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# REGIONAL IMPACT OF U.S. POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ AND SYRIA

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# REGIONAL IMPACT OF U.S. POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ AND SYRIA

**THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2015**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

I will first recognize Ranking Member Deutch for 5 minutes each for our opening statements. I will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute and thank you for my Cuban coffee.

And there are so many subcommittees and full committees taking place right now because tomorrow, Friday, we will be on a district work period, so everybody is cramming their work in.

So Ted Deutch is in an actual voting marathon in Judiciary but will come over here in a minute, and then Lois Frankel has Transportation—a committee that she has to go to.

But we will then hear from our witnesses and without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record. Members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules.

And I am going to take this a little bit out of order today because I know Congressman Deutch has to get back to votes in Judiciary.

I would like to recognize him first so that you can get on with your business, Congressman Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

I apologize to the panel. We have votes and close votes at that. So I am going to be running back and forth.

Thanks very much for providing us the opportunity to examine how current U.S. strategy in Iraq and Syria is impacting the rest of this vulnerable region and thanks to our distinguished witnesses for being here today.

This is one of a dozen or so hearings that we have had on Syria, Iraq or ISIS in the past couple of years and each time we convene to address the conflict as a whole or specific aspects I am struck by what I am concerned is a general lack of strategy when it comes to ending the Syrian civil war.

I applaud the President's willingness to take action against ISIS and we are seeing some successes from that air campaign in Iraq,

and I support our efforts to train and equip the moderate Syrian opposition.

But I do believe that we waited too long to get that program off the ground in a meaningful way. The opposition has fractured over and over again and the Syrian people are being forced to choose to align with those who can simply provide them the greatest protection.

With most of our efforts focused on ISIS' brutality, we seem to have left out a very critical piece of the puzzle. This conflict will not end unless Assad is no longer in power.

The suggestion that Assad is part of any solution or that he is a protector against ISIS is, quite frankly, ridiculous. This is a regime that has been responsible for the deaths of thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Syrians.

This is a regime that has abandoned its people, trapping them in besieged areas without access to food and basic humanitarian needs. This is a regime that has resorted to the most barbaric torture, dropped barrel bombs on its people and used chemical weapons against its own citizens.

And frankly, when we talk to our allies in the region, we are often met with confusion and frustration over, some believe, a lack of strategy for Syria. The chaos that has spun out from the Syrian conflict is having a devastating impact on the region.

The humanitarian crisis alone is threatening the stability of critical states like Jordan and Lebanon. This conflict will change the makeup of the region for decades to come.

Even if Syria was solved tomorrow it would take years before refugees and displaced persons could return to their homes and we have to make sure that the people of Syria know that the United States stands with them and that they do not believe that the coalition is acting on behalf of Assad or as Assad's air force.

And we can do that by continuing to support the opposition including the consideration of buffer zones. The United States must think holistically about what the impact of Assad remaining in power could have on the region. A direct consequence would be the emboldening of Iran.

Assad in power preserves Iran's lifeline to Hezbollah, and a report just this week estimated that Iran is spending $1 billion to $2 billion a month supporting Assad and Hezbollah in Syria.

Our efforts to combat ISIS in Iraq have resulted in moderate gains. The Abadi government seems to be willing to correct the years of weak and exclusive governance left—that left western Iraq susceptible to ISIS. Do our allies fear the U.S. will cooperate with Iran against ISIS in Iraq?

Expanded Iranian influence in Iraq could have a devastating effect on our efforts to support the Abadi government and encourage inclusive governing.

If Shi'ite militias are seen as receiving the backing of the Government of the United States, that could alienate Sunni tribes. And as we deal directly with Iraq and Syria we need to support our regional partners to defend their own countries against ISIS growth.

There are extremist groups in nearly every Middle Eastern nation who have declared allegiance to ISIS. That is why I was pleased to join the chairman in co-sponsoring legislation that would

ensure the Kingdom of Jordan receive the assistance that it needs to maintain security and stability. We must also push to strengthen efforts to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq.

ISIS' spread into North Africa, particularly in lawless Libya, has given the group new territory in which to train, recruit and attack as we, unfortunately, saw with the brutal attacks on Egyptian Christians.

How long can coalition strikes against ISIS continue? Will our Arab partners, who are vital to efforts to send a message that this is not just an American fight, continue to support our efforts if they feel that we are jeopardizing regional security on other fronts?

Because, not surprisingly, our allies are not just concerned about the spread of ISIS' influence. Perhaps most concerning at this particular moment in time to our partners is the potential for expanded Iranian influence.

What security guarantees can the United States provide to the Gulf States and to Israel? What do Iranian proxies like Hezbollah or even Hamas, which appears to have mended its relationship with the Ayatollah, look like with even greater Iranian financial support?

Or what do groups that are simply in Iran's orbit like the Houthis in Yemen look like with greater financial support and what continued action does this spur from the Saudis and other G–16 nations to counteract this threat?

Madam Chairman, we have been talking about ending the Syrian for 4 years. If there is no military solution to this conflict, how can we move a political solution forward, particularly without the Russians or Iranians?

I look to our panel today to help us understand how these conflicts might play out in the coming months and years and what effect U.S. policy can have on reaching a positive outcome.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Deutch. Thank you and we look forward to seeing you scoot in and out. And thank you, Mr. Higgins, for joining us as well.

The Chair now recognizes herself for her opening statement. In the Middle East, many times events in one country have a profound impact in other countries in the region.

In 2009, President Obama failed to support the protests that had erupted throughout Iran, an opportunity that could have turned the tide in Iran and the entire landscape of the Middle East.

In late December 2010, a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire to protest abuse by State officials. This act ultimately sparked the Arab Spring with similar large-scale protests spreading to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria in early 2011.

In Libya and Syria, both Ghadafi and Assad resisted any calls for democracy or reform and in fact responded to the protest with violence and bloodshed. However, the U.S. responses in Syria and Libya were markedly different from each other.

Whereas in Libya the U.S. responded with cutting ties with Ghadafi, sanctioning members of his regime and led the push for the U.N. to authorize military intervention in the conflict, that was not the case with Syria.

Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Assad "a reformer," and that was rather ludicrous. The death toll is now over 220,000 in Syria. But if this guy is who we thought would be a reformer, well, we did not really assess that situation correctly.

The U.S. refused to take any action against Assad and even after Assad crossed President Obama's chemical weapons red line, and has done so repeatedly, the United States did not respond with military force in Syria like we had done in Libya.

The decision to not act on the red line caused a large ripple effect throughout the Middle East and beyond, as our adversaries saw that we don't have the courage of our convictions to act and our allies saw that we can't be trusted to act and question our resolve.

Even in Libya where we did initially act, the administration failed to ensure stability and now Libya is fractured and has become a breeding ground for radicalism as extremists from Libya flock to join ISIL, al-Nusra and other terror groups.

This mirrors the consequences of the U.S. withdrawal of our troops from Iraq in 2011, leaving a void that Iran was more than happy to fill, allowing the regime to gain more and more influence over Baghdad and Maliki.

So the United States' decision to not get involved in Syria immediately and to withdraw our troops from Iraq in 2011 played a large role in facilitating the rise of ISIL and the spread from Syria to Iraq.

But I am not part of what Jeane Kirkpatrick called the "blame America first" crowd. The responsibility is with ISIL and all of these terror groups and not of the United States.

But the rise of ISIL has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis that we have seen in Iraq and Syria. Millions have left. Hundreds of thousands have been murdered.

Religious minorities have been targeted for extinction and nearly every country in the region has felt the impact of the terror of ISIL.

The crisis in Iraq and Syria is a cancer and it is quickly metastasizing and spreading throughout the region. In Jordan, the Kingdom is feeling the burden to try and take care of the Syrian refugees and to protect its own borders.

In Lebanon, there are over 1 million registered Syrian refugees and the fighting between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces has caused instability in the Golan Heights, which poses a security threat to the democratic Jewish State of Israel.

In Saudi Arabia, an attack against our embassy in Riyadh was foiled when nearly 100 individuals were arrested this week, all alleged affiliates of ISIL.

This is why the administration needs a drastic reassessment of our policies. We have got an Iran that remains unchecked in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon and in Yemen.

We have ISIL and al-Qaeda resurgent. Assad remains in Syria and the sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shi'a is as bad now as any time in recent history. Many questions remain about the Syrian train and equip program, the size and the scope of the mission.

The program isn't even up and running yet. By the time the program finishes, it could be too late and the situation in the region could be worse.

Many issues remain regarding the proposed authorization for use of military force, the AUMF, that the administration has sent to Congress, not least of which is the failure to address Assad, al-Nusra and other terror groups in Iraq and Syria.

The administration has failed to develop a comprehensive strategy to address all of the threats in Iraq and Syria. But until we do, the situation is only going to get worse and we will be faced with even tougher decisions down the road.

And at this time I would like to recognize our members for any opening statements they would like to make. Ms. Frankel, my Florida colleague.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, and Madam Chair, I just want to say you so enjoy—you have the—sort of the most diplomatic and kindest way of putting some things that I may not agree with. But we should learn from you.

Look, I just—and I enjoyed listening to your remarks. I think that this is a very complicated situation and I think from my own—my constituents the big concern is just even if we just look at recent history is somehow we take action—our country takes action—military action.

We are well intended but the action seems to fail. And I will go a little bit further back, Madam Chair, to 2003 when we sent troops into Iraq and we toppled Saddam Hussein and I think there are some who would argue that that actually helped give rise to Iran increasing its power in the region and perhaps the fighting or the new government not being inclusive may have something to do with giving rise to ISIL.

I think there are factors that are a lot more complicated. So I actually will listen very intently to what you all have to say and I thank you for being here.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, and I think I should say thank you—I am not quite sure. Thank you, Lois.

Mr. Higgins of New York.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief.

I just, you know, talk about this region of the world, it is marked by instability for a long time and U.S. intervention in that part of the world is complicated because where there is no political center there are only sides, and taking sides or being perceived to take a side has major political consequences as well.

So when we talk about this part of the region, you know, revisionist history is not helpful because there is a lot of gray area. There is a lot of nuance.

It is not black and white and to be strategic and to be smart and to use your resources as best you can but to also require that regional players also participate fully and don't play the United States as they historically have in Iraq and in other places.

Syria, clearly, is a mess—clearly, is a mess. And, you know, some people wanted us to believe that if we just supported the free Syrian army that we would be supporting the good guys against the bad guys.

But, again, when you look beyond the surface it is so much more complicated than that with so many militias and Islamic extremists that even as bad as Bashir al-Assad is, the alternatives, you know,

throughout that continuum could in fact be worse, given the history of those groups as well.

So with that, we have a distinguished group of panelists and I look forward to the testimony. I will yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Higgins and Ms. Frankel.

And so now I am pleased to introduce our distinguished panel. We welcome back Dr. Seth Jones. He is a director of the International Security and Defense Policy at the RAND Corporation.

He is an adjunct professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and has served in an advisory capacity to several operational commands in the Department of Defense.

Second, we welcome back General Jack Keane, who is chairman of the Institute for the Study of War. The general has served in the United States Army for 37 years, rising to the post of Army vice chief of staff.

He has served as a combat veteran in Vietnam, as has my husband. Also has served in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo and has commanded the prestigious 18th Airborne Corps and the decorated 101st Airborne Division.

Thank you, General, for being with us this morning and thank you for your distinguished service to our country. You are a true hero.

And last but certainly not least, I would like to welcome Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes. Help me out. Wittes. Wittes. Just as it—yes, Wittes. She is a senior fellow and the director of the Saban Center for Middle East policy at Brookings.

Dr. Wittes served as deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs from November 2009 to January 2012 and we welcome you back. Thank you.

We will begin with you, Dr. Jones.

## STATEMENT OF SETH G. JONES, PH.D., DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CENTER, RAND CORPORATION

Mr. JONES. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Deutch and distinguished members of the committee, and thanks to the other members here. We have got a distinguished group.

I am going to divide my comments into two sections. The first will provide an overview of Iraq and Syrian and the broader regional context, and the second will get into some recommendations—some preliminary recommendations.

Let me begin with the wars as they stand right now. I think one of the—one of the challenges right now is both the media and some administration and other officials try to deal with them almost separately and in fact they are quite intertwined. And we will see in my comments, it is generally a mistake to treat them even sequentially.

In Iraq right now, the United States remains engaged in a counter insurgency campaign against Da'ish, also referred to as ISIL or ISIS, and its allies.

It has lost some ground recently, including in Tikrit, but it does still have substantial territory, particularly in the predominantly Sunni areas of Anbar, Salahadin and Nineveh. It also continues to fund itself through activities like smuggling oil, selling stolen goods, kidnapping, seizing bank accounts and the smuggling of antiquities.

In Syria, the U.S. is somewhat involved in the insurgency campaign. It has provided limited support to rebels, which I will come back to in a little bit through the train and equip program.

But U.S. air strikes have been insufficient to seriously degrade Da'ish in Syria. More recently, there has been a surge of rebel activity and I wanted to highlight with our focus so much on Da'ish or ISIL in Syria.

One of the groups that has clearly benefited from the gains in rebel activity is the al-Qaeda affiliated Nusra Front. It probably has more fighters, more money and more territory than at any time since its creation.

In 2011, it retains a stronghold in northwestern Syrian areas like in Idlib. So I want to highlight my concerns with the al-Qaeda affiliate now in Syria and the gains that it has made.

There, obviously, are differences between Syria and Iraq but I think as you look at the way the wars have transpired, we have a range of issues. The movement of extremist groups and criminal networks operating on both sides of the border are moving back and forth.

The role of or the use of Turkey as a—Turkish territory as a pipeline for groups coming into the region and then, obviously, Irani involvement in both wars as being just three examples of how intertwined those wars are.

U.S. and allied efforts, obviously, need to consider a range of issues including efforts to undermine the ideology of extremist groups, to target key leaders, to build partner capacity, to engage in political dialogue including Iraq and other steps.

But I am going to focus my remaining comments on three issues. The first is interdiction efforts in Turkey and other neighboring states. Turkey, in particular, has taken some steps to crack down on foreign fighter flows.

It has added, for example, thousands of names to its banned from entry list into Turkey. But, in my view, these steps are still not sufficient. Turkey remains the most important pipeline for foreign extremists coming into both Iraq and Syria contexts.

As I—as I provide more material in the written testimony, there are a number of useful examples since World War II of successful efforts to crack down on border interdiction.

So I think there are useful lessons, again for aerial-ground maritime surveillance, strengthening capacity and resources of border security personnel, et cetera that are still worth pursuing in Turkey.

The second issue is the train and equip program. In my view, the U.S., including Congress, should put a pause on this program. I am concerned for several reasons.

First, it seems to me it makes little sense to expend U.S. financial, diplomatic, military and other resources without a long-term strategy and a desire to end-state in Syria. The U.S. needs to first

agree on a long-term strategy and then design a train and equip program to achieve that end state.

In addition, I think it is also problematic to train Syrian rebels to counter Da'ish, or the Islamic State, and not what virtually all rebels are trying to do, which is—which is to end the Assad regime that has used chemical weapons on its own population.

And then, finally, it strikes me also as problematic that the train and equip program, the way it is set up right now, at least as I understand it is to train, advise and assist local security forces outside of Syria and then to not have on the ground training in Syria itself.

Virtually every successful effort that I have seen or have been involved in myself—Philippines, Colombia, a number of other places—have required on the ground training. It provides a way of giving them hands-on capacity as well as understanding how they are actually being used.

So for those reasons and many others, I would—I would strongly urge taking a pause to this program until some of these issues get settled out.

And then finally, let me just say on the AUMF, in my view, Congress should most likely pass an AUMF that is an omnibus, and we can talk about the details. I lay it out in the testimony.

No geographical limitations, in a sense, but that get into issues of threat, a fairly broad definition of groups—happy to give you more specifics—specified purposes for which military forces for which military forces may be used, a requirement to report to Congress and then, finally, a renewal clause.

So let me just conclude by saying the biggest issue and the biggest challenge we have in Iraq and Syria is this war is spreading. It is spreading into West Africa, East Africa, North Africa.

We see Da'ish and the Islamic State rising in South Asia. We have seen arrests now in the Pacific Rim. If we do not begin to get more of a handle on it, we are going to see this spread across multiple regions, including outside of this committee's jurisdictions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

Testimony

# Historical Lessons for the Wars in Iraq and Syria

Seth G. Jones

RAND Office of External Affairs

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April 2015

Testimony presented before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa on April 30, 2015

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**Seth G. Jones**[1]
**The RAND Corporation**

***Historical Lessons for the Wars in Iraq and Syria***[2]

**Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs**
**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**
**United States House of Representatives**

**April 30, 2015**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing, "Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Towards Iraq and Syria." I have divided my comments into three sections. The first provides an overview of the intertwined nature of the wars in Iraq and Syria, the second briefly examines how past insurgencies have ended (with implications for Iraq and Syria), and the third offers preliminary recommendations for Congress.

**I. Intertwined Wars**

A dozen years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the United States remains involved in a handful of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies around the globe, including in Iraq and Syria.[3] But it is a mistake to treat Iraq and Syria as separate wars and to largely set aside the broader crisis in Syria to focus on (a) defeating Da'ish and (b) concluding a nuclear deal with Iran. The wars in Iraq and Syria are too intertwined to deal with them sequentially.

In Iraq, the United States is engaged in a counterinsurgency campaign against Da'ish —also referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq

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[1] The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.
[2] This testimony is available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT431.html.
[3] An insurgency is a political-military campaign by a non-state group (or groups) to overthrow a regime or secede from a country. A counterinsurgency is a political-military campaign to prevent insurgent groups from seceding from a country or overthrowing a government. On definitions, see, for example, Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

and al-Sham, or simply Islamic State—and its allies.[4] The United States has conducted strikes against Da'ish using the 2001 Authorization of the Use of Military Force (AUMF), which provided the executive branch with authority to conduct military operations against the perpetrators of 9/11 and their associates, as well as the 2002 AUMF for the Iraq war. After nine months of bombing and U.S. military, intelligence, and diplomatic support to the Iraqi government and local actors, Da'ish has lost some ground—including most recently in Tikrit. But Da'ish still retains substantial territory in the predominantly Sunni provinces of Anbar, Salaheddine, and Nineveh. In addition, Da'ish remains well-funded, allowing it to continue operations. Its funding comes from such activities as smuggling oil, selling stolen goods, kidnapping and extortion, seizing bank accounts, and smuggling antiquities.[5]

In Syria, the United States is involved in an insurgency campaign, providing limited support to some Syrian rebels against Da'ish under the congressionally-approved train and equip program. But U.S.-led airstrikes have been insufficient to seriously degrade Da'ish in Syria. Over the rest of 2015, Da'ish is likely to remain highly capable because of its substantial resources and its ability to replace killed and captured leaders. In addition, a recent surge of rebel gains in Syria, including by the al Qa'ida–affiliated Jabhat al-Nusrah, is likely to benefit extremists. Jabhat al-Nusrah may be more capable now—with more fighters, funds, and territory—than at any time since its creation in 2011, and it retains a stronghold in northwestern Syrian areas such as Idlib. The recent capture of the town of Jisr al-Shughour in northern Idlib province was just the latest in a string of battlefield victories by rebel forces, which have made advances in both the north and the south of the country.[6] Still, Assad appears to be the only figure acceptable to both Iran and Russia because of his ability to unite the diverse groups fighting the insurgents. These groups include the National Defense Forces, run mainly by Christian and Alawite minorities; the regular army, run by Alawi and Sunni officers; the intelligence services, which oversee the operations of the first two groups; and Iraqi and Lebanese Shi'a fighters, who are primarily backed by Iran.

While there are numerous political, economic, cultural, and other differences between Iraq and Syria, the wars are deeply intertwined. Consequently, it is a mistake for the United States to deal with them sequentially: first Iraq and then, eventually, Syria. Examples of cross-cutting issues include the following:

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[4] Da'ish is an acronym from the Arabic name of the group, al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil 'Iraq wal-Sham.
[5] See, for example, Patrick B. Johnston, *Countering ISIL's Financing: Testimony Presented Before the House Financial Services Committee on November 13, 2014*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-419, 2014. On antiquities, see Financial Action Task Force, *Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, Paris: Financial Action Task Force, February 2015.
[6] See, for example, Liz Sly, "Assad's Hold on Power Looks Shakier Than Ever as Rebels Advance in Syria," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2015.

- **Da'ish and Other Extremist Groups**: Despite sustained counterinsurgency campaigns by the Assad and Abadi security forces, Da'ish and other groups retain substantial control of territory on both sides of the border. Da'ish has frequently moved fighters, money, and equipment back and forth across the Iraqi-Syrian border.

- **Turkish Pipeline:** Foreign fighters continue to use Turkish territory as their primary pipeline into—and out of—Iraq and Syria. Despite recent efforts by Turkey to crack down on cross-border flows, Turkey remains the most important country for foreign fighters.

- **Iranian Involvement**: Iran plays a critical role in supporting Shi'a political actors and militias in Iraq, as well as aiding the Assad government and Hezbollah in Syria. In Iraq, Iran's policy of maintaining influence in Iraq is Manichean. Iranian influence is fairly strong within the central government and among non-governmental actors that challenge central authority. In Syria, Iran's support of the Assad regime and Hezbollah puts it at odds with the United States.

Successful efforts to address the Iraq and Syria wars will also require more effectively dealing with the regional nature of the conflict, including tribal, sectarian, refugee, and other factors influencing Syria and Iraq from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf—along with Turkey and Iran.

**II. Ending Insurgencies**

In addition to *simultaneously* dealing with both Iraq and Syria, it is important to understand what factors have caused insurgencies to end in the past. Since World War II, there have been 178 insurgencies.[7] They have averaged more than 12 years in duration, with a median of 7 years.[8] As Figure 1 shows, the number of insurgencies per year peaked at 60 in 1992 at the end of the Cold War. By 2014, however, the number of insurgencies had increased—in part because of instability caused by the Arab uprisings.

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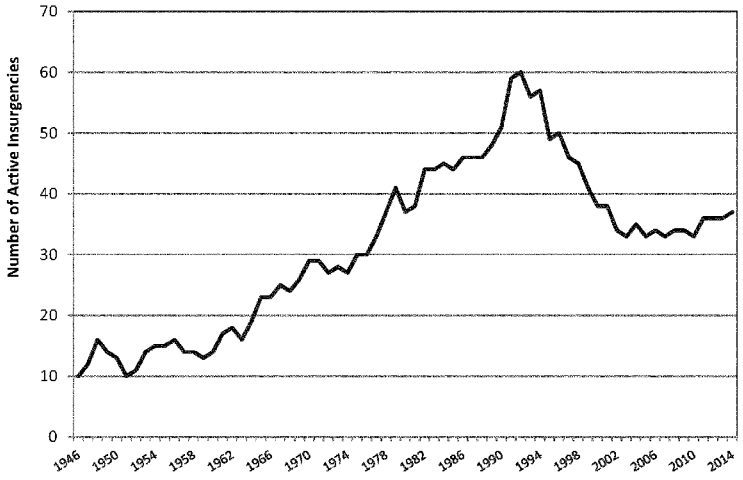
[7] Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare*, draft document, April 2015.

[8] The mean average includes ongoing insurgencies, not just those that have terminated.

**Figure 1: Number of Active Insurgencies Annually, 1946–2014**




SOURCE: Jones, 2015.

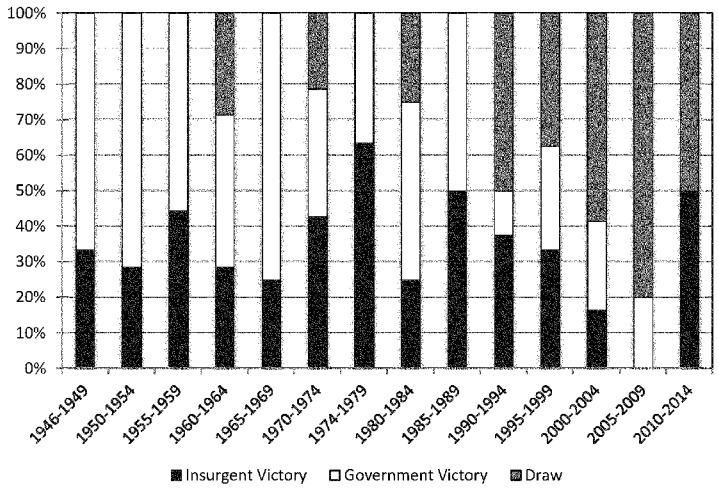
Of those insurgencies that have ended since World War II, nearly three quarters terminated because of a military victory by one side or the other—with 35 percent ending in a victory by insurgents and 37 percent in a government victory.[9] By comparison, only 27 percent ended in a draw, which included such outcomes as a negotiated settlement.[10] But draws have become more common in recent years. Figure 2 highlights how insurgencies have ended by outcome. Part of this increase in draws was likely caused by the termination of U.S. and Soviet support to insurgencies at the end of the Cold

[9] The data indicate that 50 insurgencies ended with an insurgent victory and 52 ended with a government victory, out of a total of 141 insurgencies that terminated between 1946 and 2014. In addition, 39 insurgencies ended in a "draw."

[10] Cases were coded as a draw if they ended because of a negotiated settlement or a sustained cease fire, or if the violence level dropped to 25 deaths per year for a sustained period (but there was no settlement).

War, including in such countries as El Salvador. There may be other reasons, such as greater involvement by major powers and the United Nations in brokering peace negotiations.[11]

**Figure 2: Insurgency Ending by Outcome, 1946–2014**[12]




SOURCE: Jones, 2015.

The next two subsections examine implications for Iraq and Syria.

**A. Lessons for Iraq:** The modern history of insurgent outcomes has important lessons for Iraqi and allied efforts to defeat Da'ish. Several factors increase the probability of a government victory. I will highlight two.

First, insurgents that utilize brutal tactics often lose insurgencies because their actions undermine local support, especially if governments are able to take advantage of insurgent mistakes. After all,

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[11] See, for example, Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.
[12] Jones, 2015.

popular support is a *sin qua non* in insurgent warfare. "Without question," wrote Mao Tse-Tung, "the fountainhead of guerrilla warfare is in the masses of the people."[13] These brutal tactics can involve deliberately targeting non-combatants to raise the societal costs of continued resistance or to coerce the government to concede to insurgent demands. The suffering these insurgent campaigns inflict on civilians has often been a source of recruitment for counterinsurgent forces. Da'ish's anti-Shi'a attacks and brutal executions, including beheadings and burnings, have been too extreme even for al Qa'ida. Some tactics, such as suicide attacks, have often been counterproductive, in part because suicide bombing campaigns virtually always kill civilians. No insurgent group that has utilized suicide terrorism has won an insurgency. In addition, Da'ish appears to be focusing more on punishing locals than it does on governing effectively, with residents of such cities as Mosul unhappy about the quality of electricity, water, sanitation, and other services that Da'ish has provided. Across the border in Syria, there have also been local protests against Da'ish in Ar Raqqah, Al Bab, and other areas.

There are numerous examples in which insurgent brutality undermined local support. During the insurgency in Kenya, which lasted from 1952 to 1956, Mau Mau rebels slaughtered members of the Kikuyu ethnic group that supported the government. One of the most egregious examples was in the town of Lari, Kenya, in March 1953. Mau Mau operatives slaughtered men, women, and children because they had friends or family members that were outspoken opponents of Mau Mau, undermining their support base.[14] In Algeria, the government took advantage of atrocities by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the 1990s. For example, in the town of Hai Bounab, a significant component of the population supported the GIA, including the targeting of police and home guards.[15] But the situation evolved in August 1997. "The people in Hai Bounab changed sides the day the five girls were beheaded. That's when they realized that the same thing could happen to them."[16] By 2001, the GIA was decimated thanks, in part, to successful Algerian government efforts to undermine their support base among the population. In Northern Ireland, the British government took advantage of several Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombings to undermine support for the republican cause. One of the most significant opportunities occurred on August 15, 1998, when the Real IRA detonated a car bomb in Omagh, County Tyrone. It killed 29 people and injured more than 200 others, the highest death toll from a single incident during the conflict. And in Chechnya, the Russian government developed an effective information campaign that painted Chechen insurgents as terrorists,

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[13] Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 73.
[14] On Mau Mau activity, see Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
[15] Edmund Burke III and David N. Yaghoubian, eds., *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 2006, p. 384.
[16] Baya Gacemi, *I, Nadia, Wife of a Terrorist*, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2006, p. 141.

particularly after the attacks at the Dubrovka Theater in October 2002, the August 2004 suicide attacks on two Russian passenger aircraft, and the elementary school attack in Beslan in September 2004.

Second, outside support can be extremely beneficial to insurgents, making it important to severely degrade foreign aid. Outside actors can provide a range of services (such as combat support, sanctuary, training, and intelligence) and goods (such as money, lethal material, and non-lethal material). Da'ish does not receive substantial aid from donors in the Persian Gulf, as some have claimed, but—as already mentioned—by such activities as selling stolen goods and other licit and illicit activity. However, Da'ish has been able to replenish key personnel by recruiting individuals from overseas that move through Turkey and other neighboring countries.

Historically, there are numerous cases in which governments have effectively undermined outside support. In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used the southern state of Tamil Nadu in India as a sanctuary for its war against the Sri Lankan government, which lasted from 1983 to 2009. But the Sri Lankan Navy conducted an effective maritime interdiction campaign against the LTTE, particularly by the mid-2000s. As one study concluded, a "pivotal element of the government victory was the evolution of a successful maritime interdiction strategy by the [Sri Lankan Navy], one that degraded the insurgency's robust maritime logistical network and forced their guerrillas to confront the government's final land offensives with diminished resources."[17] Sri Lankan Navy operations reduced the LTTE's smuggling of arms and other material across Palk Strait, undermined the LTTE's sea lines of communication, and prevented escape of the top LTTE leadership.

In addition to their successes in island nations like Sri Lanka, counterinsurgents have conducted numerous effective border interdiction campaigns in countries with land borders. The goal is to make infiltration difficult and raise the costs of external sanctuary by forcing insurgents to navigate perilous minefields and electric fences, elude ground and aerial surveillance, and avoid killing zones. As one assessment concluded: "Historically, barriers and pursuit forces have been used with great success to counter transnational insurgents."[18]

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[17] Justin O. Smith, "Maritime Interdiction in Sri Lanka's Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 449.
[18] Paul Staniland, "Defeating Transnational Insurgencies: The Best Offense Is a Good Fence," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 32.

In Algeria, the French significantly decreased cross-border traffic along the Algerian-Tunisian border after constructing the Morice Line during the war that lasted from 1954–1962. The Morice Line also created a "hunting preserve" where French security forces could identify and target National Liberation Front (FLN) and National Liberation Army (ALN) personnel.[19] The historian Alistair Horne concluded that the Morice Line was "a remarkable and sinister triumph of military technology."[20] In Western Sahara, Morocco constructed a series of berms made of earth and dotted with trenches, bunkers, fences, and landmines to monitor, deter, and interdict cross-border movement. The berm, which was built in six main stages between 1980 and 1987, totaled nearly 1,700 miles and substantially reduced Polisario insurgent activity. And in Greece, Tito closed Yugoslavia's border with Greece during the war that lasted from 1946 to 1949, denying Greek insurgents critical refuge and resupplies.

**B. Lessons for Syria:** The recent history of insurgency has important lessons for aid to Syrian rebels. Several factors increase the probability of an insurgent victory or a negotiated settlement.

One is that, to be successful, insurgent groups need to establish a centralized organizational structure, which is more likely to achieve victory than a decentralized, networked structure. In Syria, the absence of a cohesive umbrella structure among rebel groups has been a major problem. Centralized structures are more effective in identifying and punishing those engaged in shirking or defecting. Centralized structures are also more effective in helping insurgent leaders govern territory.

The vast majority of insurgent groups since 1946 (91 percent) have set up centralized structures.[21] But there is wide variation in the *degree* of centralization. Groups can have a high level of central control (the leadership directly controls virtually all operations and resources), a moderate level of central control (the leadership directly controls some, but not all, operations and resources), and a low level of centralized control (the leadership directly controls few operations and resources).[22] Figure 3 shows a simple cross-tabulation of the degree of intragroup centralization and the outcome

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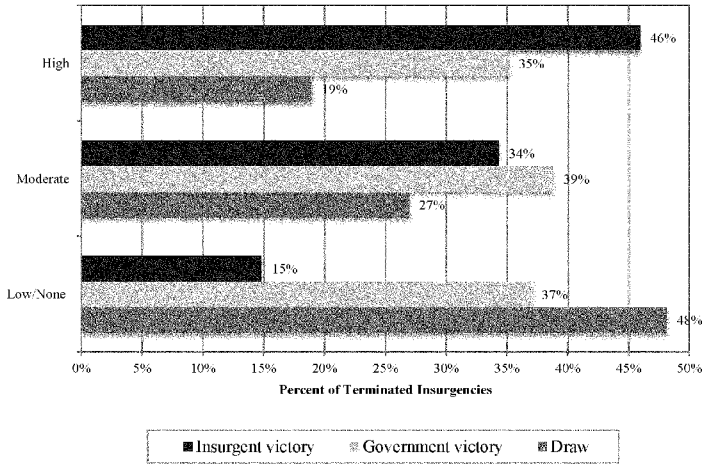
[19] Russell Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 181–182.
[20] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962*, New York: Viking Press,1978, p. 263.
[21] Data adapted from Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, David Cunningham, and Idean Salehyan, *Non-State Actor Data: Version 3.4*, November 23, 2013, available at: http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/eacd.html. In insurgencies with multiple groups, coding is based on the structure of the dominant group. Nine cases in our dataset are coded as "not available (n/a)" either because the insurgency does not appear in the Uniform Collateral Data Portal (UCDP) database (e.g., Ukraine, 2014–present) or because UCDP codes the degree of centralization as "n/a."
[22] The high, moderate, and low codings come from the Non-State Actor Data Set. See David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, Codebook for the Non-State Actor Data, University of North Texas, Version 3.3, January 2012.

of terminated insurgencies. It suggests that groups with high levels of centralization are more likely to achieve victory (46 percent) than ones with moderate (34 percent) or low (15 percent) levels of centralization.

**Figure 3: Degree of Centralization and Outcome of Insurgencies, 1946–2014**




SOURCE: Jones, 2015.

The challenge in Syria, of course, is that U.S.- and allied-backed rebels would need to fight both the government and groups that threaten the United States (such as Da'ish and Jabhat al-Nusrah). History shows that effectively fighting on two fronts is possible. Competition among groups is fairly common in insurgencies, occurring in nearly one-third of insurgencies that have more than one group. In Algeria, the FLN carried out one battle against the French and another to suppress rival nationalist elements, ethnic separatists, and even dissent within the FLN. The most important rival was the Algerian Nationalist Movement, formed by dissident elements of Messali Hadj's Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties just before the outbreak of the rebellion. The conflict between the FLN and the Algerian Nationalist Movement extended to metropolitan France, where the two groups vied for the support of the Algerian population and carried out a war of terrorism against each other. Between October 1956 and October 1957 alone, some 550 Algerian Muslims were killed, and more than 2,200 were wounded in terrorist incidents in France. The FLN eventually triumphed over the

Algerian Nationalist Movement.[23] In Peru, Sendero Luminoso conducted a ruthless campaign against another insurgent group, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, at the same time it fought the government. Until 1984, Sendero had retained a virtual monopoly of the insurgency.[24] And in Sri Lanka, the LTTE systematically eliminated competition from other groups beginning in the mid-1980s, while it was still fighting the Sri Lankan government.[25]

**III. Steps to Consider**

U.S. efforts in Iraq and Syria must be done as part of a broader effort to undermine the ideology of extremists, target key leaders with an appropriate authorization of the use of military force, build the capacity of local allies, help address local grievances, and engage in political dialogue. These steps must also involve coordination among multiple U.S. agencies and allies—such as foreign governments, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations—overseas. While there are numerous policy steps the U.S. government could make, following are several steps that Congress should consider.

**A. Improve Interdiction in Turkey and Other Neighboring States:** Turkey has taken some steps to crack down on foreign fighter flows through the country. For instance, it has added thousands of names to its "banned from entry" list. But these steps are not sufficient. Turkey is still the most important pipeline for foreign jihadists, including those that support Da'ish and al Qa'ida–affiliated groups in Iraq and Syria. The goal in Turkey should be to identify key routes that insurgents use to transit people and material; improve aerial, ground, and maritime surveillance; strengthen the capacity and resources of border security personnel; construct barriers where feasible, such as walls and berms; and conduct raids against infiltrators.

This strategy should also include targeting revenue sources for groups like Da'ish in Iraq, Syria, and neighboring countries such as Turkey. For example, Da'ish raises most of its money through licit and illicit trafficking routes that move through Turkey and other neighbors. Undermining these sources of

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[23] Norman C. Walpole et al., *U.S. Army Handbook for Algeria*, Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 550-44, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, January 1965, pp. 38–39; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Algerian Insurrection, 1954–62* , Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967, pp. 89–90; Charles R. Schrader, *The First Helicopter War: Logistics and Mobility in Algeria, 1954-1962*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999, p. 143.
[24] Raul Gonzalez, "Sendero vs. MRTA," *QueHacer*, No. 46, April-May 1987, pp. 47–53.
[25] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 51.

revenue requires providing support for local ground, air, and maritime operations that disrupt these networks. Against Da'ish, for instance, effective ground and air strikes by local forces—with U.S. assistance—can disrupt Da'ish's oil operations, reduce its profits, and buy time to build more-robust diplomatic, intelligence, and military capabilities for a coordinated effort to weaken Da'ish financially. One challenge is to avoid destroying those assets that legitimate successor governments will need to maintain.[26] Indeed, such targets as Da'ish-controlled banks, an important coffer for funds, should be a U.S. priority.

**B. Rethink the Syrian Train and Equip Program**: The United States should seriously rethink the Syrian train and equip program for several reasons. First, it makes little sense to expend U.S. financial, diplomatic, and military resources without a long-term strategy and stated objectives in Syria. The United States needs to first agree on its approach and the desired end state in Syria—and *then* design a Syrian train and equip program (along with diplomatic and other tools) to help achieve that end state. An example of key questions include: Should the goal in Syria be to remove Assad and his regime from power? Should it be to encourage Assad to leave, perhaps through a negotiated settlement, but to keep most of the state institutions intact? Or should it be to keep the Assad regime in power and focus only on degrading Da'ish and other jihadist groups that pose a threat to the United States?

Second, it is problematic to train Syrian insurgents to counter Dai'sh and not, what virtually all Syrian rebels want, to fight against an Assad regime that has used chemical weapons on its own population. The primary struggle among most Syrians is about Assad, not Da'ish. Asking U.S.-supported rebels to focus on Da'ish—and not the Syrian regime—is bound to undermine the morale and effectiveness of U.S.-trained rebels.

Third, successful U.S. efforts to train, advise, and assist local security forces—such as in the Philippines, Colombia, Iraq during the Anbar Awakening, and even Afghanistan in 2001 with the Northern Alliance—have generally required U.S. special operations forces and other units to work with locals on the ground. With the Syrian train and equip program, the primary U.S. relationship is outside of Syria. This approach severely limits the amount of hands-on training the United States can provide to rebels, and it makes it difficult to assess the quality of U.S.-trained rebels in combat.

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[26] See, for example, Johnston, 2014.

Based on these reasons, Congress should consider a pause on resourcing Syrian rebels—or even an end to the program—without a clear explanation of U.S. strategy and long-term goals.

**C. Revise the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs:** Congress should pass a new AUMF against Da'ish and other extremist groups that threaten the United States, including al Qa'ida.[27] This is less about whether the U.S. president can use force against Da'ish and other groups, including al Qa'ida, but rather about Congress's support for that action. The President has asked Congress for the authority to do something he is already doing and for which he believes he already has sufficient authorization.

Most U.S. military operations against terrorist groups are conducted under authorities Congress granted the executive branch after 9/11 in the 2001 AUMF. Relying on the 2001 authorization today, however, is far from ideal, and it would be better if Congress updated the legislation to reflect the current counterterrorist challenge. The 2001 authorization is clearly linked to the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, many of whom have been eliminated. The need for counterterrorist operations continues, but key groups the United States faces are no longer those that most threatened the United States in 2001. Operations can continue under the 2001 authority, but not without legal gymnastics in some cases.

It would therefore be better to pass broad new authorities that accurately describe and authorize operations against today's threat. Clearly aligning Congress and the executive branch on this issue would telegraph continued U.S. resolve and help clarify for the American public and the world the severity and character of the current counterterrorist challenge. Legislation should reflect the constitutional prerogatives of both the legislative and executive branches—to authorize and to implement the inherent right of defense of the nation—in order to bring the full force of the law to bear on the daunting terrorism challenges. A new AUMF should likely include: (1) no geographical limitations, (2) a fairly broad definition of targeted terrorist groups and their associates, (3) specified purposes for which military force may be used, (4) a requirement to report to Congress on groups that have been targeted under the authority, and (5) a renewal clause.

There are several options. The first and most desirable is simply for Congress to pass one omnibus authority that contains all the above considerations. This is the best option because it will send the

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[27] This recommendation draws heavily from ongoing RAND research and analysis by Christopher Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, who organized workshops on AUMF in November 2014 and February 2015 that included executive branch, legislative branch, and outside subject-matter experts.

clearest message about U.S. commitment to future counterterrorism operations and offer a more rational overall framework for counterterrorism needs. There are several other options that Congress could take: pass a new AUMF specifically for operations against Da'ish and take no action to reform the 2001 authorization; pass the counter-Da'ish authorization and update the 2001 legislation at a later date; or pass counter-Da'ish legislation and repeal the 2001 authorization. A final option—no action at all—now seems the most likely.

The purpose of AUMF reform now should be on providing a strong statement of congressional and broader public support for U.S. military operations against the terrorist threat as it exists today and is likely to develop in the near future.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

General Keane.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL JACK KEANE, USA, RETIRED, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR**

General KEANE. Thank you, Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee for inviting me back to testify. I am honored to be with such a distinguished panel today.

Attached to my written testimony are three maps that are prepared by ISW for your reference, and let me just correct something in your statement, Madam Chairman. I am a Vietnam but I did—my troops served in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia.

In my judgements, it is indisputable that U.S. policy failures in Iraq and Syria enabled Iranian expansion in the Middle East, enabled ISIS to reemerge, establish a sanctuary in Syria, expand into Iraq, Egyptian Sinai, North Africa and South Asia while conducting daily acts of barbarism against humanity and civilization, enabled the al-Qaeda, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra, to expand significantly in Syria to include the Khorasan Group, which has committed to out-of-region attacks against the United States and Europe while expanding in north and northeast Africa, enabled Assad to kill over 220,000 Syrians while forcing the displacement of over 7 million people from their homes, a humanitarian catastrophe, as the Syrian nation is systematically destroyed, which is an accelerant for jihadist groups regionally and globally.

One cannot simply blame the underlying factors that exist in the region and absolve the United States of specific policy decisions that have unintended adverse consequences. The facts are the following on Iraq.

By 2009, the Sunni insurgency supported by al-Qaeda and Iranian-backed Shi'a militias and others were defeated. However, beginning in 2009,the new administration begins to pull away from Iraq politically. Iran regains influence.

In 2010, Maliki loses the election by one vote. But instead of helping his preferred opponent, Allawi, to form a new government, the United States inexplicably backs Maliki.

In 2011, the U.S. pulls out all troops. The al-Qaeda in Iraq reemerges as ISIS. In Syria, the Arab Spring reaches Syria in 2011. Despite Assad's obvious military advantage, the opposition is succeeding. Many predict the regime will fall as the opposition seeks additional ammunition and weapons to fight the regime.

While the President calls for Assad to go, he surprisingly refuses the opposition request. Iran begins daily flights of supplies and ammunition plus the commitment of Quds Force advisors to include Qasem Soleimani.

Iran deploys its proxies, 5,000 Hezbollah from Lebanon and at its peak 20,000 Iraqi Shi'a militia. The momentum shifts to Assad's favor. The al-Qaeda recognizes the opportunity and moves in, and ISIS in 2012 deploys from Iraq to northeastern Syria to establish a sanctuary.

To avoid a regional spillover war, which we certainly have now, Clinton, Panetta, Dempsey, CIA Director Petraeus make a formal recommendation to arm the opposition in the summer of 2012.

The President refuses again. The killing continues. Assad, in 2013, as you pointed out, Madam Chairman, uses CW—chemical weapons—and cross the U.S. red line. But still the President does not act.

ISIS invades Iraq in 2014. The Maliki government requests assistance. The President refuses. Iran begins immediate assistance—Quds Force advisors, Qasem Soleimani, daily flights of supplies and ammunition.

In 2014 Mosul falls. The Maliki government, again, requests air power and the President refuses. Not until August, some 8 months after the ISIS invasion, does the United States respond.

Despite ISIS' recent setbacks in Iraq, as you can see on the ISIS sanctuary map, it still holds considerable territory and influence in Iraq and remains on offense today while it has expanded its territorial control and influence in Syria.

Moreover, it has expanded its influence in what is called the near abroad, as you can see on the global rings map. Its affiliates, or wilayats, are expanding as ISIS is rapidly becoming the new face of radical Islam and competing with al-Qaeda for control and influence. Those are the black stars on that map.

What about the U.S. strategy? In Iraq, we are taking less than half measures to assist the Iraqi security forces, the Kurds and the Sunni tribes, which stretches out the time to defeat ISIS as casualties mount.

In Syrian, there are no plans to defeat ISIS. To do so requires an effective ground forces supported by air power. There is none. U.S. policy is fundamentally inadequate to defeat ISIS.

As to Assad, he must go. Allowing Assad to continue his genocide sows the seeds for generational regional disorder and empowers expansionist Iran. As to Iran, the United States has no strategy to stop the regional hegemonic aspirations of the Iranian regime. On the contrary, the U.S. is desperately and naively, in my judgment, moving to accommodate Iran on a nuclear deal that Iran's aggressive behavior will change as it supposedly joins the community of nations.

In conclusion, the appalling lack of a comprehensive and coherent strategy to defeat radical Islam 22 years after the first attack on the World Trade center and almost 14 years after 9/11 is a generational policy failure.

To date, we don't define radical Islam. We don't explain it. We don't try to understand its appeal. We don't counter and undermine the ideology, which is grounded in a religious belief system.

This is a regional problem become a global problem and the countries who have a vested interest in defeating radical Islam should join together in an alliance to develop a comprehensive strategy.

The balance of power in the Middle East is shifting against the United States' regional interest and against the United States' security.

There is much that can be accomplished with our allies to include a Syrian strategy but the reality is American power is considered and our credibility is at an all-time low.

There are no simple answers or solutions. But without strong U.S. leadership, our adversaries will continue to be emboldened. Our friends, out of fear, are susceptible to poor decisions while the Middle East region and the world becomes a more dangerous place.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Keane follows:]

**Testimony**

**United States House of Representatives**

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs**
**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

**By**

**General John M. Keane, USA (Ret)**

**on**

**Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Towards Iraq and Syria**

**1100 hours, 30 April 2015**

**Rayburn House Office Building**

**Room 2172**

Thank you Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee for inviting me back to testify today on the "Regional Impact of US Policy towards Iraq and Syria." Am honored to be with such a distinguished panel. Attached to my written testimony are 3 maps prepared by ISW for your reference.

It is indisputable in my judgment, that U.S. policy failures in Iraq and Syria:

-- enabled Iranian expansion in the Middle East.

-- enabled ISIS to reemerge, establish a sanctuary in Syria and expand into Iraq, Egyptian Sinai, North Africa and South Asia, while conducting daily acts of barbarism against humanity and civilization.

-- enabled the Al Qaeda (AQ) to expand significantly in Syria to include the Khorasan Group which is committed to out of region attacks against the US and Europe , while also expanding in North and North East Africa.

-- enabled Assad and his regime to very methodically kill over 220K of his own population while forcing the displacement of over 7M

people from their homes, a humanitarian catastrophe, as the Syrian nation is systematically destroyed.

While I certainly understand there are other underlying factors contributing to the political, social and chaotic upheaval in the region such as historical sectarianism, repressive regimes, political incompetence, lack of moral courage, political and social injustice and the lack of economic opportunity. One cannot simply blame these "larger forces operating in the region" and absolve the US of specific policy decisions that has unintended adverse consequences. The facts are:

1. IRAQ:

By 2009 the Sunni insurgency supported by AQ and the Iranian backed Shia militias and others were defeated. This is the only time since the beginning of the Iranian regime in 1980 that an Iranian proxy was defeated. However beginning in 2009, the US begins to pull away from Iraq politically, Maliki knows he has a different relationship with the new administration and despite the Iranian defeat the previous year, Iran begins to regain influence. In 2010 Maliki loses the election by one vote but instead of helping his preferred opponent, Allawi, to form a new government, the US inexplicably

backs Maliki. In 2011 the US pulls all troops out leaving Iraq with no effective CT capability and no comprehensive intelligence. AQI reemerges as ISIS.

2. SYRIA:

The Arab Spring reaches Syria in 2011, Assad has a very violent response, many military leaders and troops depart the regime forces and join the opposition. Despite Assad's obvious military advantage, the opposition attacks the regime in multiple locations, simultaneously, and many predict the regime will fall, as the opposition force seeks additional ammunition and more sophisticated weapons to fight the regime. While the President calls for Assad to go, he, surprisingly, refuses the opposition force request. Iran, recognizing the Assad regime's problems, begins daily flights of supplies and ammunition plus the commitment of Quds force advisors to include Qassem Soleimani. Furthermore, Iran deploys its proxies: 5K Hezbollah from Lebanon and, at its peak, 20K Iraqi Shia militia. Aided also by the Russians, the momentum shifts to Assad's favor. Systematic killing of the Syrian people begins, the AQ recognizes the opportunity of this political and social

upheaval and moves in and ISIS in 2012 deploys from Iraq to North Eastern Syria to establish a sanctuary.

Many, who recognize the danger of a regional spillover war, desire the moderate opposition to be armed and trained robustly and, quickly. Secretaries Clinton and Panetta, General Dempsey and Director, CIA, Petraeus make a similar recommendation in the summer of 2012, the President refuses. The killing continues, Assad in 2013 uses CW and crosses the US "redline" but still the US president does not act. American power and credibility reaches all time lows in the region.

3. ISIS:

After expanding territory and governance considerably in Syria, ISIS invades Iraq in January 2014. The Maliki government requests assistance. The President refuses. Iran begins immediate assistance, similar to Syria: Quds force advisors, Qassem Soleimani, daily flights of supplies and ammunition. In June 2014, Mosul falls and the Maliki government again requests emergency air power. The President refuses. Not until August, some 8 months after the ISIS invasion does the US respond and the evidence suggests the beheading of Americans by ISIS and the dramatic and sudden

shift in American public opinion are a catalyst for the change in policy. Despite ISIS recent setbacks in Iraq as you can see on the ISIS sanctuary map, it still holds considerable territory and influence in Iraq and remains on offense today, while it has expanded its territorial control and influence in Syria. Moreover it is expanding its influence in what it calls the "near abroad" as you can see on the global rings map. Its affiliates or Wilayats are expanding as ISIS is rapidly becoming the new face of radical Islam and competing with AQ for control and influence.

US STRATEGY:

In Iraq we are taking less than half measures to assist the ISF with insufficient trainers and advisors, no forward air controllers, insufficient plans to train the Sunni tribes, insufficient arms to the Kurds and Sunnis, and no direct action SOF to hunt down and kill ISIS leaders. In Syria there are no plans to defeat ISIS. To do so requires an effective ground force supported by air power. There is none. US policy is to train 5K new recruits for the FSA which is fighting the regime, not ISIS and, indeed, ISIS recruits on average one thousand new fighters a month. Does this policy make any sense? The US policy to defeat ISIS: to form a politically inclusive government in Iraq,

to conduct CT, to provide humanitarian assistance, to counter the financing, to undermine the ideology and to train and assist local forces, while meaningful with some moderate success is fundamentally inadequate to defeat ISIS.

Since 2009 Iran has gained significant influence in Iraq. Syria is now Iran's client state, having saved the Syrian regime, and Iran is seeking to consolidate political and military power through the Houthis in Yemen, which, if successful, will shift the balance of power in the region as it gains control of the strategic pathway to and from the Suez Canal. The US has no strategy to stop the regional hegemonic aspirations of the Iranian regime. On the contrary the US is desperately and naively moving to accommodate Iran on a nuclear deal hoping that Iran's aggressive behavior will change as it supposedly joins the community of nations.

CONCLUSION:

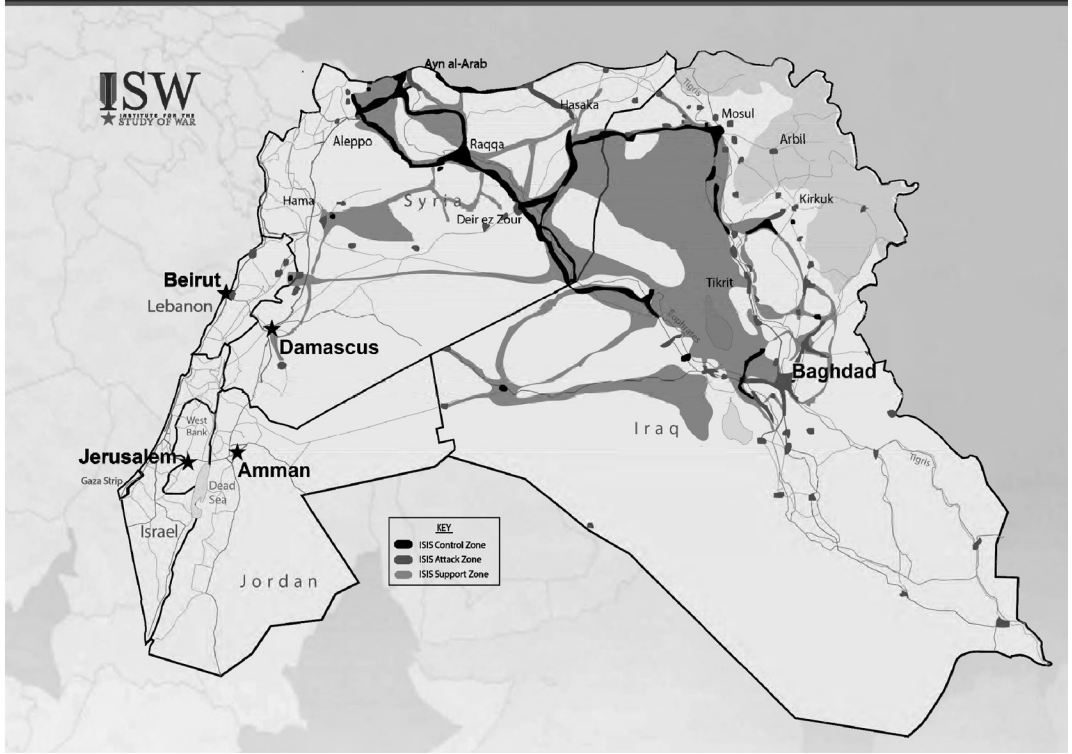
The appalling lack of a comprehensive and coherent strategy to defeat radical Islam, 22 years after the first attack on the WTC, 17 years after the two embassy bombings in Africa, 14 years after the USS Cole attack and almost 14 years after 9/11 is a generational policy failure that transcends

republican and democratic administrations. To date, we don't define radical Islam, we don't explain it, we don't try to understand its appeal, we don't counter and undermine the ideology which is grounded in a religious belief system. When I say we, I don't meant just the US, far from it. This is not just a regional problem, it is becoming a global problem and the countries who have a vested interest in stopping and defeating radical Islam should join together in an alliance to determine what a comprehensive strategy should be and how to enlist the Muslim religious leaders to undermine a religious ideology. Such an alliance would share intelligence, technology, equipment and training, similar to NATO and SEATO which successfully opposed a communist ideology.

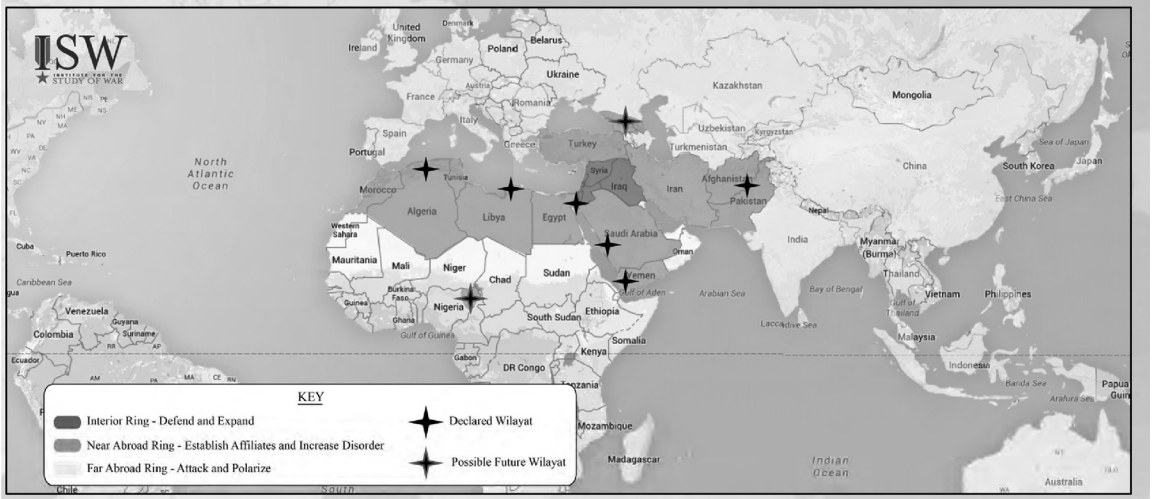
The balance of power in the Middle East is shifting against the US regional interests and against US security. As stated, American power is considered weak and our credibility is at an all time low. There are no simple answers or solutions but without strong US leadership, our adversaries will continue to be emboldened, our friends out of fear are susceptible to poor decisions, while the Middle East region and the world becomes a more dangerous place.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

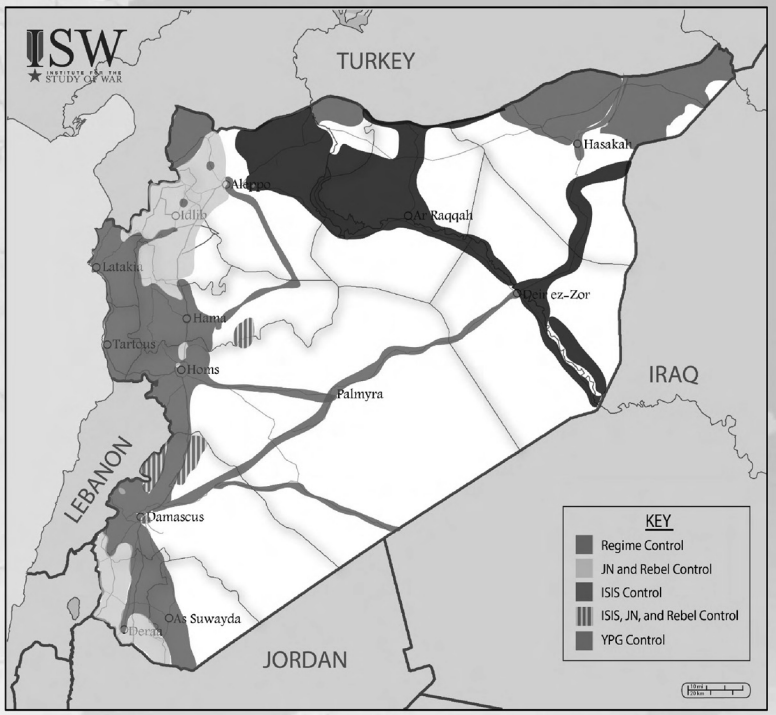
# ISIS Sanctuary: April 2015



# ISIS's Global Rings: April 2015



# Control in Syria: April 2015



Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, General.

Dr. Wittes.

**STATEMENT OF TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, PH.D., DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY AT BROOKINGS**

Ms. WITTES. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, members of the committee. I appreciate the invitation. I must emphasize, as always, that I represent only myself. Brookings does not take any institutional positions on policy issues.

The Middle East is disordered more today than in perhaps a half century and ISIS is only a symptom of this underlying breakdown in regional order.

The upheaval in the region has likewise generated newly assertive regional powers like Turkey, new opportunities for longstanding troublemakers like Iran and Hezbollah, and sometimes bitter disputes between Arab States.

Of course, this disorder is itself the product, the same long-building pressures that generated the Arab Spring. Iraq and Syria may be our focus today, but marginalizing extremist movements like ISIS demands attention to other weak and fragile states in the region.

It is no accident that Syria and Libya are the most disordered and violent parts of the region today because these are the places where leaders, having failed to govern in a manner that could have prevented mass dissent, then sought to repress their people through the use of force.

These brutal power-hungry shortsighted men broke their crumbling states to bits and drove their societies to civil war and it is the terrible choices of these terrible leaders more than anything else that created the openings that al-Qaeda, ISIS and other sectarian killers across the region now exploit.

The roots of the region's upending in this fraying and broken social contract remind us that ISIS is not the cause of today's disorder and it is not the disease.

The broken state-society relationship is what must be addressed if the region is to return to some form of stability. This means that whatever the United States does militarily in Iraq and Syria we must focus our strategy on the politics.

In Iraq, the government has given non-state militias, some under Iranian influence, a large role in the fight in ways that have exacerbated Sunni anxieties and made the fight against ISIS harder.

That said, the operation in Tikrit last month in which Iranian-supported militias failed and the Iraqi Government relied on American air support for victory, showed the limits of Iranian influence.

The U.S. strategy rightly has the Iraqi Government own responsibility for its own choices in this battle for its territory and the hearts and minds of its people.

This strategy ultimately stands or falls on Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi's ability to move forward with the kind of political and security steps that will build the confidence of Iraq Sunnis in the Iraqi state.

In Syria, as we have been discussing, U.S. efforts to equip and train cooperative Syrian opposition forces will take more than a year, perhaps more than two, to have any meaningful battlefield

impact, and meanwhile a coalition of more extremist Islamist groups is successfully routing Syrian military forces in Idlib Province.

So the question is what will follow the withdrawal of Assad's forces—extremist rule or civil administration?

The U.S. must urgently focus on working with its allies and with Syrian opposition forces on the ground to shape the situation so as to advance the latter.

Let me talk about our partners in the region. The fall of Mosul last June brought a momentary unity between American priorities and those of our traditional regional partners and allowed the establishment of this anti-ISIS coalition. But it is a thin coalition and it has been from the start.

Today, Saudi Arabia and others seem to prioritize the Iranian threat over the threat from ISIS and the military operation in Yemen is evidence for this.

The reassurance that our partners are looking for is to see the United States demonstrate its recognition and its readiness to push back against Iran's destabilizing activities around the region, and the primary arena in which Arab states wish to see that from the U.S. is in Syria.

So efforts to help expose and push back against those Iranian behaviors should be a key element of America's policies in the coming months, and I would say that is true regardless of the outcome of the nuclear talks because I think that Iranian behavior will continue regardless of the outcome of the nuclear talks.

In addition, the United States must attend to the political components of its policy in Iraq and Syria to ensure that territory and people liberated from ISIS or from Assad find reliable security from a responsible civil administration, not rough justice from extremist militias whether Sunni or Shi'a.

Finally, the United States must address the underlying vulnerabilities that produced this upheaval and gave space for ISIS across the region.

We must devote greater attention to supporting governments like Tunisia, who are using political compromise instead of violence to resolve disputes.

We should help local partners forge meaningful governance, not just a security presence, in ungoverned spaces like the Sinai.

Ultimately, building resilient societies that can marginalize extremists requires governments that can win citizens' trust and loyalty and it requires systems that can offer young people meaningful opportunities to fulfill their long-denied dreams so that they don't place their hopes in a world after this one.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wittes follows:]

**Testimony of**
**Tamara Cofman Wittes**
**Director and Senior Fellow**
**Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution**

**Hearing: Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Toward Iraq and Syria**
**House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**
**April 30, 2015**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. I am delighted to offer my views. I must emphasize, as always, that I represent only myself before you today; the Brookings Institution does not take any institutional positions on policy issues.

The Roots of Regional Disorder

The Middle East is disordered, more so than at any time since the 1950s, when the Suez War, revolutions in a host of states, and the Yemeni civil war shaped the Arab state system we knew before 2011. Today's disorder came about because of long-building trends, and long-brewing problems, that undermined the authoritarian bargain by which these states maintained support from and control over their societies, and that produced widespread discontent that burst into the open in late 2010.

This is not to say that the Arab Spring caused the turmoil and violence we are witnessing now. It is to say that today we are witnessing the outcome of a longstanding crisis in state-society relations in the Arab world, one that took several decades to germinate, one that governments failed to address. This long-brewing crisis generated revolutions, to which many governments responded poorly: in ways that exacerbated societal divisions, further weakened and in some cases collapsed state institutions, generated violence, enabled the growth of terrorist movements, and has morphed in at least three countries into outright civil war.

It's no accident that Syria and Libya are the most disordered and violent parts of the region today. These are the places where leaders, having failed to act in a manner that could have prevented mass popular uprisings, then sought to repress their people through the use of force. Instead of restoring order, these brutal, power-hungry and shortsighted men broke their crumbling states to bits and drove their societies to civil war.

As institutions of basic governance and community order failed, those with guns to impose their will gained power. As the state apparatus turned against its own citizens, those citizens turned elsewhere for protection – toward identity-based, sectarian militias and toward extremist groups, often with horrific agendas.

The terrible choices of these terrible leaders, more than anything else, created the openings Al Qaeda, ISIS, and sectarian killers across the region now exploit for their own purposes, including to threaten American interests. And those same terrible choices that created a demand for militias in Syria has had a similar effect in the Arab states that are

still standing – populations fearful of spreading violence are demanding that their governments provide order and security – even at the cost of freedom, accountability, or basic rights.

The roots of the region's upending – in the fraying and broken social contract – remind us that ISIS is not just an accelerant of chaos but is also a symptom of an underlying disorder. It is not the cause and not the disease. Where leaders have the will and capacity to govern without violence, where citizens are active participants in public life, and where state institutions respond to citizens' needs and are accountable to the public, terrorism may be a fringe phenomenon but will not be a dire threat.

**The broken state-society relationship must be addressed if the region is to return to some form of stability. This has important implications for U.S. policy now, as the coalition pushes back ISIS in Iraq, and a coalition of extremist rebels in Syria pushes back Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syria.**

With the breakdown of states, we also witnessed the breakdown of the regional order that had been in place more or less since the end of World War II. I don't think it's appropriate to talk about the end of Sykes-Picot, because what we are dealing with is not really about borders – and changing borders is no magic bullet for resolving the existing inter-communal conflicts. Instead, one can envision the conflicts raging across the region as along three distinct axes:

- One is about the nature of the state – a conflict between the traditional governments and the movements of political Islam.
- One is about the balance of power – a conflict between traditional Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia and the revolutionary Shia Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies.
- A third is about the purpose of life – an argument between the apocalyptic forces of Da'esh and everyone else.

These cross-cutting conflicts draw the states of the region into shifting coalitions in different arenas.

U.S. Policy in Iraq and Syria

Despite his previous intentions and preferences, and despite the initial reticence and war-weariness of the American public, President Obama last year reversed his effort to "rebalance" America's foreign policy focus away from the Middle East, and re-committed American blood and treasure to a fight against violent extremism in the heart of the Arab world. This reversal, not two years after the United States had withdrawn its last soldiers from Iraq, was driven by a recognition that the spillover from the Syrian civil war could no longer be contained, and by the horrific video-broadcast beheadings of two American civilians by the so-called Islamic State group. But Obama's new commitment to the Middle East is fraught with uncertainties that are already provoking anxiety, both in the United States and in the region itself.

The first uncertainty is whether the coalition military commitment is sufficient to achieve the goals President Obama laid out in September – to degrade, defeat, and ultimately

destroy the movement dubbed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

*Iraq:* Already the United States has had to send more military advisers than initially planned to support a decimated and demoralized Iraqi army. Already, the Iraqi government has given non-state militias, some under Iranian influence, a large role in the fight in ways that have exacerbated Sunni anxieties, and undermined the ability to peel local support and acquiescence among Iraqi Sunnis away from ISIS. That said, the operation in Tikrit last month, in which Iranian-supported militias failed and the Iraqi government relied on American air support for victory, showed the limits of Iranian influence in the Iraqi fight against ISIS, and showed the wisdom of a U.S. strategy that allows the Iraqi government the space to own responsibility for its own choices in this battle for its territory and for the hearts and minds of its population. However, this strategy ultimately stands or falls on Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi's ability to move forward with the kind of political and security steps that will build the confidence of Iraq's Sunnis in the Iraqi state.

*Syria:* A regular stream of news reporting suggests that U.S. efforts to equip and train cooperative Syrian opposition forces is only slowly taking shape, and will take more than a year, perhaps two or more, to have any meaningful battlefield impact. Meanwhile, recent reports suggest that a coalition of more extreme Islamist groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, is successfully routing Syrian military forces in Idlib province (whether they can hold this territory is another question).

If Assad rallies, this war of attrition between him and the Islamist opposition forces could drag on for a long time, with mounting human cost and mounting spillover to neighboring states like Lebanon and Jordan. If somehow Assad is defeated, or pushed back to a narrow area around Damascus and Latakia, then the extremist rebels will have won the day, and they are unlikely to cede political authority to more moderate forces who did not do the fighting, nor to exiles, nor to Syria's remaining beleaguered liberals.

A second uncertainty is whether, even should the military campaign succeed, the necessary politics and diplomacy will follow to restore stability to these two broken states. If Arabs and Kurds, with U.S. air support, successfully push back ISIS in Iraq, can Iraq's distrustful ethnic and sectarian groups work together well enough to hold the country together? Prime Minister al-Abadi has introduced a National Guard proposal to parliament, but it is stalled, holding up something that restive and suspicious Sunnis see as a prerequisite for them to remain part of a Shi'a-dominated Iraqi state. Likewise, even should a moderate, US-supported Syrian opposition successfully challenge both ISIS and Assad in the bloody Syrian civil war, there's still little reason to believe that Iran and Russia are prepared to end their support for Assad, that Assad would agree to join a peace process that promises to end his reign in Damascus, or that Syria's fractious opposition factions could negotiate as a unit to achieve that goal.

The Broader Implications of ISIS

While President Obama was persuaded that ISIS presented a sufficient threat to U.S.

interests to justify a sustained military response, ISIS is only a symptom of the underlying breakdown in regional order. The upheaval in the Middle East has likewise generated newly assertive regional powers like Turkey, new opportunities for longstanding troublemakers like Iran and Hizballah, and sometimes bitter disputes amongst Arab states like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

And, of course, this disorder is itself the product of the long-building pressures that generated the Arab Spring – the rise of a massive, educated, but largely unemployed generation of youth whose expectations for themselves and their societies far exceeded the real opportunities they could obtain given the arbitrary, repressive, and kleptocratic leaderships that characterized the pre-revolutionary Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. While Iraq and Syria may get all the newsprint, marginalizing extremist movements like ISIS and Al Qaeda demands attention to other weak and fragile states in the Middle East and North Africa.

What that means is that, even as the United States focuses on arenas of intense violence, like Syria and Libya, attention must be paid to those areas where governing institutions are still functioning, albeit challenged – and we need to focus on helping institutions to listen to, include and serve the marginalized majority of the region, its young people.

Sectarianism and Conflict in Today's Middle East

In responding to the Arab uprisings, many governments found a sectarian narrative useful in justifying their actions and in rallying their populations. Iran of course saw a golden opportunity in the GCC crackdown in Bahrain in March 2011, and the Bahraini and Saudi media likewise waged a vicious anti-Shia campaign to label those protesting as agents of the enemy rather than citizens with a legitimate grievance. This sectarian narrative fit well also with events in Iraq, where Maliki was escalating his purge of Sunni politicians and military officers, and in Syria, where Bashar Assad, with help from Iran, was brutally suppressing mainly Sunni protesters. The sectarian narrative has helped both sides of this regional power struggle mobilize support, and also helped Sunni countries with Shia minorities deter, isolate, and punish any domestic Shia dissent. And in the face of the violence of recent years, that narrative of sectarian conflict is a reality for too many in Iraq and Syria.

The problem with governments wielding that sectarian narrative is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and it actually increases the incentive on both sides for a real power competition to be fought both directly and through proxies. And we see that playing out across the region now.

Whatever motivated the Saudi-led intervention into Yemen, one consequence of this action is the hardening and extension of this narrative of sectarian conflict, aligning Sunni governments in a coalition that has defined its enemy in sectarian terms. I think we need to be concerned with the ways this development might exacerbate sectarian violence across the region over the longer term.

The Iranian Threat as a Unifying Factor

A year ago, I would have said that the Sunni Arab states that were struggling to deal with the disorder unleashed by the 2011 revolutions actually saw political Islam as a greater threat than Iran. Today, however, Saudi Arabia and others seem to have prioritized the Iranian threat. The fall of Mosul last June brought a momentary unity between American priorities and those of our traditional regional partners, and allowed the establishment of this anti-ISIS coalition – but if we are honest, that coalition, at least within the region, has always been paper-thin.

Our regional friends agree that ISIS is a threat, but they don't agree on how much of a threat, or how best to combat it. And they really don't agree about what sort of state should replace its rule, or the rule of the governments they dislike in Damascus and Baghdad. When it comes to Syria, different regional governments also disagree on whether Assad's ouster, or Syria's territorial integrity, or ISIS, should be the highest priority. Partly as a result, they have had a lot of trouble agreeing on which Syrian opposition actors are worthy of their support, or which of the various diplomatic initiatives for Syria are worthy of support.

The military operation in Yemen, while launched precipitously, not especially clear-cut in its goals or hopeful in its outcomes, seems to have served our Arab partners by unifying them more solidly against Iran than they were against ISIS, helping them to overcome internal divisions that had been sapping their capacity for effective collective action. That has obvious implications for the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria – especially given Saudi fears that the United States has ceded influence to Iran inside Iraq in order to fight ISIS. This presents a challenge for ongoing U.S. efforts to scale up its Arab partners' efforts against ISIS.

Some argue that this Arab assertiveness and fractiousness is a consequence of American disengagement – that if America had been more deeply invested in the region, especially militarily, our partners would line up and follow. There might have been a time, early in the Syrian conflict, when that was true. But today our regional partners are so caught up in what they view as existential struggles, that they are not necessarily interested in waiting for or following an American lead. In several instances over the last four years, the United States has voiced clear preferences and advanced clear efforts to resolve regional crises, and been rebuffed by regional governments – from Bahrain in 2011 to Egypt in 2013 to Libya in 2014. Regardless, today even a more engaged America that has reinserted itself into Iraq and is providing support to the campaign in Yemen cannot restore order without regional allies that share with Washington a clear view of the order they seek to impose, and that are prepared to set aside their differences so as to act together to impose it.

That's not what we have. In the contexts of the cross-cutting conflicts across the region, America's partners are so uncomfortable at the collapse of the region they knew, so fearful of the forces that collapse has unleashed, so mistrustful of one another's motives, that collective action is very difficult to achieve or sustain. Even the much-touted Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen was missing Oman, a major GCC member and neighbor of Yemen, and had several partners that were more symbolically than materially part of the fight.

Combining the shake-up in the regional balance of power, the sectarian dimension of regional politics, the anxieties of Sunni Arab governments, and the expansion of conflict in several regional arenas, we have the ingredients for proxy wars, miscalculations, and unintended or intended escalations of existing conflict. It is not an optimistic picture, but perhaps a period of conflict will have to proceed before regional actors are prepared for the imperfect compromises and the more far-reaching reforms that will be necessary to end civil conflicts and stabilize the region.

The Impact of a Nuclear Deal

These escalatory dynamics within the region are likely to persist regardless of whether the P5 +1 states achieve an agreement that constrains Iran's nuclear program. In fact, whether there's a nuclear deal or not, I predict we will see a more aggressive approach by Iran in a host of arenas around the region, where the upheaval has given them greater opportunities than before.

If there is a nuclear deal, the hardline elements within the Iranian regime, those most opposed to a deal, are also those with the greatest interest and investment in regional troublemaking. They are likely to use their ability to make noise regionally to try and compensate for the power disadvantages they see inherent in a deal – and they are likely to have a green light from the Supreme Leader to do so, because he will want to compensate them for their unhappiness with a deal.

If there's no deal on the nuclear issue, however, then the Iranian leadership will want to scale up its regional assertions of power for a different reason: in order to solidify or even strengthen its current regional power position in advance of whatever tougher American / Israeli / Sunni Arab efforts it anticipates to contain it.

Our Sunni allies are already upping their efforts in countering Iran regionally, as the Yemen operation and the renewed investment in the Syrian rebels demonstrates. Iran will have both the means and the incentive to respond in kind. This is a recipe for an escalatory spiral, perhaps most particularly in Syria and Iraq.

What this means is that, no matter how much the US government asserts its primary regional interest in combating ISIS and Al Qaeda, our major regional partners will remain resolutely focused on the Iranian threat as their primary concern. And it means that, in reassuring and bolstering its partners as part of any Iranian nuclear deal, the United States cannot limit itself to the nuclear issue, or to traditional defense and deterrence.

No matter what equipment or systems the United States is willing to sell to its Arab partners, no matter what aid it is willing to provide, no matter what US assets the administration is prepared to base in the region – our partners are looking for a different kind of reassurance. They are looking to see the United States demonstrate its recognition

of Iran's troublesome activities around the region, and demonstrate its readiness to push back against Iran's expansionism around the region. And the primary arena in which the Arab states wish to see that from the United States is in Syria.

Reportedly, recent gains by rebel forces against the Syrian military in Idlib province are the result of greater unity and strengthened capabilities due to more unified and concerted effort amongst the states of the Arab Gulf. If these forces continue to demonstrate success against Assad, they will be the most important players in shaping any post-Assad political order in what's left of Syria. We are still, tragically, a long way from negotiating a post-Assad political order – but to the extent that the United States does not have "skin in the game" on the ground in Syria, it will be difficult for Washington to exercise influence over either the Syrian rebels or their Gulf sponsors in shaping Syria's future. And the administration has resolutely resisted becoming more involved in shaping the trajectory of Syria's civil conflict, either directly or indirectly. This restraint is understandable, but if the current weakening of the Syrian military succeeds, or if the Iranian regime and Hizballah bolster Assad so that the conflict stalemates again at a higher level of violence, then the United States will be hard put to keep its focus in Syria on ISIS.

Policy Implications

None of the foregoing is meant to suggest that a nuclear deal with Iran that meets the requirements laid out by the administration in light of the Lausanne framework is a bad idea. On balance, in this regional context, and even if a deal does not last as long as envisioned, it's a good idea to constrain Iran's nuclear activities to the extent possible and for as long as possible. The aspects of Iranian behavior that most trouble our allies will be there, and will likely escalate, irrespective of a nuclear agreement – and thus efforts to help expose and push back against those Iranian behaviors must be a key element of America's policy in the coming months.

In addition, the United States must attend now to the political components of its policy in Iraq and Syria.

- In Iraq, that is primarily about how to help Iraqi Sunnis find their place within the Iraqi state, and how to help Prime Minister Abadi secure that space institutionally. Both Iran and the Sunni states have roles to play in stabilizing Iraq by ensuring that territory and people liberated from ISIS find a welcoming, responsive, and accountable government in Baghdad taking over.
- On Syria, the United States must escalate its engagement with political forces that have been preparing plans for post-Assad Syria, and must also intensify its dialogue with its Sunni partners in the region to bridge gaps regarding priorities and strategy in Syria.

Finally, as discussed, the United States must keep firmly in mind that the underlying vulnerabilities that produced this upheaval and gave space for ISIS still exist across the

region.

- The United States must devote greater attention to supporting governments who are using political compromise instead of violence to resolve disputes, like Tunisia.
- The United States should help local partners forge meaningful governance – not just a security presence – in ungoverned spaces like the Sinai.
- The United States should help communities in the Middle East, through indigenous civil society, to build their own capacity for peaceful dialogue and conflict resolution.

Ultimately, building resilient societies and marginalizing ISIS, Al Qaeda, and their brethren across the region requires more effective, responsive institutions that can win citizens' trust and loyalty, and more fair and functional systems that can offer young people meaningful opportunities – not just jobs, but a chance to fulfill their long-denied dreams instead of placing their hopes in a world after this one.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much to all of our panelists and I will recognize myself for the first round of questions.

Despite the clear and vocal calls for a comprehensive strategy, a U.S. policy in Iraq and in Syria, the administration continues to treat the conflicts as separate or at least as situations that should be dealt with one at a time, and this is either a fundamental misunderstanding of the issues at hand or willful ignorance due to a political calculation, namely, the administration's misguided and naive nuclear negotiations with Iran.

It must acknowledge that air strikes alone will not be sufficient to defeat ISIL in either Iraq or in Syria, that Assad must be removed from power and that Iran, even if it is the enemy of our enemy, is still an enemy.

In a hearing yesterday, former Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford testified that if the United States allies with Iran, we are playing into ISIL's narrative and helping in its recruitment.

So I ask the panelists do you believe that we are cooperating with Iran directly or indirectly against ISIL and, if so, is this helpful to our national security interests?

Dr. Jones, then General Keane—whoever wants to tackle this.

Mr. JONES. Sure. I will start.

Look, I think in particular in Iraq there is and there are areas where the U.S. has worked with Iranian-backed militia organizations in various areas. The campaign has involved a complex set of state governments including Iraq as well as sub-state actors, Kurds, but also Iranian-backed Shi'a militias.

So I think the answer to your question is yes, the U.S. has cooperated somewhat with Iran, particular at the substrate level. There have been discussions as well about the political issues, Sunni-Shi'a issues with the—with the Iraqi Government that Iran has been involved in.

I think, ultimately, the U.S. is in a very complicated position here but I do agree with your comments that a strong allied relationship with Iran, if that is the direction we go in, would be very counterproductive and would certainly walk into an anti—would certainly help with the ISIL narrative.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. JONES. It is exactly what they are saying.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. General?

General KEANE. I agree with the doctor about Iraq's level and repeat it. But in Syria, I think, really, the elephant in the room in Syria with the administration's reluctance to provide assistance to the Free Syrian Army despite a very credible and experienced national security team that recommended that, as I pointed out in my testimony, I think is Iran.

It is the elephant in the room in the sense that we have been, because the nuclear talks and establishing a deal, I think, is the unstated foreign policy major objective of the administration.

It has handcuffed our ability to do what we should have done in Syria because of a potential setback from the Iranians. So de facto our policy decisions in Syria have certainly helped Iran bona fide establish a client state with Syria, contributes to their expansionist policies and certainly encourages them to do what they are doing right now in Yemen, which if they are able to achieve what they

want to achieve in Yemen—political and military control in Yemen—then they change the strategic balance of power in the region by gaining control of a strategic waterway at the Gulf of Aden at the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb and affect and control and leverage shipping that comes in and out of the Suez Canal—a major objective for the Iranians that they would not have thought of without the progress that they have made in Syria.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Doctor?

Ms. WITTES. Thank you.

You know, I think part of the challenge is that our regional partners who are absolutely necessary to any successful outcome in Syria have until very recently been pretty divided themselves on the question of what should follow Assad and what kind of political order they would see as a desirable end state, and in many ways their elevation of the Iranian threat above the threat of ISIS, above the threat of political Islam, is a product of just the last year or so.

But up until recently, different Arab states were supporting different factions in the Syrian opposition and I think that vastly complicated any ability we had to forge unity among them.

Now, there might well have been a time early in the Syrian conflict when a more forward-leaning American policy would have created that unified front. But I think we are long past that now, unfortunately.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

I have other questions but I will wait for the next round. Mr. Deutch, our ranking member.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Iranian foreign minister was on American television last night and was talking—when asked about Iranian influence in the region and the way that it is perceived pushed back against the argument that anyone could perceive what is happening now in any part of the region as a Shi'a-Sunni conflict—that there is absolutely nothing to that.

I would like to hear from our panelists a response to that and if you disagree with that assertion what role, ultimately, can the United States play if his assertion is wrong and it is indeed perceived that way among our allies and those who are not?

Mr. JONES. Chair, I will start.

I think we are often prone to gross generalizations about the state of sectarianism. Being recently, for example, in Djibouti and looking closely at the situation in Yemen, one can easily gravitate to an argument that this is a Saudi—because they have been involved—Iran proxy war.

But the reality when you get onto the ground into Yemen and look at it is there are a range of tribal politics involved.

The Houthis have been battling Saudi Arabia for a long time. They are not an arm of the Iranian Government. They do get some assistance.

So I would say the answer to your question is there is, clearly, an Iranian grand strategy for the Middle East, for North and East Africa and other locations that as caused them to provide assistance to some groups and not others—some governments and not others.

But when you actually look on the ground, whether it is Syria or Iraq or Yemen or take your pick, I mean, I think we do have to understand that we are also bringing in the very localized elements of the dispute.

So I would say that there is a combination of both local and these grand strategic issues that is going on in all the conflicts we are talking about here.

General KEANE. I agree. I mean, one of the things that happens when you look at this region, because of the sectarianism that has been there historically, that we have a tendency to throw that out as the underlying cause for all the problems we are having.

It certainly is a contributor but there has been a lot of peace between these sectarian groups as well. Iranians—I mean, I, clearly, think this is a geopolitical strategy of theirs to dominate the region, to influence and dominate Shi'a countries as well as Sunni countries and I believe that is what is driving them.

Like other radical Islamists, they will take advantage and manipulate this sectarian divide as much as they can to their own geopolitical ends.

Mr. DEUTCH. Ms. Wittes.

Ms. WITTES. I think both sides of this regional power struggle, and I would agree it is a regional power struggle, have found a sectarian narrative useful.

It helps them rally around the flag, it helps them mobilize allies and, unfortunately, they have fed off of one another repeatedly whether it is Bahrain or in Yemen or in Syria.

Once that narrative takes hold and is advanced by one side the other side ups the ante, and we have seen this in the regional media. It has been quite vicious and nasty.

But I think that the problem with just looking at it through that lens is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy at a certain point, just as we saw in the Balkans in the 1990s.

At a certain point, when people have lost the ability to find security through the state or through the government, they are going to fall back on community identifies and if everybody around them is choosing friend or foe according to sectarian identity they will be forced to do that, too.

So the reality for Syrians, sadly, today I think is a reality of sectarian conflict. It didn't have to be that way but that is where we are.

Mr. DEUTCH. And so then where should it go and, specifically, to your—the point you made about young people who, particularly those in their teens, early 20s, who have now endured 4 years of this, many of them displaced or refugees, what is the message from the United States, going forward?

What do they need to see to counter their understandable—as you put it, their understandable decision in many instances to just fall back into tribal affiliation?

Ms. WITTES. Yes, I think in the Iraqi case there is a fierce debate going on and an effort to try and demonstrate that there is space within Iraqi politics and the Iraqi state for all of Iraq's people.

I don't know whether the angels will win that argument. I certainly hope so, and I think, by the way, that both Iran and our Sunni Arab partners, have important roles to play in helping to

stabilize Iraq by making sure those decisions on behalf of political inclusion, like establishing a national guard, move forward.

Syria, I think, is much harder because the conflict is so severe because half the population has been displaced.

But as part of what we need to do, whatever the political architecture, we need to generate within society over the long term the ability to build dialogue, to build intercommunal dialogue, to build mechanisms for conflict resolution so that while those tensions will always be there, they don't erupt into violence.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Deutch.

And now another Florida colleague, Mr. Clawson, of a great state.

Mr. CLAWSON. Thank you to the gentlelady for doing this committee hearing. I think it is great to have knowledgeable folks and let us shed some sunlight on complicated topics, and that takes time and too often up here we don't have enough time. So thank you, Congresswoman, for doing this.

It seems to me that our objectives out to be—if they are not they ought to be, number one, protect Israel in this region, number two, to counterbalance I think what you call this grand—I don't remember the exact rhetoric you just used—grand Iranian strategies.

Is that right? And so, at least from my seat, it seems like those are the two things that we ought to be trying to do.

Having said that then, I have the following observations then you all could react to. Number one, it feels like we are talking too much to the wrong people and not enough to the right people and not enough allegiance is going on—you know, alliances going on with good friends that might be able to band together and do something about this instead of talking to the bad guy.

It just feels like strategically I don't know who I am doing a joint venture with here—what is going on, number one. Number two, it feels like as the region gets more dangerous, that you all point out, why are we not giving more military assistance to Israel. It feels like an obvious question.

Number three, why do we want more nukes in the region as it becomes less volatile, and number four, you know, I voted no on the Syrian involvement last year.

It felt like if we didn't have a grand strategy to counterbalance this Iranian grand strategy, as you all call it, the isolated pinpricks just throw gasoline on the fire. It is hard to manage from halfway around the world with people we don't trust and don't really know very well and it just makes the situation worse.

So while I am all for spending more military dollars to get ready for a coming crisis, I don't consider myself an isolationist because I don't like, you know, these isolated actions that aren't linked together and seem to take us nowhere.

So I have given you four observations there. There is three of you. If each one of you take one, we might, you know, might get somewhere here.

General KEANE. Well, I will start. It is a fact that, and I agree with you, we spend a lot of time talking to our enemies and not our friends.

When you travel in the region and talk to our allies in the region, I mean, it is unmistakable that over the last several years they have lost confidence in us.

We do have a credibility issue with them and it is because of our policy decisions that I enumerated in the oral statement as well as the written statement that are driving those conclusions.

Those are very real, and in a sense it handicaps putting together the kind of comprehensive strategy that we do need, one, to deal with the Sunni-based radical Islam, which is a generational challenge we are facing, and number two, to counter the Iranians effectively.

I am of the mind that the administration has this thought—that Iran, being the country it is, a powerful country itself, has a right to a sphere of influence in the region and as such we must work with that country to achieve common objectives in terms of regional objectives.

It does not embrace the 30-plus year history of Iran's barbarism and proxy wars that it has fought and the killing of Americans from 1983 all the way to 2008 and puts that aside and chooses to treat Iran as a country that aspires to be in the community of nations and therefore tries to influence in moving in that direction.

I think that naiveness and sophomoric approach to a serious problem, to be quite frank about it, has so antagonized our allies in the region that it becomes their number-one issue with us because they had always believed that the United States strategically was a counterbalance to Iranian influence in the region.

Mr. JONES. If I could just pick up on your first point, I would add one other major U.S. interest and that is to protect the homeland, and the concern I have, particularly on the Syrian side, is that, as U.S. intelligence officials have said publically, that we have two groups—Khorasan out of looser territory and the Islamic State more kind of inspired but are plotting or encouraging attacks against the homeland coming from Syria.

And second, we have the highest percentage of foreign fighters in the history of jihadist battlefields—the recent history—coming in particular to Syria to fight, and we don't have a long-term strategy right now.

We have got a bit of a half measure with the train and equip program but in my view that is not tied to a long-term regional—certainly, not a Syrian strategy.

Mr. CLAWSON. So you would—I think the general and I, you, then the three of us would be in agreement to go big or don't go. If the problem is that serious, then either let us not mess around with it or let us go big and get something done with our allies.

Mr. JONES. Just to be clear, when you say go big you mean——

Mr. CLAWSON. Big enough to make a difference—to make us safer.

Ms. WITTES. Perhaps I can weigh in on that component because I think that—I think it is important to understand the military tool as one tool in the toolbox but a strategy looks at how all the tools fit together, right.

And so a good strategy uses military force directly or indirectly as a means to an end. I think one of the hard lessons that we have

learned over the last decade and a half is about the limitations of military force.

It can achieve a lot but there are limits on what it can achieve, especially if it is not in the context of a broader political strategy.

So as we think about how to push back on Iranian influence around the region, we can certainly increase—you know, talk about increasing assistance to our friends and partners in the region.

I am sure that when the GCC partners come to Washington later this month some of them—maybe all of them—will have a shopping list. But I would argue that that is not the most important thing they are looking for in terms of reassurance and support from us.

What they are looking for is our willingness to use all of our policy tools to push back on Iran around the region and I think in some ways the most important tools we have are intelligence to expose what we see and what we know about Iran's activities and cooperation with our regional partners on the politics and diplomacy.

If we can work diplomatically to resolve some of these conflicts and grievances, that gives the Iranians much less room to operate. The upheaval of the last 4 years has given the Iranians far more opportunities in far more places and we need to try to shrink that down.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Clawson.

Another Florida colleague, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the panelists for being here and, of course, General, for your service to our country. I deeply appreciate that.

So with that said, I just wanted to say that, General, I am—I will try to say this as kindly as possible. I am perplexed of you laying the blame on this administration, first of all, for what is going on in the Middle East—first of all, without even commenting on the fact that another administration took us—military action into Iraq in the first place.

But I want to get past that because I think to blame the United States of America on what is going on in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran, Yemen and every other place in this world is ridiculous. I think it is unfair.

And I do have a question, though, and my question is what role does a corruption of these governments, the oppressiveness of these governments, the poverty in the country and the lack of human infrastructure to replace these governments.

How does that affect what is going on? And this is for all of you.

General KEANE. Well, first of all, I didn't blame the United States for everything that is wrong in the Middle East. I quite frankly said that our policy decisions enabled these activities and I think that is an important distinction to make.

We are—we are contributors to our problem. I mean, it is conventional wisdom to say that the underlying factors in the Middle East are the real cause of all of these problems and we should absolve the United States of any accountability or responsibility and those underlying factors are the ones that you are reaching out to, and I certainly understand that.

The region, by and large, is run by repressive regimes. Almost every one of them has some degree of repression in it. The fact is the Arab Spring was about people seeking political and social injus-

tice—reform of political and social injustice and economic opportunity.

There is political incompetence in the region and a lack of moral courage to make change. There is historical sectarianism that is in the region.

But I am also suggesting that something has fundamentally changed about the United States' role in that region in the last several years compared to what it has historically been, and I tried to point out to you those mistakes—those policy mistakes——

Ms. FRANKEL. Excuse me. How about the—how about going into Iraq in the first place? Do you think that was a good decision?

General KEANE. I think the decision to go into Iraq based on the information that was provided this Congress, the U.N. thought it was the right decision.

Ms. FRANKEL. Was that a good decision?

General KEANE. Yes, at the time——

Ms. FRANKEL. Oh, it was? Okay.

General KEANE [continuing]. Based on what we did.

Ms. FRANKEL. All right. Well——

General KEANE. Now—no, wait a second. Let me—let me—let me finish the answer. If, given what we know now—we justified going into Iraq based on WMD. Given what we know now, would I make that same decision? No.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. So—okay. Let me ask Dr. Wittes. Could you comment on my question?

Ms. WITTES. I think that we have to look at all the sides of the equation here. There is no question in my mind that some American decisions have exacerbated the anxieties of our partners in the region.

There is no question in my mind that the invasion of Iraq did help to crack up this regional order. But as I said, it was breaking down anyway. It definitely gave it a push.

But I think the most important point I would make is that our regional partners are anxious anyway because the region that they knew, the status quo they counted on and befitted from is gone and it is never coming back, and they don't know what is going to replace it.

They don't have a vision themselves for what they want to replace it and so right now they are mistrustful of one another's motives.

They are anxious about the balance of power, which they do perceive as turning against them because of Iran's activities around the region and because of the rise of political Islam.

They are deeply worried about the degree of violence and the spillover and the refugees and the implications for their stability. And yes, they have some anxieties about the U.S. role.

But in that context, our role is going to be incredibly complicated and incredibly controversial almost no matter what we do. And so hewing to our own interests and being very transparent with our partners about what we are doing, what we are not going to do and why seems to me that would—that would be the best way to address the problem.

Mr. JONES. Can I briefly answer or are we over time? I will be brief.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Please go ahead.

Mr. JONES. I think when you look at, particularly since the rise—the Arab uprisings, when you look, for example, at World Bank data, in the region—in the region this subcommittee deals with, you see a categorical decline across all major governance indicators.

One factor that has contributed to what you have outlined is weakening governance across the region—across North Africa, East Africa and the Middle East.

In that vacuum, from Libya through Yemen up into the Middle East, in that vacuum we now have a range of actors that have pushed into that vacuum sub-state actors—the Islamic State, al-Qaeda in a few locations.

We have state actors like Iran. I think because of that situation this then puts the United States in a very important position. With the collapse—weakening of governance in a range of these cases and actors filling in, whether they are sub-state or state, what role does and should the United States play in filling in? That is diplomatically, economically and militarily.

I think that is where—and that is really the question to ask based on the events over the last several years. But I think the data on this is actually pretty clear. We have got weakened—severely weakened governments.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Ms. Frankel.

Mr. Meadows of North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chairman. It is refreshing to not only hear a diversity of answers but I can honestly say I followed each one of you, reading comments and work that you have done and continue to do in this particular issue.

So my request of you is the balance of diplomacy versus more military intervention versus credibility because I think that the balance of those three elements I see a lack of credibility within the region right now in terms of if we say something do we really mean it.

Are we going to be there like we have historically or is this a new era? How do we start to restore that, and I will start with you, Doctor.

Ms. WITTES. Thank you. It is—it is a challenging question. I think that in many ways the anxieties right now in the region are about intentions and objectives, not about means, and I think that if we had a stronger dialogue and clearer common ground with our partners on what we together are trying to achieve then we can debate the means.

Mr. MEADOWS. Do you think we know that? I mean, because here I am sitting in Congress and I am not sure what we are trying to achieve, if we really look at it. I know we want peace and everybody wants peace and it is really easy to say that.

But if we look at it from a strateg or a tactical point of view, I am confused on what our objectives are, specifically with Syria—you know, where our intel is less than it is in other parts of the region. Let us put it that way.

So, I mean, can you clearly define what our objective or do you know at Brookings what our objective is or should be?

Ms. WITTES. Well, I think what we have heard from the administration is a dual objective, which is to push back ISIS in Iraq and

Syria and at the same time to build up a stronger opposition force that can get to at least a hurting stalemate in the conflict with Assad so that he then is willing to negotiate. At the end of the day, civil wars, you know, only end in a couple of ways—either one side vanquishes and exterminates or expels the other or they fight to the point where an external power can help, sometimes impose, sometimes negotiate a political solution and that is guaranteed by outside powers. That is how civil wars typically end.

We wouldn't want the first outcome so we should be driving for the second and I think that—you know, to the extent the administration has articulated a long-term vision that is its vision.

The question is how do we get there. And one of the reasons I highlighted in my testimony the importance of ensuring that where we push back ISIS or where the rebels push back Assad we have something in place to replace it that is not extremist rule is because it helps us drive toward that solution.

For example, a number of our partners have talked about the idea of establishing safe zones in northern Syria and areas where the rebels have liberated territory.

What is happening in Idlib right now is that the rebels pushed, Assad's forces fell back and now the regime is bombing from the air.

So the remaining guys who were working for the Syrian Government and could be the kernel of a civil administration are fleeing like every other civilian in the area and that leaves these towns to the rebels—the extremists. So that is what we need to try and fix.

Mr. MEADOWS. So let me—let me go back, because Dr. Jones mentioned we are having more foreign, and I believe it was you, Dr. Jones, that was talking about we have more foreign fighters' intervention. And so when they are expelled from Syria they come back to the United States, to Europe, to wherever because part of the problem we have in Syria is that we had trained fighters that were in a neighboring country that actually came here.

And so we call it ISIS today. It was actually known by a different name just a few months ago. And so if we expel them without really having some meaningful military intervention, do we not just transport the extremist problem to other parts of the world?

Mr. JONES. I think the pattern of jihadist activity we have seen in Iraq and Libya, in Afghanistan and Pakistan is they will either go back home or they will go somewhere else and bring instability, unless they die on the battlefield.

The issue then on the military tools is I think I would support Clausewitz on this—that they—the military and the political goals need to be intertwined, which is where I think with programs like Syrian train and equip they are not exactly meshed. If we are going to train Syrian rebels, Syrian rebels are predominantly focused on the Assad regime. So trying to get them then to focus on the Islamic State, in my view, means that the military and the political goals are not intertwined directly.

And so I think that is where I would say we have got to focus on bringing those two together.

But, look, there is a war going on so the military tool is a necessity. They are fighting. We can try to work the political establishment and we should work for deals in both countries.

But there is a war going on.

Mr. MEADOWS. I am out of time and I am going to yield back to the chairman. General Keane, can you explain to me why we had more missiles that were launched into Israel from Gaza than sorties that we have actually conducted within Syria at this point and expect a different result?

I call it Operation Powder Puff with what we have done so far in Syria. Do we need to have more meaningful military intervention? And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Very good. We will allow General Keane to answer, if he would like.

General KEANE. Well, the Syrian strategy, from a military perspective, is a complicated one, to say the least. I mean, just thinking through it makes your head hurt.

But, frankly, arming 5,000 Free Syrian Army each year—new recruits, not an organization—where are they going to go? The Free Syrian Army is down to several brigades.

At one time it did make sense to strengthen that organization when it really had some robustness to it but we passed that opportunity.

ISIS recruits on average, according to our intelligence services, 1,000 a month and steady—still doing that. That is 12,000 new recruits that they are getting a year. So this is a fig leaf operation that has no connection to anything consequential.

I think we should listen to our allies, which have been telling us that, look, we are all for dealing with ISIS but we cannot deal with ISIS while the Assad regime is still in power and it is using its military force throughout that country.

Turkey tells us that. Saudi Arabia tells us that. All the bordering countries tell us that. So what do they want us to do? They would—in conjunction with them they would like us to establish no-fly zones, shut down the air power and free zones—stop the killing.

What is the reason for that? To pursue a political solution. You are using military force, which is always intended to do to get a political solution. What is the political solution? Assad is undermined.

Right now, his Alawite and Druze power is not what it used to be. There is no guarantee that this would happen but it is so far better than the status quo and the genocide that is taking place that it is worth a try. And then you get to some kind of coalition sharing.

Are we concerned about post-Assad? Of course. Are we concerned about, as the doctor mentioned, Jabhat al-Nusra and the strength that it has gained in the last year? Of course, we are.

All of that in some kind of political compromise and coalition sharing is a far better political answer than what we have now and you use limited military power or, in this case, the threat of it to get you moving in that direction.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Meadows.

Mr. Higgins of New York is recognized.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just a couple of things. You know, General Keane, you had talked about—you clearly made a distinction that was administra-

tion policy that has resulted in some of the instability that exist in Iraq and Syria.

But it is not just exclusive to this administration. I think if you look back in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the de-Ba'athification order and the dissolution of the Iraqi army basically said to 100,000 Sunni Iraqis that there is no place for you in Iraqi society and that formed the basis for the insurgency that we dealt with for most of the time that we were there, and I would argue that it was also the genesis of ISIS.

The second issue is the panel seemed to be somewhat dismissive of the sectarian nature of the conflict in Iraq and in Syria, and I don't think it can be dismissed at all. I mean, it amazes me and, General, you had made reference to Qasem Soleimani, who heads to Quds Forces in Iraq.

I mean, he is not only a tangential player in what is going on in Iraq today and Syria—he is there physically. He is on the ground directing Shi'a militias to prop up the Shi'a government in Iraq and they are not doing that, you know, as a good will measure.

They are doing that to impose their influence to ensure that in the aftermath of ISIS that Iraq remains Shi'a. And one could argue that ISIS basically wants their country back. They want to reestablish Sunni dominance in Iraq.

And, you know, someone had said here, you know, it is a fair assertion that we should talk less to our enemies and more to our friends. We don't really have friends in that part of the world.

You know, there is the discussion when Americans are in the room and the discussion when Americans are not in the room. And typically, we count our friends as people whose interests are aligned with ours at any given time.

But they are not really helping us, and it just seems that given everything that Americans have invested toward peace in Iraq—$25 billion to build up—to help them build up an Iraqi army, a security force—$25 billion—in their first test they ran.

They ran from a fighting force of less than 31,000. The Iraqi army at that time was estimated to be anywhere between 180,000 and 240,000 fighters. And then we depend on our allies who have proven to be helpful to us, the peshmerga—good fighters, experienced fighters, pro-Western, helped us on the early stages of the Iraq war, 190 fighters—and Shi'a militias, who are controlled directly by Qasem Soleimani, an Iraqi.

And, you know, we tried to do one thing and I think we could only expect to do one thing in Iraq and that is through our military involvement to create a place, a breathing space, within which Sunni, Shi'a and Kurds could develop a political contract, and they failed miserably.

And the guy that we put in there, Nouri al-Maliki, we put him in there first—Iran put him in there the second time—you know, basically created another sectarian divide. So, you know, at least when Saddam Hussein was in there, there was an 8-year war between Iraq and Iran and they fought to a standstill.

Khomeini had said that when the Revolutionary Guard came to him and said—and Mousavi came to him and said, we can't win this thing, he basically stopped the war.

But he said it was like drinking poison from a chalice. At least they were preoccupied with each other and expending the resources so that they weren't directed toward us.

Look, a lot of questions there. I apologize for it, but a lot of things have been said here. So I throw that out to you—all of you.

General KEANE. Briefly, you know, I agree with a lot of what you just said. I would go further. This isn't about politics for me—a Democratic administration, Republican administration. I am interested in policy.

The White House policy dealing with Afghanistan and not building an effective security force after we deposed the regime was a policy mistake that led to the reemergence of the Taliban.

As you pointed out, the decision to disband the army and not pull it back and use it as security and stability when looting led to general lawlessness was a mistake. However, having Saddam Hussein in our jail houses, and other generals, we know now that the regime began that insurgency.

They planned it 6 months before execution and they conceptualized it actually 2 years prior. So they were going to do that regardless of what we did with the military. But nonetheless, it still was a policy mistake.

The sectarian nature of the conflict, yes. I am not dismissive of it but this much I know. ISIS' own stated objectives in their 400-page document in color designs a caliphate in the region and they intend to dominate those countries.

Most of those countries are in fact Sunnis, as they are. So they intend to dominate the countries in the region to establish their caliphate, not only Shi'a countries where they have begun but also Sunni countries, which means they would depose governments and kill people in support of those governments.

I am not—and they take huge advantage of the sectarian conflict and manipulate it, you know, to their ends. And Qasem Soleimani, certainly an instrument of the Supreme Leader. Doesn't work for anybody else but the Supreme Leader. He is carrying out his regional objectives, which are largely geopolitical.

What they want in Iraq, in my judgment, is a weak government but stable, aligned with Iran and not aligned with the United States.

That is their objective and I think they are working toward that end, and I know we are sort of out of time here. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Higgins.

I am just going to ask a few more questions, if I might. Mr. Jones, in your testimony both written and oral you said that we should consider pausing the Syria and Iran train program until we get a clear explanation of our strategy and long-term goals.

The administration has said that it wants the program to only be for defensive purposes against ISIL. Yet, these forces consider Assad to be their number-one enemy, and I will ask the panelists or just Dr. Jones, what do you believe should be the mission of the train and equip and program both in Syria and in Iraq?

Should they be offensive? Should they be defensive? How can we use these programs to help bring stability to the region?

Mr. JONES. That is an excellent question, or excellent series of questions. My own experience in being involved in training pro-

grams overseas is that one can't train only for offensive or defensive purposes.

You can't control, like joysticks, fighters when they go into the field. So if they are trained for primarily defensive purposes, when they actually go into combat they are going to use both skill set—the skill sets for offensive and defensive purposes.

I think that is the general reality. My primary focus on the train and equip program, though, is to meld together a training program with a political end state in Syria and so if we are going to train Syrian rebels, if that is—if that makes political sense and then they have to be designed toward dealing with the biggest political problem in Syria right now, which is the Assad regime.

But if you are going to train then they have to be trained sufficiently, integrated with other states in the region including the Jordanians to pursue operations on the ground in—with the long-term goal of a political end goal and I think that is the end of the Assad regime.

So what I would like to see is the matching of those and, again, I would just highlight, you know, there are at least two other challenges I think there are with the program.

One is there is no follow-on force once these people hit the ground. It makes it very difficult to see what they are doing, to impact what they are doing on the ground.

The second issue is that in general they—that it makes it very difficult—if you are not there it makes it difficult to assess what they are doing, how they are doing. You really need people on the ground to be about to assess that and, again, this really is special operations skill set or an intelligence one with organizations like the CIA.

So I think if we are to do this, those are the kinds of forces I would strongly consider.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. General Keane.

General KEANE. The training program in Syria makes no sense to me whatsoever and I don't think we should be doing it. It is a fig leaf because 5,000 new recruits this year are not consequential to dealing with ISIS and that is the stated purpose of doing it.

They are supposed to join a Free Syrian Army, which is in fact fighting the regime and not fighting ISIS. The only time the training program will make any sense is when we have a political solution in Syria and ISIS is still there and we have to deal with it.

Then it makes some sense now to put together a training force. Now we would train not—and we would put—I think it would be advisable to put some advisors on the ground as well. That makes sense because now you have got a stable political situation. The regime is not pounding its people anymore or the opposition force.

In Iraq, the problem with the train and assist mission it is just—Madam Chairman, it is just so extraordinarily inadequate.

We have an 18-division force in Iraq that we began with. We are training nine Iraqi brigades and three peshmerga brigades. No advisors will go forward with those units to fight, no forward air controllers forward with those units. We need a few thousand advisors training considerably more people, compress the time frame and then let some of those trainers as advisors go forward and follow with the unit.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And that was going to be general——

General KEANE. So it is inadequate.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. My follow-up question, which was what is your assessment of the Iraqi security forces capability. But you just answered that.

But you had testified that we are taking less than half measures to assist the Iraqi security forces, that we are providing insufficient arms to the Kurds and we have no credible plan to defeat ISIL.

I will ask you, do you believe that the current government in Baghdad, that is certainly a breath of fresh air compared to the previous one, can work cooperatively with the Kurds and provide them military hardware?

General KEANE. Yes, and that is a great question and you—I think you probably know the answer here. It is pretty frustrating what is unfolding. We want to assist the Sunni tribes, we want to assist the Kurds and the Iraqi Government is constipating that process. And I know there is a thought that we should find a mechanism to go around the government.

Look, this government is an improvement and much of the success in Iraq is dependent on their ability to politically be inclusive, particularly with the Sunni tribes and with the Kurds.

The advisors and the training program and the Sunni tribes is inadequate. It is not going to get us there. The arms program is inadequate because they are not reaching them.

The same thing with the Kurds. The Kurds have skill and they have will, but they need better weapons and that is not getting there either.

More pressure needs to be put on—I would rather go through the government and make that happen than go around the government and find another program to do it. We have got to move the government in the right direction to do that.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Thank you, General.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

General Keane, if the train and equip mission is just a fig leaf, if it is not going to accomplish what needs to be done in Syria, which is, I think what you just said—you just described the problems in Iraq—so what is—how do we—how do we accomplish it?

It would start with Syria, and if in Syria ultimately the real solution involves Assad's departure then, for you and Dr. Wittes, how do we—how does that happen?

Who can put pressure on Assad if at this point it is not us and, obviously, it is not—it appears that it is not the Russians?

General KEANE. Well, what I have suggested is that, clearly, we can use the military instrument here to try to get a political solution.

We should take the counsel of our allies in the region—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan—and what their objective is, clearly, they recognize ISIS as a major threat to them.

But they understand that to pursue ISIS while the Assad regime has all of its military power and is pounding opposition forces and killing its own people makes no sense. We have got to get Assad out of there.

The way to do that—and there is no perfect solution here. But the status quo, I think, is unacceptable, given the genocide that is taking place.

So what you do is you put in, and this is what our allies would like to do and I agree with them, no-fly zones—if Assad contested then we would shut his air power down and we have the capability to do that, I don't think he would—and buffer zones to stop the genocide.

The Alawites and the Druze right now have less support for Assad than they have had through these 4 years. I think some kind of political solution with Assad gone is in the offing.

The opposition will not entertain anything with Assad there. So I would focus on that political solution and modest introduction of military threat and possible capability to do that. That allows you then to focus on ISIS.

ISIS cannot be driven out of Syria, Congressman Deutch, without an effective ground force. Where is that going to come from? It is not going to be the 5,000 recruits that we are training.

It has to be largely provided by the nations in the region. They have to step up and do that. They will not do that with Assad there.

So once we get a political solution then we can put together some kind of an effective ground force to deal with ISIS. Otherwise, the policy we have now is ISIS just continues.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. Great.

So, Dr. Wittes, how do we get that political solution?

Ms. WITTES. Thank you. Well, I think what General Keane is suggesting is that, in essence, we need to reverse the sequencing that the administration has put forward.

They have said ISIS is the first priority and Assad is the second, and the General would have it the other way around. I actually think that the problem right now on the ground is that those who are gaining influence and power are gaining it because of battlefield success.

They are not gaining it because they are protecting people. They are not gaining it because they are providing services. They are not gaining it because they are providing justice.

And ISIS is saying that it is offering a governing model but what it is really offering is, we can win, and the extremist rebels on the ground that are doing the business in Idlib right now are gaining strength because they are showing that they can win.

What we want to do is reverse that dynamic. We want to show that if you can demonstrate the ability to hold territory, to govern people, to provide security and justice that that brings benefits.

And in order to do that, I think safe zones are a piece of the puzzle definitely worth considering, and our allies are pushing that, but it would require a commitment that we so far have been unwilling to make.

Now, our allies have just been conducting air operations over Yemen and they have, you know, been part of the anti-ISIS campaign in there as well.

So I think it is worth asking the question whether policing those safe zones is something they might be willing to take on or at least be the lead on in terms of threatened use of force.

But we have also got to ensure that resources flow to these rebel-held areas in a way that keeps civilians there instead of having them flee and worsen the refugee problem and allows rebel forces who actually want to help govern Syria to begin to govern and protect Syrian people.

Mr. DEUTCH. Madam Chair, can I ask one last question?

So we know—we know that the American people will be supportive of efforts to push back ISIS. The horrific beheadings, I think, shine a light on the awful brutality of what they do and the killing of Americans is, I think, a moment of awakening for Americans. We understand that.

I think there is broad awareness of the threats that—the concerns that we have about Iran and the Iranian threat and their support of not just propping up Assad but the way that they meddle and disrupt in the region and their support of terror.

But I would just like—before we go I would just like to ask this question. With now a quarter of a million or so Syrians having died, do we—is there a place in our foreign policy for human rights anymore? Do we care? Do you think the American people care?

General KEANE. I definitely think so. I mean, I think the problem we have had here—you know, over at the Institute for the Study of War we get—we keep track of the genocide. We have got just these unbelievably graphic pictures of the results of starvation campaigns, attacking bakeries, 62 percent of the hospitals being destroyed, close to 70 percent of the ambulances—a systematic methodology that the Assad regime has used on killing his people.

It is just—it is outrageous. But very little of that is in the domain of the American people. I will tell you that—and I have to protect confidentiality here—I have dealt with some relatively senior people in the administration who had no level of detail of what this really was until I put photographs in front of them and showed them this systematic methodological campaign to do this.

It is much more than just barrel bombing. And so I think that is part of it. I mean, there is—I think the American people in general have the sense something bad is going on in Syria and people are being killed but they don't have a sense of what that really is.

I will—I always believe fundamentally that this country has and will continue to have an interest in human suffering in the world. Doesn't mean we can solve all of it. I am not suggesting that.

But I do believe that that is—and it is part of the President's policy dealing with ISIS—it is one of his tenets of it is humanitarian assistance.

Mr. DEUTCH. General Keane, I believe you are right. And Madam Chairman, we had a witness here at one of our previous hearings, if you recall, who was a physician—a Syrian-American physician—who came—went to provide medical assistance in Syria and came here and told us about not—he didn't have the evidence of systematic killing.

All he could tell us about was standing out in a school yard and looking up and seeing a black dot in the sky and knowing that it was a helicopter, and then seeing two more black dots come out and knowing that they were barrel bombs and knowing that they were being dropped and having no idea where they were going to land but the sole purpose of those dots as they fell and grew larger

and ultimately hit the ground was to kill as many people as possible.

General Keane, I believe you. I believe that we still think that human rights matter and that a regime that brutally kills over 200,000 people cannot be allowed to stand, and I think it is an important reminder. I am heartened by what you said.

And I hate to end this hearing on that note. Your testimony has been—the three of you—has been really helpful to us. But I was at a meeting with our U.N. ambassador, who raised a term—this was a while ago, actually—who raised the term, a professional term, that I never heard before called psychic numbing.

We can't afford, as a country, to allow psychic numbing to overcome the way we view the tragic deaths of thousands and thousands of people at the hands of a brutal dictator. We can't allow it. It is not who we are and I appreciate speaking here.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen. Thank you. Yes, I remember the use of that phrase tragic numbing and it is a tragedy.

Mr. Connolly, thank you so much for being kind enough to give up your time. But I wanted to recognize you so that you could say a few words before we break, and I know that we have votes on the floor.

Mr. Connolly of Virginia is recognized.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Forgive me for being late—been a harried morning. Obviously, a lot more to go into in terms of this subject area. I was informed that General Keane perhaps made the suggestion that we were deliberately holding back in support of Syria freedom fighters or insurgents somehow to perhaps please Iran.

I have never seen any evidence of that. I think we are holding back because we are not entirely sure which side to support and there isn't a great secular middle that is out there fighting the Assad regime.

But that is worthy of further examination and, certainly, I will study your testimony very closely.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. Thank you, Mr. Deutch.

I thank the panelists for your excellent testimony. You have given us a lot to chew on, a lot to ponder on, a lot to worry about.

Thank you so much, and with that the subcommittee is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:51 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

# APPENDIX

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## Material Submitted for the Record

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**
**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

April 27, 2015

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

**DATE:** Thursday, April 30, 2015

**TIME:** 11:00 a.m.

**SUBJECT:** Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Towards Iraq and Syria

**WITNESSES:** Seth G. Jones, Ph. D.
Director, International Security and Defense Policy Center
RAND Corporation

General Jack Keane, USA, Retired
Chairman of the Board
Institute for the Study of War

Tamara Cofman Wittes, Ph. D.
Director
Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Middle East and North Africa* HEARING

**Day** *Tuesday* **Date** *4/30/15* **Room** *2172*

**Starting Time** *11:00 a.m.* **Ending Time** *12:51 p.m.*

**Recesses** [*0*] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

**Presiding Member(s)**

*Chairman Ros-Lehtinen*

*Check all of the following that apply:*

**Open Session** [✓]
**Executive (closed) Session** [✓]
**Televised** [✓]
**Electronically Recorded (taped)** [✓]
**Stenographic Record** [✓]

**TITLE OF HEARING:**

***Regional Impact of U.S. Policy Towards Iraq and Syria***

**SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

***Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Clawson, Connolly, Deutch, Frankel, Higgins and Meadows.***

**NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

**HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes** [✓] **No** [ ]
*(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)*

**STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD:** *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

***SFR - Rep. Connolly***

**TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE** _____
or
**TIME ADJOURNED** *12:51 p.m.*

**Subcommittee Staff Director**

## Statement for the Record

***Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia***

Two of the three longest wars in U.S. history were fought in the 21st century. As a result, the lessons of unilateral, unlimited, and open-ended military commitments are fresh in the minds of the American public and the servicemembers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Current U.S. policy towards Iraq and Syria comprises a diversity of diplomatic, military, and humanitarian assistance operations that bolster effective partners in the region. This is not a situation the U.S. will resolve alone, nor is it a situation we will abandon. We cannot be satisfied with a region mired in misery and conflict in perpetuity, and friends in the region need to witness our resolve to foster a bright future for the Middle East.

There are ongoing efforts to help our allies and partner countries absorb the burden of Syrian refugees, as well as train and equip the forces that are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The President's budget requests $1.63 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funds for humanitarian assistance in Iraq and Syria, as well as funding for three train and equip (T&E) missions in the fight against ISIL, the global Counter-terrorism Partnerships Fund, the Iraq T&E authority, and the Vetted Syrians T&E authority. The President's budget also includes a request for $3.5 billion to counter ISIL. This must include empowering partners, stemming the flow of foreign fighters, coordinating an ambitious humanitarian relief effort, cutting off ISIL's financing, and combatting the sophisticated propaganda it deploys to recruit and incite further violence.

Furthermore, the President has asked Congress to define our operation in Syria and Iraq and provide a mandate for our mission to defeat ISIL through an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF). For those who witnessed the lesson of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution firsthand, the imperative should be clear. An ill-defined mission with no clear mandate and conflicting objectives is hardly a formula for military or political victory. Assertion of Congressional prerogative is long overdue. We should welcome a robust and transparent debate on the matter of an AUMF against ISIL. This would facilitate a broader discussion about our strategy and objectives in the region.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the U.S. might demonstrate a commitment to a future for Iraq and Syria that is not defined by violence and sectarian conflict. We must consider our lack of good options to be motivation for sound policy and not merely an excuse for inaction.



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