

Remarks to the Ministers of the Global Coalition To Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria at the Department of State

February 6, 2019

Thank you very much, Mike. And you are doing a spectacular job. I say that on behalf of many people.

It's an honor to be here today at the State Department among so many distinguished diplomats and others representing the nations of the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS. Together, we comprise 74 countries and 5 international institutions, all united in the fight against this vile terrorist organization. And vile they are.

I want to thank Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan. Patrick, stand up. You've been doing a fantastic job. We appreciate it. Thank you. Ambassador James Jeffrey, thank you. Thank you. And all of our coalition members here today for their enduring commitment to defeating ISIS in the Middle East and around the world.

In January 2017, only 2 years ago, ISIS had a vast amount of territory in Syria and Iraq. When I became President, I said, "I want to see what they have." And I looked, and it was a mess. It was a lot. When I took office, one of my very first acts was to go to the Pentagon and ask them to produce and show me a plan to defeat ISIS.

Under the new approach we developed, we empowered our commanders in the field, enabled our partners on the ground, and directly confronted ISIS's wicked ideology. And we're doing that today, except in even greater numbers.

As a result, as I noted in my State of the Union Address yesterday, the United States military, our coalition partners, and the Syrian Democratic Forces have liberated virtually all of the territory previously held by ISIS in Syria and Iraq. It should be formally announced sometime probably next week that we will have a hundred percent of the caliphate. But I want to wait for the official word. I don't want to say it too early.

Over the past 2 years, we have retaken more than 20,000 square miles of land, we have secured one battlefield, and we've had victory after victory after victory and retaken both Mosul and Raqqa.

We have eliminated more than 60 high-value ISIS leaders. So we have a—if you look at the ISIS leaders of the 60 top, we've eliminated almost every one of them. Now, they re-form; we know that. But they're having a hard time re-forming, and I wouldn't say it's a great job to have because of us. It's not exactly—hopefully, will not be a sought-after occupation. More than a hundred other top ISIS officials have been eliminated, and tens of thousands of ISIS fighters are gone. They're gone.

Together, we have freed more than 5 million civilians from the grip of these bloodthirsty killers. And you know the killers they are. You see it. And we used to see it to an extent we couldn't believe, where our people and our friends and our allies—in many cases, people whose parents I've gotten to know—had to wear the orange uniform prior to you know what. We don't want to see those scenes anymore.

Thanks to the Global Coalition, including all of you here today, and to our other partners, the ISIS caliphate has been decimated. Nobody thought it was possible to do it this quickly.

Three weeks ago, I was in Iraq and I was talking to some of our great generals, and I gave them the absolute go-ahead. I said: "Go at it. How long will it take once you get started?" He said, "Sir, 1 week." I said, "Where did that come from, 1 week?" And he meant it. And it's about a week since they really got going. And they'll be informing us very soon, officially, that it's 100 percent.

ISIS can no longer claim widespread ownership over local governments in Syria and Iraq. Now, you're always going to have people; they'll be around. They're sick. They're demented. But you're going to have them no matter how well we do militarily. You can't do better than we've done militarily. But you will have people that will be around. And we'll search them out, and you'll search them out, and we'll find them. And hopefully, they won't be around very long.

They can no longer extract natural resources because they no longer control the land or the area. They can no longer tax the citizens in that area because they no longer have that area, or steal ancient artifacts or destroy ancient artifacts, as they've been doing. They've really been set back.

We're working very hard on the internet. For a period of time, they used the internet better than we did. They used the internet brilliantly, but now it's not so brilliant. And now the people on the internet that used to look up to them and say how wonderful and brilliant they are, are not thinking of them as being so brilliant. Because they've been decimated. They can no longer control schools to impose their vicious ideology on young children.

Critically, ISIS also now lacks a significant territorial base from which to launch terrorist attacks against other countries, recruit foreign fighters, and spread havoc across the region. Their land is gone. It's a big factor. Their land is gone.

This afternoon, I want to applaud the outstanding men and women of the United States military—incredible people—for their remarkable skill and precision throughout this entire campaign.

Now, as countries in the region and across our coalition step up their commitments and we continue to destroy the remnants—that's all they have, remnants. But remnants can be very dangerous; have to remember that. A remnant can be very dangerous. But we have remnants of ISIS. We look forward to giving our brave warriors in Syria a warm welcome back home.

Rest assured, we will do what it takes to defeat every ounce and every last person within the ISIS madness and defend our people from radical Islamic terrorism.

I commend the 30 other nations who are already contributing troops to this vital effort. And it's a different effort than we had initially, but totally vital. In recent months, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia have all made financial commitments. The struggle against terrorism is a shared fight. We do it together. If we don't do it together, it can never be the same. Everyone must do their part and contribute their fair share.

We must also recognize that immigration security is national security, and that foreign fighters must not gain access into our nations. We've been extremely tough on people that we think can be in any way working with—or even be a part of—radical Islamic terror. I've been very, very tough on that, and I hope every other nation is too.

I just want to thank everybody in this room. This is a special group of brilliant people, and it's been an honor to work with you. And we will continue to work with you, because unfortunately, this is not going to be something that—as brilliant as our military is, knocking out the big, big sections, they'll still have tiny sections, can be so dangerous.

But I want to just thank everybody. Having the coalition, having the partnership—because it's really a partnership—with you has been my honor. Our military has been incredible. And your militaries have been incredible. So it's an honor to work with you.

We will be working with you for many years to come. I say that unfortunately, but that's the way it goes. We will work together for many years to come. It'll get smaller, smaller, and smaller. And someday, maybe, we won't have to even think about this problem that is so prevalent today.

Thank you all very much. It's a great honor to be here. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo; and U.S. Special Envoy to the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS James F. Jeffrey.

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