one month what it has taken the coalition years to provide in Syria. It is not too late to decisively support the Syrian opposition – we did not develop a war-winning strategy until early in the sixth year of our covert war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Without substantially increasing pressure on the Assad regime, there will be no peace in Syria, and there will be no defeat of ISIL and al-Qa'ida in Syria.



Let me now briefly turn to Iraq and make four points. First, as the retaking of Ramadi shows, a more intense application of air power and more aggressive use of U.S. combat advisors is also a good strategy in Iraq.

Second, the key to a Sunni tribal uprising against ISIL is decisive U.S. engagement. The key to sustaining it is the devolution of political power in Iraq across sectarian lines.

Third, we are in a competition with Iran for influence in Iraq. How sectarian identity, politics, and a post-war settlement will shape the future of Iraq and Syria remains to be determined, but our competition for influence with Iran is one we should seek to win.

Fourth, raids by Special Operations Forces would contribute an important line of effort to our Syria and Iraq strategy, but to be effective, the tempo of operations must dramatically increase. For this to happen, however, the Iraqi Government must approve a significant increase in the number of U.S. Special Operations personnel on its territory.

### **Defeating the Global Jihadists**

The global jihad has metastasized, and ISIL and al-Qa'ida are in a competition for leadership of the global jihad. Time is not on our side. Global jihadists cannot be contained; they must be defeated, and continually disrupted while they are in the process of being defeated. Sanctuaries must be denied.

ISIL, as its name implies, is a de facto state. It holds territory, controls population, maintains a capital, and funds its operations from resources it exploits on territory it controls. All of this can and should be taken away – in months, not years. Our strategic error before 9/11 was in not moving more aggressively to eliminate al-Qa'ida's sanctuary in Afghanistan before the attacks occurred, and in not developing a robust Global Counterterrorism Network that would improve our odds of disrupting the attacks. Our principal error today lies in conducting a gradual campaign that allows ISIL to endure as a state.

Disrupting and defeating global jihadists beyond Syria and Iraq will require roughly the same ways – precision air strikes exploited by indigenous ground forces led by U.S. advisors – and sufficient means. Intelligence is our first line of defense, and the Global Counterterrorism Network that we lead is our principal means of applying counterforce.

Policy changes that have restricted the scale and scope of Predator strikes the past three years needed to be reconsidered. The Predator has been our most effective weapon in our campaign against the global jihadists, and the size of the Predator fleet will remain a critical limiting factor in the conduct of our campaigns.

Greater engagement in Libya, in both the air and on the ground, is urgently required. ISIL is expanding its presence there, and is a growing threat. Current force levels will also need to be sustained in Afghanistan into 2017 and likely beyond, not only to keep

Taliban gains to tolerable levels, but also to prevent al-Qa'ida from reestablishing its sanctuary there. Maintenance of key forward bases, support by U.S. enablers and combat advisors, and an aggressive counterterrorism strategy will be key to success.

Syria is the central battle for the future of the Middle East, but our campaign against the global jihadists will necessarily be a distributed one, spanning multiple countries and continents. The global jihadists will not be defeated until the ungoverned space in which they operate is eliminated, their ideology is discredited, and stability is returned to the Middle East. This will require a significant investment in capacity building of indigenous forces, irregular as well as regular, and sustained U.S. engagement.

### **Reassuring Our Allies and Containing Iran**

Although it is beyond the scope of this hearing, I would like to say a few words about U.S. strategy for Iran and the need to reassure our Arab allies. We have at present only a partial containment strategy toward Iran, focused on nuclear arms control. Iran remains on the offensive in its quest for regional hegemony.

To employ a 1980s analogy, our relationship with Iran is more like our relationship with the former Soviet Union than it is like our relationship with Deng Xiaoping's China. With the former Soviet Union, despite the ebbs and flows of détente, arms control, perestroika and glasnost, we did not abandon our strategies of containment until we had won the Cold War. Indeed, we sustained our Afghanistan strategy not only until the Red Army withdrew, but through the final phase of the conflict with the Soviet-backed, Communist Afghan government. China became a critical ally of ours during the 1980s, but it was only after they had abandoned being a revolutionary power, something Iran has yet to do.

Our Gulf Arab allies feel increasingly under siege as they confront a multi-front war with Sunni radicals and Iran, and are increasingly estranged from us. Further estrangement would pose a serious challenge to our campaign against the global jihadists, and will result in our allies becoming more vulnerable to Iranian and radical Islamic aggression. Reassuring our Gulf Arab allies, strengthening our fraying Arab-Turkish-Kurdish coalition, and containing Iranian expansion are thus critical to our broader efforts in the Middle East.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

*Michael Vickers, a former Special Forces Officer and CIA Operations Officer, was Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, 2011-2015, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Low-Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities, 2007-2011.*

**Mike Vickers**

Dr. Michael Vickers is widely recognized as one of the nation's top national security professionals, with unprecedented senior tenure across Republican and Democratic administrations. He was a key operational strategist for the two great wars of our time: the operation in the 1980s to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan that helped bring an end to the Cold War – the largest and most successful covert action program in the history of the CIA – and the ongoing war with al-Qa'ida. He played a major policy and planning role in the operation that killed Usama bin Ladin.

From January 2011 to May 2015, Vickers served as the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, the Chief Executive Officer of the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, an \$80 billion, 180,000-person, global operation that includes the National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, Defense Security Service, and the intelligence components of the Military Services and Combatant Commands.

From 2007 to 2011, he served as the first and only Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Low-Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities. As the ASD SO/LIC&IC, Vickers served as the "Service" Secretary for all Special Operations Forces – a 70,000-person, \$10 billion enterprise with personnel deployed in 90 countries – and had policy oversight of all of DoD's core operational capabilities – strategic forces (nuclear forces, missile defense, space, cyber), conventional forces (air, ground and maritime), and Special Operations Forces.

Earlier, during the nearly decade and a half that spanned the operational phase of his career, he served as a Special Forces Non-Commissioned Officer, Special Forces Officer and CIA Operations Officer, and had operational and combat experience in Central America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and South and Central Asia. As the principal strategist for the multi-billion dollar effort that defeated the Red Army in Afghanistan, Vickers oversaw the policy, operations, training, and logistics of a covert enterprise that spanned several continents.

Dr. Vickers has received the nation's highest awards in the fields of intelligence and defense, including the Presidential National Security Medal. He holds a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins, an MBA from the Wharton School, and a B.A. from the University of Alabama.

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**Ambassador Robert S. Ford  
Written and Oral Statement  
House Armed Services Committee Hearing on "Outside Views  
on the U.S. Strategy for Iraq and Syria and Evolution of Islamic Extremism"  
January 12, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

It is an honor to be on this distinguished panel. Thank you for inviting me.

We have American military personnel deployed in combat operations in Iraq and Syria against the Islamic State. There needs to be a serious national discussion about what we are doing and whether we are doing all we can to succeed. And not just succeed in destroying the Islamic State but also in ensuring that it doesn't return in a new, even more virulent form.

I will focus more on the political angles, leaving the military tactics to those who have greater military experience. Overall, my assessment of our efforts, and those of our allies, is that (1) there is progress being made against the Islamic State in Iraq, (2) more needs and can be done there to ensure long-term success; (3) that the Islamic State in Syria will be a harder problem than Iraq, and (4) we need to pay more attention to the Islamic State's activities in North Africa.

Iraq

Forces loyal to the Iraqi government, with help from the American-led coalition, slowly, steadily are recapturing territories from the Islamic State and holding nearly all the areas they recapture.

Holding territories matters because the Islamic State now controls large spaces. It has a bureaucracy. It publishes schoolbooks, collects taxes, operates a military and even writes parking tickets. One analyst has said the Islamic State is more than just the sum total of all of its fighters.

Recapturing its territory and shutting down its state operations matters in terms of reducing the threat it poses to us and also to undermining its theological case for existence. In brief, if it can't impose shari'a in territories it controls, then even hardline Islamist scholars would deny its right

to exist as a proclaimed caliphate and thus would dent its recruitment draw. This is all the more true if Sunni Arabs, from whose communities most of the fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq came, can return to their homes, and there are functioning services that operate better than whatever the Islamic State had before.

Big military challenges remain, including recapture of Fallujah and the sprawling city of Mosul. Iraqi forces eventually can do it, with our discrete backing, and they don't want large numbers of foreign forces on Iraqi soil. This means that it will take longer than we might like, but injecting large numbers of western forces into Iraq will play into the Islamic State's recruitment effort.

I visited Iraq in October to meet Iraqi leaders, many of whom I have known since 2004. They were confident that the Islamic State tide had crested even before the recapture of Ramadi. But in Baghdad and the Kurdish region capital of Erbil, leaders worried about finding the resources to fight the Islamic State. Low oil prices have hit both the central government and the Kurdish regional government. Kurdish Peshmerga fighters often wait months for their pay. I also plainly heard frustration that American arms are not flowing in fast enough. There is even some bizarre conspiracy-theory thinking that the Americans don't want to destroy the Islamic State.

More favorably, Iraqi politics are evolving in a potentially favorable way that would undergird longer-term stability. Iraqi Sunni Arabs from Ramadi and Mosul whom I met no longer hope to dominate the central government. Instead, most said they want to govern themselves in a decentralized or even federal Iraq, enjoying basically the same local governance that the Iraqi Kurds enjoy. This is a 180 degree turn from before, it is in line with the political vision of Iraq that the Iraqi Shia and Kurdish leaders used to emphasize 10 years ago, and it is consistent with the Iraqi constitution. Hopefully, Iraq's leaders can develop a governance formula all accept.

Many of the mistakes that enabled the resurrection of the Islamic State in Iraq in 2012-2013 stemmed from Sunni Arab resentment at discrimination and corruption by Baghdad authorities operating in their towns and cities; many Mosul residents welcomed Islamic State fighters when the city fell in June 2014. If the Sunni Arabs in places like Anbar and Mosul can establish a greater degree of local governance and accountability, then perhaps the mistake of 2012-2013 need not be repeated and the Islamic State over time can be ground out of the holes it will hide in after the major cities all are recaptured.

If by contrast national reconciliation again falters like 2011-2013, we eventually will see a third version of al-Qaida in Iraq/the Islamic State. Our interest, therefore, is to help promote national reconciliation and agreed governance provisions in Iraq. Sunni Arab fears of Shia militia, often well-founded, and Shia bitterness at Sunni Arab past actions, also well-founded, create situations



where honest brokers, such as the UN and the Americans, are needed to help develop real discussions among Iraqis that in turn develop solutions.

In sum, going forward we should

\*\* the Congress should vote for an authorization to use force against the Islamic State which would show our resolve to foreign states, the Islamic State and to the Iraqi public;

\*\* understand that flowing in large numbers of American troops into Iraq might sound like a fix, but actually would make things worse;

\*\* help the Iraqi central authorities and the Kurdish regional government obtain resources so that Iraqis can pursue the battle against the Islamic State with our discrete help;

\*\* refuse to facilitate the deployment of specific, notorious Shia militia units into Sunni Arab communities - we know which ones are the really bad ones;

\*\* redouble efforts to promote national reconciliation by remaining engaged -- not dominating but pressing the Iraqis themselves to develop genuine reconciliation processes, a function where the Embassy in Iraq must take the lead for the American side.

\*\* help the Iraqi central and local authorities plan for restoration of basic services and reconstruction in liberated areas, tasks that the State Department and USAID should undertake and for which they need the proper resources themselves.

## Syria

On the positive side, the Syrian Democratic Forces, an entity we have stitched together mostly from PKK-affiliated Kurds as well as Arab fighters, have recaptured a large stretch of mostly Kurdish territories in northern Syria. These advances impede Islamic State movement and operations and reduce its oil revenues.

However, the Kurdish fighters are operating in the broader context of the Syrian civil war. They are unilaterally establishing an autonomous region in northern Syria. This area is not like Iraqi Kurdistan - it has Kurdish, Arab, Turkoman and Assyrian communities scattered amongst each other. Moreover, the Syrian Kurds have historic family and social ties with Turkish Kurds that the Iraqi Kurds do not have. Thus, this autonomous region along the Syrian-Turkish border is sensitive to many Syrian communities, not just the Kurds, and to Turkey. We will have to address Turkish concerns if we want its help.

The American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces have not taken back a major Arab city from the Islamic State. The Syrian Kurds are wisely being very careful. If they focus mainly on their autonomous region, however, the rest of eastern Syria is a big space. It is not clear how the American-backed Arab fighters, who are limited in number, can retake it against a numerically superior Islamic State force, much less hold it against an Islamic State insurgency.

The Islamic State, moreover, will enjoy two special boosts to its recruitment efforts in Syria, neither of which need apply in Iraq:

\*\* the Assad government's brutality continues unchecked, and there is little prospect of success in finding a political solution to that conflict as things now stand; a recent poll showed the number one reason young men join the Islamic State is to "defend Sunnis" against Assad, and the number two reason is to get paid;

\*\* Arab resentment against Kurdish domination of Arab towns that Syrian Democratic Forces recapture. Amnesty International in October issued a reporting accusing the Syrian Kurdish forces fighting in northern Syria of ethnic cleansing and war crimes. If such allegations are true, they will drive some Syrian Arabs to the Islamic State.

The great majority of Syrian armed opposition groups, much larger than the Syrian Democratic Forces, also fight the Islamic State, but their main focus is against Assad. They will never join with the current Syrian government against the Islamic State. Even the Arab fighters in the American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces say they also fight for the Syrian revolution against Assad. The Russians want all these armed opposition forces to join with the current Syrian government, perhaps with some cosmetic changes. After the intense bloodletting and atrocities, it will not happen until there is a dramatically different national government.

Without a new Syrian national government able to mobilize more Syrians under its banner against the Islamic State, we will just see disjointed efforts continue. Moderate opposition fighters will fight it on one track, the Syrian government and its backers occasionally will fight it on a separate track and the American-backed SDF effort will be a third track. Tacking advantage of that confusion, the Islamic State will control substantial territories for years yet.

On top of this, there is the separate problem of the big al-Qaida operation embedded in Syria. Most of the fighters and their local communities don't have much political sympathy for the al-Qaida project. However, largely abandoned by western countries in their drive to get rid of the

Assad government, they have resorted to working even with al-Qaida's Nusra Front against Bashar al-Assad. There will be no Syrian-led reckoning with al-Qaida in Syria until Assad goes.

Thus, in Syria we should:

\*\* insist on conditionality with Syrian Kurds and the other Syrian Democratic forces about their treatment of local Arab communities. If they abuse or mistreat, those local commanders should be excluded from further American aid. Accountability is key, and our track record enforcing accountability is mixed at best. This is not very different from what we insisted upon in Iraq where we properly refused to help Shia militia attacks.

\*\* as in Iraq, help local Syrian civilians restore services and rehabilitate communities in Syrian towns liberated from the Islamic State - a task again that the State Department and USAID will need to do and which they will have to do despite a tough security environment, and they will need resources for this task;

\*\* apply pressure as will be needed to secure concessions from the Assad government and from the opposition so that there is a real political negotiation and a genuinely different and new national government in Syria able to mobilize many more Syrians against the extremists in their midst. I entirely agree with General Petraeus' remarks to the Congress about how to boost that pressure on Assad.

\*\* redouble efforts to find a common strategy with Turkey about the future of northern Syria such that the border is closed to extremist infiltrations in a manner that the Turks will actually support.

#### Beyond Iraq and Syria

Finally, North Africa is also an important region in the fight against the Islamic State. Its Libyan branch lost the city of Darna near Egypt but captured the city of Sirte along the central coast, and its fighters have gained control of more oilfields. Moreover, as occurred in Syria, Islamic State loyalists can use Libyan bases to launch fighters and resources to threaten neighbors like Tunisia and Algeria as well as to prepare attacks against western targets. The Islamic State threat adds to an existing al-Qaida threat in the region.

History can judge the efficacy of western post-Qaddafi efforts in Libya in 2011-2012, but looking forward, we need to be ready to strongly back whatever tenuous national unity government emerges from the UN-led reconciliation effort. Our Algerian friends are cautioning, as do our Iraqi friends, that injecting large numbers of western troops is not the answer. Rather, as in Iraq, we need to help build capable indigenous forces and understand this will take serious resources and substantial time.

**Robert S. Ford, Ambassador (ret)**

Ambassador Robert S. Ford served thirty years in the State Department and Peace Corps, finishing his career as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria from 2011 to 2014. For his leadership of the American Embassy in Damascus he received a Presidential Honor award in 2012, and for his work on Syria he received in 2014 the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award, the State Department's highest award. For his defense of human rights in Syria, he received from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston the 2012 Profile in Courage award.

Ford also served as the U.S. Ambassador to Algeria (2006-2008) where he boosted bilateral cooperation in fields such as education and rule of law.

He served three times in Iraq between 2003 and 2010, including as the Ambassador's senior political advisor during the tumultuous elections and stand-up of the new, permanent Iraqi government 2004-2006. Later, as Deputy Ambassador in Iraq 2008-2010 he assembled a government team that devised the logistical and security plans the new Obama administration used to establish American diplomatic posts in Iraq after the withdrawal of U.S. military forces.

As Deputy Ambassador in Bahrain 2001-2003 Ford led the Embassy team that helped negotiate a free trade agreement with Bahrain, the first of free trade deal with a Persian Gulf state. Ford also served in Cameroon, in Algeria 1994-1997 during the civil war there, in Egypt and Turkey and in domestic assignments at the U.S. Department of State in Washington. He started his career as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco 1980-1982. He speaks fluent Arabic and French. Ford has a B.A. from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and an M.A. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.

Ford is now a scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington where he writes and speaks about Iraq, Syria and North Africa. He will also be a senior fellow at Yale University in 2016. He has appeared on CNN, NBC, PBS, MSNBC, Fox News, NPR, the BBC and in Arabic language interviews on Arab networks. His wife, Alison Barkley, is also a retired Foreign Service Officer, and they are avid fans of hiking, theater, classical music and the Baltimore Orioles.

12 January 2016

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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☒ Individual

☐ Representative

**If appearing in a representative capacity, name of the company, association or other entity being represented:** \_\_\_\_\_

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2014

Foreign contract/ payment	Foreign government	Dollar value	Subject of contract or payment

2013

Foreign contract/ payment	Foreign government	Dollar value	Subject of contract or payment





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**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING**

JANUARY 12, 2016

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#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LANGEVIN

Mr. LANGEVIN. The situation on the so-called “Mara Line” in northwest Syria has been problematic for some time. From the failed train-and-equip of Syrian fighters which were then captured by the Nusra Front, to infighting between opposition groups, to continued advances by regime forces and ISIL, is it possible for the U.S. to change course in this strategic area and find new local or regional forces to lend support? If so, what forces would be best equipped and motivated to achieve U.S. goals?

Mr. MORELL. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

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Dr. VICKERS. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

Mr. LANGEVIN. Dr. Vickers, you have stated that we are attempting to “play the long game” in Iraq and Syria, but that we need a “more rapid and disruptive strategy” instead. How do you believe we can best implement a more rapid strategy in light of escalating involvement by Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, for example?

Dr. VICKERS. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

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Ambassador FORD. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. FRANKS

Mr. FRANKS. You do an excellent job pointing out why ISIL has been much more successful than Al Qaeda at recruiting allies and affiliates across the globe and that it presents a new and unique threat. Should the president authorize all of our combatant commanders to conduct status-based targeting of all ISIL affiliates in order to prevent or at least slow the spread of the ISIL?

Mr. MORELL. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

Mr. FRANKS. You have spoken of the urgency and necessity to shift our focus to Syria and that until we do so we will not be successful. Should we establish a no-fly zone in Syria? [If “no”]: Isn’t establishing a no-fly zone a precondition to stabilizing Syria and assisting groups who are both anti-Assad and anti-ISIL?

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Ambassador FORD. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]

Mr. FRANKS. Is the Iraqi government in Baghdad currently making good-faith attempts at political reconciliation with the Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds?

Ambassador FORD. [No answer was available at the time of printing.]