

**THE PLAN TO DEFEAT ISIS: KEY DECISIONS
AND CONSIDERATIONS**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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THE PLAN TO DEFEAT ISIS: KEY DECISIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2017

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker [presiding], Risch, Rubio, Johnson, Gardner, Young, Barrasso, Isakson, Portman, Paul, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Markey, Merkley, and Booker.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We thank our witnesses for being here, and all the Senators who are here, and those who will come. I hope your experience here today can be informative, as we take stock of our efforts against ISIS.

Last month, President Trump asked for a new plan to defeat ISIS. The preliminary draft should be completed by the end of this month.

While the executive branch is looking at new options, I think it is a good time for us to take a look at what has been accomplished, what remains to be done, and what decisions need to be made.

As the battle for Mosul continues and the preparations for Raqqa begin, I hope we can get your perspective on what additional steps to defeat ISIS could look like, and with whom we should partner.

The fight in Iraq appears to remain on course, but huge questions remain about the future of American influence and what role Iran will play in a post-ISIS Iraq.

Unfortunately, in Syria, the problem has only gotten harder with time. And now the Trump administration is faced with choosing the least bad option. One decision they must make is who to involve in the military campaign.

Who actually clears Raqqa could have wide-ranging strategic consequences, whether it is the Kurds, Kurdish-supported Arabs, Turkey and the Syrian opposition, or the Assad regime and its allies.

I criticized the previous administration for a glaring disparity between their anti-ISIS efforts and their diplomatic efforts to end the

Syrian civil war. I would appreciate your perspectives on the logic that defeating ISIS without a political solution in Syria will simply lead to another ISIS, and whether or not it is possible to link the two strategies.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Department of Defense was tasked as the lead agency in developing this strategy. This is probably a good moment for us to examine the structure the administration is using to lead the coalition and the role of the State Department.

With that, I would like to thank you again for appearing before the committee, and I look forward to your testimony, and turn to our distinguished ranking member, Ben Cardin.

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

Senator CARDIN. Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for calling this hearing. To me, this is an extremely urgent subject for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the United States Senate, and the United States.

So I welcome our two witnesses, and I look forward to a robust discussion.

President Trump now faces a key decision point on how he will direct the fight against ISIL. Over the past 2 weeks, we have all had a chance to see how President Trump handles national security issues. I certainly hope that the risky and chaotic start we have just seen on how he handled the Muslim ban is not an indicator as to how he will handle ISIL.

Last week, we saw how he abandoned our allies like Australia and appeased our enemies like Russia. It also remains totally unclear how Mr. Trump's never-ending desire to make nice with the Russians, even after they attacked our democratic system, will influence his plans in Syria.

And President Trump's abandonment of our core American values with his Muslim ban will also alienate the Muslim allies we need to work with the Middle East to fight ISIL.

Any path forward fighting ISIL brings risks. Increasing U.S. boots on the ground, directing U.S. troops to get closer to the fight, or changing the rules of engagement, demand an assessment of the risks to the U.S. forces and to civilians living inside ISIS territory. Arming new groups like YPG in Syria must be balanced against Turkish concerns and the desired end state in Syria.

Changing the deepening U.S. involvement in the fight against ISIS must be weighed against what we know from past experience. U.S. forces on their own in this part of the world only inflame resentment and become the target of violent extremists.

There is no sustainable win against ISIS without a long-term political solution. That means a political settlement that ends the civil war in Syria, and removes Bashar al-Assad, and ensures that Iraq has a government that is inclusive, accountable, and reflective of its citizens' needs.

Mr. Chairman, every day we hear more about what is happening in Syria. Today's report by Amnesty International, that up to 13,000 people have been executed in a prison north of Damascus

in a hidden campaign authorized at the highest levels of the Assad regime, is beyond disturbing.

This stomach-churning report is a must-read for those in the Trump administration who want to move forward on counterterrorism cooperation with Russia against ISIL. Russia's military intervention was explicit to save their man in Damascus, Bashar al-Assad.

This amounts to war crimes, and we cannot be complicitous in covering up accountability for war crimes.

On January 28, President Trump issued National Security Presidential Memorandum 3 directing the Department of Defense to develop a new plan to defeat ISIS. This directive instructed the Defense Department, as the chairman pointed out, to collaborate across the U.S. Government, including the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the intelligence community.

This should alarm members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee because a plan to defeat ISIS that is viewed primarily through a military lens is not going to succeed. We need to lead with a solution to the problem, not just a military solution.

If we have learned anything from the experience of the last decade, it is that the military fight is not even half of the battle. Long-term, sustainable ends to conflict demand political agreements; international donors; stabilization activities; reconciliation initiatives; development expertise; accountable local leadership; and, above all, patient, consistent diplomacy and political engagement.

The State Department must be the leader in our counter-ISIS strategy. The counter-ISIS strategy carried out by President Obama, including military force, is one line of effort. It is a critical line to our effort, to be sure, but just one element in a holistic approach.

Equally important are cutting off terror funding, stopping foreign fighter flows, countering ISIS propaganda and online recruitment, and providing humanitarian assistance to the innocent civilians in neighboring countries impacted by ISIS depravity and violence.

Evidenced by this line of effort and more, President Trump has clearly inherited the most capable, experienced people at the State Department. I hope he uses them. We have the experts there that can help us determine long-term strategy.

We have made progress in defeating ISIS. We have taken back territory. We have been able to deal with circumstances on the ground with the local forces. We need to build on that and build on the expertise that we have already developed within our State Department to make this work.

But one thing is clear to me and that is, we have to work with our allies. I was pleased to see yesterday that President Trump pulled back on his hostility toward NATO. That was a good sign.

But threatening the relevancy of the United Nations or embarrassing the President of Mexico or abruptly cutting short a phone call with the Prime Minister of Australia will only isolate America and our ability to really defeat ISIS through the type of partnerships that we need globally.

So I hope that we can address these issues in a partnership working with our allies. Australia, by the way, is one of our closest

allies in our war against ISIS. And I hope that we can figure out a way in which this committee can weigh in.

One thing is clear to me. The Muslim ban is a recruitment tool that will be used that will hurt our chances of defeating ISIS.

And no, Mr. President, this is not like some other proposal that has been made by previous administrations. This is much more comprehensive and has clearly been interpreted and is based upon the religion of the individuals, and that alienates over 1.7 billion Muslims globally and countries working with us in the coalition.

This ban needs to end, and the Congress needs to speak, and I hope this hearing will be the beginning of our debate here in this committee as to how we can help in regards to our fight against ISIS.

The CHAIRMAN. Are you finished?

Senator CARDIN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I do want to agree on the 13,000 people that supposedly have been hung. I think all of us have seen the photographs that Caesar presented here, that the Holocaust Museum put on display. I know you and I were there for that ceremony.

And I do hope that, at the end of this, we do not forget we have a major war criminal on our hands in Syria. And as we move through this, he has got to be punished. He has got to be brought to trial. He has got to be dealt with in the most appropriate way, so I could not agree more.

I will say that, last week, in meeting with General Flynn, the national security adviser, I do think that Mattis and Tillerson have made a combine that neither one of them are going to come forward with plans that the two of them have not agreed to. But I agree that the State Department certainly needs to be involved with this.

So with that, let me introduce our distinguished witnesses. Our first witness is the Hon. James Jeffrey, currently with the Washington Institute. Ambassador Jeffrey previously served as the Ambassador to Iraq, the Ambassador to Turkey, the deputy national security adviser to President George W. Bush.

We thank you so much for being here.

Our second witness today is Mr. Jeremy Bash, the managing director at Beacon Global Strategies, a former chief of staff to Leon Panetta at the U.S. Department of Defense and the CIA.

We want to thank you both for being here. I think you both have done this before many times. Your written testimony, without objection, will be entered into the record, and if you can summarize in about 5 minutes, that would be great. We look forward to questions.

Again, in the order introduced, if you would begin, I would appreciate it.

Ambassador?

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JAMES JEFFREY, PHILIP SOLONDZ
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE,
WASHINGTON, DC**

Ambassador JEFFREY. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, first of all, and members of the committee, thank you very much for having us here today. This is a really important and crucial issue.

As you said, our written comments are submitted to the record. I will try to summarize them. But frankly, the two of you, in your opening statements, hit on most of my top points.

Number one, the President's directive to move very quickly on ISIS with the goal of defeating it is exactly the right strategy.

Number two, this has to be done in conjunction with the State Department and Defense Department, because the military operation is not the only operation. We will defeat ISIS as a state. We will not eliminate it completely, for the same reason we have not eliminated Al Qaeda completely. But getting rid of it as a state, as a caliphate, is an extremely important step.

But how we do this politically, as you said, in relation to Syria, to Iran, which is possibly an even greater danger in the region, with Russia now involved in the region, is crucially important. This is a watershed in the region, as we move to eliminate in Raqqa and Mosul, equivalent to probably nothing we have seen since the surge a decade ago.

Let us start first on the battle that we have before us, because it is not won yet. Mosul is slowly being liberated from ISIS, and that will eliminate ISIS, essentially, from Iraq, other than some minor terrorist groups. The issue there will be to keep it from coming back, as it came back again after its predecessor was defeated in 2008 to 2010.

The Raqqa battle is the bigger battle. And as the chairman said, there are several options.

Using the Kurdish YPG, which was what the Obama administration did, has advantages. The problem is it does not have the heavy weapons. It is violently opposed by Turkey, and Turkey is essential to this battle, its airfields, its logistics, its support. Turkey actually has troops in the fight against ISIS.

So I am very concerned about going forward without getting the Turks on board. That is possible, as someone who has spent 9 years in Turkey.

But it will not be possible until after the early April referendum in Turkey about the presidency. For various internal reasons, President Erdogan has to take a very tough line on the Kurds, until that time. He has been more flexible in the past. I think he can be flexible, if he is given a role in Raqqa, in the future. So I hope we can look to that.

Inviting the Russians, Syrians, and Iranians in to be our allies in this fight for a dozen reasons, including some you just cited, is a very bad idea.

The Russian military capabilities, frankly, apart from carpet-bombing civilians, are not impressive in this campaign so far. And the Iranians and Syrians are feared and hated by the people of eastern Syria. So we have to be very, very careful about that.

But what is going to happen after we inevitably take Raqqa?

First of all, speed is important, and that is why I would urge the Senate and the administration to consider upping significantly the American enablers we have—advisers, artillery, attack helicopters.

But also consider at least some ground forces, not just ours but from other NATO forces, in the battalion level, a few thousand people at most, to spearhead the attack, because what I have seen in

the battle in Mosul and the Turks and the battle for Al Bab, this is going to be very tough without elite forces.

But what happens on the day after? First of all, there are immediate issues of providing relief to the people, ensuring that one group does not go after the other group. But so far, surprisingly, from what all I have seen in the Middle East, in Iraq and to some degree in Syria, that has gone okay.

It is the longer term we have to watch. We need to be present in Syria, and the battle against ISIS gives us an opportunity to do so. We have two alliances we need to keep steady. First, the Turks, who have essentially a no-fly safe zone in the north of Syria, and the Kurds in Rojava, if we can work out a way between the two, we will have a presence there, and we can use that to leverage pressure on the Syrian Government and on the Russians to maintain the Astana ceasefire, which is absolutely critical and will be opposed by Assad and, frankly, the Iranians, who want a total victory in Syria, which is destabilizing for the whole region.

The other thing is, soon, the battle in Iraq is over. We should learn from what happened in 2014, when ISIS returned, that it is a mistake for us to get out of that country. Iraq is crucial not only to prevent Sunni extremism but also as—I will not say a buffer, but as a balancing country to Iran. And that requires some sort of American presence, including at least a minimal American military training presence. And I hope this time we can do it.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Jeffrey follows:]

THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES F. JEFFREY

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you for having me here to discuss this national security issue of the utmost significance.

SUMMARY

The threats the Islamic State (ISIS) poses to our homeland and those of our allies and partners, its destabilizing role throughout the Middle East, and the recent success the U.S.-led coalition has had against it, all argue for an immediate, intense effort to destroy this terrorist scourge as our most urgent priority in the region. Published reports and administration statements indicate the Trump administration is fully behind this goal.

But while ISIS is the most urgent priority in the region, it is not the only, or even the most dangerous, one. Iranian expansionist activity, at times partnered with Russia, poses at least an equal security risk to the region and key U.S. interests: stability of regional partners, flow of hydrocarbons to the global economy, non-proliferation and counter-terrorism. Defeating ISIS, while worthy in itself, must be done in a manner to reinforce regional stability and U.S. interests.

Today I would like to discuss considerations related to both the defeat of ISIS itself, and possible 'day after' scenarios, stressing how the latter play into U.S. interests, and in turn depend on not only whether, but how, and with whom, we defeat ISIS.

In short, our plan to take Raqqa in Syria, the key remaining objective, should be done in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, Turkey. After the Turkish constitutional referendum in early April Ankara should be willing, if it understands longer-term U.S. goals, to accept additional support for the Syrian Kurdish YPG in the Raqqa battle, assuming Turkish equities in Syria are supported. And if the United States desires a rapid victory over ISIS, it probably will have to commit more supporting forces, and possibly limited ground combat formations.

The destruction of the ISIS 'state' in Iraq and Syria, in the context of the Syrian civil war, Iran's quest for hegemony, and Russian reengagement, will be a watershed in the Middle East equivalent to the U.S. march into Iraq, the Iranian revolution, and America's regional intervention during the Yom Kippur conflict. Decisions

taken over the coming year by the United States and others will shape the region for decades.

As U.S. vital regional interests are at stake in the post-ISIS scenario, the United States should choose its political-military strategy for the defeat of ISIS not only from a military but from a political standpoint—to advance a ‘day after’ scenario that keeps the United States in the region, maintain our new (YPG) and old (Turkish and Iraqi) relationships, push back Iranian ambitions and ‘manage’ an inevitable Russian presence.

THE ISIS BATTLE

As Graeme Wood has written in *The Atlantic*, the unique nature of ISIS is based on its status as a “Caliphate,” a statelet with a population, army, economy, and government, and a claim to the Caliphate tradition from Islam’s golden age. While ISIS has offshoots in ungoverned territory throughout the Muslim world, its unique nature and threat flows from its territory in Northwestern Iraq and Eastern Syria, centered on Mosul and the ISIS capital, Raqqa. Taking those cities will destroy the ISIS “state” and defeat ISIS in its current form and dramatically reduce its threat to U.S. interests.

The U.S. led coalition’s campaign against these two cities, while coordinated, is militarily and politically differentiated. My focus in both, while it will touch on military issues, will be the political considerations underlying military decisions and goals.

IRAQ: By most accounts, the battle for West Mosul will take several months. The coalition-Iraqi game plan for that campaign is well-developed and succeeding. Once successful, the only major ISIS presence in Iraq will be Hawijah, near Kirkuk, presumably an easy target. As the Mosul victory nears, ground maneuvers, especially by the Kurdish Peshmerga and the largely Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), will require careful U.S. engagement to avoid clashes and to advance longer-term U.S. interests in Iraq.

SYRIA: By all accounts the United States is preparing for a final push against Raqqa. But given the tenacity of ISIS defense of other cities, capturing Raqqa will be a major undertaking. The United States has options to generate forces for such a victory, but each has significant political-military implications.

YPG-led operation: This was the preferred solution of the Obama Administration but, according to press accounts, has been challenged by the Trump Administration. It foresees an offensive organized around the Syrian Democratic Force (SDF), led by the Syrian Kurdish YPG, but with a minority of Sunni Arabs. But the SDF has only limited crew-served, and little or no heavy, weapons. Urban warfare typically requires integrated tank-engineer-infantry forces supported by fires. To develop such a combined arms capability the United States would have to provide heavy weapons.

Turkey is opposed to this given the YPG’s relationship with the Turkish Kurdish insurgent organization, the PKK, engaged in a bitter internal conflict with Ankara. Turkey is not only opposed to the United States arming the YPG, but also to the YPG moving into Sunni Arab areas, particularly those occupying Turkey’s entire Syrian border. It is difficult to see how Washington could pursue anti-ISIS operations in Syria without Turkish bases and other cooperation. In addition, according to a draft report by the Washington Institute, all four major Arab tribes around Raqqa are to one or another degree at odds with the Kurds, raising a question of ‘the day after’ in Raqqa if the city was liberated by Kurds, or Arab elements under their control. Finally, a largely YPG victory over ISIS in Raqqa and the expansion of the YPG over a large swath of Arab territory, as now seen in the city of Manbic, has troubling implications for regional arrangements post-ISIS, including possible YPG cooperation with Iran and Assad.

Turkish Alliance: The Turks have offered to either lead or support a coalition assault on Raqqa using their Free Syrian Army (FSA), largely Arab allies, along with the Turkish armor-infantry taskforce in northern Syria. According to reporting in the *Washington Post* February 2, the Turks are not seen as capable of carrying out this mission themselves, and their stalled anti-ISIS offensive in al Bab strengthens such an assessment. While the same Washington Institute report suggests that the Raqqa tribes would be less antagonistic to a Turkish presence, an expanded Turkish military role could be problematic for both the YPG and the Assad-Iran-Russia coalition.

Combination: A joint effort on two fronts by the Turks/FSA and YPG/SDF would put more military pressure on ISIS and potentially calm Turkey’s concerns about the YPG. Such a joint operation would be easier for the United States politically than throwing its lot with a single YPG or Turkish-led offensive, but would still re-

quire delicate diplomacy. Turkey would need assurances on weapons to the YPG, and how far YPG forces would move into Arab territory. However, while the YPG's links with the PKK make it a threat to Turkey, part of President Erdoğan's hostility to the PKK and thus YPG stems from his political alliance to win an early April Constitutional Amendment referendum. Once that is behind him, he may be more flexible with the PKK and YPG, as he was before Summer 2015. The YPG, in turn, would require assurances that its core Kurdish territory would not be pressured by Turkey.

Russian-Syrian-Iranian Support: The military capabilities of this coalition are not apparent. Russian airpower routinely targets civilian populations and lacks precision weapons. It is hard to see a military advantage it brings which could not be met by a minor increase in Coalition aircraft. Likewise, Syrian and Iranian surrogate infantry capabilities are not impressive, and employing them in Sunni Arab areas is risky. Moreover, unless it is clear that the United States, with whatever above option it chooses, cannot take Raqqa, then the benefits of recruiting Russia, Iran and Assad must be balanced against their 'sharing' a victory that the United States could obtain without them. On the other hand, acceding to a token Russian role against Raqqa, or more intensive intelligence sharing and air tasking coordination with Moscow, could complement efforts described below aimed at Iran.

U.S. and NATO forces: One reason for recent success against ISIS has been a loosening of restrictions, and personnel/equipment ceilings, on U.S. force 'enablers' (Joint Terminal Attack Coordinators—JTAC), advisory teams, attack helicopters, artillery, and the rules of engagement they operate under. Reportedly a further loosening is under review in DoD, and that makes sense. A more decisive step would be the introduction of limited U.S. and other NATO elite ground combat forces in direct combat. In particular a relatively small (several thousand strong) U.S. armor contingent could be a decisive force multiplier with risk of casualties limited. From a political standpoint, a more robust U.S. ground presence would reassure the Turks, YPG, and residents of Raqqa about U.S. commitment and potentially increase their receptivity to U.S. initiatives.

THE DAY AFTER

Once Mosul and Raqqa have been liberated, and the Caliphate destroyed, the United States should engage diplomatically and militarily to ensure that outcomes in both Syria and Iraq are compatible with U.S. interests, especially the containment of Iran. This task has both 'immediate' and 'long term' aspects.

The immediate goals are relief to liberated populations and protection of civilians against ill-disciplined victorious factions. Generally this effort has been successful in Iraq and on a smaller scale Syria, so should not require extensive new U.S. involvement. But governance and security decisions taken immediately will have an impact on the attitudes of the population towards their liberators, and if ill-considered could encourage a return of ISIS or al Qaeda. This is obviously of interest to the United States.

The longer-term outcomes of the defeat of ISIS are of great import to the United States, as noted in the summary. Apart from preventing a new descent into chaos or extremist control, the U.S. interest for this "Syria-Iraq theater" is to preserve Iraqi unity and independence, uphold the Astana Syrian cease fire, limit Iranian influence in Iraq, react to Russia's regional expansion, and reconcile Turkey and the YPG.

To avoid any Syrian-Iranian effort to break the Astana ceasefire and achieve a total victory over the opposition, the United States should support the Turkish zone in Northern Syria, the Rojava and Afrin YPG enclaves, and a 'free zone' around Raqqa, including with some temporary U.S. military training and liaison detachments inside Syria. Reconciliation between Turkey and the YPG (and potentially the PKK) would reinforce these efforts. The option of arming the FSA must stay on the table. Such conditions offer the best chance of splitting Russia off from Iran and Syria.

The U.S. military should press for a 'stay-behind' train and liaison presence of several thousand troops in Iraq, supporting both Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi regular military forces. This likely will require direct communications and a mix of 'carrots and sticks' with the Iranians, and with an inevitable risk of Iran lashing out at U.S. forces there.

The above steps represent an initial political-military post-conflict 'shaping of the environment' to balance the various regional actors, restore partners' credibility in U.S. military success and commitments, and buy time for a more comprehensive policy towards the region.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
Mr. Bash?

**STATEMENT OF JEREMY BASH, MANAGING DIRECTOR,
BEACON GLOBAL STRATEGIES LLC, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. BASH. Mr. Chairman, distinguished Ranking Member Mr. Cardin, members of the committee, and great public servant Ambassador Jeffrey, I come at this issue having seen counterterrorism and military operations through the prism of those who led them at the CIA and the Defense Department.

And I think here is the bottom line. We have been talking about Syria. We have been talking about Iraq. ISIS is a global threat. ISIS is a global challenge. That is why I believe we need a global, comprehensive strategy to defeat ISIS and protect American national security interests.

This challenge is so urgent, so complicated, that, in my view, the only way to accomplish it is to simultaneously use the full measure of our diplomatic, military, law enforcement, intelligence, economic, and public diplomacy efforts.

Now, let me make three quick points about the current campaign, and Ambassador Jeffrey hit on some of them.

First, I think the campaign against ISIS in Mosul and in Raqqa should be intensified. What does intensification look like? Greater intelligence resources to track ISIS planners; increased pace of airstrikes, particularly in Raqqa; training and equipping those forces on the ground who can deny ISIS a safe haven.

Point two, on the global front, we have to stay on the offensive against ISIS everywhere. And I should also add Al Qaeda. I know that is not the focus of this hearing, but let us not focus—let us not lose sight of the important role that Al Qaeda plays as well.

ISIS, we have to operate—they operate in the Sahel, to Europe, to South Asia. And when American airpower is necessary, as it was recently in Libya, I believe we should deploy it without hesitation.

But in many cases, our work is going to entail the less headline-grabbing activities: information-sharing, data correlation, intelligence training, law enforcement training, and diplomacy.

Take Europe, for example. There, we must keep our focus on the travel of foreign fighters, work with our European allies and partners. In most areas of the world, the main levers of U.S. power will be this intelligence cooperation, the day-to-day diplomacy. And that is why our campaign cannot, in my view, be globally led by the military alone.

Point three, we must counter ISIS's use of social media, Twitter, Telegram, and other outlets that they use for their propaganda purposes. As this committee has recognized, propaganda is an accelerant on the process of radicalization.

In that vein, our efforts should be geared toward working with Muslim leaders here in the United States and in Muslim-majority countries from Africa to the gulf to Southeast Asia, to counter ISIS's narrative.

Turning now to the current administration's already stated plans, and although the administration is only about 3 weeks old, it actually has moved aggressively in some areas with regards to counter-ISIS policy. I strongly support the President's decision to

conduct a quick review of the anti-ISIS campaign. We do not want our momentum to stall.

However, I think there are some areas where I think the administration's early steps warrant some adjustment.

First, we must make clear that we support our allies. They are taking fire from ISIS at this very hour. For example, Australia—Australia has fought with us in every war since World War II. They are the second largest troop contributor to the counter-ISIS effort. We have to thank Australia every chance we get.

We also need the support of our NATO allies, and there will be an opportunity later this spring for the President to make that case clearly himself when he attends the NATO summit.

Second, we should ensure that diplomacy is on an equal footing with military planning. We referenced the 28 January directive. A comprehensive global strategy requires that the State Department be on equal footing with the Defense Department.

Third, in my view, we should repeal the Muslim-only ban, and I say this strictly from a national security perspective.

Counterterrorism requires focus. If you put an entire civilian populace under suspicion, you are inevitably going to take your eye off the true threats. And worse, we have handed ISIS, in my view, the ultimate recruiting tool.

Fourth, we should disavow taking their oil or torture. These play into the worst fears of the very people we are trying to enlist to support our efforts.

Finally, I agree with Ambassador Jeffrey. I would not outsource the counter-ISIS campaign to Russia or to Iran or to Assad. This is a very dangerous idea. Russia and Syria have conducted hideous crimes, in my view. They liquefied the town of Aleppo in a scene too horrible to allow it to be shown on my own television in my living room when young children were present.

Russia's misdeeds cannot be trusted, and the administration, I believe, will inevitably come to this conclusion after a period of time.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the counter-ISIS campaign has made important progress. ISIS has lost more than half its territory. Many of its senior leaders have been taken off the battlefield. They are being squeezed.

But we cannot and should not be complacent. Now is the time to accelerate our campaign, intensify our efforts, and hasten the defeat of ISIS on a global scale.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bash follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEREMY BASH¹

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you today, alongside one of our country's great public servants, Ambassador James Jeffrey.

I come at this issue having seen counterterrorism campaigns and military operations through the prism of those who led those efforts at the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon. In addition to developing and executing these missions, it was the role of these senior leaders to advise the President on the most fateful decisions a President makes: whether to send our women and men into harm's way. A President must be able to avail himself of information, facts, expertise, and candid advice. From what I observed, the Commander in Chief simply cannot do his job

of keeping our country safe without these critical inputs. Hearings like these provide one of those critical inputs.

Decisions made in the White House Situation Room have enormous consequences. I commend President Trump for taking the time last week to travel to Dover Air Force Base to pay his respects to one of our fallen heroes. I have made that trip myself and seen the bravery of the family members whose loved ones we welcomed home. I do not think it is possible to understand the stakes of these decisions until you see the faces of the mothers and fathers, siblings and spouses, and most poignantly, the young children of those who sacrifice everything for our nation.

During my decade in government, we witnessed many false starts and missteps in the effort to take on Al Qaeda—in Iraq, in the Arabian Peninsula, in the Maghreb, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan. But over time, we developed strategies to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the senior leadership of Al Qaeda, stopping specific external plots, and denying them the ability to plan and execute another large-scale attack on our homeland. I believe there are lessons to be learned from both the failures and the successes that can inform the plan against ISIS.

What is needed today is a comprehensive strategy to defeat ISIS and protect American national security interests.

I use the term “comprehensive strategy” because this challenge is so urgent and yet so complex that, in my view, the only way to accomplish all of our objectives simultaneously is to employ the full measure of our diplomatic, intelligence, military, law enforcement, economic, and public diplomacy efforts.

I want to focus my testimony on four areas:

First, the campaign in Syria and Iraq;

Second, the global hunt for ISIS;

Third, the effort to counter ISIS propaganda, primarily online; and

Fourth, adjustments to the current approach against ISIS.

CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

The United States-led counter-ISIS campaign in Mosul, Iraq, and in Raqqa, Syria, should be intensified to make it even harder for ISIS to plan external operations. Intensification requires three elements:

- First, we should devote greater intelligence resources to tracking ISIS senior planners—their whereabouts, their communications practices, and their ties to cells or individuals in Europe, Asia, or the United States. I would urge any new Administration to conduct a searching review of our intelligence posture against ISIS senior leaders and make recommendations to upgrade that posture.

- This is particularly important in light of the Feb. 4, 2017 article in the New York Times that revealed that ISIS leaders were in direct communication with operatives in 10 out of the 40 attacks that occurred outside of the so-called caliphate. In other words, a large portion of attacks thought to be “lone wolf” attacks had an actual operational connection to ISIS in Syria.

- Second, we should increase the pace of air strikes against ISIS targets, particularly in Raqqa. We have hit ISIS with over 17,000 airstrikes—including nearly 7,000 in Syria—since Operation Inherent Resolve began. But we need more pressure. These strikes are necessary to destroy the command-and-control infrastructure of ISIS. These strikes also force ISIS commanders to choose between keeping their head down or communicating with each other. We employed this strategy to great effect from 2008–2012 against Al Qaeda senior leaders along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. We saw many plots stopped dead in their tracks once air strikes took out the operational leader of the plot.

- Third, we should continue to train and equip those forces on the ground who can deny ISIS a safe haven. Training and equipping local forces are necessary tools to avoid U.S. casualties and ensure that counter-terrorist operations are not seen as U.S. efforts to impose a solution from afar or plunder their natural resources. In Iraq, the Iraqi military units have retaken about half of Mosul. We must continue to work with the Iraqi military to finish the Mosul campaign. In Syria, we should fund, train, and provide lethal offensive equipment to the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF). The SDF represent our best chance to take back ground in Raqqa.

- I know there is not unanimity on this point. While this option would have some near-term costs (such as creating friction with Turkey), it must be weighed against the alternatives. Other forces in the area are far less capable and will take too much time to mature. And doing nothing is not an option, for as long as ISIS feels comfortable in Raqqa, they will continue to look for ways to export their terror. A successful operation to liberate Raqqa will require a robust effort by Secretary Tillerson and his team to manage Ankara’s concerns.

- One of the reasons that Assad must go is because he will never allow a moderate opposition to exist in his country. He has relentlessly attacked any moderate Syrian group, under the banner of counterterrorism. He enjoys protection and support from Iran and Russia. Keeping him in power will not help defeat ISIS; it will maintain the status quo of a Syria in chaos. ISIS, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups will thrive in that chaos.

CAMPAIGN TO TRACK DOWN ISIS, AL QAEDA AND THEIR RECRUITS WORLD-WIDE

Intensification will put pressure on ISIS's strongholds in Syria and Iraq. But the threat does not end there. We must stay on the offensive everywhere ISIS or Al Qaeda operates, from the Sahel to Europe to South Asia. These global efforts require coupling United States capabilities with those of our allies and partners. We are working with the French in Mali. We are working with African Union-led forces in Somalia. We are working with key Gulf partners in Yemen. When American airpower is necessary—as it was recently in Libya to degrade an ISIS stronghold 1A²—we must deploy it without hesitation. But in many cases, our work is going to entail the less headline-grabbing activities such as information-sharing, data correlation, and law enforcement and intelligence training.

In Europe, where ISIS has attacked with deadly effect, we must keep our focus on the travel of foreign fighters, and work 24/7 with our European allies and partners to track potential extremists, penetrate the plots, and stop them before they hard innocent civilians. We must strengthen our relationships in Europe and help them build their counterterrorism capabilities.

In some areas of the world, such as Libya and Somalia, we will be able to use air strikes and limited ground troops from the Special Operations Forces. But in most areas of world—Europe, India, and Asia—the main levers of U.S. power will be intelligence cooperation and diplomacy. That is why our campaign cannot be led by the military alone.

CAMPAIGN TO PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE TO ISIS'S PROPAGANDA

Perhaps more important to ISIS than a physical caliphate is a virtual caliphate they have tried to create through their propaganda and incitement, particularly on social media. ISIS's use of Twitter, Telegram, and other social media outlets is well known. Of course, ISIS claims in its propaganda to be representing the true nature of Islam, but it is, in fact, perverting Islam.³

A recent study co-sponsored by the University of Chicago looked at the 104 individuals in the U.S. who the Department of Justice charged with ISIS-related crimes from 2014–2016.⁴ Two-thirds went to college. Three-quarters had jobs or were in school. Many of these people had a great deal to live for, but they were radicalized by terrorist propaganda. Nearly 85 percent had exposure to propaganda videos, either by ISIS or by Al Qaeda. Propaganda is an accelerant on the process of radicalization.

American efforts to counter the propaganda of terrorists have been met with mixed results. Fundamentally, the voices that will do the most to discredit ISIS are voices from within Islam itself. Our efforts should be geared toward working with Muslim leaders here in the U.S. and Muslim-majority countries from Africa to the Gulf to Southeast Asia to counter ISIS's narrative. When the American government is shown to be behind these messages, they are apt to be disregarded or even disbelieved.

I have been impressed with the energy and focus of the State Department's Global Engagement Center and would urge Congress to continue support for this activity.

ADJUSTMENTS TO THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH

Although the new Administration is less than three weeks old, it has already moved forward with several aggressive policy approaches that will have an impact on the ISIS campaign. I strongly support the President's decision to conduct a quick review of the anti-ISIS campaign. We do not want our momentum in this campaign to stall, and our allies and partners on the ground are awaiting the results of this review. In other areas, however, I would seek adjustments to the Administration's current course. My recommendations for the new Administration are as follows:

- 1) Support our allies. Our allies in the anti-ISIS coalition are working very hard to stop the next ISIS attack. We should stand by them. For example, Australia has fought with us in every war since WWII and is the second-largest contributor of troops to the counter-ISIS effort. We should be thanking Australia every chance we get because we need them in the fight that is currently underway. We also will need the support of our NATO Allies, who continue to play a role in training and equip-

ping forces confronting ISIS. President Trump's decision to attend the NATO Summit in May is the right decision.

2) Ensure that diplomacy is on equal footing with military planning. The Presidential Memorandum of January 28 was addressed to all relevant departments and agencies. The memorandum, in my view, correctly catalogued ISIS's heinous record of depravity and the attacks inside the U.S. that can be traced to ISIS. The memorandum goes on to call for "comprehensive" strategy and plans for the defeat of ISIS. I agree that a comprehensive strategy is required.

But the memorandum directs the Defense Department to develop the Plan. The State Department, the Director of National Intelligence, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff are directed to provide input and collaborate with the Defense Department. As noted above, a comprehensive strategy requires that diplomatic efforts be treated just as importantly as the military efforts. The State Department and the Defense Department should be tasked to develop the plan together. This is a small but important fix. As this Committee appreciates, the solution in Syria is not going to be found solely through military power. Military power is necessary to stopping ISIS by force, but it is insufficient for the broader effort to end the war in Syria or to conduct the global hunt for ISIS operatives.

3) Repeal the Muslim-only ban. Counterterrorism missions require focus. They require acquisition of specific time-sensitive information that allow plots to be stopped. They require correlation of data with real-time intelligence to screen those who would seek to do us harm. When intelligence or law enforcement officials are required to put entire civilian populations under suspicion, they take their eye off real threats. Furthermore, by enacting a Muslim-only ban, we have handed ISIS the ultimate recruiting tool. ISIS has already been leveraging this propaganda online. A main theme of ISIS propaganda is, in effect, "look at how America is treating its own Muslims." Given that thousands of students from the seven countries were affected, given that Muslim families were separated, given that lawful permanent residents were prohibited from entering the country in which they live lawfully and permanently, ISIS has been given a tailor-made message for its theme that America does not treat its own Muslim population on par with its Christian population.

Late Sunday evening, 10 former national security officials, including two former Secretaries of State, a former Secretary of Defense, four former heads of the Central Intelligence Agency, a Secretary of Homeland Security, and senior National Security Council officials, filed a declaration with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals stating that the ban would not make the country safer from terrorism and would, in fact, undermine those efforts.⁵ Those officials have shouldered the solemn responsibility of protecting the country from terrorism, and I agree with them that this ban cannot be justified on national security grounds.

4) Disavow 'taking their oil' and torture. Threatening to take Iraq's oil or expressing support for torture plays into the worst fears of the people we are trying to win over to our cause. It thus undermines the brave and heroic work conducted every day by women and men in the military, the diplomatic core, the intelligence and homeland security community, and the Muslims who fight alongside us.

5) Do not trust Russia to handle ISIS for us. Outsourcing to Russia the counter-ISIS effort in Syria is a dangerous idea that runs counter to fundamental American interests and values. Russia lacks the professionalism, the training, and political will to cooperate with us in any serious way. Russia is not seeking cooperation with the United States, but instead has worked consistently to undermine U.S. efforts in Syria and the Middle East. The State Department and the Pentagon tested the proposition that U.S. could work with Russia in Syria over the past six months, and the test failed. Putin's Russia has sought to use the Syria conflict as a way to end Russia's isolation from Ukraine, bolster its last remaining foothold in the Middle East, undermine U.S. influence in the region, and showcase its military improvements. Russia has played their own game, which was to keep Bashar al-Assad in power at all costs. The result is that Russia and Syria continue to kill moderate Syrians in the name of counter-terrorism. They liquefied the town of Aleppo, Syria, in a scene too horrible to allow to be shown on TV in our living room when young children were present. Russia has consolidated its position in Syria and will continue to work with its Iranian allies to forestall American influence and interests in the region. Russia's misdeeds have shown that they cannot be trusted and the Administration will inevitably come to this conclusion after a period of time.

CONCLUSION

The counter-ISIS campaign has made important progress in both taking terrorists off the battlefield and in liberating civilian populations. ISIS has lost more than half its territory. ISIS no longer controls most major population centers. Its ability

to recruit is getting more difficult. Many of its senior leaders have been removed from the battlefield. ISIS is being squeezed. But we cannot and should not be complacent. Now is the time to accelerate the campaign, intensify our efforts, and hasten the defeat of ISIS so that it no longer threatens us.

I am pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Notes

¹ Former Chief of Staff, Department of Defense under Secretary Leon Panetta; former Chief of Staff, Central Intelligence Agency under Director Leon Panetta; former Chief Counsel, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; current Managing Director, Beacon Global Strategies.

² <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/19/politics/us-airstrikes-libya-isis/>

³ For that reason, I prefer not to use the term “Islamic,” lest it legitimate their efforts; I prefer “Islamist,” or simply “terrorist.”

⁴ See Trump’s Travel Ban Misses the True Threat: Homegrown Terrorism by Michael Morell, *foreignpolicy.com*, Feb. 2, 2017 (citing a study from the Chicago Project on Security and Threats.)

⁵ <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2017/02/06/17-35105%20opposition%20exhibit.pdf>

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you both. I am going to ask one question and reserve the rest of my time.

But it is interesting. We have talked about the Kurds. We talked about the Kurdish-supported Arabs. We talked about Turkey and Syrian opposition. We talked about the Assad regime and its allies. You referred to American presence. You did not yet.

So tell us. What is the U.S. role in this?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is a pretty complicated single question, Mr. Chairman.

The U.S. role, first of all—

The CHAIRMAN. In Raqqa. In Raqqa.

Ambassador JEFFREY. In Raqqa.

The CHAIRMAN. In Raqqa, what is the U.S. role?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The U.S., as the head of a coalition, has the overall command and control of the various operations being conducted now by what is called the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is, essentially, largely—

The CHAIRMAN. The Kurds and Arabs.

Ambassador JEFFREY. And a few Arabs.

And the U.S. has people embedded with them, coordinates with them. It has not really given the Kurds weapons. It has given some light weapons to the Arab component of the SDF.

And so, basically, it is seen as the overall military campaign against ISIS, focused on ISIS as a state, and Mosul and Raqqa. And this is essentially the western side of the offensive.

The question is, given the United States’ list of allies in the region, including Turkey, how can we ensure the maximum rapid defeat of ISIS and the taking of Raqqa? And that raises questions about who our allies are and how we coordinate all of these folks, because while many of them agree on fighting ISIS, they do not agree on each other, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, it is the question. And no offense, it has not been answered.

So, Mr. Bash, I am not trying to be offensive here. It seems it is the question everybody is dancing around, for lots of reasons. But you mentioned not outsourcing it to all these people, so what does that mean?

Mr. BASH. Three aspects of the U.S. role. First, intelligence-gathering, human intelligence, signal intelligence collection; second—

The CHAIRMAN. I am not asking—I want to know what it means to not outsource it? Gathering intelligence is not taking Raqqa. Please be specific with your answer.

Mr. BASH. Forward air controllers by U.S. special operations forces.

And the third element I believe would be training, funding, providing lethal offensive equipment to the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The CHAIRMAN. And that would be—those are the only people that we should be in coordination with, not the Turks.

Mr. BASH. Well, of course, I think we have to dialogue with the Turks, because, as Ambassador Jeffrey noted, we have to have them on board, ultimately, for our efforts there.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Mr. Chairman, I can add to my answer. We do need the Turks in the fight. We need two parallel fronts, I believe, for political reasons, and possibly for military.

Again, I think we need at least some ground combat American troops to support the other forces we have in there, if we want this to go quickly and if we want to have some influence on what folks do after the day.

The Russians put some of their elite special forces troops in a combat as opposed to advisory role. They did not get in a quagmire, and they had considerable success.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you agree with that?

Mr. BASH. I do believe we will need some of our special operations forces on the ground, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. And those would be ground troops then?

Mr. BASH. Well, they would be troops, U.S. troops. Whether they would conduct direct action missions or they would be in an advise and assist role, and assisting the local elements, I think we would have to hear from the commanders on the ground that will be most affected.

But I would have no problem with some small number of U.S. special operations forces—

The CHAIRMAN. Do you get the sense that the Pentagon will recommend having U.S. forces on the ground in Raqqa?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Pentagon, sir, I believe, from my experience there, and Jeremy has worked there and I have worked with it for 50 years, basically takes the mission that the President and the Congress gives it and then turns it into options.

It is hard for me to believe, if you let that process work out and you say we want to destroy ISIS as a state, we want to do this quickly, and we want to have influence on the ground with our allies afterward, that you would not at least consider a small element of U.S. ground troops.

And I will be specific. I am talking maneuver battalions, perhaps an armored battalion. You saw how effective tanks have been in Mosul with the Iraqis against ISIS. Who is going to provide the armor in Raqqa?

I would say we need to look at that very carefully.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I had known you had made those comments in the past and was just trying to tease that out.

I just want to say, we are working through all kinds of proxies here. And it is very difficult to control what proxies do. And I mean, it is the one question I think that really is not being dis-

cussed as openly or as candidly—I know it is going to be discussed at one point, at some point. So that is why I am asking the question.

Ambassador JEFFREY. With my experience, including 45 years ago in uniform, a few American troops on the ground up there with the people who are doing the fighting have not only a tremendous multiplier effect on the military effectiveness, they can win the confidence and the trust of the people on the ground. And that has a huge impact on the political side of things, as well as the military.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much.

Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for that line of questioning. I think it is extremely helpful.

And it really underscores my concern with the Department of Defense being the lead rather than the State Department, because, Ambassador Jeffrey, I think you answered the question as the Department of Defense will answer the question. You have a military mission. These are the options. The President selects one of those military options. And, yes, we have immediate success on the military operation.

But long term, we do not have a solution, and we are back to where we were, in a long process with perhaps emboldening the recruitment of extremists.

So this is a complicated situation. No one denies that. We welcome the review by the Trump administration. We are dealing with the realities that Russia and Iran are in Syria. And as both of you pointed out, we cannot deal with Russia in Iran, and I agree with that completely. But they are there, so how do we frame a response with the realities of Russia in Iran?

We have coalition partners that have different priorities and strategies than we do. Turkey has a different strategy. Saudi Arabia has a different priority. How do we deal with the realities of our coalition partners?

So there is no easy answer. My concerns are the risks that you both brought out of more American troops on the ground. What does that mean? Or if we are talking about—and can we control the numbers, when we start with a small number and the mission requires additional military support and America has the strongest military.

Are we going down a path that is going to lead to a significant increase in our military commitment on the ground, which we know leads to long-term challenges that are hard to overcome?

And secondly, if we are not on the ground and we are supporting military operations, and we see large civilian casualties, does that add to our challenges of long-term success in the region, since we have delegated that to the opposition or troops that may not be as sensitive to what happens with civilian casualties?

Any comments either one of you have about that observation? How do you overcome that? How do we ensure that we are not going down a path of major increase in U.S. presence through ground troops, which has historically proven to be counterproductive, or we are complicit in a large number of civilian casualties?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I share your concern, Senator, having spent years in Vietnam and Iraq, classic examples of being bogged down in conflicts.

First of all, when I said you give DOD a mission and it will rack and stack the options, I am talking about the military side of the mission, and that is correct. That is not the whole mission and I know—

Senator CARDIN. But they are being placed in the lead here, which has me concerned.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I realize that. But the person who is being placed in the lead, Secretary Mattis, who I have had many experiences with in both tours in Iraq, is someone who knows the political side of things and knows he needs that political battle buddy, if you will, just like Crocker and Petraeus a decade ago on the surge, so I think that you will get that.

But still, from the military side of it, there is a military component to this, and there are various military solutions.

Inserting more American troops, as you said, raises political as well as military and questions of casualties, but it can cut both ways. If you give the U.S. military a concrete military goal, be it liberating Kuwait in 1990 or, for that matter, taking down Saddam in 2003, the military is able to generate the forces and do it.

The question is the political question of the day after. We had a pretty good but not complete answer in 1991. We did not have a good answer in 2003. And by default, we passed that on to the military, and we all know, in this chamber, what happened.

That is something I would be absolutely opposed to. But that should not force us to go back and say we cannot even use ground forces for military missions. The point is we cannot use ground forces for armed nation-building, sir.

Senator CARDIN. Ambassador Jeffrey, I agree with your point. I have all the confidence in our military carrying out a military mission. And I want Mr. Bash to respond.

But also, if you could, include in your answer how the rumored executive order dealing with black sites by the administration, and the executive order dealing with immigration and refugees, how does that play into our strategies in regards to Syria?

Mr. BASH. On detention and interrogation, we have not engaged in enhanced interrogation or employed those black sites—

Senator CARDIN. What if there was an executive order that led us down that path?

Mr. BASH. Right. That is my point, Mr. Ranking Member, which is we have not employed those since President Bush—not President Obama—President Bush emptied the black sites in 2006. And now, 11 years later, we have been actually able to protect our country from a large-scale terrorist attack.

So I think those tactics are totally unnecessary, and I think it would be a huge mistake for the administration to return to enhanced interrogation or, as the President calls it, torture, and detention in black sites.

On the issue of U.S. forces on the ground, look, I think we can learn a lot of lessons from taking out Al Qaeda's—decimating Al Qaeda's senior leadership along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where we did not have a lot of ground troops that we could use.

We used a lot of intelligence and a lot of precision airstrikes. We were able to basically suppress them and prevent them from their external operations, which really fundamentally is our biggest priority when it comes to ISIS in Iraq. We do not want them planning external plots. So I think we should put an emphasis on that.

As for U.S. forces on the ground, I would not draw a line and say no boots on the ground or have some policy like that. I think we probably do have to have U.S. special operations forces on the ground. In what quantity and specifically how they are armed or trained, I think that is a point of conversation.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Johnson?

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

According to our hearing briefing, in the fight in Mosul, we have about 65,000 combination Iraqi, Kurdish, Peshmerga, Sunni tribesmen engaged in that battle, about 5,000 U.S. troops, 3,500 coalition personnel. We have been at that now for about 4 months.

How much longer is that going to go on? Just a quick estimate.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Three or 4 more months, probably, Senator, unless they crack.

Senator JOHNSON. So that is an 8-month effort with more than 70,000 troops. Is Raqqa going to be easier or more difficult than Mosul?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The assumption from troop levels and such that I have heard is that it is not as heavily defended or as dug in as Mosul, that Mosul is where they decided, ISIS, to make their big fight. And we have had good success pushing close to Raqqa with the YPG and the Syrian Democratic Forces over the past six months.

Nonetheless, we should not underestimate how tough any of these fights are with these guys, because with Raqqa, that will be their Alamo.

Senator JOHNSON. So do you think we will need substantially less than 70,000 total combined troops to take over Raqqa?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Of the 70,000 troops that have been committed, Senator, probably 10,000 to 15,000 are actually in offensive combat roles into the city that—the Iraqi counterterrorism service, which is very good; the Ninth Armored Division, which provides most of the heavy weapons; some of the Iraqi National Police division, which is actually also an elite force; and bits and pieces of several other—

Senator JOHNSON. So you have 15,000 good Iraqi troops, again, close to 10,000 good American and coalition troops. That is 25,000. Are we going to need 25,000 for Raqqa?

And I am going to go back to the chairman's question. Who is going to provide those?

Again, to say the Syrian Democratic Forces, when we had the debate over the Syrian Authorization for Use of Military Force, who is leading it? I mean, there are 1,200 different Syrian groups. Where is this force?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Syrian Democratic Forces, which is essentially a camouflage of the Kurdish Syrian YPG, has about

25,000 forces, not all of which could be committed to the Raqqa battle.

I do not think that is enough troops, and I think that is one reason why we are going slow.

Senator JOHNSON. So let us say we have a combination of U.S., coalition and I guess Kurdish YPG or Peshmerga forces to clear it, to take Raqqa. Who is going to hold it?

Who is going to hold the territory in Syria so that Assad just does not flow right back in there? We clear it out, and they hold it.

Mr. BASH. I think we need to have an element of the SDF play the hold role, along with other coalition allies and partners. And I think we cannot do this alone, and I think they cannot do this alone, but there are no other options.

Senator JOHNSON. Define the element of the SDF. Who are they? Where are they? I just heard they are really camouflaged Kurdish forces, so those are the Kurds. That is not going to go over well with Turkey.

We can throw these things out, but realistically, is that even possible?

Ambassador JEFFREY. You are absolutely right, Senator. The four major tribes around Raqqa, we just did research at the Washington Institute, none of them are enthused about Kurds coming in. They have had long-standing, essentially disputes and conflict with the Kurds.

There is an Arab element in the Syrian Democratic Forces. The State Department people who are operating that are optimistic about that, less so—people outside the administration are less so. It is one reason why we want to see the Free Syrian Army, who we have better contact with, because we did train some of them. And we are working with the Turks indirectly, and the Turks—

Senator JOHNSON. You trained some of them. In the hundreds?

Ambassador JEFFREY. In the thousands over the past few years on various clandestine programs.

Senator JOHNSON. So how many Free Syrian forces do we have?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It gets squishy on numbers, but you are talking about somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000, counting both the YPG, the other Arabs—

Senator JOHNSON. Again, those would be Kurdish forces.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Those are mostly Kurdish forces.

Senator JOHNSON. So if it is primarily Kurdish forces to clear Raqqa, they are going to kind want to hold it, are they not?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is the default position of every military force I have ever seen in the Middle East, Senator. It does not mean that, at the end of the day, that is what happens. But you have to take that into consideration.

It is one reason why I am concerned about putting all of our weight on that particular force.

Senator JOHNSON. Diplomacy follows facts on the ground, right? So facts on the ground, if a military force takes over a city, they are going to hold it.

Ambassador JEFFREY. If diplomacy has a big enough sledgehammer, it can push things in its way. But again, it is one reason why you need American forces on the ground in some numbers. It

is why you have to have a very strong American command-and-control.

Senator JOHNSON. But the question is still American forces bolstering whom? I still have not gotten the chairman's question answered. Who is going to fight this fight? Who is going to hold?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you all very much for being here to discuss what is obviously a very thorny issue. And I share both of the views that you have expressed about the importance of reassessing at this stage our policy with respect to ISIS.

I also agree with both of you, as Senator Cardin has said, that the military piece is the easy piece. It is the diplomatic and what comes next that is the hard piece.

So tell me how we do that, because I think we talk about the specifics of the military aspects of this kind of conflict because it is easier to understand and it is easier to do when you think about we can put X number of troops on the ground. We can provide X number of flights. We can do X number of bombing raids.

But how do we build governance, local governance, in a country like Syria that has had no civil society groups at all, that has been decimated?

And as you both point out, we have not done well. We did not do it well in Vietnam. We did not do it well in Iraq. In Afghanistan, it still remains to be seen what the outcome is going to be.

So what are the building blocks that we need to do if we are going to get this right, in terms of balancing the diplomatic mission of this effort with the military mission?

So either one of you can go first.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think Senator Johnson made a pretty good case that actually the military side of it is not the easier part of it, that we have to answer a lot of questions on the forces and that. And that also feeds into, Senator Shaheen, who will hold the ground afterwards?

Senator SHAHEEN. That is the question that I am asking. What happens the day after?

Ambassador JEFFREY. There are several problems with your question, and it is a legitimate and very important question.

One is, anybody who thinks he or she can give a really good answer to it has not seen what I have seen over the past 30 or 40 years.

Secondly, it also depends on some outside conditions. We looked at this, including this chamber, 20 years ago in the Balkans, and some of the same questions came up. I was involved in that. One thing I learned is, if you can get the basic diplomacy of the region right so that you do not have outside forces trying to undercut whatever messy situation, temporary, messy, sloppy situation you have on the ground, because that is the only situation you have, it kind of works.

In Bosnia, which is a very, I do not want to hurt the Bosnian Government or people, but it is a very, de facto, very jury-rigged thing.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes, I am familiar with that. But I am still not clear on what you think should happen as part of that governance, getting it right.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Most importantly, we need some kind of understanding, shared or accepted or forced on Iran and Russia and Turkey and, to a lesser extent, the Arab states, on what the order in Iraq and Syria should look like, how independent those countries should be and how free of influence from the outside, and the outside is mainly Iran, under these circumstances.

If we can get that under control, local forces in these areas, with help from the international community, with help from us, with help from NGOs, can slowly build up.

That is what we did in the Balkans. We did it outside in, where we fixed the diplomacy in the region. We got everybody more or less on board, and then we had several decades to tinker at reconciliation at the village level, digging wells and that kind of thing.

If you try to start with digging wells and reconciliation when the Iranians, the Pakistanis, the Syrians, and others are sending in people to kill the folks doing it, believe me, it does not work. I have seen it.

Senator SHAHEEN. So I agree with you. It does not work.

So, Mr. Bash, what is the likelihood we are going to get it right, given what is happening with Russia, with Iran, with Iraq, with the fragility of Mr. al-Abadi's leadership in Iraq? What are the chances that is—

Mr. BASH. The likelihood that we will know even if we are getting it right is very low, because I think this is fundamentally a generational struggle. And as Ambassador Jeffrey laid out, there are so many elements that have to play out over such a long time that this is going to require the patient work of our diplomats and our coalition partners over time to find partners on the ground who want to be responsible for their own country.

We cannot want it more than them, and it is going to require us convincing them to take ownership of their own country. And I am referring specifically to Syria in that case.

At the end of the day, I do not believe Assad is going to be a reliable partner. I think he is going to sow chaos and cause destruction and mayhem as long as he is there. So fundamentally, I think any plan to defeat ISIS, in terms of ejecting it completely, ejecting the conditions for ISIS on the ground in Syria, has to include the removal of Assad.

Senator SHAHEEN. We had a briefing in the Armed Services Committee last week from the Institute on the Study of War, and they suggested that defeating ISIS was not ultimately going to solve our problem, that they would be replaced by another terrorist group. In fact, if we look at areas that have been cleared in Syria of ISIS, that Al Qaeda has moved in to some of those small villages and that they have picked right up and are taking over in terms of governance.

So do you share that view? And how does that affect what is happening right now, in terms of the military situation?

The CHAIRMAN. Briefly, please.

Ambassador JEFFREY. As a terrorist group, people are right, in any situation like Syria, but unlike Iraq where when ISIS has

cleared, essentially government authority has been reinstated, so that would be my argument to your other question. There are ways to make things work, because nobody on the outside is trying to mess with what is going on with Iraq today, once ISIS is driven out.

Syria is different. Other people will pop up, as long as you have a situation that is as chaotic as Syria is.

But even then, ISIS is unique as it is a state. It has an army. It controlled, at its height, 5 million, 6 million, 7 million people. That is what made it such a threat to the region and a threat to project power against Europe and against the United States.

That will go if we defeat it. If we do not solve Syria, and we do not solve the mess that will be afterwards, we are still going to have terrorist groups, but it will be a different order of magnitude.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

It is with a slight degree of trepidation that I disagree with the only female member of this committee. I think, in Syria, my observation has been it has been that we have not been able to come up with a real military strategy, whether it is others or not. We have tried all kinds of train-equip, not tried it enough, in my opinion. But to me, we are where we are today—

Senator SHAHEEN. I was talking theoretically, not specifically.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. I think the military component in Syria has, by far, been the most difficult, unanswered question. There has been a lot of diplomacy, but diplomacy without changing facts on the ground has been fairly hollow.

Senator Young?

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Bash, in your written testimony, you discussed the fact that diplomacy needs to be on equal footing with military planning in a successful strategy to defeat ISIS. I agree, which is why I sent a letter to that effect to Secretary of State Tillerson.

I request unanimous consent the letter be entered into the record.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

[The information referred to is located at the end of this hearing transcript]

Senator YOUNG. Ambassador Jeffrey, based on your years of experience as a senior diplomat, your time at DOD and CIA, would you agree that the largest number of victims by far of radical Islamic terrorists, whether it is ISIS or Al Qaeda and its affiliates, have been Muslims?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Absolutely.

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Bash, based on your years of experience, do you agree?

Mr. BASH.: Yes.

Senator YOUNG. And both of you, would you agree that the vast majority of Muslims oppose terrorism?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They do.

Mr. BASH. Yes.

Senator YOUNG. Would you agree that if we are ever going to defeat radical Islamic terrorists and their depraved ideology, we will

need to work closely and collaboratively with predominantly Muslim governments and populations?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I do, and we actually do.

Mr. BASH. Yes.

Senator YOUNG. And would you agree that ISIS and Al Qaeda would love for the U.S.-led campaign against them to be characterized as a war of religion or a war of civilizations?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is exactly what they claim it is and what they hope we will fall into.

Mr. BASH. Yes, I agree with that.

Senator YOUNG. So within a week after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush visited the Islamic Center of Washington. He said, "These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith." He continued, "America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads. And they need to be treated with respect. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect."

Would you both agree that such a statement not only honors American values, but it is also factually correct and strategically smart?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I agree.

Mr. BASH. It was a very wise statement.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Mr. Bash, in your prepared statement, you discussed ISIS's use of online propaganda and incitement, their "virtual caliphate."

You also cite the Chicago Project on Security and Threats. This study examined 112 cases of individuals who perpetrated ISIS-related offenses, were indicted by the U.S. Justice Department for such offenses, or both, in the U.S. between March 2014 and March 2016. Eighty-three percent of those studied had watched ISIS propaganda videos.

As you state, propaganda is an accelerant on the process of radicalization. You also state that American efforts to counter the propaganda of terrorists have been met with mixed results.

Working with Muslim leaders, what specific steps can the United States Government and the State Department take to better counter ISIS propaganda that has played such a significant role in terrorist radicalization and recruitment?

Mr. BASH. I think, most importantly, we have to convince the Muslim majority countries of the region to speak up about what Islam, in their view, stands for and what the proper view of Islam is, and to work with their local leaders and their local religious leaders to articulate that vision.

And that just cannot be done from government podiums. It has to be done where ISIS and others communicate, particularly online and social media.

Senator YOUNG. So to facilitate that sort of conversation, those sorts of messages being delivered, what role, as you see it, might this committee play?

Mr. BASH. I think supporting the efforts of and looking at the efforts of the Global Engagement Center at the State Department and other public diplomacy efforts on that vector are appropriate.

Senator YOUNG. And what is your assessment of the Global Engagement Center? And how do you measure success or falling short?

Mr. BASH. They have had a couple reboots. I think some of our efforts have had some false starts. My sense, and I do not have this with great specificity, I would like to look into it, is that, in recent months, they have had a renewed energy, a renewed focus. And I think they have had a good team in place there, and I hope that they continue to.

Senator YOUNG. How do we measure success, both of you, with respect to information, operations, cyber strategies, public diplomacy? It is unclear to me. We emphasize this a lot, but how do we measure success? I am running out of time, but if you have any thoughts on that, either of you.

Ambassador JEFFREY. You cannot look at the inputs, because that is typically what we do. How many people we have, how many messages we get out.

Basically, it is feedback from communities that basically tell folks who we trust in those communities that they like what they are hearing. And a lot of it has to be us supporting people so that folks do not even know it is coming out of the United States, or it is coming from the West, but it is coming from people—and they are all over the Middle East—who essentially abhor what ISIS and Al Qaeda are doing.

Mr. BASH. I would just add one thing, Senator. CSIS, under the leadership of my old boss, Secretary Panetta, and Tony Blair, conducted a countering violent extremism study and commission. They reported out just after the election. And there is a lot of good polling information in there and a lot of good information about how to measure the impacts of some of these efforts.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Markey?

Senator MENENDEZ. Senator Markey has gone.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both, for your testimony.

Mr. Bash, I appreciate the comprehensive nature that you mentioned in your testimony, because from my own personal perspective, I think it is one of the aspects—although we say we have a comprehensive plan, I think we have fallen far short from a comprehensive plan, and I appreciate the efforts that you laid out. I think they are spot on in terms of what we need, and I hope the administration will actually take to heart some of what you have said.

I want to particularly ask about Russia.

President Trump has indicated he would like to cooperate with Russia to defeat ISIS. My question is, is this a realistic proposition? Russia is and has repeatedly shown its interest in the region in supporting a war criminal like Assad, and the latest reports just magnify the brutality of that regime, collaborating with leading state sponsors of terrorism in Iran.

In fact, over the weekend, a Kremlin spokesman said, “Russia has friendly relations with Iran. We cooperate on a wide range of issues. We value our trade ties. We hope to develop them further.”

So between sentiments like that and the President’s national security adviser putting Iran on notice, how viable is a partnership with Russia in combating ISIS? It does not seem to me that that has been their central focus in the region.

Mr. BASH. Let me answer it this way, Senator. We tested that proposition. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, tested that proposition, and the test failed.

Russia utterly lacked the professionalism, the training, and the political will to cooperate with us. It was not just that their military actions were imprecise and targeted civilians. They did those things. It was that they actually would not coordinate with us and would not work with us in any productive fashion.

And I believe what they were fundamentally trying to do in reaching out to us to coordinate was to establish their own foothold in Syria, to end their global isolation from what they had done in Europe and Ukraine, and to try to challenge and undermine our interests around the world.

So I think not only would it not be productive, it would actually be counterproductive.

Senator MENENDEZ. So let me just say, it seems to me that while we have not had the comprehensive strategy I think we need, I do think that President Trump is inheriting a functioning coalition that has avoided blowups in Iraq and taken back all the cities except half of Mosul, trained up Iraqi forces, kept Shia militants largely sidelined from the main battles, and done all of that while keeping Americans out of combat and off the frontlines.

So what happens from here on is on the President’s watch.

In that regard, when you say that Iran—when the President says that Iran is taking over Iraq more and more every day, I wonder how that kind of talk plays in Iraq. Unlike Putin’s Russia, which is totally authoritarian, al-Abadi and Iraqi democratic politics are subject to far more consequences of language like that. There is only so much they can absorb, versus entities that are as authoritarian as Putin’s Russia is.

And so, Ambassador Jeffrey, what do you say to that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It was not helpful, and, of course, the Iraqis immediately reacted and said, heaven forbid, we have nothing to do with Iranians.

The point is, Iran is probably the most important player in Iraq. But it is not like in Lebanon where it actually controls essentially a monopoly of force or can generate a monopoly of force and basically dictate to the government.

It has two major obstacles.

One obstacle is, of course, the religious authorities in Najaf, who have a different view of Shia Islam and do not turn to Iran.

The second one is the oil that Iraq pumps. It is one of the major reasons why Iran is not reaping the kind of financial rewards of selling oil now after the nuclear agreement, because oil prices are low. And one of the major reasons for that is Iraq’s success.

And the Iraqis, including the Shia Arab Iraqis, do not want to be a vassal state of Iran. And there are ways that we in the inter-

national community can help Iraq stay independent of Iran, but it requires sustained engagement on our part, and it requires us recognizing that Iran is the problem. And up until very recently, we have not had that, sir.

Senator MENENDEZ. I agree. It requires us recognizing Iran as a problem. It requires us recognizing that Russia is complicit with Iran in a variety of serious issues.

It also has to have some sensitivity for President Trump to understand that when he says what he says about Iraq, when he says we are going to take their oil, it undermines the effort of a nascent government and their ability to be cohesive and be less dependent on Iran. That, to me, is a critical part of the fight against ISIS.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Portman?

Before I get to that, though, this is something I have been saying for some time. This is not a recent thing. But I mean, in fairness, this has nothing to do with the current President, nor any defense. I mean, Iran has huge influence over the parliament there. There is no question, is there?

And I have been saying for a couple years now that everything we are doing there is, to a degree, making Iraq a better country for Iran. I mean, I know we want to maintain our influence, but, I mean, there is some truth to that somewhat rhetorical statement, is there not?

Ambassador JEFFREY. About every third morning I get up and I would agree with that. But the other two mornings, I see what goes on there. The way that people welcomed us back, Senator, in 2014 and 2015, and how we have been able to forge this force that is now fighting effectively against a very tough enemy—we also have the Kurds in the north who are very close to us and can play a very interesting role in balancing that ship of state.

And the Iraqis, what they do not want to do is be enlisted in any American campaign against Iran. They want to stay neutral, if they can. That is one reason why they resist the Saudis and others, because they want them to say, “We are Arabs. We are against Iran.”

Again, if Iran could have had its way, Iraq’s oil exports would have been capped way below what Iran’s were, and Iran would have reaped the benefits of much higher oil prices. But Iran was smart enough to know they could not demand that because the Iraqis would say no.

That is what I look at is, what would Iran like to do in Iraq that it cannot do? And the next big question is us trying to keep our forces on.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, we will find out as soon as Mosul is taken, will we not?

Senator Portman?

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me dig a little deeper into the discussion we had earlier about Russia and their role.

In response to Senator Menendez’s question, Mr. Bash, you said that you believe that Russia’s intent is to have a stronger foothold in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, and that they also were

seeking to move away from the political isolation based on their actions in Eastern Europe.

I think it is more than that, and I think it is an attempt by Russia to try to work on a grand bargain, as we talk about around here, which would be to relieve some of the sanctions, certainly the sanctions related to Crimea and probably what they are doing on the Eastern border of Ukraine, maybe some of the human rights sanctions, in exchange for a fight against ISIS. So I think we have to look at what has actually happened.

I guess the first question I would have for you is with regard to the government that they are backing in Syria and have kept in power, in effect, which is Assad. I mean, do you think that the Assad's regime, particularly the barrel-bombing of civilians, the chemical weapons use, this atrocity we heard about over the weekend, the attacks against moderate rebel groups, do you think these sorts of things have escalated the conflict and fueled the growth of ISIS in Syria?

Mr. BASH. Very much so. I think Syria creates the petri dish in which an ISIS can grow, and Assad's policies accomplish that.

I agree with the premise of your statement that the whole mode of Syria and Assad is to do these things in the name of counterterrorism, in the name of fighting ISIS, when, in fact, what they are doing is liquidating the entire part of the country that could be a moderate opposition and that could actually assume power.

And that is why he is doing it, because it is a threat, fundamentally, to his seat of power. He is doing that with the umbrella and tactical and operational support of Russia.

Senator PORTMAN. So it is to say that, by backing Assad, it has helped with regard to the fight against ISIS, which is what this hearing is about.

Second would be, how effective has Russia been at going after ISIS? My sense is, from all the reporting we are getting, and a letter from groups that have now documented this, that Moscow has targeted the non-ISIS forces far more than they have ever targeted any ISIS forces or other extremist forces.

Is that your understanding? Do you agree that Russia and Iran devoted the bulk of their efforts in Syria to defeating the moderate opposition rather than going after ISIS?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I do, Senator. And there is a long tradition of that. During the Iraq campaign, Assad was allowing Al Qaeda volunteers to come through Damascus and go over the border and support the Al Qaeda attacks on us and on the Iraqi Government. And we have seen this with Assad basically cutting deals, particularly in the oil area, with ISIS over the past years and focusing on the more moderate groups.

And with the Russians, they have done one campaign against ISIS. They seized Palmyra. But you will notice that ISIS took it back, so I am not impressed with their military capabilities against ISIS, let alone their political motivations.

Senator PORTMAN. You mentioned that earlier, on the military capabilities. That was interesting.

Let me ask you the question then. Would either of you think that it would be in our interests as a country to lift the Ukraine-related

sanctions in exchange for Russian cooperation in the Middle East against ISIS?

Mr. BASH. In my view, that grand bargain would be a horrible deal for the United States. We would get all the downside and none of the upside.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I agree. The only argument for lifting sanctions on Ukraine is a deal on Ukraine. It is a totally separate issue.

But even if it were linked somehow, I still have to ask, what does Russia bring to the fight other than endorsing the very worst elements in the region that fuels conflict, fuels extremism, and does not tamp it down?

Senator PORTMAN. Ambassador, based on your broad experience in the intelligence community and national security community, how do you feel about relieving sanctions when the underlying reason for the sanctions, the cause of the sanctions, is not addressed? Does that not send a terrible signal to our allies and our adversaries alike, that the United States does not stand by the reasons we put these sanctions in place?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Absolutely. And sanctions, particularly the sanctions we have against Russia right now, are having a significant effect on the Russian economy, and that is a good thing. And it also gives us leverage to get them to, first of all, contain their own aggressiveness in the Ukraine and possibly, eventually, someday, do a deal.

But until they do a deal, the sanctions should stay on.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you. I have very little time, but I want to echo some of the comments that my colleague Senator Young said in terms of our fight against ISIS. This is a hearing about that issue. And in the Governmental Affairs Committee, we have had some of these same discussions, how to get the Global Engagement Center to be more effective.

As you said, we have had a difficult time putting the U.S. Government policies together to be able to effectively counter, particularly online, much less involving, as you suggest, Muslim-majority countries and the Muslim community here in a more effective way. I think that is our most significant challenge.

So I am going to follow up with some questions in writing for both of you on that, following up on some hearings we have had in the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murphy?

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I hope that this administration recovers from a very rocky start on America's relationship with the world, but if they do not, this committee is going to be incredibly important in providing oversight and asking some questions.

I think this administration has made some really stunning mistakes when it comes to the counter-ISIL campaign.

They have launched a new strategy with the Department of Defense in the lead. This panel has told us that State should be equivalent to Defense in plotting that strategy.

They have suggested that Russia will be a key component to the military strategy. This panel has told us that Russia should have no part of that military strategy inside Syria.

They have launched a ban on immigration from Iraq and Syria. This panel has told us that that, in fact, could feed recruitment efforts of the very groups that we are fighting.

But, frankly, I think all those mistakes would be dwarfed by a decision on behalf of this administration to put U.S. combat troops into Syria.

And so, Ambassador Jeffrey, I just want to drill down a little more on this question, because it is one of your recommendations. I am trying to understand how we would limit a large deployment of troops—you recommend in the thousands—to a military mission. The reality, I would imagine, is that, after the military objective was accomplished, and this very complicated, convoluted process of sorting out who controls Raqqa began, the United States military presence could not leave, because having invested major treasure and perhaps lives in securing Raqqa, we would not leave the distribution of power to a set of players that were under our control during the invasion.

And so I guess I am worried about a military deployment, because I do not understand how it does not end up in the same way that Iraq did, that we are bogged down, that we cannot leave, that we have so much at stake that we need to keep that military presence there in order to try to have some say over the distribution of power.

But you seem to suggest that we could have a purely military role and then leave the politics to somebody else, even though that is not how things have played out in previous military engagements in the region.

Ambassador JEFFREY. This committee is right to look carefully at any suggestion of American ground troops, given our history that has been rocky in that regard.

That said, I would point out that, as we heard, we have some 5,000 troops involved in things that, to an outsider, would look very close to combat—Apache helicopters, artillery, special forces teams conducting raids, advisers at the battalion level essentially calling in strikes—5,000 troops doing that, along with 3,500 other allies from NATO countries, Australia and such, already in the fight in Mosul. And we are reinforcing the number of troops.

So it is not a question of having forces on the ground.

Senator MURPHY. But is that not a little unfair? Is not the question of Mosul post-invasion very different than the question of Raqqa and Syria post-invasion?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Absolutely. But, again, I am just simply stating that we already have forces on the ground in a more or less quasi-military mission, and we are going to have to answer questions. We will have to answer questions on Mosul. It is a lot easier than Raqqa, but it still will have issues of who goes where in Tal Afar and Sinjar Mountains, and west and east Mosul. People are focused on this all of the time. And the same thing in spades would occur in Raqqa.

Again, I am not saying that you go in and then leave. It is just that major combat units do not assume the responsibility of secur-

ing a population and jumpstarting some kind of economic and social transformation. That is what we did in Iraq. It is what we are still doing—or we did up until recently—in Afghanistan. And it is a highly questionable strategy.

Senator MURPHY. Do we, and either one of you can answer this—maybe I will pose it to Mr. Bash.

Let us set aside the military objective of crushing ISIL. Does the United States have a national security interest, a vital national security interest, as to which one of the surrounding powers ultimately prevails in the future Syrian Government?

Is it a vital U.S. national security interest as to whether the Turks or the Saudis or the Russians end up having the most influence inside a future Syrian Government?

Should we stick around just to make sure that ISIS is defeated, or should we stick around to try to sort out who has influence?

I would be glad to have both of you answer it, but I am short on time.

Mr. BASH. I think we have an interest in stability and in good governance, and a partner there that we can work with. Its precise complexion, I am not sure we have a large interest. But I would say I would not want it to be Iran and Russia, because we already know their complexion. We already know that they will work to undermine U.S. interests.

The other countries you referenced could, I think, be constructive partners.

Senator MURPHY. I would, Mr. Chairman, turn it back over, but we would beg for the Syria pre-conflict, Syria in which Iran and Russia essentially had proxy control over that government. That I think a lot of us would wish that that scenario was still the reality on the ground.

So I just challenge the notion that, in the end, that is a vital national security interest of the United States.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you want to answer that, Ambassador?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Very quickly, in that happy era, Senator, Iran was not seen in the region as being on the offensive.

And secondly, Iran's control over Syria was quite limited. Syria was negotiating with the Israelis. Syria was working closely with the Turks. Syria was off with the North Koreans developing a nuclear capacity that Iran not only did not know about but was shocked to hear.

So it was a much more independent Syria, and it was not part of, essentially, a front against the rest of the region that we have right now.

The CHAIRMAN. But this hearing, I mean, there are a lot of great questions being asked, and they are very difficult to answer, are they not? And that is why I think Syria is in the shape that it is in today.

Senator Paul?

Senator PAUL. I would like to go on record as saying that it would be a really rotten, no good, bad idea to have ground troops in Syria, and very naive to think you are going to put 1,000 troops in there and everybody is going to welcome us, very presumptuous

to think we are going to decide who takes Raqqa and who occupies Raqqa.

Do you not think the people there would be aghast to think we are, 3,000 miles away, going to decide who is going to take over Raqqa and who is going to occupy it? That Assad is just going to let us waltz in, and Mr. Bash says, oh, we are just going to remove Assad.

The assumptions of all of this, the naiveté of thinking, oh, my goodness—but here is the other problem. We can win any battle, but when we win, we usually go big. So there have been many people, the Powell Doctrine of go big or do not go, 1,000 soldiers—and then the other problem. Let us say we could win with 1,000 soldiers. Senator Murphy is exactly right. The mantra is always stay, stay, stay, we must stay forever. And if we leave, that is our fault for leaving. There is no exit from a situation like this.

But I would say that when you look at a war like this, let us say we were to go in and defeat those who were there, to defeat ISIS, do you think that is the end? No. When a big force comes, they are going to shrink away and they will fight until the end of time. And they will fight against an American target if Americans are the target.

This is a war within Islam, and I think we should be supportive and try to amplify those who are trying to defeat this aberration, but let us not make it our war.

Look, there are 200,000 Peshmerga. There are 200,000 Iraq soldiers. There are 100,000-some-odd in the Syrian army. There are 600,000 in the Turks. And there are 15,000 ISIS. And we have to go over there to defeat them?

I think we ought to think this thing through and think that this will not be the end. This will be the beginning.

And I guarantee the voices are loud and strong. Everybody says we should have stayed in Iraq. Everybody is still saying we should stay in Afghanistan. Are we going to stay everywhere forever?

So I think we need to think through whether or not this needs to be an American-led battle for Raqqa, and that, all of the sudden, the Kurds are going to waltz in and Assad is going to love that and the people who live in Raqqa are going to love having the Kurds there?

I mean, these are pretty naive assumptions, and we have to be, I think, concerned and think through before we say, oh, we are going to put 1,000 Americans as we go into Raqqa. Perhaps maybe 1,000 people from Raqqa might be better than 1,000 Americans, you know?

You know, I am not opposed to putting some money in there to help them with weapons, to help them. But putting 1,000 Americans in there is a really, really terrible idea.

You can both respond, or chastise me, or however you would like to respond. I am open to it.

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is a hard question to try to push back against, Senator, because we have had a lot of bad experiences. Again, and as one who has argued constantly that we are not welcome when we go big on the ground in the Middle East, in particular, and that we often have very ambiguous social and economic missions that keep us tied down, and that is wrong, I find myself

in an almost contradictory position. But I am very confident in what I am saying for several reasons.

First of all, do we want to destroy not Al Qaeda, because we cannot destroy Al Qaeda. You are absolutely right. What we can do is destroy something that looks a lot like a state and an army, because we are good at that. We can break those things. And almost nobody else is really good enough.

You are absolutely right about the numbers you have cited, and I think absolutely right that all of those king's horses and king's men have not done that well against ISIS.

Senator PAUL. But we are going to remove Assad and tell Russia to leave? You know, Assad, look, Assad is winning right now. I mean, I would think he is on the ascendancy.

And I would say, a couple years ago, there was a possibility. I think there is almost no possibility that Assad is going. There is almost no possibility that Russia is going anywhere.

How long have they had a base in Syria? I would say it is pretty important to them. I am not saying it is right or wrong. I am just saying it is pretty important to them.

The ultimate answer here is a diplomatic one. You need Turkey to get along with the Kurds, which they do not. You need them to want to defeat ISIS more than Assad. You need to get Assad involved in this as well, and to agree that it is in his best interests to get rid of ISIS. But it cannot be removing Assad, if you want Assad to help with this at all.

But ultimately, all the region needs to be somehow unified. But that is the problem. That is the conundrum. It is a virtually impossible task.

But putting 1,000 Americans in the middle of a battle in Raqqa is a very bad idea.

Ambassador JEFFREY. To clarify, I never said using American troops or even American diplomacy to get rid of Assad. I think, for the moment, Assad in the part of Syria where he is, is not part of the solution but it is part of the facts.

I am talking about using an American force for a very specific military mission that nobody else has seemed to figure out how we are going to break it.

Senator PAUL. It will happen without us. It can happen with our support, but it is a really bad idea to put American troops in the assault on Raqqa.

Mr. BASH. May I just add one thing?

The CHAIRMAN. Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Mr. BASH. You are undoubtedly correct, Senator, that all of the enumerated problems that you laid out cannot be solved by us alone. It certainly cannot be solved by a small number of U.S. forces. It is one of the reasons why I do not think the Defense Department alone can be the lead on this.

However, if we resolutely focus on one narrow aspect of our national interest, it is preventing Raqqa from being a safe haven for ISIS to conduct external operations and plots that could attack Europe and the United States. And I would just commend for the committee's review this article in the New York Times on February 4th that stated that 40 percent of the so-called lone-wolf terrorists

that have deployed around the world, actually, there was an operational connection between them and ISIS senior leaders in Raqqa.

So while we are not going to solve all the problems, if we can put more pressure, either through airstrikes, special operations forces, smaller application of military force to keep a suppression force on ISIS command-and-control, we might be able to reduce that number from 40 percent to 20 percent to 10 percent, and reduce the possibility that ISIS can conduct attacks that can kill innocent Americans.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks to the witnesses. This will be very helpful as we review what the administration brings to us. I appreciate your testimony today.

Ambassador Jeffrey, I am looking at your written testimony, and you said a version of it in your verbal testimony.

The last page, "The U.S. military should press for a 'stay-behind' train and liaison presence of several thousand troops in Iraq, supporting both Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi regular military forces." And you believe that that is necessary to avoid ISIS rushing back in to claim space that is a vacuum.

In your verbal testimony, you said let us not repeat the mistake that led to the 2014 rise of ISIS.

I just want to drill into this one for a second. You are not suggesting we should stay in Iraq over their objection or be an occupier, correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. No, not that we would be able to.

Senator KAINE. So the idea is, we should stay because what we provide adds value and they would want us to stay. But the political reality of that, it seems to me there have been two things in the last 2 weeks that are going to make this harder.

The notion that the U.S. President is saying we want to take Iraqi oil will make them, if they take that seriously, a little bit skittish about us staying.

And second, a decision to ban Iraqis from coming into the United States, even Iraqis that helped the American military when they were there, that is also going to make Iraqis a little bit skittish about a continued U.S. presence.

And I imagine both of these things are probably being used by Iran right now to say, you see, is the U.S. your friend, when they will not let Iraqis come into their country? Is the U.S. your friend when their President is saying we are going to take oil?

Do you not think it is pretty important, as a matter of policy, that we fix these things if we want to try to convince Iraq that we should be a partner going forward, rather than somebody that they want to leave after Mosul falls?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I could not agree more. On taking Iraq's oil, the Iraqis, if asked, would have to comment on that and say—in fact, they have. But I do not think they really believe that.

Now, where you have a point, sir, is on the immigrant decision, the executive order. The thing, from a policy standpoint, that was I think the only really troubling thing, leave aside the constitutional and the humanitarian and the other, was including Iraq. Be-

cause who are the others? Five failed states in the middle of chaos and Iran. That is why it did not have much of an impact in the larger Middle East, because those are not countries like Pakistan and Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Turkey that are now major players.

Iraq is different though. It is a serious ally of ours. It is a functioning country. It also has an Al Qaeda and an ISIS presence.

But it should not have been on that list. I think it was a mistake to go on it. We all know the genesis of that list from the seven countries that you could not go back to in the last administration. And somebody did not think.

But if there is one thing I am pretty sure of from my many years of watching government is that whatever mistakes this new administration makes in the next years, Senator, they will not make that specific mistake again.

Senator KAINE. I pray that that is the case, and I think that there is still time to fix it, and I hope it is fixed either in the courts or here or by an administration that rethinks it.

Second, and this is to follow up on some questions both Senators Portman and Menendez were asking, candidate and President Trump has said that he expected Russia's help in defeating ISIS. I think we would all agree that has been virtually nonexistent thus far. And I think the testimony that you gave in connection with Senator Portman's question is the expectation, that that will dramatically change, that Russia will be an ally in defeating ISIS, you would have to be quite a risk-taker to take that bet right now, do you not agree?

Mr. BASH. Yes. I think Russia feels more emboldened, not more in the mode of doing what we want them to do.

Senator KAINE. And President Trump last week said he thought Russia would assist us in keeping Iran in check, and then Russia immediately came out and said, no, Iran is an ally of ours. We are trading partners. We are allies. And we want a deeper relationship.

So would you also agree that any expectation that Russia would be a check against Iranian ambitions would be pretty darn naive right now?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Now that is a different and interesting question, Senator.

There may be a little bit of light there. The reason is—and I am not normally a Russia expert, but I have had 2 weeks with the Russians over the last year, mainly on Syria and Iraq and Iran. And there is a difference.

There is a way to split them off. Russia wants to have a lot more influence in the Middle East, but it is backing a horse, Iran, which sees the Middle East as a clash of Shia and Sunni Islam, with itself leading the Shia forces and the revolutionary forces, the Islamic forces. But the bulk of the region, which is Sunni Muslim, sees that as an abhorrent threat to their very existence. And that puts Russia in a funny position.

I do not think Russia really wants to help Iran and Assad seize all of Syria. I think that they really are halfway serious about the Astana ceasefire, and we ought to be able to build on that. And I think that they will not be able to actively limit what Iran is doing in the region. Relations are too close.

But it would be really nice if they could be careful on how and how rapidly they sell our weapons to Iran and how strongly they support Iran on the Security Council.

Senator KAINE. And do you predict they will be careful?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I predict that there may be a deal there, but I am not sure. It is going to be hard, and they will want something in return.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir.

Senator Isakson?

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As usual, you made a very prophetic statement when you opened the questioning period, when you said, after all, we are really just talking about a bunch of proxies fighting over each other. And if you listen to everything that has been said, that really is true.

The lives that are on the ground, except for the few of the United States of America, are lives that are fighting for a proxy that has nothing to do with the country they are from or the religion that they are in. I just wanted to make that observation. That makes it different.

I have been listening to everybody. I have been thinking, there have been two times in the United States' history when we were attacked and had great loss of life. One was Pearl Harbor. We lost almost 3,000 Americans in 1 day. The other was 9/11 in New York where we lost 3,000 Americans in 1 day.

And the result of World War II and the attack on America at Pearl Harbor was we ultimately declared war both in the Pacific and with the Axis powers in Europe.

Since 9/11/2001, we have fought a lot of battles. We have made a lot of declarations. But there is not, to my knowledge, a declaration of the global effort to fight ISIL.

Am I correct there?

The CHAIRMAN. Say that one more time?

Senator ISAKSON. Is there a declaration somewhere on the global fight to disrupt ISIL? Any declaration of war?

The CHAIRMAN. No, I think the administration has relied upon the '01, saying that they are a derivative of Al Qaeda. And last week, in meeting with the national security adviser, we began discussing this very topic and maybe a way forward.

But go ahead.

Senator ISAKSON. My reason for bringing it up is just to comment on everything that we have listened to. The one thing that is missing from the two great comparisons, which is 9/11 and Pearl Harbor, is the result after Pearl Harbor was pretty quickly a coalition of freedom-loving people who joined together in a powerful force to take on the Axis powers and, in fact, Nazi Germany.

I would submit to you that the enemy we face today, although it does not have a territory, does not have a uniform, does not have a recognized leader, is every bit as lethal, every bit as awful, and every bit as big a threat to America as was the World War II effort against Nazi Germany and the Axis powers in the Pacific.

I just want to make the point, we need to make that declaration at some point in time. And we need to find out if our friends are going to rally to the declaration or sit on the sidelines and watch.

Right now, everybody who could be a friend of the United States in fighting, with the exception, and there are exceptions, the Swedes in Afghanistan. There are a lot of countries helping us here, there, and yonder. But in terms of an absolute commitment of the countries' commitment to the effort, they are not there, because there is not a declaration there.

And I am doing all the talking, not asking questions, and I am sorry about that. But I just had to make that point, because it is something we are eventually going to have to do.

Mr. Bash, you made a statement a minute ago, or in your speech, about we ought to stop the Muslim-only order, and then you made a statement that working with Muslim leaders in America, we ought to come to a decision.

Who are those Muslim leaders? Has there been any assembly of those Muslim leaders that you know of? Or do you know who they are?

Mr. BASH. I think there are a number of leaders of organizations and communities here in the United States who have stepped forward and expressed a willingness to work together with the U.S. Government, to work together with law enforcement, who have worked with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies and departments that are interested in providing funds, and resources to those elements that are engaged in countering violent extremism activities and to looking out for those communities.

Senator ISAKSON. Is there an equivalent in the Muslim world to either the Pope or Billy Graham?

Mr. BASH. Not that I am aware of.

Senator ISAKSON. Just wondering. We need to find that person somewhere or that title. That would be the place to start negotiating and bringing them in the conversation, because I think they have a lot to lose too. I mean, I have a number of Muslim friends. I had a Muslim roommate when I was in high school in a foreign exchange program. I have a great respect for the faith. But they have as much to lose in this war as anybody else has.

Mr. BASH. It is a good point. And my dad is here, who is a member of the clergy. And it is interesting to see different religions and the hierarchy that governs them. And I think you have put your finger on an issue that I think we need to work through.

Senator ISAKSON. My last point is, the reference was made during Senator Shaheen's questioning to Vietnam and Iraq as two examples of where, when it was over, there was not a plan to keep it going, and, therefore, we lost. There was no nation-state built.

Of course, in Vietnam, we basically lost. We left without winning. But in Iraq, we ultimately won with a surge of 130,000 troops that went into Iraq. Then we put in provincial reconstruction teams and the State Department and USAID in those regions to really bring back Iraq to a civilized society. And we only lost Iraq when we took out that remaining small residual force, military force, that was there.

My only point is, at some point in time, you probably have to make the decision that you are going to have to have some military presence over a protracted period of time if, in fact, victory is important enough to you to send troops to take over that country—

just look at Japan and Germany today, 70 years after World War II.

And I thank you for the time, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

If I could, would one of you all respond to Senator Isakson's premise that ISIS is something that deserves a global effort equal to what we did in World War II?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I do not think it is as big a threat to the United States. I put ISIS in the same category as the Islamic State.

Essentially, Sunni extremist, radical movements are a threat to the region. They are definitely a threat to Europe because they have very strong, if you will, footholds in Muslim communities in Europe.

I do not see them as a threat to us because they do not have that kind of situation that you have, for example, in France, in Belgium, and in Britain.

And their ability to strike us, other than periodically by terrorist attacks, will be limited as long as they are not allowed to have a state. And the reason that ISIS has been pretty effective launching these attacks, as Jeremy Bash said, is because it has the ability to motivate people around the world. That is why job one in the fight against terror has to be to bash the ISIS state.

I do think, though, and I know you have talked about this before in this committee, that an authorization for the use of military force against ISIS would be a good idea because, as you said, Senator, we are still operating on 1.2, but then we got it back down to one authorization that tracks the immediate post-9/11 period. And I think it would be perhaps helpful to clarify exactly the questions that the Senator and many other Americans have raised.

The CHAIRMAN. But marshaling efforts around the world to deal with this is not something that you would disagree with? The order of magnitude of the threat may be different, from your perspective, but—

Ambassador JEFFREY. The overall mess that is the Middle East, and much of that has one or another Islamic component—certainly, Sunni Islamic extremism in Iran, which is an Islamic entity of another sort, taken as a whole, has obviously been for a long time—look at our military engagements there—and will continue to be a major risk for the security of the entire world. And it pulls in other countries like Russia today, perhaps China tomorrow. And that is the danger too.

So it is a very big priority for our foreign policy and our national security, to try to get the region under control. I think, in that sense, it is a major effort. But I would not say—it is not a war on a specific thing the way it was in World War II.

Mr. BASH. May I just add, Mr. Chairman, may I just add, we do have a global coalition and I would not want to leave anyone with the impression, particularly our coalition partners, that we do not think that they are there in the fight with us. They very much are. They are taking fire, and they are doing some very important things alongside our diplomats, our intelligence officers, and our troops. That is point one.

But point two, I think it is worth it, since we have just come through an election, to refresh that and to refresh that statement, refresh that declaration. With Congress in the lead, I think it is very appropriate.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Coons?

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Corker.

I have three basic lines of questioning.

One will simply continue that, which is to follow up on one of your opening statements, Mr. Bash, to ask about the global affiliates of ISIS that have pledged allegiance to the caliphate. And I want to explore with you a little bit what that really means, how much control there really is, what sort of coordination there really is.

Second, I will ask about how we prevent Iran from expanding their hegemony into Syria after the fall of Raqqa and into Iraq after the fall of Mosul.

And then third, a number of my colleagues have covered, and you have spoken to directly, a number of President Trump's unhelpful statements about seizing Iraq's oil, the impact of his saying he would reinstate torture, and then, most importantly, the executive order banning refugees from seven majority Muslim countries.

But let us take those in order, if we could.

First, in the Sahel area, I paid a fair amount of attention to it as chair of the Africa Subcommittee my first years, and in Southeast Asia region, others have raised, you have ISIS affiliates. But my superficial impression is that they are not tightly aligned, not funding each other, not sharing technology and weaponry and training. But perhaps I am missing a core point.

You did, in your opening, and I think it is important, emphasize that Australia has been our ally in virtually every undertaking in the last century. That NATO is an absolutely crucial partner. And I just wanted to give you, Mr. Bash, Ambassador Jeffrey, a moment to speak to the global consequences and the importance of reaffirming our coalition partners.

Mr. BASH. Well, I think the specific operational ties vary in different situations. Actually, if you look at—I read through that statement that the White House released last night about the terror attacks that, in their view, have been underreported. And actually, so many of those were those that were inspired or enabled by ISIS's propaganda, their incitement, and their ideas.

And that is their main weapon. That is their main export. That is how they do their business. And, by the way, it is pretty effective.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Let me tackle the containing of Iran. The first thing we have to do, and this would be a change from the last administration, is to recognize that Iran is a problem in the region and that America, with its friends and allies in an economy of force way, needs to push back. And that will set the stage for cooperation with a lot of friends who believe the same way.

But specifically, there is a ceasefire that the Russians and the Iranians and the Turks and the Syrians put together for Syria, the Astana one. The Turks are willing to live with that, even though their side lost, basically. The Russians put it together and have

some interest in it. The Syrians, the Assad government, does not really like it. It wants to retake the whole country on the back of Iranian surrogates and Russian airplanes. And Iran is probably there with Syria.

But I think that the first thing is we should embrace that. We should put people into those negotiations, bring in the Europeans, and put pressure on Russia, as part of our relationship with Russia, that we want that thing to hold. Also, with Turkey.

And I think that there is a real chance of that happening because retaking the rest of Syria is not an easy job, and the Russians seem not to want to get bogged down in Syria, despite their military victory in Aleppo.

In the rest of the region, you have a situation in Yemen that is quite critical. You have a situation that is brewing in Afghanistan with Iran. You have a situation that is relatively quiet but it is not good in Lebanon.

But throughout the region, basically, it should be clear that the United States is going to work in various ways against the expansion of Iranian influence. And that is totally aside from the nuclear agreement.

Senator COONS. I could not agree with you more, that containing Iranian aggression, attempts at expanding their hegemony, is a key goal for our foreign policy, both in our engagement after Mosul is retaken and in how we act in the region.

Let me just ask a quick question. Since you both identified ISIS propaganda, their ability to reach out and radicalize, as their most effective weapon, does it not simply strengthen and expand the reach of that weapon to have an executive order in place that correctly or not is being characterized throughout the Muslim world as an anti-Muslim ban.

Mr. Bash?

Mr. BASH. It has already been utilized by ISIS sympathizers on Telegram, one of the social media entities I referenced earlier. And one of the arguments, just to put a little bit of a sharper focus on it, is ISIS has always said, hey, let us look at how America treats its own Muslim population, and you can judge America that way.

And then when we do not allow back into the country lawful, permanent residents who are of the Muslim faith, back into the country that they are legally here, and we do not allow others to be reunited with their families, we do not allow the tens of thousands of students who are studying in our own universities and colleges to actually be here or to travel home and come back, I should say, then I think it actually validates, in some ways, ISIS's claim.

Senator COONS. Well, Ambassador, I appreciate you also observing that Iraq should not have been included. I think it is a pressing security threat for us to have partners in an ongoing fight now not allowed to come here for training, for consultation, those who kept troops alive on the battlefield not able to come home.

And it is my hope we will find ways to address this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could—I agree with that, but are you saying the others should have, in making that statement? And are you agreeing with that?

Mr. Bash?

Mr. BASH. I am sorry. I do not understand the question, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The statement he made was Iraq should not have been included. I agree with that. But that sets the premise the others should have.

Mr. BASH. I think the construct of the ban was ill-conceived. I think banning travel from entire populations without regards to specific intelligence and terrorism threats I think was a mistake for reasons that we have talked about.

So my recommendation would be to look at vetting procedures—I think that is always appropriate—but not to do it in the context of a travel ban.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Gardner?

Senator GARDNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to both of you for your endurance today. It is a heavily attended committee hearing, which is a very good thing, I think, for the committee. So thank you very much for being a part of it.

Mr. Bash, I want to clarify or follow up a little bit on the answer you gave to Senator Young, talking about the Muslim faith. I do not want to put words in your mouth, so I want to make sure I understood what you said.

In talking about it, I think the question about most people, the predominant majority of people in the Muslim faith are of peace and reject terrorism, an overwhelming number. But you said, when he asked what more should be done, I think, Mr. Bash, you said something about we need those to share, we need people to share a proper review of Islam.

Could you talk a little bit more about that, what you mean, who you mean, and what can be done about that?

Mr. BASH. As I have traveled in the Middle East, and I was there not long ago speaking with leaders, particularly in the gulf, I mean, their view, and I credit this, is that what ISIS has done successfully, and to some degree what the supreme leader has done in Iran on Shia side, is perverted Islam and perverted the religion, done things in the name of the religion that, in the view of more moderates in the region, is not consistent with the way they think Islam should be practiced.

And I think we should listen to those people, and I think we should empower them and look for ways to have their view of their own religion—

Senator GARDNER. But is that not something we have been trying to do since over a decade ago, looking for those voices, trying to strengthen those voices—

Mr. BASH. Yes.

Senator GARDNER.—trying to find a platform for those voices. So why have all those efforts failed, if we still need to do it?

Mr. BASH. We have been trying to do it. We need to do it more. I would not put it in a binary of it has worked or it has failed. There are places where it has worked. There are places where it has not worked.

I think we need to, obviously, expand the efforts so that it works in additional places.

Senator GARDNER. Again, this is something that we have been talking about. We have been pursuing it at the Global Engagement

Center. This conversation has been held multiple times before this committee on how do we find those moderate voices, those reasonable voices that agree with the vast majority of people in the faith that reject this?

So I would love to follow up more with how we can do a better job, because I do put it in the terms of have we succeeded or have we failed, because, if it is still happening, if ISIS is still radicalizing people, if their ideology is spreading, then we have not succeeded.

So anyway, I think we can follow up a little bit more on that.

I want to talk a little bit about, Ambassador Jeffrey, in your statement, you said that it is difficult to see how Washington can pursue anti-ISIS operations in Syria without Turkish bases and other cooperation. Can you talk a little bit about the Turkish-Russia activities and what that means for the U.S.?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Turkey has had a 250-year running conflict with Russia to its north. Russia's expansion in the 16th through 19th century came at the expense of Turkish territories, to a significant degree in the Balkans, in Crimea, and in other places, the Caucasus.

And so there is a deep suspicion, and it is a classic case of, if you have two major powers in one area, they tend to not get along.

That said, there are energy ties and other ties with Russia. Russia is a big player. Turkey knows it.

The current war, of course, with the fight in Syria where Russia and Turkey were on opposite sides. You know the history. Turkey shot down the Russian fighter that went into Turkish territory. A strong reaction but still a limited reaction on the part of Putin, and a military offensive that Putin supported in Aleppo against the forces that Turkey was backing. Turkey was backing, very strongly, forces who wanted to overthrow Assad. Some of them were people who we would not want to work with, but a lot of them in the Free Syrian Army were people we were also working with. We cooperated with Turkey to train many of those people.

Then, at the end of the day, Turkey wanted to do a no-fly zone, ultimately. And they wanted to do it with us. They wanted to have a no-drive zone. They eventually did it themselves, and they seized a huge chunk of northern Syria, partially to block the Kurds but also to go after ISIS and also to put pressure on Assad. They had a three-way purpose in that.

But they were evermore disappointed that we were not in the fight with them in any sort of way. They did not see a policy toward Syria, and they did not see a policy toward Iran. And frankly, I think they were right.

And at the end of the day, they were presented with a fait accompli. Their side lost the battle of Aleppo. The western Syrian battle was basically over. And to save what they could of their Free Syrian Army Forces, many of whom are still under arms and coordinating with the Turks, they decided to work this deal with the Russians, the Astana ceasefire.

But the Turks are very unhappy at Assad's violation of this. They keep on saying, at least for the record, that they are opposed to Assad. They think he needs to go. And they are uncomfortable

with this second-class status that they have been given with Russia.

And, thus, I think they are very willing to work with us. And I see all kinds of signs—

Senator GARDNER. There are no threats to U.S. interests in Syria or Iraq as a result of the Russian-Turkey operations?

Ambassador JEFFREY. No, I do not. I think that Turkey feels forced into this. They would love to have a situation where they could—I do not want to paint too—where they could play us off against the Russians. We will not like it, but it is better than where we are now, because right now, there is no gain. They just basically have to go along with the Russians.

Senator GARDNER. I am out of time, but at some point, we can follow up a little bit more about ISIS and Jakarta, and the attacks in Jakarta in 2016, Southeast Asia. I think it is important that we view ISIS and this issue not just as a Middle East or Europe or even a distant threat to the U.S., I think somebody had said, through attacks but also talk about what is happening in Southeast Asia.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio is walking down, if you would like to filibuster by asking about that.

Senator GARDNER. I would love to ask that question.

The CHAIRMAN. If Senator Cardin does not object.

Go ahead.

Senator GARDNER. Just again, I will make it quick, talk about Southeast Asia, talk about the threat that ISIS poses. About 600 known fighters in Southeast Asia right now. We have counterterrorism efforts in place.

Are those sufficient? Do we need to do more? How is our partnership on counterterrorism efforts proceeding?

Mr. BASH. I think we could always do more in the field of intelligence cooperation and law enforcement training. We have had some good experience with countries in Southeast Asia countering the Al Qaeda threat in the aftermath of 9/11.

Of course, you referenced Indonesia. That is where Hambali was. In working with allies and key partners there, we successfully took him down.

Again, this is a place where I think Australia could be critical, because as you talk to officials in Canberra, one of the things that they are very concerned about is the ISIS threat in Indonesia, in Jakarta, in Bali, and elsewhere. And they can play a very constructive role in working with us there.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Thank you both for being here. It is a busy day, a busy night, a long night.

And I apologize if this has been asked before. Let me just ask your opinions on the following, and that is, there has been a lot of talk, some out there arguing, well, you know, Assad is a bad individual but he is better than the alternative.

I have often said that, irrespective of what happens in this conflict, as long as—given both the nature of the Assad regime and ev-

everything that has transpired, that as long as Assad is in power, or those close to him are in power, given what has occurred in Syria, there will always be—Syria will always be ripe for a Sunni resistance to his rule, that it is difficult to go to someone who has had their family slaughtered, who has faced deep oppression, and somehow ever get them to fold into national unity under the rule of an individual responsible for those these sorts of horrific acts.

Do you share that view, that it will be very difficult if not impossible for Syria to ever be peaceful and unified as long as someone with as much blood on his hands as Assad is in power?

Mr. BASH. I strongly agree with that statement, Senator Rubio. Assad has used chemical weapons to kill at least 1,400 of his own civilians, including several hundred children. As we noted earlier in the hearing, we had to witness on our own televisions, in a manner that was inappropriate for young children to be in the living room when these scenes were being shown, the way the Assad forces were liquidating the city of Aleppo and slaughtering civilians and making it impossible for relief organizations to be there.

So I agree 100 percent with your statement.

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Assad system is exactly what you described, Senator, because as Jeremy said, it is absolute brutality against the entire population, with some exceptions, of Syria. Anybody who gets in the way gets thrown in jail, gets tortured, and the mass slaughter of thousands of civilians, poison gas, all of that.

It is possible to imagine scenarios where Assad is left in power as a figurehead as part of some kind of compromise of countries in the region and outside of the region agree to, as long as the system goes away. But as long as that system, which only goes on one speed, which is oppression full out, continues, you are not going to have peace in Syria. And without peace in Syria, you are not going to have peace in the region.

Senator RUBIO. Yes. I guess the broader point I have always been driving, and it sounds like you both either directly agree or largely agree with, is that there are a lot of people who talk about this notion that Assad is terrible but he is better than the alternative. I guess my argument is, as long as Assad is there, given everything that has transpired, you are basically providing the fuel and the conditions. Even if ISIS is wiped out, you already see Jabhat al-Nusra, or whatever their new name now is, stepping into that void.

In essence, given everything that has occurred, there will always be a Sunni resistance that will tend toward radicalization in some cases, if no other alternative is available. I just make the argument to people that Assad is one of the reasons why we have an ISIS. He is not a counter to ISIS. He is, in many ways, one of the reasons that accelerated the rise of ISIS and those radical Sunni elements within Syria.

I know I am running out of time and I know you have had a long hearing, so let me just ask you this. There is also some discussion out there about basically figuring out a way for the United States to leverage or to peel Russia off of their alliance with Iran and, in particular, work jointly together on trying to defeat ISIS in Syria and beyond.

But I guess my point is, how realistic do you think that sort of strategy is? And what would we have to give up, in your estimation, in other parts of the world in order to entice Vladimir Putin to both cut ties with Iran or at least the alliance they established with Iran, albeit an alliance of convenience, and also become more active participants in the fight against ISIS? How realistic is that strategy, which I know others have flirted with? And what would we probably have to give up in other parts of the world to make that something that Putin would find enticing?

Mr. BASH. Senator, the United States of America tested that proposition over the last 6 months, and the test failed. We tried to enlist them in a productive manner in Syria, and their military operations were imprecise, counterproductive, and they did things in the name of counterterrorism that were actually counterproductive to our efforts; in other words, taking out the moderate forces that could be a leave-behind force in Syria.

So I think I agree with the premise of your question. And I do not believe that we could do a grand bargain with Russia where we outsource the ISIS fight or somehow enlist their effort to moderate Iran's influence.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Specifically, on the ISIS fight, absolutely not, other than carpet-bombing civilians, there is nothing they really can do militarily in this campaign.

The larger question of Iran, assuming we have what I would consider a healthy strategy toward Iran—which we did not in the last administration; they are working on it now in this administration—then there are areas where you can try to peel off Russia because Russian and Iranian interests are not identical.

But that is a longer term effort, and it should not start with giving them any invites to the Raqqa battle.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could highlight, again, Russian troops are not even trained to deal with this type of issue that we have in Raqqa. Is that correct? I mean, all they can really do is what you just mentioned, carpet-bomb. They are of no use, are they, relative to a ground effort in Raqqa?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They had some very high-end forces that we would call special forces, but they are closer to the 75th Ranger Regiment; that is, highly trained light infantry. And they did deploy some of those people at times, which is why I cited that earlier in my argument that we need to put some elite ground troops in.

And those forces are pretty good, but they are nothing in numbers or quality like what we have between the United States and our NATO allies. We have tens of thousands of people who can do that and who have been doing this for a decade in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me thank you for your testimony. As I was listening to the members ask their questions and your responses, I think there is general consensus here that we do not want to see U.S. military in a sustained ground combat operation. There are different views here as to whether it is appropriate for us to interject our special forces and how we interject our special forces, or how we deal with the uncertainty of what occurs, where

we may need to use U.S. forces for rescue, need U.S. forces for an urgent need.

And I say that because President Obama submitted an AUMF that restricted our combat to no sustained ground combat operations, and we all scratched our heads at the time and said, what does that mean?

And I agreed with the chairman that it was impossible for us to get unity to pass an AUMF. We have disagreements whether the 2001 AUMF covers the operations today, and that is never going to be fully resolved because there is no way to resolve that, whether it covers it or not. The President is operating under it, and there is no way of really legally challenging it, other than through the appropriations process, which is a tool that will not be used, because it affects the safety of our military.

So I mention that because, Mr. Chairman, we are going to have to revisit this at some point, because I do think there is general consensus against us using combat troops on a sustained basis in Syria or Iraq, that that would be counterproductive or, by the way, in the other regions in which ISIS is now operating.

That would be, I think, looked at as counterproductive because it would be used as a recruitment tool. It would make it more difficult for us to govern after the combat operations are over. And you are not going to be able to hold unless you have the local will and capacity to hold regions.

For all those reasons, we have to be cautious. We want to get rid of ISIS. We want to get rid of terrorists. But we have to have a game plan.

Mr. Chairman, you have been one of the first to point out that that may not have been true in our Libya campaign. We did not have an idea what was going to happen after we got involved in Libya.

So I just make that as a word of caution. And I would welcome our two witnesses, and maybe would ask this for the record, how would you frame an AUMF where Congress is weighing in to support the operations, recognizing that many of us would be reluctant to an open-ended AUMF because we believe we have responsibility to authorize sustained operations, and we are not prepared to give that congressional authority today?

So it would be interesting to see.

But as far as the use of our military, I could not agree with you more. They have the capacity, the unique capacity. No other country can do what we can do, whether it is our combat troops or whether it is our special forces troops or whether it is the people who are in intelligence in the military, they do the best. And without their participation, it is hard to imagine we could come to any type of successful completion to what is happening today against ISIS.

So I think there is probably more agreement than disagreement. But the question of how does the Senate, how does the Congress, weigh in is a much more difficult assignment. If you have thoughts on that, I would be willing to listen.

Ambassador JEFFREY. As an advocate for non-sustained ground troops—and, of course, definitions are everything—what are ground troops? Are they a forward observer team? Is it special forces on

a raid? I am talking about essentially a number of maneuver battalions, 500 to 800 strong American units participating in ground fire and maneuver.

I think that if we can do operations without that, we should because we are basically in internal conflicts and we want to, for many reasons, put the burden on the locals, but as much local as possible, as much American engagement as necessary.

And we come very close to that, Senator, with the 10,000 troops we have in Afghanistan. They get involved in more fighting than the folks do in Iraq that we have, the 5,000.

The second thing is, I am troubled by this artificial line that special forces can go out and do raids and shoot people up and get shot in the process, and artillery can fire and Apache helicopters can fire rockets, but that is not ground combat. But a U.S. tank company cannot lead an assault on a very dug-in ISIS force.

If we could do this with somebody else, fine, but let us not wait. The Mosul battle has been going on. And, all in all, it is successful. But it has been going on for 3 and a half months, and we still have to take the hardest part of the city in the west.

And there is a cost to doing these things. Maybe we will be okay, but every month you get bogged down in a conflict, there is a risk that something will happen, an ally will fall out, a new development will come in. There is something to be said for rapidity in any operation, diplomatic or military.

In terms of an authorization for the use of military force, I think there were two elements, if I remember, because I gave testimony either here or in the House on authorization. And the two concerns were, first of all, the limitation on sustained use of ground troops. I think that needs to be worded differently because it just was troubling from many standpoints.

Senator CARDIN. We are all looking at new language these days.

Ambassador JEFFREY. The other thing was, there was—I do not know whether it was a geographic—it was everywhere in the world. And that was a little bit troubling too. If you are going to authorize the use of military force, as this chamber knows very well, dating back to 1964, you really have to be careful what you authorize.

Senator CARDIN. And then, lastly, there was a challenge of whether this would be the exclusive use of the authority, whether we would repeal 2001 or whether 2001 would still stay in. So there were different—and whether it would have a sunset or not have a sunset.

There were many open issues about how we would do this, so it was not free from challenges. But the bottom line is, what is the appropriate authorization for the use of force by Congress?

Mr. BASH. And maybe I will add as a coda, Senator Cardin, if you just tell the Defense Department, “Give us some options,” the last slide is going to be the low, medium, and high option. And I sense the struggle here among all of us to figure out what are the right numbers, what are the right missions, what are the right capabilities we want to have in country.

And I think the premise of this hearing, and my recommendation would be, do not make that decision in isolation. Think about the comprehensive approach. What else are we doing diplomatically?

Who else is with us in the fight? What is the nature and capability of the ground forces of local partners that we will be employing? How good and precise are our airstrikes? What kind of intelligence precision do we have?

I think if you look at the entire picture, that will inform the low, medium, and high decision that the Defense Department will inevitably come forward with.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you both. Of course, the authorization is something that I think we will be dealing with here in the next couple months.

I think the first step, as it relates to Syria, is to have the administration lay out a plan and for them to come before us and talk about the details of that. I think this hearing has been really, really useful in that regard.

Back to the AUMF component, I mean, that would then help us as it relates to Syria itself. But then there is this global issue that we are dealing with, that each circumstance could develop into something very different.

So just for what it is worth, I know that you had some things on the floor. I am not sure there is that much unanimity on what we should do. There was a lot of conflicting thoughts.

I think that there are many people who believe that, when you authorize the military, you should just authorize the military. And then I think there are others that feel like there should be more of a management there relative to what we do.

But again, here, today, the hearing is really about what we are going to do right now in Syria. I know that is what Mattis has been charged to do. My guess is Tillerson will be highly involved in that.

And I think this whole issue that you both are alluding to relative to ground troops, not to be pejorative, the last administration's reticence caused much of that to occur. It has no doubt affected where we are today. I mean, we keep looking in all of the—I do not really see a force on the ground by itself that is capable, on one hand, of dealing with this. We have elements that do not particularly get along well with each other.

And so it is going to be interesting, as they walk through this process, to try to weave the Turks, the Arab-supported Turks, the Arab-supported Kurds, the Kurds, the Russian-Iran component, trying to weave that together into something that is coherent to me is going to be very, very difficult. And I think this hearing has been most useful in describing that, describing those complications.

Jeffrey, if you would, if you were the person waving and describing how it is going to be most focused, which of those areas would it be?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Really quickly, one, we wrung our hands about the Balkans for 3 years because of exactly all of those same complications. And then we acted. And suddenly, almost all of them melted away. They melted away good enough for government work.

I think the Middle East is more difficult. We are in a very dangerous situation with multiple foes, with multiple complications. I think that if Iran understands we are going to contain Iran; Russia understands that we are not going to try to throw it out of the Mid-

dle East but that we are also going to watch carefully what it does in the region; Turkey believes that we are not going to develop this relationship with what they think is a potentially existential threat, the YPG branch of the PKK in Syria; and that the Iraqis know that we are not going to try to use them against Iran but that we also do not want to go away, I think that, bit by bit, we can put this back together because we have the military, we have the political, we have the economic power.

And when you add up all of our allies and friends in the area—we have not talked much about Israel, about Saudi Arabia, about all these other countries—they are capable of being mobilized for some kind of plan like this.

And I think it is eminently doable over time, but we have to start with whacking ISIS and making it clear that Iran is somebody that we are not going to let take over the region, and it will flow from there.

The CHAIRMAN. I think that is a good way to close the hearing. If you would answer questions, we are going to leave them open until close of business tomorrow, Thursday. I know that you have other things that you do during the day. But if you can answer those as quickly as possible, we would appreciate it. Thank you both. I think this has been an outstanding hearing, and I think it has caused everyone up here to think about this in a little different way, and we will have hopefully something that comes out of the administration that can be supported and can be successful with the help of your testimony today.

So thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF THE HONORABLE JAMES JEFFREY TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. What are your detailed assessments of the State Department's Global Engagement Center?

Answer. Under former DoD Assistant Secretary Lumpkin the Center has taken a more indirect approach working with those in the region and in the United States who are more closely connected to communities vulnerable to jihadist recruitment. The difficulty with this Center with its current and former programs is that, first, measurement of success is extremely difficult. Second, its 'target audience', those tempted to support or join violent Islamic movements, is an extremely small portion of the global Muslim community, and their motivations typically are highly differentiated from individual to individual. Nevertheless as an element in a whole-of-government approach to violent Islamic extremism, the Center should be supported.

Question. As ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, should we expect many ISIS fighters to attempt to flee and return to their home countries or to travel to ungoverned or weakly governed areas elsewhere? Should we expect them to travel to the U.S. or Europe in order to conduct terrorist attacks? How will most of the ISIS fighters go about fleeing Iraq and Syria? Will they flee through Turkey? Is Turkey doing all that it can to prevent this terrorist exodus? How can the U.S. help capture or kill these terrorists as they flee Iraq and Syria?

Answer. At least the foreign fighters will flee Iraq and Syria once the ISIS 'state' is defeated, as their inability to speak local dialects makes them identifiable to security authorities once they are no longer 'embedded' in an ISIS community. Some will travel to the Sinai, possibly Libya, Yemen, or Afghanistan, but many likely will try to return to their homelands, especially in Western Europe or the former Soviet Union. Given the already extensive vetting of foreigners traveling to the U.S. receive, and the likely intensification of that under the Trump administration, few are

likely to reach the U.S. Many will unfortunately be more successful reaching Europe, a concern for us as attacks by them there threaten the security and stability of American allies.

Only a small number of American citizens have joined jihadist movements in Syria and Iraq, but they pose a potential threat because as citizens they are not routinely vetted upon reentry into the U.S.. Specific intelligence programs are important to identify such people. There is also a limited danger of European passport holder veterans of jihadist campaigns entering the U.S. for example via the visa waiver program. The Obama administration modified that program to deal with this threat and every indication is that the Trump administration will further intensify it.

Clandestine travel of jihadist elements from Syria and Iraq is currently easiest through Turkey, but Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia cannot fully control their borders either. Turkey of late has taken extraordinary efforts to shut down ISIS-linked sponsors and sympathizers, but could do more. The U.S. is already working very actively with all of these border states. Assisting them with intelligence, training and certain military and intelligence equipment to enhance their effectiveness should be a central priority once the ISIS 'state' is defeated.

Question. Do you both believe that there will be no durable defeat of ISIS in Syria if the U.S. agrees to a Russian demand to keep Assad in power and fails to insist on the establishment of an inclusive government in Damascus that protects rather than murders its own people?

Answer. It is possible to envisage an end to ISIS as a state and army even if Assad were to stay in power, if the U.S. remained very active against ISIS remnants in Syria and Iraq. However, as long as Assad remains in power a major portion of Syria's Sunni Arab populations will resist him, and some doing so will join ISIS (or al Qaeda). While ISIS may not be able to reconstitute its 'state' with control of wide swaths of territory, it certainly could sustain itself as an underground terrorist organization able to attack the Syrian population and government, and those of its neighbors. It also could launch or inspire terrorist attacks in the U.S. or Europe.

The end of the Assad regime, particularly, as the question noted, if replaced by a more inclusive and decent government, will reduce dramatically the recruitment appeal of ISIS. While ISIS could still survive, its strength and capabilities would be dramatically weakened.

Finally, as long as Assad remains in power, Iran continues its expansion throughout the region, and in particular Assad and his Iranian allies attempt to conquer all of Syria, there is a risk of a region-wide Sunni-Shia conflagration. Under those circumstances large numbers of recruits could flock to ISIS or al Qaeda as they are seen as among the most effective fighters in a religious conflict with the Shia.

Question. Do you both believe it is in U.S. national security interests to retain U.S. military personnel in Iraq after the fall of Mosul, if so why? How many troops, where, and for what purpose? Do you believe the Iraqi government will want to keep U.S. troops in Iraq after the fall of Mosul? Do you believe Iran will try to expel the U.S. military presence in Iraq after the fall of Mosul?

Answer. It is very much in the U.S. interest to keep a contingent of troops in Iraq, in Baghdad itself and on a handful of Iraqi bases including those in the north in the Kurdistan Regional Government. The ostensible purposes of these forces, probably around 5,000 in number, would be to, as planned in 2011, train Iraqi forces, exchange intelligence, and assist in counter-terrorist operations against ISIS or al Qaeda remnants. But such a presence would support broader U.S. diplomatic goals by demonstrating U.S. engagement and interest in Iraq, giving the U.S. 'eyes on' for developments in the Iraqi armed forces, and potentially enabling other Western nations or NATO to, keep small training contingents in Iraq, as in the past and again currently against ISIS.

Once ISIS is defeated some Iraqi elements for nationalistic reasons, and others influenced by Iran, will certainly push for a total U.S. withdrawal. There are strong arguments which the U.S. and those desiring our forces can make in response: First, the need to integrate the over \$10 billion of military equipment Iraq has purchased from the U.S.; Second, the failure of Iraqi security forces against ISIS after the U.S. withdrew in 2011; Third, the need to keep the KRG, which is very interested in U.S. forces remaining on its territory, within the Iraqi union. More subtly, many Iraqis would see a U.S. presence as 'balancing' Iranian influence which is resented by Iraqis of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

A legal basis for the U.S. presence could be found in the "Strategic Framework Agreement" of 2008 between the U.S. and Iraq, and the various exchanges of letters governing the U.S. presence since 2014.

Question. Do you believe we should establish safe zones in Syria? What are some of the benefits and challenges associated with establishing safe zones in Syria? Where in Syria do you believe these safe zones should be located? Who would defend and secure these safe zones on the ground? Would you support the U.S.-led coalition protecting these safe zones from the air?

Answer. There are already informal ‘safe zones’ in Syria, a small one along the Jordanian border where the U.S. and others have trained the Syrian resistance, the Turkish zone west of the Euphrates for about 95 miles, and up to 20 kilometers deep, and the Syrian Kurdish PYD “Rojava” areas of Kobane East of the Euphrates, and in Afrin northeast of Aleppo. The U.S. could expand those zones, for example to include the areas around Raqqa once liberated.

U.S. advisors and U.S. aircraft routinely operate in those areas. While there is not a formal ‘no fly zone’ declared or defended, deconfliction between the U.S. and coalition aircraft (and Turkish aircraft in the Turkish zone) and Syrian and Russian aircraft routinely occur, and the U.S. by press accounts has scrambled fighters on occasion to intercept Russian or Syrian air missions over ‘our’ areas.

The U.S. working with Turkey and local forces could ‘formalize’ these regions for the following purposes: (1) invite in refugee agencies to establish refugee centers, thus relieving refugee pressure on the EU and reducing the threat of jihadists traveling to the U.S. or other NATO states; (2) leverage these zones to enforce the Astana cease fire for Syria; (3) advance the goal shared by the U.S. and most of the region to see a post-Assad inclusive government of Syria; (4) use these zones as ‘lily pads’ to operate with local forces against ISIS remnants and al Qaeda.

The U.S. along with Turkey and whichever coalition forces wish could establish ‘control’ over these zones with fighter aircraft, drones and surface-to-air missiles. (Critics of the idea stress that the U.S. and allies would have to operate within the ‘umbrella’ of Syrian and Russian air defense. They forget that Russia and Syria have conducted their operations inside the ‘fan’ of U.S., Turkish, NATO, Arab states and Israeli radar, air defense and fighter-interceptor forces continuously).

Question. As areas in and around Mosul are liberated, how is the Iraqi government doing managing the behavior of the Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to avoid the mistreatment of Sunni residents that could make them susceptible to ISIS recruitment? When ISIS controlled areas are liberated, how is the Iraqi government doing in rapidly restoring government services and establishing inclusive governance? Do you agree that the Iraqi government’s “Phase IV operations” in Sunni majority areas are essential to the durable defeat of ISIS in Iraq? How can or should the State Department and USAID support the Iraqi government’s efforts to establish responsive government services and inclusive governance for Sunni populations to prevent the return of ISIS?

Answer. Apart from some initial outrages by PMF elements in liberated zones in 2014 and again during the 2016 Fallujah campaign, the PMF elements have behaved tolerably well with exceptions (typically by more Iran-oriented elements) throughout Iraq.

Once areas are liberated the most important ‘initial steps’ are to provide immediate relief (medical, nutrition, etc), reestablish local police forces, and remove the PMF elements. There are government institutions both local and federal that can quickly engage or be reinstated as we have seen in Anbar and Saladin provinces. More sustained, as noted, “Phase IV” counterinsurgency efforts in economic, political and security realms for reconstruction and reconciliation will be needed to discourage elements of the Sunni population from joining ISIS or al Qaeda elements. As the U.S. has learned in its own Phase IV operations, however, durable success is uncertain, long-term, and resource intensive. Nevertheless, any palpable progress, combined with a more inclusive political attitude on the part of the Baghdad central government towards its Sunni citizens, likely will deter many from again taking up arms.

The U.S. can assist first with immediate relief and assistance programs and efforts to reconcile former foes, including through USAID and NGO’s such as USIP. More generally, the more engaged the U.S. is in Iraq, and in particular with a long-term military presence, the more leaders in the Sunni (and Kurdish) communities will put their faith in a unified and democratic Iraq. That is the ultimate barrier to reconstitution of ISIS or al Qaeda.

Question. What do you believe were the main weaknesses of the Obama administration’s approach to ISIS? What should the U.S. be doing in Iraq and Syria that we are not?

Answer. Initially, the Obama administration made light of the threat, notably in the President’s quip about it being the “J-V”, although members of his own admin-

istration, outside observers, and Iraqis, were warning publicly of ISIS' threat as early as late 2013. The Obama administration's lack of effective response after ISIS seized the city of Fallujah in January 2014 was especially irresponsible. Its initial response after the fall of Mosul in June 2014 was too limited, although justified by the effort to leverage U.S. firepower in return for a replacement to Prime Minister Maliki, who contributed greatly to ISIS's rise by his neglect and oppression of the Sunni Arab population. After August, with Maliki's replacement and the commencement of U.S. airstrikes, the administration led the effort to slowly roll ISIS back, but this effort was characterized by half-measures, an obsessive commitment to zero civilian casualties, a preoccupation with avoiding U.S. casualties and a significant U.S. force deployed, and, in general, a lack of political will to win. The result again was a very slow liberation of territory from ISIS as well as one setback, the fall of Ramadi, to some degree the fault of the U.S.

After November 2015 the administration gave the ISIS fight a much greater priority, loosened somewhat tight rules of engagement, committed more advisors, and initiated some 'ground combat operations'—SOF raids, artillery, attack helicopters. The effort against ISIS thereafter gained momentum, but is still hampered by the U.S. refusal to put any U.S. ground maneuver units into the battle.

As noted in my written testimony, the U.S. needs a stronger military effort against ISIS, generated by more U.S. forces committed to combat, including perhaps limited—battalion or brigade level—ground maneuver forces, and diplomatic coordination of our various allies including in Syria the Kurdish YPD and its allied Arab contingent in the Syrian Defense Force (SDF) and the Turkish army and its allied Free Syrian Army (FSA). Military success against ISIS and diplomatic success unifying U.S. allies will also assist the U.S. in dealing with the larger questions of Iraq, Syria and Iran noted in answers to 3, 4 5, and 6 above.

Question. As ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, shouldn't we expect it to transform into a more traditional terrorist insurgency in both countries? What should the U.S. and our partners be doing now to prepare for that predictable development?

Answer. There is no doubt that ISIS will seek to act as an insurgent force just as it was (under the name "al Qaeda in Iraq") before the Syrian civil war.

Our major step to avoid that would be to continue the coalition and the 'all-elements-of-government' approach, essentially the recommendations made for U.S. and others' courses of action in 1–5 above. In addition the containment of Iran by the U.S. will eliminate one of the major recruiting tools for ISIS.

Question. Is Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi in danger of losing his position? Why? What would be the implications of that for U.S. interests?

Answer. Abadi's government is weak. Apart from his own organizational problems this stems primarily from in-fighting among Shia factions but also to a serious split between the Kurdish parties and the lack of a unified Sunni political movement that could support him as the 'least bad' of Shia political leaders. Iran in particular is maneuvering to either replace or weaken him, probably by supporting a return to power of former Prime Minister Maliki.

Nevertheless the Kurds and Sunni Arabs likely prefer Abadi to any other leader, Muqtadah al Sadr although unstable has a large following and also would prefer Abadi to Maliki, as would most of the senior clerics in Najaf. So Abadi may be able to hold on to his position.

Losing Abadi as prime minister, especially if replaced by Maliki or another figure seen as close to Iran, would be a disaster for the U.S. and for the effort to avoid a resurgence of ISIS, which would be facilitated by a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad especially if led by Maliki.

The U.S. can avoid this by remaining engaged in Iraq. A U.S. military presence has to be adroitly 'sold' to the Iraqis, in particular involving neither U.S. 'bases' nor an officially 'permanent' or 'combat' presence. The Iranians will react against that, which argues for warning Iran that if it wants Iraq to be stable and united it should not oppose a limited U.S. presence which would have the same goal.

Question. In order to durably defeat ISIS and to prevent the emergence of other Sunni insurgent and terrorist groups, do you believe it is important for Sunnis in Iraq and Syria to feel fully represented in Baghdad and Damascus? Do you believe a failure to establish such governance will ensure that ISIS and other Sunni insurgent groups will continue to find a sympathetic population from which to recruit?

Answer. The more integrated Sunni Arabs feel themselves to be into governments in Baghdad (where if democratic they will be in the minority) and in Damascus (where as long as Assad and his Alawite ethnic group rule their role will be constrained), the less they will turn to ISIS or other Sunni extremist groups. But the U.S. even at the height of its presence struggled to reach true Sunni Arab integra-

tion into the Baghdad government, and the Syria civil war is largely about that question. Thus this is a very difficult task to fully accomplish.

Nevertheless, good faith efforts in either capital towards inclusiveness, palpable economic and security progress in Sunni Arab areas, and engagement by the international community led by the U.S. (seen as more balanced to the Sunni Arabs) all can reach a 'good enough to work' level and keep recruitment to radical groups under control.

Question. What is your assessment of the post-coup crackdown there? How would you assess current relations between the U.S. and Turkey? What is your assessment of Turkey's evolving relationship with Russia?

Answer. For Turks, the Gulenist-inspired and probably organized military coup of July 15 is equivalent to our 9/11, in part because unlike earlier coups it was not organized or supported by the military top leadership, and saw military personnel indiscriminately mowing down unarmed Turkish civilians.

What is going on now in retaliation is a major effort to arrest and try those involved directly in the coup or in the "clandestine" side of the Gulenist movement, as well as a much greater effort targeting hundreds of thousands of people allegedly linked to the more overt elements (education, banking, business, media, religion) of the Gulenist movement. These people typically lose jobs in the civil service or quasi-public professions. Such purges have been common after earlier upheavals and coups in Turkey, but there is little doubt that President Erdogan, rattled by his near assassination during the coup, is using these purges to strengthen his rule and intimidate opposition including in the media and among Turkish Kurdish groups.

Relations between the U.S. and Turkey are very poor despite a seeming convergence of interests against ISIS, Iran and to some degree Russia. Erdogan and former President Obama had at the end a very chilly relationship. Major points of contention now are the Turkish request for extradition of Fetullah Gulen, the accused ring-leader of the July coup, who is a green card holder resident in Pennsylvania, and the U.S. support in the fight against ISIS for the YPG, seen by the Turks accurately as a subsidiary of the anti-Ankara Turkish Kurdish PKK insurgency. More generally, the Turks believe Washington did not live up to its commitments, first to help overthrow Assad, and second, to keep the YPG east of the Euphrates River in Kurdish areas. U.S. leaders are unhappy with Turkey's flirtation with Russia, but in fairness Turkey felt abandoned in Syria by the U.S. and after the fall of Aleppo decided it had to make the best possible deal with the winner.

Turkey's relationship with Putin is one of necessity and convenience and is transactional in nature. The primary reason as noted just above was the fall of Aleppo as well as U.S. policy decisions. Turkey however has lucrative energy and other economic interests with Russia that influence its decision-making with Moscow. That said, Turkey and president Erdogan personally are very concerned about Russian encroachment into the region (and in the Black Sea, Caucasus, and Southeastern Europe) but feel the U.S. in the past has not shown equivalent concern. More concern about Russia (including its semi-alliance with Iran) on the part of the U.S., some action even short of extradition concerning Fetullah Gulen, and a more balanced U.S. approach to the final battle against ISIS in Syria between the YPG/SDF and the Turks and their FSA allies, together could rectify much of the current strains in the relationship quickly.

Question. What is the status of Iraq's energy sector?

Answer. Iraq's success developing its extraordinarily large oil and eventually gas reserves is a credit to the Iraqi people and to the efforts of the international community and to the U.S. engagement in Iraq. Encouraged by the U.S. Iraq invited in western and other International oil and gas companies including Exxon and Chevron and many smaller U.S. energy sector firms to develop its energy sector. The KRG government did the same in the north.

As a result Iraq today is the second largest OPEC oil producer, reaching levels including the KRG of over 4.5 million barrels/day produced by late 2016 (the OPEC quotas approved in November 2016 will reduce this by several hundred thousands of barrels/day at least theoretically), and well over 3.5 million barrels/day exported from the south and north. This has been one of the major factors (along with U.S. tight oil production) for the more than 50% fall in oil prices globally since 2014 and thus much less expensive gas at U.S. tanks, as well as a reduction of inflation world-wide.

The Iraqis have significant problems with additional expansion of their southern fields to reach Saudi levels of 7-10 million barrels/day produced, beginning with delays in a salt water injection program to pump up to 10 million barrels of sea water into wells to increase efficiency and exploit fully hard-to-reach reserves. In

addition, the KRG and Baghdad are repeatedly in political conflict over the nature of contracts let by the KRG, the percent of southern oil revenue 'owed' to the KRG, and the KRG's effective control over the Kirkuk oil field and its exports since ISIS drove a physical wedge between Kirkuk and central Iraq. Currently they have reached with U.S. urging another limited compromise oil export and revenue policy but tensions remain.

Question. As we consider optimal U.S. military posture in Iraq after the fall of Mosul, what lessons should we learn from the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in late 2011?

Answer. First we have to be aware of the reasons why despite an Obama administration effort we were not successful:

—Iranian interference: The U.S. did little to counter this, which ranged from lobbying in the Iraqi parliament to lobbying Improvised Rocket-Assisted Missiles at our bases and installations. If we attempt to leave troops behind after ISIS is defeated, which as noted above I have advocated, we will have to either intimidate the Iranians or convince them that any U.S. presence would be limited and not offensive (i.e., aimed at Iran) in nature.

—Parliamentary endorsement of legal immunities for U.S. troops: This is a reasonable demand on the part of the U.S. but proved impossible to obtain from the Iraqi parties that made up the majority of the Iraqi parliament. All Iraqi parties except the Sadrists with 15% of parliamentary seats agreed that U.S. forces could stay on, but only the Kurdish parties with less than 20% of seats supported a parliamentary endorsement of legal immunities for U.S. troops. Such immunities understandably are usually a sine qua non for stationing of U.S. troops within foreign countries. The Iraqi government was willing to give written immunities, and has done so in fact in 2014 to secure a return of U.S. forces against ISIS, but such executive branch immunity can easily be challenged in a parliamentary system. If the U.S. does keep troops on in Iraq it will have to accept the ambiguous immunities provided by executive letter, as there is essentially no chance the Iraqi parliament would vote for them.

—Popular resistance: Except among Iraq's 15–17% Kurdish population less than 20% of Iraqis polled indicated interest in having U.S. troops remain in Iraq, according to essentially all polls in the 2010–2011 period. Iraqis may have learned from the 2014–17 experience that American forces are essential to their security, or perhaps they have not, under the influence of Iranian and rabid nationalist propaganda.

—Direct Presidential Engagement: President Obama was less engaged personally with the effort to keep troops on, although he formally accepted the recommendation to seek an enduring troop presence. Such engagement however is essential both to convince Iraqi leaders, and to take the difficult steps outlined above—keeping American troops in an ambiguous situation in terms of legal immunities; limiting the size, location and missions of U.S. troops; and dealing in one or another way with Iranian objections.

RESPONSES OF JEREMY BASH TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. What are your detailed assessments of the State Department's Global Engagement Center?

Answer. I have not performed a detailed assessment of the State Department's Global Engagement Center. I have worked in the past with the recent leader, Mr. Michael Lumpkin, whom I think very highly of. He was a strong and capable leader when I served with him at the Department of Defense. The mission of the center—to coordinate USG counterterrorism messaging—is sorely needed. "Winning the argument" is a crucial piece to winning the battle against terrorist networks. From anecdotal evidence, it appears to me that the Center is focused on the correct activity—specifically empowering third party voices who have the background and credibility to counter jihadist narrative and propaganda. I also have a sense that the Center would benefit from increased funding and support, but I have not performed an assessment of its resources or staffing.

Question. As ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, should we expect many ISIS fighters to attempt to flee and return to their home countries or to travel to ungoverned or weakly governed areas elsewhere? Should we expect them to travel to the U.S. or Europe in order to conduct terrorist attacks? How will most of the ISIS fighters go about fleeing Iraq and Syria? Will they flee through Turkey? Is Tur-

key doing all that it can to prevent this terrorist exodus? How can the U.S. help capture or kill these terrorists as they flee Iraq and Syria?

Answer. It is reasonable to assume that as ISIS loses territory, some of its fighters will attempt to flee to Europe, North Africa, and possibly farther. Those who attempt to come to the United States likely would do so with a specific operational plan. Turkey could provide one route, but there are, in theory, multiple routes that an ISIS fighter might employ. The most effective way to penetrate plots and counter threats is to focus intelligence collection on specific targets and work with the intelligence services of countries in the region to track the travel of suspected ISIS operatives. If the terrorist is traveling through Europe, the interdiction is likely going to occur by the intelligence and law enforcement agencies of the host government.

Question. Do you both believe that there will be no durable defeat of ISIS in Syria if the U.S. agrees to a Russian demand to keep Assad in power and fails to insist on the establishment of an inclusive government in Damascus that protects rather than murders its own people?

Answer. Yes, I do believe that.

Question. Do you both believe it is in U.S. national security interests to retain U.S. military personnel in Iraq after the fall of Mosul, if so why? How many troops, where, and for what purpose? Do you believe the Iraqi government will want to keep U.S. troops in Iraq after the fall of Mosul? Do you believe Iran will try to expel the U.S. military presence in Iraq after the fall of Mosul?

Answer. I believe that it will likely be necessary to have a military presence in Iraq for the foreseeable future. The presence does not have to be large, and its role can be circumscribed carefully. As for whether the Iraqi government will welcome such a presence, I believe it will. Iran will continue to work against U.S. interests across the region, including in Iraq. Iran's sponsorship of proxies that may attack U.S. forces is a contingency for which U.S. forces should prepare.

Question. Do you believe we should establish safe zones in Syria? What are some of the benefits and challenges associated with establishing safe zones in Syria? Where in Syria do you believe these safe zones should be located? Who would defend and secure these safe zones on the ground? Would you support the U.S.-led coalition protecting these safe zones from the air?

Answer. Probably so. However, I would want a current briefing from military leaders before suggesting the specific contours or location. In general, I believe the U.S. could do more to protect innocent civilians. I would support the U.S.-led coalition protecting these safe zones.

Question. As areas in and around Mosul are liberated, how is the Iraqi government doing managing the behavior of the Shia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to avoid the mistreatment of Sunni residents that could make them susceptible to ISIS recruitment? When ISIS controlled areas are liberated, how is the Iraqi government doing in rapidly restoring government services and establishing inclusive governance? Do you agree that the Iraqi government's "Phase IV operations" in Sunni majority areas are essential to the durable defeat of ISIS in Iraq? How can or should the State Department and USAID support the Iraqi government's efforts to establish responsive government services and inclusive governance for Sunni populations to prevent the return of ISIS?

Answer. Yes, I share the view that the Iraqi government must do a better job of including Sunnis in the governance of Iraq going forward. As the Iraqi government "holds" the territory liberated from ISIS, it is essential that the people in those liberated areas have faith in the government agencies controlling the territory. This faith will be undermined if Iraqi government officials allow Shia elements to marginalize and persecute the Sunni. Working with the Iraqi government on countering sectarianism is one of the most important roles that the U.S. government can play in Iraq.

Question. What do you believe were the main weaknesses of the Obama administration's approach to ISIS? What should the U.S. be doing in Iraq and Syria that we are not?

Answer. As I have testified, I believe that the military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq should now be intensified. I also believe, however, that the military campaign in Syria and Iraq is only one dimension on of the problem. ISIS is a global threat. As such, we must redouble our effort to work with allies and partners—including in Europe—on issues such as intelligence sharing and data correlation so that we can track travelers and penetrate plots. We also need to do a better job

countering ISIS's message, primarily by identifying and leveraging Arab and Muslim voices in the region who can refute ISIS's claims about the religious obligation of engaging in terrorism.

Question. As ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, shouldn't we expect it to transform into a more traditional terrorist insurgency in both countries? What should the U.S. and our partners be doing now to prepare for that predictable development?

Answer. The U.S. government should plan for a scenario in which remnants of ISIS live on as an insurgency force for many years. Most importantly, the U.S. should plan for and resource a long-term presence—not necessarily military but probably State Department-led—to help with governance and anti-insurgency activity.

Question. Is Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi in danger of losing his position? Why? What would be the implications of that for U.S. interests?

Answer. I do not believe I have the requisite information to predict that Abadi is in position of losing his position.

Question. In order to durably defeat ISIS and to prevent the emergence of other Sunni insurgent and terrorist groups, do you believe it is important for Sunnis in Iraq and Syria to feel fully represented in Baghdad and Damascus? Do you believe a failure to establish such governance will ensure that ISIS and other Sunni insurgent groups will continue to find a sympathetic population from which to recruit?

Answer. Yes.

Answer. Yes.

Question. What is your assessment of the post-coup crackdown there? How would you assess current relations between the U.S. and Turkey? What is your assessment of Turkey's evolving relationship with Russia?

Answer. (Assuming the first question refers to Turkey:) I think it would be a mistake for Turkish leadership to go overboard in purging the Turkish military. Turkey needs a strong and professional defense force, and Erdogan should—in my view—focus more on addressing the concerns that led to the coup attempt, rather than trying to ensure that all of his opponents are imprisoned. The U.S. and Turkey have a strong foundation upon which to build an enduring alliance. Turkey is a NATO ally. In broad strokes, we share many of the same concerns in the region, including regarding terrorism and threat posed by the Assad regime. As for Turkey's relationship with Russia, I do not put much stock in it. Turkey and Russia have strategic interests that collide. Russia would like to prop up Assad, and Russia would like to peel Turkey away from NATO. As such, the warming of Turkey-Russian relations will have its limits. Turkey will soon see Russia's true intentions are to undermine the West and maintain its proxy state in Syria.

Question. What is the status of Iraq's energy sector?

Answer. Iraq has resources that could help it become a leading energy exporter—and, if managed properly, those funds could generate economic development for Iraq. I strongly disagree with those who suggest that the United States should have, or should in the future, “take Iraq's oil.”

RESPONSES OF THE HONORABLE JAMES JEFFREY TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR EDWARD J. MARKEY

Question. Over the past year, I have frequently expressed concern that tactical successes against ISIS will not bring about its strategic defeat unless:

1. Military operations are done in ways that not only avoid harming civilian populations, but pro-actively protect them; and

2. Our ground-force partners and we plan for and aggressively broker political arrangements among divergent groups in the areas where we are fighting ISIS to protect the people, provide necessary services, and restore and support legitimate local government.

Last month after Iraqi forces pushed ISIS out of East Mosul initial reports showed children returning to school, but more recent reports raise serious concerns. On Friday, Reuters reported that people in West Mosul feel abandoned by the government, which they say is doing little to provide assistance with immediate post-conflict relief and stabilization, and is obstructing former local police officers who want their old jobs back.

As we look toward West Mosul, the UN refugee agency predicts that 250,000 people could flee, on top of the 160,000 who have already fled the fighting in East Mosul.

In my view the most crucial political question presented in the battles against ISIS is what our partners and we plan for and do before, during, and after battle to address humanitarian requirements, resolve local political conflicts, and restore and support legitimate local authorities.

What is your perspective on the adequacy of what the Iraqis and we are doing to plan along these lines, and on the implementation of such plans during and following offensive operations against ISIS?

Answer. This is a difficult question. Delaying military operations to protect civilian populations and to ensure all elements are in place, for initial relief of, and particularly for longer term economic, security and political care for, liberated civilian populations could well be a mistake. First, there is a military price to pay for delay, as well as a political/diplomatic cost. A campaign against ISIS is a serious endeavor that fully engages the U.S. and other states, and necessarily distracts Washington and its famously limited 'bandwidth,' as well as diverts concrete military and diplomatic resources, from potentially equally important issues (Iran, North Korea, China, Russia) which don't involve immediate life and death decisions. There is thus a benefit beyond ISIS to finishing this phase of the struggle with it quickly.

Second, while the above holds in most circumstances, it is particularly salient when a population is under the sway of ISIS. Having been on the scene and dealing with civilians traumatized by its predecessor, al Qaeda in Iraq, repeatedly, I believe the messiest liberation, assuming mass casualties are avoided, is better for the civilian population (totally apart, as noted above, from the other advantages of defeating ISIS) than leaving it in the horrific hands of ISIS. The reports I have read of the treatment of the population in West Mosul under siege documents this, and the cruelty of ISIS as long as the siege continues is compounded by the lack of foodstuffs and medicine.

Third, Iraq (or other states in the Middle East, with the exception of Turkey and Israel) usually never get really good at dealing with liberated populations. We have seen many foul-ups and inadequate relief in other liberated areas. But in each case the Iraqi government effort, assisted as it should be by the U.S., other governments, and NGO's, has turned out to be 'good enough' to keep people sufficiently nourished, housed, and secured to allow a gradual return to their homes.

Again, such actions are terribly inadequate in some cases, usually riddled with incompetence and inefficiency, and occasionally by deliberate retaliation, but that unhappy set of circumstances must be considered not in isolation but in comparison to (1) the realistic standard of 'best' under such conditions (even when the U.S. military was leading relief and rehabilitation, e.g., after the battles for Najaf and Fallujah in 2004, 'best' was not much better than what the Iraqis have been doing); and (2) the costs, first to the civilian population, and then to the broader military campaign and diplomatic goals, of allowing such considerations to delay defeating an enemy like ISIS and leaving hundreds of thousands of quasi-hostages in their brutal hands during a siege.

Question. In his memorandum directing Secretary Mattis to develop a new plan to defeat ISIS President Trump required him to recommend, "changes to any United States rules of engagement and other United States policy restrictions that exceed the requirements of international law regarding the use of force against ISIS."

Presumably, the President is thinking of reducing the weight that commanders give to the risk of civilian casualties. This is of particular concern in a place like West Mosul, which is very densely populated.

I am very concerned that we not step onto a slippery slope toward the type of military operations that were all too common in the twentieth century, that Syrian and Russian forces displayed a few weeks ago in Aleppo, and that President Putin used in Grozny during Russia's brutal campaign in Chechnya seventeen years ago.

What is your perspective on the risks inherent in President Trump's requirement that Secretary Mattis recommend changing the rules of engagement in Iraq and Syria? How would the people who we seek to liberate from ISIS perceive such changes, considering that they are the same people most likely to be hurt if our commanders give less weight to the risk of civilian casualties when making targeting decisions?

Answer. Military effectiveness, political results (to which military efforts must be ultimately subordinate), and treatment of civilians on battlefields are all in dynamic tension. Discussions with senior U.S. military and Iraqi officials involved in the campaign against ISIS indicate that the Obama administration rules of engagement (ROE) may have been so tight as to have impacted adversely operations. The ISIS

seizure of Ramadi in 2015 has been cited in this regard. To some degree ROE has been loosened over the past 14 months, thus President Trump might have been focused on earlier ROE.

Nevertheless, there is still some indication that ROE are too tight. Given the dynamic tensions related to this question, it is important to first lay out the range of considerations.

Since World War II the United States has not engaged in the deliberate targeting of civilian populations that you cited in regard to Russian bombing of Aleppo. Those acts are violations of the Geneva Conventions and seen as such by the U.S. military. I am confident we can rule out any Department of Defense recommendation to use anything like those tactics. On the other hand, even the most meticulous attention to avoiding civilian casualties—and the ROE of the Obama administration ROE against ISIS, against terrorist targets regionally, and in Afghanistan, come as close to ‘meticulous attention’ as I am aware of related to a force seriously conducting combat—by that administration’s own admission, have led to the deaths of hundreds of civilians.

The absolute standard of no strike unless one is sure of no civilian casualties (essentially the standard used by the Bush administration in drone strikes against terrorists), is not possible in ‘normal’ rapid combat. (i.e., in drone strikes an abort, usually not noted by the target, does not mean the strike cannot be done later. But under normal combat conditions protecting ones own or allied forces, destroying enemy personnel, and seizing ground, all require rapid action.)

A concern about the Obama ROE was the levels of command and clearance that were required before a strike could be approved. This delayed strikes, at times with tactically significant costs. Easing of those preconditions, while still maintaining policies to avoid civilian casualties by restricting the type of ordnance, use of warnings before strikes, and prioritizing intelligence collection to the status of civilians near strikes, all make sense.

The issue of political impact of civilian casualties at any level is also complicated. Tens of thousands of French civilians were killed by U.S. bombing during the campaign to liberate France, yet the French population was extremely welcoming of American forces. Again, the dynamic of final ends and relative costs are in play between results of military action as seen by a population and civilian casualties, just as between military results and ‘day after’ readiness to care for civilians liberated as discussed above. U.S. strikes in 2015 and 2016 in Kunduz, Afghanistan led to significant civilian casualties, and an investigation of a strike on a hospital, but little outcry from the population or from the Afghan Government. Whereas typically strikes in the Afghan countryside especially in Pashtun areas led to strong local and governmental reactions.

In the case of ISIS many civilians in Mosul might opt for a limited increased risk of casualties (they have been very low in this campaign compared to the numbers of civilians near the fighting) in return for more rapid liberation from ISIS, similar to the population of Kunduz.

Question. In his prepared testimony, Mr. Bash stated that, “We must keep our focus on the travel of foreign fighters, and work 24/7 with our European allies and partners to track potential extremists, penetrate the plots, and stop them.”

Secretary of Defense Mattis, in testimony at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin is “out to break NATO.” It is also clear that President Putin is working to undermine the European Union through intelligence-led influence campaigns to help extreme nationalist, anti-EU parties in European elections, much as he did in our election last year.

Meanwhile, President Trump has called NATO obsolete and expressed sympathy for the idea of EU disintegration.

It seems to me that while it is very important for European allies to cooperate with us, it is critically important for them to cooperate closely with each other, particularly with respect to their security and justice systems.

How do you rate the risk that President Putin’s attacks on European integration will undermine cooperation against ISIS? How does President Trump’s anti-NATO and anti-EU rhetoric affect that risk? If NATO or the EU disintegrate, will that make it easier or more difficult for ISIS to plan and carry out attacks in Europe or the United States without being detected and apprehended beforehand?

Answer. Our role—all in all extraordinarily positive—in the world since 1940 has been placed at risk by President Putin’s effort to replace the rule-of-law global order based international system with a return to rapacious 19th century great power competition, which produced World Wars I and II.

If President Trump does not recognize that then his foreign policy efforts, and surely his goal to 'make America great,' will fail. This does not preclude deals or cooperation with Moscow, but does require that we recognize our benefits from and interest in this international order and under no circumstances accept a weakening of it in return for tactical Russian concessions or facilitation on specific issues.

Key to that order is our system of alliances and international organizations. NATO and the EU are at the center of them. They provide the operational levers for the Europeans—with a population more than 50% greater than ours, and a GDP equal to ours, to mobilize themselves in support of our efforts around the world, be it joint action in Afghanistan or against ISIS, earlier in the Balkans, or against Russian aggression in the Ukraine or earlier in Georgia. Putin realizes this, and also recognizes that Europe is in certain respects the most vulnerable of his "enemies," so he is putting much effort into undermining European institutions.

Even rhetoric on the part of the U.S. against the EU or NATO (and so far we have not seen or heard of concrete actions taken or pending) demoralizes those who believe in these institutions, and undercuts faith in the U.S. as a reliable, predictable partner. Obviously actions taken and not taken by the EU and by our NATO European partners can weaken ties with the U.S., and more persuasion or even pressure on them could be an effective strategy. But given the emotional, psychological and historical factors at play, U.S. questioning of its own, or EU or NATO state commitments to the "Atlantic Community" beyond a certain point will undercut the ability of European states through NATO and the EU to cooperate with the U.S.

Specifically, NATO and the EU provide mechanisms for common action against terrorists, including ISIS. Of particular concern is European military commitment in the anti-ISIS coalition, which at present is considerable, and intelligence sharing, which is essential for protection of both North America and NATO Europe.

LETTER TO HON. REX TILLERSON FROM SENATOR TODD YOUNG

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February 2, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Tillerson,

I want to congratulate you on your confirmation yesterday to serve as our nation's Secretary of State. As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I am eager to work with you and ensure that you have all of the resources and authorities that you need to fulfill fully the responsibilities of your office that are so important to our national security. As the administration prepares a new plan to defeat ISIS, I write to encourage you and the Department of State to take an active role in shaping this new plan and ensuring that the strategy includes the necessary elements to complement progress on the battlefield as well as attain the durable defeat of ISIS and its barbaric ideology.

As you know, President Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum on January 28, 2017, directing the development of a "comprehensive plan to defeat ISIS." The President has asked for a "preliminary draft of the Plan to defeat ISIS" within 30 days. I applaud the administration's eagerness to reassess our current approach toward ISIS to ensure that we are implementing the most effective strategy possible, and I am pleased that the President explicitly directed that the plan address "public diplomacy, information operations, and cyber strategies to isolate and delegitimize ISIS and its radical Islamist ideology." These elements are indispensable to an effective strategy.

While al Qaeda affiliates remain a serious threat, the President correctly cites ISIS as the "most vicious and aggressive" radical Islamist terrorist threat we face. There is no doubt that our national security interests and the safety of Americans require the sustainable defeat of ISIS. ISIS has murdered Americans, inspired or supported terrorist attacks in the U.S. and Europe, destabilized much of the Middle East, threatened allies, and engaged in a methodical campaign of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Given the severity of the threat, the Obama administration's approach toward ISIS was belated, incremental, and insufficient. Nonetheless, the Obama administration was correct to identify the fact that a successful strategy against ISIS must include many efforts beyond the Department of Defense. It is worth noting that the Obama administration's strategy included nine lines of effort and only two of them were primarily military in nature. Many of the remaining lines of effort and their associated tasks fell at least partially within the Department of State's purview. Examples include promoting effective and representative governance in Iraq

and Syria, building the coalition, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters, providing humanitarian relief, working with regional partners to disrupt ISIS's finances, and exposing ISIS's true nature.

In order to defeat ISIS decisively and permanently, the U.S. government must devote significant and sustained attention and resources to these objectives—and the State Department must play a central, rather than peripheral, role. There is no doubt that military success on the battlefield against ISIS is essential and facilitates success in other areas—but progress on the battlefield alone will not result in the durable defeat of ISIS. As is often said, we cannot kill our way to victory against ISIS. The coalition must kill or capture ISIS terrorists who are irreconcilably committed to terrorism, while working to eliminate the sources of radicalization for the next generation of terrorists.

A failure to address the political, economic, and ideological conditions that allowed ISIS to constitute itself and establish control of large portions of Iraq and Syria will ensure that any military success against ISIS is only temporary. If Sunnis in Iraq and Syria feel like second-class citizens who are not fully represented in Baghdad and Damascus, then ISIS will continue to find a sympathetic population from which to recruit. Likewise, if ISIS's barbaric and perverted ideology is not discredited authoritatively in the minds of individuals susceptible to recruitment, we should expect an endless supply of new recruits to replace the terrorists we kill. Even if ISIS loses all of its territory in Iraq and Syria, a failure to address the root causes that facilitate the recruitment and radicalization of ISIS terrorists will result in a sustained terrorist counterinsurgency there—as well as a deeply destabilizing global diaspora of battle-hardened terrorists who will find willing terrorist partners when they return home.

Also, I note that the Presidential Memorandum also calls for the “identification of new coalition partners in the fight against ISIS...” I believe it is wise to attempt to strengthen and expand our coalition, but we should approach this task carefully when it comes to Moscow. Moscow does not share our interests and consistently opposes our efforts to defend universal principles of human rights. Moscow seeks to keep the Assad regime in power and together they have demonstrated a deplorable eagerness to kill systematically and repeatedly innocent men, women, and children. The administration should be under no illusions regarding Moscow's intent and the implications of keeping Assad in power. There will be no durable defeat of ISIS in Syria if the U.S. shortsightedly agrees to a Russian demand to keep Assad in power and fails to insist on the establishment of an inclusive government in Damascus that protects rather than murders its own people.

In addition, I hope the administration seriously considers the establishment of safe zones in Syria for the people there who have endured unspeakable hardships. Safe zones in Syria could provide protection for many Syrians and help mitigate the refugee crisis in Europe. Any safe zones in Syria will have to be defended and secured on the ground and protected from the air. I encourage the administration to identify local and regional forces to provide security on the ground, while the U.S.-led coalition could ensure no aircraft threaten the safe zones. To avoid establishing permanent refugee camps, any plan for safe zones in Syria should be accompanied by a clear and implementable strategy to establish the security and political conditions for these refugees to return eventually to their homes.

As you begin at the State Department, I realize many issues compete for your time and attention. I believe this issue is sufficiently important to warrant your personal involvement. I encourage you to engage assertively in this issue to ensure that the Trump administration's new plan incorporates all of the elements necessary for success. Together, we must avoid a strategy that focuses exclusively on the military defeat of ISIS without addressing the other elements of the strategy necessary for the durable defeat of ISIS and its deplorable ideology.

I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of State and your interagency partners to strengthen the administration's countering violent extremism (CVE) programs and related initiatives. Within two weeks of the Secretary of Defense submitting the interim plan to the President, I ask that Department of State briefers come update me on its efforts to ensure the plan effectively addresses the essential non-defense elements of a strategy to defeat ISIS.

Congratulations again on your confirmation as our nation's Secretary of State. I look forward to working with you to protect our country and promote our nation's interests abroad.

Sincerely,



United States Senator